EuroSciCon

June 21-22, 2018
Paris , France

World Summit on
Climate Change and Global Warming

Expert Opin Environ Biol 2018 volume: 7
DOI: 10.4172/2325-9655-C1-021

LOCAL VERSUS MODERN KNOWLEDGE ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE: CASE STUDY OF MENTAWAI COMMUNITY OF MENTAWAI ISLANDS, INDONESIA

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The Mentawai Islands are located off the coast of Sumatra in the Indian Ocean. Due to lack of exploitable resources, they were generally ignored by colonial powers and local rulers alike. Hence the traditional knowledge of local communities has been preserved there. Only during recent decades, business interests from the Indonesian mainland have discovered the islands which led to a clash of different lifestyles, ideas about development and perceptions about the environment. We have been studying Mentawai for over a decade, on issues of community development, both general and gender-specific, disaster-coping strategies and environmental history from socio-economic and natural science perspectives. As the islands are a clearly defined micro-cosmos, where distinct traditions of local inhabitants and outsiders can be defined, they offer a study-case on the interaction of community development and climate change, in how one affects the other. We have experienced various events, possibly connected to climate change, and could monitor the responses of locals and outsiders on the islands (government, business), and we have analyzed several activities, again by locals and outsiders which are considered to have a climate impact, e.g. traffic, construction, agriculture, energy, and more general consumption patterns, from a broader socio-economic context. This paper presents diverse insights into these developments and internal-external entities. We argue that outsiders' interference is both reducing the ability of the local population to cope with climate change and triggering a development path which leads to a strong increase of greenhouse gas emissions while only marginally improving their overall living situation. We also identify certain climate-conscious fields of outside interference which could improve on this situation. We conclude that Mentawai knowledge and systems have the capacity to address degradation of natural environments with damaging effects on local livelihoods and climate conditions and to protect Mentawai's unique coral reefs and natural resources.

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