



Policy context and climate actions in Nepal: Lessons for building climate resilient health systems

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Key messages

- Climate change is recognized as a growing health risk, and Nepal has developed several related policies.
- Competing priorities, resource constraints, limited access to global funding, and weak cross-sector collaboration hinder effective climate-health integration.
- Strengthening policy and communication, localizing the Health National Adaptation Plan (H-NAP), integrating actionable climate measures into health planning, and improving policy monitoring and implementation are critical for building climate-resilient health systems.

Background

Climate change is expected to increase health disparities in low- and middle-income countries with relatively fragile health systems [1]. Nepal, ranked as one of the countries highly vulnerable to climate change, faces exposure to extreme weather events and associated health risks. The topography of Nepal is diverse, including snowy mountains, hilly areas and plains, and the country's diverse geo-climatic system, which combines heavy monsoons, steep terrain, and remoteness, renders the country vulnerable to natural disasters. Nepal faces a range of extreme weather events, including high and low temperatures, continuous warming, variability in rainfall, floods, droughts and landslides [2].

Although Nepal has developed several national policies and strategic frameworks addressing climate change and adaptation, translating these policies into effective local implementation remains challenging. Strengthening local stakeholders' understanding, preparedness, and capacity is essential for building climate-resilient health systems. This brief highlights key gaps in integrating climate change into policy frameworks and summarizes recommendations / actionable lessons to foster climate-resilient health systems.

Methods

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach comprising a policy review and qualitative data collection. A total of 35 key informant interviews were conducted with stakeholders from health, environment, planning, disaster management, and agriculture sectors at local government levels, as well as relevant stakeholders working in climate change and health at provincial and federal levels.

The research site includes three local levels /

municipalities representing diverse geographical and climatic contexts:

- Kapilvastu Municipality in Lumbini Province (Terai/plains),
- Patarasi Rural Municipality in Karnali Province (mountain region), and
- Budhanilkantha Municipality in Bagmati Province (mid-hill/urbanizing context).

Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis.

Results

Nepal has progressed and initiated the development of various policies related to climate change and acknowledged climate change as a growing health risk. However, the study identified critical gaps in climate-health integration.

At the federal level, while the Health Coordination Division is assigned with responsibilities for climate and health, **climate change is one of several competing priorities**. Resource constraints limit the integration of climate activities in federal budgets, and there is limited access to global funding for health. Moreover, siloed activities for climate and environmental health issues hinder coordination actions.

Translating national-level policy commitments into local actions is a key challenge. Awareness and understanding of national climate and health policies among local stakeholders remains limited. Many local officials reported inadequate orientation, technical guidance, and operational frameworks to support implementation. As a result, local governments often struggle to identify context-specific climate change issues and design appropriate mitigation and adaptation interventions.

Further, **local planning processes tend to prioritize disaster response** rather than preparedness and long-term resilience building. Climate change actions receive relatively low priority in annual and periodic local development plans, largely due to limited technical capacity, financial constraints, and competing development priorities. These gaps increase the vulnerability of local health systems to climate-sensitive diseases and extreme weather events.

Lessons and the way forward

Strengthening policy dissemination and communication

National climate and health policies, including implementation guidelines, should be systematically disseminated to province and local governments. Contextualized communication materials, technical orientation programs, and capacity-building activities should be developed to enhance local stakeholders' understanding of policy mandates and operational mechanisms.

Localizing / implementing the Health National Adaptation Plan (H-NAP)

The H-NAP is insufficiently understood and operationalized at subnational levels. Efforts should focus on adapting H-NAP priorities into local health planning processes by developing context-specific implementation frameworks, monitoring indicators, and practical operational guidelines tailored to local contexts.

Although policy documents mention some key roles of local governments - such as developing climate-resilient, gender-responsive adaptation plans; integrating adaptation into local development planning; strengthening pollution control; improving waste management, and conducting public awareness activities - these **responsibilities are not consistently reflected in implementation practices**. This indicates a significant policy-to-practice gap at the subnational level.

Assessing current climate resilience at health system and facility levels, and then supporting the most vulnerable local governments with budgets and programs, can help prioritize and implement actions for climate resilience. This study has also adapted and co-developed a climate resilience capacity assessment framework, which is an effective tool for resilience assessment and planning actions.

Developing practicable, specific action plans for climate-resilient health systems is essential. Federal, province and local governments need to formulate clear strategic roadmaps. Although H-NAP has such a vision, specific guidance on strengthening climate resilience at the broader health system and facility levels is needed. This plan must be supported by defined roles and responsibilities across sectors and governance tiers, adequate and assured human resources and financing mechanisms, and institutional accountability structures.

In 2025, the Bagmati River flooded during heavy rainfall, impacting on riverbanks and homes. AP Tolang via iStock.



Integrating climate actions in local plans

Incorporating climate risk assessments, vulnerability mapping, and climate-sensitive disease surveillance into municipal annual planning and budgeting can improve preparedness and responses. In urban settings, such as Kathmandu, this can be complemented by investments in climate-resilient infrastructure and planning, including improved drainage systems to manage intense rainfall, enforcement of land-use zoning to reduce settlement in high-risk areas, and protection of rivers, wetlands, and open spaces. In addition, including air pollution management in climate action through emission control, sustainable transport, and dust reduction can help address interconnected environmental and public health risks.

Strengthening policy monitoring and implementation

Establishing robust monitoring, evaluation, and accountability frameworks is essential to ensure effective implementation of existing climate and health policies. Regular reviews, intergovernmental coordination, and evidence-based decision-making mechanisms can strengthen implementation and sustainability of climate-health initiatives.

References

1. World Health Organization. Fact sheets - *Climate change and health*, 2023. [cited Mar 16 2026]. Available from: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/climate-change-and-health>
2. World Bank. *Nepal climate and health vulnerability assessment*, 2024. [cited Mar 16 2026]. Available from: <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/entities/publication/f3a311d2-791b-4511-8a4c-d12605842d11>

Further information on this study - *Assessment of the policy context and climate resilience capacity of health systems in Nepal* – can be found on the ReBUILD website, and by contacting info@herdinfo.com

<https://www.rebuildconsortium.com/projects/climate-resilience-capacity-nepal/>

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