

Healthy people, healthy planet

Enabel places climate-resilient health systems and climate-smart health action at the heart of its priorities. It does so with a view to safeguard global health and the planet in the face of the triple planetary crisis: climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change - UNFCCC, 2022).

Introduction

Climate change directly and indirectly threatens our health. According to the Institute for Global Health in Barcelona, extreme heat caused more than 47,000 deaths in Europe in 2023. The World Health Organisation predicts 250,000 excess deaths annually from climate-related diseases by 2050. Low- and middle-income countries with weak health systems are particularly vulnerable to floods, heatwaves and the development of diseases and mental health disorders (WHO, 2024). Their health systems should therefore be reinforced and adapted urgently. Health systems can and must contribute to climate change mitigation by reducing their emission of greenhouse gases, improving their energy efficiency and promoting healthy lifestyles (WHO Foundation, 2025). Finally, health is of strategic importance in climate change measures for developing countries (UNFCCC, 2023).

Health systems are critical in preventing and combatting climate change. Without strong, people-centred climate-smart action, decades of development progress may be undone. Already vulnerable communities will be hardest hit. Enabel wants to ensure that health is a driving force of change in climate policies.

Positioning

Enabel recognises the health risks posed by climate change and the need for health system adaptation. Whilst placing people at the centre of the response, Enabel strengthens

community resilience and builds climate-resilient health systems. Enabel supports actions with clear benefits for health, such as access to clean energy, healthy environments and sustainable urban development. This approach fosters inclusion, sustainability and a positioning at the intersection of climate justice and health equity.

Enabel's climate-smart health action

This action is structured around five key axes:

Climate-resilient health systems development

Enabel contributes to climate-resilient health systems by integrating climate into health infrastructure: health infrastructure projects in Burundi, for example, applied bioclimatic design principles and integrated renewable energy systems. New hospital and health centre constructions in Niger increasingly consider climate risk (e.g., heatwaves and flooding) and favour the use of solar energy. In other countries, renewable energy is systematically promoted to reduce carbon intensity and improve energy reliability.

Enabel also strengthens early warning, preparedness and crisis management mechanisms, like in Mozambique with the deployment and modernisation of integrated early warning systems, improved forecasting for floods and droughts, and enhanced governance with regards to loss and damage (Enabel, 2024a).

By partnering with the African Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, Enabel contributes to strengthen public health institutions, workforce capacity and local manufacturing of health products, including vaccines and diagnostics. This collaboration enhances countries' ability to anticipate and respond to health threats, including those intensified by climate change, by investing in surveillance, laboratory systems and emergency preparedness (Enabel, 2024b).

Fight against climate-related diseases

Climate change affects disease patterns: vector-borne diseases spread rapidly (malaria, dengue fever), water-borne diseases become uncontrollable (cholera, diarrhoea), stunted growth and malnutrition as well as mental disorders (stress, eco-anxiety, depression, violence and suicide) are on the rise.

Enabel supports projects that strengthen local capacity for disease prevention, surveillance and response in vulnerable regions.

With funding from the Belgian government and the Gates Foundation, Enabel works on vector-borne climate-related diseases like malaria in Niger and Burundi whilst in other countries Enabel contributed to the fight against other zoonoses like Trypanosomiasis in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) or Ebola Virus Disease (Enabel, 2023a).

These efforts are guided by a One Health approach, recognising the interconnectedness of human, animal, and environmental health in tackling climate-related diseases. Enabel invests in innovation that strengthens the capacity of healthcare providers to better diagnose climate-sensitive diseases such as malaria, dengue, cholera, and diarrheal diseases. For example, it is using artificial intelligence to improve malaria diagnosis in Burundi and Niger (Enabel, 2024c).

Enabel projects in Mozambique and Tanzania address climate-driven water scarcity and contamination, which fuels waterborne diseases. By improving access to safe, clean water and sanitation, Enabel reduces climate-related health risks while easing the burden on women and youth who travel long distances for water. Water is also promoted as a socio-economic asset. Communities' resilience is strengthened thanks to sustainable supply and hygiene measures (Enabel, 2023b).

Finally, in Burkina Faso, Burundi, Niger and DRC, a multisectoral approach is developed to fight malnutrition, which severely affects physical growth and health of more than half of the under-five population.

Promotion of gender equality, sexual and reproductive health and rights

Climate change disrupts health systems and intensifies reproductive health risks, particularly affecting women and girls. Environmental shocks worsen pregnancy complications: preterm birth, stillbirth, low birth weight and maternal bleeding, while displacement and resource scarcity create barriers to essential maternal health services, increase risks of sexual and gender-based violence, and limit family planning access.

