United Nations Office
to Support the
International Decade
for Action
'Water for Life'
2005-2015

United Nations
Department of Economic
and Social Affairs
(UNDESA)

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2005-2015

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Background document

International Media Consultation on Water and Climate Change

The Role of the Information and Communication Community in Enabling Adaptation Strategies to Climate Change in Water Resources Management

Zaragoza (Spain), 24-25 September 2009

In cooperation with:
United Nations Department of Public Information (UNDPI)

With the support from:
GOBIERNO DE ESPAÑA · MINISTERIO DE MEDIO AMBIENTE Y MEDIO RURAL Y MARINO · CONFEDERACIÓN HIDROGRÁFICA DEL EBRO
GOBIERNO DE ARAGON
Zaragoza AYUNTAMIENTO

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1. Key issues about climate change adaptation and water management.

The consequences of climate change are already affecting everything on the earth's surface activity and most of these effects are going to happen through a common element: "changes in the water cycle". The changes affecting water at any stage are going to be some of the most urgent and difficult challenges to be managed by people worldwide.

Scientific data, observations and future climate scenarios provide enough evidences about changes on freshwater resources and its impact on ecosystems and societies.

The adaptation to these new circumstances in unavoidable and must be addressed immediately.

The making of the list of all the effects of climate change over the water cycle, or even just over the freshwater resources is a very complex task. We must at least clearly identify the more relevant effects specially the ones influenced or enhanced by the current human activities.

Hydrological cycle

The greenhouse gas emissions and large scale land use changes, for more than one century have a direct consequence: atmosphere warming. This effect has been clearly linked to changes on the earth hydrological cycle, such as the variations on the water vapour content in the atmosphere, on the intensity and extremes of the precipitation models, on the increasing on ice melting and the reduction of snow cover and soil changes on moisture and runoff.

As a rule, changes on precipitation show important variability both, at space and time levels. At a large scale approach, over the last century and mainly since the 70's, precipitation in high northern latitudes has mainly increased while in southern latitudes (30° to 10°) has decreased. The proportion of rainfall coming from heavy events has been increased in most areas as well as it has been observed duplication of the very dry areas surface. Mountain glaciers and snow cover in the Northern hemisphere have been significantly reduced and consequently the amount of stored water has also diminished. Those changes in mountain snow and glaciers melting also had consequences on rivers and lakes processes.

According to climate model simulations for the current century, water stored in glaciers and mountain snow will be decreasing, so water supply, coming from these sources during dry and warm seasons, will be reduced in those regions where the snow melting contribution is an important component. Regarding precipitation, simulation models generally project increases in high latitudes and certain areas of the tropics and decreases in some regions of subtropics and lower mid-latitude. In

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other regions, projections are highly variable depending of the model, and uncertainty is the only conclusion, even clearer when we look at a local or low geographic scale level.

Floods and draughts

The annual average river runoffs as well as the availability of water, according to the pattern for precipitation and model simulations, are projected to increase in high latitudes and certain tropical areas, while in some dry regions at mid-latitudes and dry tropics, the expectation is to decrease. The impact of climate change is expected to reduce the water resources availability in some of the semi-arid and arid areas such the Mediterranean Basin, southern Africa, north-eastern Brazil or western USA.

The frequency of events of heavy precipitation, during the 21st century, will probably increase over most areas and consequently, the risk of rain-generated floods will be higher. The same relationship is established for those areas in extreme drought with projections to reduce the precipitation. In these areas the drought periods will be even stronger and enlarged as in many continental areas of subtopics and mid-latitudes during summer season.

Water supply & Sanitation

Floods, droughts and higher water temperatures are factors that can affect water quality and start up any kind of pollution, from sediments, nutrients organic carbon dissolved, pathogens, pesticides and salt. These factors can have strong impacts on ecosystems, human health, and on the technical and economical cost of water supply. In addition, in coastal areas, the rise in sea-level is projected to generate salinisation of aquifers and estuaries that will still decrease the availability of freshwater for people and ecosystems.

