

Climate change negotiations and health



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23/10/2015*

Climate change has been called the greatest challenge to health threat of the 21st century¹. The health consequences are multiple and complex ranging from direct impacts such as those of heat exhaustion and trauma secondary to extreme weather events, to indirect impacts such as shifting patterns of diseases secondary to changing transmission conditions, vector migration and much more complex impacts that are mediated through societal systems including health impacts of forced migration and conflict².

¹ Costello, A, Abbas, M, Allen, A et al. Managing the health effects of climate change: Lancet and University College London Institute for Global Health Commission. Lancet. 2009; 373: 1693–1733. [http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(09\)60935-1/fulltext](http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(09)60935-1/fulltext)

² Smith, K.R., A.Woodward, D. Campbell-Lendrum, D.D. Chadee, Y. Honda, Q. Liu, J.M. Olwoch, B. Revich, and R. Sauerborn, 2014: Human health: impacts, adaptation, and co-benefits. In: Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability. Part A: Global and Sectoral Aspects. Contribution of Working Group II to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [Field, C.B., V.R. Barros, D.J. Dokken, K.J. Mach, M.D. Mastrandrea, T.E. Bilir, M. Chatterjee, K.L. Ebi, Y.O. Estrada, R.C. Genova, B. Girma, E.S. Kissel, A.N. Levy, S. MacCracken,

Currently, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the UN body under which the Kyoto Protocol was negotiated is hard at work creating a negotiation space for the highly anticipated Paris Agreement which is expected to be adopted at the 21st Conference of the Parties (COP) in Paris in December 2015.

The negotiation process on the specific text of that agreement started after the COP21 and had its first working session in Geneva, Switzerland, in February 2015, followed by three more sessions in Bonn, Germany in May, September and October.

Health is but a minor part of the climate change negotiations even though health impacts of climate change are recognized as important ever since the creation of the UNFCCC where they were specifically named in its first article: "Adverse effects of climate change" are defined as "changes in the physical environment or biota resulting from climate change which, have significant deleterious effects on [...] human health and welfare". In the negotiations here, health has been discussed in relative limited context specifically in the preambular section with a variety of language repropounded at a few by some parties to the convention:

- "Recognizing that actions to address climate change simultaneously contribute to the attainment of the highest possible level of health and that climate change policies and health policies should be mutually supportive"³⁴
- "Acknowledging that action to address climate change should take into account environmental integrity, the integrity of ecosystems and that of Mother Earth, fully respect human rights, the right to development, the rights of indigenous peoples, gender equality and human health as well as promote a just transition of the workforce and the creation of decent work in accordance with nationally defined development priorities and strategies"⁵

P.R. Mastrandrea, and L.L.White (eds.]). Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom and New York, NY, USA, pp. 709-754.

<http://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar5/wg2/>

³ Geneva Negotiating Text. Advance unedited version 12 February 2015. UNFCCC. Bonn, Germany. 2015. https://unfccc.int/files/bodies/awg/application/pdf/negotiating_text_12022015@2200.pdf

⁴ Streamlined and consolidated text. Version of 11 June 2015 @ 16:30. UNFCCC. Bonn, Germany. 2015. http://unfccc.int/files/bodies/awg/application/pdf/adp2-9_i3_11jun2015t1630_np.pdf

⁵ Compiled working document. Version of 8 September 2015 at 18:00. UNFCCC. Bonn, Germany. 2015. http://unfccc.int/files/bodies/awg/application/pdf/adp2-10_8sep2015t1500_cwd.pdf

- “Recognizing that actions to address climate change bring co-benefits including the attainment of highest level of human health and ecosystem integrity”⁶

And at the latest session of negotiations in Bonn in October 2015, the following 2 options for text were proposed, the second of which was for the first time proposed in an operational section of the agreement: in article 2 on the purpose of the agreement.

