

## **ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES AND CHILDREN HEALTH IN ARMENIA**

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Armenia is one of South Caucasian Republics with 3.5 million populations. Armenia is a mountainous country characterized with cold winters and hot summers, distinguished by droughts and shortage of water and so is especially vulnerable to the unfavorable consequences of the forecasted global climate change.

The sever and frequent droughts of last 2-3 years resulted in considerable loss in water balance in the rivers by 40-50%. The air temperature increased by 2.0-2.6°C, which serves an example of the forecasted future climate for Armenia. Such a tendency can have severe consequences on the agriculture and food provision of the republic. At the same time this forecast may become a model to evaluate the health security of children, who are more affected to the climatic changes.

Human beings, like all other species, are usually adapted to the climate in which they live. But increase of temperature and decrease of precipitation can affect on human health both directly and indirectly creating favorable conditions for reproduction and development of pathogenic organisms, insect vectors, carriers of infection diseases, increase of their number and area.

The consequences of ozone layer depletion are also a serious problem. Armenia having a high mountainous location is under high ultraviolet radiation. In the result of ozone layer depletion the population becomes more vulnerable. Children are more affected to the ultraviolet radiation, as they spend more time outdoors and due to their age and behavior, they are more vulnerable ultraviolet radiation.

Studies revealed that human health in Armenia is vulnerable to some investigated group of illnesses.

The analysis of results of malaria has shown the possibility of increase in number and significant expansion of the area of the infection distribution.

Transition to market economy is accompanied with breakdown of the social security services and health provision. The previous sanitary hygienic services are weakened and population must more rely on modern preventive measures, that is why the awareness rising and education of population is one of urgent problem.

Our NGO “Khazer” is building its activities mainly in the regions far from the main cities where the health institutions are abandoned. We have published posters, video films and simple brochures (particularly for pupils) popularly describing the climate change threat, ozone layer depletion, deforestation, using of persistent organic pollutants and genetically modified organisms, fresh water pollution problems, basic hygienic norms, the first symptoms, which must alert to apply to the hospital. Such information materials and measures are very useful in far regions as there is lack of information.

The awareness rising campaigns of course are important but drastic decline of social security level in our countries takes away a lot of child lives and this must be alarm to decision makers.

Without increasing the role of public participation, public awareness, even a strict legislation will not be able to provide the effective protection of children's health. As the Government is unable to regularly implement public awareness raising programs, we think that in such situation the role of NGO is indispensable.

Provision of updated and reliable information and basic knowledge about the sustainable development among parents and people in general is also important. It must become one of the main targets of the educational system as a whole, including the structures of the formal and informal education and all levels from the preschool age till the higher education and adults education.



