

LEAD UPDATE

Climate Change and Health – Bridging the Gap First National Training Session, Cohort 15

June 12 - 15, 2010

Climate change, as we all know, is no longer an issue for the distant future. It is already taking place, and the South Asian countries particularly the poorest people are most susceptible to risks. While climate change affects multiple sectors, the effects on health are the only ones that pose a serious threat to long term sustainable development. Unfortunately, there has been little recognition among the practitioners of the various scientific disciplines, of the relationships between environmental changes and human health.

In Pakistan, apart from a dedicated few, health professionals have not yet come to the climate change debate. LEAD Pakistan aims at bringing about a change in the status quo by strengthening capacities for research on negative health effects of climate change. In order to achieve the same, with financial assistance provided by Asia Pacific Network for Global Change Research (APN), LEAD Pakistan enlisted public health professionals to build in them the ability to assess and interpret climate data, information and projections; so that the educational and scientific base of Pakistan can be strengthened and its capacity to adapt can be increased.



Participants working in a group

First National Training session-Cohort-15

LEAD Fellows network has always emerged as a unique association of multi-sectoral and multicultural leaders to fill the leadership gap in the social and sustainable development arena. The National Training Session arranged by LEAD Pakistan was the first step in the capacity building program planned for the selected group of health professionals. The session was designed with the aim of: improving the ability of those from Pakistan's health related community to interpret the information available about climate change; acquainting them with the complexity of the climate



Participants on an Exposure visit to Pakistan Meteorological Department



change-health relationship; and equipping them with the skills required to address the methodological challenges involved in analyzing the same.

The First National Training Session was organized in Islamabad. A group of thirteen mid to senior level Public Health Professionals selected from across the country attended the workshop. The group shared a similar portfolio in terms of academic background, professional experience and research skills. The 4-day workshop was designed on LEAD Pakistan's training methodology of experiential learning and included interactive talks, presentations, group work, panel discussions, screening of documentaries, and a field visit to Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD). The resource persons invited were mostly climatologists, environmental health experts, policy makers and academics from different governmental and non governmental institutions of the country.

Proceedings

The workshop on the whole focused on exploring and analyzing the climate change – health relationship. The thematic areas of discussion were drivers and dynamics of climate change, direct and indirect health effects, Climate Injustice, health related vulnerabilities and climate change research focus. Panelists elaborated climate change in Pakistan scenario to launch a road map for the future.

The workshop was inaugurated by Dr. Amir Muhammad, Rector FAST University. Dr. Amir in his key note address brought forward the causes and ramifications of the climate change phenomena and deliberated on its

potential impact on human health. The chief guest of the ceremony, Mr. Momin Agha, Deputy Secretary, Climate Change, MOE, asserted the need to identify mitigation and adaptation options as climate change is irrevocably harming Pakistan, with its tremendous social, environmental and economic impacts.

In order to improve the cohort's familiarity with the concept of climate change and its impacts on water issues, energy resources, food security, and the challenges posed on human health and poverty, a documentary titled "Climate Challenge: Voices from Pakistan" was screened in the first session of the training. The drivers and dynamics of climate change were elaborated through this documentary with a focus on the science of global warming, its past and present trends, projected climate scenarios, potential impacts and possible measures for addressing the challenges posed by climate change. Later the Resource Person, Dr. Qamar Zaman Chaudhry, explained the planet's climate system and elaborated the workings of the green house gases. He stressed on the importance of sharing with the concerned policy makers, scientific information about climate change, its effects on health, and the possible response options.

Mr. Shahid Lutfi threw light on 'Direct Effects of Climate Change on Health.' The relation of health and climate change was established through effects such as heat stress, extreme weather, air pollution, water-borne and food-borne diseases as well as vector-borne diseases.

Presenting 'Indirect Effects of Climate Change on Health' Dr. Zafar Fatmi started the session with different definitions of environment in the context of health, moving on to reasons for climate change; he mentioned natural variability and human activity. It was established that links between human health and climate change are diverse and occur via multiple pathways.

