

# UNDP Bulletin

SPECIAL EDITION

Curated by UNDP's Community of Practice on HIV and Health  
in collaboration with the Planetary Health Alliance



# PLANETARY HEALTH

Planetary health stresses that the disruption and degradation of natural systems are an urgent threat to humanity, recognizing that human health and the health of our planet are inextricably linked (1). The climate crisis, pollution, biodiversity loss, and land use change are worsening health outcomes and driving health inequity. Climate change is already impacting health, including by leading to death and illness from increasingly frequent extreme weather events, like heatwaves, storms and floods, the disruption of food systems, increases in zoonotic and food-, water- and vector-borne diseases, and mental health issues. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the close relationship between the health of people and the health of the planet, and has further exacerbated existing social injustices and vulnerabilities in our communities and our health systems.

Health, equity and well-being are a part of the solution. This year, for the first time, health was a science priority area in the 26th Conference of the Parties (COP) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Health can motivate more ambitious action on the climate crisis. Resilient and sustainable health systems can contribute to better equity and protect their populations from the negative impacts of the climate crisis and sustainable low carbon health systems can make a substantial contribution to reducing emissions. The UN Secretary-General's Our Common Agenda, UNDP's Strategic Plan 2022-2025 and the HIV, Health and Development Strategy, all stress the need for transformative solutions to safeguard the health of the planet and people for current and future generations.



UNDP's Climate Promise is an example of an ongoing programme with transformative potential: by supporting 120 countries to enhance their Nationally Determined Contributions to the Paris Agreement, it can reduce global emissions and through that, improve health, and social and economic outcomes. Similarly, UNDP's Food and Agriculture Commodities Systems Strategy 2020-2030, and work in areas such as antimicrobial resistance provide opportunities to reduce the burden on our ecosystems and improve health outcomes.

## São Paulo Declaration on Planetary Health

On October 6th, UNDP in partnership with the Planetary Health Alliance and the University of São Paulo launched the São Paulo Declaration on Planetary Health in *The Lancet*. Developed by the global planetary health community, the Declaration states that humans must make transformational shifts now in how we live in order to optimize the health and well-being of all people and the planet. It also lays out specific instructions for 19 stakeholder groups across society with suggested concrete actions that support a more just and regenerative post-pandemic world.

The Declaration is an important step for bringing the international and national environmental and health conversations under the same umbrella, with an emphasis on equity, social justice, and human survival.

More than 300 people from over 70 countries contributed to the development of the Declaration with support of UNDP's SparkBlue platform, and over 310 organizations from more than 50 countries have signed the Declaration as of November 2021. The Planetary Health Alliance plans to collaborate with all the signatories to transform the words of the São Paulo Declaration into action.



Visit [planetaryhealthalliance.org](https://planetaryhealthalliance.org) for more information.

## 1. Health and climate solutions

In 2020, global carbon dioxide emissions dropped by 5.4% because of reduced human activities during the COVID-19 pandemic. A year later, emissions are bouncing back to pre-COVID levels and greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere continue to rise (2). If the global community is to achieve the Paris Agreement objective to halt global warming to 1.5 Celsius compared to pre-industrial levels, an immediate reduction in emissions is needed. This is possible only through decisive, large-scale action across

sectors. The healthcare sector has an important role to play due to its high emissions: if it was a country, it would be the fifth largest greenhouse gas emitter (3).

UNDP has collaborated with WHO, UNEP and UNICEF to produce the Compendium of WHO and other UN guidance on health & environment. The Compendium provides concrete tools and guidance on how to reduce exposure to indoor and outdoor air pollution that cause multiple health problems including noncommunicable diseases; strategies to address health risks linked with climate change such as heat stress, rising sea levels, and climate-sensitive diseases; ways to

improve access to clean water, sanitation and hygiene services and clean energy; and advice related to links between biodiversity loss, infectious diseases, pandemics and nutrition security and diversity. The Compendium also proposes ways for the health sector to reduce its carbon and toxic emissions and waste. It includes examples of UNDP's support for the solarization of remote health facilities in low-income countries, guidance on reducing the impacts of tobacco use and farming on health, environment and sustainable development, and provides ideas for action that can be taken to protect biodiversity while preventing the emergence of new infectious diseases.



