Operational framework for building climate resilient health systems





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Cover illustration: Building climate resilience requires strengthening of a range of health system functions, from disease surveillance, to enhanced health action in emergencies. Health facilities are at the front line. The photograph shows a health clinic in Nepal, which uses solar panels to ensure reliable energy access to provide essential medical services, including during extreme weather events.

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Acronyms and abbreviations

COP	Conference of the Parties
DFID	Department for International Development
EDRM-H	Emergency and Disaster Risk Management for Health
GEF	Global Environmental Facility
GFATM	Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria
H-NAP	health component of NAP
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
NAP	National Adaptation Plan
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
V&A	vulnerability and adaptation
WHA	World Health Assembly

WHO World Health Organization

Introduction

This document presents the World Health Organization (WHO) *Operational framework for building climate resilient health systems*. The framework responds to the demand from Member States and partners for guidance on how the health sector and its operational basis in health systems can systematically and effectively address the challenges increasingly presented by climate variability and change. This framework has been designed in light of the increasing evidence of climate change and its associated health risks (1); global, regional and national policy mandates to protect population health (2); and a rapidly emerging body of practical experience in building health resilience to climate change (3).

Primarily intended for public health professionals and health managers, this framework would also help guide decision-makers in other health-determining sectors, such as nutrition, water and sanitation, and emergency management. International development agencies could use this framework to focus investments and country support for public health, health system strengthening and climate change adaptation.

The objective of this framework is to provide guidance for health systems and public health programming to increase their capacity for protecting health in an unstable and changing climate. By implementing the 10 key components laid out in this framework, health organizations, authorities and programmes will be better able to anticipate, prevent, prepare for and manage climate-related health risks. Least developed countries and countries in the process of developing the health components of National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) (4) may find this document particularly useful in their efforts to design a comprehensive response to the risks presented by short-term climate variability and long-term climate change.

Background

2.1 Public health rationale

There is clear evidence that human actions, principally the burning of fossil fuels and associated release of climate pollutants, are causing significant changes in global climate. This in turn is creating observed consequences in environmental and social conditions across all continents (5). As many of the largest health concerns are strongly influenced by weather and climate conditions, this inevitably presents risks for human health that can be grouped into:

- Direct impacts, such as those arising from damages and illness due to increased frequency and severity of extreme weather events.
- Environmental system mediated impacts, such as rising air pollution and changing patterns of vector-, food- and water-borne diseases.
- Socially mediated effects that occur via effect of climate change on social and human systems, such as health effects resulting from undernutrition, occupational heat stress and mental illness, as well as potential increases in population displacement, slowing of economic growth and poverty aggravation.

Table 1 shows some of the main climate-related health risks, that have been assessed as having medium-to-strong evidence by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). In addition, the IPCC identifies a series of key reasons for concern with regard to effects of climate change which are either particularly severe or irreversible (5). This includes the potential: (i) increase in severity and frequency of extreme weather events, such as storms and floods causing mass displacement and disruption of livelihoods in low-lying coastal zones and small island states due to storm surges and rise in sea level; (ii) breakdown of food systems resulting in food shortages and volatile prices, particularly in low- and middle-income countries; (iii) potential increase in risk of violent conflict associated with resource scarcity and population movements; and (iv) slowing down of economic growth and exacerbation of poverty, with associated reversal of global health progress, achievement

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