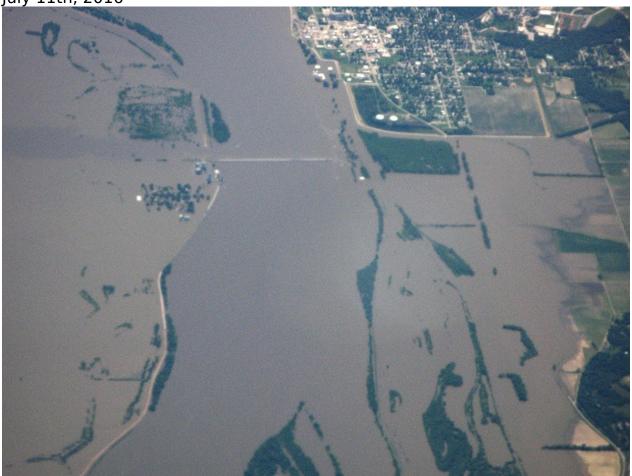


# How to adapt to higher river flood peaks? Not (necessarily) by raising the dikes

July 11th, 2016



River \$\footnote{\text{spod}}\text{ risk increases due to climate change and socio-economic developments unless effective adaptation measures are taken. Flood risk is the combination of hazard, exposure and vulnerability. Hazard is the extent of the \$\footnote{\text{spod}}\text{, exposure the population and economic assets located in hazard-prone areas, and vulnerability the susceptibility of population and assets to the \$\footnote{\text{spod}}\text{. Adaptation reduces \$\footnote{\text{spod}}\text{ risk by acting on one of these risk components.} The effectiveness of four types of adaptation measures has been assessed for a scenario of 4°C global warming by the end of the century and rapid economic growth. These four measures are

# 1. Increase of flood protection levels

for instance by raising dikes.

## 2. Reduction of peak flows

 by setting up areas within or aside the river network that can be flooded in a controlled manner when the river stage reaches critical levels, by using reservoirs and basins to (temporarily) store or retard part of the flood discharge, or by afforestation and river renaturation.

# 3. Reduction of vulnerability

• including the implementation of early warning systems, dry and wet flood proofing, and floating buildings. This measure does not reduce the frequency of flooding events but rather the consequences of the flooding (number of people or value of assets effected).

### 4. Relocation

 reducing the exposure of people and assets at risk of flooding by moving them to areas with negligible risk.

The assessment shows that only increasing the level of sbod protection is not sustainable in the long term, even though this measure is often highly cost-effective. This is largely due to the fact that a higher level of sbod protection results in the loss of sbod memory, where people and business increasingly settle in sbod-prone areas (again) because the last sbod is already so long ago, thus increasing exposure. This is called the 'levee effect': strong dikes 'attract' people and investments, and sbods become more catastrophic if dikes do fail.

On the other hand, empirical evidence suggests that recurrent stooding is usually associated with decreasing vulnerability, due to the enhanced resilience and coping capacity acquired by the society during previous events. This so-called 'adaptation effect' is the reverse of the 'levee effect'.

According to this assessment, adaptation efforts should give priority to measures targeted at reducing the consequences of hazardous events, rather than trying to avoid their occurrence. In particular, relocation and vulnerability reduction measures should be further developed. These measures have two interesting features. First, they reduce the impacts of all stoods and thus strengthen the resilience of societies and ultimately the 'adaptation effect'. Second, uncertainties in future climate projections (strongly related to hazard) do not complicate the design of these adaptation measures (focused on resilience).

Source: Alfteri et al., 2016. Climatic Change 136: 507-521.

Photo: Kevin Dooley (www.stckr.com)