In **Ukraine**, UNDP supported the Kyiv-Mohyla Business School to develop an online course to assess the impact of climate change on public health. The course was also used to introduce sustainable procurement practices for the use of health care products. Specific case studies demonstrate how to apply various concepts, methods, and tools to mitigate the impact of climate change on the country's health care

system. As a result, health care professionals from 12 regional Public Health Centres are now able to better understand the impact of climate change on public health and adapt existing practices for a more sustainable use and production of health care products.

As part of their **Sustainable Health in Procurement initiative**, UNDP and Health Care Without Harm have launched its Global Road Map for Health Care Decarbonization: A navigational tool for achieving zero emissions with climate resilience and health equity. The tool charts a global path towards zero emissions in health care, aligning it with the Paris Agreement's ambition to keep global warming below 1.5 degrees. The road map models how the health care sector can decarbonize by taking seven high impact actions to reduce the sector's global emissions. It also provides a set of recommendations for health sector leaders to respond rapidly to help prevent and prepare for the inextricably linked climate and health crises while also contributing to broad-based health equity.

## 2. Sustainability and resilience

To drive sustainability and resilience there is a need to scale practices that do not compromise the health and wellbeing of future generations and create systems that are able to recover and adapt after disruptive events. Currently, most human actions and systems are not prepared for intensifying environmental changes. Instead, high amounts of pollutants and waste, including hazardous chemicals, are emitted. Air, soil and water pollution account for around 9 million annual premature deaths and are a major cause of noncommunicable diseases (4).

During COVID-19 health care waste has increased including due to the use of personal protective equipment such as masks and gloves. UNDP has developed guidance to promote the sustainability and resilience of the health sector. In Tanzania, UNDP supported the development of **Health Care Waste Management (HCWM) Guidelines and**

**Standards** and facilitated the incorporation of sustainable HCWM treatment methods and procedures into national policies.

In **Colombia**, UNDP is working with Health Care Without Harm and local healthcare providers to strengthen sustainable procurement practices in response to COVID-19. Assessment tools are used by local hospitals to ensure that all purchases undergo an environmental review. For example, in one hospital the decision to purchase 18,000 reusable gowns for the care of COVID-19 patients, prevented the disposal of 1,200 gowns per day and resulted in monthly savings of US\$ 80,000. Similarly, approximately 3,000 m<sup>3</sup> of water is saved each month because of the introduction of specialized equipment designed to efficiently wash and disinfect COVID-19 contaminated garments.

In **Malaysia**, UNDP is supporting an initiative to phase out hydrochlorofluorocarbons (HCFCs). It aims to eliminate ozone depleting chemicals that damage the ozone layer. Although Malaysia does not produce HCFCs, they are imported as part of the manufacturing of products such as air-conditioning, refrigeration, foams, firefighting sprays, and solvents. The initiative is helping the Government of Malaysia to achieve the Montreal Protocol's post-2015 targets, through a combination of interventions such as technology transfer investments, policies and regulations, technical assistance, training, awareness, co-ordination and monitoring in various HCFC-consuming sectors.

In **Zimbabwe**, through the Solar for Health (S4H) initiative, UNDP is supporting the installation of all solar energy systems in health centers and storage facilities to improve access to quality, low-emission healthcare. Between 2017 and 2021, UNDP has installed 944 solar energy systems across the country as part of the framework of the Health and Energy Platform of Action. To date, UNDP has supported the solar electrification of 1,150 health centers and storage facilities in **Angola, Bhutan, Chad, Eswatini, Liberia, Libya, Malawi, Namibia, Nepal, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Uganda, Yemen, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.**



UNDP Yemen

### 3. Pandemic preparedness

An estimated 75% of new infectious diseases are zoonotic, meaning they transmit from animals to humans (5). Changes in the environment and climate also increase the likelihood of virus transmission from animals to humans, heightening the risk of pandemics such as COVID-19 (6). Being better prepared for future pandemics will require integrated health, environment and climate strategies and a systems approach.

