

Are we aware of greenwashing?

Many countries of the world have framed laws to stop greenwashing. There are many recent, positive examples of industry groups cracking down on false environmental claims.

DR MD MIZANUR RAHMAN

In 1986 an American Environmentalist, Jay Westerveld introduced the term 'greenwashing' in an essay on 'hotel industry's practice of placing placards in each room promoting reuse of towels ostensibly' to save the environment. Greenwashing may be defined as the deceptive use of the word green in the business to mislead a perception that the products are eco-friendly.

The term is generally used when more money or time is spent for the advertisement of green products rather than spending resources on eco-friendly products. This is an activity of changing the name or label of a product to evoke the natural environment or nature -- for example, putting an image of a green field on a bottle containing harmful chemicals. Eyewashing, a very similar word is highly used in our media to describe the deceptive actions to mislead the mass people.

The term "detoxification" is broadly used when the definition of toxicity for certain substance or the name of that substance is changed, so that fewer things fall under a particular classification as toxic. Another example is the renaming of sewage sludge to organic fertilizer, despite the presence of many toxic elements like lead, cadmium, arsenic, etc. Auto-vehicles cannot do anything good for the environment except less damage than others. But many

automakers claim their vehicles as "green", "clean" or "eco-friendly".

There are many ways through which different companies or corporations perform greenwashing. Very often the manufacturers advertise of eco-friendly products, while the products or core business are inherently polluting or unsustainable. Some companies target advertising and public relations campaigns to exaggerate an environmental achievement in order to divert attention away from environmental problems. Sometimes different companies advertise or speak about 'green commitment', while they lobby for pending or against the environmental laws.

In our country many companies spend huge money for advertisement of products in the name of 'organic foods', 'herbal medicine', 'herbal cosmetics', 'naturally extracted goods', 'pure foods' 'mineral water', 'eco-products' and so on. They do not hesitate to advertise it ever since as the public's environmental awareness is growing and for public relations strategies as well. Frequently it is observed that our brick field sector claims that they are manufacturing brick in eco-friendly manner, albeit it is one of the major environmentally hazardous sectors. In fact, they do not follow any environmental guideline; do not keep environmental track record nor use environmental or green code.

Tourism which is an innate right of people may be considered

as a passport of peace and green. Recently in our country the term 'ecotourism' has been so much popular. What is advertised as ecotourism is simply conventional tourism enwrapped with a thin veneer of green. Eco-tourism propelled by travel agencies, tour operators, hotels, motels and resorts is a quick and superficially "green" visit within a conventional package.

Travel industries use this word for the expansion of tourism markets and lowering of trade barriers. Some run counter to the tenets of sound ecotourism. Many of them are not aware of energy and environmental conservation, water and air quality, recycling, safe management of waste and toxic materials, noise abatement and community involvement. They have no well-trained staff dedicated to strong principles of nature conservation.

Every travel agency should wear "The Green Bangladesh" sign, which will mean that they are committed to environmental improvement and peaceful tourism.

In the recent time there has been a gradual trend for many eco-tourists to be less intellectually curious, socially responsible, environmentally concerned and politically aware than in the past. Increasing number of rich travelers have begun opting for comfort over conservation.

Unless and until we all are involved in the nature conservation, beautiful destinations may not be here for future generations to enjoy. We should leave only footprints and take only snaps. We should not buy products made from endangered plants or animals, such as ivory, tortoise shell, animal skins, and feathers.

Many countries of the world

have framed laws to stop greenwashing. So far, most of the developed countries have made progress in stopping greenwash. There are many recent, positive examples of industry groups cracking down on false environmental claims; especially in Europe. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) of USA has provided guidelines for environmental marketing claims. The FTC has the right to prosecute false and misleading advertisement claims. Australia has modified the Trade Practices Act to punish the companies those provide misleading environmental claims. Any guilty organization may face up to 1.1 million dollar in fines. Norwegian government has forbidden the car manufacturers from claiming that their automobiles are environmentally friendly on the basis of other cars manufactured by other companies.

The Canadian Competition Bureau and Standards Association are discouraging the companies from making "vague claims" towards their products. The advertising authority in the UK recently asked the Malaysian Palm Oil Council to pull misleading television ad that ran on the BBC. The ads claimed that palm oil was eco-friendly, and used green images and statements, such as "A gift from nature, a gift for life", "Helping the planet breathe" and "Sustainably produced since 1917." In France, the consumer protection agency determined that cars should no longer be portrayed in nature, as is a common practice in auto advertising. Instead, they must only be shown on roads and other routes open to traffic, where they are typically used. Now it is the time for us to frame new laws and to enforce those laws against environmental marketing claims.

