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OUTREACH

a multi-stakeholder magazine on environment and sustainable development

CLIMATE CHANGE IS ALL ABOUT WATER

BY ZAFAR ADEEL

WATER CHALLENGES AND CHOICES

WATER & CLIMATE CHANGE: INTRODUCING A SOUTHERN CIVIL SOCIETY PERSPECTIVE

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EDITORIAL TEAM

Editorial Advisor
Felix Dodds
Stakeholder Forum

Editor
Nicola Williams
Stakeholder Forum

Political Editor
Sabrina Chesterman

Design and Layout
Cesar Huerta
www.coroflot.com/cesarhuerta

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Republic of Slovenia
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Zafar Adeel
UN water

Danielle Morley
Freshwater Action Network

Alastair Morrison
Stockholm International Water Institute

Philip Pearson
Trade Union Congress (TUC)

Christoph Schwarte
FIELD

Alex Stark
Adopt a Negotiator Project

Frances Buckingham
Think Tank Manager, SustainAbility

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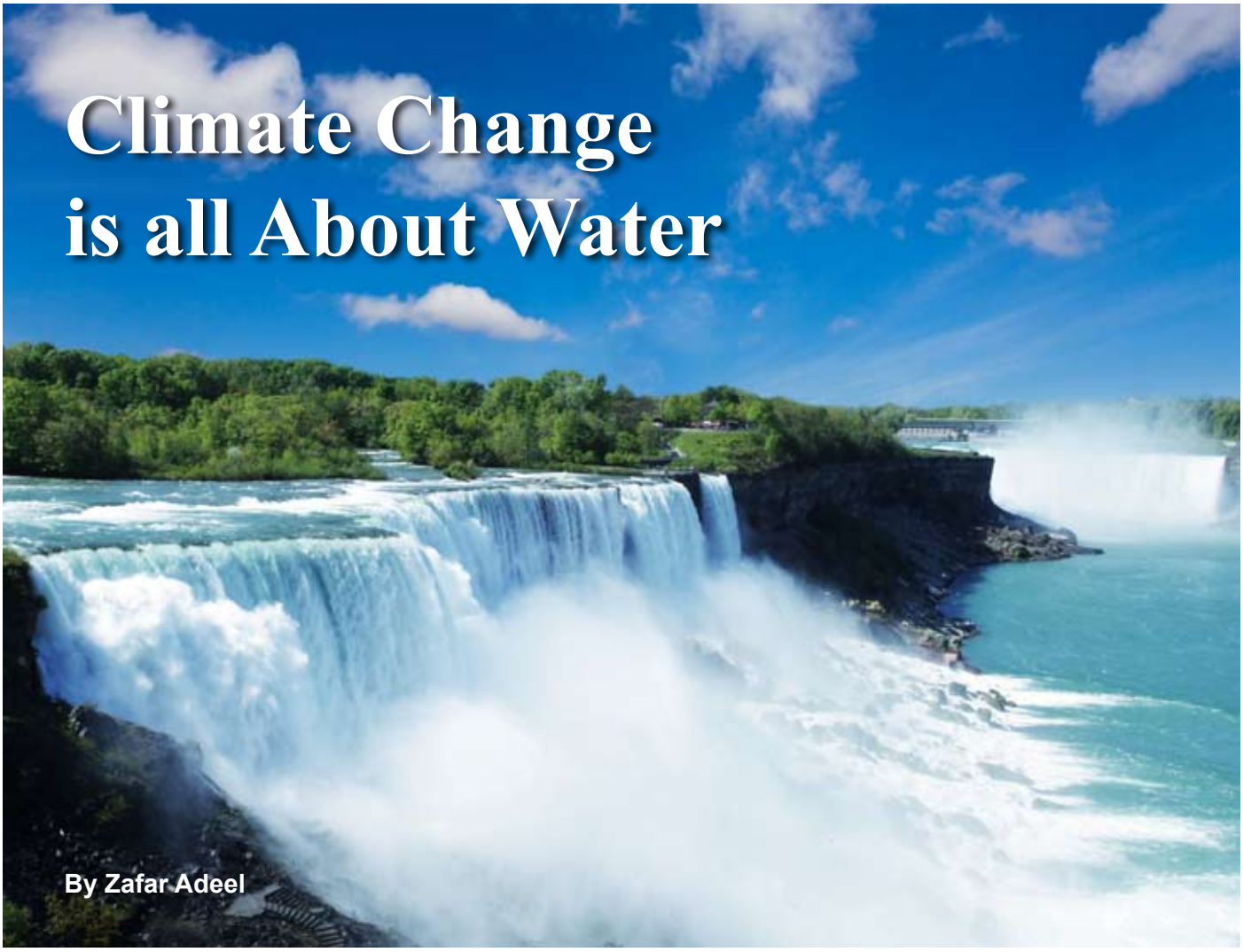


Climate Change is all About Water

By Zafar Adeel

Many people may consider expanding deserts as the main manifestation of a warming planet, and that's likely to occur. However, it is just one consequence of predicted shifts in the global water cycle -- changes that will affect the quality, timing and volume of precipitation and water availability everywhere.

