

Urgent Appeal to the UN Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation

1. The following target should be adopted as UN MDGs:
To halve, by 2015, the number of flood-related human loss of life.
2. To achieve the target, the following actions should be taken by all countries as important step:
 - A. Water-related risk management strategies should be incorporated within the IWRM,
 - B. Establish and reinforce monitoring, forecasting, warning and emergency response systems,
 - C. Establish global solidarity support system for flood disasters.

INTRODUCTION

Water related disasters are a consequence of the interaction of extreme hydro-meteorological events and the vulnerable human economic activities in the influence area of such events. Most of the flood hazards exist in areas that also present opportunity for human activities. They have large potential to turn into disasters if economic activities are pursued without factoring them into development planning or without adopting prevention and mitigation measures. Number of such natural disasters and their impacts has been steadily increasing during the last few decades. Particularly, during the last decade (1991-2000), on an average, around 80,000 people died every year due to hydro-meteorological disasters, 90 percent of which are flood related.

In developing countries impact of flood disasters forcibly diverts the limited financial resources from development activities to relief and rehabilitation measures thereby, affecting their efforts towards meeting MDGs. Damage to infrastructures such as water supply and sanitation, irrigation or spread of pollutants and harmful chemicals hamper the fight against poverty and hunger and have adverse long-term impacts on environment. The damage due to these hazards in the developed economies is also substantial especially in terms of absolute damages.

The following target should, therefore, be adopted as new UN MDGs,
“To halve, by 2015, the number of flood-related human loss of life.”

Most flood disaster victims, occupying the marginal lands are often below poverty line.

These and other weaker sections of the society, being more vulnerable, are the worst affected and further slide down the poverty scale. The situation is aggravated due to migration of affected people from rural areas towards generally peri-urban informal settlements exposed to hazards.

This unsustainable trend is mainly attributed to the vulnerability of marginal rural and peri-urban communities and their poverty, fragmented approach to development activities, unplanned urbanization and environmental degradation in the river catchment areas. A number of development interventions adversely impact riverine ecosystems such as wetlands, which are subject to frequent flooding. Various land-use changes like elimination of natural flood retention coupled with interference with natural drainage conditions in addition to increasing the flood hazard also affects the basin biodiversity and the resource base of vulnerable sections of society.

Due to increasing population and intensive and sometime unsustainable land use planning and economic activities by 2050, another 2 billion people will be vulnerable to flooding. The increased hydrological variability and extremes due to anthropogenic and climate change is also likely to increase the frequency of such disasters.

The evidence worldwide is that people will not, and in certain circumstances cannot, abandon flood-prone areas. Fight against poverty will have to be continued within these marginalized flood plains. Balancing development needs and risks in such areas is therefore, imperative.

The development process has to factor all natural hazards including those due to flood into development planning to ensure sustainable development. If not addressed appropriately, it is likely to have adverse impacts on global efforts towards achieving MDGs, especially to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger and ensure environmental sustainability.

ACTION PROPOSED

Water-related risk management strategies should be incorporated within the IWRM

Traditionally, flood management has essentially been problem driven and is fragmented. Sustainable development has to appropriately incorporate the risk posed by all hazards, especially floods. There is need for an integrated – rather than fragmented – approach to

flood management. Multi-sector and inter-disciplinary disaster risk reduction strategies such as integrated flood management: integrating land and water resources development, various structural and non-structural options with a suitable mix of long, medium and short-term measures in a river basin, within the context of IWRM need to be developed and adopted.

The aim of such an integrated approach is to put in place well-functioning integrated measures for flood management that ensures linkages between various relevant development sectors involved in safety chain of prevention, mitigation, reconstruction, and rehabilitation activities.

Establish and reinforce monitoring, forecasting, warning and emergency response systems.

Reducing flood risks means, on the one hand, developing capacity to monitor their magnitude, duration, timing and location, and on the other, assessing and reducing our vulnerability to them. Mitigation of the impacts of floods has to be achieved through robust public infrastructure and resilient societal systems build through raising awareness that should include information on possible risks to the communities and available infrastructure, share knowledge about future climate change, and facilitate planning adaptable to climate change. It should provide information on disaster risks and mitigation options, recognizing the local traditional and indigenous knowledge and implement risk management training for civil servants, and local leaders.

Such a societal resilience is built on decentralization of responsibilities for disaster risk management to local communities, and empowering them to participate in local disaster preparedness planning and emergency management.

Regular monitoring and efficient early warning system is a prerequisite for preparedness, and a prompt and effective response to warnings from both government machinery and public. A people-centered early warning system, recognizing the needs of diverse groups is an essential component. Data and information on flood disasters and warning need to be made available to all stakeholders as a public good and funded by the state.

Establish global solidarity support system for flood related disasters.

Establishing a global information system with appropriate protocols on exchange of data and information across political boundaries in support of early warning and response supported is essential for disaster preparedness.

Disasters effects development in low income countries which are far way behind in achieving the MDGs. Such countries, in aftermath of disasters, as a token of solidarity and concerns for human sufferings, are offered substantial support in rehabilitation activities. These financial resources are more often spent on ad-hoc activities and do not bring bringing long-term and permanent benefits. A global goodwill partnership should be created for taking preemptive actions in flood prone countries especially those which are far behind in achieving the MDGs. Such an approach will provide a sustainable plank to poverty reduction efforts.

NEXT STEPS

At CSD 13 in April 2005, governments should agree that goal on flood disaster is to be included in MDGs, as well as important actions to reach the goal, as recommend herein.