How to reduce or stop greenwashing?

- Making new laws and regulations to monitor greenwashing and punish the companies those provide misleading environmental claims
- Providing a guideline for environmental marketing claims
- Prohibiting the usage of environmentally friendly image on the product which has no environmental impacts
- Presenting an environmental



Advising people to beware of greenwashing while going green.

marketing claim in a way that makes clear whether the environmental attribute or benefit being asserted refers to the product, the product's packaging, a service or to a portion or component of the product, package or service

- Not presenting an environmental marketing claim in a manner that overstates the environmental attribute or benefit, expressly or by implication
- Avoiding implications of significant environmental benefits if the benefit is in fact negligible
- Presenting a comparative statement of the environmental marketing claims in a manner

Dr. Md. Mizanur Rahman, a biodiversity specialist, is Senior Assistant Commissioner, Jhalakathi Collectorate (mizan_perj@yahoo.com)

CLIMATE CHANGE

Coastal ecosystem too vulnerable to sea level rise

Bangladesh is a natural laboratory and the place of highest species assemblage as well as species richness in the world, especially the southwestern coastal areas of the country.

DR MA BASHAR

Climate change affects all aspects of biodiversity; however, the changes have to be taken into account vis-a-vis the impacts from the past, present, and future human activities, including increasing atmospheric concentration of carbon dioxide. For the wide range of IPPC emission scenarios, the Earth's mean surface temperature has been projected to warm 1.4 to 5.8°C by the end of the 21st century, with land areas warming more than the oceans and the high altitudes more than tropics. Then globally, by the year 2080, about 20% of the coastal wetlands could be lost due to sea level-rise. The associated sea-level rise is supposed to be 0.0 to 0.88m.

So far the impact of climate change on biodiversity is concerned, it is to affect individual organisms, populations, species distributions, and ecosystem composition and function both directly (through increase in temperature and changes in precipitation and in the case of marine and coastal ecosystems also changes in sea-level and storm surges) and indirectly (through climate change the intensity and frequency of disturbances on species assemblage).

Climate change impact on plants, animals and humans is enormous in volume and it is more or less everywhere of the world. But the impacts of climate change on sea-level-rise and its consequent effects on coastal ecosystems are exceptionally significant. These impacts are equally devastating to the biodiversity and to the people in the different areas of the ecosystem.

A coastal ecosystem provides high species assemblage and at the same time human need-resources. Human need-resources are available in the coastal ecosystems from different dimensions and different formations.

Coastal ecosystems are affected by both anthropogenic activities and climate change variability. Coastal developments, tourism management, land clearance, pollution, exploitation of species, habitat degradation, and depletion of coral reefs, mangroves, sea grasses, coastal wetlands and loss of beaches are due to anthropogenic activities. Climate change impacts affect physical, biological, and biochemical characteristics of the ocean and coastal ecosystems at different time and space scales. These modify their ecological structure and functions.

As it is told that, when sea surface temperatures will increase by more than 1°C, coral reefs will be impacted upon detrimentally. It is already reported that many coral reefs occur at or close to temperature tolerance thresholds. Over the past several decades, increasing sea-surface temperatures have been recorded in much of the tropical oceans. Coral reefs have been adversely affected by rising sea surface temperatures. Many coral reefs have undergone major, although often partially reversible, bleaching episodes when sea surface temperatures have risen 1°C above the mean seasonal sea-surface temperatures in any one season, and extensive mortality has occurred in a 3°C rise. The coral bleaching events of 1997-1998 were the most geographically widespread

-- with coral reefs throughout the world being affected leading to death of some corals.

If sea-surface temperatures increase by 3°C in short term, and if this increase is sustained over several months, it will cause extensive mortality of corals. In addition, an increase in atmospheric CO₂ concentration and hence oceanic CO₂ affects the ability of the reef plants and animals to make limestone skeletons (reef calcification); a doubling of atmospheric CO₂ concen-

ated sea-level rise, is likely to be exacerbated by sea-level rise and adversely affect coastal biodiversity. A 1-meter increase in sea-level is projected to cause the loss of 14% of the land mass of Tongatapu island, Tonga, and 80% of Monjuro Atoll, Marshall Islands, with consequent changes in overall biodiversity.

