Launching of new research on water security and climate change in South Asian cities

Press Brief

In the context when the Himalayas and South Asianregion are experiencing a record breaking impacts of post winter drought this year, 25 delegates representing 15 organizations and cities from Nepal, India, Australia and Canada are meeting in Dhulikhel to develop impact pathways to address water concerns for cities in South Asia.The delegates include researchers, planners and scientists struggling to find viable solutions to address critical water challenges. They represented Southsia institute of Advanced Studies (SIAS, Nepal), Centre for Ecology Developent and Research (CEDAR, India), Tata INstitue of Social Science (TISS, India), University of New South Wales (UNSW, Australia), University of Sydney (Australia), IUCN Nepal, ICLEI, India and IDRC (Canada).

They agreed on outputs, outcomes and impact pathways of the project to address the looming crisis of climate change and water insecurity in the cities and noted the following critical issues:

1. Cities in South Asia face extreme water insecurity due to changing climate and rapid urbanization. Sources of urban water supply are under increasing threat as rainfall patterns become more erratic and cities are slow to develop adaptation strategies.

2. Although cities in India and Nepal receive significant annual rainfall, they struggle to find institutional solutions to store rainwater in critical water zones such as reservoirs, off-season flow in the running rivers, and the ground water system. While securing water for cities is a growing challenge, many cities have a poor record in ensuring equitable water access.

3. There is a critical need of more innovations and engaging approach to address these emerging challenges through transformation of existing knowledge and practices. The researchers will work in the six cities in Nepal and India form the basis of developing solution using participatory research and action/piloting on the ground and analyze city scale planning practices and policy barriers.

4. The key benefits from the project are several– such as improved management of critical water zones and their catchments, informed city-scale water management planning, effective knowledge partnerships, increasing public awareness and engagement, and institutional frameworks and tools for enhancing water security under the changing climate.

5. The five outcomes of the projects are: a) improved adaptive capacity of the cities through better understanding of climate risks and incorporation of equity concerns in water management systems, b) development and application of better incentives for the protection of critical urban water zones through participatory action and learning, c) improved policy linkage to facilitate city adaptation and the development of adaptive water supply management systems and strategies, d) enhanced capacity of junior researchers in the region; and e) contributing to scientific knowledge about urban water systems adaptation to climate change, with a focus on critical urban water zone governance.

6. As a testimony on the importance of the workshop, Professor SushilaLaxmanAbute, the Mayor of Solapur Municipality, South India pointed out that cities in South Asia are facing hardship because they either do not have enough water in critical water zones or have not been able to manage water for equitable distribution.

   She further noted that "Solapur is facing a serious problem of water salinazation but the city doesn't have enough fund to fix the problem". In this context, roles of IDRC funded project under 'Cities and Climate Change' and other similar projects have instrumental roles to address water problems in the cities of South Asia.

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