The UNDP and WHO **Building Resilience of Health Systems in Asian Least Developed Countries to Climate Change initiative**, is supporting **Nepal, Timor-Leste, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Lao PDR and Myanmar** to integrate climate risks into health sector planning, improve surveillance and early warning systems and integrate health into the national adaptation planning. For example, in **Nepal**, a review of the existing disease surveillance system from a climate change perspective was conducted. Four sentinel sites in three different ecological regions have been selected for the implementation of a climate - informed health surveillance and early warning system. The analyses will serve as a useful tool in policy and decision-making, and resource allocation, to ensure that climate-informed health investments are made, and that risks are mainstreamed in national plans and legislation. In **Timor-Leste**, dengue data has been integrated

into the Health Emergency Operation Centre’s website to detect and promptly respond to outbreaks of dengue. In **Bangladesh**, a data sharing mechanism was established with the Bangladesh Meteorological Department for obtaining weather data. The Early Warning and Response System dashboard is being piloted using cholera data from a district and can provide information on outbreak alarm.



UNDP Timor-Leste

## Voices of planetary health leaders



**Pats Oliva,**  
Communications  
Campaigner,  
Health Care  
Without Harm  
Southeast Asia

### ***What does greening of the health sector look like in your country? What more could be done?***

“In the Philippines, greening healthcare has been a challenge, mainly due to other priorities and/or a lack of resources. But we see in the work of our partner hospitals that it is possible. They were able to transition from nonessential plastics to sustainable alternatives. They started using water dispensers instead of plastic bottles in the cafeteria. Some have integrated solar in their energy source to lower carbon emissions, while

others are cultivating organic vegetables in their rooftop gardens to serve to patients and staff. Philippine doctors’ associations on the other hand maximize social media to creatively campaign for clean air and healthcare climate action.

There’s so much more that can be done. The health benefits of decarbonization and climate leadership must be tackled in health and medical education. Health professionals must heed their influential role in society to advocate for the transition away from fossil fuels and toward renewable energy. Furthermore, the Philippine government should integrate and prioritize climate in all health policies and vice versa, including providing appropriate budget allocations geared towards a healthy, climate-resilient, and more equitable healthcare.”



**Sam Myers,**  
Director,  
Planetary Health  
Alliance

### ***How is the Planetary Health Alliance (PHA) supporting the growth of the planetary health field?***

“Planetary health is interdisciplinary and engages researchers, practitioners, educators, policy makers, and students across a breadth of fields. For such a community to be effective and work together they must be connected and have a common vision for how the pieces might fit together and be greater than the sum of the parts.

The PHA was founded six years ago to serve as a nerve centre for the emerging field of planetary health. In a short time, we have grown to over 270 organizations in 57 countries. We support planetary health education by developing and curating new educational resources including a [text book](#) for the field, [free downloadable case studies](#), and [multimedia resources](#) to be used by educators around the world. We publish a [monthly newsletter](#) with research updates, news, announcements, job postings, and interesting new

resources. We help to convene the planetary health annual meeting each year—last year’s meeting with the University of São Paulo attracted 5,000 registrants from 130 countries. Along with our membership we help to convene several sub-communities around the world including Planetary Health Campus Ambassadors, Clinicians for Planetary Health, and regional planetary health hubs in 10 different regions. We have also developed an online community platform that allows people around the world to connect around planetary health topics and coordinate their efforts with each other.”

