

Women Suffer More From Climate Change



Cambodian women ride their bicycles loaded with mats along a street in the province of Svay Rieng.

Climate change is harder on women in poor countries, where mothers stay in areas hit by drought, deforestation or crop failure as men move to literally greener pastures, a Nobel Peace laureate said.

"Many destructive activities against the environment disproportionately affect women, because most women in the world, and especially in the developing world, are very dependent on primary natural resources: land, forests, waters," said Wangari Maathai of Kenya, Reuters reported.

"Women are very immediately affected, and usually women and children can't run away," said Maathai, who won the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize for her work on sustainable development.

"Men can trek and go looking for greener pastures in other areas in other countries ... but for women, they're usually left on site to face the consequences," she said. "So when there is deforestation, when there is drought, when there is crop failure, it is the women and children who are the most adversely affected."

Maathai was in Washington with 1997 Nobel Peace laureate Jody Williams, who got the award for her work in creating an international treaty to ban landmines, and both spoke to reporters at a briefing.

Williams said she saw climate change as a threat to security, and said desertification of former agricultural land fueled the conflict in Darfur.

>Climate Justice

In that case, she said, women forced to move for political and environmental reasons were more at risk than men.

As the leader of a United Nations mission on Darfur, Williams said she visited a vast refugee camp in neighboring Chad where water was scarce and women and girls were dispatched to get water from outside the camp.

"Why did the women have to go?" Williams asked. "Because if the men went, they'd be killed. If the women go, the only--only!--thing they have to face is rape."

"If you don't deal with development and climate, you will have an increasingly insecure world," Williams said. "But if you're going to deal with it, you need to deal with it in terms of climate justice."

That meant rich countries, including the United States, must cut their own pollution and greenhouse emissions--not just offer aid for environmentally sound development.

Maathai, who founded the Green Belt Movement that started as a tree-planting program and grew into an international human rights and environmental organization, said the United States has taken a "back seat" on global environmental leadership.

"As long as the United States of America doesn't take its leadership position, the rest of the world hides behind her and wants to say, 'she is the greatest polluter, she isn't doing anything, why should I do something?'" Maathai said.

Mangrove Destruction Also Blamed for Myanmar Toll

The destruction of mangrove forests that served as a buffer from the sea is partly to blame for the massive death toll from a cyclone in Myanmar, the head of the ASEAN regional bloc said.

More than 22,000 people have died after the cyclone swept through the Irrawaddy river delta over the weekend and pounded Myanmar's main city of Yangon, the country's state media reported.

"Why the impact is so severe is because of the increase of the population," said Surin Pitsuwan, secretary general of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, to which military-ruled Myanmar belongs.

This has led to an "encroachment into the mangrove forests which used to serve as a buffer between the rising tide, between big waves and storms and the residential area," he said in a speech in Singapore.

"All those lands have been destroyed. Human beings are now direct victims of such natural forces."

Surin was giving a keynote address at the launch of a new centre

at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies to focus on non-traditional security threats. These include climate change, degradation of the environment, and diseases such as bird flu.

The official New Light of Myanmar newspaper said the devastated town of Bogalay, in the heart of the Irrawaddy river delta where the storm swept ashore, had suffered most of the losses.

The Irrawaddy is one of the most heavily silted rivers in the world because of deforestation and intensive agriculture activities along its banks, the ASEAN Regional Centre for Biodiversity Conservation said on its website.

It said land outside the reserved forests has been converted for agricultural use and mangrove forests within the reserve "are now disappearing at a rapid rate."

The centre cited a study which said that if the rate of destruction between 1977 and 1986 was maintained, all mangrove forest would disappear in 50 years.

News in Brief

New Look at Baby Bottle Chemical

The EU food safety watchdog EFSA said it may review its clearance of bisphenol A for use in the manufacture of plastic baby bottles after Canada moved to ban the substance.

"EFSA is aware of the studies on bisphenol published in the United States and Canada," spokeswoman Anne-Laure Gassin told AFP. "The agency will examine whether it should review its opinion on this product, which dates from January 2007."

The European Food Safety Authority, headquartered in Parma, northern Italy, will reach a decision soon, she said.

The Canadian government announced last month that it was seeking public comment on whether to ban baby bottles made using bisphenol, considered "potentially harmful."

It would become the first country to ban the chemical compound.

A US government report last month also found that bisphenol A could endanger reproductive health and the nervous system.



Russia Not Ready for Tough HIV Steps

Russia is "not ready" to adopt measures that could prevent thousands of people from getting infected with the virus that causes AIDS, the country's chief public health officer said.

Gennady Onishchenko said regulations are not strong enough to allow measures such as methadone replacement therapy for heroin addicts to work properly, AP reported.

Health advocates say such therapy is vital to Russia because of the particular way HIV has spread through the country.

Up to 80 percent of Russia's 1.6 million HIV-positive people became infected through dirty needles, according to various estimates.

The World Health Organization, the United Nations and United States, among others, have published studies showing that injecting drug users who switch to clinic-supplied methadone are up to five times less likely to contract HIV.



Iraqi Lawyer to Publish Book on Saddam

The first of a three-volume book on Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein's life from childhood to the day of his execution is to be published later this year, Iraqi lawyer Khalil Al-Dulaimi said.

Dulaimi told AFP he has been working "day and night to compile the memoirs of the late Iraqi 'rayess' (leader in Arabic) so as to publish the first volume by the end of the year."

The leader of Saddam's defense team in court said the three volumes would run to more than 2,000 pages, covering his life "from childhood to his youth... his rise to power and the last day of his life."

It will contain 400 texts handwritten by Saddam, as well as interviews which the slain dictator gave to Dulaimi in his prison cell and details about his life in US custody.

"I transcribed what he dictated to me or what I could remember because the Americans often prevented me from leaving the prison with Saddam manuscripts," said Dulaimi, who said he visited Saddam in jail a total of 144 times.



Indian Doctors Urged To Neaten Writing

Doctors have long been the butt of jokes for their illegible handwriting, but GPs in India are being urged to neat and computerize their scrawl to prevent patients being given wrong drugs that could prove deadly.

Long-suffering chemists have joined the campaign in a country where most prescriptions are still jotted on paper despite a roll out of computer systems in larger hospitals and clinics.

"Bad handwriting of doctors is a phenomenon which has always been there. So why not face it?" Dr. Vinay Agarwal, head of the Indian Medical Association, told Reuters.

"I have, from time to time, held seminars with my colleagues to address the issues of illegible handwriting and ways to move from hand-written prescriptions to paperless work," he added.

Shantanu Samanta, an IT professional, knows how dangerous a drug mix-up can be.

"The drug that I was given for my hypertension was Atenolol. However, the chemist confused it with Stamlo Beta, and I ended up in hospital on the verge of a stroke. The chemist said he could not properly read what the doctor had written," Samanta said.