If we put in a balance both, the positive and the negative impacts coming from climate change, the negative ones will exceed the benefits. Land area with increasing water stress because of climate change is projected to be more than twice than the area with water stress reduction, according to simulation models. Changes in the precipitation and distribution along the year may create other negative impacts such alternative floods and droughts that directly affect negatively water management related to supply, quality, risk, etc.

Ecosystems

People and economies around the world depend on nature. Nature is not just one more thing to include in the long list of elements of human societies. Ecosystems bring to humans all the goods and services we need to survive and improve our well being. These services are the result of complex processes and interrelations among the components of biodiversity at its different levels: genes, species and ecosystems.

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Benefits are expressed in many diverse ways, from the basic goods for life, such water, food, clean air, etc. to the aesthetic or spiritual inspiration of each human culture and society. Ecosystem services are the basis in which we build our daily lives, even for those people that are not yet conscious of this complexity.

In 2005, as a request from the UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, was published the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MEA). The MEA allows to describe, from a scientific approach, these services and to analyse the current state of delivery of those services, as well as the drivers that impacted upon that delivery. This framework provides a clear understanding of the many ways that nature supports our lives. But the MEA is not just important in terms of scientific data and/or knowledge; the main interest of MEA is that it assesses the consequences of ecosystem changes for human well-being and the scientific basis for action needed to enhance the conservation and sustainable use of those systems. For all those reasons, the MEA is an excellent tool for measuring the progress achieved in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which are clearly reflecting the relationship between the environment and sustainable development. In fact their targets and indicators are based on the delivery of ecosystem services to the poor.

The MEA showed that the loss of services from ecosystems such deforestation, soil degradation or water purification, is a big obstacle to reduce poverty, hunger and disease. MEA made it clear that human actions are depleting Earth's natural capital, "*putting such strains on the environment that the ability of the planet's ecosystems to sustain future generations can no longer be taken for granted*". The MEA also recommended that a system of payments for ecosystem services be established and that land and water rights be clarified.

In this context, climate change will aggravate the problem destabilizing and degrading many ecosystems that are already threatened by destruction and overuse, and result in direct severe impacts on those people who depend on them for their livelihoods. Climate change can lead to big ecosystem failures and consequently, to large-scale population displacements in many regions.

In terms of water, changes in hydrology projected by simulation models show important biodiversity impacts on every continent. In fact climate change effects in most species have already been observed in most regions. Temperature has a direct impact on species but there is also an indirect impact through changes in the moisture availability. A clear example is found in the Amphibians group, which due to the combined effects of temperature and water stress, can be massively extinted in different countries such as Costa Rica, Spain or Australia.

Ecosystem responses to changes in hydrology involve complex interactions of biotic and abiotic process, but of all ecosystems, however, freshwater ecosystems appear to have the highest proportion of species threatened with extinction by climate

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change. Climate change is enhancing the existing threats coming from a large unsustainable overuse of water.

People of many developing countries depend directly on ecosystem services, and their capacity to mitigate and adapt is intimately linked to the resilience capacity of these ecosystems. As a consequence, adaptation strategies from an ecosystem approach, will play a key role in strengthening the resilience of communities affected by climate change in such sectors as coastal zones, agriculture, forests, health, infrastructure and obviously water.

It is important that those strategies are developed in an integrative way. For example, an initiative to reduce deforestation and to promote reforestation and the recovery of degraded lands would achieve multiple objectives: sequestering carbon from the atmosphere; strengthening ecosystems and biodiversity; expanding food production; and providing employment, principally to the poor and to indigenous people and improving water availability and quality in a basin.

Agriculture and forestry

Availability of water depending on temporal distribution of precipitation and evaporation as well as its quality has direct impact on forestry, fisheries and agriculture productivity (including irrigated crops).