## Young people advancing planetary health

***What must be done to advance the planetary health movement?***



**Krishna Adhikari,  
Planetary Health  
Campus  
Ambassador,  
Nepal**

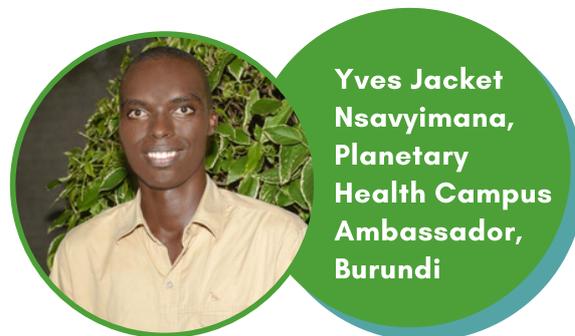
“It is critically important to communicate with leaders, government officials, and policymakers regarding the needs and importance of a healthy planet for us and generations to come and making them aware that there is no other option than Planet Earth.”



**Easrat Jahan  
Esha, Planetary  
Health Campus  
Ambassador,  
Bangladesh**

“COVID-19 is a devastating example of why we need to focus on planetary health right now. If we

dream about a peaceful life in the near future, we need to end major planetary crises such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and environmental pollution.”



**Yves Jacket  
Nsavyimana,  
Planetary  
Health Campus  
Ambassador,  
Burundi**

“It is time to realize as African nations the importance of protecting our land, leading the fight against climate change. As young people we must invest ourselves for a better tomorrow, which consists in taking all necessary actions to protect our continent, our planet.”



**Kevin Ardon,  
Planetary  
Health  
Campus  
Ambassador,  
Honduras**

“In Honduras we are training medical students on the interlinkages between the environment and health that are currently overlooked in the medical curricula. This year we organized a national conference with the planetary health theme, training more than 100 medical students. We also have an open-source resource bank on climate and health education, including planetary health (<https://www.imeccs.org>). The aim is to create resources that can be easily implemented into existing medical curricula worldwide.”

*The Planetary Health Campus Ambassador program is a competitively-awarded leadership opportunity for undergraduate and graduate students committed to educating their campus community about planetary health.*

## Conclusion

Urgent and collective action on health, environment and climate is more important than ever. Integrated approaches like planetary health can result in both strong climate change action as well as positive health impacts.

The COP26 Special Report on Climate Change and Health sets out 10 recommendations from the global health community to governments and policy makers, calling on them to act with urgency on the current climate and health crises. Chief among these is the commitment to a healthy, green, and just recovery from COVID-19. This will be achieved by aligning climate and health goals, supporting a fossil free recovery, improving global capacity for pandemic prevention, preparedness and response, adopting a 'Health-in-All-Policies' approach and committing to vaccine equity.

At COP26, 50 countries have committed to develop climate-resilient and low-carbon health systems. The governments of these 50 countries, which include some of those most vulnerable to the health harms caused by climate change as well as some of the world's biggest carbon emitters, have committed to take concrete steps towards creating climate-resilient health systems. Forty-five of these countries have also committed to transform their health systems to be more sustainable and low-carbon. Fourteen have set a target date to reach net zero carbon emissions on or before 2050.

This demonstrates that progress is possible with the right political commitment. However, greater ambition is needed for the solutions to be adequate to match the scale of the crisis. The health arguments for climate action have never been clearer. Health and climate advocates must work together to prioritize urgent action to protect the health of people and planet.

## References

1. The São Paulo Declaration on Planetary Health – The Lancet, October 2021
2. United Nations Environment Programme 2021. Emissions Gap Report 2021: The Heat Is On – A World of Climate Promises Not Yet Delivered. Nairobi
3. Health Care Without Harm and Arup 2019. Health Care's Climate Footprint. How the Health Sector Contributes to the Global Climate Crisis and Opportunities for Action
4. The Lancet Commission on pollution and health, October 2017
5. The World Bank 2020. Fighting infectious diseases: The connection to climate change
6. World Health Organization 2020, Biodiversity & Infectious Diseases, Questions & Answers



For more information visit: [www.undp.org](http://www.undp.org)  
**United Nations Development Programme**  
One United Nations Plaza • New York, NY 10017 USA

### CONTACT INFORMATION

Andrea Nannipieri, Programme Specialist:  
Community of Practice on HIV and Health and UNAIDS  
email: [andrea.nannipieri@undp.org](mailto:andrea.nannipieri@undp.org)