

Climate Change, Everyday Survival and Urban Health

Results of a Qualitative Dipstick from Urban India

Natasha Singh, Armaan Choudhary, Diksha Singhal, Nisha Sharma, Dr. Shilpa Ravi*, Sneha Palit, Ashwin Desmukh

Context

- Climate change is an immediate and growing urban health concern in India. 2024 was India's warmest year on record, with 3,200+ deaths from heatwaves, floods, and lightning — and cities may see 2x the heatwave and heavy-rain days by 2030.
- Adaptation measures — Heat Action Plans (250+ across 23 states, including Thane), disease surveillance (Surat), flood warning systems (Chennai) — exist in parts of urban India but their reach and effectiveness in underserved and informal settlements remain less understood.
- Existing research rarely captures how communities and frontline workers experience, respond to, and cope with climate-related health risks.

Objective: To document lived experiences and understand how vulnerable communities and frontline health workers respond to climate-related health risks.

Methodology

- Qualitative dipstick study in select urban poor settlements of Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra, India (Dec 2025 – Jan 2026).
- Guided by the IPCC vulnerability framework: exposure, sensitivity, adaptive capacity and health system preparedness.
- 21 small group discussions (5–8 participants each) with community members and 12 interviews with frontline health workers.
- Participants: 140 community members (mixed groups, elderly/chronic illness, pregnant & lactating women, outdoor workers) and 12 frontline health workers.
- Thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and context-specific experiences.

