



THREE INSIGHTS

HOW CAN WE COLLABORATE BETTER ACROSS CLIMATE AND HEALTH TO DRIVE EQUITY AND RESILIENCE?

CLIMATE JUSTICE SUMMIT / PARTNERSHIPS / WORKSHOP / 9 NOV 2022

We would like to thank the following lead discussants and members of the Business Fights Poverty community for their participation:

Hannah Green, Corporate Affairs Director, Sustainability, **GSK**; **Elaine Mead**, Chair, **Alliance for Water Stewardship**; **Maggie Rarieya**, Global Partnerships Director, **Amref Health Africa**; **Juanita Silva**, Campaign Manager, **Race to Resilience**, **UN Climate Change High-Level Champion**; **Fiona Smith-Laittan**, VP Global Health, **GSK**

Hosted with **GSK**

Climate change threatens people's lives, health, and wellbeing. But these impacts are not being felt equally and reflect deep-seated global inequities. This workshop focused on the many intersections of health and climate, including the physical and mental health impacts of climate change; how the health system feeds into global GHG emissions and environmental pollution which, in turn, harm human health; and how social factors play an often-understated role in health outcomes.

Participants discussed ways to better integrate health into climate solutions across sectors and how to break free from silos to form partnerships and foster win-win solutions.

INSIGHT 1: "HEALTH IS THE HUMAN FACE OF CLIMATE CHANGE"

Human health is inextricably linked with the health of natural systems. We all depend on clean air, clean water, and fertile soil to survive and thrive. As Hannah Green, Corporate Affairs Director, Sustainability at GSK pointed out, "even being in nature is strongly linked to good health outcomes."

Maggie Rarieya, Global Partnerships Director at Amref Health Africa, described the devastation to human life already caused by climate change, from extreme weather events like flooding, which exacerbates disease like cholera, or drought, which can cause crop failure and subsequent nutrient deficiencies.

Sharing [statistics](#) from the World Health Organisation, Maggie stated that "over a quarter of the world's diseases and over 250,000 deaths annually have been directly attributed to climate change." Biodiversity loss is also [linked](#) to the increased likelihood of widespread disease and pandemic-level situations. These impacts are inevitably more pervasive in areas of the global south that already struggle from centuries of

We really do need to start thinking about how we, from the beginning, bring human health and health equity into the climate field.

Hannah Green, Corporate Affairs Director, Sustainability, GSK

CLIMATE JUSTICE SUMMIT

exploitation and disinvestment, leading to over-pressured health care systems.

The harder-to-detect so-called “silent killer” of climate change is how it’s affecting mental health in different parts of the world. Smallholder farmers in the global south, for example, might experience mental stress because they can no longer rely on regular rain patterns to feed their crops. “We should reflect on the differences when we talk about mental health,” expressed Elaine Mead, Chair of the Alliance for Water Stewardship. “We need to hear more about and understand that mental health is an issue worldwide, but for completely different reasons.”

Critical infrastructure that people depend on for health services is also affected by climate change. Maggie pointed out a recent example of a healthcare facility in Uganda that was washed away by a flood. She expressed how we need to build infrastructure in ways that are climate resilient and make sure health centres are “fit for purpose.”

INSIGHT 2: CO-BENEFITS TO TACKLING CLIMATE CHANGE AND SAFEGUARDING HEALTH MUST BE DESIGNED IN FROM THE START

Fiona Smith-Laittan, VP Global Health at GSK, talked about how GSK is partnering with organisations like AMREF and Save the Children to improve health systems’ ability to absorb and respond to climate shocks. One aspect of this is training healthcare workers to become an “early warning group” for outbreaks of infectious diseases.

When it comes to climate mitigation and nature-based climate solutions, GSK “designs health co-benefits in from the beginning.” Hannah gave the example of GSK’s work around water basins along their supply chain. “Clearly, we need to be able to have a reliable supply of water to continue to manufacture our medicines and vaccines,” she explained. “But we also have a broader responsibility to make sure that those communities also have equitable access to clean water.” In fact, WASH interventions (water, sanitation, and hygiene) are a core focus of GSK’s climate and nature-related work.

All participants agreed that to develop effective programmes to address both health

As healthcare professionals, we’re absolutely committed to doing no harm. But we now recognise that we’re harming our planet as we’re treating our patients.

**Elaine Mead, Chair, Alliance
for Water Stewardship**

and climate concerns, healthcare providers need to consult local communities and design for their specific needs. An interesting approach is looking at the social determinants of health. For example, rates of poverty have reduced over the past 20 years, which has, in turn, helped health outcomes. During the same time, emissions have drastically risen, which contributes to negative health outcomes. This “tension” between the environmental and social determinants of health can only be truly understood through a holistic, whole-systems perspective.

Embedding health benefits into climate action also requires recognition of the healthcare system’s contribution to climate change. Healthcare is [responsible](#) for around 5% of global emissions, and equipment is often designed to be disposable. “We’ve long understood the impact of climate change on the health of our population,” said Elaine. “But it’s pretty recently that we’ve recognised the impact that the delivery of healthcare has on the health of the planet.”

INSIGHT 3: BUILD ON EXISTING INITIATIVES

Speakers expressed disappointment that health isn’t more prominent in high-level climate negotiations like COP27. But embedding health into climate action doesn’t necessarily mean starting from scratch. “Our challenge for the future is bringing climate and health together into the conversations,” said Juanita Silva, Campaign Manager for Race to Resilience and UN Climate Change High-Level Champion. “I think a great opportunity to do that is focusing on the work that’s being done on resilience around the

CLIMATE JUSTICE SUMMIT

world. Building resilience for communities is increasing health for the communities, and that cannot be separated.” Another opportunity is to build on the lessons of responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Amref is using its network to bring different sectors together to better understand the intersections of human health and climate. “We’re getting policymakers to come together and to start seeing and joining the dots,” said Maggie. “And then [we’re] asking, “how will we solve this problem together?” So taking health out of health and inserting it into other sectors, and making other sectors feel accountable to it.”

Workshop participants shared creative ideas on how to leverage existing services to bring awareness to the climate-health nexus—engaging with schools, for example, or using

healthcare centres as hubs for learning about climate information that’s relevant to the local community. Another idea: tapping into easily-accessible technology to spread awareness, and intentionally engaging women in designing responsive and adaptive health-centred climate solutions. Existing waste management policies and infrastructure could also be utilised more effectively to ensure proper disposal of medical waste and avoid any leakage into the environment.

The need for climate and health communities to collaborate rang clear throughout the workshop. “Global health, climate impacts, and nature impacts on health is one of the few areas where we are very non-competitive,” expressed Fiona. “We really are genuinely all in it together. If one of us wins, we all win.”

RESOURCES SHARED:

- **ACTION FRAMEWORK:** [Business and Climate Justice Framework](#). Business Fights Poverty with the Corporate Responsibility Initiative at Harvard Kennedy School and Change by Degrees.
- **ARTICLE SERIES:** [The Business of Climate Justice](#). Stanford Social Innovation Review.
- **REPORT:** [How Can Self-Care Help Health Systems Rebuild Better During COVID-19?](#) Business Fights Poverty.
- **REPORT:** [The National Business Compact on Coronavirus - One Year On: A Blueprint for Rapid Collaboration?](#)
- **CAMPAIGN:** [Race to Resilience](#)
- **BRIEFING:** [Sharing our journey to net zero and nature positive for a healthier future](#). GSK.