

Lesson from drought

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Pupils queue up to take drinking water delivered by militia officers and soldiers of the People's Armed Forces Department of Yinjiang Tujia and Miao Autonomous County, at Yantang Village, Zhongba Township of Yinjiang, southwest China's Guizhou Province, March 23, 2010.(Xinhua Photo)

BEIJING, March 24 -- As the saying goes, it's never too late to mend the fence after a sheep is lost. To view the increasingly worsening drought in more than a century in Southwest China through this mindset, we need to do much more than quench the immediate thirst of millions of local residents.

We need to look at how local economic developments in the past decade have impacted the local ecology, especially if the developments have played a part in causing the drought.

In the past decade, more and more hectares of native forestland have been razed to make room for plants such as rubber and eucalyptus trees, which have brought benefits to the local economy. However, these substitute forests are harmful to the ecology. Instead of conserving underground water, these trees absorb, negatively impacting the local ecology.

The coverage of rubber trees has exceeded 200,000 hectares; eucalyptus trees cover more than 1 million hectares in Yunnan province alone.

They have undoubtedly contributed to an ecological imbalance. The number of foggy days in Xishuangbanna, a subtropical area in Yunnan, has decreased by 60 days annually in the past two decades - indicative of a drop in moisture in the air - because of the expansion of rubber trees.

The construction of many hydropower stations in the upper reaches of several major rivers in the region in the past decade has also added to the dramatic change in the local climate.

Rome was not built in a day. The campaign to promote development of the southwestern region has indeed accelerated the economic growth there, but the cost may be too high when it comes to ecological degradation and environmental pollution.

(Source: China Daily)

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