

India is not doing enough to build climate-resilient infrastructure

If there is one popular conversation starter across the world, it is the weather. Of late, however, the subject is no more a conversation starter, but often a conversation driver. Here's why: Last week, at least 124 people were killed and more than 300 others injured in five states as a dust storm and rain swept north and west India. This sudden downpour, which was caused by western disturbance, was followed up by a high-velocity dust storm in north India on Monday. In Uttarakhand, pilgrims have been stranded in Kedarnath after unseasonal snowfall. While the latest round of weather conditions may not be linked to climate change, there is no denying that extreme weather conditions — such as floods and drought in the same year — are becoming the new normal in India. There are more incidents of heat waves, which then help in the formation of local thunderstorms, and heavy rainfall within a short period of time, adversely affecting not just humans but also agriculture.

While a lot is being planned to ensure that the march of climate change is halted, the truth is that we are not investing enough in resilience and adaptability. "Climate change is an emerging concern for city governments across the world. Though, in India, climate change does not yet figure as one of the primary considerations while urban planning.

Besides this, even if a city has an environmental or sustainability goal outlined in its vision statement, it is often observed that it is not translated into the design elements of infrastructure and services," says a report by TERI, Planning Climate and Resilient Coastal Cities. It is critical to invest in climate-smart infrastructure --- water management, transport, and energy to name a few --- because they provide critical social and economic services not only to the city but also to regions beyond that. These need to be done now because changing them requires a significant amount of lead time to design and implement.

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