

## **A FRAMEWORK FOR A NATIONAL ACTION PLAN TO REDUCE THE HEALTH BURDEN FROM CLIMATE CHANGE IN BANGLADESH**

### Preamble

The current and projected climate change-related health risks in Bangladesh are associated with more frequent and more intense extreme weather events (e.g., cyclones, storms, floods, droughts, heat waves, glacial lake outburst floods), vector-borne diseases (e.g. dengue and malaria), respiratory diseases and allergies due to air pollution, malnutrition from food and water scarcity, and psychosocial trauma from disasters and forced displacement.

The availability of basic data on weather, climate, water, air quality, socioeconomic and health information on climate sensitive diseases is limited, and available data are often not well integrated. Furthermore, there is insufficient capacity to assess, research, and communicate on climate sensitive health risks in many countries. Most current health programmes addressing climate sensitive diseases are performing on a free of cost basis. The effectiveness is sometimes challenged and the coverage of services for these particular health outcomes is partial, and the capacity of the health system to respond to the projected climate change-related health impacts could be overwhelmed. Another handicap has been that historically the debates on climate change have been focusing mainly on ecological aspects, with little attention paid to human health issues.

In general terms, there is still insufficient awareness about the urgency to address the current and projected health impacts from climate change. For this reason, the current political commitment to mitigate and adapt to climate change at national and international levels, is still limited.

To address these challenges a framework for a national action plan for the health sector is presented here. It is based on the outcomes of a DGHS – WHO organised national workshop on climate change and human health, held in Dhaka on 19 – 20 November 2007.

The health sector will require a comprehensive approach for dealing with risks to human health due to climate change.

The approach would be based on increasing the knowledge base on the subject for the health community, awareness raising in the health administration as well as population in general, advocating for changes, planning for addressing health issues related to climate change and developing national capacities at all levels: national, sub-national and local/community levels putting effective systems and institutions in place.

The challenges posed to health by global warming and climate change will require linking up with the other sectors having a bearing on or relationship with the health sector and establishing effective coordination with them. It will also need capacity building for research and analysis including looking at regional experiences and monitoring and evaluation for a feedback mechanism. It goes without saying that in order to make all these things functional, policy intervention is a key requirement. All of these can only be possible if policy changes are backed up by political will and resource mobilization.

### Goal and objectives of the national action plan

#### **Goal:**

**To reduce the disease burden from current and projected risks due to climate change by empowering and equipping health system institutions in the country.**

**Objectives:**

- (1) To increase knowledge and awareness of the health consequences from climate change within and outside the health sector
- (2) To prepare mitigation and adaptation plans based on a vulnerability assessment of the national health systems
- (3) To ensure coordination with, and advocate for decisions on climate change in other key sectors that enhance public health

Recommended actions

**Objective 1: To increase knowledge and awareness of the health consequences from climate change within and outside the health sector**

- (1) On the basis of the existing knowledge provided by the IPCC, advocate for the creation of an inter ministerial committee on climate change. Organise a regional meeting to obtain highest level commitment.
- (2) Develop awareness-raising resource materials to educate a broad range of stakeholders, notably local communities, health and development professionals, and the media on the potential health effects of climate change and on appropriate measures to reduce the impact of climate-sensitive health determinants on health.
- (3) Enable the national health authorities to prepare for assessing and handling new and emerging health risks due to climate change. Develop capacity building programmes for health professionals in public and private sector, in a holistic manner. Consider national and international non profit organisations. Develop and provide locally adapted training for communities.
- (4) Undertake action oriented studies to contribute to the evidence base showing the relationships between climate change and human health.

**Objective 2: To prepare mitigation and adaptation plans based on a vulnerability assessment of the national health systems**

- (1) Develop and implement national action plans on adaptation and mitigation to climate change, focusing on health concerns. Conduct vulnerability and adaptation assessments, identifying risks to vulnerable groups, quantifying burden of disease from climate change, and quantifying costs and benefits of health adaptation measures, to ensure comparability with other interventions. Make use of existing study results vulnerability and adaptation assessment of related studies carried out in the country. Use analysis software, and develop set of indicators on climate change-related health risks.
- (2) Develop coordinated mitigation and adaptation plans on the basis of the findings, facilitating the active participation of local communities, nongovernmental organizations, civil society and academia to, including relevant sectors, administrative levels and disciplines
- (3) Develop integrated strategies to incorporate current and projected climate change risks into existing health policies to prevent and control climate-sensitive health outcomes, including integrated vector management, and health risk management of disasters.
- (4) Strengthen existing infrastructure and interventions, particularly surveillance and monitoring systems to reduce the burden of climate-sensitive health determinants and outcomes. Key concerns include water and vector-borne diseases, air quality, food and water security, psychological trauma. It will be of significant importance to ensure environment-friendly interventions for controlling disease vectors and other health risks.
- (5) Strengthen public health systems and disaster preparedness and response activities, incorporating psychosocial support. This should include documentation, sharing, and evaluation of the effectiveness of local knowledge and practices.
- (6) Provide early warning systems for some health outcomes to reduce current and projected health burdens. To achieve this end, access to national and regional climate forecasting information, including climate change projections, should be facilitated. To this purpose it will be paramount to integrate lessons learnt from regional experiences, particularly experiences from countries like Nepal, India and Sri Lanka.
- (7) Implement adaptations over the short, medium or long term; be specific to local health determinants and outcomes of concern; and facilitate the development of community-based resource management. The costs and benefits of different interventions should be determined.
- (8) Establish or strengthen effective monitoring and evaluation programmes when implementing adaptation actions.
- (9) Support training programmes on methodologies to ensure inclusion of health impacts and adaptation in national communications to the UNFCCC, and on assessment and management of risks due to climate change

- (10) Develop communication materials on how to motivate changes in the general public, individual, and corporate behaviours that mitigate greenhouse gas emissions, while promoting health

**Objective 3: To ensure coordination with, and advocate for decisions on climate change in other key sectors that enhance public health**

- (1) On the basis of a situation analysis, identify most appropriate partners within and outside the health sector. Ensure closer intersectoral collaboration and information exchange between the various public, and non public stakeholders addressing climate change issues at national and at local levels, making sure that health dimensions are included, to identify joint actions.
- (2) Of high priority will be to contribute to the national situation analysis on the impacts of global warming and climate change on food security and to provide inputs on nutritional and food safety aspects related to health.
- (3) The health sector will need to coordinate with agencies/institutions/coalitions dealing with water-sanitation sector and the local government for effective communication of water related health risks due to climate change.
- (4) Develop integrated strategies to incorporate current and projected climate change risks into existing policies, legislation, strategies and measures of key development sectors to control climate-sensitive health outcomes. Examples include promotion of public and non-motorized transportation, clean energy, and disaster risk management.
- (5) Health sector to actively participant in national communications to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and encourage inclusion of health issues in the negotiation process.