

Water evaporates from the climate change negotiating text

November 3, 2009. Governments, UN agencies, international NGOs and civil society advocates gathered at a *Water Day* in Barcelona today, to urge negotiators to consider the critical role that water plays in climate change adaptation. The failure to recognise the role of water in adapting to climate change risks undermining the wider objective of the negotiations.

Participants called for recognition that water is not a sector but is the primary medium through which climate changes will impact on human populations, society and ecosystems, due to predicted changes in its quality and quantity. The way that water is managed in and between countries will be a critical component for the success of any efforts to adapt to the impacts of climate change. It will also be a vital consideration for many mitigation activities, including hydropower, agriculture and forestry projects.

To a large extent, the global climate crisis is a global water crisis. Yet the latest iteration of the negotiating text on adaptation, the so-called Non-Paper 31, has deleted any clear references to water and its management as a vital consideration for climate change adaptation. This is despite increasing mobilisation by the water community to call for a strong outcome on water from Copenhagen.

"Let me be very clear. There is no development without water. There is no food security without water. There is most likely also no energy security without water. Water is the primary medium through which climate change influences the Earth's ecosystems and therefore people's livelihoods and well-being. If water is not further recognized in adaptation strategies and plans, we are making a big mistake." Pasquale Steduto, Chair, UN-Water and Service Chief, FAO

"Even with the best mitigation strategies, water related effects of climate change will come. The challenge for many nations is, how to adapt. Climate Change is in effect Water Change, since it will be through water that the changes will be realized first and foremost. Climate adaptation is to a large extent about water resource management."
Anders Berntell, Executive Director, SIWI

Participants at the Water Day drew particular attention to the following issues:

Climate change impacts on water resources will affect livelihoods and development

90 percent of the 3 billion people who are expected to be added to the population by 2050 will be in developing countries, many in regions already under water stress conditions. Integrated land and water management arrangements will be critical to manage water flexibly among competing users, prioritising human needs.

Climate Change adaptation is not just a national issue

More than 75 percent of the world's nations have shared river basins within their boundaries. Regional co-operation on climate change adaptation will be vital for addressing climate change impacts on shared water resources, even as a way to prevent potential conflicts.

Investing in ecosystems can help preserve water supplies

Ecosystems build resilience to climate change. Healthy ecosystems need water and in turn help maintain a healthy water cycle. Care must be taken that climate change mitigation activities do not damage and degrade ecosystems, and that adaptation efforts prioritise their preservation. This is critical not least to food security.

Data, information and governance are key

Understanding climate change impacts on water resources will require enhanced data collection and sharing, and increased capacity for gathering and using data. However, climate change impacts are

being felt now and improving water governance arrangements to respond to uncertainty and variability will be the key to good adaptation.

Climate change mitigation efforts must take water into account

The projected increase in hydropower and bio-energy to meet low-carbon energy needs will depend heavily on sustained water flows and water availability. Projected changes in the water cycle as a result of climate change must therefore be taken into account. Building dams for water storage and energy needs must be done in the context of understanding and mitigating potentially negative impacts on human populations and the environment. Bio-energy must be balanced with food security and ecosystem protection.

The Water Day was held against a backdrop of drought and famine as many developing countries begin to experience the devastating impacts of climate change on the water cycle. If precautions are not taken, this may lead to an increase in conflicts related to water availability and distribution. Extreme weather events leading to drought and floods, as recently witnessed in Kenya and the Philippines, are predicted to increase in frequency and intensity as a result of climate change, and are likely to become 'the norm' in coming decades. It is imperative for the Parties to the UNFCCC to recognize the pivotal role of water in adapting to climate change in order to increase resilience and achieve sustainable development.

Stakeholder Forum, an international NGO, and Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI) have been leading advocacy efforts on water at the climate change negotiations over the past 8 months under the Global Public Policy Network on Water (GPPN). The World Water Week in Stockholm in August also delivered a strong message from all participating organisations on the centrality of water to climate change. The *Water Day* represents a culmination of efforts to put water at the heart of climate considerations.

UN-Water is a light mechanism, backed up by a small Secretariat, through which the UN system comes together to devise effective strategies to support countries in the integrated management of water resources to eradicate poverty, promote public health, enable equitable economic growth and sustain the environment. UN-Water is producing important inputs to policy debates and processes and is increasingly proactively shaping the water agenda to spur action on the ground. These efforts are backed up by various targeted activities including substantive reports such as UN-Water's triennial World Water Development Report (the third edition was launched in March 2009), the Global Annual Assessment on Sanitation and Drinking Water (GLAAS) and the biannual reports of the Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP). For more information please visit www.unwater.org.

STOCKHOLM INTERNATIONAL WATER INSTITUTE (SIWI), UN-WATER, STAKEHOLDER FORUM

Endorsements: Global Water Partnership (GWP), Tearfund, Freshwater Action Network (FAN)