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Building Resilience for Impact of Climate Change on Human Health

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Abstract—The World Health Organization estimates that the warming and precipitation trends due to anthropogenic climate change of the past 30 years already claim over 150,000 lives annually. There is near unanimous scientific consensus that greenhouse gas emissions generated by human activity will change Earth's climate. The recent (globally averaged) warming by 0.5°C is partly attributable to such anthropogenic emissions.

It is now widely accepted that climate change is occurring as a result of the accumulation of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere arising from the combustion of fossil fuels. Climate change may affect health through a range of pathways, for example as a result of increased frequency and intensity of heat waves, reduction in cold related deaths, increased floods and droughts, changes in the distribution of vector-borne diseases and effects on the risk of disasters and malnutrition. Mitigation of climate change by reducing the use of fossil fuels and increasing a number of uses of the renewable energy technologies should improve health in the near-term by reducing exposure to air pollution.

The United Nations 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets set out in the 2030 Agenda explicitly elaborate on the interlinkages across the economic, social and environmental dimensions of development and the opportunities to build positive synergies among them. Some of these interlinkages and synergies are fundamental to facets of building climate change resilience and reducing inequalities.

There is therefore a need for actions to reduce emissions of greenhouse gas emissions to avoid the more extreme climate change scenarios, and to ensure that human health is protected as far as possible from the negative effects of the climate variability and change that is already occurring. The necessity to mitigate and adapt to climate is the focus of this paper. It provides a summary of the main health effects of climate change, and outlines the functions necessary to increase resilience.

1. INTRODUCTION

Climate change is one of the all-encompassing global environmental changes likely to have deleterious effects on natural and human systems, economies and infrastructure. The risks associated with it call for a broad spectrum of policy responses and strategies at the local, regional, national and global level. The UNFCCC (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) highlights two fundamental response strategies: mitigation and adaptation. While

mitigation seeks to limit climate change by reducing the emissions of GHG (greenhouse gases) and by enhancing 'sink' opportunities, adaptation aims to alleviate the adverse impacts through a wide-range of system-specific action (Fussler and Klein, 2002).

Albeit both mitigation and adaptation measures must be pursued to tackle the climate change problem and to create an effective and inclusive international climate change regime more attention has been devoted to mitigation in the past, both in scientific research and policy debate. Sensitivity to the issue of adaptation has grown over the last couple of years particularly after the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) TAR (Third Assessment Report). Adaptation has now emerged as an urgent policy priority, prompting action both within and outside the climate change negotiation (Parry et al. 2005).

Climate change is a change in the statistical distribution of weather patterns when that change lasts for an extended period of time (i.e., decades to millions of years). Climate change may refer to a change in average weather conditions or in the time variation of weather around longer-term average conditions (i.e., more or fewer extreme weather events). Climate change is caused by factors such as biotic processes, variations in solar radiation received by Earth, plate tectonic and volcanic eruptions. Certain human activities have been identified as primary causes of ongoing climate change, often referred to as *global warming*.

There is near unanimous scientific consensus that greenhouse gas emissions generated by human activity will change Earth's climate. The recent (globally averaged) warming by 0.5°C is partly attributable to such anthropogenic emissions. Climate change will affect human health in many ways—mostly adversely.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) was established by the World Meteorological Organization and the United Nations Environment Programme in 1988, in response to the widespread recognition that human-influenced emissions of greenhouse gases have the potential to alter the climate system. Its role is to provide an assessment of the

