



## WHEC UPDATE

Briefings of worldwide activity of Women's Health and Education Center (WHEC)

June 2010; Vol. 5, No. 6

We live in a world governed globally and locally with power and not justice or freedom or humanity. Will climate change impact the right to women's health and development? The impact of climate change on women and men is not the same. Women are increasingly more vulnerable, mainly because they represent the majority of the world's poor and are proportionally more dependent on threatened natural resources. This is no longer an abstract notion. Worldwide women have less access than men to resources such as land, credit, agricultural inputs, decision-making structures, technology, training and extension services that would enhance their capacity to adapt to climate change, including access to decent healthcare. Women's vulnerability to climate change stems from a number of factors – social, economic, and cultural. 70% of the 1.3 billion people living in conditions of poverty are women. In urban areas, 40% of the poorest households are headed by women. Women predominate in the world's food production (50-80%), but they own less than 10% of the land. In many societies, socio-cultural norms and childcare responsibilities prevent women from migrating or seeking refuge in other places or working when a disaster hits. Such a situation is likely to put more burden on women, such as traveling longer to get drinking water and wood for fuel. Women, in many developing countries suffer gender inequalities with respect to human rights, political and economic status, land ownership, housing conditions, exposure to violence, education and health. Climate change will be an added stressor that will aggravate women's vulnerability.

In spite of their vulnerability, women are not only seen as victims of climate change, but they can also be seen as active and effective agents and promoters of adaptation and mitigation. Adaptation initiatives should identify and address gender-specific impacts of climate change particularly in areas related to water, food security, agriculture, energy, health, disaster management, and conflict. Women's priorities and needs must be reflected in the development planning and funding. Women should be part of decision-making at national and local levels regarding allocation of resources for climate change initiatives. Funding organizations and donors should also take into account women-specific circumstances when developing and introducing technologies related to climate change adaptation and to try their best to remove the economic, social and cultural barriers that could constraint women from benefiting and making use of them. The global health effort is currently focused on "care and cure" for specific diseases, not the overwhelming global web of risk-factors which underpin health outcomes. From a global health perspective, the growing diversity and magnitude of health-related crises around the world is converging into a potentially disastrous perfect storm. We invite your thoughts and ideas for publication in **WomensHealthSection.com** – join us in this global debate.

Women In The Shadow Of Climate Change

*Rita Luthra, MD*

## **Your Questions, Our Reply:**

Why transparency during public health emergencies? How to bridge the gap between rhetoric and reality?

**Policy Development in Public Health Emergencies:** The first and most pressing rationale for transparency during a health emergency is the role that information plays in promoting core public health objectives. When the public is at risk of a real or potential health threat, treatment options may be limited, direct interventions may take time to organize and resources may be few. Communicating advice and guidance, therefore, often stands as the most important available tool in managing a risk. In addition to serving core public health objectives, transparent public communication also addresses key strategic imperatives – political, economic and psychosocial – which are associated with public health emergencies. Effective management of public health emergencies demands open and transparent public communication. The rationale for transparency has public health, strategic and ethical dimensions.

Like so many policy dilemmas in the area of public health, transparency will not happen through one initiative alone nor is it likely to be accomplished overnight. One concrete step that public health authorities can take, however, is to codify transparency through an organizational policy or guideline that will identify the goal of transparency, identify the kinds of information that need to be communicated during an infectious disease outbreak, and suggest the appropriate level of transparency to be applied to each particular type of information. While the goal of transparency suggests that all relevant information ought to be communicated or made accessible, it has to be recognized there may be legitimate reasons for withholding certain types of information in any public health emergency.

We believe, the strategic communication of information is a fundamental public health emergency management tool and needs to be recognized as such. At the same time, our experience acknowledges that, in practice, global public health too often fails to match reality with rhetoric and that practical new steps are required to address such failings.

## **NGOs in Partnership with Division for Social Policy and Development, United Nations:**

It is indeed our pleasure to share this honor given to Women's Health and Education Center (WHEC). We all at WHEC are looking forward to a productive collaboration to improve maternal and child health worldwide. The present Directory is a database of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) having established steady working relationships with the Division for Social Policy and Development (DSPD), Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), United Nations (UN). These CSOs, referred to as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), work in the various fields of social development: poverty eradication, social integration, employment, youth, aging, family, disability, indigenous persons and cooperatives.

The Directory is compiled by The Civil Society and Outreach Unit of DSPD. It is elaborated with the objective of paying tribute to the work conducted by civil society organizations in support to the social development agenda of the United Nations. As such, this Directory is a testimony of the partnership between civil society organizations and DSPD in advancing social progress and development.

