INSIGHTS SUMMARY

WHAT ARE THE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN HEALTH EQUITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE, AND HOW CAN BUSINESSES PLAY A ROLE?

CLIMATE AND HEALTH / ONLINE WRITTEN DISCUSSION / 16 MAR 2023

WITH THANKS TO OUR EXPERT PANEL – *we are very grateful to each of the contributors to this Online Written Discussion:*

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The intricate link between health equity and climate change demands urgent attention and action from businesses. Climate change intensifies extreme weather events, high temperatures and air pollution, resulting in significant health consequences. These impacts are not evenly distributed and often affect already marginalised and vulnerable communities, such as low-income and minority populations.

To address the complex intersection of health equity and climate change, businesses must take proactive measures. By mitigating the negative effects of climate change on public health, they can reduce healthcare costs and absenteeism while improving workforce productivity. Additionally, building business resilience to climate-related risks, including supply chain disruptions, property damage, and business interruption, is essential.

This paper summarises the Online Written Discussion hosted by Business Fights Poverty, examining how businesses can take action on health equity and climate change. The discussion highlighted positive case studies and explored ways to collaborate more effectively to make a difference and build momentum towards a sustainable future.

HOW CAN BUSINESSES BEST ADDRESS THE ISSUE OF HEALTH EQUITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE?

The discussion identified five ways in which businesses can address these issues:

UNDERSTAND AND EMBED ACTION INTO THE CORE OF THE BUSINESS

- Understand the material risk and exposure your business has when climate change and health issues are combined. This should include mapping out exposure and business continuity planning in the short, medium and longer term.
- Secure the support of leadership so that all decisions, investments, innovations, and measurement systems are meaningfully embedded into the core business.

- Articulate health equity and climate change within core business values and sustainability goals.

ENGAGE WITH YOUR STAKEHOLDERS

- Involve stakeholders such as customers, community members, and employees to help businesses identify community needs and develop initiatives to address health equity and climate change.
- Deepen awareness of health impacts from climate change events in the regions you operate through employee and stakeholder practical guides and tools – ensuring pragmatic resilience-building advice is built in.
- Build actions appropriately into employee and supply chain objectives and planning – including measurement and feedback loops.

STRENGTHEN WORKER HEALTH AND WELLBEING

- Support employee health and wellbeing: Businesses can take action to strengthen the health and resilience of people within their own organisations and supply chains, e.g., by enabling access to quality healthcare and health information.
- Promote healthy work-life balance and pay living wages to support people in living healthy lives and to build resilience to climate change.
- Invest in creating health equity programmes that focus on health resilience to climate change impacts across your value chains and within the communities you serve.

TAKE ACTION TO MITIGATE NEGATIVE IMPACTS

- Reduce fossil fuel burning in urban settings: Businesses can reduce staff and fleet transport usage of fossil fuels and use of fossil fuels for generating heat and electricity. Fossil fuel pollution worsens asthma and heart disease in local communities, and poorer communities are particularly impacted.
- Adopt sustainable practices such as the use of renewable energy sources, the reduction of waste, and use of eco-friendly products can help businesses reduce their carbon footprint and promote economic growth. This should include Scope 1–3 emissions.
- Mitigate climate change impacts by investing in reforestation, wetlands, and coastal habitat restoration and green cities.

INVEST IN BUSINESS INNOVATION

- Develop innovative business solutions to help communities and their health systems mitigate and adapt to climate change.
- Invest in circular, low-carbon solutions for the health sector to reduce emissions and build resilience. Power purchase agreements, as a simple example, can enable health systems to purchase renewable energy at scale.

WHAT ARE THE BEST EXAMPLES OF BUSINESSES TAKING ACTION ON HEALTH EQUITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE ISSUES?

There are a number of examples of businesses taking on health equity and climate change but fewer examples of businesses explicitly working at the nexus between climate and health equity. Some examples include:

- Food scarcity is becoming an even greater concern due to climate change, and the Nutrient Gap Initiative by **Bayer** aims to expand access to vitamins and minerals for 50 million people in underserved communities by 2030 and adapt solutions to the needs of those they serve.
- **Unilever**, which has set ambitious sustainability goals and launched initiatives to promote health equity, including improving access to clean water and hygiene in developing countries.
- **Ikea**, which has invested in renewable energy, promoted sustainable sourcing and launched initiatives to promote health and wellness.
- **Danone**, which has committed to carbon neutrality by 2050 and launched initiatives

to promote sustainable agriculture and reduce carbon emissions, as well as initiatives to promote healthy eating habits and improve access to clean water.

