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TASKFORCE RECOMMENDS NEW CLIMATE SERVICES FRAMEWORK TO SAVE LIVES, LIVELIHOODS AND REDUCE DISASTERS

GENEVA 12 May (WMO). A top-level panel of experts has recommended the establishment of a new global system to provide climate services which would help countries understand and adapt to climate change, reduce the risk of disasters from extreme events and save lives and livelihoods for generations to come.

The report by a High-level Taskforce proposes an implementation strategy for a Global Framework for Climate Services to consolidate and fill the gaps in the existing provision of climate information and to make sure it reaches vulnerable countries and communities who need it most.

The implementation has been costed by the Taskforce at around 75 million US dollars per year of which around 72 million US dollars would be sourced from development aid and committed to carrying out capacity development projects in the countries most vulnerable to adverse impacts from climate events. The proposed Framework would provide a holistic approach to meet the challenges of climate variability, climate change and disaster reduction by building on existing service provision capabilities of national meteorological and hydrological services and other organizations that work in this area.

“With this modest investment we will revolutionize the knowledge and facts available for climate vulnerable communities. We will thereby save lives, prevent disasters and make improve agriculture and health and water services more robust for those who need it the most,” said Jan Egeland, co-chairman of the High-level Taskforce.

“We all share the same planet, the same atmosphere, the same ocean, the same multi-faceted climate. Every community, every socio-economic sector is affected by climate variability and climate change,” said World Meteorological Organization Secretary-General Michel Jarraud.

“I am convinced that all the investments which are made on adaptation, mitigation and managing the risk of climate will be suboptimal - maybe wasted - if they are not informed by the best possible science, the best possible information. This is what the Global Framework for Climate Services is. It is about making the best possible information available to decision-makers.”

The Taskforce’s report was presented at the Global Platform on Disaster Risk Reduction, the world’s foremost gathering on reducing disaster risk and building the resilience of communities. WMO is an active participant in the Global Platform given its extensive work on disaster risk reduction – which was singled out as one of the priorities by the Taskforce’s report.

The United Nations commissioned the High-level Taskforce report in accordance with the recommendations of the World Climate Conference 3 of 2009. The XVI World Meteorological Congress (16 May–3 June) will study and respond to the Taskforce’s recommendations and proposals for implementation of the Global Framework for Climate Services. A climate service is the process of providing information to help manage climate risks and opportunities.

Scientifically Sound Information

About 90% of disasters in recent decades were caused by weather or climate-related hazards such as tropical cyclones, storm surges, floods and droughts. Economic losses from these hazards currently amount to about 100 billion US dollars per year and are rising, and can inhibit the pace of development by years if not decades.

Climate change is expected to lead to an increase in the intensity and frequency of such extreme events. Population growth means that more people will be vulnerable.

It is therefore becoming increasingly important to have scientifically sound climate information to increase understanding about these extreme events and so prevent them becoming disasters with major loss of life, property and jobs. Good management of the existing climatic risks today is the foundation for managing the changed climatic risks of tomorrow.

Progress in climate modelling and forecasting provide unprecedented opportunities for managing risks and extreme events through informed medium to long-term planning and risk management strategies.

The High-level Taskforce report said that global use of improved climate services would provide substantial social and economic benefits.

“Unacceptable and unjust”

The Taskforce report highlighted three basic facts:

“Firstly, we know that everyone is affected by climate – particularly its extremes, which cause loss of lives and livelihoods all over the world, but overwhelmingly in developing countries. Secondly, we know that – where they exist – needs-based climate services are extremely effective in helping communities, businesses, organizations and governments to manage the risks and take advantage of the opportunities associated with the climate. Thirdly, we know that there is a yawning gap between the needs for climate services and their current provision. Climate services are weakest in the places that need them most – climate-vulnerable developing countries,” it said.

“We feel this situation is unacceptable and unjust. Our vision is for an end-to-end system for providing climate services and applying them in decision making at every level of society,” it said, calling for a “global mobilization of effort.”

“We believe the Global Framework for Climate Services is the right vehicle to guide and coordinate this effort. For a modest investment, and by building on existing systems and capacities, we believe it can achieve great benefits. Great benefits in terms of reduced disaster risks, increased food security, improved health, and more effective adaptation to climate change. Great benefits in terms of development and well being in all countries – but particularly for the poorest and most vulnerable,” said the Taskforce report. The 12-member Taskforce was co-chaired by Mahmoud Abu Zeid of Egypt and Jan Egeland of Norway.

It recommended that the disaster risk reduction, water, health, and agriculture sectors should be given priority.

It gave specific examples of how disaster risk can be reduced by active policies based on scientific information. In China, an estimated two million people died in the floods of July 1959 but over the recent decade 2000-2009 the average recorded annual death toll has fallen to 577, owing to the development of flood monitoring and early warning systems coupled with effective evacuation services, it said.

Equally, in the Greater Horn of Africa, Bangladesh, China and India, where millions of people died from famine in the last century, such enormous death tolls have been hugely reduced or even eliminated thanks to food security programmes. These combine surveillance and early warning information about the climate, agriculture as well as household status and food markets, integrating the results with national and international food aid mechanisms. Seasonal outlooks are routinely used by governments in many countries to prepare for possible hard times and to avoid turning an extreme climatic event into a disaster.

Plugging the gaps

The foundations for a global system for climate services are already available in WMO's existing structure and networks and can be readily developed and built upon. These include the existing weather and climate observing systems and data exchange, climate research programmes and risk management techniques used in different economic and social sectors. National Meteorological and Hydrological Services have a key position in climate services because of their core role in weather observations and early warning systems.

What is lacking is a framework to link and develop the available elements and to plug the gaps, fix the shortcomings and create new capacity in developing countries which are the most vulnerable to climate variability and change. More than one-third of countries are currently unable to provide much more than the most basic climate services and a few are unable to provide even this level.

"We need to strengthen research in all parts of the world. We need to develop more appropriate services for climate, similar to what we develop for weather services. There is no way any country can do it alone, not even the largest one. We need a multilateral, multidisciplinary system," said Michel Jarraud.

*The World Meteorological Organization is the United Nations System's
authoritative voice on Weather, Climate and Water*

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