



Climate Change and Water-related Risks

Summary of the online discussion

The online discussion on climate change and water-related risks took place from 21 - 28 January 2013, and comprised different activities, including a video message, discussion questions to the stakeholders, a live video where the audience was able to ask questions to an expert, as well as a question poll.

1) Video

A 3-minute video message by Dr. Harry Lins, a hydrologist with over 40 years research and programme management experience on topics related to climate and water was displayed throughout the week and was viewed over 168 times. The purpose of the video message was to trigger discussions among the audience. In his message, Dr. Lins shared some insight on water-related risks associated with climatic variability and change, and stressed that understanding changes in the distribution and nature of hydrologic hazards associated with climatic variability and change is essential in planning for and adapting to future climatic conditions. Dr. Lins also mentioned the need for societies to adapt to a very wide range of hazards. He also mentioned two critical tools to human's ability to minimize the adverse impacts of water-related risks: Integrated Water Resources Management and Adaptive Water Management for which the need for comprehensive long-term hydrological and meteorological monitoring networks are essential.

2) Discussion questions

Five questions were posed to the audience with different levels of complexity. The aim was to have the opinion of stakeholders on some key facts and challenges that are being faced in the context of climate change.

Is adaptive management sufficient to cope with climate change? - This question raised most comments among the audience. Globally, the posts agreed that adaptation to climate change was important, but not enough as it addressed only half of the climate change challenge. Adaptation measures should thus be combined with mitigation approaches that address the other half.

Why is the “no regrets” strategy so difficult to implement in practice? - The need for indicators of value that are not monetary was expressed. “Water Reserves for the Environment” was given as an example of a no-regrets strategy to face climate change, as it shows how actions can be developed which aim to strengthen current management, and which are totally justifiable with or without climate change.

You find the water and climate change Genie's lamp; he grants you one wish. What do you wish for? - This question also received many comments. Here, people expressed their wish that governments would recognize the extent to which climate change impacts on water resources and ecosystems and take measures accordingly, while recognizing the need to work together in developing adaptation strategies across borders, especially in transboundary basins. The wish to reduce uncertainties related to climate change and to establish more risk assessment models for mitigation and adaptation in the future was also expressed. Other wishes included global environmental justice or going back in time 150 years with the knowledge on climate change we currently have to convince pre-industrial age world leaders that a different development path is necessary.



How do we improve cooperation to promote synergies between mitigation and adaptation to climate change? - The move towards low-energy water production and low-water energy production in mitigation efforts to reduce carbon emissions was suggested. Further, the contribution to mitigation by managing forests and agricultural lands to optimize the sequestering of carbon was also mentioned. Methods to tax CO₂ emissions or tradable emissions certificates etc. were highlighted as promising approaches to fund adaptation.

Why does climate change impact some communities more than others? How can better water management help reduce inequalities? - Comments suggested that the focus should be on vulnerability “hot spots”, where exposure and sensitivity to climate change-related hazards are high, and include: low-lying deltas and coastal mega-cities, drylands, small islands, mountains and their rivers. The highest priority challenge of adaptation is therefore to help the poorest in vulnerability “hot spots” to manage the unavoidable and unknowable impacts of climate change. The poorest people are most vulnerable, making adaptation fundamental to poverty reduction. Failure to adapt will make escaping poverty harder in future.

The entire posts and comments can be found at:

<http://www.worldwewant2015.org/water/waterresources2>

3) Live video

A 1-hour live stream video by Dr. Michael H. Glantz titled “One decade down, nine decades to go - coping with climate, water and weather related hazards and disasters in the twenty first century” took place on Thursday 24 January, 2013. After a short introduction about himself and his experience, Dr. Glantz introduced the theme, stressing that human beings are now an integral part of the climate system, and thus influence the global climate system. Dr. Glantz also mentioned that with the physical changes related to global warming more extreme events are expected. The introduction was then followed by a question & answer session, where the audience was able to ask questions to Dr. Glantz via twitter and facebook. The questions and answers have been compiled and are available online at:

<http://www.worldwewant2015.org/node/311021>

4) Question poll

The question for the poll was the following: Most water resources managers do not seem to consider climate change information in their long-term planning. What do you think is the reason? The question poll received a total of 80 votes, and the six possible answers were subdivided as follows: 35% of the poll participants answered that the reason was because the water managers feel there is still too much uncertainty to justify concrete actions; 28,75% answered it is because they are aware of the impacts but they don't know what to do; 15% answered it is because they ignore the potential impacts of climate change on water resources; 12,5% chose to answer none of the above; 7,5% answered it is because they think the impact of Climate Change on water resources will not be significant; and finally 1,25% answered it is because they don't believe in Climate Change.



Key messages

Key messages that arose from the week's consultation on climate change and water-related risks include the following:

- Need to raise awareness on climate change and adaptation to climate change of populations, especially children, but also of decisions-makers from other non-water related disciplines, as it is everyone's responsibility.
- Water is at the very heart of adaptation. Better management of water would improve adaptation to climate change.
- Both adaptation and mitigation are needed to tackle the impacts of climate change.
- Need for more political commitment on climate change.

Key issues for follow-up

The consultation on climate change and water-related risks should not be seen as an end, but rather as a beginning, as such an exercise requires a longer time perspective.