

□ How can we incorporate climate change scenarios into the design of safer health facilities?



The negative impact of climate change on health includes worse sanitation conditions from limited water supplies and conditions that favor the spread of water and vector borne diseases like malaria, dengue and gastroenteritis, among others. But at the same time, health care facilities are one of the largest consumers of energy, with a large environmental footprint.

Furthermore, energy prices are constantly going up, and the resources used to pay for energy consumption could be used in improving health services and having safer health facilities. Indeed, there are potentially multiple gains in integrating disaster risk reduction with low carbon energy use and adaptation and environmental protection of the health sector.

Investing in this kind of efforts has financial and social benefits in addition to those related to health. Key co-benefits include lower operation and maintenance costs, thereby freeing money for allocation towards patient care and health in the community; reduced impact of volatile and high energy costs and greenhouse gas emissions; improved environmental performance; and a healthier healing and work environment.

In light of these issues, PAHO/WHO with the support of the United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID), will work in 2012 towards achieving health care facilities that are both environmentally greener and safer against disasters and the impact of climate change.

The initiative will be piloted in two health care facilities in two countries in the Caribbean in the frame of the Safe Hospital initiative. This region has felt both the direct and indirect impact of climate change and natural disasters, including hurricanes, floods, earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. Six of the 20 countries worldwide with the highest mortality risk from multiple hazards

are in this region . Between 1991 and 2005, seven of the top 20 greatest losses to natural disasters worldwide were also in the Caribbean. It is also important to note that energy prices in the Caribbean are among the highest in the world.

The Hospital Safety Index and the wind hazard maps (tools produced by PAHO/WHO) will be an important part of the planning process as they provide critical information related to disaster mitigation and risk reduction. In the future, these two models of smart facilities are intended to stand as examples for other countries and facilities which are critical for the climate change mitigation and adaptation processes.

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1 (Banco Mundial, 2005) Natural Disaster Hotspots: A Global Risk Analysis.