Each year DSPD services the Commission for Social Development, which the main intergovernmental body to which this administrative unit of the United Nations Secretariat provides technical and substantive support. An important number of representatives of NGOs in consultative status with ECOSOC participate in sessions of the Commission, by making written and oral statements, holding discussions and organizing events on social development-related issues. They contribute, by that means, to and review the outcome of the World Summit for Social

Development. They also make proposals the ways and the means by which the implementation of the other major standard-setting documents on social development is conducted. At the field level, civil society organizations are parts of key partners involved in translating into actions commitments made by representatives of governments during major United Nations summits. In publishing this Directory, DSPD intends to provide relevant information on civil society organizations working in the various areas relating to social development. The Directory would specifically:

- Identify and provide a comprehensive overview of the activities of the civil society devoted to social development;
- Promote networking and sharing of information;
- Recognize civil society efforts in advancing social progress and development.

**View:** [http://social.un.org/ngodirectory/ngosdirectory\\_view.asp?editid1=9](http://social.un.org/ngodirectory/ngosdirectory_view.asp?editid1=9)

## **About NGO Association with the UN:**

UN Partner on Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)  
*A Gateway to the UN System's Work on MDGs*

### **UNEP & MDGs (United Nations Environment Program & Millennium Development Goals)** Goal # 7: Ensure Environmental Sustainability

Target 9: Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programs; reverse loss of environmental resources.

Target 10: Reduce by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water.

Target 11: Achieve significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by 2020.

The existence of an environmental MDG in itself is an explicit recognition by world leaders that environment is a crucial element of development. It is a recognition of the fact that without environmental sustainability there will be no long-lasting development. MDG7 and the underlying targets also show commitment at the highest political level to ensuring environmental sustainability. However, environment is of importance not only for MDG7 but also for the other MDGs. The President's Summary of the discussion of Ministers and Heads of Delegation at the 23rd Session of the Governing Council of UNEP concluded: "If they (the MDGs) are to be achieved in a sustainable manner, recognition that environmental sustainability underpins the achievement of all the goals must be at the heart of further efforts of the international community."

MDG7 is of direct relevance to most of the work that is being undertaken by UNEP under the organization's slogan 'Environment for Development'. UNEP works in co-operation with like-minded partners. One example of this is the Poverty and Environment Partnership (PEP), an informal network of development agencies that seeks to improve the coordination of work on poverty reduction and the environment. Together, we have developed an initiative that seeks to reinvigorate political attention to the environmental challenges that are central to achieving the MDGs. This initiative includes the development of a number of analytical papers, the planning of a high-visibility event at the World Summit as well as the building of a strong coalition for MDG7 beyond the Summit. UNEP's Support to MEAs With the proliferation of Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) at the global and regional level, there has been a growing need for a strategic approach to increase collaboration between MEAs. UNEP's Division of Environmental Law & Conventions (DELIC) was established in 1999 at UNEP headquarters in Nairobi in order to:

- Provide substantive support to MEAs, partner organizations and developing countries in the implementation of MEAs;

- Promote of collaboration with and between MEAs leading to synergies at the global, regional and national level;
- Increase collaboration between UNEP's activities and those of MEAs.

Details: <http://www.unep.org/dec/index.asp>

### **Collaboration with World Health Organization (WHO):**

WHO and UNDP launch new project for Health adaptation to climate change

WHO, along with UNDP, launch in 2010 the first global project on public health adaptation to climate change. This series of pilot projects aim to “increase adaptive capacity of national health system institutions, including field practitioners, to respond to climate-sensitive health risks”. This project is executed by Ministries of Health and other relevant national partners in Barbados, Bhutan, China, Fiji, Kenya, Jordan, and Uzbekistan. The experiences and lesson sharing from this project will significantly contribute to identification of best practices to address the health risks associated with climate variability and change. All country projects share four aims to enhance systems of early warning and early action; build capacity of national actors; pilot specific health risk reduction interventions; and document and share lessons learned in addressing the health risks associated with climate change in their area. This global project addresses a wide range of health concerns as collectively the seven countries represent common health risks associated with climate change in small island developing states (SIDS) highland, water-stressed, and urban contexts. For example, China will focus on strengthening early warning and response systems to extreme heat in urban settings; whereas Barbados and Jordan focus on diarrheal disease control through safety of wastewater reuse as a response to water scarcity; Kenya and Bhutan address vector borne disease risks in the highlands; and Fiji and Bhutan highlight actions for community awareness and preparedness for flooding. This WHO/UNDP project will receive US\$4.5 million for activities from the Global Environment Facility (GEF) - Special Climate Change Fund (SCCF) as well as leverage significant co-financing and in-kind support from 2010-2014.

