

Information Paper: Human Health Vulnerability to Climate Change in Fiji

2013 Summary



FIJI

Protecting Human Health
from Climate Change

1 Introduction

Climate change impacts human health directly through injury, death, disease; and indirectly via compromised food and water sources, air quality, range of disease pathogens and psychosocial impacts from livelihood losses and population displacement. This paper is a summary of the information paper on “Human Health Vulnerability to Climate Change in Fiji”.



2 Observed Health Impacts of Historic Climate Variability and Extreme Events

Empirical research and anecdotal evidence from long-serving health sector workers highlights that communicable diseases (CDs), non-communicable diseases (NCDs), as well as access to health care services are affected by climate variability (climate patterns over time) and extreme events (e.g. droughts, cyclones, floods) in Fiji. There is insufficient disaggregated health data to determine how health outcomes are impacted by climate change (this requires at least 30-50 years of data).

To begin with, research undertaken by the joint Ministry of Health-Fiji Red Cross Society-WHO-UNDP ‘Piloting Climate Change Adaptation to Protect Human Health’ (PCCAPHH) project in Fiji shows that climate variables like rainfall, maximum (daytime) and minimum (night-time) temperatures, as well as humidity can cause an increase in CDs like diarrhoea, leptospirosis, dengue and typhoid cases a month or two after reaching certain threshold levels, especially in the Ba, Bua and Suva medical sub-divisions.

Secondly, anecdotal evidence shows that soon after extreme climate events like cyclones hit an area in Fiji, the damage to food systems results in childhood malnutrition and in the longer term, NCDs like diabetes in adults. Increasingly hot days will also make it difficult for people to exercise and will expose outdoor workers to unhealthy work conditions. This can give rise to conditions like obesity, dehydration and high blood pressure and cause kidney and heart diseases. Research is required to determine the pathways in which climate change will change the burden of NCDs in Fiji.

3 Projected Health Impacts of Climate Change

Days and nights in Fiji are expected to get hotter over time, sea levels are expected to continue rising and overall, the country will get drier. A 2005 study used various climatic scenarios and predicted an increase in malnutrition, childhood diarrhoea and dengue in Viti Levu. For instance, droughts will worsen sanitation and hygiene outcomes and damage food output, causing malnutrition.



4 Health Adaptation Options

There is enough evidence globally, and one could argue locally, to underscore immediate climate change adaptation in the health sector.

Some health adaptation options for Fiji include:

Health Sector	Disaster Risk Reduction	Other sectors
Strengthening existing disease surveillance, monitoring and control measures.	Climate-proofing health infrastructure (e.g. stronger hospitals with back-up power and water supply).	Improved water, sanitation and hygiene and better control of waste from livestock.
More research on health vulnerability to climate change and the most effective adaptation interventions.	Strengthening the Ministry of Health's disaster risk reduction, response and recovery programmes.	Enhanced community resilience to climate change and extreme climate events.
Systematic incorporation of climate information in health decision-making.	Improved coordination among inter-sectoral partners.	Protection of natural ecosystems as sources of clean air, water and food.

5 Conclusion

To conclude, health facilities, healthcare services, communicable and non-communicable diseases and many determinants of health are sensitive to climate conditions. In the absence of sufficient measures to adapt locally and mitigate globally, health impacts will worsen as the climate changes. The health sector's resilience to climate change requires greater political will, human and financial resources.

