

High School Essay Third Place

Communities Facing Climate Change Together

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I sit on the ninth story balcony of my grandmother's apartment, swatting at the mosquitoes that refuse to leave. It is a hot and humid evening with a bright red sun setting in the horizon—one of the signature images of Bangladesh. As I sit, I notice the children playing in the village below with kites made of washed-up plastic. They run around the tightly packed maze of shanties, mostly built from scavenged wood and rusty tin. Korail, a thriving slum of 50,000, was built on unwanted swampy land in the capital city of Dhaka. Resilient innovators from the slums built it up into the community it is today. Using the refuse of the city around them, they created land. On the land, they built their homes, schools and mosques. Korail sits only inches above the water; any rise would spell disaster for its residents. At current rates, Korail will again be underwater within the decade.

According to the Climate Clock in New York City, we have seven years to achieve net zero emissions before the impact of climate change becomes irreversible. Closer to home, the impacts of climate change can be seen in our own communities; nine of the 10 hottest years on record have occurred since 2005. To prevent the worst of climate change, Maryland residents have been pioneering creative solutions. Take Altenera Project, for example. The Bethesda company creates green energy alternatives to those already seen on the market. One of their recent projects, called BREEZBEE, harvests wind energy through patented reed technology. The wind vibrates the reeds, creating energy that can be used. The reeds are organized in lightweight cells that allow users to scale up or down the size of this clean energy source.

Another example would be the Food Recovery Network. Food production costs a lot of energy; cutting food waste lowers energy expenditures, decreasing greenhouse gas emissions. The Food Recovery Network is a student-led national organization that focuses on distributing food that otherwise would have been thrown away. This program was founded by four college students at The University of Maryland College Park who noticed that dining hall food was being wasted. They took action. After the first year, 30,000 meals were recovered and donated. Today, 3.2 million meals have been donated and 7.4 million pounds of carbon dioxide emissions have been prevented.

Combating climate change will take a worldwide effort, one rooted in community action, urgency and justice. As we work together, we must not forget that climate change disproportionately impacts already marginalized communities, such as those living in Korail. Whether through technological or social innovation, the efforts of all of us can make a difference. There is no small role. From Maryland to Bangladesh, innovators, entrepreneurs, activists and everyday citizens all play crucial roles in this race against time.