Climate change will affect all societies and ecosystems most profoundly through the medium of water – the arrival of too much in some places, too little in others and at unexpected times. Sadly, most communities in developing countries are ill-prepared to adjust to the looming new reality. The need is growing by the day for disadvantaged countries to work on ways to cope with climate change impacts.

Changes to precipitation patterns have already been documented and are projected to amplify through global warming. Receding glaciers, melting permafrost and changes in precipitation from snow to rain would further affect seasonal water flows.

Meanwhile, rising sea levels will seriously affect coastal aquifers on which many cities and other users rely heavily. This phenomenon will also severely impact agricultural production in major delta regions -- the food bowl of many countries.

Climate change will also directly affect industrial, agricultural and household demand for water. For example, demand for water to irrigate crops may rise as transpiration increases with higher temperatures.

Finally, extreme weather events have become more frequent and intense in many regions, resulting in a substantial increase of water-related hazards. The impacts of recent major floods, such as this summer's deadly and costly ($9.5 billion in damages) catastrophe in Pakistan earlier this year, is an indication of what could lie ahead from increased climate variability. More intense droughts experienced in the past decade are also linked to changing climate and water cycle patterns.

In order to prepare the developing countries for impacts on their water resources, three strategies must be employed.

First: Build resilience of societies to unexpected climate patterns

While this certainly means investment in hardware (infrastructure, water reservoirs, water delivery and treatment systems) there must also be an equal emphasis on "software" (especially raising awareness of public and policy-makers alike).

The creation of community groups that would respond to climatic emergencies and care for those most vulnerable is one aspect, as successfully demonstrated in some countries including Cuba. Developing national economic policies that account for changes in water distribution is another.

Second: Foster better understanding of sectoral impacts of water-related climate impacts

How we manage water affects almost all aspects of the economy, particularly a) public health, food production and security; b) domestic water supply and sanitation; c) energy and industry; and d) environmental sustainability. An integrated set of policies for water management at every level of government is critical to the economic, social and environmental well-being of societies everywhere.

Third: Bring in additional resources and new investments to ensure that adaptation to climate impacts is undertaken effectively

In the dialogue during and around climate change negotiations in Copenhagen last year, United Nations member states recognized this reality and are responding favourably. The additional resources in question are not just financial; they also include training people to lead the national responses and deploying cost-effective technologies.

The political complexity and competing interests in the climate change debate have led to uncertain action on the mitigation of emissions and, in the process, assured future adverse impacts.

The focus on adaptation to climate's impact on our water resource must, therefore, become a center-stage priority. This should be reflected in national development policies and budget allocations, but also in the international discourse on climate change.

Zafar Adeel *is Director of the United Nations University's Canada-based Institute on Water, Environment and Health, and Chair of UN Water, which coordinates water-related efforts of 28 United Nations organizations and agencies.*

This text was commissioned by the National Water Commission of Mexico in support of the Dialogs for Water and Climate Change (D4WCC) in COP 16, a series of awareness-raising activities held from 1-8 December. The final activity in the D4WCC will be a high-level panel, on the Mexican Pavilion in Cancunmesse, on 8 December from 9 to 11am, in which confirmed participants include UNFCCC Secretary General Christiana Figueres, OECD Secretary General José Ángel Gurría, IADB President Luis Alberto Moreno, WMO Secretary General Michel Jarraud, and CONAGUA Director General José Luis Luege Tamargo.

Water People Profiles:

One resource, three people.

Profile

Julia Bucknall

Nationality: British
Country of residence: United States
Organisation: World Bank
Current Position: Manager of World Bank Water Practice
How long have you been in this position? 1 year

Describe your first attempt to 'save the planet':
In 1982 I became a vegetarian. My mum was furious at the time and she still is.

Favourite quote:
'The world is your oyster but your future's a clam' – The Jam

What jobs have you held that have led to the role you are in today?
Worked on water investment projects and analytical work in North Africa, Central Asia, Central Europe, Central America and Cambodia.

What do you believe should be achieved at COP16?
REDD and recognition of the importance of adaptation.

What do you consider the most significant hurdle to achieving an international agreement to succeed the Kyoto Protocol?

It is important to make clear that water is a resource, not a sector. We do however aim to get a common platform amongst various groups. There is currently a need to determine a collective approach to in order to help climate change negotiators better understand and respond to critical water issues. Currently water is only recognised five times in the UNFCCC text. An objective is to determine a collective position and there create key policy positions for climate negotiations and organise a common work programme.

What is your message to world leaders?

That nothing is achievable without water and adaptation needs to involve a water management plan in order have food security, sustainable urban growth, energy security and biodiversity. This will involve hard political solutions, solid infrastructure investment and public education and outreach. It is important to note that even if you are in a country with water security, if you import food or energy you are vulnerable to another country's insecurity.

