

The Asian Co-benefits Partnership (ACP) serves as an informal and interactive platform to improve information sharing and stakeholder coordination on co-benefits in Asia. The ACP was launched with the support of the Ministry of the Environment, Japan in 2010 to help mainstream climate and environmental co-benefits into decision-making processes in Asia. Learn more about us at our website. <http://www.cobenefit.org/>



Highlights



Choking Development: The Growing Health Crisis Facing Children in India

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India's struggles with air pollution are well-documented. This issue of ACP newsletter shares a commentary from Dr. Nanda Kumar JANARDHANAN on how India can ensure air pollution does not endanger one of its most valuable assets: children's health.

India has a huge 'demographic dividend'—one that could potentially help it achieve double-digit growth in the future. However, air pollution has become a health hazard for millions of citizens, especially children. Endangering this segment of the population also threatens long-term socioeconomic goals and could undercut plans to take advantage of the demographic dividend to drive future growth.

India is notably a 'young nation' with more than a quarter of the population (29.5 per cent) below 14 years old and almost 10 per cent of the population below 4 years old (Census, 2011). Regrettably, the statistics suggest that this segment is facing a 'health crisis'. Around 70 per cent of the most polluted cities are in India, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO). As per a WHO report, 2018 in India, 60,987 deaths for children under 5 years old in 2016 can be linked to their exposure to fine particulates (PM_{2.5}).

The mortality has been greater among girls under the age of five. About 32,889 girls died, compared to 28,097 boys. Across both age groups (below 5 years and below 14 years), over 100,000 children died in India due to both PM_{2.5} ambient and household pollution in 2016. More than 2 million deaths are said to occur prematurely in India due to pollution, accounting for 25% of the global deaths due to air pollution. Moreover, maternal exposure to air

pollutants has been linked to low infant birth weight. It is increasingly clear that development at the cost of the health of children is unsustainable.

Outdoor air pollution is a health hazard and has emerged as a silent killer in India. It is high time India fixed the problems of air pollution and address the crisis. On this note, the government has initiated the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP), a pan-India strategy aimed at curbing air pollution across the country. However, the NCAP is still in an early stage of development and yet to make any significant headway on pollution control.

Several other measures taken by the central and state governments have also been kneejerk reactions. The stopgap solutions along with weak enforcement of environmental regulations may have added to the woes rather than reducing air pollution.

There are several measures which India could take to tackle the ongoing health crisis among children, especially in cities, which owes its origin to air pollution. Some key forward steps include:

First, institutional strengthening and ensuring adherence to environmental standards by polluting industries with a focus on urban peripheries. Weak enforcement has been an unfortunate character trait of environmental governance in India. While the Ministry of Environment and Forests and Climate

Change has stringent rules and regulations regarding air pollution, the implementation at the city and state levels have been lax. Enforcement gaps are widened by troubles coordinating the multiple agencies and departments working in the policy and implementation space. The lack of accountability by States to environmental norms has been additional factors behind the health crisis. These institutional and governance issues needs to be addressed at centre and state levels.

Second, to limit the exponential growth of polluting vehicles, the fiscal policy of taxation should be adopted by the centre and state governments. By imposing taxes on households with more than 2 petrol/diesel based vehicles, consumers preferences can be nudged towards electric vehicles. The first steps in this direction have been taken in the Union Budget 2019 by reducing goods and service taxes on EVs from 12 to 5 per cent.

Third, in major cities and towns, alternative transportation options that enable children and adults to commute on non-motorised or public transport can be provided. These changes can be enhanced by incentives for car-pooling to schools and offices etc. The above reforms will boost safety and security among citizens and build citizen's confidence in their transport system. Further, the government can increase the number of 'vehicle-free' areas within cities. Even stronger incentives to nudge behaviours can be introduced like the Ultra-Low Emission Zones (ULEZ) in April 2019 in London, wherein vehicles

below a certain level of emission standards cannot ply zones without being penalised.

Fourth, the mission to establish 100 'smart cities' by 2024 initiated by Government of India in 2015 should clearly earmark funds for 'environmentally smart' solutions to address vehicular and industrial pollution. As of now a small component regarding the use of clean technologies forms part of smart city mission. A greater emphasis should be given to pollution levels in cities.

Fifth, the Ministry of Environment & Forests & Climate Change should seek to engage health professionals in the creation of environmental volunteer groups. Environmental volunteer groups can create awareness among citizens about air pollution and its ill effects. Residents welfare associations, employee associations, student volunteer groups should be mobilised to participate in an extensive print and media campaign to generate awareness among the public about the health hazards of crop residue burning, lighting firecrackers during festivals and celebrations, and waste burning.

Finally, regular and continuous monitoring and strict punishment for behaviours detrimental to the environment should be enforced. Children should have the '*Right to Clean Air*' to reach their potential.

If environmental issues are not prioritised and an urgent 'health emergency' declared to take forward steps to fix air pollution in India, the development will remain a distant dream. Sustainable development cannot be a reality if children cannot breathe clean air.

Updates

ACP 10th ANNIVERSARY WORKSHOP held in Tokyo, Japan, November 2019

Ten years ago, several key organisations and countries in Asia came together to launch a new platform aimed at supporting the mainstreaming of co-benefits into policy and project decisions called Asian Co-benefits Partnership (ACP). Over that ten-year period, the ACP has made significant progress in raising awareness and sharing information on co-benefits. On 7th of November, the 10th Anniversary Workshop of the ACP was held to recognise achievements and discuss a new structure, contents and functions for the ACP.



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