Briefing for UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Negotiators

Health and climate change – making the connections

The human causes, impacts and future risks of climate change are widely accepted, and now threaten to undermine the last half-century of gains in development and global health. Climate change is affecting human health in multiple ways: both directly – through extreme weather events, food and water insecurity and infectious diseases – and indirectly – mediated through economic and social processes (leading, for instance, to migration and conflict).

The 2015 Lancet Commission on Health and Climate Change highlights the fact that many of the projected impacts on health can be avoided by low-cost solutions to mitigate climate change and by implementing policies that support populations to adapt to a changing world.

This briefing discusses key climate change issues that should be considered ahead of Paris 2015 by UNFCCC negotiators seeking to realise these global health co-benefits.

Health adaptation

Health systems should act as anchors of community resilience, helping populations to adapt to climate change. Climate-ready health systems will need to be able to withstand extreme weather events and be responsive to new and emerging epidemics, which may threaten the viability of poorly prepared healthcare infrastructure.

Including the health impacts of climate change (and the responses to them) in national assessments is an essential step for countries party to the UNFCCC. National Adaptation Plans must include a regular review of health vulnerabilities and interventions to address these, with technical support available from the World Health Organization.

To facilitate this, renewed investment in climate change, public health monitoring and surveillance infrastructure is required, ensuring a better understanding of the adaptation needs and the potential co-benefits of climate mitigation at the local level, where it matters most. This is best achieved by strengthening existing infrastructure, aiming to provide more locally-relevant...
The 2015 Lancet Commission examines mitigation policies in light of their health implications, providing recommendations to governments, with important implications for the UNFCCC negotiations:

1. To protect cardiovascular and respiratory health, the Commission strongly supports the 2015 World Health Assembly resolution on air pollution, and recommends an early and decisive policy package which targets air pollution from the transport, agriculture and energy sectors, aiming to reducing the health burden of PM2.5 and short-lived climate pollutants.

2. Central to this policy package, is the rapid phase-out of coal from the global energy mix. Indeed, it is recommended that many of the 2,200 coal-fired plants currently proposed for construction globally be replaced with cleaner energy alternatives. In line with this, the UNFCCC’s Clean Development Mechanism (and any future market based mechanisms under the ADP) should reverse ACM0013 on public health grounds.

3. Health considerations should be built into guidelines for the preparation of National Communications and contributions under the UNFCCC and reporting under any new agreement, facilitating accurate quantification of the avoided burden of disease and reduced healthcare costs that result from climate mitigation activities. This should be coupled with scaled-up national and local statistical capacity, political support, and decision support to help guide countries on low-carbon healthy energy choices.

4. Measures to rapidly expand access to renewable energy in low-income and middle-income countries should be prioritised. This provides reliable electricity for communities and health facilities, unlocks substantial economic gains and promotes health equity. Indeed, a global development pathway that fails to achieve this expansion will come at a detriment to public health, and will not achieve long-term economic growth. This expansion provides an opportunity to engage with the post-2015 development agenda’s drive for ‘sustainable energy for all’.

CHINA’S ENVIRONMENTAL TRADING SYSTEMS PILOT

In 2006, China became the world’s biggest greenhouse gas emitter. In line with its stated aims of reducing CO2 emissions 40-45% by 2020, seven environmental trading systems (ETS) pilots were started, guaranteeing a specified level of emissions reduction. Each of the pilots was contextually designed, with diverse monitoring systems, penalty fines and tools to manage prices. One common factor was the use of ‘relative’ CO2 caps, set in relation to local economic activity, rather than an absolute cap as applied in the EU ETS.

2015 and Beyond

The Commission has developed an independent and international “Countdown to 2030: Global Health and Climate Action” coalition. Building on the success of the Commission, the ‘Countdown’ will report in The Lancet every 2 years, tracking, supporting and communicating progress and success across a range of indictors in global health and climate change. In particular,
it will track the development of health adaptation policies, and support the implementation of mitigation interventions which yield public health benefits. Ultimately, it will support driving a transition towards a low-carbon future, taking advantage of the greatest global health opportunity of the 21st century.

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**2015 LANCET COMMISSION ON HEALTH AND CLIMATE CHANGE**

The Commission is an international, independent collaboration of academic experts, formed to map out justification for policy responses to climate change. It exists as a collaboration between European and Chinese climate scientists, geographers, social and environmental scientists, biodiversity experts, engineers, energy policy experts, economists, political scientists and public policy experts, and health professionals – all seeking a response to climate change which is designed to protect and promote human health. Administrative, communications, and design personnel also support this Commission.

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