Profile

Alastair Morrison

Nationality: British
Country of residence: Sweden
Organisation: UNDP Water Governance Facility at SIWI (Stockholm International Water Institute)
Current Position: Project Manager
How long have you been in this position? 2 years

What prompted your early interest in environment?
A love of the outdoors, cycling, hiking and being outside in beautiful wild places.

Describe your first attempt to 'save the planet':
Constructing a sewerage outfall to clean up Bondi Beach in Sydney (or so said the water authority)

What jobs have you held that have led to the role you are in today?

Key jobs include; 9 years water, sanitation and flood management work in UK, Hong Kong and Malaysia; emergency relief in Mozambique after the 2000 floods, emergency water and sanitation work in Angola for Oxfam as the war ended in 2002; and co-ordinating reconstruction in Banda Aceh after the tsunami for UNDP and the Government of Indonesia.

What do you believe should be achieved at COP16?
more efforts to help better, appropriate and sustainable adaptation measures in the South.

What do you consider the most significant hurdle to achieving an international agreement to succeed the Kyoto Protocol?
NIMBYism – 'I won't do anything unless you do' … (even if I can actually do quite a lot…)

What timeline is reasonable for an international agreement to be achieved? And what should this look like?
Unfortunately I am rather pessimistic about a global agreement – I hope that individual actors and nations do at least do something to help.

What is your message to world leaders?
You can be a rich developed country and still have low emissions – compare Stockholm (3t/person/year CO2) with Indonesia (15t/person/year. Also - try cycling.

Profile

Bai-Mass Taal

Nationality: Gambian
Country of residence: Nigeria
Organisation: The African Ministers' Council on Water (AMCOW)
Current Position: Executive Secretary
How long have you been in this position? 5 years

What jobs have you held that have led to the role you are in today?

Water and Environment Minister for Gambia, Work at UNEP for 14 years, Director of Forestry in Gambia.

Describe your first attempt to 'save the planet':

After studying at Duke University and learning of the "limits of growth" from my professor I returned to Gambia and tried to deliver this message that resources were in fact finite. This was in the 1970s, before the phrase 'sustainable development' was actually coined. I was a lone voice in Africa. In my first job I tried to raise awareness of this and people just brushed it off as Western ideas. Soon people came around after experiencing drought, livestock death and a food crisis.

Favourite quote:
"Without water there is no life. Water is the nerve centre of development"

What do you aim to achieve at COP in terms of water and climate change?

To integrate water so it becomes a programme of work. Therefore, we want individual governments to write to the chair of the SBSTA. We also need to get water people into the UNFCCC political negotiations. While we have biodiversity, Climate change and desertification negotiations we do not have a bridge between these issues. I am trying to play a role for Africa in order to mainstream water into these issues.

What time line is reasonable for an international agreement to be achieved? And what should this look like?

I don't think it will happen in Cancun or in Durban. In two years time perhaps but right now there is no movement and groups are still holding firmly onto their positions. I am hoping from here we can help to ease the way to Durban.

Can public International law help the negotiations?

By Christoph Schwarte, FIELD

In the current climate change negotiations many developing countries refer to per capita emissions as the main criteria for justice and equity in a future post-Kyoto climate regime. They consider atmospheric resources the common wealth of humankind. As industrialised countries are responsible for the majority of historic green house gas emissions, they already occupy more than their fair share of atmospheric space.

While developed countries represent less than 15% of world population they contributed around 45% of the increase in carbon in the atmosphere between 1850 and 2009. In comparison, the majority of the world's population living in developing countries has 'under-used' what would have been their share of the available carbon space. As a result – many developing countries argue – they are owed a climate debt.

The UNFCCC Preamble recognises that the largest share of historical and current global emissions of green house gases has originated in industrialised countries. It describes the Earth's climate as a common concern of humankind. Annex I countries, however, have been careful not to accept legal responsibility for their previous conduct. While in terms of justice, the per capita allocation of airspace may provide a compelling argument, its validity under the law that applies between nations (public international law) is limited.

But does public international law provide other levers? In October 2010 the Foundation for International Environmental Law and Development (FIELD), published a paper on "Internatinional climate change litigation and the negotiations process". The study analysis the current legal discourse and has summarized its findings in a four page briefing and a longer working paper. Both are available through the FIELD website **www.field.org.uk.**

Today a large part of the relevant legal literature suggests that the main polluting nations can be held responsible under international law for the harmful effects of their greenhouse-gas emissions. The legal basis commonly invoked in this connection is the "no harm rule" – a widely recongised principle of customary law whereby a State must prevent and reduce the risk of significant environmental harm to other States.

As a result affected countries may have a substantive right to demand the cessation of a certain amount of emissions or reparation for damages. By taking industrialised nations to an international court or tribunal, climate-vulnerable developing nations could use international law to break the current deadlock in the intergovernmental negotiations on climate change.

However, there are very limited procedural means to pursue such a claim and seek redress under public international law. An international judicial forum - such as the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague - can only hear contentious disputes concerning an alleged breach of an international obligation if (and to the extent) the States concerned have accepted its jurisdiction.

