

Environmental Health

INTRODUCTION

The civil war resulted in a collapse of the national health care system. The absence of financial revenues and failure of numerous national government institutions left the Ministry of Health with a miniscule budget and unable to maintain the already deteriorating health care clinics and hospitals.

The impact of the civil war continues to be felt by rural and urban populations. These visible symptoms continue to stress the country's relief services and economic growth. Sprawling slums in the capital, uncontrolled refugee camps, absence of waste treatment system's and polluted waterways are common in areas with high population density.

Environmental health issues are some of the most visible symptoms of the challenges facing Nimpala as health and development statistics continue to quantify the massive impact of the war and stalled development process on the quality of life of most of the Nimpalan population.

The UN team conducted a desk review of available information on urban and environmental health issues, despite scarce data from the Northern border regions and Eastern portions of the country. Data was generally more available in the Western zones. Site visits were conducted in all regions of the country with particular attention in the Northern border regions, IDP camps, and the capital city and industrial cities in the West.

URBAN CONCERNS

The civil war caused displacement and natural environment degradation, sharply increasing rural-urban migration. Western towns in Nimpala, due to historical legacy of the British and location on the major river, are the site of limited industrial production. In response to these industrial centers and job opportunities, there has been a steady and steep increase in the capital's population and rapid growth of slum areas. This results in massive urban sprawl and, in turn, increased risk to health, environment and social problems. The UN Team observed slums and informal settlements on the outskirts of every town they visited.

The collapse of the urban planning institutions during the civil war and ongoing sporadic violence diminishes the capacity of the major cities sewage treatment plans. The capital has started reporting a serious problem with raw sewage flowing directly into the Western river, causing increased reports of waterborne diseases in the city and downstream from communities dependent on the river for survival.

WATER BORNE ILLNESSES

Waterborne diseases are reported to be roughly 75% of the reported health problems in the country. These reported occurrences fluctuate seasonally with the greatest concern during the beginning of the wet season. The main concerns are over cholera, dysentery, hepatitis A and a range of parasitic infections like schistosomiasis. Stagnant water and collection sites in cities have also increased due to the war and raise concerns about increasing instances of malaria. Other tropical diseases include river blindness and guinea worm.

There has been very limited monitoring of water quality for bacterial contamination. This limited monitoring has made policy responses difficult. The Northern region of Nimpala has over 60% of the world's reported cases of guinea worm but the UN Team believes that number is underestimating the actual cases.

In 2002, a major outbreak of cholera was reported the Northern region, with cases in all of the major cities. A total number of victims reported by WHO was over 27,000 with over 1,120 deaths. The WHO team reported that water and sanitation problems are so severe that there is no way to pinpoint a single source.

WASTE MANAGEMENT

Solid waste management in Nimpala is uncoordinated and lacks national planning. Organized garbage collection is only found in wealthy neighborhoods through private providers who later dump directly into open, unlined and unmonitored landfills. This is a significant concern for contaminating nearby groundwater resources.

AIR POLLUTION

There are no systematic stations for data collection on air quality in Nimpala. Increased monitoring is required to the team to generate specific recommendations.