Making water perspectives part of climate frameworks

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As the UNFCCC negotiations commence at COP18 in Doha, countries around the globe are already dealing with the new reality of a changed climate.

As difficult as it might be to predict the effects of climate change, there is one thing we can be sure about: in the future, uncertainty will be the only certainty. A global temperature increase will change water run-off patterns, speed up evapotranspiration and the melting of glaciers, and increase the frequency of droughts, storms, and floods – turning traditional knowledge about weather and rainfall patterns on its head. In short, water is the primary medium through which climate change impacts humans and ecosystems. Floods and droughts accounted for 86% of the natural disasters that struck nearly two billion people in the last decade of the 20th century. They present major risks to agricultural production and challenge planners to create proper structures for water storage and conveyance. Furthermore, increased temperature is likely to increase the spread of water-borne diseases and parasites.

Water managers around the world already deal with issues of water availability and variability on a daily basis. By supporting and developing sustainable and proactive water management strategies and streamlining them into climate adaptation plans, we can build resilience against the impacts of climate change. Therefore it is crucial that water management perspectives become an integrated part of climate frameworks on all levels – from policy, down to implementation.

It is not only a matter of adaptation. Many mitigation strategies also have a profound impact on water resources – biofuels, forest carbon, hydropower, ecosystem services and agriculture are all heavily dependent on sustainable, resilient water resources management. Looking through a water lens, the necessity to mitigate and adapt in a coherent way becomes obvious. Adaptation and mitigation cannot become competing causes, and green growth cannot be put in place so that carbon emissions are reduced but adaptation hindered.

In July, the UNFCCC held a technical workshop on "water and climate change impacts and adaptation strategies" in Mexico City. Among the outcomes of that workshop was a consensus among participants for "an urgent need for policy considerations on climate change impacts on water resources and adaptation strategies in the UNFCCC process". As COP18 in Doha commences, it is crucial that these realisations are captured in the negotiations.

Water is a cross cutting resource, fundamental for almost all functions of society. As a consequence there is no one place in the UNFCCC process where water issues have their home. Instead, these perspectives need to be integrated in all parts of the process – and most crucially in the work of the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA) and the Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI), in the Adaptation Committee and in the Green Climate Fund. What it all comes down to in the end is to make the right decisions and the best investments to ensure a sustainable future for our planet. How can the UNFCCC help make sure we get there?

About the Water and Climate Coalition
The Water and Climate Coalition is a global coalition of organisations seeking to place water management at the heart of global climate change policy. The members and collaborative partners of the Water and Climate Coalition are: Cap-Net, Chartered Institute for Water and Environmental Management, Conservation International, Green Cross International, Freshwater Action Network, IUCN, Instituto Ipanema, International Water Association, Progressio, Stakeholder Forum, Stockholm International Water Institute, The Nature Conservancy, UDYAMA, University of North Carolina, The Nature Conservancy, WWF, The Global Water Partnership, and CONAGUA ■

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