International Disaster and Risk Conference IDRC Davos, August 25 – 29, 2008

Press Release – Monday, 25 August 2008

Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Reduction

Opportunities for disaster risk reduction

Today, the International Disaster and Risk Conference IDRC 2008 started with a focus on climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction. After the opening ceremony, it was discussed in the first plenary session to what extent climate change adaptation could offer opportunities for disaster risk reduction. It was highlighted that climate change should be seen as an opportunity as well, and that the term development will have to be re-defined in such a way that development goes parallel with adaptation. The role of the insurances was pointed out, and it was shown that while companies have mostly introduced a risk officer, countries and governments are still lacking this position. Because climate change is not a fashion, not a phenomenon that will go away any time soon, but it is a fact that we will have to deal with for all times. The brief statements of the experts on the panel were followed by a lively discussion from the audience. The audience got introduced to the idea of creating "100 ideas for action" until the end of the week. Every participant was asked to come up with just one suggestion, so that at the end of the week, a large collection of creative ideas, ready to await realisation, can be presented at the closing ceremony.

Wide range of topics in several parallel sessions

Right after the first plenary session, the parallel sessions started, covering – still under the main focus of climate change adaptation – a large number of interesting topics, such as the development of resilient infrastructures, the climate risk insurance, the impacts of coastal hazards or the implementation of tourism into a national emergency management.

How can climate change adaptation be mainstreamed?

The second plenary session of the day tried to find ways to mainstream climate change adaptation and to harmonize these efforts. Regarding this, it was pointed out that too often development programs are being set up in a rather complex way, while the people that are affected by disasters need simple and fast help. Thus the call to keep support, disaster relief and prevention measures simple. It was explained that currently, the short term effects of climate change are overestimated – a dangerous development, as through this, climate change is treated as a fashion, as something that will go away if we just wait for a while. Further, the research on ecosystems should not be neglected, as it has to be understood that climate change will affect people only through ecosystems. Nature itself does not mind any disaster, it will just change. But we do mind, for us it is a catastrophe. Thus, the only way to adapt to climate change is by improving the resilience of natural systems. Several times the role of the media was discussed. It was found that the whole pattern of world wide communication has changed within shortest time, as totally new ways of direct people-to-people communication have come up, communication that does not rely on official channels.

Wrapping-up the sessions of this first day of IDRC 2008, it was made clear, how important it is to find a common language, that is, words should mean the same for all concerned.

Official launch of the Global Risk Forum

Before closing the day, the official launch of the Global Risk Forum GRF Davos took place. The Global Risk Forum is the organizer of the IDRC and an independent foundation, based in Davos.

Have a look at tomorrow's program on www.idrc.info, and check our daily press release again tomorrow night. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us by e-mail at anja.schilling@idrc.info or by phone on +41 79 564 87 56.