To date only 66 countries have made a unilateral declaration accepting the ICJ's compulsory jurisdiction (as binding with respect to other States that have done the same). This includes several industrialised countries such as Canada, Germany or the UK and many developing countries particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change. For example: Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Egypt, Haiti, Pakistan, Peru, Philippines or Senegal. However, it excludes several of the main players, in particular the US on one side but also small island states on the other.

A judicial decision would only apply in relation to the parties to the proceedings. This could involve a significant number of countries but realistically exclude several of the main players – in particular the US. However, depending on the content of such a decision, the parties bound by it could be compelled to take leadership within or outside the current negotiation process. The definition of necessary measures to reach a climate change deal before it is too late from the perspective of an independent third party would also send a strong signal to the entire international community.

International courts and tribunals rarely decide on complex scientific questions disputed between the parties or force a specific performance upon States. But if a sufficiently strong case supported is presented, an international judicial organ may be willing to creatively engage with the process of settling the dispute in question. It could determine specific procedural measures such as time-lines or the establishment of an expert commission. Thus, the paper concludes, climate change litigation or the threat thereof may help to create the political pressure and third-party guidance required to re-invigorate the international negotiations.

For any feedback
and queries please contact
christoph.schwarte@field.org.uk

Water challenges and choices

By Republic of Slovenia,
Ministry of Home Affairs

Slovenia, like many countries is aiming to champion environmental challenges into foreign policy. At the end of August this year the fifth Bled Strategic Forum took place in Bled, Slovenia. This annual event traditionally brings together business people, think-tanks, media, and policy-makers and is as a leading regional forum in addressing and defining responses to emerging challenges.

Water was in the forefront of this year's Forum. By 2030, almost half of the world's population will experience high water stress. Bearing such bleak projections in mind, improved management of water resources is essential for assuring water security. The improved water management should integrate all three pillars of sustainable development in finding balance between different aspects of water management, including political, social, technical, economic and environmental. These issues and dilemmas were addressed by the thematic panel focused on 'the Water Challenge'.

As recognised by Andreas Kraemer, Director of Ecologic Institute in Berlin, water is a cross-cutting issue at the heart of today's global challenges. It links the challenges of human health and food security, economic development and the elimination of poverty, emphasised environmental protection, as well as international peace and security.

Janez Potočnik, European Commissioner for the Environment presented the EU's efforts towards integrated water management for ensuring high quality of water, efficient use of water in line with the EU Water Framework Directive. He reaffirmed the importance of cross-sectoral approach in river basins management and many good practices in Europe (Rhine, Danube, etc.). Jorge Borges, State Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Cape Verde, Jorge Borges reaffirmed that water cannot be taken for granted by states. He outlined the specific features Cape Verde as a salient case study with very limited water resources; and where re-using wastewater and improving desalinization are key technological challenges. However, water is also a moral issue. Addressing water challenge requires global response and global responsibility, particularly as countries already water scarcity will be the ones most affected by climate change.

This aspect of ethics was recognized by Kerri-Ann Jones, US Assistant Secretary of State for Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs, who underlined that water issue is frequently part of foreign policy activities already at present, and that water diplomacy should be further strengthened. In order to face water challenges, she believes that it is necessary to integrate water into different policies and shape partnerships around the world.

Management considerations

Another essential aspect to consider is the social dimension of management. Insufficient water supply is not only the result of resource scarcity, but also limited access to water, very often due to social and political reasons. The dilemma needs to be addressed, whether water is considered a commodity or an amenity and the question of water price. In the international framework, water is often regarded as a strategic asset. However, water is more often a catalyst of cooperation, as water management is in principle a win-win situation.

Water is climate change in a nutshell. The impact of climate change is most visible in the changes of natural water cycle. However increased water stress is just as much the result of poor water management and political decision-making. With specific reference to developing countries affected with water scarcity, virtual water is not incorporated in the food and other products for international markets, thus aggravating the water stress. Consequently underlined the importance of strengthening meteorological services, promoting research and education for water needs to be highlighted. As John Matthews, lead scientist on freshwater climate adaptation at World Wildlife Fund stressed, the link between water and adaptation to climate change. River basin management must invariably consider climate change and its impact on river flows and the water ecosystems. He mentioned that water management as a part of adaptation to climate change is often overlooked in existing climate negotiations.

