

Press Release



Loss and damage from climate change is already happening, says UNU report

Vulnerable communities experiencing adaptation limits and constraints

Bonn, 7 November 2013 - In the lead up to the high-level Climate Conference COP 19 in Warsaw, Poland the United Nations University's Institute for Environment and Human Security today released a new research report focusing on the loss and damage that climate change is already causing. The report finds that despite adaptation efforts, vulnerable communities are experiencing loss and damage that are threatening their most fundamental needs, livelihood and food security.

"Our research findings clearly show that current levels of adaptation and mitigation efforts are insufficient to avoid negative impacts from climate stressors. Policy responses are needed now," explained Dr. Koko Warner, Scientific Director of the Loss & Damage Initiative at the United Nations University. "People are feeling impacts right now that affect their food security and way of life. These negative effects will only grow unless we take action. Maintaining the status quo is no longer an option."

The scientific case studies in the current report explore the impacts of floods and droughts in Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Mozambique and Nepal, and build on earlier research conducted in Kenya, the Gambia, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Micronesia. In total 3269 household interviews and over 200 focus groups were conducted for all nine case studies.

Despite applying a variety of coping and adaptation measures to mitigate the damage caused by climate change, 96 per cent of households surveyed in selected districts in Ethiopia, 78 per cent in Nepal, 72 per cent in Burkina Faso and 69 per cent in Mozambique still experienced severe negative impacts on their household budgets. Three out of four surveyed households across the study sites reported that they have to cut down on the number of meals or reduce portion sizes - a clear sign that coping capacity is inadequate. As the households in the case study regions are primarily small-scale farmers, climate change impacts, such as changing rainfall patterns, increased frequency of flood and drought, also directly and critically threaten their livelihood security in addition to their food security.

"Following a severe flood in Ethiopia in 2007, 94 per cent of respondents reported that their crops were severely damaged or entirely destroyed. Large-scale destruction of crops also lead to higher food prices, which made staple foods such as maize unaffordable", stated Dr. Fatima Denton, Coordinator of the African Climate Policy Centre (ACPC), a partner for the African case studies. "Time and time again the study found that households that are already struggling, are forced into deeper poverty due to climate change impacts. When adaptation is insufficient to manage climatic stressors, the loss and damage that results will undermine human well-being and sustainable development."

While loss and damage from climate change impacts is commonly expressed in monetary terms, non-economic loss and damage, such as loss to culture and identity, may actually have the most far-reaching and significant consequences. In Burkina Faso, pastoralists have had their herds decimated due to lack of water and fodder. This represents not only a loss of physical assets but also a critical loss of cultural identity and way of life.

The evidence on loss and damage presented in this report comes at a crucial time in the lead up to the upcoming climate negotiations in Warsaw, Poland, where there is a mandate to establish institutional arrangements to address climate change-related loss and damage.

Background

The Loss & Damage in vulnerable countries initiative at the United Nations University assesses a broad range of both extreme weather events and slow onset climatic changes in vulnerable countries around the world.

The four case studies presented in this report, Volume 2, focused exclusively on droughts and floods. Three case studies were conducted in Africa (Ethiopia, Burkina Faso and Mozambique) and one in Asia (Nepal).

They build on previous case studies published in Volume 1 which investigated floods in Kenya, droughts in the Gambia, cyclones and salinity intrusion in Bangladesh, glacier retreat and changing monsoon patterns in Bhutan, and sea-level rise and coastal erosion in Micronesia.

The previous and current research brings together new empirical evidence on loss and damage based on 3269 household interviews for all nine case studies in Volume 1 and 2 and over 200 focus group discussions and expert interviews in 9 vulnerable countries.

About the Climate and Development Knowledge Network (CDKN)

The Climate and Development Knowledge Network (CDKN) aims to help decision-makers in developing countries design and deliver climate compatible development. CDKN has provided support for the underlying empirical research for this report, as a contribution to the Loss and Damage in Vulnerable Countries Initiative (www.lossanddamage.net).

Download the full report here: <http://ehs.unu.edu/file/get/11480.pdf>

Attention Online Media

High resolution images from field research are available for download here:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/unubonn/sets/72157637299727934/>

For more information or to schedule an interview, please contact:

Janine Kandel, Communication Officer, UN University, Bonn: kandel@vie.unu.edu, Tel +49-228-815-0219

Sijia Yi, Communication Associate, UN University, Bonn: yi@vie.unu.edu, Tel +49-228-815-0284