- **Microsoft**, which has committed to being carbon negative by 2030 and launched initiatives to promote sustainability, reduce waste, and promote access to technology and digital literacy in underserved communities.
- **CVS Health Zones** and **Walmart Health Clinics** are working to meet communities' basic health needs and reducing health access barriers, which may already include climate-related health effects such as heat stroke.

Initiatives promoting sustainability and health equity include:

- **The Sustainable Healthcare Coalition** brings together public and private health organisations to research and implement sustainable practices in health care, including waste reduction and social and environmental standards in supply chain procurement.
- The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has established the **Office of Climate Change and Health Equity**, which launched the Health Care Sector Climate Pledge to invite healthcare industry stakeholders to commit to climate-friendly actions.
- Foundations such as the **Wellcome Trust** and **Rockefeller Foundation** are working in this area.

HOW CAN WE WORK TOGETHER FOR A MORE POSITIVE IMPACT ON HEALTH EQUITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE?

The ways climate change will affect people's health will differ by multiple deprivation issues, from: location to income levels, education to accessing financial resilience buffers. Action is needed at all levels, from global to local, in order to ensure meaningful mitigation is in place as climate change ramps up its effects on people's health. Collaboration between companies and across sectors is vital. Three prorities were identified during the online written discussion, each with some possible areas of joined-up action:

SHARE DATA – FROM LOCAL TO GLOBAL

- The absence of localised health data holds back health provisions around the world. Overlaying rapidly changing climate and environmental impacts means that accurately modelling climate and health impacts is challenging... and creating robust responses to climate change impacts on health near impossible.
- Local collaboration is essential to understand the context of the local situation, which needs to include robust data collection. This can allow appropriate interventions to be designed and implemented for maximum impact at the community level whilst strengthening the national or global data bank.
- Suggested responses include: Join collective action such as The Lancet Countdown, which brings together experts from across the globe to track how climate change is affecting health and how the world is responding.
- Deepen the understanding of the intersection between climate change and health equity by collecting more granular data to develop evidence-based strategies and models. Data collection nodes could include: worker sick days by local climate events, productivity across the business and supply chains; changes in disease prevalence; and uptake of resilience mechanisms; among other things.
- Partner with research and public organisations to contribute technology and expertise as well as help gather local data via mobile technology platforms. To combat climate change, we need to collaborate locally and understand the specific needs of each country since the consequences of climate change will differ in each.

DEVELOP JOINED-UP MESSAGING, EDUCATION AND TRAINING

- Climate change is perhaps the biggest threat humanity has experienced, and yet we face inertia, perhaps due to its abstract

nature. Jointly reframing the climate crisis to focus on how to save human-kind is important, and the direct human health impact could be a vital key to this.

- Education and information campaigns and their dissemination – businesses should partner to raise awareness of health equity and climate change impacts, which can create a sense of urgency and inspire action whilst avoiding confusion or panic.
- Support Governments in implementing policies and strategies that assist developing communities in adopting sustainable practices, investing in healthcare infrastructure, promoting healthy lifestyles, building partnerships, and embracing innovation.
- Sharing of best practices, tools and guidance – businesses can, for example: train their value chains and the communities in which they operate on building resilience to climate change – for example, building for extreme weather events or training for regenerative agricultural practices which increase carbon sequestration, reduce desertification and reduce water consumption (noting that the WASH agenda is one of the most critical enablers of good health, and pressure on potable water supplies is increasing due to climate change).

ALLOCATE MORE FINANCE TO COLLABORATIONS

- In 2018, less than 0.5% of multilateral climate finance was allocated to health projects.
- Supporting intergovernmental and government strategies and initiatives, such as Health National Action Plans and Nationally Determined Contributions, can be useful in identifying where resources and expertise can best support national initiatives.
- Businesses can partner with academia, health experts, NGOs and others to advocate for stronger local, national and international policies to protect and help people affected by climate change.
- Financing contributions towards collaborations amongst scientists, architects, engineers, health care providers, and development professionals to generate low-cost, scalable interventions that improve health and climate outcomes simultaneously will be essential.

THE FULL ONLINE WRITTEN DISCUSSION CAN BE FOUND HERE:

https://forum.businessfightspoverty.org/t/what-are-the-connections-between-health-equity-and-climate-change-and-how-can-businesses-play-a-role/3472/5?filter=summary

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