



SUMMARY

International Workshop Governance of Climate-Related Risks in Europe: the Need for Policy Oriented Research

08-09 September 2011

Introduction

This international workshop follows the 2009 EC DG Research-UNISDR event on “Dialogue Between Scientists and Stakeholders” and the 2010 on “Climate Change Impacts and Adaptation: Reducing Water-related Risks in Europe” and aims to promote dialogue between the scientific and policy maker communities towards more effective measures to adapt to climate change through Disaster Risk Reduction.

This event is the third of its kind and it was co-organised by the European Commission Directorate General for Research and Innovation, the UNISDR and the Council of Europe EUR-OPA Major Hazards Agreement. Whilst the workshop in July 2010 focused on the climate change impacts and water related risks in Europe, this year’s theme was to link climate change adaptation to disaster risk reduction.

Background

A study published earlier this year by the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction secretariat (UNISDR Europe) and the Council of Europe’s European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA) identifies the way the governance of risk is undertaken at the national and international level through well-planned policies and projects as a key aspect of resilience to climate-related hazards.

The central role of governance in reducing risk is recognised at the international level by the Strategic Goal 1 – Priority for action 1 of the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015 : Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters (HFA) while the importance of education and scientific advances on the topic is indicated by the Priority for Action 3 of the HFA. In Europe, the White Paper “Adapting to climate change: Towards a European framework for action” sets clear regional policy guidance on reducing climate-related risks as a central issue for a sound adaptation to a changing climate. The Council of Europe, through its Major Hazards Partial Agreement EUR-OPA, has also encouraged the necessary interaction between decision makers and scientists to improve the governance of risk.



In the last decade, a growing number of national programmes and international projects have been developed in the European region. There is a growing accumulation of knowledge on “what has worked” (and what has not) in implementing policies, programmes and projects, which address climate adaptation with the objective of reducing risks posed by climate-related hazards. However a pre-condition for “What has worked” in climate adaptation intervention is a clear guidance provided by policy makers . There are two reasons for this:

- Adaptation and disaster risk reduction (DRR) are both short- and long-term processes. There is no real adaptation to climate change and reduction of vulnerability if there is not a long-term vision and strategy for sustainable development on the side of policy makers.
- Adaptation to climate change and interventions need integration at multiple levels. A sound governance of adaptation and DRR is needed to create and maintain a framework of intervention, which well connects the community to the national to the regional and international level.

Climate change is an increasingly important topic gaining attention among governments and international organisations. Though current policy orientations on climate change are still primarily focused on ”mitigation”, Climate Change Adaptation (CCA) is increasingly taken into account as scientists, decision makers and the general public have started to realise that we are unable to fully mitigate the effects of a changing climate. In this scenario, DRR is an approach that can greatly contribute to adaptation to a changing climate. DRR is both a short- and long-term strategy focusing on reducing vulnerability to natural hazards by increasing human, social and environmental capacity and improving physical infrastructure to address the projected changes of future climate.

While in recent years the scientific community has broadened the body of scientific knowledge on climate change and CCA there is still a need to consolidate scientific information alongside the assimilation of lessons learned from practitioners involved in the management of adaptation projects. Governmental decision makers demand guidance and information to enable well informed decisions on how best to invest in risk reduction measures to prevent the risks associated to weather-related hazards.

Goal and objectives

The event aimed to discuss three main topics:

- 1) **Knowing Risks:** the most recent publications and studies relevant to DRR and climate change adaptation were presented along updates on main European polices and interventions relevant to the subject.



2) Making Scientific Research Policy Oriented: the leading FP7 Research projects supported by the EC presented their adaptation and DRR policy relevant scientific findings along with key European policy makers and regional organizations presentations on the recent implementation of interventions and policy dealing with climate change adaptation and risk reduction.

3) Governance of Climate-Related Risks in Europe: a focus on governance and the decision making process on DRR and Climate Adaptation policies in the Europe context and an active exchange between the policy makers and the FP7 Coordinators on effective partnerships for effective climate adaptation and risk reduction in Europe took place.

Summary of contents

The event gathered a number of speakers from both the research and scientific community and policy makers. In line with the overall aim of the event, being to improve the communication between actors, the presentations focused on the importance of a common knowledge base on disaster risk reduction, on the need to tailor scientific research to the policies being designed, and on the importance of governance of climate related risks in Europe.

The workshop provided some recommendations:

- Improved communication between stakeholders is crucial.
Participants agreed on the need to find common language which both communities could understand and refer to, as well as the need to improve the existing knowledge base on disasters. The information gap on industrial disasters was highlighted as an example of an area for which more extensive information needs to be developed. The European Union Clearing House Mechanism and Prevention Web (UNISDR) were discussed as tools to facilitate sharing of good practices and lessons learned amongst European actors.
- Improved coordination between stakeholders is a key issue.
Governance is important: availability of resources is to be seen in conjunction with the ability of national, regional and local actors to exercise governance. The role of National Platforms in Europe was highlighted as crucial to creating partnerships among research communities, governments and private sector.
- A stronger link between climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction is essential.
All too often these two themes are looked at separately, when they are in fact closely related. The 2011 Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction suggests the incorporation of CCA and DRR in a central planning location or a relevant ministry with funds and the authority to support a risk reduction agenda. Similarly, the issue of accountability of governments was raised.



- A strengthened policy on disaster risk reduction is required.
The European Commission is looking at ways to coordinate various the available financing tools and legislations to strengthen existing policies: the EU is planning to develop a fully-fledged risk management policy by 2013. The EC produced common guidance on Risk Assessment at the end of 2010 and members States are being encouraged to develop their own risk assessments based on these guidelines. The EU will prepare an overview of risk assessment in Europe based on these national risk assessments, to be used in the context of the Europe HFA Report and the Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction.
- A greater interfacing among stakeholders is needed.
The potential different perception of phenomena by scientists and decision makers requires to develop as many interfaces between them as possible to overcome such gap. In that line, national platforms for Disaster Risk Reduction can be an optimal framework for interfacing at national/regional/local levels while the international organizations can help to create such interfacing at more international level, introducing a greater coherence of all strategies at various levels.

Conclusions

In a difficult financial context all over Europe, costly measures to be implemented urgently to cope with the climate change challenge require that a real interaction between researchers and policy is settled not only at national level but also both at international and local level. The ongoing development of National Plans for Climate Change Adaptation is a possible useful tool to ensure such interplay at national and sub-national levels. At the international level, the efforts to set up transnational projects to propose methodologies applicable to the various national/regional/local cases can also significantly contribute to a better risk management. Cooperation at the international, regional, national and local level through different initiatives is key to better implementation of policies and research.