



Water resources planning key for sustainable climate adaptation in SA: experts

An international conference on climate change and water resources management has concluded that urgent action is needed to ensure South Asia is better prepared to address future climate conditions, including anticipated extremes of flooding and drought.

Part of the World Bank-led South Asia Water Initiative (SAWI), the conference saw participation from over 65 water resource and climate change experts, scientists and policy makers from seven South Asian countries - Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka - as well as China. Speaking at the opening session, Guest of Honour Dr.

UNDERSCORING THE NEED FOR SOLUTIONS THAT CAN ADAPT TO CHANGE AND ARE THEREFORE MORE RESPONSIVE TO UNCERTAIN DECISION-MAKING ENVIRONMENTS, PROFESSOR CASEY BROWN FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST PRESENTED THE DECISION TREE FRAMEWORK SUPPORTED BY THE WORLD BANK

Sarath Amunugama, Minister for Special Assignments in the Government of Sri Lanka said, "This seminar comes at a very important time, almost all countries represented here face crises of some sort as a consequences of climate change."

According to research undertaken by IWMI scientists, many areas of

Sri Lanka will experience future changes in temperature, rainfall, evaporation and sea level rise. This will affect a range of sectors, including agricultural production of important export crops. Surface and groundwater quality in coastal areas is also likely to be impacted affecting important drinking water

supplies. Participants agreed that coordinated responses across all sectors can help to reduce the impacts of changing weather patterns on key sectors, urban centres and the country's substantial natural heritage.

Three scientific papers presented at the conference highlighted the pressing need for action amid the uncertainty surrounding future water access and availability.

Underscoring the need for solutions that can adapt to change and are therefore more responsive to uncertain decision-making environments, Professor Casey Brown from the University of Massachusetts Amherst presented the decision tree framework

supported by the World Bank. This framework informs planning of water resources infrastructure using examples from hydropower planning in Nepal and water supply planning in Kenya.

Professor Aris Georgakakos from Georgia Water Resources Institute presented an integrated river basin planning approach used for the Rufiji basin in Tanzania under the World Bank Water Sector Support Project which emphasized smart approaches to develop "no regrets" solutions benefiting communities, agriculture and energy sectors, business and the natural environment, as well as integrating climate change implications.

MORE ON P3

Contd. from Page 1

Water resources...

Other notable experts included Professor Mohan Munasinghe, one of Sri Lanka's most senior researchers on climate change and a member of the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Highlighting the vulnerability of South Asia to climatic fluctuations, he stressed the importance of managing water resources in a manner consistent with the Sustainable Development Goals, suggesting the need for a Sustainable Water Resources Management approach, 'SWARM'.

Climate change is likely to profoundly impact water supply and demand as well as increase extreme events, such as floods and droughts, underscoring the need for developing effective policy frameworks as well as practical adaptation responses. According to Dr. Rafik Hirji, the World Bank Team leader, "Governments in the region who haven't yet mandated integrated water resources management (IWRM) are urged to step up efforts to formulate and implement those policies and those with policies in place need to elevate attention to their implementation. Effective planning, development and management of surface and groundwater will be key to ensuring that the resource is protected, conserved, secured and utilized optimally for the benefit of all South Asians."

Experts voted on series of potential next steps including practical initiatives on public education and awareness raising, initiatives on flood early warning and on climate adaptation and groundwater, ways of addressing 'non-water' sectors effectively in tackling water governance challenges and building more substantial regional data and knowledge sharing and capacity building through establishing a community of practice.

The conference was followed by a field visit on July 14, organized by the Ministry of Irrigation and Water Resources Management to areas north of Colombo recently affected by flooding along the Kelani River, and where flood response measures are being undertaken by the government.