ujiyari

UPSC & STATE PCS CURRENT AFFAIRS · UJIYARI.COM

EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

# The Heat That Deepens Poverty: When a Hot Day Costs a Wage

DOWN TO EARTH

25 July 2026 · ENVIRONMENT · GS3 GS2

CURATED & WRITTEN BY

## Bharat Choudhary

UPSC Educator & Content Creator

linkedin.com/in/epicbharat

# The Heat That Deepens Poverty: When a Hot Day Costs a Wage

Down to Earth 25 July 2026 GS3 GS2

Every fact web-verified against primary sources

## THE LIFT LINE

A heatwave does not read a bank balance, but it might as well. The same afternoon that costs a salaried office worker a little discomfort costs a daily-wage labourer the whole day"s pay.

## WHY THIS EDITORIAL MATTERS FOR YOUR EXAM

Heat is usually framed as a disaster-management or health question. The sharper framing, and the one that lifts an answer, is heat as an equity and development crisis: a climate hazard whose burden is distributed by class, occupation and gender, not by temperature alone. This connects the environment paper to the social-justice paper in a single argument.

**GS Paper 3:** Climate change and its impacts, environmental degradation, and the economic cost of extreme weather.

**GS Paper 2:** Vulnerable sections of society, mechanisms for the protection of workers, and the development challenges posed by a hazard that widens inequality.

For **Prelims**, hold the specifics: the concept of **wet-bulb temperature** (a combined measure of heat and humidity; a sustained wet-bulb reading near **35 degrees Celsius** is the theoretical survivability limit for the human body); the ILO finding that heat stress could cost about **2.2 per cent of total working hours by 2030**, equal to roughly **80 million full-time jobs** and about **USD 2.4 trillion** a year; and that **South Asia** is among the regions expected to lose the most working hours. For **Mains**, carry the argument that heat converts a physical hazard into lost labour, lost income and deepened poverty, and that the response must be a social protection question, not only a weather-warning one.

## BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

A Greenpeace study on the Philippines, released in 2026, put a human face on a phenomenon that runs across South and Southeast Asia. Drawing on focus-group discussions with fishing communities in May 2026, it described a **climate-poverty trap**: rising heat shortens fishing hours, pushes fish into deeper and cooler water, cuts the catch, and erodes the income of households that were already poor. Of the country"s roughly

**2.3 million registered fisherfolk, about 1.9 million are small-scale**, with poverty rates near **27 to 31 per cent**, close to double the national average. Heat also shut schools, with **22 to 24 school days lost** to extreme heat in a single academic year.

The mechanics travel well beyond the Philippines. Across South Asia, the majority of the workforce is in the informal economy, much of it outdoors: farm labour, construction, street vending, brick kilns, fishing and waste picking. These are the workers with no cooled workplace, no paid heat leave and no wage if they stop. When the mercury climbs, they face a cruel choice between their health and their income.

## THE CORE ARGUMENT / ISSUE

The argument is that extreme heat is regressive. It taxes the poorest hardest, and because it strikes their labour and income directly, it does not merely coincide with poverty, it manufactures more of it.

### Heat is a tax on labour, paid by the poor

Heat lowers the productivity of physical work long before it becomes lethal. As wet-bulb temperature rises, the body must slow down to shed heat, so output per hour falls and the working day shrinks. For an outdoor worker paid by the day or the piece, that lost hour is a lost wage. The ILO estimate that work done in the sun, rather than the shade, sharply raises the productivity loss captures exactly the exposure that informal workers cannot escape.

