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September 26, 2014

Improved disaster reporting, vigilant joint role critical to mitigate floods

The two-day international workshop, capacity building of community elders and media towards flood vigilance and disaster reporting organized by UNESCO in partnership with the National University of Sciences and Technology (NUST) here, aimed to strengthen the potential role of community elders and reporting on floods by the media.

The recent flood in Pakistan further increases the workshop's significance, building on UNESCO's efforts to strengthen flood forecasting, early warning system and information dissemination through media to the local communities for reducing the human and socioeconomic impacts of flooding.

In collaboration with NUST, the workshop would help streamline the standard operating procedures for the media on disaster reporting.

Speaking at the inaugural session, Dr. Tariq Mehmood, Principal SCEE, NUST, acknowledged the collaborative support made available by UNESCO and the guidance and patronage provided by Higher Education Commission (HEC) and Ministry of Science and Technology (MoST).

He appreciated the collaboration of partner organizations including Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD), Pakistan Space and Upper Atmosphere Research Commission (SUPARCO), Federal Flood Commission (FFC) and National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) for their efforts in organizing the current workshop.

He highlighted the importance of community vigilance for better disaster management.

"An organized and well prepared community could bring a new synergy in the flood management activities and now the time has come to change the perspective of disaster coverage; besides reporting on disasters there is need of reporting on the lines of disaster risk reduction (DRR), so the vulnerability and risk factor could be reduced to some extent if the communities are well informed and individual initiatives are pooled together to be carried out in an organized way", Dr. Tariq added.

The introduction of private media and realizing its important role, especially the significant role it played in Pakistan's 2005 devastating earthquake and the flooding of 2010-2014, the workshop is providing an in-depth understanding of floods to transform the perspective of disaster and disaster risk reduction reporting and coverage through timely warning dissemination to an informed community through local media to minimize the vulnerability and risk factors.

Speaking on behalf of UNESCO, Zafar Hayat Malik explained that UNESCO's flood warning and management capacity project helped in achieving better capacity to mitigate floods in the country and stressed the role of media in reaching local communities with timely warnings and alerts to minimize the human and property losses due to natural disasters, particularly floods.

He extended his gratitude to the Governments of Pakistan, and Japan, PMD, SUPARCO, NDMA, FFC, national institutions and organizations for supporting the project on Flood Warning and Management Capacity.

"Let's make the people of Pakistan safe from natural disasters and improve the social, economic, and ecological benefits of floods to foster safer human settlements near flood plains", he added.

National and international experts from Indonesia, Pakistan Meteorological Department, Federal Flood Commission, Flood Forecasting Division, National Disaster Management Authority and universities, attending the workshop would be sharing their expertise and experiences to help strengthen flood early warning systems and disaster management capacity of key government institutions and other relevant stakeholders.

During the two day workshop, training on the use of hand crank radios will be imparted to the participants.

UNESCO will be handing over 1565 radio sets to NDMA for distribution in the local communities residing in the flood plains for receiving flood warnings and information during the monsoon season.

Source: http://pakobserver.net/detailnews.asp?id=253307