

Train Coastal Groups to Survive Tsunami: Swaminathan

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Eminent agricultural scientist and Member of Parliament Dr M S Swaminathan today asked the Central Institute of Fisheries Education (CIFE) to promote high-synergy fishing communities by organising non-degree training programmes for them on methods of group co-operation to cope up with any calamity along the Indian coast.

Speaking on lessons to be learnt from the recent triple tragedy that struck Japan, Swaminathan said the Japanese system of early childhood education instills the habit of caring for others and helps to foster social energy.

"Scientists and scholars should give a thought to methods of enhancing the coping capacity of coastal communities to such mega-disasters," Swaminathan said at the tenth convocation of CIFE (a deemed university) here.

"They should also develop a plan of action for promoting sustainable capture and culture fisheries both along the coast and inland waters," he said.

About the second lesson to be learnt from the Japanese experience, he said, "it was only through harmony with nature, we can minimise the damage arising from natural disasters."

As a former founder of International Society of Mangrove Ecosystems (ISME), he said during the 2004 tsunami which hit Tamil Nadu, he said the coastal communities observed that dense mangrove forests served as a speed breaker, reducing the damage done.

ISME then launched a programme both in India and Sri Lanka to plant mangrove and non-mangrove bio-shields along the coast, he said.

Swaminathan also said the earthquakes and tsunamis are no strangers to people of Japan but the new threat which had created the greatest fear is the damage done to nuclear power plants.

There is now public concern about the safety of nuclear power plants located along the coast such as Kalpakkam and Kudankulam in Tamil Nadu and "in my view, in addition to appropriate steps in reactor design and engineering safety, we should also promote bio-shields comprising mangroves and non-mangroves bioshields in the coastal areas adjoining nuclear plants," Swaminathan said.

For this purpose, it may be worthwhile to declare these areas as Critically Vulnerable Coastal Areas (CRZ-I), he said.

He also suggested that CIFE scientists should develop an anticipatory research programme to checkmate the multiple adverse impact of unfavourable weather on capture and culture fisheries.

This is because India can also expect similar catastrophes more frequently since extreme and unpredictable weather conditions are now becoming common, he said.

It is also important to make sure to spread quality education among fisher families as well as among those involved in the post-harvest management of fishes, said the founder and Chairman of M S Swaminathan Research Foundation, Chennai.

Swaminathan urged the students of CIFE to adopt seawater farming for coastal area prosperity' programme where the technology involves agro-forestry systems involving integrated tree-fish farming.

Besides mangroves, other salt tolerant trees and shrubs like Salicornia, Atriplex and Casuarina can be cultivated along with fish ponds.

"Now both seawater farming and below sealevel farming are feasible and the unique below sea level farming system of Kuttanad in Kerala is being proposed for recognition under UN body Food and Agricultural Organisation," he added.

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