

Climate Change and Health in Small Island Developing States

Regional Plan of Action for SIDS in the African and South East Asian Regions

A WHO Special Initiative in collaboration with UNFCCC and the Fijian Presidency of the COP-23

This Plan of Action was developed during the Third Global Conference on Health and Climate Change which was organized as a regionally dispersed conference with a focus on SIDS. The Conference was held in Mauritius, specifically for SIDS from Africa and South East Asia Region, on 21-22 March 2018. Participants included Ministers of Health and Ministers of Environment and high-level officials from Mauritius (host country), Cabo Verde, Comoros, Madagascar, Maldives, Sao Tome e Principe, and Seychelles.

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Background

- 1 In 2017, at the 23rd Conference of the Parties (COP) of the UNFCCC in Bonn, WHO launched a Special Initiative on Climate Change and Health in Small Island Developing States (SIDS), in collaboration with UNFCCC and the Fijian Presidency of the COP-23. The Initiative recognizes that SIDS are in the front-line facing a range of acute and long-term risks, including extreme floods, storms, drought and sea level rise; and increased risks of water-, vector- and food-borne diseases.
- 2 The initiative aims to provide national health authorities in SIDS with the political, technical and financial support, and the evidence to:
 - Better understand and address the effects of climate change on health including those mediated via climate change impacts on the main determinants of health (e.g. food, air, water and sanitation, vectors);
 - Improve the climate-resilience and environmental sustainability of health services;
 - Promote the implementation of climate change mitigation actions by the most polluting sectors (e.g. transport, energy, food and agriculture) that maximize health co-benefits, both within and outside SIDS.
- 3 The initiative will also aim to lead the way in transforming health services in SIDS away from a model of curative services with escalating costs, and towards one based on disease prevention, climate resilience and sustainability. It will also implement approaches that promote working in a more integrated way across different health programmes (e.g., environmental health, worker's health, health systems strengthening, emergency preparedness and response, food security and nutrition), and with other partners.
- 4 This Plan of Action is for the period 2019-2023, and corresponds to the implementation of WHO Special Initiative on Climate Change and Health in SIDS in the African and South-East Asian Regions of the World Health Organization.

Current situation in African and South-East Asian SIDS

African Region

- 5 In 2006 Ministers of Health endorsed the creation of the SIDS Network to include five African countries (Cabo Verde, Comoros, Mauritius, Sao Tome e Principe and Seychelles). The Network has since met biannually addressing several recurring themes, including health system strengthening, noncommunicable diseases, communicable diseases especially HIV and Malaria, health security and emergencies, and climate change. The 2008 Libreville declaration on Health and Environment in Africa made commitments by countries to act jointly to manage threats to health from environmental factors. In 2011, Ministers of Health met for the Sixty-first session of the WHO Regional Committee for Africa, and adopted Resolution AFR/RC61/R2 on the Framework for Public Health Adaptation to Climate Change. This resulted in a Plan of Action for the health sector, for adaptation to climate change in Africa, to be implemented in 2012 to 2016. Although the target for the plan were all Member States of the African Region, it is highly relevant to SIDS.

- 6 In 2013, the Clim-HEALTH Africa International Network was established, and includes participation of UN, academic, governmental and intergovernmental institutions, and national and international NGOs. Clim-HEALTH Africa's goal is to strengthen the resilience of African countries and communities through improved management of the public health effects of climate variability and through resource planning for climate-sensitive health outcomes, moving from a reactive to a proactive mode. In 2017, the Regional Committee for Africa reviewed the Progress Report on the implementation of the Regional Programme for Public Health Adaptation to Climate Change. In order to address the many challenges related to climate change, the following priority actions were identified, and to be implemented by 2019: (a) conduct assessments of vulnerability and adaptation to climate change; (b) develop and implement health national adaptation plans to climate change; (c) support capacity building for mainstreaming climate resilience in health programming so as to improve early warning and surveillance of climate sensitive diseases; (d) promote win-win partnerships, intersectoral collaboration, and advocacy to facilitate access by Member States to global multilateral financial mechanisms, including the Global Environment Facility and the Green Climate Fund; and (e) support community engagement through awareness raising and social mobilization, and the development and implementation of community-based adaptation programmes.

