

International Day for Disaster Reduction

Roundtable Discussion: “Managing Forests and Watersheds for Natural Hazards Protection and Livelihoods”

13 October 2010, 12 – 2 pm.
International Environment House-I, Room 2
11-15 Chemin des Anémones, CH 12-19
Châtelaine, Geneva, Switzerland

Aims and Focus

- √ To mark the occasion of the International Day for Disaster Reduction, while giving special attention to the environmental dimensions of disasters and disaster risk.
- √ To raise awareness of the importance of sustainable management of ecosystems, especially forests and watersheds, in reducing vulnerability to disasters. Discussions to focus on the multiple services and benefits provided by forests and watersheds, including for natural hazard mitigation and regulation as well as support to local livelihoods and economies.
- √ To link with the Global Campaign on “Making Cities Resilient” through discussion on how forests and watershed management can increase urban resilience.

Invited speakers

His Excellency Manuel B. Dengo, Ambassador
Permanent Representative of Costa Rica to the United Nations in Geneva

Ms. Margareta Wahlström, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction.

Mr. Andrew Morton, Country Programme Manager – Haiti
United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP),
Post-Conflict and Disaster Management Branch (PCDMB)

Ms. Karen Sudmeier-Rieux, Disaster Risk Reduction Thematic Group Lead,
Commission on Ecosystems Management, International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN)

Summary of issues raised at the roundtable

Close to 50 people attended. *Key issues and action points:*

- √ Consider upstream and downstream users in watersheds in order to reduce risks for all concerned stakeholders. Increasingly, people are living downstream (e.g. in urban centres) which are affected by human activities upstream. Urban areas are often part of watersheds and depend on their many goods and services (clean air, water, recreation, forest products). Sound watershed management is therefore critical for increasing urban resilience.
- √ Break down the concept of “ecosystems” in more practical terms that enable policymakers and development planners to integrate ecosystem values in their decisions. Develop practicable approaches within the short time frames (2-3 years) of elected officials and policymakers so they can show concrete results from their investments.
- √ Need to place dollar values for lost ecosystem services, including their DRR functions. Recognition that work on economic valuations of ecosystem services is still very nascent but critical for advocating to policymakers and elected leaders.

- √ Financing for DRR remains a major challenge. DRR investments need to be embedded in other sectoral budgets and “bundled” with other development priorities such as the climate change agenda and MDGs/poverty reduction.

Other issues discussed:

- √ Managing forests and watersheds should be considered within the wider context of achieving sustainable development, where social, economic and environmental objectives are met.
- √ Changing human/social behaviours and more effective governance is critical for achieving real impacts in disaster reduction.
- √ Disaster risk management strategies must be based on scientific knowledge and understanding of the physical and ecological processes at the watershed level.
- √ Identify agents or “triggers” of change – who and what creates an enabling environment to facilitate changes in policies, programming, planning.
- √ Important to recognize that there are environmental / ecological thresholds that should not be surpassed. In the case of Haiti, it is no longer simply as straightforward as implementing reforestation projects, given the very degraded soil conditions and extreme poverty.
- √ Integrated water resources management is a mechanism established by several conventions, notably the Dublin Convention (1992) to improve how water is managed for consumption, irrigation and other uses, but also for reducing disaster risks. (<http://www.un-documents.net/h2o-dub.htm>)

For further information on the Roundtable, contact Marisol Estrella – UNEP Disaster Risk Reduction Programme Coordinator at Marisol.Estrella@unep.org

For further information on PEDRR, visit www.pedrr.net