

Climate change adaptation is mainly about water...

Water is the primary medium through which climate change influences the Earth's ecosystems and therefore people's livelihoods and well-being. Already, water-related climate change impacts are being experienced in the form of more severe and more frequent droughts and floods. Higher average temperatures and changes in precipitation and temperature extremes are projected to affect the availability of water resources through changes in rainfall distribution, soil moisture, glacier and ice/snow melt, and river and groundwater flows; these factors are expected to lead to further deterioration of water quality as well. The poor, who are the most vulnerable, are also likely to be affected the most.

Water resources and how they are managed impact almost all aspects of society and the economy, in particular health, food production and security, domestic water supply and sanitation, energy, industry, and the functioning of ecosystems. Under present climate variability, water stress is already high, particularly in many developing countries, and climate change adds even more urgency for action. Without improved water resources management, the progress towards poverty reduction targets, the Millennium Development Goals, and sustainable development in all its economic, social and environmental dimensions, will be jeopardized.



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Adaptation to climate change is mainly about better water management.

Recognizing this and responding to it appropriately present development opportunities. Appropriate adaptation measures build upon known land and water management practices to foster resilience to future climate change, thereby enhancing water security. Innovative technologies and integrated solutions are needed at the appropriate scales, for adaptation as well as mitigation. Any adaptation measures, however, need to be assessed for inadvertent adverse effects, in particular on the environment and on human health.

Adapting to increasing climate variability and change through better water management requires policy shifts and significant investments that should be guided by the following principles:

1. Mainstreaming adaptation within the broader development context;
2. Strengthening governance of water resources management and improving integration of land and water management;
3. Improving and sharing knowledge and information on climate, water and adaptation measures, and investing in comprehensive and sustainable data collection and monitoring systems;
4. Building long-term resilience through stronger institutions and water infrastructure, including well-functioning ecosystems;
5. Investing in cost-effective adaptive water management and technology transfer;
6. Releasing additional funds through increased national budgetary allocations and innovative funding mechanisms for adaptation through improved water management.

The sense of urgency for climate change adaptation and the recognition of the centrality of water therein, have not yet permeated the political world and are not systematically reflected in national plans or international investment portfolios for adaptation.

It is imperative for the Parties to the UNFCCC to recognize the pivotal role of water in adapting to climate change in order to increase resilience and achieve sustainable development.

UN-Water is an inter-agency mechanism formally established in 2003 by the United Nations High Level Committee on Programmes. UN-Water strengthens coordination and coherence among UN entities and non-UN partners dealing with issues related to all aspects of freshwater and sanitation. This includes surface and groundwater resources, the interface between freshwater and seawater and water-related disasters.

UN-Water is:

- Providing a platform for system-wide discussions to identify challenges in global water management, analyse options for meeting these challenges and ensuring that reliable information and sound analysis informs the global policy debate on water.
- Providing information, policy briefs and other communication materials for policymakers and managers who work directly with water issues, other decision-makers that have an influence on how water is used, as well as the general public.
- Building the knowledge base on water issues through efficient monitoring and reporting systems and facilitating easy access to this knowledge through regular reports and the Internet.

Much of UN-Water activities are carried out through time-bound Task Forces, established to focus on areas of particular importance. This messages document has been established by the Task Force on Water and Climate Change through a consultative process with UN-Water members and partners.

For more information on UN-Water and its members and partners, please visit www.unwater.org

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