### The trap that closes behind them

A single hot season is survivable; the danger is the ratchet. Lost wages force a household to skip meals, sell an asset or pull a child from school. Each of these lowers future earning capacity, so the next heat season lands on a household with even less cushion. Women, the elderly and children absorb a disproportionate share, because women often add unpaid domestic and care work in heat, and the elderly and very young are physiologically most at risk.

| DIMENSION | WELL-OFF WORKER | POOR OUTDOOR / INFORMAL WORKER |
|---|---|---|
| Workplace | Cooled indoor space | Open sun, no cooling |
| Pay if work stops | Salary continues | Wage lost that day |
| Heat protection | AC, hydration, rest | Little to none |
| Recovery buffer | Savings, insurance | Debt, asset sale, skipped meals |
| Net effect of heat | Discomfort | Deeper, compounding poverty |

### Heat Action Plans exist, but thin

India has responded with **Heat Action Plans (HAPs)**, now numbering in the hundreds across states and cities, built on early warning, public advisories and the Ahmedabad model that cut heat deaths. But most HAPs are strong on warning and weak on protecting income. They rarely carry dedicated financing, they seldom guarantee wage compensation or paid rest for outdoor workers, and enforcement of work-hour shifts is patchy. A warning that tells a labourer to avoid the afternoon sun, without replacing the lost wage, is advice the poor cannot afford to take.

## HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS (ANALYTICAL FRAME)

Use a **distributional-impact frame**: judge a hazard not by its average effect but by how it lands across the income ladder. Extreme heat is the textbook regressive hazard, its cost rising as income falls. The corollary is that adaptation must be equity-weighted. Cooling shelters, work-hour rules, hydration points and above all income support for lost work hours are not welfare extras; they are the difference between a HAP that saves lives and one that only issues warnings.

## THE DIAGRAM IN WORDS

```
Extreme heat and high wet-bulb -> outdoor and informal work slows or stops -> lost working hours and lost daily wages -> household skips meals, sells assets, pulls child from school -> lower future earning capacity -> deeper vulnerability to the next heat season -> break the loop with income-linked Heat Action Plans
```

## WAY FORWARD

1. **Finance Heat Action Plans properly.** Attach dedicated budgets and a clear disaster-finance line to HAPs, so cities can fund cooling shelters, water points and enforcement rather than relying on advisories alone.
2. **Compensate lost work hours.** Extend wage support, paid heat leave or work-guarantee wages (linked to schemes such as MGNREGA) when authorities order outdoor work to stop during extreme heat, so protection does not mean lost income.
3. **Redesign the working day.** Enforce shifted hours, mandatory rest-and-shade breaks and hydration at worksites for construction, farm and kiln labour, with occupational-safety rules that name heat as a workplace hazard.
4. **Target the most exposed.** Prioritise women, the elderly, children and outdoor informal workers in heat preparedness, and build local data on heat-related income loss so plans are judged by who they actually protect.

## PYQ LINKAGE AND PRACTICE

UPSC has asked about heat waves as a disaster and about the vulnerability of specific social groups to environmental change, and it consistently rewards answers that connect climate impact to social justice. The equity framing of heat is a ready bridge between the environment and governance papers.

**Practice question (Mains, GS3/GS2, 15 marks):** "Extreme heat is a regressive hazard that deepens poverty rather than merely coinciding with it." Discuss with reference to informal and outdoor workers, and evaluate whether India"s Heat Action Plans address this equity dimension. (250 words)

*Sources: Down To Earth, International Labour Organization*

Source: The Heat That Deepens Poverty: When a Hot Day Costs a Wage — Ujiyari.com | Free UPSC & State PCS Editorial Analysis

### RELATED DAILY ARTICLES

24 Jul India's Paddy Fields Emerge as Global Methane Hotspots

23 Jul DeepDATA: A Citizen-Science App to Map India's Deep-Sea...

22 Jul The Teesta Stage-VI Tunnel Disaster and Himalayan...

20 Jul Manasbal Lake, Reviving India's Deepest Freshwater Lake

CURATED & WRITTEN BY

# Bharat Choudhary

UPSC Educator & Content Creator

linkedin.com/in/epicbharat

📖 Read Full Article on Ujiyari →

https://ujiyari.com/editorials/2026/07/dte-heat-poverty-trap-climate-equity-2026/