
Climate Change Hits Vietnam's Largest Delta

Tuesday, 15 December 2009

Many scientists warned that if the United Nation's Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen, Denmark does not take strong action on global warming, the Vietnam's largest delta in the Mekong River basin will face extreme consequences.

These small changes towards something potentially more extreme could turn the Cuu Long (Mekong) River Delta upside down in the next dozen of years, according to the Vietnam news agency (VNA) on Monday.

VNA reported that in the last month of the year, daily life is going on as it has been for hundred years in the Mekong River Basin, but residents around the vicinity feels subtle changes caused by the weather.

As world leaders gather in Denmark for the conference later this week, the Mekong Delta has become a magnet for world attention. International delegations have been taking turns to visit its provinces in southern Vietnam to discover what is occurring there.

The most recent visit was by a British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) team who criss-crossed canals during a four-day cruise across the Mekong River's two main tributaries of Tien (Front) and Hau (Rear) early this month.

Around the circumference of Thoi Son Islet, which is in the middle of the Tien river facing My Tho City, one of the main centres of the delta, concrete dykes

can be seen here and there to protect the vulnerable land against tidal waves which have become more and more aggressive in recent years.

Thoi Son's area of 11 square kilometres is populated by 6,000 residents, most of whom live on rice crops, fruit crops and fish farms.

Their livelihood is largely dependent on the surrounding river, and for generations they have been as familiar with its behaviour as with the back of their hands.

But there is something else they have never known, and cannot explain.

"For the last three years, tidal waves in the flood seasons have grown bigger and bigger," said farmer Le Thi My Nuong, adding that tidal waves often inundate the islet for an hour twice a day during flood seasons that fall in the ninth and 10 th lunar months.

Pointing to a new house under construction on a raised foundation half a metre above the earth, Nuong said that her family had no choice but to live with floods.

"We have been living on this land for generations. We can't leave sit or afford new land elsewhere," she said.

Houses built on raised ground like Nuong's are becoming, whose population is pooling money to built embankment around their homes, gardens and orchards.

"Places without an embankment will have fruit trees wilting and pond fish swept away into the large river," she added, noting that floodwaters tend to rise so suddenly that an anchored boat can be pushed onto the ground within seconds.

Floodwaters this year are about 20cm higher than last year, said Huynh Van Dung, 44, a fish farmer living on a floating farm in the middle of Tien River just offshore the islet.

Dung said he knows nothing about climate change and that his biggest concerns are about the price of his fish and where he can sell this product.

At Thot Not district's Dong Hiep commune, which is a two-hour drive from Can Tho, farmers who follow the Vietnamese model that combines an orchard, fish pond and pigsty are also feeling the effects of climate change.

"The last four years have seen massive rainfall over four on five consecutive days," said Ho Van Ba, 87, a farmer living on the bank of Dung canal, adding that the downpour has stripped his mango trees of flowers and stimulated growth of harmful insects.

It's definitely raining more than dozens of years ago, he said.

(Source:Bernama/VNA)