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PERSPECTIVE

Navigating the Climate Crisis: Q&A with Dr. Deepshikha Sharma

Deepshikha Sharma shares insights on the future of PERCC and her plans for leading the initiative's climate-induced migration work.



Credit: Jitendra Raj Bajracharya/ICIMOD.

June 5, 2024

This [World Environment Day](#), we highlight the impactful work of Deepshikha Sharma, Director of Climate Sciences to [Population Council Consulting Pvt. Ltd.](#)

Sharma has more than a decade of experience in climate change mitigation, public health, and environmental science policy. She also plays a key role in the Population Council's Population, Environmental Risks, and the Climate Crisis ([PERCC](#)) initiative to build research and partnerships in India and across the region.

In this interview, Sharma shares insights on her career, the future of PERCC, and the innovative solutions her team is using to investigate climate-induced migration and more.

(The interview has been edited for ease of reading.)

How does the PERCC initiative pursue justice in the face of the climate crisis?

PERCC prioritizes an intergenerational, environmental, and global justice framework, built into the initiative's strategic objectives. These objectives inform our approach to research and adaptation solutions. Our approach recognizes that the impact of climate change is disproportionate, affecting marginalized communities the most whereas they contribute the least to the problem.

First, PERCC's work around **health research** includes understanding of the biological mechanisms and pathways between climate hazards and health outcomes. This understanding will lead to designing the Social and Behaviour Change (SBC) interventions along with effective research solutions.

Next, PERCC creates space for **youth in leading the climate research**. This will develop inclusive life skills and education curricula for adolescents, especially girls, strengthening the voices of the future generation.

Additionally, PERCC's third strategic objective outlines the need to **design datasets and predictive models** that helps in identifying the climate risk hotspots and equitable delivery of climate adaptation policy that directly supports the most vulnerable.

How does the PERCC initiative support communities at the frontlines of the climate crisis?

I would like to share an example of our work in this context. The REACH (Research, Evidence and Analysis on Climate and Health) project investigates the connections between climate hazards and health outcomes, with a focus on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), nutrition, and mental health. For example, we identified risks to maternal health posed by saline drinking water in the coastal zone of Bangladesh. Our work revealed that [saline drinking water might be connected to pre-eclampsia and eclampsia](#), due to increased salinity from rising sea-levels caused by the climate crisis. We have shared the situation with the communities and empowered them to demand inclusive and equitable climate policies, using the power of data.

In the coming years, we will be prioritizing our work around the intersections of climate, health, young people, and urbanization. We will generate more evidence on the linkage between climate events and health, including scaling evidence-based solutions for salinity to more countries with coastal communities like we did in Bangladesh, as well as addressing nutrition and mental health. We will also build on the Council's foundational work around girls' empowerment by equipping them with green skills, creating a cadre of young climate leaders, and addressing migration, through a program called GREEN (The Girls' Resilience, Education, Empowerment, and NEEDS). Further, we will step up our work in the urban space to generate accurate data and design effective tools to understand the hotspots of vulnerability to contribute towards development and deployment of inclusive urban adaptation solutions.

How has your professional background led you to PERCC and researching the connections between the climate crisis and health?

Having worked with various bilateral, unilateral and government organizations in India and abroad for the last 15 years, in the field of environment and climate change, has enabled me to build the

strategy for PERCC and initiate the research connections. My contribution includes development of organizational strategy on climate change and designing action plans to achieve the objectives.

My past engagement in multiple projects funded by United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP); Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office's (FCDO); Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI); The World Bank, Asian Development Bank etc. enabled me to add value to the team. I have also worked on projects including Nordic Profiling and Branding in India with context to sustainable cities in India. I have also contributed to the current Indo-Danish Green Strategic Partnership and worked in concept development and MoU for Urban Living Lab in India.

My last engagement with International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) has shaped my passion for advancing climate resilience and promoting sustainable development in the Hindu-Kush Himalaya region and beyond.

At present, I am leading a comprehensive study on climate-induced migration in India that will help us to contextualize the complex dynamics of migration with gender and 'Just Energy Transition' lenses. Furthermore, the learning from more than 20 publications and research articles that I have authored adds to the collective.

What areas of research are you looking forward to conducting under PERCC? What impacts are you hoping to accomplish in your new role as PERCC co-lead?

We realize that impactful work requires partnership and collaboration. We plan to institutionalize the PERCC networking platform by building the capacity of 100+ local partners across Asia and Africa on evidence collection, analysis and action. We will also strengthen our work in urban areas as ¾ of the world population is expected to live in cities by 2050. Further understanding migration pattern and triggers; hotspots of vulnerable populations; demographic modelling; and creating coalitions for action are one of our core foci. In addition, we will explore renewable energy use for climate adaptation and building resilience in communities, particularly in farming systems and Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) to ensure productive end-use of renewable energy.

I would like to undertake research on environmental justice and equity; climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies; circular economy and waste management; health impact of climate and environment changes for various intersections; climate policy and governance.

One project which I am very excited about is [IMPACTS](#) (Integrated Models of People and Climate Across Time and Space) as it brings to light who, and where is most affected by the climate crisis. Demographic projections are critical in designing a suitable climate action plan by predicting future energy and end-use emissions, land use patterns, and identify hotspots of climate risk. This work is also expected to drive dialogue at the policy level.

What is innovative about your focus area within climate research?

There are a lot of unanswered questions in climate research. The complexities of climate change need to be decoded to design the mitigation and adaptation strategies to build resilience. The role of key players and their inter-connectedness and dependencies are important to understand. We are engaging climate data analytics and machine learning which will help us extract meaningful

insights at the intersections of climate change with our other work areas at the Council in [SRHR](#), the [GIRL Center](#), etc.

What is essential for the public to know about the future of the climate crisis and climate-induced migration?

Highlighting how climate change affects food security, public health (physical and mental), livelihoods especially during natural disasters, and economic opportunities in specific regions can help mobilize action.

While migration is recognized as an important outcome of climate crisis, community acceptance of this is very low, and impacts of climate change are seen in a fragmented manner.

Governments, international organizations, and civil societies increasingly recognize the link between environmental degradation, extreme and prolonged adverse weather conditions, and displacement. These displacements are more internal than cross-border, often moving from rural to urban areas or from high-risk to safer regions, with some cross-border migrations driven by other factors such as conflict, poverty, lack of opportunity, etc.

It's important to recognize that each one of us can contribute in small yet significant ways to address the climate crisis. By acknowledging our collective role, we can better cope with, and mitigate the impacts of climate change. Understanding how we can support those most affected by climate change is crucial. Together, we can make a difference.

This brings forth the issue of agency – agency to act. By raising public awareness, fostering dialogue, and empowering communities to take action, we can build momentum to address the climate crisis and its impacts on migration, ultimately working towards a more sustainable and resilient future for all.