

Factsheet by SDC Foundation on

Climate Change and Public Health in Uttarakhand: Reviewing State Action Plan on Climate Change 2014 and Draft State Health Policy 2020

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Climate change is one of the most pressing issues. Its impact is devastating and irreversible. It stands well documented that one of the major influences of climate change is on the public health system. *As per a study*, India is expected to see an increase of 10% in the death rate by the end of the century. Moreover, India's average temperature is expected to rise from 24 degree Celsius to 28 degrees. Scenarios like these have a deep effect on public health systems.

State Action Plan on Climate Change (SAPCC) and Draft State Health Policy (DSHP), both recognize climate change as an enormous challenge to the growth of Uttarakhand. The policy documents raise an official alert on the wide-ranging impacts that climate change can have on Uttarakhand's fragile health system. Let's have a look at some key observations.

Climate change issue	Its possible impact on public health
Increased rainfall or temperature	It can cause Change in pattern of vector borne infections such as Malaria, Dengue, Diarrhoea, Cholera, Chikungunya etc. It also has the potential to alter the food cycles leading to issues of hunger and malnutrition, resulting in impaired child growth and development.
Air Pollution	It can give rise to increased incidences of cardiovascular and respiratory related disorders like allergies, heart related diseases, asthma etc.
Waste Management and Water Shortage	It can lead to improper sanitation risking the public health at large. Slum populations in urban areas are highly vulnerable to this.
Landslides and Flash Floods	They pose a huge threat to physical public health infrastructure like hospitals, clinics, labs, ambulance centres, approach roads etc. especially in remote areas

(Source: SAPCC and DSHP)

Both the policy documents underline a crucial fact that climate change has made it extremely difficult to control the spread of infectious diseases. Major killers like Malaria, Dengue, Cholera etc. have become highly sensitive to climate change. In fact, during the outbreak of Dengue in 2019 in plain districts, health officials claimed climate change to be the major reason behind the outbreak.

The policy documents also note that effects of climate change will differ as per the social groups. Marginalized communities will be the most affected. Women and children are also amongst the highly vulnerable categories of social groups.

However, DSHP fails to take a deeper dive into these risks and challenges and set the context with respect to local factors of the state. Also, both the documents do not mention deadlines or targets for addressing the issues of climate change and public health in Uttarakhand.

Technical suggestions	Community oriented suggestions
<p>DSHP notes that gender perspective remains missing in the state’s public health response and hence it calls for a more inclusive policy making process and need for documenting gender-disaggregated data.</p>	<p>DSHP and SAPCC have focused immensely on behavior change oriented communication interventions for the local communities. Both the policy document agree that robust IEC programs can ensure better handling of these issues.</p>
<p>DSHP calls for strengthening the epidemiological surveillance and outbreak management systems in the state. Capacity building of healthcare workers will also play a key role.</p>	<p>SAPCC calls for climate change resilient agricultural practices. It further talks about preparing an action plan on sustainable agriculture in the state.</p>
<p>Surprisingly, DSHP continues to promote PPP model of healthcare in the state and calls for increased participation of private sector.</p>	<p>DSHP suggests sustainable management of waste and water, especially in urban areas, where slum populations remain highly vulnerable to outbreaks. Green building and improving public transport are also key mitigation measures shared under SAPCC.</p>
<p>DSHP talks about deployment of boat and air ambulance services and mobile health vans to provide timely health care services to the population residing in the remote areas of the state.</p>	<p>DSHP, very briefly, talks about documenting and incorporating the traditional knowledge of the local communities on health and conservation in the formal system.</p>

About SDC Foundation:

SDC Foundation is Dehradun based not-for-profit engaged in research and communication on issues of climate change and public health in Uttarakhand. Write to us at contactsdruk@gmail.com

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