

TAKING STOCK: SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS in **CLIMATE** COMMITMENTS

GLOBAL REVIEW SUMMARY

Sexual and reproductive health and rights and rights-based approaches in national climate documents: **A global review of Nationally Determined Contributions since 2020**



INTRODUCTION



Climate change has lasting impacts on human health and disproportionately affects women and girls.

Women, girls and marginalized groups who are largely dependent on natural resources for livelihoods are among the hardest hit by extreme weather patterns.

These weather patterns limit their access to food, water, shelter, education and access to essential health services, including those that address sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), gender-based violence (GBV) and preventing harmful practices such as child marriage and female genital mutilation. Emerging evidence shows the direct and indirect impacts of climate change on women, girls and marginalized groups and on their SRHR, as well as on GBV and harmful practices.

Heat, air pollution and climate-related diseases have an adverse impact on maternal and newborn health outcomes. In addition, climate-related loss of livelihoods increases poverty and food insecurity, which further negatively affect maternal and newborn health and well-being. The impacts of climate change often result in disruptions to essential services, while simultaneously creating conditions of vulnerability that increase the risk

of GBV and harmful practices such as child marriage and female genital mutilation. Indeed, there is strong evidence that during any crisis – whether a disaster, pandemic or conflict – GBV, including domestic violence, significantly increases. There is a need for region-specific interventions that address the underlying structures and vulnerabilities that, if left unaddressed, are likely to further worsen existing gender and health inequalities.

A Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) is a national climate plan, submitted by all signatories of the Paris Agreement, for reducing carbon emissions and adapting to and building resilience to climate change. As the NDCs support countries in a transformative shift towards a more sustainable future, they have the potential to create greater social inclusion and address the disproportionate impacts of climate change on women and girls.



PURPOSE OF THE STUDY



This study, commissioned by UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, in collaboration with Queen Mary University of London, aims to provide an overview of the integration of SRHR, GBV, harmful practices and related themes in 119 NDCs.

The findings provide an entry point for dialogue and action at the global, regional, national and local levels on the intersections between climate change, SRHR, GBV and harmful practices. This study also identifies

the necessary actions for a more meaningful inclusion of SRHR, GBV and harmful practices in climate policy and action, highlighting gaps, opportunities and best practices to allow for stronger language on the aspects of gender and climate negotiations at the global level.

METHODOLOGY

This review involved a systematic content analysis of the inclusion of SRHR, GBV, harmful practices and five related thematic areas (health, gender, population dynamics, young people, and human rights and participation) in NDCs submitted in or after 2020.

The review looked at the 119 NDCs that were submitted between 2020 and the time of completion of the analysis in August 2022. These include 19 reports from East and Southern Africa, 22 from West and Central Africa, 15 from the Arab States, 25 from the Asia and the Pacific, 26 from Latin America and the Caribbean and 12 from East Europe and Central Asia. To ensure the inclusion of perspectives from young people, UNFPA selected six young people who were members of either the UNFPA Joint Youth Working Group on SRHR and

Climate Change or YOUNGO, the youth constituency to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, and were experienced in the NDC or similar development processes. The young people selected are based in the five regions where UNFPA works. The selected young people produced a short report that provided their perspectives on the NDCs and the climate crisis in their respective regions as well as a reflection on how climate change affects SRHR.



FINDINGS



Sexual and reproductive health and rights, gender-based violence and harmful practices

The review of the 119 NDCs shows that 38 countries include issues related to SRHR, GBV and harmful practices. Globally, the most frequent references to aspects of SRHR are maternal and newborn health (23 countries) and GBV (15 countries). There is one reference to harmful practices (child marriage). Other SRHR issues are much less pronounced. However, NDCs do include references to sexual and reproductive health information and services (six countries), HIV and AIDS and sexually transmitted infections (three countries), sexual orientation, gender identity and expression (three countries), adolescent and youth SRHR (two countries), child marriage (one country), contraception (one country) and menopause (one country).

The analysis shows that, while some countries only refer to aspects of SRHR and GBV in their situational analysis, others acknowledge the impacts of climate change on SRHR and GBV without addressing specific programmes or interventions. Some countries go beyond references on impact to include a description of action and intervention related to the effects of climate change on SRHR and GBV, including through the description of programmes or the inclusion of budget lines. However, this is a small number of countries, and work is needed to support greater linkage of references to meaningful action.

In a previous review of 50 NDCs in 2021, there were six direct references to SRHR, GBV and harmful practices, one reference specifically to GBV and no reference to harmful practices.¹ Although this 2021 review was global, it primarily focused on countries in East and Southern Africa, in which only two countries had references to SRHR.

Examples of best practices include the following (see table 1):

- Benin demonstrates strengthening of its health system by including SRHR, through its measure to improve the quality and accessibility of health services for maternal and child health (Benin NDC, 2021: p. 60).



