



INDEPTH Network

Better Health Information for Better Health Policy

PRESS RELEASE

Direct the debate and challenge of GEC on ways of adaptation

Accra, 5 June 2015. Within the context of Global Environmental Change (GEC), the theme of the World Environment Day (WED) 2015 “how the well-being of humanity, the environment and economies ultimately depends on the responsible management of the planet’s natural resources” insists on the urgent necessity to direct the debate and challenge of GEC on ways of adaptation.

“This year’s WED theme aptly fits what the Environment and Health Working Group of INDEPTH has been working on so far” says Dr Ali Sie, leader of the group. The INDEPTH Network joins the world in celebrating World Environment Day (WED) - a day set aside to raise awareness about the importance of protecting planet Earth and Mother Nature. On this day, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) calls on nations, encouraging them to do something positive for the environment.

The theme for this year’s WED is “Seven Billion Dreams. One Planet. Consume with Care”, tells us how the well-being of humanity, the environment, and the functioning of the economy, ultimately depend upon the responsible management of the planet’s natural resources.

“Our working group is aimed at rigorously assessing, on one hand the health impacts of ever rapidly changing Earth ecosystems as a result of various pressures from an ever-growing world’s population. On the other hand, we also assess the environmental impacts of these changes through indirect and monitoring of ecosystems services” he said.

The INDEPTH Network, with its headquarters in Accra, Ghana, has a network of 52 health and demographic surveillance system (HDSS) sites run by 45 research centres in 20 countries across Africa, Asia and the Pacific region. The Network tracks the health and demographic data of millions of people in Africa, Asia and Oceania.

The Network has over 10 working groups in its various research thematic areas, one of which is the Environment and Health Working Group which was created in 2004 to demonstrate the capability of Health Demographic Surveillance System (HDSS) sites to monitor consequences of Global Environmental Change (GEC) on health in addition to their usual demographic surveillance; to identify a research agenda on GEC for the INDEPTH Network, and to explore opportunities to build and strengthen capacity in INDEPTH sites to include environmental aspects in their demographic work.

According to Dr Ali Sie, who is also the leader of Nouna HDSS centre in Burkina Faso, the sustainable management of natural resources to the benefit of the well-being of humanity, the environment and economics will require mastering some aspects which he named as fecundity, migrations, production, consumption, poverty and climate change.

On fecundity, he explained that a young population means more human pressure on natural resources, so family planning and reproductive healthcare must be promoted. On migration, he said massive movement of population will affect new ecosystems. Talking about production, Dr Sie said the great majority of the active population in lower-income countries is concentrated in the primary sector (agriculture including livestock). "Keeping the slash-and-burn agriculture in a context of a very limited space to cultivate will lead to a serious depletion or irreversible change of the ecosystem," he cautioned.

"Daily use of firewood with traditional stove lead to deforestation and indoor air pollution. The poor do not have any other choice than taking resources from the natural which seems available to them," he said, adding that: "A responsible management of natural resources constitutes an adaptation measure to promote especially in INDEPTH member sites."

In terms of health impact measure, the INDEPTH Environment and Health working group conducted a multisite data analysis workshop (CLIMIMO) which enables the group to study the nexus between weather and mortality in the Nouna HDSS on a daily and monthly time scale, to investigate the association between temperature, rainfall and mortality in the Nouna HDSS, to study the lag between weather variables and mortality, to contrast the associations in groups of age and sex.

In terms of adaptation strategy, the group is implementing a larviciding project in the Nouna HDSS. The main objective is to achieve a significant reduction in the density of the malaria transmitting mosquitoes, and thus a reduction in the transmission of malaria based on integrated biological larviciding of the environment. Main target groups are the high risk groups of newborns and children aged less than five years. Larviciding is the use of insecticides to kill immature mosquitoes (on the larval life stage of an insect).

The INDEPTH Network also provided funds to the African University College of Communications (AUCC) in 2014 to facilitate a two-year programme to educate journalists especially in Africa about effective climate change and sustainable development reporting practices.

"Thus, the Journalist for Climate Change Awareness Group (JCCA) was created. This awareness group was established to provide journalists and other stakeholders a framework for sharing and capacity building on climate change, following the latest alarmist report of the Intergovernmental Group of studies on climate change, decisions and resolutions of Rio 20, of the Conference of Heads of State and Government of the United Nations September 23, 2014," says Dr. Augustina Amakye, the Dean and Communication School Director, Distance Learning Programme at the African University College of Communications (AUCC).

The group also aims to inform stakeholders on the potential role of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), and aims to provide journalists with information and tools to be useful in reporting about mitigation and adaptation to climate change.

AUCC has successfully managed to form a Journalist for Climate Change Awareness group in Ghana and also one in the Ivory Coast and hopes to establish at least one more, according to Dr Amakye. She said the JCCA is in the process of establishing a website that will be a repository of climate change information written about Africa by African journalists. The site will also have a portal for other journalists in other continents to write about their specific areas.

Policy Engagement and Communications

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