



Roundtable Discussion on the Role of Ecosystems Management in Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Reduction

On the occasion of the Global Platform for Disasters Risk Reduction

Thursday 17 June 2009, 16.30-18.30

Background

The close linkages between climate change and disasters are increasingly recognised. In its Fourth Assessment Report, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) concludes that global warming is indisputable, which as a consequence will likely result in the increased frequency and magnitude of natural hazards, including flooding, heat waves, wildfires, prolonged droughts and storm surges. Climate change will therefore increase vulnerabilities of communities to climate- and weather-related disasters and affect vital sectors including food production, water resources, industries and public health.

Population growth and migrations to areas of high risk exposure (e.g. coastal areas and drylands) are raising the numbers of those affected by hazards — turning hazards into disasters. The poor in least developed as well as in richer countries are most vulnerable; they tend to live in high-risk areas including fragile and marginal lands, depend on climate-sensitive livelihoods such as agriculture and often have limited or no means to cope with climate change and increased disaster risks.

At the same time, experiences from around the world have shown that healthy ecosystems can lower disaster risks by enhancing community resilience, livelihoods and adaptive capacities and by mitigating carbon emissions through biosequestration. For example, intact mangroves provide multiple benefits, including protecting coastal communities from storm surges, providing important breeding grounds for local fisheries and serving as carbon sinks. Conversely, degraded ecosystems increase disaster risks, for instance deforestation can result in severe flooding and landslides, which will be compounded by climate change.

Improved ecosystems management, therefore, represents a valuable approach for *both* disaster risk reduction and climate change mitigation and adaptation. Protected and well-managed ecosystems have been proven as a cost-effective solution to promoting sustainable livelihoods and increased resilience and offer new economic opportunities through global carbon trading schemes.

While promoting healthy ecosystems is not new, applying an integrated management approach that accounts for the full values of ecosystems in disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation / mitigation is less widely understood and advocated. Political commitment at the highest level is thus critical in order to better mainstream ecosystems management in existing DRR and CCA policy instruments, strategies and investment portfolios. As the Copenhagen Conference (COP 15) draws near, it will be important to ensure that negotiations are informed by dialogue that recognizes the role of ecosystems in disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation / mitigation.

Roundtable discussion

A high-level roundtable discussion is planned on Thursday June 17, following the GP High Level Panel on Reducing Disaster Risk in a Changing Climate scheduled on the same day. The roundtable

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will comprise senior representatives from national governments as well as from major international development agencies.

The purpose is to provide a forum in which to engage senior government officials who can share country-level perspectives on maximising opportunities in ecosystems management for disaster reduction and climate change adaptation. The roundtable also represents an opportunity to determine future cooperation and political commitment in promoting ecosystems as a critical component of DRR and CCA strategies, both at the global and national levels.

The roundtable will include individuals with strong links to the environment, DRR and climate change communities:

Chair: Ibrahim Thiaw, UNEP

Expected outcomes

- (i) Improved understanding of the role of ecosystems management in disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation and of the challenges as well as opportunities for integrated implementation. Based on country-level perspectives and experiences, policy implications at the global and national levels will be identified.
- (ii) Action-oriented recommendations that identify concrete steps to promote increased political commitment and financial investment, at both global and national levels, for incorporating ecosystem management in climate change and disaster risk reduction portfolios. Key agreements from the roundtable will be presented at COP15 in December 2009 to renegotiate a post-2012 climate change agreement and as input to the Hyogo Framework for Action mid-term review at country level.

Structure

The two hour meeting will begin with welcome and opening remarks by the chair. To set the general context for discussions, a brief presentation will be made focusing on the linkages between ecosystems management, climate change adaptation and disaster reduction.

Each **panel member/discussant** will be asked to discuss and share his/her perspectives based on **three/four** questions:

- (i) How can existing policy frameworks on DRR and CCA- both at the global and national levels- be maximised to integrate ecosystems management in disaster reduction, climate change mitigation and adaptation initiatives? What are the constraints and limitations in current policy instruments with respect to promoting ecosystems?
- (ii) What institutional mechanisms exist – both at the global and national levels – which can facilitate the integrated implementation of improved ecosystems management, disaster risk reduction, climate change mitigation and adaptation? What are the constraints and limitations?
 - a. How can national development planning processes be influenced to promote risk reduction and climate change adaptation/mitigation through ecosystems management?

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