



Save Our Children - Climate Change Emergency - Air Pollution Minutes

“Save Our Children”

Webinar | 07 March 2024

Phuro Innovations hosted the webinar “Unveil Delhi – Save Our Children” on 7th March 2024 to give voice to children, children of New Delhi who cannot speak for themselves and are unknowingly breathing toxic /hazardous air every year. The webinar was hosted to minute the request raised to add "eradicating Delhi Air Pollution" as a political agenda for General Election. The discussion between Ms. Rachna Sharma, the President and Founder – Phuro Innovations; and Dr. Naveen Gupta, MBBS, MD - Paediatrics, DNB – Neonatology brought into focus the impact of high AQI levels on children and to be mothers of Delhi and called for a collective and immediate action to bring AQI levels in healthy range.



Rachna Sharma

President & Founder - Phuro Innovations

Ms. Sharma began on a note that what we see in Delhi is one of the manifestations of climate change which is a man-made as well as a natural problem. Man made problems resulting from the factors such as transportation, household consumption, stubble burning, open waste burning, firecrackers and burning of effigies etc., while seasonal winds and the cycle of harvest are natural. She

opines that when we have problems of this serious magnitude, then we need a solution that is sustainable and long term. Short term planning would not be sustainable, and this needs complete change.

Being a mother herself, what moved her was when she herself had to be nebulized and she vomited with dizziness and disorientation post exposure to hazardous air during one of the winter days. She also noted that her children were on nebulizers and medicines for more than three months on and off. That's when she was moved that if an adult cannot tolerate this kind of air, how can children, especially the ones not born and newborns can, who cannot even express what is happening to them. Post discussing to a lot of mothers, she realized that they were not even aware that it was this dangerous for them. Hence, she took a resolve to educate them to save their children. We are talking about increasing the life span of a human being, how can that happen if we are bringing in children where they can't breathe.

She also underpinned that as parents, and as elders, it is our duty to show some leadership and initiative and talk to the government and sensitize them about this problem which is impacting our children. Referring to Bhopal Gas Tragedy, she reminded everyone of its impact such as chronic illnesses, children born with disabilities and underdeveloped minds having neurological and lung issues. She also made an attempt to remind people of the horrific effects of Chernobyl tragedy in 1984 and referred to the irresponsible acts of government and



industrialists to not to listen to experts and the people who were time and again warning them with reports for the need of maintenance. Highlighting the causes and repercussions of the two cases, she pin-pointed the need of immediate actions to bring down AQI in Delhi.

Referring to the COVID times, she mentioned that COVID virus impacted everyone irrespective of wealth, religion, caste, or creed. The endeavour to manoeuvre through COVID united everyone. She requested Delhiites to learn from COVID times and called for everyone to unite again because during COVID, people just did not rely on the government or any external agency but we as people the courage to come together for a collective action whether it be funeral services or creating factories to meet the demands for masks or PPP kits. Ms. Sharma then requested Delhiites to request the political parties to solve their problem in exchange of their vote.

Ms. Sharma further pointed out 2024 General Elections as a golden opportunity as during this time the government has time and the willingness to engage with the citizens directly, and they come to visit their constituencies, our doorsteps seeking votes. We must request for safety from air pollution.

She further underlined that we cannot take 2030 or 2035 as the goal to end the menace of Delhi Air Pollution, since this is about becoming the voice of those who cannot speak for themselves, whether those are newborn kids, or the unborns, or the children going to school. It is our responsibility as parents, and as leaders in different walks of life, to become the voice of change. We must not underestimate ourselves as voters and should ask the election candidates coming to our doors for fresh air, and we need to be very careful when we choose government this time, whether that is central government, or the Delhi government.

Pointing towards the lack of data on the impact of high AQI levels, she said that it is because our country lacks institutions and research centres.

She ended by sharing that Phuro Innovations has created a Model City New Delhi plan and shown that via a flow chart, as to how the Delhi AQI can be brought down while adopting the bigger plan. Most of these documents have been shared with Prime Minister, Finance Minister, and Lieutenant Governor of Delhi.



Dr. Naveen Gupta

MBBS, MD - Pediatrics, DNB – Neonatology

Dr. Gupta started by responding to the query of the impact of particulate matter on lungs especially in children. He mentioned that the AQI levels in winter months wavering between 500-600 acts as a trigger for the kids who are already at the risk of asthma or the ones who already have asthma. It becomes difficult for them to breathe, and normal medications do not usually work for infections in children. He also underscored the fact that as per various international organisations such as UNICEF, WHO and Indian agencies; high AQI starts impacting the children in



the womb itself. The pollutants inhaled by the mother are transmitted to the child through placenta and it can lead to problems in delivery, increased risk of miscarriages and prematurity; coupled with lesser birth weight and growth restriction.

He cited four reasons for such vulnerability in babies. Firstly, since their immune system is weak, hence they are at a higher risk. Secondly, he mentioned that is that babies breathe at a very fast rate as compared to an adult because of which they inhale more air as compared to adults and hence more pollutants. Thirdly, since the height of babies is shorter than adults, many of the particulate matters tend to gravitate and are found in more density near the ground surface. This results in the increased inhalation of pollutants by babies. And fourthly, babies breathe by mouth which increases the risk of pollutants moving to other organs apart from lungs.

He further pointed out that air pollutants increase the risk of myocardial infection, which means that 4-5% of risk of heart attack is attributed only to air pollutants. Similarly, the air pollutants are also dangerous for brain and can result in dementia or parkinsonism, etc. In regard to kids, they are likely to have reduced brain growth due to air pollutants. He also mentioned since there is no formal research or study, we are unaware of the irreversible damage it can have to children's lungs, brain, and hearts.

When asked by Mrs. Sharma about the impact of high AQI levels on people without adequate resources to afford air purifiers or healthcare apparatuses, Dr. Gupta mentioned that the lesser fortunate ones including the kids going to schools and colleges knowingly or unknowingly are receiving more harm than people working inside offices or at homes. He further mentioned that for an AQI in the level of 500-600, the data is not available for its impact on life expectancy but as per existing data of the western world, an AQI of 100 to 150 is very bad and it decreases the life expectancy by ten years. He mentioned that that most of the governments panic world over with AQI going beyond 100, as this can lead to civil unrest or internal conflict due to frustration. He highlighted the need for an immediate action since the AQI ranges between 500 to 600 every four months in a year especially required for the people and children who do not have access to adequate healthcare facilities as our public infrastructure is not so well equipped to take care of such a larger load. As per him during such months sometimes there is no availability of the beds and hence it should be the top priority of the government to improve the quality of air as a preventive measure rather than talking about cure. The goal should be to prevent it by whatever means which is possible.