

LESS THAN 10% OF CLIMATE AID REACHING POOREST

LONDON: Less than 10 percent of funds spent to help poorer communities adapt to climate change impacts and adopt clean energy are reaching the people most in need of the money, finance researchers say. In part, that is because international climate funds, under pressure to get donated funds into action, are opting to work with development banks and other big international agencies that can quickly spend millions - rather than with smaller-scale local governments and projects, said researchers at the London-based International Institute for Environmental and Development (IIED).

Weak local ability to design and evaluate projects, and to fill out complicated forms to access money are another problem, the report said, as is the smaller scale of local projects, as vetting each one takes more time. Another obstacle is the lack of a specific target in the Paris Agreement on climate change to spend more finance at the local level, the researchers said in a report released this week. "Understanding how to get money where it matters is the challenge of the moment," said Clare Shakya, climate change director at IIED and one of the report's authors.

Today, donors have given only 11 percent of the climate funds they promised, in part because of the obstacles, she said. Richer nations have promised to donate or otherwise mobilize \$100 billion a year by 2020 to help poorer countries switch to clean energy and adapt to problems such as worsening droughts,

flooding and sea level rise. But getting that money raised and flowing has proved challenging.

The United States, for instance, has promised \$3 billion to the Green Climate Fund and so far delivered \$1 billion. But President Donald Trump has suggested he would not make any additional contributions, and may pull the United States out of its international climate agreements. The lack of international finance is a problem for countries such as Ethiopia, which has estimated it needs \$7.5 billion a year to switch to clean energy and adapt to climate change, but is so far receiving between \$100 million and \$200 million a year in international support, said Saleemul Huq, a senior fellow at IIED.

Ethiopia pushes ahead

Ethiopia is nonetheless moving ahead with a large-scale national push toward hydropower and wind, solar and geothermal energy, and on projects to adapt to climate change, including worsening drought, said Gebru Jember Endalew, the program coordinator for Climate Change Forum-Ethiopia and the new chair of the Least Developed Countries group in international climate change negotiations. The east African nation is saving money by incorporating its clean energy projects into its national plans, rather than carrying out each piece of the effort as a separate internationally funded project, he said. Such work "needs to be part of the development plan of the country," he said. "It needs to be managed there. It's much less costly than using consultants."

Endalew said poor countries have little option but to push ahead on climate change adaptation efforts as much as possible on their own because the impacts of climate change "are already more severe" than anticipated, with the world just 1 degree Celsius above pre-industrial temperature levels. "Imagine when they're 3 to 4 degrees" higher, he said. He said the Least Developed Countries group would continue to push for swift action on climate change because "our main goal is for the world to remain safe".

Local level finance

Some examples of how international climate finance could reach local level - and the most vulnerable people - are emerging, however. In Mali and Senegal, a three-year effort by IIED and the Near East Foundation has led to the creation of six \$700,000 funds to help local communities build resilience to climate variability and extreme events. The funds, administered by local governments, allow communities to choose the actions they think will most help them. In Senegal, for instance, a salt harvesting community has used money to plant salt-resistant trees to help protect the estuary where they work. The effort, part of the UK-funded Building Resilience to Climate Extremes and Disasters (BRACED) project, aims to help local governments and communities develop better skills to manage climate funds and to use money in a transparent and cost-effective way. — AFP

LOSING JOBS, WORKERS IN FRANCE SEE FUTILE VOTE

WHIRLPOOL MOVING JOBS TO POLAND

AMIENS, France: Two months before France's presidential elections, workers for Whirlpool in the northern French city of Amiens are torn between anger and resignation as the US appliances giant prepares to move their jobs to Poland. The move to Lodz, set for June 2018, will affect some 290 workers and is the latest in a string of manufacturing closures to hit the city famous for its Gothic cathedral.

Caroline Bizet and many of her colleagues at Whirlpool, a domestic appliances brand, could not hide their contempt for politicians in a campaign season marred by corruption scandals. "All the jobs are being outsourced. People are being laid off, there are suicides, there are divorces, everything," said Bizet, 49, who has worked for Whirlpool for 17 years. Her contempt for politicians was clear. "They're in their gilded armchairs and they couldn't care less about us," she said at the end of her shift at the factory some three kilometres from the city center where clothes dryers are made.