Enabel addresses these challenges by integrating sexual and reproductive health and rights in climate and health programmes, strengthening health systems to ensure continued care. In Guinea, Senegal, Burkina Faso, DRC and Benin, Enabel builds climate-resilient maternal health systems through improved emergency transport, supply chain security for contraceptives and medical supplies, and community-based services that reach women during climate emergencies. Our actions in Tanzania and Mozambique demonstrate how climate adaptation strategies that prioritise universal access to family planning and maternal health care create more resilient communities while advancing gender equality and reproductive rights.

Promotion of healthier and more sustainable lifestyles

Enabel supports the use of clean energy and reduced pressure on natural ecosystems through locally adapted solutions. Enabel indirectly contributes to lower greenhouse gas emissions by promoting clean cooking solutions and the energy recovery from organic waste. In Côte d'Ivoire, the focus is on strengthening sustainable value chains for clean cooking and valorising biomass from agricultural and forestry processing. In Senegal and Burkina Faso, efficient charcoal production technologies, improved cooking stoves and alternative fuels like biogas and briquettes are being introduced to reduce pressure on forest ecosystems (Enabel, 2022).

Enabel supports inclusive urban planning and climate-responsive design to improve living conditions and health such as community-based planning enhancing access to waste management services and encouraging communities to reclaim public space for green, healthy neighbourhoods (Enabel, 2024d & 2024e). Urban greening initiatives and green corridors contribute to cooling cities and reducing heat-related illnesses. Enabel also fosters the shift to low-carbon transport through support to electric mobility in Tanzania, Uganda, Burundi thereby reducing air pollution while promoting healthier urban environments (Enabel, 2025).

Enabel also mobilises citizen science and urban innovation. It fosters co-creation of solutions with community residents through innovative citizen participation approaches, such as urban living labs (Tanzania). These participatory methods empower residents to identify local challenges and test solutions supporting the development of climate-neutral, liveable, and healthy cities.

Health integration into climate policies

Enabel supports partner countries in integrating health into national climate policies, including Nationally Determined Contributions, National Adaptation Plans, and Health National Adaptation Plans. By promoting collaboration between health, finance and environment ministries, Enabel advocates for health to be considered in decision-making. Through partnerships, namely through its involvement with the Coalition of Finance Ministers for Climate Action, Enabel strengthens the role of health in climate governance.

By leveraging its expertise, Enabel can channel climate finance to strengthen health systems, combat climate-related diseases and enhance resilience in vulnerable communities.

Enabel is a key implementing partner for major funds, including the Green Climate Fund, aiming to operationalise the climate-health nexus. By contributing to health-focused climate initiatives under international climate finance and bilateral frameworks, Enabel can align its technical expertise with donor priorities. This allows to bridge the gap between global climate commitments and health actions at the local level.

Recommendations

- 1. Integrate the Climate-Health Nexus as a priority in all programmes.** Simple and innovative actions on infrastructure, early warning systems (for heatwaves and diseases), climate sensitive supply chains, use of renewable energy and health professionals can be implemented in all programmes, with high impact on climate adaptation and mitigation. A One Health approach that recognises the links between human, animal, and environmental health is key. Health professionals should be strong advocates for climate-smart actions and should systematically build climate-resilient health systems.
- 2. Strengthen the national policy-making process through the double anchorage.** Engaging both in local communities and national ministries allows aligning policy and practice. This double anchorage ensures that climate health policies are evidence-based and applicable, and allows local experiences to influence national adaptation strategies in the domain of health, while ensuring that top-down policies have the support of communities. The approach accelerates policy development, reduces implementation gaps and creates sustainable change by anchoring climate-health actions at both governance levels simultaneously.
- 3. Foster inclusive, multi-stakeholder collaboration.** Accelerated collaboration among development agencies,

national governments, private sector actors and communities is essential. Leveraging Enabel's expertise and networks to strengthen these partnerships enhances coordinated action, shared responsibility and long-term resilience in the face of climate-health challenges.

- 4. Redirect climate finance to include empowerment of local health systems.** Current climate financing often bypasses local health systems, despite their critical role in climate adaptation. Direct, multi-year funding should be channelled to local health systems in vulnerable areas, supported by simplified procedures, efficient debt swaps and blended financing instruments to ensure that resources reach frontline health workers and local communities to implement contextually appropriate solutions.

Conclusion

The climate-health emergency demands coordinated, multisectoral and people-centred responses. By implementing local gender-responsive and inclusive climate strategies through the double anchorage approach, Enabel plays a key role in bridging the gap between global climate goals and tangible local health outcomes. Enabel is committed to respectful partnerships, evidence-based action and long-term impact in safeguarding the health and well-being of vulnerable communities and people.

Climate change & health impacts

Climate hazards & risk pathways



Extreme heat



Extreme weather



Changed vector distribution



Water scarcity



Sea level rise



Food safety

Health impacts

Heat-related illness & death

Reproductive health and gender based violence

Mental health disorders

Infectious diseases

Undernutrition & food insecurity

Waterborne illnesses

Health system impacts

Increased healthcare demand

Healthcare offer disrupted

Health inequity worsens

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