

It is not by coincidence that this special volume on climate change and human health is being launched just before the COP-15, the crucial meeting of policy-makers from 192 countries, in Copenhagen from December 8th to 19th 2009, to negotiate future climate policy.

Although invoked frequently, the health argument has not been sufficiently firmly put forward, accompanied by hard evidence, as a driver for the climate policy community. Against this perspective of fostering dialogue between the global health and climate policy communities, the editors have chosen the COP-15 meeting as an occasion to present this special volume.

It is now almost 20 years since WHO published its first report on the health implications of climate change (1). Since that time, the Organisation has worked with researchers around the world to build the evidence base describing the linkages between climate change and health. In 2008, the 193 nations which constitute the World Health Assembly called for stronger action to respond to this emerging threat, and specified the need for more applied research. WHO has since coordinated an international consultation to define a global research agenda that responds to these needs (2). This agenda is action-oriented, stresses links with other, non-health, sectors and highlights the importance of research in and by low and middle-income countries.

This volume is an excellent contribution to such truly global, action and policy-oriented research. Firstly, the editors and authors highlight the needs for better and more scientific evidence on how climate change affects human health and what can and should be done about it. Secondly, this special volume goes well beyond health in a

narrow sense. For example, new evidence is provided of how heat and heat waves reduce not only health and well-being but also work productivity of farmers and industrial workers. Thirdly, the volume contains papers on infectious disease impacts in the Arctic and the tropics, and therefore generates an innovative global view of health impacts. Finally, I am particularly pleased to see such a strong interest and representation of authors from low and middle-income countries.

I trust it will trigger debates between health researchers and policy-makers and help to highlight the need for a consensus on effective climate policies. Without effective and equitable international action, we will be unable to protect future generations from the long-term adverse health effects of a changing climate.

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References

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2. WHO. Protecting health from climate change: global research priorities. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2009. Available from: <http://www.who.int/globalchange/publications/9789241598187/en/index.html> [cited 5 October 2009].