

Addressing Climate Change

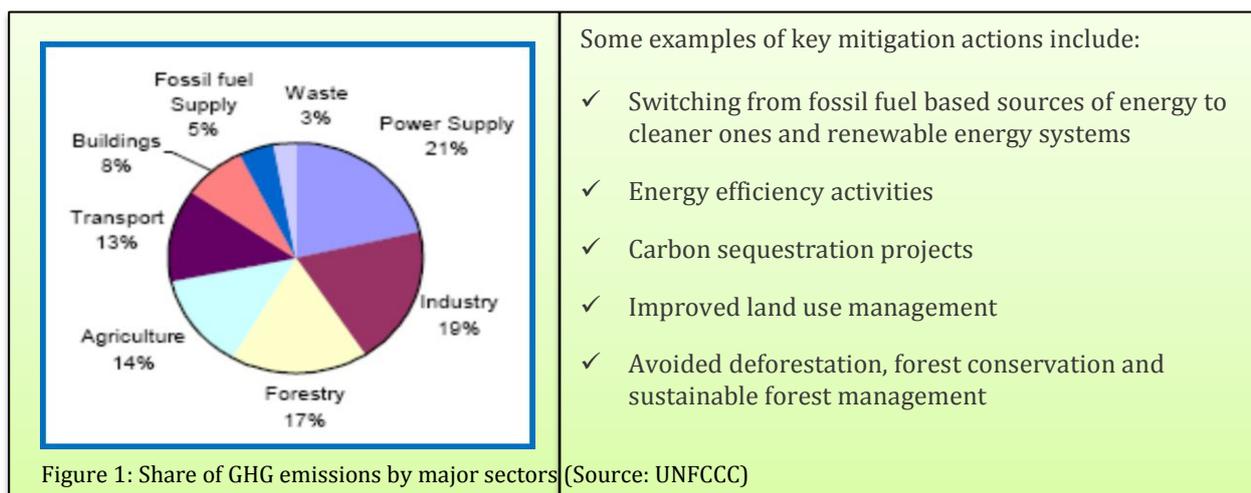
In previous articles, the impacts of climate change and future projections for Guyana and the world at large were discussed. To address this global dilemma, several significant actions have been taken at the global, regional and local levels. Some of the key approaches to addressing climate change are discussed in this article.

In addressing climate change, actions are generally grouped under two broad headings - Mitigation and Adaptation.

MITIGATION

Mitigation involves actions to reduce the emissions of greenhouse gases (GHGs), either by addressing the source of emissions (such as vehicle exhaust fumes, industrial pollution, and cutting down of forests) or by enhancing their removal from the atmosphere through “sinks” (a sink includes forests, vegetation or soils that can reabsorb carbon dioxide (CO₂)).

Countries can use different types of policies and instruments to support and create the incentives for mitigation action. They include: integrating climate policies in wider development policies, regulations and standards, information instruments, taxes and charges, financial incentives, voluntary agreements, and research, development and demonstration.



Many countries support mitigation actions that are suitable based on national circumstances.

In Guyana, for example, almost 85% of the country's territory consists of tropical rainforest that is still largely untouched. Forests are natural regulators of CO₂ in the atmosphere by helping to store carbon for long periods. When forests are damaged or cleared, the burnt or decaying wood releases the carbon stored in trees in the form of CO₂. Guyana is playing a key role in mitigating climate change through the continued conservation and sustainable management of its forests and by avoiding deforestation.

Guyana's geographic characteristics have afforded the country many opportunities for renewable energy. The country's policies place great emphasis on exploring renewable energy options such as hydropower and solar energy systems.

While many countries have the potential to support activities to mitigate climate change, there are a wide range of challenges, including limited financial resources, which limit their ability to do so.

According to the Stern Review, 2007, 'mitigation must be viewed as an investment, a cost incurred now and in the coming few decades to avoid the risks of very severe consequences in the future. If

these investments are made wisely, the costs will be manageable, and there will be a wide range of opportunities for growth and development along the way’.

It is therefore important to take strong measures to mitigate climate change as soon as possible, in order to avoid the occurrence of the most catastrophic effects of climate change.



ADAPTATION

Adaptation (in the context of climate change) refers to adjustment in natural or human systems in response to actual or expected climatic stimuli or their effects, which moderates harmful impacts or exploits beneficial opportunities.

Adequate attention must be given to responding to the impacts of climate change that are already occurring, while at the same time preparing for future impacts. In this regard, it is most urgent to ensure adequate and rapid support to the most vulnerable countries and communities. Increased investment in adaptive capacity, such as strengthening the ability of countries to reduce disaster risk, will safeguard economic progress already made and increase the climate resilience of economies on the way to achieving overall development goals.

Some examples of Adaptation options are:

- ✓ Behavioural change at the individual level, such as the keeping waterways and drainage canals clean
- ✓ Technological and engineering options such as increased sea defences or flood-proof houses
- ✓ Risk management and reduction strategies such as early warning systems for extreme events
- ✓ Promotion of adaptive management strategies such as disaster management plans, water conservation strategies and mangrove restoration plans
- ✓ Development of financial instruments such as insurance schemes
- ✓ Promotion of ecosystem management practices, such as biodiversity conservation to reduce the impacts of climate change on people



Developing countries are amongst those most vulnerable to the negative impacts of climate change and have to place great emphasis on adaptation. For such countries, a range of barriers limits both the implementation and effectiveness of adaptation measures. The capacity to adapt is dynamic and is influenced by a society’s productive base, including natural and man-made capital assets, social networks and entitlements, human capital and institutions, governance, national income, health and technology.

In Guyana major efforts have been taken to build the country’s capacity to adapt to the anticipated impacts of climate including extreme weather patterns and sea-level rise leading to flooding.

It is quite clear that significant global, regional and local efforts and resources are needed to fully support mitigation and adaptation efforts, especially for the poorest and most vulnerable

countries.

In the next instalment, we will examine actions taken by Guyana to address climate change.

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