



Steering Group on Water and Climate Change

The "Singapore Statement" on Guiding Principles and Recommended Actions

For the Asia-Pacific Water Ministers Forum, Singapore, 28 June 2010

Acknowledging the Risk: Climate change poses a fundamental threat to the well-being of the people living in the Asia-Pacific region. This threat encompasses their security in water, food, energy and health. The least advantaged among us—the poor, the marginalized, and those in disaster-prone and ecologically-sensitive areas—are at greatest risk. Climate change is not hypothetical, and its impacts are already evident, as both scientific observations and the experiences of the region’s inhabitants confirm. The assumption of stationarity - that the historical behavior of climate provides a reliable basis for future planning and design - can no longer be trusted. In confronting the risks and challenges posed by changing climate, we must now acknowledge the fundamental uncertainty in our projections of future climatic and water resources conditions, and work to improve our ability to identify effective responses while reducing this uncertainty.

Challenge and Opportunity: Although we are unlikely to fully resolve the uncertainty in projections in the near future, we already know enough to take effective actions today. Many of the essential threats posed by altered and uncertain climates, including floods, droughts, coastal storms, and contamination of surface- and groundwater sources, have long been with us, and have long challenged our efforts to achieve sustainable and equitable development. There is thus no essential trade-off between addressing our present water security challenges—including climate variability and climate-related disasters—and addressing the impacts of climate change: our efforts to improve water security in the present will improve security in the uncertain future as well. Climate change is a profound challenge, but it also presents us with an opportunity to re-think our strategies and to re-commit societies to achieving water security for all in the Asia-Pacific region, making use of accumulated knowledge and rapidly evolving science and technology.

No Regrets: Accordingly, we can work to address uncertain future risks by taking actions today, based on what we already know. Low-regret and no-regret investments and measures have been identified, including water demand management, increasing water use efficiency, diversification of water supply and management options, and of livelihood strategies, which address today’s problems as well as tomorrow’s challenges. We must encourage and enable “end-to-end” cooperation among scientists, engineers, economists, water managers, decision-makers and local communities in order to establish mechanisms and protocols for sharing and making effective use of available data and knowledge in guiding decisions. In this process, high priority should be given to scientific and technological efforts to quantify, to reduce and to communicate the uncertainty in climate projections for countries, river basins and cities.

Wise Investments: The costs of inaction in the face of climate change are high, and we must advocate for an increase in climate-related funding, and for innovation in the design and application of financing instruments and approaches. However burdensome these investments might appear today, they are likely to be small relative to their long-term economic, social and environmental benefits. We must maintain a holistic view of the continuity between climate change adaptation, environmentally sustainable development and enhanced resilience as development themes that enhance our progress toward the Millennium Development Goals.

Laying the Foundations for Action: To lay the foundation for effective adaptation and mitigation efforts in the water sector, the Steering Group advises leaders in the Asia-Pacific region to support and adopt the following general principles and recommended actions:

Principle 1 - Usable Knowledge: *Scientists and practitioners working together must prioritize the development of knowledge that supports effective actions and increases public awareness.*

- ✓ Develop data infrastructure and networking for sharing data, information and knowledge to support decision-making and to raise public awareness.
- ✓ Accelerate scientific efforts to quantify and to reduce the uncertainty related to climate projections for countries, river basins and cities.

Principle 2 – No Regrets: *We must identify and implement approaches that improve water security over a wide range of potential conditions, including current climate variability.*

- ✓ Plan for incremental adaptation actions in tandem with improving climate projections.
- ✓ Use an appropriate mix of structural and non-structural measures.

Principle 3 - Resilience: *We must build the capacity of society to demonstrate resilience in the face of changing climate.*

- ✓ Strengthen the adaptation capacities of water managers, communities, scientists, and of society as a whole.
- ✓ Improve community-based water risk management capacities.

Principle 4 – Mitigation and Adaptation: *We must adopt optimal combinations of measures.*

- ✓ Promote integrated water resources management (IWRM) in river basins as the appropriate process for planning and investments.
- ✓ Engage in dialogue for taking coordinated adaptation actions involving water, energy, health, agriculture, and ecosystems.

Principle 5 - Financing: *Substantial increases in dedicated financing are required.*

- ✓ Conduct economic impact assessments for various adaptation options.
- ✓ Mobilize significant investments today (e.g., 1% of GDP) to prevent greater damages later (e.g., 5% of GDP) as advised by the Stern report.

Steering Group. The Steering Group on Water and Climate Change was established by the Governing Council of the Asia-Pacific Water Forum in June 2009 and tasked with three key result areas: (i) advising leaders on policies and practices; (ii) guiding knowledge networking in the region; and (iii) reporting progress annually to the leaders in the Asia-Pacific region with recommendations for action. The Steering Group comprises scientists, practitioners from international organizations, governments, and civil society, and experts from development funding agencies including World Bank, Asian Development Bank and the Japan International Cooperation Agency. The Group held its first meeting in March 2010 in Manila. To provide further advice to leaders after this Singapore Statement, the Steering Group is developing a framework document on water and climate change adaptation with guidelines for policy-makers and practitioners in the Asia-Pacific region, drawing on the IPCC Assessment Reports, subsequent updated reports, other authoritative guides, and examples of practice.

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