Water is crucial for food availability and security especially in the 80% of world rain-fed agricultural land, and crops are depending only on rain water to maintain the soil moisture and grow up. Thus food production is expected to be reduced in arid and semi-arid regions in the tropics and subtropics, as well as in Mediterranean-type regions, where agricultural production is very vulnerable to climate, And as a consequence, farmers' vulnerability is going to be increased as a result of those changes in water coming from climate change and worsening other traditional water management problems.

But even in the remaining agricultural areas productivity, the available water resources for irrigation also depend on climate characteristics and changes. As a matter of fact, irrigated land, represents just 18% of global agricultural surface of land, but produces about half the world's total supply of grain.

Regarding forestry, forests are determinants of water supply, quality and quantity, worldwide. The importance of forests as watersheds will even be significantly increased in the next decades, as freshwater resources become scarcer, particularly in developing countries. Forests contribute to the regional water cycle, with large potential effects of land-use changes on local and regional climates. At the same time, in terms of risk management, forest protection can contribute to mitigate both drought and flood.

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Afforestation and reforestation may increase soil moisture, reduce the temperature and increase rainfall locally; instead, deforestation can lead to decreased local rainfall and increased temperature. These are clear examples of land use management directly contributing to climate change or helping to adapt to it.

Industry and energy

Climate change affects the function and operation of existing water related infrastructures; these include hydropower systems, flood defenses infrastructures, irrigation systems and water supply to any kind of industrial activity. The impacts of climate change on freshwater systems have a negative synergic effect on other human originated stresses such growth of population, economic activities, land use change and urbanization, that are already causing a continuous increase on water demand.

Water management

Current practices on water management don't seem enough to face the challenges associated to climate change on water supply reliability, flood risk, health, agriculture, energy and ecosystems. In fact, already in the current climate variability situation, it is quite usual to observe water management problems associated to flood and droughts events. The reason is a lack of an efficient mechanism that incorporates climate variability information into water-related management. This must be one of the first measures to progress towards adaptation to the long-term impacts of climate change on water resources as well as to the common challenges and impacts coming from human activities.

Two additional points to take into consideration are: the reliability of current water management systems and infrastructures that can be altered by the consequences of climate change, and the uncertainty as a key factor on water-related management and planning.

Adaptation

The fight against climate change has two different components. The first one, widely known is mitigation consists on the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. Mitigation has been the main subject in the media news about climate change until recent times. The scientific evidences unfortunately, indicate that climate change is already unavoidable. Empirical data show a rise of 1ºC for the northern hemisphere during the last century and predictions indicate that an additional warming of 0.8ºC is unavoidable by 2020. We have to face some of the first consequences of this unavoidable climate change, even with the best results on mitigation strategies; however, we have to adapt to these new changing circumstances.

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Adaptation should be anticipatory and be linked to economic growth and sustainable development, and must be integrated with poverty reduction strategies. Adaptation is not just about designing different projects or putting together lists of measures to reduce the impacts of climate change in a reactive manner. The aim of adaptation is to build the resilience and reduce the vulnerability of populations and ecosystems, emphasizing preventive local and regional actions in order to manage the risks associated with the impacts of climate change.

Unlike strategies for mitigation, the adaptation ones are still in their beginning stages. They should be based on institutional inventories of risk and emphasize local and regional data -as environmental constraints can be different from one area to another. Additionally, they request from a multidisciplinary approach in order to be effectively implemented. The active and coordinated response of local, regional and national authorities and specially their spatial planners as the first step forward must be achieved in order to progress in these stages.

Since the Stern report appears in 2006, the debate on whether it would be cheaper to pay for future damages instead of acting right now by mitigation and adaptation measures, has no sense anymore. Economic costs of adaptation measures compared to economic losses caused by river floods, sea-level rise or strong weather events are clearly lower. We must keep in mind that there is not only an economic question but mainly a social one, as the impacts will be affecting millions of people.