South-East Asian Region

- 7 Following the 2008 World Health Assembly resolution on Climate Change and Health, in 2009, the South-East Asia Regional Committee on Climate Change and Human Health, was approved. In 2012 WHO/SEARO published its Regional Strategy for protecting health from climate change. The strategy has the overall objective of assisting the health sector of Member States to assess health vulnerability of the people and the sector itself.
- 8 In 2017, Member States of WHO South-East Asia Region endorsed the Malé Declaration with commitments to build resilient health systems able to anticipate, respond to, cope with, recover from and adapt to climate-related shocks and stresses. Ten actions at the national level were agreed, including raising public and policy awareness; encouraging the health sector to play a leading role in climate change research and implementation; working closely with other sectors; mainstreaming climate change into policies and plans, including for disaster risk management; strengthening national capacity to build climate-resilient health systems; enhancing health system preparedness, including promoting climate-resilient healthcare facilities; facilitate greening the healthcare; and mobilizing human and financial resources. The Declaration will be implemented through the regional Framework for Action for Building Health Systems Resilience to Climate Change in South-East Asia Region, between 2017 and 2022.
- 9 In both the African and South-East Asian Regions, countries are engaging in the WHO-UNFCCC Climate and Health Country Profile Initiative which aims to raise awareness of the health impacts of climate change, support evidence-based decision making to strengthen the climate resilience of health systems, and promote actions that improve health while reducing carbon emissions. This is a valuable tool to track progress on country advances on supporting climate change and health actions.
- 10 The SIDS initiative and its implementation in the African and South-East Asian Regions intends to support and strengthen current initiatives described above, and the implementation of actions to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

Plan of Action 2019 - 2023

Vision

- 11 The SIDS Initiative has a vision that **by 2030 all health systems in SIDS will be resilient to climate variability and change.**

This must happen in parallel while **countries around the world are reducing carbon emissions** both to protect the most vulnerable from climate risks, and to gain the health co-benefits of mitigation policies.

Strategic Lines of Action

- 12 The SIDS initiative has four Strategic Lines of Action, to be implemented in the period 2019-2023, as follows:

- **Empowerment**

Supporting health leadership in SIDS to engage nationally and internationally

- **Evidence**

Building the business case for investment

- **Implementation**

Preparedness for climate risks, adaptation, and health promoting mitigation policies

- **Resources**

Facilitating access to climate and health finance

For each Strategic Line of Action, this Plan proposes indicators, actions and targets for monitoring progress.

Empowerment

Supporting health leadership in SIDS to engage nationally and internationally

- 13 Since the establishment of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 1992, protecting “human health and welfare” has been recognized as a priority in responding to climate change. The Paris Agreement in its Preamble states, “the right to health”, presenting the opportunity to implement the agreement as a public health treaty. This is particularly relevant to SIDS, which have made minimal contribution to global carbon emissions, but are among the most susceptible countries to climate change impacts.
- 14 Although health is increasingly recognized in the climate discussions, it is still not routinely and formally recognized as a priority – missing opportunities both to protect health, and to mobilize health as an argument and success measure for climate action. There is a need for concrete actions to ensure the health argument is effectively incorporated into the official positions of relevant SIDS groupings in global UNFCCC negotiations. SIDS could leverage on the strength in numbers, composing about one fifth of UN and WHO Member States, to advocate for global action. The Initiative aims to address this through the Line of Action on Empowerment.
- 15 A measure of success is that the voice of health leaders, on behalf of the most vulnerable populations, becomes a driving force for adaptation in SIDS, and for mitigation by countries around the world.

Proposed actions

- Establish a SIDS unit at WHO to provide support to all health issues with a special focus on climate change
- Establish mechanisms that support an open process of engagement between SIDS and WHO, and between SIDS and other development partners
- Implement changes in the health system, including the identification of a focal person in the Ministry of Health, for climate change and health
- Establish and operationalize national health and climate multi-sectoral groups
- Ensure the participation of health leaders in the preparation for the UNFCCC-COP and other key relevant Conferences and support their inclusion in national delegations to these events

- Work with country delegations to the UNFCCC and with stakeholders leading relevant climate change processes at national level (e.g. National Adaptation Plan (NAP), National Communications (NCs), Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)) ensuring the health sector to have a technical input into the process, before and after each Conference, including the dissemination of recommendations
- Ensure the theme climate change and health is included in the work agendas of all relevant regional climate change and health meetings
- Establish an institutional framework to integrate health into strategies and policies and resource mobilization platforms
- Build capacity among policy makers on climate change and health diplomacy and negotiation
- Empower communities, NGOs and other sectors such as tourism, environment, waste management, agriculture, fisheries, industry regarding climate change and health, and promote community engagement and social mobilization on the adverse health impact of inadequate adaptation measures in these sectors
- Partner with NGOs to advocate and build awareness on climate change and health and the impact on SIDS
- Establish and strengthen the monitoring of health issues within international conventions and agreements on the environment
- Build, operationalize and support work groups on climate change and health among the SIDS in the Region
- Establish regional risk assessment and risk communication mechanisms
- Convey the outcomes of the three SIDS conferences to the agenda of AOSIS
- Strengthen the African SIDS network by including other SIDS as members, and addressing climate change and health issues as an on-going agenda item of the network
- Address within the SIDS Initiative issues related to food security and nutrition,

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