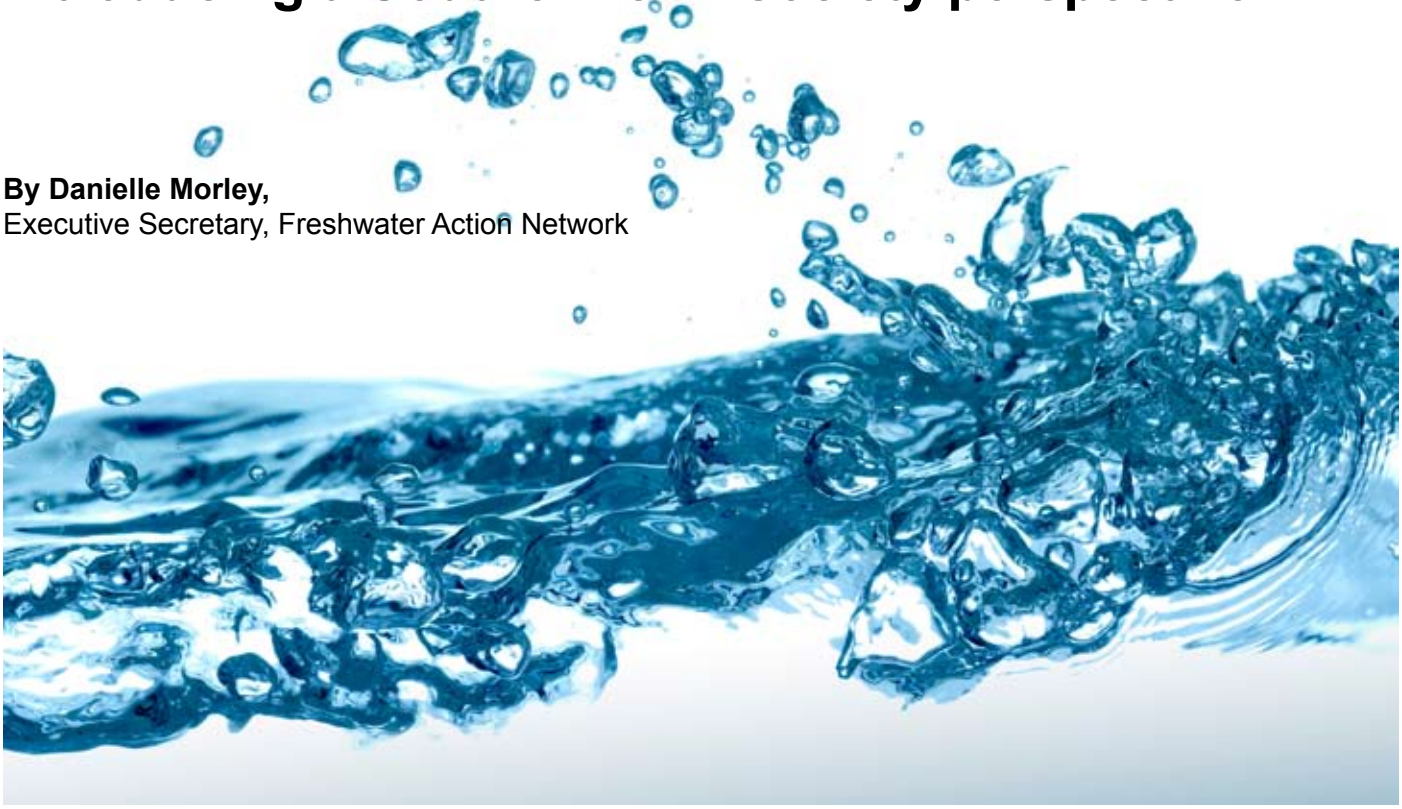
In summary, Bled Strategic Forum concluded that water as a global challenge is multidimensional and inextricably linked to other emerging issues. There is an urgent need to highlight water as the nexus among human security, economic development and environmental sustainability. Water should be considered as a natural resource, as a social asset and as an economic commodity. Water governance therefore depends on cooperation between key stakeholders, including international organizations and agencies, national governments and local authorities, science, business, and civil society.

Although water has its place on the global agenda, its complexity often makes it invisible. Water diplomacy should aim to promote global responsibility and to find the language to communicate the urgency of water challenge.

Water & Climate Change

introducing a Southern civil society perspective

By Danielle Morley,
Executive Secretary, Freshwater Action Network



The UNFCCC should swiftly move to address water and climate linkages. Global warming will transform the hydrological patterns that determine the availability of water. Many of the worlds water stressed areas will get less water; there will be less predictability of water flow and more extreme event.

A global discourse on water and climate change

Creating a global discourse on water and climate change within the UNFCC is critical across the mitigation and adaptation divide. A multi-lateral response should be met by a bottom up approach that responds to local communities' rights. In July 2010 the UN General Assembly passed a resolution recognising the human right to water and sanitation and on 30 September 2010 the UN Human Rights Council made this legally binding with resolution; 'A/HRC/15/L.14. This resolution was the result of a decade of campaigning by civil society organisations, together with progressive governments. It can now be used as leverage for action on water and climate, as it is the poorest and most vulnerable who will be most affected by the changes to water availability.'

The biggest constraint and area of concern is the lack of national level coordination limited, funding and unclear policies with are not synergistic with the emerging climate science and importantly finance mechanisms. This absence of national policies or regulations to deal with water security in a changing climate and the low capacities of the public authorities to respond or adapt is a major concern.

Water security under threat

Around one fifth of the world's population face water scarcity and 900 million lack access to safe drinking water. People living in the more fragile environments, such as temporary settlements or on land prone to flooding, are the most vulnerable to climatic impacts on water resources. Local communities are facing a diverse range of issues such as irregular rainfall and drought in Kenya, sea levels rising and contaminating freshwater in Bangladesh, depletion of the groundwater table in Southern India and long periods of floods and droughts in the Apa Basin between Brazil and Paraguay. The majority of those asked believe that climate change is exacerbating such issues.