Dr. Suleman Qazi, presented the case of 'Climate Injustice – Mapping Health Related Vulnerabilities' wherein he tackled issues such as the differences in

the health impacts of climate change on developing countries compared to developed countries. He elaborated that a population's vulnerability results from an interplay among factors like local environment; access to & level of material resources; effectiveness of governance and civil institutions; quality of public health infrastructure; access to relevant information on extreme weather events and degree of exposure to climate hazards.

The cohort also visited Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD). The participants were briefed about how PMD obtains, collects, records and interpret data about different weather events? PMD Directors Dr. Hanif & Mr. Azmat facilitated the cohorts during the visit and informed them about the purpose and objectives behind the establishment of the department; acquainted with its workings and operations; given a field tour of its different units and educated about the type of data that can be used to explore the impact of climate change on health.

Mr. Usman Qazi, an expert in community development, elaborated on the approaches and prospects of adaptation.

Later the cohort was divided into four research groups to share ideas for research. A 5-member panel especially constituted for the purpose assessed their research themes in terms of feasibility, relevance and importance. The research methods were focused that may be used by public health professionals in studying climate change impacts (direct and indirect) on health.

Reflections

In a roundtable discussion the present scenario of Pakistan was highlighted and envisaged role of the public and private sector in addressing health effects posed by climate change was visualized. Panelists focused on the threats posed by climate change to different sectors, in particular health. Panelists elaborated different areas of interest and exchanged their view points about health and climate change.

Federal Minister of environment, Mr. Hameed Ullah Jan Afridi was

the guest of honor for the certificate distribution ceremony. He congratulated LEAD Pakistan for holding this event which is of immense significance. He appreciated LEAD Pakistan's contributions in improving the ability of Pakistan's health related community to interpret the information about climate change through such capacity-building activities.

List of Resource Persons

- Dr. Amir Muhammad, FAST University
- Mr. Momin Agha, Ministry of Environment
- Dr. Qamar Zaman Chaudhry, Pakistan Meteorological Department
- Dr. Mujtaba Kamal, Ministry of Health
- Mr. Shahid Lutfi, WMC Pvt. Ltd.
- Dr. Zafar Fatmi, Aga Khan University
- Mr. Usman Qazi, Expert, Sustainable Community Development
- Dr. Ejaz Ahmad Khan, Health Services Academy
- Dr. Ayesha Khan, Health Services Academy
- Mr. Kashif Jan, World Health Organization
- Dr. Aurangzeb, Planning Commission
- Mr. Ali Tauqeer Sheikh, LEAD Pakistan
- Mr. Adnan Sattar, LEAD Pakistan
- Dr. Suleman Qazi, LEAD Pakistan
- Ms. Dina Khan, LEAD Pakistan
- Ms. Frida Khan, LEAD Pakistan
- Ms. Rafia Rauf, LEAD Pakistan

List of Participants

- Dr. Adil Faraz, Hamdard University
- Dr. Farah Rashid Siddiqui, Islamic International Medical College
- Dr. Komel Zulfiqar, Islamic International Medical College
- Brigadier Dr. Maqsood Ul Hassan, Army Medical College
- Dr. Mukhtar Ali, Inst. Of Public Health
- Prof. Dr.M. Irfan Ullah Siddiqui, Bahria University Medical and Dental College
- Dr. Razia Shahnawaz, Inst. Of Public Health
- Dr. Samina Badar, Quaid-e-Azam Medical College
- Dr. Samina Mohsin Khan, Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences
- Dr. Saira Afzal, King Edward Medical University
- Dr. Seema Nighah-e-Mumtaz, Hamdard University
- Dr. Syed Muhammad Mubeen, Hamdard University
- Dr. Syed Sanwar Ali Shah, Jinnah Medical and Dental College