It is important to underline that water must be seen as an entry point to assess adaptation needs. The development of adaptation options to climate change on water-related management must include both, integrated demand-side as well as supply-side strategies. It is crucial to promote different kind of incentives to encourage water conservation and to work from an integrated water resources management approach to have the best results to achieve adaptation measures across socioeconomic, environmental and administrative systems.

Integrated water resources management must have regularly updated data from a river basin area, about water resources in terms of availability, demand, quality, risks of floods and droughts, etc, with the aim to assess water usages and risks in different activity sectors.

Adaptation planning must include the preservation and restoration of ecosystems as part of an investment in natural and environmental infrastructure for climate resilience. Natural ecosystems must be recognized as water 'customers' in their own right. This is the case of all freshwater ecosystems including many underestimated wetland areas.

Water demand must be effectively managed including engagements with all sectors. These commitments are: enhancing water storage capacity; investing in new generation irrigation technologies, changing crop varieties to reduce water

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consumption, upgrading infrastructure to enhance water-use efficiency and productivity, and re-designing fees and taxes structures. These items must allow flexible water allocation systems that protect social and environmental interests, whilst permitting flexibility in economic use of water.

The promotion of effective mitigation measures can substantially reduce the impact of climate change on water resources, however, without an integrative procedure; the same measures can have negative side effects. As an example of negative impacts, we have the increase of water demands because of the needs of certain aforestation or reforestation activities, or the case of biofuels production coming from new crops requesting more water. Any kind of project to mitigate global warming should be sustainably located, designed and managed.

In fact both, adaptation and mitigation measures, need to be addressed across multiple water-dependent sectors, but perhaps the most important factor is the strategies for adaptation designed in the context of improving the development, environment and health policies of developing countries.

Gaps and uncertainties

There is a huge amount of information and data about climate change impacts on water-related issues, but there are still gaps in knowledge in terms of observations and research needs. Data observation, gathering and access are crucial for the adaptative water management and to improve understanding and modeling of climate changes related to the hydrological cycle at the appropriate scales for decision-makers.

Information related to climate change impacts on water is inadequate on water quality, aquatic ecosystems and groundwater; this is especially important regarding their socio-economic dimensions. The tools to facilitate integrated upgrading of adaptation and mitigation options across multiple water-dependent sectors are a key element and must be urgently developed.

2. Information and communication: state of the art.

Public perception of climate change

We can identify different areas of interest when we look at the available information about public perception of climate change, such as: the citizens' real knowledge of climate change, the existing degree of concern among the population, the risk perceived by the individuals, the support for certain policies of mitigation and adaptation or the perception of possible solutions to climate change and confidence in the different social actors. Notwithstanding, there is not enough information available about the specific perception of current people on climate change related issues that require the understanding of complex processes such as the case of

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climate change linked to water management.

The different international studies show a common thing: the citizens have a general high concern for climate change. The surveys carried out in different developed countries in recent years show that citizens' concern for climate change is high and they seem to give large support to the efforts of their governments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. However, this concern still fails to match climate change with other problems, such water availability and/or quality and, especially, it doesn't reflect a true perception of the risks coming from climate change.

According to data of the Eurobarometer on the environment published by the European Commission in 2005, climate change is one of the four environmental problems that concern European citizens the most, along with water pollution, man-made disasters and air pollution. This concern varies significantly between the different European countries, with less concern among new members. And, in fact, the evolution of this concern among citizens shows a fluctuating but not a growing tendency. This perception is continuously and intimately linked to the social and political context of each country and neither reflects a clear understanding of the links between the four key environmental problems identified of main concern in Europe.

Climate change and media

Studies related to communication and climate change show an evolution on the scope of the subject. The starting point was the media contribution on building social concern about climate change; afterwards the move towards the relationship between politics, science and society; and more recently the analysis of the role and impacts of different strategies used by different actors in communicating about climate change.

