

Changing climate displaces people around the world

By Joydeep Gupta

Bonn, June 12 (IANS) Sena Alouka from Togo, Peter Triloff from Germany and Ana Romero of Mexico have one thing in common - they all have to deal with farmers who can no longer cope with climate change.

Alouka grew up in a village called Tsiko, on the banks of river Wuto in northern Togo. By the time he became a teenager, his parents did not have a job any more. They were the traditional water carriers of the village, but the river had dried up.

"Our months are named after seasons, but now they mean nothing," Alouka told IANS. "The rains come at different times, no one knows when to sow. You cannot live like that.

"I migrated to Lome (the capital), and every day I get phone calls from people in my village, asking if they can come over. They are coming to my house in the slums. How long can I keep them? So they are building more shacks.

"There's no work for them. So they're borrowing money and becoming taxi drivers. Even then they cannot feed their families. The price of maize went up by five times in the last one year."

Alouka and the others have come here to attend the June 1-12 talks of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, which are in preparation for a climate summit in Copenhagen this December. At the summit, a global agreement to tackle climate change is expected to be inked.

Triloff, who advises farmers all over Germany, said: "Now we have proof of significant changes in weather, month by month, since the early 1990s. June has become much warmer and drier, so our apples don't get the water they need then.

"Instead, there's a lot more rain in August than there used to be, with the result that fungal diseases on apple trees have increased many times. There are such huge fluctuations in farm output that some farmers are going out of business."

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) had predicted in its benchmark 2007 report that climate change did not mean uniform global warming, but would increase fluctuations and "extreme weather events".

That is exactly what Ana Romero found when she went back to her hometown Guadalajara in Mexico. "Northern Mexico is dependent on a short rainy season, but that's not happening any more. Cattle and crops are being destroyed there, while central Mexico is suffering from forest fires and the south of the country from floods.

"What can people do? They're moving into cities where there are no jobs, so the crime rate keeps going up. Leave alone provide jobs, cities cannot even provide water to so many people. In Mexico City, where I now live, only 40 percent of the water needed is being supplied.

"There are fights over water breaking out all the time. It's a vicious cycle."

Romero and Alouka work in NGOs that help people displaced by climate change.

They are getting completely frustrated by the lack of progress towards a climate deal, though delegates from 182 countries have been spending hours at the meeting rooms here.

"I don't know what they are talking about, since they are not doing anything," Alouka said. "These (the government delegates) are not the people who should be deciding the future of the world. What should speak here is science, the facts."