Details: [Further information can be found at the UNDP Adaptation Learning Mechanism, under Public Health Case Studies](#)

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### **Collaboration with UN University (UNU):**

UNU-WIDER (World Institute for Development Economics Research) *Expert Series on Health Economics:*

The Climate Change Challenge

The United Nations has played a prominent role in drawing attention to the existence and significance of climate change. It is also likely to have a key role in the future, as countries grapple towards collective solutions to global warming. However, as Derviş points out, climate stability is a classic example of a global public good, so achieving agreement is likely to pose special challenges. The first requirement is a broad consensus on the appropriate target for reductions of greenhouse emissions. This is a non-trivial exercise given the disparity of scientific opinion regarding the link between greenhouse gases and climate change, and the different views of economists towards the aggregate costs and benefits of alternative courses of action. However, agreeing how to share the costs of climate change mitigation is a far more difficult task. Establishing a fair allocation of the burden is likely to strain relations not only between developed and developing countries, but also within the developed world. This Annual Lecture stresses the development side of climate change, in particular the plight of poor nations—and poor groups within countries—who have contributed least to the stock of greenhouse gases, and yet face the prospect of a disproportionate effect on their livelihoods and health. It is undoubtedly one of the

greatest potential threats to improvements in welfare in the developing world. On grounds of prudence, Derviş argues for early action to address climate change. He also recommends flexibility in terms of the precise targets and timetable, the way they are formulated, and the means by which they may be achieved. Multiple instruments will be required, and novel technologies must be explored to see how energy patterns can be changed. Most importantly, all of the major players in the world will need to be closely involved in the process of seeking solutions to the problem of climate change.

Climate change has so many dimensions—from the physical sciences to economics, from domestic politics to foreign policy, from environmental to social issues—that obviously I will not be able to touch on all of them. I will however focus on what I see as the important elements to consider in defining the contours of a global approach to address climate change. Beyond its intrinsic importance, a discussion of climate change is also an opportunity to look into the wider challenge of policy towards the provision and financing of global public goods (of which climate stability is a prime example). This is one key dimension of international cooperation, which differs from development assistance for poverty reduction as such. Both of these dimensions however are present in the climate change challenge, so I hope that the discussion in this lecture might provide broader insights into the types of challenges that the international community, including the UN, faces, when it comes to the provision of global public goods.

I will say that we do need a global framework. If some countries opt out now, others will eventually opt out, leading to an unraveling of a common approach. There are some people that argue that the big actors should get together and negotiate and reach a deal among themselves. I am not arguing that all the debates and all the negotiations should take place in a big room with 190 countries present. A lot of the action may have to take place between the big actors, the EU, US, Japan, Russia, and China. They have to get together and find ways and areas around which they can reach compromises. But there is always going to be the question of who is not included? Do we include India in the big actors' negotiation? While some would agree because of India's size and importance in the world economy, and in terms of its emissions, there is also an argument not to include India because it is not as developed as China, and in per capita terms it has much lower carbon emissions. But if we do include India, there will be other countries. Should we include the Republic of Korea? And Brazil should probably be included because of the forest issue. Indonesia also is important. So, there is no easy way of ring-fencing the set of 'important players'. We need parallel approaches. On the one hand we need a global framework that should be under the auspices of the United Nations, as it has been. But on the other hand we need to have the flexibility and the space for some actors to get together to work on compromise solutions, even some bilateral talks may be useful. We need this two-track approach: we need the global framework, the UN framework, the universal participation; but we also need the dynamics that a small number of players could create to move us forward.

Author: Kemal Derviş; Copy-right holder: UNU-WIDER; Sponsor: UNU-WIDER acknowledges the financial contributions to the research program by the governments of Denmark (Royal Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Finland (Ministry for Foreign Affairs), Norway (Royal Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Sweden (Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency—Sida) and the United Kingdom (Department for International Development).

*(Details of the paper can be accessed from the link of UNU-WIDER on CME Page of WomensHealthSection.com)*

## **Constitution Of The World Health Organization:**

*(Continued)*

### Article 15

The Board, after consultation with the Secretary-General of the United Nations, shall determine the date of each annual and special session.

#### Article 16

The Health Assembly shall elect its President and other officers at the beginning of each annual session. They shall hold office until their successors are elected.

#### Article 17

The Health Assembly shall adopt its own rules of procedure.

#### Article 18

The functions of the Health Assembly shall be:

