

A Brief report on “World day to combat Drought and Desertification” - 17th June, 2011

I. Introduction:

The world day to combat drought and desertification was held at Lalithakala parishat, Anantapur which was organised by Accion Fraterna Ecology Centre on 17-06-2011. The UNCCD has decided in 1994 to celebrate 17th June of every year as world day to combat drought and desertification. It also declared the decade i.e., from 2010 to 2020 as “Combat Drought and Desertification” decade where in many programmes will be taken up for overcoming Drought and Desertification in different parts of world. The main objective of the UN declaration is to warn and make the people and Governments to take up the Drought mitigation and Anti Desertification activities in affected areas. Accion Fraterna Ecology Centre took initiative to celebrate this day and sensitize the people and Government on the issues of drought & desertification as Anantapur is a chronically drought-prone area and fast desertifying!



II. The participants and Invitees :

About 1350 people from 4 mandals of AF project villages participated the meeting. The meeting started at 11.00 AM with lighting lamp by Dr. Y.V.Malla Reddy, the District Collector Mr. B.Janardhan Reddy, IAS., Mr. Subba Reddy, DFO, Mr. Murali Project Director, DWMA, Mr. Vidhya Shankar, JD, Horticulture, Mr. Purushotham Reddy, DD, Ground Water, Mr. Imam, Editor, Kadalika Magazine, Mr. Govindu Chowdary, Progressive Farmer, Mr. Lakshmikantham, DFO (Rtd.) and Mr. B.Kondaiah, Head, Sustainable Agriculture, the MSS (Mandal Sasyamithra Samakhya) convenors Ms. Anasuyamma, H.S.Varalakshmi, Ms Sulochanamma and Saralamma also shared the Dias along with other dignitaries.



III. Inaugural Address:

Dr.Y.V.Malla Reddy presided over the meeting and in his inaugural address he remarked that Anantapur district has become a home for droughts and desert. Scientists have been warning that rapid desertification is also taking place as sand domes seen in Kanekal mandal of Anantapur district. A large sheet rock, Spread over in 10 acres in Andepalli village of Kambadur mandal was broken into



pieces due to increased heat in the weather indicating the desertification process. He opined that appearance of sand domes and camels is not the only indication of desertification. But disappearance of trees, animals, birds and unfavorable conditions for agriculture is the indication of desertification; and this is the reason why farmers are reaping only 3 normal crops in a span of 10 crop years in Anantapur district.

IV. Consolidation of messages by guest speakers

1) Generally the human undue interference with nature and over-exploitation of natural resources causes the droughts and desertification and the single most important remedy begins with an proving vegetation in the area. There is about 10% forest land in the District, but devoid of vegetation. So all the people, Especially farmers are advised to protect the existing vegetation and take up massive plantations where ever possible, with suitable species for food, fodder, fruit, fibre etc. The plantations should be eco-friendly as well as economy friendly to the farmers on sustainable basis.

2) The erratic rainfall with high intensity causing soil erosion apart from the wind erosion. The soils are becoming unproductive due to erosion of fertile top soil. Protection of soil from sun (heat) and directly intense falling of rain on top soil are to be taken care of thro developing green cover on the soil and mulching. It was suggested to grow trees across in the District on large scale, so that top soil as well as moisture can be conserved.



3) Harvesting of scarce rain water by construction of water bodies like check dams, Farm ponds, Repair of old tanks, rejuvenation of natural springs etc is required to

improve surface and ground water. The speakers appreciated and put on record the efforts of Accion Fraterna Ecology Centre and RDT in rain water harvesting as well as soil & moisture conservation and vegetation development through their watershed programme, horticulture and tree cropping programmes. Further the speakers also appreciated the recent efforts in this direction by DWMA under MGNREGS.

- 4) Development of tree crops in Anantapur District (Sustainable income and healthy environment) helps a lot in combating Drought and Desertification. The Government, RDT and AF Ecology Centre have been implementing special rainfed horticulture and other tree cropping programmes on large scale. Further under MGNREGS. Government is providing 100% subsidy to SC/ST farmers and 90% subsidy to other farmers including provision for pitting, plant cost, watering charges, weeding, mulching etc. The participant farmers are requested to effectively make use this scheme and thus secure income security to themselves and also help in combating drought and desertification. The Department of Horticulture suggested the farmers to plant densely different fruit plants in one acre land in order to get stable (assured) income year after year.



- 5) The MGNREGS is being implemented in Anantapur District and about 6 lakhs labour are getting employment through which the family income is stabilized to some extent. Mr. L.Murali, Project Director, DWMA expressed that earlier there were not enough funds to combat drought in Anantapur district. But now MGNREGS has come as boon and up to now Rs.1051 crores have been expended to mitigate the drought and poverty. Variety of activities related to trees, horticulture, water bodies, rain water management, land development, fodder development etc are being implemented under MGNREGS with the objective of combating drought & desertification. The Project Director, DWMA appealed the participants to effectively utilize the MGNREGS programme, which is helping in mitigating the drought and desertification.



6) The District Collect Mr. B.Janardhan Reddy, IAS appealed to the people of Anantapur District to protect the soil and use scarce rain water efficiently. Out of the 522 cm rainfall received only 10% is infiltrating into the ground (converted as ground water). With appropriate land and water management measures we can increase the ground water soil



productivity substantially. Plantation on large scale and cloud seeding is to be taken up to improve the rainfall, apart from protecting the soil from exposure and various erosions. He added that it will take 10 thousand years to form 1" (one inch) of top soil. He explained that the rain water is simply reaching the sea without being utilized for the Agriculture and other beneficial purposes. He demonstrated this to the participants by pouring water one person's bald head and showed how it ran-off and on other person's head with lot of hair and how it was absorbed into the hair. It was well understood by the people how vegetation helps the land to absorb the rain water. The Collector emphasized that protecting soil from sun and effective utilization of rain water is the most important measure in combating the drought and desertification.

Conclusion:

The MSS conveners also expressed their views and appealed the gathering to implement the measures suggested by the guest speakers.

The meeting was successful and ended by 2.15 pm with vote of thanks to the participants and invitees. The initiative of conducting this meeting by AF Ecology Centre for the first time in the District was appreciated by each and every person from Government Administration, NGOs and also public. The extensive coverage about this meeting was given by all popular news papers.

Place: Anantapur

Date: 06.07.2011