This analysis includes, among many official and unofficial sources, the information coming from new organizations, linked to conservative interests, aiming to create discredit to the IPCC reports and the international political agreements achieved by the UNFCCC, with the final objective to move climate change public debate from a political and social context to just a natural phenomenon.

However, a substantial part of the worldwide increase in the media attention to climate change in the recent years is closely linked to three main documents: the *Stern Review*, The Al Gore film and book, *An Inconvenient Truth*, both published in 2006 and the 2007 IPCC report, which finally provided the definitive scientific consensus on climate change. All this information was reinforced with several extreme weather events and patterns in many regions.

Notwithstanding, the information and news addressing adaptation and climate change, related with other subjects, i.e. water management, are still not relevant compared with information focusing on mitigation and energy related actions. Hence, it shows a clear dependence with the main contents of the international agenda's

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negotiations on climate change instead of including also the real problems of people at local level.

It is important to remind that in general, media systems play a crucial role in shaping the social context in which policies are developed. Through the media, citizens learn how public policies will affect them. On the other side, media make it possible that governments receive citizens' feedback on their policies and actions. Media act as the first channel between those who wish to influence policies and the policymakers by means of controlling the scope of political discourse and regulating the flow of information. Consequently, media must be considered as a key actor not only communicating, but also enabling people and societies to act on climate change and water management challenges and its relationships. But obviously, this is going to show a huge range of options and situations depending on both, the level of democracy and public participation of each country and the level of development and availability of resources for the media.

A recent publication from Mike Shanahan related to the Media Coverage of Climate Change in Nonindustrialized Countries suggests that climate change is also raising up in the media agenda of these countries. There are many new reports focusing on local aspects of climate change, however it seems that in most of the countries the media are not quick enough in its capacity to inform about one of the biggest issues of concern of our time. While coverage of climate change in non industrialised countries is increasing, the quantity and quality of reporting do not match the scale of the problem.

Often the news rely on reports from developed countries agencies instead of focusing on locally relevant news. Additionally, there is a lack on adaptation information in general and more concretely on the link of climate change with water availability and quality; two of the most urgent and relevant issues for poor people. This fact doesn't contribute to help them to be prepared for climate change impacts. In most developing countries, local people is observing clear negative changes on the climate of their areas, as well as in water availability, but they don't understand the link with a global problem such climate change is; and neither the way that those changes will be affecting their traditional livelihoods in the near future.

The spread of available international information on climate change, in most of the developing countries has a problem of lack of resources, skills and access to information and expertise, by journalists. This is even worsened with the low priority given by the editors to this kind of information. Climate change is usually considered under the topic of the environment, instead of a transversal issue affecting also social and political decisions and having a direct impact on other key development factors, such as food security, water availability and quality or risk management. People are facing all these problems on a day by day basis, but unfortunately without an appropriate climate change adaptative approach.

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As the United Nations Development Programme's 2007 Human Development Report (UNDP, 2007: p 67) on climate change states: "*The media have a critical role to play in informing and changing public opinion. Apart from their role in scrutinising government actions and holding policymakers to account, the media are the main source of information for the general public on climate change science.*"

3. Main documents of reference

Large bibliography related and recommended to participate in the seminar discussions is included in the **reading's guide**.

4. The Seminar

The international political response to climate change began with the adoption of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 1992. The UNFCCC entered into force on 21 March 1994, and now has 192 signatory countries.

A main contribution to the activities that will be undertaken to mitigate the adverse impacts of climate change will be the ability to transmit information about the impacts of climate change to the public in general and in particular to the ability to change public opinion and behaviour related to the management and use of water as we all learn to adapt to the changes in water availability caused by global climate change. In achieving a broad participation of the public in the adoption of solutions to this problem, the most important partner and asset is the mass media and specially the people who within it are considered "opinion makers" because of their public persona and credibility within the general population.

