

UN to deliver as one on climate change

UNDP Swaziland Resident Representative a.i Neil Boyer has assured the people of Swaziland that climate change is one of the priority areas where the UN system is committed to deliver as One.

Speaking at the launch of the 2007/2008 Human Development Report Mr. Boyer alluded to the December 2007 Bali Conference where international community committed to collective action to contain global warming and urged all partners to start preparing climate change adaptation strategies.

“The time for action is now”, Mr. Boyer told a high level meeting of national policy-makers including the Prime Minister Mr. A.T Dlamini, members of his cabinet and leaders from business and civil society.

He said even though the exact nature of the threat to Swaziland is not yet known, urgent action is still required to prepare for disaster.



Green and drought – cattle grazing beside a dry river. Swaziland's main rivers are disappearing due to climate change.

“Most of us take out some form of insurance. We send our children to school under the belief that if they are educated, they are more likely to be able to take care of themselves in later life. There is always the possibility that an uneducated child will do very well, but the odds are stacked against them. We take out medical insurance because we know that even the healthiest of individuals can fall ill. That we haven't fallen ill so far doesn't mean we won't in the future. We take out one form of insurance or the other because we don't know the future and though the probability may be small, the potential impact can be catastrophic to our families and ourselves,” he said.

Mr. Boyer highlighted the possible scenario of climate change increasing incidents of drought, shorter rain seasons and food shortages and said even though this impending disaster is not of our making, the country will still have to deal with it.

He said climate change is significant threat to human development, and that in some communities, it is already undermining efforts to reduce extreme poverty and achieve the MDGs.

Pointing out that the higher prices of bread, rice and other basic food items mean that more and more people are unable to feed themselves or their families. As regions become drier and there is less water, crop yields decline. He predicted that the ability to support food production will also be severely affected by storms that will become more destructive, hail and heat that will destroy crops at their most vulnerable time, and winds that will remove valuable topsoil and reduce soil fertility. He warned that even irrigation plans may be affected by a reduction in rainfall which is supposed to fill the rivers and streams. "If people can't farm because there is no water for their crops or livestock, they will move - but where will they go? We can see that all of our development outcomes, from the fight against poverty to the war against HIV/AIDS will increasingly be affected by climate change. So we must see the fight against poverty and the fight against the effects of climate change as interrelated efforts. They must reinforce each other and success must be achieved on both fronts jointly," he said.

Urgent adaptation strategies

Mr. Boyer called for urgent efforts to develop adaptation strategies "because climate change is still going to affect the poorest countries significantly even if serious efforts to reduce emissions start immediately". He said developing countries will need to develop their own adaptation plans but the international community will need to assist them, not as a favour, but out of realization that at the end of the day, "we only have one planet, which all of us call home, regardless of our language, the colour of our skin, our gender or nationality".

He said the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) and UNDP responded to the urgent requests especially of sub Sahara country by launching a partnership in Nairobi during the last climate convention in November 2006. The two agencies committed to provide assistance in reducing vulnerability and building the capacity of developing countries to more widely reap the benefits of climate change adaptation processes such as the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM).

Delivering as One

He cited the UNEP and UNDP partnership as which will enable the UN system to act promptly in response to the needs of governments trying to factor in climate change impacts into their investment decisions as a living proof of the United Nation's determination to 'deliver as One' on the climate change challenge.

Among examples of interventions to help countries improve existing infrastructure to cope with severe extreme weather events such as drought, could be the development of weather resistant crops. Other areas of potential assistance include the development of cleaner and renewable energies, climate proofing and fuel-switching schemes.

"While we pursue adaptation, everyone, at whatever level must start to reduce emissions and take other steps at mitigation so that the irreversible changes already underway are not further amplified over the next few decades. If mitigation does not start in earnest right now, the cost of adaptation twenty or thirty years from now will become prohibitive for the poorest countries," he said.

He said stabilizing greenhouse emissions to limit climate change is an essential strategy for the world as a whole, and a prerequisite for reducing poverty and attaining the MDGs. Mr. Boyer called for a dialogue between the UN, government, the private sector, civil society and development partners to identify and implement priority interventions to protect the people of Swaziland from the most severe effects of climate change.

"As the UNDP and the UN system, we look forward to engaging with government on the issues of climate change, and are committed to this issue for the long term. In a neighboring country, a country was faced with a storm that it could no longer control. It's leaders were faced with one option, to 'Adapt or Die". They made a choice, and with it signaled the end of Apartheid and the birth of a new dawn in South Africa.

"We are now faced with a different type of storm, but our options are just as clear...." He said.