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Title of the Session: Towards water resilient cities - coping with climate change, urban densification and water management.

Date: 09/11/2015 to 15/11/2015

Summary

How can we make cities less vulnerable to extreme flooding, drought, urban heat and ongoing urbanization? This is a pressing and relevant question by global climate change, and particularly in densely populated deltas. If we want to keep our cities safe and livable in the future, than we should deal in the right way with climate change, urban densification and water management. This requires creativity and making the right choices. The ambitions are there, just like the available technologies. It is now time for the last fundamental step: a different approach to water. A difficult step because of socio-economic and governance barriers. Yet, we must take this step.

Context

With most densely populated cities in deltas, along coasts and next to rivers, nearly 90% of all natural disasters in urban areas are water related. It seems obvious that the attention is often given to dealing with floods in urban areas. Rising sea levels, increased river flows and extreme rainfall in conjunction with the fact that cities over the past half century have grown considerably and compacted with impervious surfaces, creates more nuisance, damage and even casualties. How do we deal with this, at what price vulnerabilities will be reduced and should we in this only think in technical solutions?

Urban areas are not only vulnerable to floods and heavy rain, but often have to deal with drought, heat, erosion and subsidence of the soil as well. In connection with the decline of natural resources, the growing vulnerability of urban areas including vital and vulnerable infrastructure, gains more and more attention.

Many cities are struggling to actually implement measures to reduce flood risks, safeguard fresh water resources and to regulate urban heat stress. To achieve a water resilient and climate proof city, we need to get started immediately. An integrated approach is required. By involving design, engineering and governance in the spatial planning process, we bring the built and the natural environment in balance. Often there is not enough sense of urgency and political commitment to build the required capacity and generate the necessary funds. The policies and investments that get this rapid urbanization right hold the key to resilient and sustainable development.

Achieving a water resilient and climate proof city is above all achieving a healthy and livable city. Involving our living environment and social values is vital. After all we are part of the urban ecosystem.