Similar processes are expected to affect endemic plant species in Cuba, endangered and breeding bird species in Hawaii and other islands, and the loss of important



Salt water intrusion into fresh water ecosystem of Bangladesh coastal area.

tration could reduce reef calcification and reduce the ability of the coral to grow vertically and keep pace with rising sea level. The overall impact of sea-surface temperature increase and elevated CO₂ concentration could result in reduced species diversity in coral reefs and more frequent outbreaks of pests and diseases in the reef system. The effects of reducing productivity of reef ecosystems on mollusks, echinoderms, crabs, birds and marine mammals are expected to be substantial.

When climate changes and sea-level rises, the situation erodes beaches and barriers of the coastal areas. Coastal erosion, which is already a problem on many coastlines for reasons other than acceler-

ation could reduce reef calcification and reduce the ability of the coral to grow vertically and keep pace with rising sea level. The overall impact of sea-surface temperature increase and elevated CO₂ concentration could result in reduced species diversity in coral reefs and more frequent outbreaks of pests and diseases in the reef system. The effects of reducing productivity of reef ecosystems on mollusks, echinoderms, crabs, birds and marine mammals are expected to be substantial.

Climate change has negative impacts on the abundance and distribution of marine biota as a whole. The impact of climate change will affect dynamics of fish and shell fishes. Climate change impacts on the ocean system include sea-surface temperature-induced shifts in the geographic distribution of marine biota and compositional changes in

biodiversity, particularly at high latitudes. The degree of the impact is likely to vary within a wide range, depending on the species and community characteristics and the region-specific conditions.

It is not known how projected climate change will affect the size and location of the warm pool in the western and central Pacific but, if more El Nino-like conditions occur, an easterly shift in the centre of tuna abundance may become more persistent. The warming of the north Pacific Ocean will compress the distribution of sockeye salmon, essentially sequencing them out of the north Pacific and into the Bering Sea. There are clear linkages with the intensity and position of the Aleutian Low Pressure system in the Pacific Ocean and the production trends of many of the commercially important fish species.

Sea-level rise with many other factors could affect a range of fresh water wetlands in low-lying regions. In tropical regions, low-lying floodplains and associated swamps could be displaced by saltwater habitats due to the combined actions of sea-level rise, more intense monsoonal rains, and larger tidal or storm surges. Saltwater intrusion into freshwater aquifers is also potentially a major problem.

Scientists are concerned with a fact that, everybody anticipates sea-level-rise impact and associated climate change impact on Bangladesh coastal areas. It is already reported that about 18% of Bangladesh's land will be submerged if the sea-level rises by one meter.

In Bangladesh, sea-level-rise is colossally affecting coastal areas. Of the severely affected coastal districts, most affected ones are Satkhira and Bagerhat. Ten years ago in the districts of Bagerhat and Satkhira, rice production was very common almost in all areas. Now almost entire area of the Satkhira district and 80% of the Bagerhat district have gone under sea-level-rise impacts. An area of 80km long and 40km wide has lost rice produc-

tion capability and has been taken under shrimp culture projects in the Bagerhat district. In the Satkhira district, shrimp culture is prevailing throughout the entire district. Rice cultivation has been reduced by 8 times during the last 10 years in these two districts.

We must remember that impact of climatic change anywhere in an ecosystem (especially in the tropics and subtropics) is first and most sensitively received by plant phenology and by the life stages of animals (especially of phytophagous animals). Plant-animal relation in an ecosystem is biotic-biotic interaction. Sequence and/or occurrence of biotic-biotic relation is the key factor for species assemblage/species richness in an ecosystem. This species richness is the healthiness of biodiversity in a region of the biosphere. Healthiness of biodiversity is the sustenance of integration of biotic-biotic and abiotic-biotic interactions. This sustenance of integration never stands in proper 'functioning' condition when phenological stages of the plant and life stages (especially developmental stages) of animals are affected by climatic changes or any other anthropogenic activities.

Bangladesh is a natural laboratory and the place of highest species assemblage as well as species richness in the world, especially the southwestern coastal areas of the country. This area functions both as terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems ensemble. This situation is presented by mangrove vegetation as the aquatoco-terrestrial condition and estuarine ecosystem as the highest productive area of marine and riverine ecosystem. Here is the secret of containing highest integration of biotic-biotic and biotic-abiotic interactions; and then for the maintenance of the highest species assemblage in the world. These interactions of the biological processes in such fertile ecosystems are very vulnerable to climatic changes.

Dr. MA Bashar is professor, EBBL, Department of zoology, University of Dhaka.