

### Why humanitarian agencies should get engaged in the UN climate change negotiations

*By the end of 2009 in Copenhagen, the world's leaders will have agreed to a new deal to reduce greenhouse gases and to adapt to those consequences of climate change that we can no longer avoid. Negotiations are underway and will, among other issues, decide on mechanisms for distributing substantial funding. Humanitarian and disaster risk reduction organizations must be engaged in the coming months to ensure that the final deal will support disaster risk reduction and enable the most vulnerable people to adapt effectively to climate change. The opportunity to positively influence the negotiations is upon us: disaster risk management and risk reduction have been identified as important elements of the climate change deal, and a workshop on risk reduction will be held in Poznan, Poland, in December 2008. The Poznan workshop is one of few official events that will provide input to the negotiations. Therefore, humanitarian and DRR organizations must make clear to negotiators in Poland the policies and resources required to avert and be well prepared for climate-related disasters.*

Most in the humanitarian and disaster risk reduction communities have not been actively engaged in climate change because for more than fifteen years it was regarded as an environmental issue and international attention was focused on addressing the *cause* of climate change, greenhouse gases. Climate change was also viewed as primarily a problem of the future. However, it is now clear that climate change is happening and that it will greatly worsen disaster risk. Evidence for this is not only seen in global temperature and sea-level rise experienced over the last century, but, significantly, an observed increase in extreme weather events. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change attributes increasing drought and heavy precipitation (the latter often leading to floods) in some regions, as well as extreme temperatures across the globe, to climate change. It is virtually certain that these trends will continue in the future.

And worse is to come. The extremes we observe today will further accelerate in the coming decades as the planet continues to warm. More disasters and more complex emergencies are expected as livelihoods and human health become impacted by climate change. Agriculture will be adversely affected

by decreasing yields in warmer environments and drought, as well as increased insect outbreaks. Floods and storms will threaten settlements, commerce and transport. Human health faces risk from heat-related impacts, food and water shortage, water and food-borne diseases, as well as risk of death by drowning in floods and migration-related health effects.

The poorest of the poor, who have contributed the least to the problem, will be hit first and hardest. Developing countries do not have the means to begin the processes for reducing the impacts of climate change that can no longer be avoided. The required adaptation actions are dependent on the resources the international community is willing to offer. For the least developed countries, a funding mechanism has been established to enable them to develop 'National Adaptation Programmes of Action' (NAPAs) for the most immediate needs. Yet there are insufficient funds available to implement even the most urgent programmes identified in the NAPAs. In most other developing countries, very few initiatives are being taken to prepare for the unavoidable impacts of climate change. Many governments agree that additional funding will be needed to reduce the risks

of climate change in developing countries. The first very rough calculations reveal that the cost will be at least tens of billions annually for developing countries. There will need to be agreement on how much will be needed, how the additional finances will be mobilized, and how the necessary adaptation strategies will be implemented.

Although lack of finances is the main reason for the delay in developing and implementing climate change adaptation plans, a contributing factor is that professionals in health, agriculture, urban planning, disaster management, local governance, etc.—those who are the natural experts on climate change adaptation—are not aware of, let alone engaged, in national adaptation planning. Though climate change is increasingly acknowledged as a contributor to crises, like the current food crisis, there are too few attempts to turn this awareness into concrete adaptation actions at national and local level.

Yet current negotiations under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change present important opportunities for humanitarian and disaster risk reduction experts to engage. In 2007 in Bali, Indonesia, negotiators identified in the Bali Action Plan the elements to develop a new climate change deal, one that would follow the Kyoto Protocol, the obligations for which expire in 2012. These negotiations will be concluded by the end of 2009, in Copenhagen, Denmark. This year two more rounds of talks will take place: in Accra, Ghana (21-27 August) and in Poznan, Poland (1-12 December). The Bali Action Plan calls for enhanced action on adaptation to include consideration of disaster reduction strategies, disaster risk management and risk transfer. Formal workshops will be held in Poznan on these risk issues, therefore, the Poznan meeting presents the best opportunity for humanitarians and risk reduction experts to inform the negotiations.

Humanitarian and risk reduction experts need to engage now to ensure that:

- Existing knowledge and experience in disaster risk reduction (tools and

mechanisms, practices, lessons learned) are well presented to the negotiators,

- Priority actions agreed under the Hyogo Framework for Action are reflected in the Copenhagen climate change agreement to guide adaptation,
- New and additional funding for climate risk management will support local level disaster risk reduction and truly serve the most vulnerable.

To ensure impact in Poznan, humanitarian and risk reduction experts may wish to prepare publications, side events, policy recommendations and position statements based on analysis of (1) tools and methodologies to assess, reduce and manage climate risk; (2) successful practices and programmes to reduce risk and their cost; (3) existing mechanisms for funding disaster risk reduction and management, their effectiveness and cost; and (4) assessment of the capacities and systems that will be required to scale-up humanitarian preparedness in a changing climate. Within the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (on humanitarian matters), the International Federation of the Red Cross is leading preparations in close collaboration with the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, as the UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR) secretariat likewise coordinates efforts for the ISDR system. Real impact in Poznan, and ultimately in the Copenhagen agreement, will require the coordinated effort of the full humanitarian and disaster risk reduction system.

In the last night in Copenhagen the final deal will be made. The better informed and confident the negotiating ministers are then about disaster risk reduction as an important strategy for climate change adaptation and the increased needs for humanitarian action, the better the deal will be. It is time the humanitarian agencies begin to contribute to that deal, to ensure that the most vulnerable people will be better protected against the forces of climate change. The train that left the station in Bali to arrive in Copenhagen in December 2009 is gaining speed but there is still time for many more passengers to join.