Lack of access to adequate information and resources

We live in a world of information overload, with the internet providing a plethora of sources of information on water and climate related issues as a whole. Despite this abundance of information many stakeholders still feel ill-equipped and without adequate tools to understand what is causing water stress or to effectively respond to climate-related issues in their context. The issue relates to the fact most of the information is impenetrable due to sheer volume and complex terminology. Therefore the problem is not the availability of information but its reproduction, adaptation and dissemination. In order for information to be applied to practical action on the ground, it needs to be handled more systematically and made more accessible to local people for productive uses.

Getting the right information to the right people at the right time is critical but a technology doesn't address the power struggle between rich and poor. Reducing the vulnerability of poor communities to climate change should also focus on the software of people-centred development. Capacity, accountability and responsiveness programmes that support local peoples in their struggle for affordable and adequate clean water will become ever more important under climate change.

Building on local adaptation techniques

Despite immense challenges, communities are adapting to the variable climate at the local level with a number of water-related responses and many interesting and valuable local initiatives. Poor communities

in Bangladesh are building sanitation units on raised foundations so that pit latrines are not swept away and to prevent spread of disease during floods. Others are working to improve their local watersheds to reduce the likelihood of floods or droughts and enabling communities to better cope with adverse impact. We need to find ways to strengthen local adaptive capacity, supporting localized approaches and replicating them to scale.

Freshwater Action Network is committed to supporting local civil society organisations to better understand and assess the impact of climate change on their local water resources, to ensure that vulnerable communities understand the risks and develop local capacities to build adaptability.

Key priority areas for action

Broad stakeholder engagement: Local needs should be considered in the development of water-based adaptation strategies. Southern CSOs need to more involved in decision-making and planning.

Dissemination and scaling up positive experiences: Technical and financial support is needed to help develop long term sustainable adaptation solutions, building on local approaches.

Enhancing sharing of best practice: More dialogue, communication and knowledge-sharing between the water and climate change sectors.

Promote greater collaboration in data collection, monitoring and access to information: Climate risk information, where available, should be made widely accessible and used to inform water planning strategies.

***Freshwater Action Network Global** is a member of the Water and Climate Coalition (WCC), working to ensure that water resources management is placed at the heart of policy responses to climate change.*

Climate Change Adaptation Need Not Be Expensive

By Alastair Morrison, SIWI

With the protracted negotiations in Cancun making little headway, adaptation to the worst impacts of climate changes will become increasingly essential. Most of the anticipated impacts of climate change will be felt through water. Changing rainfall patterns cause floods and droughts and trigger landslides. Rising temperatures lead to sea level rise, more cyclones and more glacier outburst floods. Water-borne diseases and agriculture will be severely impacted by such changes, and progress towards many of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) will be jeopardised. All communities will be impacted by these changes to some degree. But the greatest impacts of climate change will fall disproportionately upon poor communities who are least able to cope. Climate change adaptation currently receives relatively little funding – little more than five percent of the total funds available for mitigation initiatives.

Value for money adaptation

This lack of funding is frequently quoted as a reason for inaction. But money isn't everything. Many of the most effective adaptation measures are free. Many others involve minimal
costs, and are far cheaper than more conventional approaches to development. Governance interventions are a key part of adaptation. Zoning restrictions, for example, can stop people and property being exposed unnecessarily to natural hazards. Inappropriate developments – those that block drainage runs, pollute watercourses and increase rainfall runoff and downstream flooding – must be stopped. In many Southeast Asian and Latin American countries, poor communities are forced to live in dangerous floodplains, on riverbanks and in ravines. This is not due to a lack of overall land availability – population densities are still relatively low – but because powerful elites own most of the safe and productive areas. Improved land tenure can do much to reduce the climate risks to the poorest and most vulnerable. Such governance interventions need not entail any substantial capital expenditure
to safeguard vulnerable and marginalized communities.

Traditional and local knowleged

Traditional knowledge offers many solutions to climate risks. For example, most houses in Southeast Asia used to be raised on stilts, allowing floodwater to pass safely underneath. In Mongolia, strict hygiene customs ensured that nomads carefully protected their limited water sources. But today, rapid urbanisation and a desire for 'modernity' means that such knowledge is lost, and populations are more vulnerable than ever before. Why do development practitioners prefer expensive adaptation options? Perhaps capacity building is needed – people are simply unaware that simpler, alternative solutions do exist. The need to disburse money rapidly, and show tangible project outputs, could be another reason. Risk assessments and building resilience into projects can be seen as causing 'intolerable delays'. Legitimate management fees and contractors' profit margins also increase as more and larger contracts are signed. Opportunities for other, less honourable gains increase too.

