Heat Action Plans in India

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Heat Action Plans in India: Gaps and Challenges

Context

With rising **extreme heat events** due to climate change, **Heat Action Plans (HAPs)** are crucial for protecting vulnerable populations. However, a recent study reveals that most **Indian cities lack effective long-term strategies**, making them ill-prepared for future heat risks.

Background

- The study, **"Is India Ready for a Warming World?"**, was conducted by the **Sustainable Futures Collaborative (SFC)**, a New Delhi-based research organization.
- It analyzed HAP implementation for **11% of India's urban population** across **nine high-risk cities**.

What is a Heat Action Plan (HAP)?

- A **preparedness and early warning system** for extreme heat events.
- Aims to **reduce heat-related deaths and illnesses** by improving coordination, public awareness, and emergency response.
- Includes **short-term measures** (immediate relief) and **long-term strategies** (urban planning, infrastructure upgrades).

Current Government Initiatives

- The **National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA)**, in collaboration with state governments, has implemented HAPs in **23 heatwave-prone states**.

- According to a **Lok Sabha response**:
    - **Heatstroke deaths increased from 530 (2020) to 730 (2022)**.
    - In **2024**, reported cases dropped to **269 suspected deaths and 161 confirmed deaths**.

Study Methodology

- **Selection of Cities:** Cities with **over 1 million population** (2011 Census) and **high projected heat index values**.
- **Cities Analyzed: Bengaluru, Delhi, Faridabad, Gwalior, Kota, Ludhiana, Meerut, Mumbai, and Surat**.
- **Interviews Conducted:** Government officials from **disaster management, health, urban planning, and labour departments**.

Key Findings

1. Short-Term Measures Exist, But No Long-Term Vision

- Emergency actions like **drinking water availability** and **adjusted work schedules** are in place.
- Comprehensive long-term strategies are missing, including:
    - **Cooling solutions** for vulnerable workers and households.
    - **Insurance coverage** for heat-induced work losses.
    - **Fire management services** for heat waves.
    - **Electricity grid improvements** to ensure reliable transmission and distribution.

2. Poorly Targeted Urban Interventions

- **Green cover and open spaces expanded**, but without **focusing on high-risk populations**.
- Lack of **integrated urban planning** to reduce heat exposure in densely populated areas.

3. Health-Focused Approach, But Prevention Lags

- HAPs **prioritize healthcare preparedness** (hospitals, emergency response) over **preventive strategies**.
- **More funding** is required to **implement long-term actions** effectively.

Conclusion

- **Extreme heat is a growing climate risk** in India, demanding **stronger policy action**.
- **Urban resilience planning** must focus on **infrastructure, public awareness, and funding**.
- **HAPs should integrate environmental, health, and economic solutions** to ensure sustainable heat adaptation.