

UFS-DiMTEC's first Disaster and Environment workshop

The University of the Free State-Disaster Management Training and Education Centre for Africa (UFS-DiMTEC) organized a one day workshop on Disaster and the Environment on the 29 July 2015 at Villa Bali Hotel in Bloemfontein, South Africa. The theme of the workshop was "Working with nature to build resilient communities". The workshop was attended by delegates from diverse background who have a role to play in disaster and environmental management. Representation included delegates from the National Disaster Management Centre of South Africa, Provincial Disaster management Centre for the Free State, Mangaung Metropolitan Disaster Management Centre, Free State provincial Department of Environmental Affairs, Economic Development and Tourism, UFS-DiMTEC, The Disaster Management Institute of Southern Africa, Department of Law of the UFS, the Post Graduate Student Council of the UFS. The workshop was coordinated by Mr. JA Belle (Lecturer and researcher at UFS-DiMTEC).

Guest speakers at the workshop included:

1. Dr Anthony Turton (Environmental Advisor | Speaker | Author & visiting professor at UFS-CEM)
2. Mr. Motlhale Tshepho (Senior Manager at the Johannesburg City Disaster Management Centre)
3. Ms Nozi Mabafokeng Nkoe (Chief Director: Environmental Quality & Protection, FS)
4. Mr. Monde Walaza (Director: Policy and planning at FS DETEA)

The workshop was also greased by the following keynote speakers

- Dr. Andries Jordaan (Director of UFS-DiMTEC)
- Prof. Miatland Seaman (immediate Ex-Director of UFS-CEM)
- Prof. Dusan Sakulski (Disaster Adviser to the Premier's Office)
- Dr. Oliver Fuo (Environmental law expert from UFS)



During the general panel discussion on burning issues on DRR and the environment, the following summary key issues were raised:

- The new UN approach to disaster risk reduction being proposed focuses on the A2R which stands for Anticipate, Absorb and Restructure with greater emphasis on Resilience.
- Acid mine drainage is a slow onset disaster in South Africa. Extensive research exist on acid mine drain but some of the findings are still regarded as classified information. The system approach as recommended whereby systems adapt by learning and without learning there is no adaptation and adaptive response
- Government which promotes academic research and learning does not often show the will to implement the recommended research results due to mistrust and paranoid between the two parties with regard to development approaches
- Disasters are often the result of unsustainable development like the Soweto mine dumps with recurrent flash floods and uranium contaminants. Uranium has been mined in South Africa for long and it is a threat to water bodies in South Africa
- Disaster Management is more challenged to think the unthinkable especially under the present situation of climate change
- Japan was cited as hosting the world disaster risk reduction conferences because it has invested more by funding the disasters risk reduction agenda. On the contrary, there is general lack of funding for DRR in South Africa; disaster prevention and mitigation programmes were not prioritised for funding
- Trained and skilled personnel were limited in the Disaster Management Centres while the silo mentality in Government departments in dealing with disaster issues and disaster management was not yet fully a collective effort in South Africa. There is a great need for the integration of functions for example the South African Weather Services (SAWS) and the Joint Operation Centre (JOC) during disaster responses.
- Lack of political will and too much political interference in appointment of disaster managers



- Wrong placement of the disaster management function; some disaster management units are still under the fire department in some parts of the country. There is need to recognize disaster management as an important function by its own right.
- Important national programmes like the National Development Plan which is the national blue print for development is silent on disaster risk management issues despite the proven link between disasters and development. In the same vein, the “Back to Basics” approach does not address disaster risk management. All these need to be corrected.
- Disaster Management Centres were identified as white elephants with only a building, a few unqualified workers with no equipment and no adequate budgets.
- Most risk assessments were identified as thumb sucking and therefore the need for scientific risk assessment that include traditional, local and indigenous knowledge. Environmental issues and tools should be incorporated in decision-making for DRR.
- Some critical departments like the Department of Environmental Affairs and Home Affairs were side-lined in DRR programmes and need to play active roles in DRR
- Disaster Management in South Africa was also considered to be a top-down approach without feedback from the bottom.
- There should be measurable targets when it comes to DRR deliverables as prescribed in the new Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (SFDRR).
- Start using ecosystem-based approaches to reduce disaster risk, adapt to climate change and build community resilience. A new paradigm shift and attractive to many countries and projects.
- Climate change has affected agricultural output especially maize and wheat in the Free State province of South Africa

The outcomes of this workshop were further discussed at the Annual Disaster Management Institute of Southern Africa (DMISA) Conference held from 9 to 11 September in Hartenbos, Western Cape Province of South Africa. Some of the findings were also used as inputs for the provincial preparation of COP 21 to be held



in Paris in December 2015 while others were used to review the Free State Province Air Quality Management Plan

Other related issues and action plans included:

- Preparation for COP 21 Workshop at Presidents Hotel in Bloemfontein on 19 August 2015
- National Association of Clean Air launch from 28 September – 2 October 2015
- Free State Air Quality Management Plan was under review from 30 July – September 2015

