

COP 17 Side Event
UN System support to adaptation: Progress and opportunities for enhanced action
Chaired by Michel Jarraud
Secretary General, World Meteorological Organization
(Durban, 5 December 2011, 13:15—14:45, Levubu River)

Excellencies,
Dear Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It's a pleasure and an honour to welcome you to this side event on adaptation to climate change and natural hazards, which I have been kindly invited to chair and which will contribute to highlight how the UN system is acting "*As One*" to support countries in adapting to climate change and to enhance their coordinated response.

A growing number of key socioeconomic sectors and systems which are essential to sustain human livelihoods such as, in particular, health, water resources, agriculture and food security, as well as our natural environment, are being increasingly and adversely affected by climate change.

This is also occurring through an increase in the frequency and intensity of weather and climate extremes such as heat waves, drought and heavy rainfall events, as highlighted in the 4th Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and its recently released Summary for Policymakers of the Special Report on Managing the Risks of Extreme Events and Disasters to Advance Climate Change Adaptation which highlights that the impacts of climate extremes is also dependent upon the vulnerability and exposure of populations.

WMO has just released its provisional annual statement on the status of the global climate in 2011, showing that 2011 was the tenth-warmest year on record, warmer than any previous La Niña year, which are typically cooler than the preceding and following years. It is remarkable that the 13 warmest years on record have all occurred in the last 15 years.

Before proceeding any further, I would like to acknowledge each of the participating UN System Agencies and Programmes represented today at this event (*in principle, they would be UNU, UN-Habitat, WFP, UNICEF, UNDP, UNEP, UNISDR, WHO, CBD, FAO and UNCCD*), as well as the vital role of various UN mechanisms established to facilitate inter-Agency coherence within the UN family of organizations in key specific fields, such as UN-Oceans, UN-Energy and UN-Water.

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The global climate is changing at unprecedented rates due to anthropogenic causes and it will continue to do so until an appropriate mitigation agreement can be attained. Even beyond, we need account for the changes to which we are already committed due to the inertia of the climate system.

The associated impacts and risks are global in their nature and geographically diverse. Moreover, the most vulnerable communities are often those least capable of responding. Neither adaptation nor mitigation alone can avoid all climate change impacts, but adaptation and mitigation can complement each other and together can significantly reduce the risks of climate change.

At the sixteenth session of the Conference of the Parties of the UNFCCC, Parties agreed that enhanced action and international cooperation on adaptation is urgently required to enable and to support the implementation of adaptation actions, including in the areas of water resources, health, agriculture and food security, infrastructure, ecosystems and coastal zones, and so they established the Cancun Adaptation Framework to guide the implementation of, and support for, adaptation under the Convention.

This side event aims to highlight that the United Nations system collectively offers a range of tools, services and expertise to assist vulnerable countries and communities to manage climate-related risks in their efforts to achieve sustainable socioeconomic development, in particular through knowledge sharing, strengthening of technical and institutional capacities and the provision of financial and technological support.

Some examples of how current and anticipated climate change impacts can affect vulnerable communities:

- Hunger risk may increase up to 20 percent by 2050 due to climate change, with about 65% of this increase in sub-Saharan Africa. The number of malnourished children is also expected to increase, with projections as high as 21 percent, or 24 million children (WFP 2009).
- In Africa alone, some 650 million people already live on degraded lands. Four times the amount of nutrients are being removed from the soil as are being returned. With climate change, two-thirds of the region's arable land may be lost by 2025 (FAO 2008). At the same time, a number of countries are increasingly dependent on alternative sources of revenue, such as tourism, a sector particularly sensitive to climate variability (UN-WTO).
- Disasters tend to further affect the poorest communities. The 2010 Pakistan floods displaced about 2 million people and seriously set back their poverty alleviation efforts. In 2010, climate-related extreme events and disasters affected some 300 million people, most often in countries with very slight coping capacity. Floods alone affected the lives of almost 200 million people, the highest number in a decade (EM-DAT 2011).
- Estimates of rising food prices are in the range of 70-90 percent by 2030 – without taking into account the effects of climate change. With climate change, food prices increase projections for maize, wheat and rice are as high as 120-180 percent (Growing a Better Future, Oxfam 2011)

The UN system is committed to assist countries in adapting to climate change. It is currently aligning its strengths to support countries in planning, designing and implementing effective strategies and measures to address climate change, with adaptation as a key area of focus. Let me provide you three examples of ongoing joint UN activities to address these impacts:

- Promoting a better understanding of the climate system and filling information gaps: Adaptation planning and implementation are knowledge intensive activities. There is a key role for science, , and there is a strong demand for climate services as well as a need for better ways of combining climate change projections with local climate data and knowledge. WMO and UNESCO are coordinating the UN system efforts in the area of climate knowledge. Climate change adaptation will require significant strengthening and scaling up of global disaster risk reduction and risk management efforts. For this reason, the Global Framework for Climate Services (GFCS) is being developed by the UN System to guide and to coordinate adaptation planning efforts. Through a modest investment and by building on existing systems and capacities, we can achieve notable benefits in terms of reduced disaster risks, increased food security, improved health, and more effective adaptation to climate change, particularly for the poorest and the most vulnerable.
- Assisting developing countries in planning and implementing adaptation and resilience to climate change and natural hazards: WMO and FAO have been collaborating since 2008 in organizing International conferences in various African sub-regions to develop Regional Adaptation Frameworks. WHO and UNEP developed a Framework for Public Health Adaptation in Africa to strengthen public health protection from climate risks. UNISDR, UN-HABITAT, UNICEF and WHO are working with more than 800 cities and local governments to assist them in adapting through the *"Making Cities Resilient"* campaign. UNDP, in partnership with UNIDO, UNICEF and WFP and supported by Japan, is implementing the Africa Adaptation Programme to support governments in shifting adaptation planning from single-sector projects to multi-sector strategic approaches.

- Linking humanitarian relief with risk reduction, adaptation and resilience building activities: many UN specialized Agencies and Programmes and others are contributing to reduce vulnerability, particularly to drought risk, by implementing the Africa Regional Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction. WFP supports the strengthening of countries' emergency preparedness by providing a global early-warning monitoring service and mainstreaming contingency planning.
- The UN is also addressing climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction in an integrated manner at country level, as part of "UN Delivering as One". Under the leadership of UNDP and through the UN Resident Coordinators, several UN Agencies and Programmes have worked together in over 16 countries to assist their governments in their poverty strategy and development plans and to ensure inclusion of climate change and disaster risk concerns.

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The UN system is committed to support countries' response to the climate change adaptation challenge by delivering "*As One*" at the global, regional and country levels on the basis of its convening, normative and advocacy role, its sectoral expertise, and its operational and coordination capabilities, in partnership with all relevant stakeholders.

The UN system's work on adaptation is built on key mechanisms, through which it brings its expertise to bear in support of countries, especially developing countries, in adaptation planning and implementation; knowledge sharing; building partnerships; and integrated data collection and analysis.

With its unique convening authority and capacity, the UN system is well positioned to facilitate partnerships for adaptation, bringing together a wide combination of the stakeholders such as; specialized agencies, governments, climate sensitive sectors, local authorities and communities, indigenous people's organizations, science community private sectors, NGOs, IGOs and many more.

As negotiations progress and further decisions are made, notably after the Cancun Agreements and beyond, the UN system and its partners are preparing to build on existing strengths to respond effectively to the priority needs of the LDCs, SIDS and other vulnerable countries, to assist them in formulating and in implementing their respective adaptation strategies.

Thank you.