This is not to argue against the need for adequate climate adaptation funding. More funding would be beneficial, but only if it is invested correctly and integrated into national development plans. There are still many situations where hard engineering structures might be the only practical solution. Structures are often appropriate when combined with other measures to ensure sustainability. For example, if a flood levee is built, it must be of sound construction and properly maintained. Protected communities need to be aware of any residual risks, and the consequences of structural failure. As Hurricane Katrina showed, these last challenges are difficult to achieve, even in the most advanced societies. Low cost adaptation measures are a 'low hanging fruit' that would bring many development benefits. Even under today's climate, with natural variations, good water governance brings tremendous benefits. If the worst scenarios of climate change come to pass, water adaptation measures will bring returns that far exceed any initial outlay.

Steven Chu, U.S. Energy Secretary, Speaks

By Alex Stark

As more and more high-level ministers arrive in Cancun for the UN climate talks, the venues have taken on the air of a red carpet. TV cameraman and reporters move in flocks, chasing down the most important ministers for interviews, and long lines form outside of the meeting rooms where they are scheduled to speak.

Such was the case earlier this afternoon, when U.S. Secretary of Energy Steven Chu gave a talk at the U.S. Center in the civil society venue. The small make-shift room in the center of a warehouse-like space was packed, but I managed to slip in a glimpse of the detail-laden slides that accompanied the talk, which brought me back to high school science courses (no surprise, since Chu is a Noble Prize-winning scientists and lectured at Berkley).

The first half of Chu's talk focused on the science of climate change. This might be surprising for the expert audience here, but made plenty of sense in the context of the United States, where scientists are waging a PR battle with "climate deniers," who have managed to convince many Americans that anthropogenic climate change does not exist. He showed charts and graphs to convey the message that the world is definitely warming in temperature, ice masses are decreasing globally and increased concentrations of carbon in the atmosphere are disrupting natural atmospheric circulation.

Perhaps more interestingly to someone who follows U.S. politics, Chu stated that "we will live in a carbon constrained world" in the near-term future. He noted that demand for oil will increase in the future even as supplies become more difficult to extract, increasing oil prices. In this context, he reaffirmed President Obama's deep commitment to meeting the Copenhagen commitments, saying that "moving to a clean energy economy is about security:" both economic and national security.

Chu also listed several steps that the Department of Energy is taking to achieve our energy goals, noting that "energy savings and cost savings are the same: energy efficiency means money saved." First, the Department is working to improve energy efficiency savings through approving and enforcing efficiency standards for appliances, vehicles and buildings. Chu also aims to "double U.S. clean energy generation by 2012," with some of the economic stimulus package passed last year used to galvanize clean energy investments. This includes a clean energy tax credit, as well as a "historic investment in carbon capture and sequestration (CCS)." A $4 billion investment with public funds has been met with $7 billion in private funds in CCS.

Finally, Chu explained U.S. investments in clean energy research, including "energy frontier research centers," energy innovation hubs and ARPA-E (the Advanced Research Projects Agency for Energy). Since Chu himself was a researcher at Lawrence Berkley National Laboratory, his belief that research centers can come up with "game-changing" innovations makes sense.

Chu's talk may not have taught many of its listeners anything new, but it was an important signal at these climate negotiations. It was most likely designed to build trust in other country parties that the United States remains committed to the commitment it made in Copenhagen of cutting emissions by 17% by 2020 over 2005 levels even without national legislation, through Department of energy investments, regulations and other parts of a piecemeal approach. It was also meant to convey a sense of transparency in the mitigation actions that the United States is taking, a significant signal **in the debate over MRV.**

The talk may have also been an important signal for people back home who are urging the Obama administration to act on climate change. Sending Steven Chu, a noted "climate hawk" to these meetings, is an important statement on the administration's part that it is serious about tackling this issue both at home and in the international arena. Of course, even if the United States is able to reach the 17% commitment, this will not be enough to protect global health, economy, security and the environment.

A report released today by called "**The U.S. Role in International Climate Finance"** notes that "we are therefore deeply concerned about the inability of our nation to come to terms with the enormity of the climate crisis and mount an ambitious, comprehensive response. This failure has many causes, from the influence of polluters and corporate special interests in U.S. politics to the aftermath of the recent recession." Even so, it goes on to say that "even in the face of these unavoidable political realities, we believe the United States can reduce emissions well below current levels by 2020 if it aggressively pursues a mix of climate and energy policies."

If the United States is able to achieve significant emissions reductions due to an aggressive energy policy, it will only be if and because we have smart and capable leaders like Steven Chu pushing the Obama administration and U.S. policymakers every step of the way. In that context, it's good to know that Chu is in charge.

Alex Stark** is a negotiations tracker with the Adopt a Negotiator Project, representing the United States. To view her blogs and those by other youth from 13 countries, please go to* ***http://adoptanegotiator.org/

A Vision for our Future

By Frances Buckingham

Apocalyptic warnings of climate change and its devastating consequences have made us acutely aware of the need for governments, businesses and consumers to act to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Yet there is a growing body of evidence that, while accurate, dire climate scenarios based on rising sea levels, extreme weather events, failing crops and chronic water shortages are not changing attitudes or behaviours nearly enough.

