

Media Update - 12 March 14



Press Release

12.03.2014 – UNESCOPRESS/ISB

UNESCO and SUPARCO inaugurated two-day international workshop on “Safe, Connected Communities against Floods through Remote Sensing and GIS Tools”.

Flood early warning and flood forecasting obtained through models such as IFAS and RRI, using ground and satellite based rainfall data would be instrumental in flood management and decision-support for mitigation and relief activities in the country.

To improve and strengthen the flood early warning system and management capacity of Pakistan, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in collaboration with Pakistan Space and Upper Atmosphere Research Commission (SUPARCO) organized a two-day international workshop in Islamabad. The workshop aimed at building the capacity of the participants from various organizations in flood modeling, hazard mapping and web GIS based decision support system to visualize the flood extent and its damages. Application of satellite remote sensing and GIS technologies in flood hazard mapping activities along with the application of Web GIS technologies for flood early warning remained the focus of the two-day workshop.

Speaking at the inaugural session as Chief Guest, Mr. Ahsan Iqbal, Federal Minister for Planning, Development and Reforms highlighted that UNESCO and SUPARCO's initiatives for enhancing the flood early warning, management and responsive system is a positive step towards flood mitigation and timely measurements. He said that natural hazards become disasters when public lives and properties are damaged and this further affects socio economic development. He said that GIS had now become a cross cutting tool in every development activities that interlink various stakeholders such as government and citizens, relief agencies and other development partners for proper planning and response to the situation. He applauded SUPARCO, Government of Japan, UNESCO and other stakeholders for extending valuable support for flood upgradation in Pakistan.

Ahmad Bilal, Chairman SUPARCO, Rob Duijs, Senior Advisor DRR UN RC-Office, Dr. Kozue Kay Nagata, Country Director/Representative UNESCO Islamabad; Hiroshi Inomata, Ambassador of the Japan, Dr. Shahbaz Khan, Deputy Director UNESCO Regional Science

Bureau for Asia and the Pacific also addressed at the inaugural session. Representatives from national and international partner organizations such as International Centre for Water Hazard and Risk Management (ICHARM), Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA), National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD), Federal Flood Commission (FFD) and international experts from Australia, China, France, Indonesia and Japan also participated in the event.

Pakistan has witnessed devastating floods and torrential rains particularly in monsoon between 2010 and 2013 that caused extensive damage to lives, property and infrastructure. These floods unfolded the institutional impediments and capacity constraints in the existing flood forecasting and early warning system in the country.

To address this issue, UNESCO with the support of Government of Japan and Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), initiated a major project for the up-gradation of the flood forecasting, flood early warning system and the hazard mapping of the flood plains along the Indus River in 2011. The project focused on the capacity building of nation's flood forecasting and early warning infrastructure using state-of-the-art Remote Sensing and GIS technologies for the flood assessment, management and decision support system.

Speaking on the occasion, Hiroshi Inomata, Ambassador of the Japan remarked that the field of disaster management remained as one of the major areas of collaboration between the two countries.

"Having suffered from many disasters in the past, Japan has continued to develop indigenous technologies and expertise for disaster risk management and mitigation. It is our strong belief that we should share our experience with other disaster-prone countries, primarily with Pakistan", Hiroshi Inomata added.

Addressing the audience, Dr. Kozue Kay Nagata, Country Director/Representative extended her gratitude to the Government of Pakistan, Japan, JICA, SUPARCO, PMD and other national intuitions and organizations for supporting the project on Strategic Strengthening of Flood Warning and Management Capacity of Pakistan. She highlighted that enhancement of national capacity to mitigate flood-hazard in Pakistan was one of the key contributions of the project.

"I am glad to share that we have made significant strides towards GSMAP and IFAS modeling of the Indus catchments. Besides, we also have knowledge platform ready for timely sharing of data from national, provincial and district levels; the web based platform is now up and running and we hope to have established a system of near real-time repository of flood management data", she added.

Highlighting the importance of media, Dr. Nagata stated that media's role was critical for real time dissemination of warnings and natural disaster to the masses.

In his opening remarks, Ahmad Bilal, Chairman SUPARCO said that after 2010 floods, SUPARCO and PMD had jointly developed a collaborative flood monitoring system with support from UNESCO, JICA, JAXA and ICHARAM. The system aimed at strengthening the role of satellite technologies in flood hazard mapping and warning, rainfall estimations, damage assessment in reaching communities and developing of Web based GIS visualization tools for information dissemination.

During the two-day workshop, national and international experts from China, Australia, Japan, France, Indonesia and the panelists will be sharing their expertise and experiences to help strengthen flood early warning system and disaster management capacity of Pakistan.

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