

PRESS RELEASE
New Delhi, June 27th, 2024

Heat Action Plans of most cities are not designed for implementation, says iFOREST.

- iFOREST assessed Heat Action Plans (HAPs) of 14 cities and districts, including a detailed study of Delhi, to assess their effectiveness.
- The study finds that HAPs are not tailored to local conditions. They contain general information and broad recommendations.
- None of the HAPs have developed specific action plans for hotspots and vulnerable populations.
- No city has analysed the new and additional infrastructure, human resources and finance required to implement HAPs.
- HAPs also do not have financial or legal backing.
- iFOREST has recommended a wholesale change in approach to developing HAPs, including a revision in the guidelines developed by the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA).
- It has recommended the inclusion of heat waves as a natural disaster under the Disaster Management Act, 2005.
- It has also recommended revising the definition of heat waves based on "Feels like" temperature.

New Delhi, June 27, 2024: The International Forum for Environment, Sustainability and Technology (iFOREST), a prominent environmental think tank, released its assessment on the effectiveness of Heat Action Plans (HAPs) in dealing with this year's unprecedented heat crisis. The assessment also focuses on Delhi, which has experienced a record heatwave season.

The assessment was released at a webinar, "Why Heat Action Plans Failed to Save Lives? A Case Study of Delhi,". It provided insights from a comprehensive assessment of several city and district Heat Action Plans (HAPs) to determine whether the current framework is sufficient for adapting to and mitigating heat risk.

The study assessing nine city and five district HAPs identified major gaps in the current framework, made key recommendations, and introduced a new Heat and Cooling Action Plan (HCAP) framework to solve the dual challenges of extreme temperatures and rising cooling demand in Indian cities.

Speaking at the occasion, Dr Chandra Bhushan, President and CEO of iFOREST, said, "We need a wholesale change in approach to developing Heat Action Plans. While many cities have made noteworthy progress, the fact is that most HAPs are unimplementable. They lack financial and legal backing, as well as an implementation plan."

A. Key Findings of the Study

(1) On Heat Action Plans

- HAPs are not tailored to local conditions. They contain general information and broad recommendations. For instance, most HAPs do not undertake any heat impact assessment to evaluate the cascading impact of heat stress on sectors such as energy and power supply, water supply, public transport, education, agriculture, and animal husbandry, among others, which can further significantly impact human health and livelihoods.
- Cities face a greater risk from heat stress due to the urban heat island (UHI) effect, which makes certain urban areas warmer than their surroundings. Therefore, city HAPs must conduct spatial vulnerability analysis to understand the disproportionate impact of the UHI effect and identify heat hotspots in order to develop effective mitigation measures. However, none of the HAPs have developed a specific action plan for hotspots and vulnerable populations.
- No city has done an analysis of the new and additional infrastructure, human resources and finance required to implement HAPs.
- Most HAPs did not mention funding mechanisms and sought the departments to self-allocate resources from existing budgets. Since HAPs contain expensive structural investments and expansions of human resource capacity, financing shortfalls often lead to non-implementation.

(2) In Delhi's HAP

- While other cities have prepared HAPs since 2013, Delhi notified its first HAP only in 2023 – a decade later. It has notified its latest HAP at the beginning of the heat wave season (April, 2024).
- Delhi's HAP has yet to develop a specific action plan for hotspots or vulnerable populations.
- Departments were unprepared (lacked capacity) to deal with such high-intensity heat waves.
- The first big meeting by the Delhi government was held just a week back, at the tail-end of the heat wave season.
- The bottom line is that the state government and the municipalities were completely unprepared.

B. Recommendations

- The research highlighted the need to notify heat waves as a national disaster and include them under the Disaster Management Act, 2005, to provide the national, state, and local governments with a comprehensive legal framework and finances to better manage the disaster.

- The Indian Meteorological Department's (IMD) current criteria for defining heat waves is limiting. Heat waves should be declared based on "Feels like" temperature, considering other important factors, such as humidity and warm nights, which are crucial in assessing heat discomfort besides the maximum temperature.
- With temperatures soaring to an unprecedented level, cooling has become a necessity rather than a privilege. To address this dual challenge, iFOREST proposed a new Heat and cooling action plan (HCAP) framework at the city level.
- NDMA should revise HAP guidelines to make it more specific and actionable.
- All ULBs should be encouraged to develop HCAP; currently, less than 2.5% of ULBs have HAPs.
- Current HAPs need to be improved and cities should re-do their HAPs to reflect the ground realities and realistically estimate impact and resource requirements.

Speaking at the occasion, Dr Chandra Bhushan said, "Heat waves will increase across the country. Most forecasts indicate that with increasing global warming, heat waves will have a devastating impact on health, the economy, and livelihoods. We must prepare for this eventuality as countries are not doing enough to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and hence global warming. Developing a comprehensive HAP will aide in saving lives and livelihoods."

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