

Thematic Sessions on Water Related Risk

Background

There are intrinsic links between disasters risk reduction and the broader water agenda, both internationally and nationally. Reducing vulnerability to water related hazards involves far more than just the water sector. Increasing social vulnerability to water stress (floods and droughts) in many parts of the world reflects a wide range of pressures, involving city managers, community organizations, planners, the agriculture sector, disaster managers along with people and institutions of the water sector.

Reducing the risk to water related hazards will require, on the one hand, a capacity to monitor the magnitude, duration, timing and location of the hazards, such as floods or droughts, but also landslides, storms, earthquakes, and volcanic eruption, all of which have impacts on freshwater resources and infrastructures. On the other hand, the assessment and reduction of the vulnerability to such extremes require decisions about issues such as development and planning control, legislation and land-use, as well as environmental management and financial tools such as insurances.

The year 2003 is the International Year of Fresh Water. This is an excellent opportunity to focus the attention of policy makers, practitioners and the public in general on the possible solutions and options to address and reduce risk to floods and drought or another climate related disasters.

The panel discussion will look to formulate general recommendations that could be brought to the third World Water Forum in March 2003. Three areas have been identified for the discussions:

1. Integrated Water Resource Management promotes, on a watershed scale, a more intersectoral approach to decision making, integrating policies, improving institutional frameworks and promoting participatory and transparent governance in water management. In this context, the panel will discuss the implication for flood and drought management, in particular how this more integrated approach can support the reduction of communities vulnerability to disasters such as floods and drought. This includes aspects of: 1. Social vulnerability - the community's capacity to cope with floods or droughts, specifically related to poverty, informal settlements, land-use, and institutional structure 2. Environmental vulnerability - the effect on the intensity and frequency of extreme events 3. Economic vulnerability - sectoral composition of economies.

2. The panel will help identify existing directives or guidelines for flood management and the process through which they are implemented. The panel will identify gaps and shortfalls in existing guidelines and make suggestions on ways to strengthen and support the distribution and application of flood guidelines in Asia.

3. Finally, the panel will discuss action to be taken to inform the public and influence policy towards more effective disaster reduction in the context of water related disasters. In particular, how to encourage governments to incorporate disaster risk reduction into national planning processes, including land use legislation and building codes, as well as networks through which disaster reduction related information should be circulated to reach out to the water community in Asia.

Background documentation: The UN/DESA, NOAA, ISDR and WMO, draft set of guidelines for reducing flood loss (available upon request from brewster@un.org or harding@un.org)".