

Necessity to Address the Challenge of Climate Change and Its Consequences in Small Islands

Dear Editor,

Climate change tends to alter the social and environmental attributes of health, with low- and middle-income nations being the worst prepared and least equipped to handle the consequences of the same due to the weak health infrastructure.^[1,2] It has been anticipated that, from 2030 till the end of the mid-century, more than 0.25 million extra deaths will occur each year due to environment-related consequences.^[1] Further, it is expected that climate alteration will mount an extra financial burden of US\$ 2–4 billion each year by 2030.^[1] Climate deterioration has brought about extensive changes such as extremes of heat; exacerbation of asthma due to increase in the level of pollen; increase in the number of climate-related natural disasters, accounting for the deaths of thousands of people; displacement of thousands of people from their homes due to rising sea levels, which in turn damages homes and health-care facilities; and variability in the pattern of rainfall (might result in either drought/famine in some places or floods in others), which affects the supply of fresh water and can even compromise hygiene levels, thereby augmenting the risk of diarrheal diseases.^[1–3] In addition, a significant rise in the incidence of waterborne diseases (of mosquito origin) and a change in the distribution of diseases transmitted through other insects has also been reported.^[1,2]

Even though the entire population of the world is susceptible to the harmful consequences, children and elderly population groups are quite vulnerable to the resulting health risks and also have prolonged aftereffects.^[1,4] Further, those people residing in small islands, coastal localities, major cities, and hilly areas are extremely vulnerable to the climate-related consequences.^[4] Most of the small islands have a high prevalence of climate-related diseases, but the climate deterioration has accounted for a significant rise in the caseload of these infectious diseases and even affected the parameter of access to safe food supplies, clean water, and better sanitation facilities.^[4]

Furthermore, owing to the rising sea levels, any land earmarked for agriculture can no longer be used for the same due to the contamination of the soil with sea water.^[1,2] Furthermore, these raised water levels have forced people to migrate to higher regions, which leaves a serious mental impact on the lives of the affected populations.^[1,4] From the health sector perspective, apart from being resistant to the strong storms or other extreme environment-related events, health centers have to simultaneously enhance their capacity to meet the needs of the population.^[4]

Owing to the presence of numerous problems in the small islands, there is an immense need to strengthen the early-warning disease surveillance systems, to promote early detection of the outbreaks, and to follow it up with the initiation of a prompt response.^[1,2] In addition, there is a need to foster linkages with the welfare agencies to prioritize the issue of climate change, augment awareness about the impact of climate

change on humans, generate evidence about the same through promotion of research activities, and assist nations in building capacity to minimize health vulnerability to climate change.^[1–4]

To conclude, the impact of climate change on human health has been extensive, with people living in small islands being extremely vulnerable to the consequences. It is high time that the agenda is given priority and steps are taken to minimize the impact of the climate change on health.

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