

Climate-resilient and Low-carbon Health Systems: Strengthening Partnerships for Impact

Climate change is no longer just an environmental problem; it has a direct effect on human health and is considered a major risk to global health in this century. According to an estimate, climate change can cost additional [USD 2-4 billion per year due to health damages](#). Climate change is also threatening to [reverse and weaken](#) the development and progress made in the last century in the domain of global health. Similarly, health systems across the world have become vulnerable due to the catastrophic impact of climate change. While the contribution of Pakistan to global warming is negligible, the country is bearing a substantial cost of climate change and [this threat is increasing continuously](#).

On the one hand, the health system in Pakistan is prone to several issues, including poor infrastructure, insufficient resources, inequality, low coverage, and governance issues. The danger of climate change is making this situation worse by impacting negatively the overall health system as well as health poverty in the country. Factors including glacier melting, rainfall variability, increased temperature, and deforestation are becoming the driving force for severe and excessive flooding, heat waves, air pollution, and droughts, which have harmful consequences for the overall [public health of the country](#). For instance, the flooding in 2022 caused a loss of more than [USD 15 billion](#), with a significant impact on health in terms of deaths, increased disease burden, disrupted supply chains, and damaged [13% of all health facilities](#) in the country. Furthermore, it has been estimated that extreme river flooding will impact around [five million people annually from 2035-2044](#).

Besides this, climate change also impacts public health by giving rise to different diseases such as respiratory problems, malnutrition, vector-borne diseases, waterborne diseases, and mental stress. According to the World Health Organization, as of November 2022, [around 64,767 cases of dengue virus](#) were reported only in the flood-affected areas. Similarly, Pakistan reported around [1.6 million cases of malaria](#) in 2022. On the other hand, the situation is becoming more critical as more than [470,000 cases](#) were reported in the first five months of 2023. Likewise, around [ten million people](#) in these affected areas were unable to access clean drinking water, forcing people to utilise disease-ridden water.

According to the [Global Health Security Index \(2021\)](#), the health system of Pakistan is ranked 130 out of 195 countries with an overall score of 30.4 with a decline from the score of 35 in 2019, primarily due to COVID-19 and climate change. This performance is alarming in terms of the health system's response to emergencies as Pakistan is ranked 192 out of 195 countries. It is evident from the aforementioned facts, that climate change is posing serious threats to the already weak healthcare system in Pakistan and making people vulnerable to different public health problems.

However, Pakistan has made some progress toward climate-resilient health systems. For instance, the National Adaptation Plan (2023), Framework of Action for Climate-Resilient Health Systems in Pakistan (2023), National Health Vision (2016-2025) and Pakistan's commitments to the Global Health Security Agenda (GHSA), and COP26 Health Programme are reflective of the fact that the government has recognised the risk of climate change and provided a broader framework for making health systems resilient to it. Nonetheless, adaptation and mitigation planning and implementation in the health sector is struggling with various challenges including coordination, lack of vulnerability assessment of health facilities, along with financial and human resource constraints.

Considering the aforementioned facts, this session, in collaboration with Alliance for Health Policy & Systems Research (HPSR), aims to understand the key gaps in existing policy response as well as the implementation challenges being faced to move towards climate-resilient health systems in Pakistan. The session will bring together health and climate specialists from different organisations including federal and provincial government departments, academia, practitioners, development agencies, and think tanks working in the healthcare and climate sectors from Pakistan as well as at regional and global level to discuss and address the following main questions:

1. How is climate change impacting health systems in Pakistan and what are its implications for marginalised groups?
2. How effectively does Pakistan's existing healthcare system adapt and respond to different challenges due to climate-related shocks and stresses, including floods, extreme heat waves, and droughts?
3. What challenges does Pakistan face in terms of governance, infrastructure, and human resources to make its health system resilient to the impact of climate change?
4. What are different short- and long-term solutions to mitigate and manage the impact of climate change on the health system capacity in Pakistan?
5. What lessons can Pakistan learn from other countries and explore avenues for partnerships and collaborations?

Panel Organisers

Mr Qasim Shah, Deputy Executive Director, Sustainable Development Policy Institute, Islamabad, Pakistan

Email: qasim@sdpi.org

Ms Rabia Tabassum, Senior Research Associate, Sustainable Development Policy Institute, Islamabad, Pakistan

Email: rabia_tabassum@sdpi.org

Mr. Hassan Murtaza, Research Coordinator, Sustainable Development Policy Institute,
Islamabad, Pakistan

Email: hassanmurtaza@sdpi.org

Mr. Salah Ud Din Yousaf, Project Assistant, Sustainable Development Policy Institute,
Islamabad, Pakistan

Email: salahudin@sdpi.org