Futerra, a communications agency with many years' experience in communicating climate change, state in a recent report that "threats of climate hell haven't seemed to hold us back from running headlong towards it". Recent research from the University of California, Berkeley has found that dire or emotionally-charged warnings about the consequences of global warming can backfire if presented too negatively.

Yet the UN set the context for the latest round of talks in Cancun by issuing a further gloomy warning that the world is firmly on the path for dangerous climate change in the coming century, with current emission pledges leaving the world far short of what is required to prevent the global average temperature rising beyond 2°C. At the same time, expectations for progress at Cancun are low, with many commentators and participants left hoping that the talks don't completely breakdown.

Where is the hope?

When John F Kennedy announced to the world his ambition to place man on the moon – with no clear roadmap for how it would be achieved – he created an inspirational vision that captured the imagination of a country and led to arguably the greatest human achievement of all time. According to IPCC's 4th Assessment Report, to stand an evens chance of staying below the critical 2°C threshold, we'll need to engineer a zero carbon energy system by 2050, with all the interim steps this implies. So why are we so hamstrung by realism – urged to focus on the 'low-hanging fruit' – when all evidence indicates that something absolutely extraordinary must happen and the world needs a vision of what the extraordinary might be? The evidence points to the need to go lighter on the doom and start to present a game-changing view of the future that captures the imagination, using the zero-carbon goal to echo the words of JFK: "we choose to [do these things], not because they are easy, but because they are hard, because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills, because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept, one that we are unwilling to postpone and on which we intend to win".

Show us the future

Leaders with courage and vision will need to emerge from both the business and political spheres if work to decarbonise the economy is to secure the popular support it requires. Only bold and decisive leadership will prove sufficient to inspire the public towards zero-carbon, even if we don't necessarily know how we will get there. We need to rethink and redesign the future instead of relying on economic factors such as rising fuel prices and dwindling oil supplies to drive investment, or waiting for top-down climate regulation to set standards for corporate climate accountability. China is surging ahead of the rest of the world in renewable energy, according to a recent study by Ernst and Young, creating 'a new world order in the low-carbon sector' because it sees Cleantech – including renewable energy – as representing a significant part of the country's future economic growth plans.

Vision drives change

Some companies are beginning to demonstrate they can go beyond the art of the possible by setting stretch targets for change that they do not know how to achieve. Procter & Gamble has made a leap of faith by committing to targets that are beyond its current ability to deliver, such as powering its factories with 100% renewable energy. Interface – a long-time sustainability pioneer – made a commitment through its Mission Zero to purchase renewables not yet available, planting a stake in the ground and giving the renewables industry confidence to invest.

In a recent interview with The Guardian William Todd, the head of operations for PepsiCo UK & Ireland, talked about how innovation is driven by setting by setting bold goals which "forces people to look at every area of our operations and encourages ideas to bubble up. If you come up with a commitment, say to reduce energy by 3% next year, you will not get people engaged or any real financial engagement. But if you set an engaging vision, you can get a coalition of people excited by the possibilities". The Chairman of IBM, which is paving the way with its smarter planet initiative, is quoted as saying: "No one waited for legislation to pass; no one waited for an industry consortium to form; no one waited to engage in a bit public policy debate – only through beginning do we being to learn more and move forward."
Political and business leaders need to be bold. Paint a picture of the future we are going to build together, help us understand the limitless possibilities of a decarbonised world. Lead us with the courage and vision that put man on the moon.

Frances Buckingham
Think Tank Manager, SustainAbility
Buckingham@sustainability.com

UN cuts Just Transition

By Philip Pearson, TUC

In an apparent bid to "simplify" its negotiating text, the UN has deleted almost references to labour and human rights at the climate conference here in Cancun. The ITUC delegation has been busy setting up meetings with the around 50 national governments we cover here, including the UK whom we met briefly on Sunday.

Our concern is that the UN's Shared Vision text should set the tone for the real policy solutions for combating climate change. An ambitious strategy, in which social issues counterbalance an otherwise market driven process, has been replaced by a pared back vision that, to all intents and purposes, repeats minimal aspirations on global temperature rise and a CO2 peaking year (still unspecified, by the way). Whilst there may be a case for seeking to focus more tightly on climate change core issues, the emphases on market solutions are retained, but labour and human rights demands are not.

Whilst we are still in play with our lobbying, this feels like the UN is shifting decisively in a market oriented direction, whether deliberately or out of expediency. Either way, one cant help being reminded of Stern's dictum, that climate change is the biggest market failure in history.

So to elevate market-based solutions doesn't inspire much faith in this process from the perspective of trade unions, youth, gender and other Observer groups that have invested so much in a progressive, democratically based shared vision.

We came here to lobby for commitment on Finance packages for developing nations, as a way to "operationalise just transition". In a just transition setting, climate finance offers the means to enable developing nations to invest in climate resilient development – from green growth and agriculture adaptation – in a way that will help to secure decent work, and labour and human rights.

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