



Climate change threatening survival of Himalayan communities – UN report



Himalayas

11 December 2009 – Climate change is posing a serious threat to communities in the Hindu Kush-Himalayan region, bringing both drought and catastrophic floods to hundreds of millions of people, according to a new United Nations-backed report.

Food security, housing, infrastructure, business and even the survival of people living in mountainous regions and their neighbours in river basins downstream in the region are extremely vulnerable to climate change, it said.

The publication was launched today in Copenhagen, Denmark, where nations are hammering out an ambitious new deal.

Its findings are based on research carried out by five teams in China, India, Pakistan and Nepal to assess the changing realities brought on by climate change.

"The acute experiences of people in this region are living proof of the pressures some societies are already enduring as a result of the onset of climate change – adaptation here is not just a necessity but a question of local communities' very survival," said the United Nations Environment Programme (**UNEP**) Executive Director Achim Steiner.

Temperature increases in the Himalayas seems to be more dramatic than the global average, with 0.6 degree centigrade rises reported in the Himalayas per decade, compared with the worldwide average of 0.74 degrees centigrade over the past century.

The new report found that extreme climate events are destroying crops; depleting water resources; depleting livestock and cropland; and dealing a blow to agricultural productivity.

It called on governments to boost local adaptation strategies and long-term resilience, not just disaster management.

Additionally, the publication appealed for a new Blue Revolution in Asia to enhance the efficiency of irrigation and water use to make more water available for crop production.

Nepal, which is normally known for its water abundance, has experienced extreme droughts, some lasting for years, while in some parts of India, embankments to contain the Koshi River have led to waterlogging and even calamitous flooding.

The report is a result of a two-year pilot assessment that was a joint effort by UNEP, the Centre for International Climate and Environmental Research (CICERO) and the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD).

In another study released today, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (**FAO**) found that fisheries – already facing challenges triggered by overfishing and habitat loss – are not adequately prepared to deal with the problems arising from climate change.

Particularly vulnerable are small island developing States, with at least 50 per cent of their animal protein intake being fish.

But also at risk are inland fisheries, the vast majority of which are located in Africa and Asia and threaten the food supply and livelihoods of some of the world's poorest people, the report noted.

Since most aquatic animals are cold-blooded making them sensitive to temperature fluctuations, global warming, it found, will have a significant impact on the reproductive cycles of fish.

In the North Atlantic, cod will be especially hard-hit given that temperature changes in plankton populations are already impacting the survival rates of young cod.

News Tracker: past stories on this issue

Life-saving early warning systems for droughts are focus at UN-backed meeting