

UNFCCC MUST MAINSTREAM PUBLIC HEALTH AT COP MEETINGS

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The future of the world rests in the hand of how well public health is crafted and how articulately public health is mainstreamed as an all-policies approach.

COP27 underway in Egypt has once again shied away from strategically and directly mainstreaming public health and integrating health systems. While there has been wide coverage on issues pertaining to climate finance, adaptation and resilience, youth and education, gender, land use, science, there is a wilful neglect on public health.

UNFCCC will become a playground of discussion without ever being able to bring forth outcomes if public health is not put in place. Growing research and evidence has been rich in terms of establishing the impact of climate change on human health issues. The onslaught of disaster events, pandemics and the public health consequences of extreme weather events is painting a watershed moment for global sustainability.

The climate – disaster – public health – pandemic – agriculture nexus

The nexus between a disaster event inspired by climate change supported by pandemics and having impact on health systems and agriculture is putting human race to the brink of collapse.

When a disaster strikes due to extreme weather events, it breaks the backbone on which health systems thrive.

Doctors today have very limited knowledge on addressing disasters, practicing medicine with limited resources and barely read about this nexus, because its never taught in medical school and investments in this direction are not taken seriously by practitioners of the trade. Regulatory authorities governing healthcare have also shied away from mainstreaming the issues of disasters and climate change. We need bold decisions to begin this dialogue, to inspire change and regulate a new future which puts human beings at the epicentre of progress and sustainability.

Role of UNFCCC in Integrated climatic action

Being an apex institution that must inspire a climate resilient future, UNFCCC threads on delicate futures. The burden that lies on UNFCCC is clear. Climate change is spreading its wings over all sectors and navigating old policies within government frameworks to build new algorithms that address cascading risks is not going to be easy.

UNFCCC embodies a purity of ideals, but this solitary effort fighting hostile institutions, hubris and proliferating industrial conditions will not permit progress we wish to achieve. UNFCCC needs today a global revolution built with the promise of inter-generational solidarity, tactful diplomacy and systematic engagement with stakeholders across the sector.

UNFCCC and Modern Medicine

Years ago, I completed my MBBS and MD. Almost everyone in India knows that when I started to study medicine, climate change as a topic was absent from textbooks. We had no clue how climate change could influence human health, let alone how climate change influences vectors and aggravating diseases. The change I wish for UNFCCC to now realize was then missing from the warehouse of my mind. I wanted to make a difference, I wanted the UN to be more than an institution that brings out reports and works on lobbying, I wanted to live in a world where those who come after us will be grateful, because we took the time to care.

This would surely be a personal triumph but at the same time, I am a child of this planet deeply pained by how we are thriving and watching the insanity in futile submission. This is where I feel very strongly that the intersection of modern medicine with UNFCCC will set the tone for a new path to progress.

Modern medicine as always presents challenges and also has the potential to invest in a better future.

If we invest in health systems strengthening now, if we care to address disaster risk reduction, if we shape physicians-in-training today to understand what can be done to defend the planet, we will invest in a community of influencers that have the potential to heal the world, in a right way.

UNFCCC needs to create Medical Envoy's on climate change for every country. The future lies with this excluded agenda being included and fixed. The timing cannot be better than this. If not COP27, COP28 must be the turning point for world history.