Presentation of United Nations World Water Development Report 2018

"Nature-based solutions for water"

Nature-based solutions can play an important role in improving the supply and quality of water and reducing the impact of natural disasters, according to the 2018 edition of the United Nations World Water Development Report.

The report, which will be presented at the World Water Week in Stockholm (Sweden) on 28 August, argues that reservoirs, irrigation canals and water treatment plants are not the only water management instruments at our disposal.

The 2018 edition describes how nature-based solutions can substitute, augment or work in parallel with grey infrastructure in a cost-effective manner to address complex water management challenges involving water scarcity, quality and disaster risk reduction.

Wetlands, for example – both natural or constructed and managed – can play an important role in increasing water storage, improving water quality and reducing disaster risks. They can act as natural barrier or retention area, working as a natural "sponge" by trapping rainwater surface runoff, and can also help control soil erosion.

Nature-based solutions (NBS) use natural processes to contribute to the improved management of water. Those solutions include changing farming practices that allow soils to retain moisture and nutrients; harvesting rainwater: re-charging aquifers; conserving wetlands that capture runoff and filter water; restoring floodplains; and turning rooftops into gardens.

So-called 'green' infrastructure, as opposed to traditional 'grey' infrastructure, focuses on preserving the functions of ecosystems, both natural and built, and this has multiple applications in agriculture, the greatest consumer of water by far. Green infrastructure can help reduce pressures on land use while limiting pollution, soil erosion and water requirements by contributing to the development of more effective and economic irrigation systems, for example. According to cited estimates, agricultural production could be increased by nearly 20 percent worldwide if greener water management practices were used.

Such measures are not restricted to developing countries or those suffering from chronic water scarcity but also to developed countries with generally wetter conditions. For example, the improved agricultural practices and soil management would have reduced the impacts of the recent droughts in Norther Europe where several farmers have been reporting increasing risks of significant crops failures.

The 2018 edition of the United Nations World Water Development Report aims to encourage policy and decision-makers, inside and outside the water community, to find the most appropriate blend of green and grey investments to maximize benefits and system efficiency while minimizing costs and trade-offs.

The session will introduce the main findings of this flagship publication of UN-Water and facilitate a free discussion among the panelists and the audience concerning its policy messages and concrete applications of NBS to achieve the water-related Goal (SDG 6) and Targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Coordinated by the UNESCO World Water Assessment Programme, the United Nations World Water Development Report is the fruit of collaboration between the 31 United Nations entities and 39 international partners that comprise UN-Water. Its publication coincides with World Water Day, celebrated every year on 22 March.

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