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Responding to Drought – WMO-GWP Integrated Drought Management Program Launched

The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and Global Water Partnership (GWP) have launched a joint Integrated Drought Management Programme (IDMP) on March 13, 2013, to improve monitoring and prevention of one of the world's greatest natural hazards.

The programme was launched at the High-level Meeting on National Drought Policy (HMNDP) in Geneva, Switzerland, where decision-makers and scientists from around the world are discussing proactive, forward-looking national drought policies to replace the current piecemeal, reactive approach.

"Whether because of climate variability or climate change, droughts have a severe impact on water availability and quality, agricultural and energy production, and ecosystem health," says GWP Executive Secretary Dr Ania Grobicki. "There is an urgent need to develop better drought monitoring and risk management systems, and for countries to have frameworks in place to manage drought risks through an integrated approach. This programme aims to support countries in this endeavor, within their regional contexts."

"Without coordinated national drought policies, nations will continue to respond to drought in a reactive way. What we need are monitoring and early warning systems to deliver timely information to decision makers, effective impact assessment procedures, pro-active risk management measures, preparedness plans to increase coping capacities, and effective emergency response programmes to reduce the impacts of droughts. The Integrated Drought Management Programme is therefore an important initiative," said WMO Secretary-General Michel Jarraud.

The new programme capitalizes on the ten years of success with the Associated Programme on Flood Management, a joint project of WMO, the Global Water Partnership, Japan, Switzerland and many other partners. It will focus especially on sharing scientific information, knowledge and best practices to advise policies and management approaches.

The growing concern worldwide is that droughts are increasing in frequency and severity, due to climate change. This was discussed at the Geneva meeting where a GWP delegation from several regions and the Global Secretariat is participating. "The increase in catastrophic events such as droughts and floods will impact lives, livelihoods, land values, and investment incentives, especially in vulnerable areas inhabited by poorer populations," according to Alex Simalabwi, GWP global climate change focal point.

Sabina Bokal, the project manager for the new GWP Central and Eastern Europe drought programme located in Bratislava, Slovakia, said, "In co-operation with national hydro-meteorological institutions, river basin authorities, ministries, research institutions and the Southern and Eastern Europe Drought Monitoring Centre (DMC), the project will implement drought monitoring and risk assessments."

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At global level, the IDMP will contribute to best practices related to drought risk management through:

- Better scientific understanding of, and inputs for, drought management;
- Improved knowledge base, with better access to information and products;
- Drought risk assessment, monitoring, prediction, and early warning;
- Policy and planning for drought preparedness and mitigation across sectors; and
- Drought risk reduction and response.

Better drought management is also one of the priorities of the Global Framework for Climate Services, the GFCS. This framework is now being implemented by governments with support from several partners from the United Nations System. Climate services can be a powerful tool to increase drought resilience, by improving climate information and services, especially for the most vulnerable. They will build on fast improving climate prediction capabilities.

GWP is responding to the climate change challenge through a portfolio of programmes and projects aimed at building climate resilience through better water management. Initial implementation of the regional drought programmes will focus on Central and Eastern Europe, the Sahel (GWP West Africa) and the Horn of Africa (through GWP Eastern Africa). These regional programmes will contribute to the global integrated drought management programme located within WMO's Water and Climate Department.

More about the meeting and the new programme: <http://www.gwp.org/gwp-in-action/Events/GWP-at-High-Level-Meeting-on-National-Drought-Policy/>