- “Pp 11 Also emphasizing of the importance of aligning actions with the goal of promoting food security and livelihood security, restoration of degraded lands, health, and ecosystem integrity, participation in environmental decision-making by civil society and individuals, and a just transition of the workforce and creation of decent work and quality jobs in accordance with nationally defined development priorities and strategies [towards environmentally sustainable economies for all”⁷
- “2. [This Agreement shall be implemented on the basis of equity and science, in [full] accordance with the principles of equity and common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities[, in light of national circumstances] [the principles and provisions of the Convention], while ensuring the integrity and resilience of natural ecosystems, [the integrity of Mother Earth, protection of health, a just transition of the workforce and creation of decent work and quality jobs in accordance with nationally defined development priorities] and the respect, protection, promotion and fulfillment of human rights for all, including the right to health and sustainable development, [including the right of people under occupation] and to ensure gender equality and the full and equal participation of women, [and intergenerational equity].]”⁸

⁶ Draft agreement and draft decision on workstreams 1 and 2 of the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action. Version of 20 October 2015@13:30hrs. UNFCCC. Bonn, Germany. 2015. http://unfccc.int/files/meetings/bonn_oct_2015/application/pdf/master_na_od_lt2_.pdf

⁷ Advanced Unedited Version Draft agreement and draft decision on workstreams 1 and 2 of the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action. Version of 23 October 2015@15:30hrs. UNFCCC. Bonn, Germany. 2015. http://unfccc.int/files/meetings/bonn_oct_2015/application/pdf/ws_1_and_2.pdf

⁸ Advanced Unedited Version Draft agreement and draft decision on workstreams 1 and 2 of the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action. Version of 23 October 2015@15:30hrs. UNFCCC. Bonn, Germany. 2015. http://unfccc.int/files/meetings/bonn_oct_2015/application/pdf/ws_1_and_2.pdf

Outside negotiations, we have seen some strong contributions supporting climate action with a health narrative namely from the Lancet Commission on Climate Change and Health⁹ which release it's second report highlighting the opportunities lying ahead and the many no-regret policies that can co-benefit climate change and health, by Medical Associations which have committed to divestment including the British Medical Association (BMA)¹⁰, the Canadian Medical Association (CMA)¹¹, and recently the World Medical Association (WMA) which called upon its constituent member associations to divest from Fossil Fuels¹².

These health imperatives for a strong climate agreement however have been so far inadequately translated within the negotiation space; nevertheless, the opportunities for that still exist at some of the most important area of disagreement within the negotiations:

- Emphasizing an ambitious long term goal for the climate agreement such as maintaining the global temperature increase below 1.5 degrees Celsius would reduce health consequences from climate;
- Adequately addressing losses and damages would increase the incentive for early and effective climate action while also creating mechanisms to address health consequences of extreme weather events;
- Creating financial and technology transfer mechanisms for the transition to clean, renewable energy;
- Reaffirming commitment to the importance of health adaptation to climate change impacts;
- Recognizing co-benefits of climate change and health;
- Ensuring an agreement that has the fundamental principles of equity which are central to human health and a healthy international policy space.

In short, the outcome of the current climate change negotiations will shape the world for the coming century and will influence health and disease trends

⁹ 'Health And Climate Change: Policy Responses To Protect Public Health'. The Lancet. BDJ 219.2 (2015): 67-67. Web. <http://www.thelancet.com/commissions/climate-change-2015>

¹⁰ UK Doctors Vote to End Investments in the Fossil Fuel Industry. Medact. 2014. <http://www.medact.org/news/uk-doctors-vote-end-investments-fossil-fuel-industry/>

¹¹ Canadian Medical Association Divests of Fossil Fuels. CBC News. 2015. <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/canadian-medical-association-divests-of-fossil-fuels-1.3210048>

¹² HCWH Supports World Medical Association Call to its National Association Members to Discuss Divestment from Fossil Fuels. Healthcare Without Harm. 2015. <http://www.healthenergyinitiative.org/wma-calls-discuss-divestment/>

around the world. Health professionals will have to face the consequences of our prolonged degradation of the climate system and overcome many challenges for health. However, health professionals can also serve as powerful advocates and health can be a strong motivator of international action on climate change.

Further readings:

Our Climate Our Health

Our Climate Our Health is a Global Climate and Health Alliance coordinated campaign to put health at the heart of the Paris climate change negotiations.

<http://www.ourclimateourhealth.org/>

Doctors for Climate Action

Campaign led by the Royal Australasian College of Physicians promoting measures which will have positive co-benefits for patients and advocating for action on climate change at the individual and local level.

<http://doctorsforclimateaction.org/>

The Global Climate and Health Alliance

The Global Climate and Health Alliance was formed in 2011. Alliance members are health organizations from around the world, united by a shared vision of a sustainable future.

The Alliance works to tackle climate change and to protect and promote public health.

<http://www.climateandhealthalliance.org/>