- (a) To determine the policies of the Organization;
- (b) To name the Members entitled to designate a person to serve on the Board;
- (c) To appoint the Director-General;
- (d) To review and approve reports and activities of the Board and of the Director-General and to instruct the Board in regard to matters upon which action, study, investigation or report may be considered desirable;
- (e) To establish such committees as may be considered necessary for the work of the Organization;
- (f) To supervise the financial policies of the Organization and to review and approve the budget;
- (g) To instruct the Board and the Director-General to bring to the attention of Members and of international organizations, governmental or nongovernmental, any matter with regard to health which the Health Assembly may consider appropriate;
- (h) To invite any organization, international or national, governmental or non-governmental, which has responsibilities related to those of the Organization, to appoint representatives to participate, without right of vote, in its meetings or in those of the committees and conferences convened under its authority, on conditions prescribed by the Health Assembly; but in the case of national organizations, invitations shall be issued only with the consent of the Government concerned;
- (i) To consider recommendations bearing on health made by the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council, the Security Council or Trusteeship Council of the United Nations, and to report to them on the steps taken by the Organization to give effect to such recommendations;
- (j) To report to the Economic and Social Council in accordance with any agreement between the Organization and the United Nations;
- (k) To promote and conduct research in the field of health by the personnel of the Organization, by the establishment of its own institutions or by co-operation with official or non-official institutions of any Member with the consent of its Government;
- (l) To establish such other institutions as it may consider desirable;
- (m) To take any other appropriate action to further the objective of the Organization.

*To be continued....*

#### **Top Two Articles Accessed in May 2010:**

1. Sterilization; <http://www.womenshealthsection.com/content/gyn/gyn029.php3>  
WHEC Publications. Special thanks to WHO for contributions and our writers/editors for compiling the review.
2. Placenta Accreta; <http://www.womenshealthsection.com/content/obs/obs009.php3>  
WHEC Publications. Special thanks to our reviewers for helpful suggestions and editors for compiling the review.

## From Editor's Desk:

### Gateway to the UN System's work on climate change

During the twentieth century, the earth's surface warmed by about 0.74° C, according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). Science has made great strides in determining the potential causes for that change. The IPCC's Fourth Assessment Reports in 2007 stated that warming of the climate system is "unequivocal" and that most of the observed increase in global average temperatures since the mid-twentieth century is "very likely" due to the rise in greenhouse gases generated by human activity. The IPCC's Fourth Assessment Report observed that between 1970 and 2004, greenhouse gas emissions increased by 70 per cent, and carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) – by far the largest source with 77 per cent of total emissions – grew by about 80 per cent. Atmospheric concentrations of CO<sub>2</sub>, methane (CH<sub>4</sub>) and nitrous oxide (N<sub>2</sub>O), the IPCC found, had risen markedly since 1750 due to human activity, and today, far exceed pre-industrial values.

Projections indicate that if emissions are allowed to rise at their current pace and double from pre-industrial levels, the world would likely face a 2° - 4.5° C temperature rise by 2100, with a 3°C increase most likely. There is near universal acceptance that complete avoidance of climate change is now impossible and that adaptive capacity needs to be improved everywhere, including in high-income countries. Disruption in the climate system is manifesting itself around the world through more frequent floods, droughts and heat waves whose severity will only increase. A wide range of adaptation options is available, including disaster risk reduction efforts, insurance and other risk transfer mechanisms. Their widespread use is needed to reduce the vulnerability of high-risk communities to inevitable climate impacts.

Under the IPCC's most stringent emissions reduction scenario, the world has a 50 per cent chance of limiting further temperature increases to 2° C. Achieving that would require a comprehensive global mitigation effort, including a further tightening of existing climate policies in developed countries and concurrent emissions reductions in developing nations. In other words, the world would need to see an emissions peak before 2020 and a 50 per cent reduction below 1990 levels by 2050. For industrialized nations, that translates to a 25-40 per cent emissions reduction below 1990 levels by 2020. The impacts associated with such a scenario are serious but widely regarded as more manageable if a risk reduction approach is fully embraced. However, without action, there is overwhelming scientific evidence that climate change will threaten economic growth and survival of the world's most vulnerable populations:

#### Examples of climate change impacts

- By 2020, some 75 to 250 million people in Africa will face increased water shortages. Yields from rain-fed agriculture (dominant method) could fall by up to 50 per cent in some African countries.
- About 20-30 per cent of plant and animal species will likely face increased risk of extinction if global average temperature increases exceed 1.5°-2.5° C.
- Widespread melting of glaciers and snow cover will create risk of flash floods and, over time, reduce annual melt water from major mountain ranges (i.e.: Hindu-Kush, Himalaya, Andes), where more than one billion people live.
- Seven of ten disasters are now climate-related.
- More than 20 million people were displaced by sudden climate-related disasters in 2008 alone. An estimated 200 million could be displaced as a result of climate impacts by 2050.

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change: <http://unfccc.int/>

**Special Thanks:**

WHEC thanks Dr. James F. Phillips, Senior Lecturer, Heilbrunn Department of Population and Family Health, Mailman School of Public Health, Columbia University, New York, NY (USA) for the assistance to the project and it is indeed a pleasure to have you on the Advisory Council. Look forward to many years of collaboration.

**Words of Wisdom:**

The United Nations was not created to take humanity to heaven; But to save it from hell.

– Dag Hammarskjöld, Former UN Secretary General and 1961 Nobel Peace Prize Winner

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*Monthly newsletter of WHEC designed to keep you informed on  
the latest UN and NGO activities*