

The Challenges of Health and Environment in India: A Study

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Abstract: *A substantial burden of communicable and non-communicable diseases in the developing and developed countries is attributable to number of environmental risk factors. WHO estimates that the environmental factors are responsible for an estimated 24.0 per cent of the global burden of disease in terms of healthy life years lost and 23.0 per cent of all deaths; children being the worst sufferers (Narain, 2012). Given that the environment is linked with most of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs, 2000) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs, 2016), without proper attention to the environmental risk factors and their management, it will be difficult to achieve many MDGs and SDGs in globe particularly in developing countries. The environmental disease burden is attributable to a few serious risk factors which include insecure water and sanitation, exposure to indoor smoke from cooking fuel, outdoor air pollution, exposure to chemicals such as arsenic, and climate change and second, that environment, health and sanitation aspects must become, as a matter of urgency, a national priority, both in terms of policy and resources allocation. Environmental sanitation is a major public health issue in India. Recent interventional studies on environmental sanitation in India highlighted the importance of prioritizing control strategies. This paper discusses various intervention strategies related to environmental, sanitation as well as health in India and emphasizes to prioritize it according to the need of country.*

Keywords: MDGs, SDGS, Environment, Health and Sanitation

Introduction

Environmental sanitation envisages supporting of health of the community by providing clean environment and contravention the cycle of disease. It depends on various factors that include hygiene status of the people, types of resources available, innovative and appropriate technologies according to the requirement of the community, socioeconomic development of the country, cultural factors related to environmental sanitation, political commitment, capacity building of the concerned sectors, social factors including behavioral pattern of the community, legislative measures adopted, and others (Pandve, 2008 and Ganesh et al, 2011). India is still lagging far behind many countries in the field of environmental sanitation. Environmental issues are one of the primary causes of disease, health issues and long term livelihood impact for India. There are many environmental issues in India. Air pollution, water pollution, garbage, and pollution of the natural environment are all challenges for India. Air pollution, poor management

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of waste, growing water scarcity, falling groundwater tables, water pollution, preservation and quality of forests, biodiversity loss, and land/soil degradation are some of the major environmental issues India faces today (World Bank 2010). According to environmentalist and economist argue that urban air pollution declined in most countries between 2000 and 2006, with the greatest progress in low-income and lower middle-income countries. But concentration levels are still nearly three times higher in these countries than in high-income countries; the globe has become drier in the last decade as water resources per capita have diminished under the pressure of fast-growing population. Water availability is below scarcity levels in the Middle East and North Africa and South Asia. Forest cover has fallen in Latin America and the Caribbean, South Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa. In developing countries the net loss of forest area for 2000–07 is at 80,000 square kilometers a year, roughly the size of Portugal. Also, the lack of access to energy consumption continues to be an important health risk factor in the poorest countries, where nearly 50 percent of energy use comes from biomass fuels and waste. According to data collection and environment assessment studies of World Bank experts, between 1995 through 2010, India has made one of the fastest progresses in the world, in addressing its environmental issues and improving its environmental quality. Still, India has a long way to go to reach environmental quality similar to those enjoyed in developed economies. The impact of environmental poverty on health may continue well into the future and the situation in fact, is likely to get worse. In order to address this challenges two facts are, First, that much of the environmental disease burden is attributable to a some critical risk factors which include unsafe water and sanitation, exposure to indoor smoke from cooking fuel, outdoor air pollution, exposure to chemicals such as arsenic, and climate change another one that environment and health aspects must become, as a matter of urgency, a national priority, both in terms of policy and resources allocation. To meet the challenge of health and environment now and in the future, the following strategic approaches must be considered which include conducting environmental and health impact assessments; strengthening national environmental health policy and infrastructure; fostering inter-sectoral co-ordination and partnerships; mobilizing public participation; and enhancing the leadership role of health in advocacy, stewardship and capacity building.

