

Opening Remarks

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The Asia-Pacific Drought Risk Dialogue:

Transforming institutional drought risk management for resilience

Regional Webinar on the GAR Special Report on Drought 2021

13:00 - 14:30 Bangkok Time, Tuesday 27 July 2021

Welcome everyone who has joined us for this webinar. And I am thankful and glad for the presence of our colleague:

- Letizia Rossano, Director of the Asia and Pacific Centre for the Development of Disaster Information Management (ADPIM)
- Dr. Sanjay Srivastava, Chief of the DRR section at UNESCAP and our distinguished presenters
- Dr. Wadid Erian, Professor at Cairo University, Dr. Jothi Sundaram, Team Leader at the Regional Integrated Multi-Hazard EWS for Africa and Asia (RIMES)
- Dr. Graham Bonnett, Research Director at Australia's national science agency, CSIRO
- Dr. Riyanti Djalante, the Head of Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance (DMHA) Division in the ASEAN Secretariat.

We are here because water is the most essential element for life and without it, it ceases to exist. Its shortage in the form of droughts has been a challenge that has affected human civilisations for thousands of years. And today they continue to be a concern that many countries across the Asia-Pacific region face.

In tropical Southeast Asia, a severe drought, that has been exacerbated by upstream hydropower dams, has throttled agricultural productivity, devastated fisheries, and threatened the food security and livelihoods of millions of people in the Mekong River Basin.

In the Pacific, drought coupled with the intrusion of seawater has caused a water security crisis in the smallest islands that rely on rainwater and shallow groundwater in lenses.

In Northeast Asia, we saw this year how desertification in Mongolia caused it to experience its worst sandstorm season in a decade. These sandstorms blanketed China's capital of Beijing and even reached western Japan, putting the health of millions at risk.

In addition to their impacts on health, food and water security, drought can cause displacement, which is what occurred in Afghanistan in 2018, when a quarter of a million people were displaced by drought. This concern returned this year as the country last month officially declared a national drought.

Drought has also impacted neighbouring Iran, causing severe water shortages, severe water shortages, which the government has attributed to this year being “one of the driest years in five decades.”

These indirect and cascading impacts are likely to grow over the coming years as climate projections indicate that droughts will become more frequent and more severe than in the past.

In their 2019 Asia-Pacific Disaster Report, our colleagues at ESCAP estimated the region’s disaster losses at \$150 billion USD from a combination of earthquakes, cyclones, floods, and tsunamis. However, when they factored in slow-onset disasters, like drought, the loss estimates jumped four folds to around \$675 billion USD.

Given these immense current and projected impacts, the UN Office of Disaster Risk Reduction is proud to release its 2021 Global Assessment Special Report on Drought, to help countries better understand and mitigate drought.

This report is indeed special because prior to this, our Global Assessment Reports identified the need to have a specific analysis on drought due to its complexity.

The drivers of drought risk are inherently complex because they include elements of meteorology, climate change, agriculture, power politics, food security, commodity markets, soil science, hydrology, and hydraulics, water management, security to name a few.

Moreover, unlike storms and earthquakes, the impacts of drought are non-structural and can lead to cascading impacts that may affect areas distant from the drought and it may last long after the drought has ceased. These impacts are of economic, social, environmental and political nature and deeply affect the achievement of the SDGs.

To address the systemic risks and multi dimensional impacts associated to droughts, the report call for advancing adoption of integrated watershed and land use planning approaches which are a core for a comprehensive management of climate and disaster risks

To shed more light on the report and how countries can proactively mitigate the risk of drought in the current scenario of a warming climate, changing rainfall patterns and more frequent and severe droughts, we are fortunate to have with us a group of esteemed panellists, including some of the authors who contributed to the report.

I thank them, and all of you, for joining us today.