UN 2023 Water Conference Side Event

[Water for Climate Mental Health Resilience - Integrating inclusive water strategies in climate services] V141

[20 March Monday: 15:00 - 16:30 in CET, Virtual]

Organized by: [UNU-MERIT, UNU-CRIS, UNU-EHS]

Background on the event (one paragraph)

Building on the rich discourse from the Flood Knowledge Summit 2022 and the series of discussions (COP27 UN System side event, CESSMIR conference, UNU Migration Network Symposium), The UNU's Climate Resilience Initiative aims to bring awareness to the importance of mental health in the context of water and climate crises and work towards a future that is both resilient to the impacts of water-related challenges and supportive of human well-being. In our efforts toward the co-creation of a resilient future, we reckon that enhanced focus on water crisis-related mental health impacts could serve as valuable to bridging the science-policy interface and address some of this complex nexus in a comprehensive and integrated manner with practical, scalable solutions that can accelerate SDG 6 implementation holistically. The session showcased various insights to enhance the understanding of the interlinkages between water, climate risks and mental health, followed by a moderated panel discussion to identify complexities and vulnerability factors, and assess the gaps and needs in existing water strategies in climate services that feature mental health support. (more details can be found here: https://www.merit.unu.edu/events/event-abstract/?id=2278&speaker=Sanae%20Okamoto%20(UNU-MERIT)%20;%20Nidhi%20Nagabhatla%20(UNU-CRIS);%20Robert%20Oaks%20&%20Kariuki%20Weru%20(UNU-EHS))

Water Action Agenda (one paragraph, if possible, please include the link to your commitment in the Water Action Agenda database)

Water insecurities and water-related disasters can impact mental health through direct and indirect impacts. Possible mental health and psychosocial outcomes are extensive (WHO, 2022). The existing mechanisms to support the impacts of water-related climate risks on mental health by government and non-government agencies are often disaggregated, and in many countries, specific action plans and initiatives to support affected households and communities are limited or absent (WHO, 2014). There is a visible gap in the coordination of effective practices to provide affected people with the required mental health and psychosocial services (MHPSS). As communities continue to cope with and respond to water-related climate risks

and environmental degradation, we argue that water governance frameworks must be amplified to include these dimensions and support practitioners to build psychological resilience within communities and ourselves. Building on existing research from the United Nations University - Climate Resilience Initiative project (https://cri.merit.unu.edu/), our water action agenda will support a collective 'call for action' towards the aggregated knowledge and better understanding of robust evidence and 'fit to propose' solutions to address mental health implications of water insecurities and disaster events, and overall, boosting the water for climate resilience agenda.

Key Issues discussed (5- 8 bullet points)
1. Interlinkages of water insecurity and water related disasters, climate risks and mental health and psychosocial well-being (MHPSS): How can we address needs and challenges for populations with vulnerabilities (e.g., gender, age, indigenous status, disability, socioeconomic status) that exacerbate water-related crises?
2. What is the potential impact of climate change on mental health (CCMH) on building water resilience, and how can it be measured and evaluated?
3. Health professionals, institutions, service systems: How can national / regional support services acknowledge psychosocial and psychiatric needs? What role can health institutions / mental health support systems play in fostering the development of water-resilient communities?
4. Multisectoral and community based approaches: How can community-based interventions be used to address the mental health impacts of water and wastewater management crises? / How can water and health institutions work together with local communities to build water-resilient communities that are prepared to address CCMH?
5. Advocacy, knowledge dissemination, awareness: How can advocacy and awareness campaigns such as international conferences be used to promote mental health resilience in the face of water related climate risks? / What unique advantages could the youth and future generations have / contribute to the vision of an inclusive climate resilient future?
6. Case studies, your observations from your regions, countries: Environmental degradation in landscapes / waterscapes and biodiversity, and its impact on mental health of the population / Emerging concepts of mental health outcomes such as climate change anxiety, eco-grief, solastalgia

Key recommendations for action (5 - 6 bullet points)
One of the key benefits of investing in this research nexus and dialogue is that it will enable communities and countries' ability to bridge the gap between scientific knowledge and practical application and help amplify the spectrum of water governance in health policy and climate action (heat and disasters event related to climate change and water stress) by involving stakeholders from various sectors and agencies, fostering transdisciplinary research and transformative solutions. We anticipate that well-prepared communities and countries can ensure the observations and findings from researching this nexus are scaled up and put into action. Another advantage of such knowledge is it can help boost the ability of agencies and institutions to promote greater understanding and cooperation between experts, people, and experts from different disciplines and encouragement of cross-fertilization of ideas, shared learning, and the creation of new knowledge for inclusive water governance, health security, and climate action. This not only leads to the development of integrated solutions but also fosters a deeper understanding of the interconnected nature of complex problems in the water sector.