She was referring to the expenses scandals that have embroiled both far-right leader Marine Le Pen and one of her main rivals in the presidential race, conservative Francois Fillon. Picketers distributed leaflets outside the factory, which was bedecked with protest banners. "When you talk about deindustrialization of our country it has special resonance here," said Brigitte Foure, the city's centrist mayor, voicing her "bitterness" over the exodus to eastern EU states with cheaper labor such as Poland, Romania and Slovakia.

Unemployment in Amiens, a cathedral city of around 200,000, stands at 11.9 percent, two points higher than the national average. In 2014, the Goodyear tyre company outsourced more than 1,100 jobs, and Whirlpool moved its washing machine production to Slovakia in 2003. Another 60 jobs of a Whirlpool sub-contractor, Prima, are also at risk next year, as well as those of some temporary workers. Guillaume Bonnard, a 33-year-old foreman with Prima, told AFP: "The problem is that as long as everyone is not at the same level in Europe it can never work."

Frexit?

Mohamed El Mokretar, a union leader at Prima, thinks a "Frexit" is the only solution, saying simply: "We have to leave the European Union." Francois Ruffin, a leftist who was behind last year's youth protests against labor reforms across France known as Nuits Debout (Up All Night), is among a handful of politicians who have ventured to Amiens to confront the gloom. Ruffin, who is running for parlia-



AMIENS, France: This file photo taken on Jan 24, 2017 shows Whirlpool employees leaving the Amiens production factory on Jan 24, 2017. — AFP

ment in June, campaigned in the city aboard a multi-colored truck with loudspeakers blaring revolutionary songs.

The director of a hit documentary "Merci Patron" (Thanks, Boss) in which the little guys take on France's richest man, Ruffin says protectionism is the only solution. "I don't want the (far-right) National Front (FN) to have a monopoly on this political weapon, or for them to be the only ones to dare to talk about tariffs and import quotas," he told AFP as he handed out his manifesto.

Recently the FN's local representative Eric Richermoz paid one of his frequent visits to the Whirlpool factory, showing workers a video on his cellphone of Le Pen promising a 35-percent surtax on the products of companies that outsource jobs. Le Pen, who says she will hold a referendum on France leaving the EU if elected, is tipped to win the first round of France's presidential election on April 23 but lose in a run-off vote on May 7. — AFP

'MCLIZARD' SERVED TO PREGNANT INDIAN WOMAN

NEW DELHI: Would you like some fries with that lizard? A pregnant woman in Kolkata in eastern India has complained of finding a lizard in the french-fries she bought at her local McDonald's restaurant. McDonald's said yesterday it was investigating the incident. A picture circulating widely on social media and local news channels showed a tiny lizard amidst golden-brown fries in the chain's iconic red carton it uses to serve french-fries. AFP could not immediately verify the authenticity of the photograph.

The incident happened on Tuesday when Priyanka Moitra went to grab breakfast at her local McDonald's restaurant in Kolkata city. "I was like, yuck! Oh my God, this is a lizard in my fries," Moitra told the NDTV news network in an interview aired yesterday. "I spoke to the area's sales manager, spoke to the in-charge but they dismissed it with a neglectful attitude," said Moitra, who filed a police case Tuesday evening. The police later temporarily shut down the restaurant.

"We are taking the situation seriously," McDonald's said in a statement. "Immediately upon being made of aware of the complaint, we launched a thorough investigation in an effort to gather the facts of the matter... it is still ongoing." The restaurant has since reopened after receiving a green light from food safety authorities, a company spokesperson said.

Food safety standards are often lax in India where it is difficult to build a watertight supply chain due to a shortage of infrastructure and resources. Tainted water, unreliable cold storage facilities and a lack of education on hygiene pose serious risks for international food chains, whose reputation can suffer a big blow from one local slip. — AFP