21

Small group discussions · 140 participants

12

Frontline health worker interviews

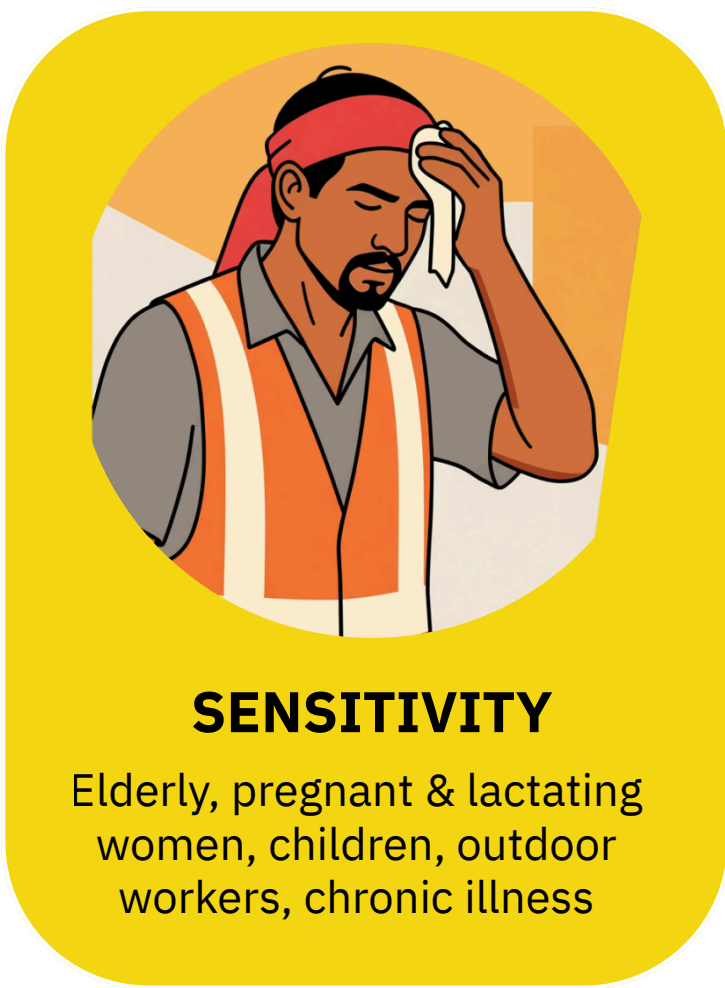
2

States: Uttar Pradesh & Maharashtra



EXPOSURE

Heat, erratic rain, floods, water scarcity



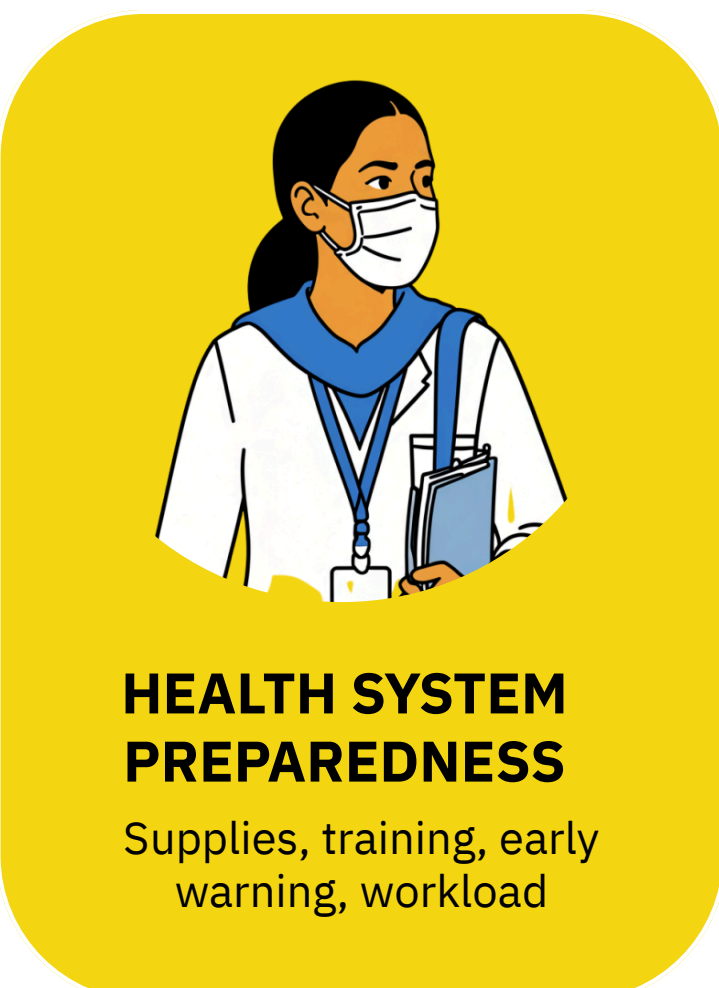
SENSITIVITY

Elderly, pregnant & lactating women, children, outdoor workers, chronic illness



ADAPTIVE CAPACITY

Income, housing, basic infrastructure, informal coping



HEALTH SYSTEM PREPAREDNESS

Supplies, training, early warning, workload

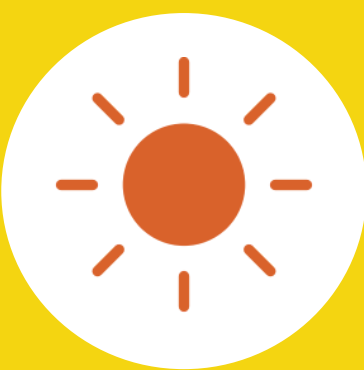
CLIMATE-HEALTH VULNERABILITY OF THE URBAN POOR

Findings

1. LIVED EXPERIENCES

Across all sites, communities reported rising heat, erratic rainfall, flooding, water scarcity and growing seasonal unpredictability, and linked these to a wide range of health problems

1. CLIMATE STRESSORS REPORTED



Rising heat



Erratic rainfall



Flooding



Water scarcity

2. PRESSURE ON EVERYDAY SURVIVAL

- Work in extreme heat • Sewage enters homes in floods
- Cooking in unbearable heat • Water is bought in summer where supply is absent
- During rains, waterlogging on roads makes it difficult to commute to work.

3. HEALTH EFFECTS DESCRIBED

- Dehydration • Fever • Heat exhaustion • Respiratory illness • Skin infections • Dengue • Diarrhoeal diseases
- Worsening chronic conditions

2. COPING & RESPONSE

Coping was household-level, informal and reactive, and often insufficient in prolonged heat or floods. Frontline workers reported rising workload and gaps in supplies of medicines, climate health training and early warning.

WHAT DO COMMUNITIES DO?

- More water, ORS and homemade drinks (buttermilk, sattv, lemon water, curd) to prevent dehydration
- Wet cloths, thermocol roofing, resting in shade
- Adjusting work hours, where the job allows it
- Home fixes: wet cloths on windows, thermocol roofing, exhaust fans, bed nets; some temporarily move to villages

• Informal • individual • insufficient

WHAT FRONTLINE WORKERS FACE?

- Rising diarrhoea & heat illness in summer; dengue & malaria in monsoon
- Supply gaps: one worker reported only 12–13 ORS sachets for 1,000 homes
- No structured training on climate-health risks
- No early warning before heat or heavy rain

Systems stretched, under-equipped

Floods and heat inside the home
Women spoke of sewage water entering their homes during floods, and of cooking in unbearable heat.

“Rozi ke liye kaam karna padta hai.”
(We must keep working to survive.)
Outdoor workers described collapsing at construction sites, yet continuing to work despite extreme heat.



Learn more about our work at Samyak