This aspect of the Climate Change process appears in various articles of the UNFCCC, mainly in the art.4 and 6: "Promote and cooperate in education, training and public awareness related to climate change and encourage the widest participation in this process, including that of non- governmental organizations".

The Convention refers also to adaptation measures in Climate Change in Article 2 and Article 4 , particularly 4.1 (e): Cooperate in preparing for adaptation to the impacts of climate change; develop and elaborate appropriate and integrated plans for coastal zone management, water resources and agriculture, and for the protection and rehabilitation of areas, particularly in Africa, affected by drought and desertification, as well as floods.

Recent important meetings have addressed the issue of adaptation and the importance of this process.

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The 13th Conference of the Parties (COP 13) held in Bali, Indonesia in December identified in the Bali Action Plan four key elements or "building blocks": mitigation, adaptation, finance and technology. One of the significant outcomes in The Bali roadmap was the decision to create the Adaptation Fund, which was set up to finance adaptation in developing countries. The Adaptation Fund was subsequently launched in December 2008, at the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Poznan, Poland.

The Buenos Aires Programme of Work on Adaptation and Response Measures (DECISION 1/CP.10) and the discussions in Nairobi Work Program (NWP), list within their objectives the need to assist countries in improving their understanding of climate change impacts and to make informed decisions on how to adapt to them, including through the formulation of National Adaptation Programmes of Action (NAPAs) by Least Developed Countries (LDCs).

Related to the issues of water and sanitation, the United Nations General Assembly, in December 2004, proclaimed the years 2005 to 2015 as the International Decade for Action " Water for Life", The primary goal of the Decade is to promote efforts to fulfil international commitments made on water and water related issues by 2015 and also to discourage the unsustainable exploitation of water resources and to develop integrated water resource management plans as agreed in the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation adopted at the World Summit on Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg, South Africa in 2002 and in the Report on the Thirteenth Session of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development held in April 2005. Adaptation to climate change has become an essential component of integrated water resource management as it has become evident that the current and future changes in the patterns of water availability caused by climate change will condition the use and management of water resources in the foreseeable future.

The United Nations Office to Support the International Decade for Action "Water for life" 2005-2015 aims to develop a United Nations system-wide coordinated communication response to accelerate the implementation of the water and sanitation agenda. In a coordinated response with the ongoing Climate Change negotiations and the upcoming Conference of the Parties to be held in Copenhagen later this year, we are engaging in this activity to raise the profile of the water dilemma within the world media in support of the climate change discussions, in particular related to policy making and adaptation strategies, and the need for new communication/advocacy strategies.

Objectives

1. Create awareness and provide information to meeting participants on the issues related to the link between water availability and climate change in order to build a more capable source of information to the public on these issues.

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2. Explore strategies to more effectively use the media to achieve the changes in public perception and behaviour related to water management that will be necessary for successful adaptation to climate change.

3. Explore the potential for an active participation of the media in the process of adaptation and the requirements that such cooperation would entail for the current sources of knowledge on water and climate change issues.

4. Discuss the potential for improvement in the sharing of information on water management and climate change, and how information may be produced in ways that it is more useful for the media and more easily digestible by the public in general.

5. Assess ways and means to build awareness on climate change issues in various water related sectors, facilitating better access to expertise, background information, and contacts to enhance quality reporting of such issues.

Expected outcomes

The main goals of the event are:

- To educate and build capacity in this very select group of media personalities on issues related to water availability and climate change
- Improve media understanding of the problem and adaptation strategies to climate change in the context of Integrated Water Resources Management.
- Establish key contacts and partnerships with Opinion Makers and Media sources
- The meeting will serve as a basis for the design of a communication/advocacy strategy on water and climate
- The meeting will contribute to the debates on water management adaptation to climate change at COP15 of UNFCCC in Copenhagen in December 2009.

Zaragoza, September 2009.