Challenges: Health and Environment

Air pollution, unsafe water supply, poor sanitation and hazardous chemicals exert significant pressures on human health, particularly the elderly and the young. While some global trends (e.g. access to improved water sources) are getting better, others – such as urban air pollution and lack of access to basic sanitation – continue to pose a serious risk to human health. Major environmental issues are forest and agricultural degradation of land, resource depletion (such as water, mineral, forest, sand, and rocks), environmental degradation, public health, loss of biodiversity, loss of resilience in ecosystems, livelihood security for the poor (Ramesha Chandrappa and Ravi, 2009). The major sources of pollution in India include the rapid burning of fuel wood and biomass such as dried waste from livestock as the primary source of energy, lack of organized garbage and waste removal services, lack of sewage treatment operations, lack of flood control and monsoon water drainage system, diversion of consumer waste into rivers, cremation practices near major rivers, government mandated protection of highly polluting old public transport, and continued operation by Indian government of government owned, high emission plants built between 1950 and 1980. (Milind Kandlikar, Gurumurthy Ramachandran, 2000; The New York Times, 2010; Steve Hamnera et al, 2006;). Moreover air pollution, poor

management of waste, growing water scarcity, falling groundwater tables, water pollution, preservation and quality of forests, biodiversity loss, and land/soil degradation are some of the major environmental issues India faces today (Chabukdhara, 2015). India's population growth adds pressure to environmental issues and its resources. Rapid urbanization has caused a buildup of heavy industrialization, consumerization and miss utilization natural resources. India contains over 68.0 per cent of India's total population, and half of all residents of rural areas live below the poverty line, struggling for better and easy access to health care and services. Health issues confronted by rural people are many and diverse – from severe malaria to uncontrolled diabetes, from a badly infected wound to cancer (World Bank, 2002). Postpartum maternal illness is a serious problem in resource-poor settings and contributes to maternal mortality, particularly in rural India (India Today, 2012). Approximately 1.72 million children die each year before turning one. The under five mortality and infant mortality rates have been declining, from 202 and 190 deaths per thousand live births respectively in 1970 to 64 and 50 deaths per thousand live births in 2009 (Chabukdhara et al, 2016). In poor/underdeveloped countries with annual per capita incomes of \$300 or less, at least 90.0 per cent of the population depends on wood and dung for cooking (Anandan and Ramaswamy, 2016). Major causes for poor Infrastructure like hospitals, roads, water and sanitation are lacking in rural areas. Shortages of healthcare providers, poor intra-partum and newborn care, diarrheal diseases and acute respiratory infections also contribute to the high infant mortality rate. The impacts on human health from degradation of the environment affect society not only in terms of loss of quality of life, but also in terms of expenditure on health care, loss of productivity and loss of income. Since these impacts are very different, different approaches are required for estimating their magnitude.

Suggestion and Controlling Strategies

The public health challenge inherent in meeting the MDG and SDGs targets is ensuring that improvements result in access to water and sanitation for the critical at-risk populations. This challenge can be met with a coherent approach which develops all her environment, sanitations and health. The main areas action for which detailed policy recommendations are mode as follows are, Innovative approaches are required to ensure the availability of low-cost, simple, and locally acceptable water and sanitation interventions and integrating these approaches into existing social institutions such as schools, markets, and health facilities; Prevention of contamination of water in distribution systems; Growing water scarcity and the potential for water reuse and conservation; Implementing innovative low-cost sanitation system; Providing sustainable water supplies and sanitation for urban and rural areas; Reducing disparities within the regions in the country; Sustainability of water and sanitation services. Encouraging renewables and local solutions; Promoting and focusing energy R&D; Promoting environmental security through entitlements for the poor, gender equity and empowerment; Creating an enabling environment and regulatory oversight for competitive efficiency; To integrated approach in health and environmental planning through decentralized planning machinery it is possible to achieve the goal of sustainability. Education, awareness, people's participation, economic benefits plays a vital role in the adoption of environmentally sound research and development.

Conclusions

The environment has a major impact on health and investing in environmental health is certainly a good investment. Rapid urbanization, industrialization, globalization and an increasing

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population is putting further stress on the environment. If planned actions are not taken urgently by all sectors, the problem is likely to get worse thereby impacting human health directly and indirectly in the globe. The impact will be hardest on the poor and vulnerable sections of the population. Given that the environment is closely linked with each of the MDGs and SDGs goals, without priority being assigned to interaction between environment and health, it will be a challenge to achieve MDGs and SDGs.

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