

Climate Change, Disaster Management and Sustainable Development

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Abstract

Climate change is intensifying and increasing the severity of disasters and extreme events, displacing people, and posing global health security threats. Despite mounting evidence of impacts that jeopardise our next generations, we are slow to adapt and short on actionable solutions. Researchers have developed many complex scientific and mathematical models to assess climate change trends and to project their potential adverse effects on the environment and human health. While this body of research enhances our understanding of how big a problem we face, we lack implementable strategies to deal with these serious challenges. The four-part of my presentation will first provide an overview of what we already know about climate change and disaster impacts. It will then discuss how unprepared we are to deal with these disasters in our changing climate, as well as the gaps in our capacity to respond to them, particularly in the health sector. To this end, the presentation argues that what we urgently need is not to keep repeatedly measuring impacts, but to seek answers to the “what” and “how” questions of solutions. Scientists and researchers must conduct translational research that creates useful policy and practices and then communicate them effectively with stakeholders so that, together, we can co-design usable solutions and use them in the pursuit of sustainable development. The final part of the presentation will present a 2010-2011 disaster management case study from Queensland, Australia, in which the climate change, disaster, and public health sectors worked together to mount an exemplary disaster response to what has been called the “Summer of Sorrow”. Their experience demonstrates the importance of a partnership approach that combines the knowledge and efforts of government, academics, professionals and communities to deal with climate-related disasters and secure a sustainable future.