

## SEAL THE DEAL: Climate change illustrates need for better water management

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November 4, 2009 -- Water is at the centre of many of the worst natural disasters. Too much of it and there are floods that inundate homes and cropland and displace thousands of people. Too little of it, and there can be droughts that ruin harvests and destroy the livelihoods of entire communities.

Climate change is only increasing the severity and frequency of such events, and to devastating effect. Rising temperatures and sharply fluctuating levels rainfall have the potential to dramatically impact the availability and quality of water, hurting the poorest the most. A United Nations-backed Water Day is being held today to highlight how the issue of water intersects with all adaptation efforts during the last negotiating session in Barcelona, Spain, before next month's conference on climate change in Copenhagen, Denmark. The Day is supported by UN-Water, an inter-agency group bringing 26 UN bodies and nearly two dozen external partners together to enhance coordination to deal with issues related to all aspects of freshwater and sanitation. The issue of adaptation to climate change is "really all water-related," said Frederik Pischke, adviser for UN-Water with the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA). The consequences of climate change, including rising sea levels, will mainly be felt through their impacts on water, he stressed. The management of water resources has implications for almost all corners of society and the economy, including health, food security, sanitation and energy. Climate variability means that increasing stress will be placed on water, requiring urgent action, especially in the most vulnerable nations, according to UN-Water, which cautions that without improved management, gains made in reducing poverty and achieving the social and economic targets known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) will be compromised. The use of water must be "equitable, effective and responsible," Mr. Pischke underscored. National plans and international investment in climate change adaptation do not fully take into account the centrality of water, and any policy adopted must ensure that adaptation is a central part of any development strategy. Therefore, "it would be good if there's strong reference" to water in the agreement reached at next month's conference in the Danish capital, Mr. Pischke said. The current negotiating text does include references to water resources. The UN and its partners, he pointed out, are already looking into how what is agreed upon in Copenhagen "to trigger the necessary action on the ground." Water Day, marked on the sidelines of the Barcelona talks, will feature sessions led by experts and advocates from governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) focusing on water's relationship with livelihoods; ecosystems and forests; land; regional and transboundary cooperation; gender; and energy. (Un news)