

Delegate's Report

The Young Commonwealth Climate Change Summit, October 28-30

The Young Commonwealth Climate Change Summit held in London attracted youth delegates around the world as well as the UK government ministers, high commissioners and commonwealth officials. I had the opportunity to represent Sri Lanka and the APSL (The Association of Professional Sri Lankans in the UK) at the Summit. Setting up a framework for engaging youth in commonwealth countries to combat climate change was the main aim of the Summit. It also provided a platform for sharing experiences and networking with influential delegates. It was also a great opportunity to raise awareness of APSL activities, particularly the 'Solar Village' concept, and Sri Lankan government's efforts to rebuild the country after the war. Sri Lankan government's support for renewable energy applications and sustainable businesses was thoroughly appreciated by many delegates.

I was the only delegate with a technological or engineering background. Therefore I focused mainly on increasing awareness of renewable energy technologies to combat climate change. Surprisingly most delegates from developing countries didn't appreciate the availability of affordable renewable energy products. They found the 'Solar Village' concept readily applicable to their own countries and some of them may visit Sri Lanka to study this project in the future. I also stressed the need for technology transfer and setting up a fund for renewable energy research and sustainable product development in developing countries. Both those requests were positively received by the UK minister of Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the UK government envoy for vulnerable countries and the director of Commonwealth economic affairs division.

I was in the team of delegates selected to formulate the Summit recommendations and I managed to include both above suggestions. Key recommendations include;

- Introduction and enforcement of legislation to combat climate change in commonwealth member countries
- Ensuring youth participation at all levels for climate change related decision making
- Setting up a framework to achieve a greener economy: Technology transfer, fund for technology development and promoting sustainable businesses

These recommendations will be sent to Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting (CHOGM) in Trinidad and Tobago and the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP15) in Copenhagen. Also a youth network was set up at the end of the Summit to continue action on climate change.

According to UN, World Bank and IPCC Sri Lanka is rated as a highly vulnerable country to climate change threats such as floods, sea level rise, droughts and disruptions to agriculture. Whilst actively advocating for an agreement by industrialised nations at CHOGM and COP15 meetings to significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the future, vulnerable countries like Sri Lanka can make a significant contribution towards combating climate change by increased emphasis on renewable energy and sustainable businesses.

Investment for renewable energy research and product development has grown exponentially over the past few years due to its immense future potential. Lack of available funding for renewable energy research in developing countries including Sri Lanka in the past made them lag behind industrialised countries and dependant on high cost technologies. A positive outcome from COP15 may result in the availability of significant funding to tackle climate change in developing countries. Sri Lanka could utilise these funds effectively provided the availability of suitable projects. Moreover the market for

renewable energy products will be growing rapidly over the coming years generating thousands of green jobs. For example providing electricity supply for over 1.5 billion people in the world without grid access could make small scale solar energy products attractive. With the right direction and technology knowhow Sri Lanka could potentially become a leading manufacturer of small scale solar energy products.

Support for sustainable businesses can reap significant rewards over the coming years. Local and foreign entrepreneurs are already involved in setting up sustainable businesses in Sri Lanka. For example World View Impact (www.worldviewimpact.com) invests in a sustainable rubber plantation in Sri Lanka. Its CEO made an inspiring speech during the Summit and praised Sri Lankan government for supporting their activities.

APSL could most probably make a significant contribution towards developing renewable energy applications and creating sustainable businesses in Sri Lanka. While APSL is already actively involved in developing off grid electricity supply with the 'Solar Village' project, it could further utilise the expertise of its members to establish renewable energy research and product development. Government backed sustainable business ventures could be an attractive option for Sri Lanka. APSL could support this by mentoring would-be entrepreneurs and promoting sustainable business creation in Sri Lankan higher education institutions.



Dr. Mahesh de Silva
Senior Electronics Engineer
Nujira Limited
Building 1010
Cambourne Business Park
Cambourne
CB23 6DP

mahesh_cam@yahoo.com