¹ McMullen, Heather, and others (2021). Sexual and reproductive health and rights in national climate policy: a review of 50 Nationally Determined Contribution documents. New York: UNFPA.

- Costa Rica recognizes the need to strengthen the evidence base on the impacts of climate change on vulnerable groups. It includes in its NDC measures to collect and analyse disaggregated data for the transgender community, women, young people, Indigenous peoples, people living with disabilities and older adults (Costa Rica NDC, 2020: p. 53). The NDC also includes an intervention to develop spaces for dialogue and participation for the transgender community and other vulnerable groups (Costa Rica NDC, 2020: p. 50).
- Jordan includes a measure in its NDC that targets women who have experienced some form of abuse. The intervention covers the most vulnerable groups in the country. It aims “to strengthen social protection systems to cope with climate change consequences and include poor, orphans, elderly, abused women and children” (Jordan NDC, 2021: p. 53).
- Seychelles highlights the importance of strengthening the evidence base on the impacts of climate change on SRHR. The NDC also stresses that climate-related vulnerability assessments and actions should consider sexual and reproductive health (Seychelles NDC, 2021: p. 36).

Health

A total of 117 NDCs integrate aspects of health, with 50 NDCs referencing mortality, 84 referencing climate and diseases, 104 referencing extreme weather events and/or disasters, and 72 emphasizing health surveillance.

Gender

The majority of NDCs (109) reference gender. Gender mainstreaming is the most common gender reference and is integrated to some degree in 93 NDCs, while 72 recognize women as a vulnerable group. Other significant references are female participation (64), women’s empowerment (58) and gender in relation to health (48).



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TABLE 1:
Nationally Determined Contributions cited in this brief

Country	Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) reviewed	Submission date	Original language
Benin	Updated NDC	12/10/2021	French
Costa Rica	Updated NDC	29/12/2020	Spanish
Jordan	Updated NDC	12/10/2021	English
Seychelles	Updated NDC	30/7/2021	English



Population dynamics, human mobility and urbanization

Most (108) NDCs describe some aspects of population dynamics, including references to population size, age structure, growth and distribution, migration and urbanization. Sixty-five NDCs make specific reference to migration, urbanization and human mobility.

Young people

A majority of the NDCs (100) mention youth to some degree, most commonly regarding youth participation (62), with most references in East and Southern Africa. Nearly half of NDCs (57) recognize youth as particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change. Other notable references to youth include education and/or awareness (42) and health (36).

Leaving no one behind: human rights, participation and consideration of vulnerable groups

Most NDCs (101) describe segments of their population as vulnerable to climate change and/or consider such groups in climate action, with 84 countries describing vulnerable groups as a key consideration for climate mitigation and adaptation strategies. One hundred NDCs acknowledge that some groups are more vulnerable to the effects of climate change.

Nearly all (115) countries mention some degree of participation of the population in climate policy or action, with all of them describing public participation in the NDC development and/or implementation. Most NDCs also note participation in relation to gender (71) and in sustainable local resource management (66). Around a third (41) of NDCs reference human rights, with the highest number of references in Latin America and the Caribbean.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Data and evidence

1. **Strengthen the national-level evidence on the impacts of climate change on SRHR, GBV and harmful practices.** This should include improving data systems to better account for and forecast the differentiated impacts of climate change on SRHR, GBV and harmful practices, including through the conduct of gender-related climate vulnerability and risk assessments that integrate SRHR and GBV. Detailed country-level research, preferably led by local researchers, on the intersections between climate, SRHR and GBV is required to better support communities at the local and national level but also to contribute to the global evidence base.
2. **Scale up efforts to collect and use disaggregated data and account for the differentiated impacts of the climate crisis.** The demonstration of such efforts in the NDCs is encouraging. Gender-disaggregated data supports the identification of groups that are more vulnerable to the effects of climate change and can help mobilize more sensitive and accurate climate action. This better represents the differentiated impacts of the climate crisis while supporting research, data, planning and intervention to reach better outcomes. This also enables gender-sensitive budgeting, including for components related to SRHR and GBV.

Financing and accountability

3. **Increase support, funding and evaluation for adaptation and resilience-building efforts, including within NDCs and in the development of climate policies.**

While adaptation sections are increasing in frequency and detail within NDCs, greater support, evaluation and financing are required to ensure these policies reflect the needs of underserved populations and topic areas, such as SRHR and GBV.

4. **Strengthen the integration of costed SRHR and GBV interventions across sectors in climate policy and action.** Include SRHR and GBV issues in domains such as gender and health, as these represent entry points for the inclusion of SRHR in national climate policies. Costed action, tied to monitoring and indicators that reflect impacts on gender, health and SRHR and GBV, requires more financial and technical support. Many existing interventions, particularly related to gender and health, could begin to provide or increase the integration of programming on SRHR and GBV.
5. **Strengthen health systems' resilience to climate change by ensuring the inclusion of SRHR.** This includes ensuring the inclusion of SRHR in vulnerability risk assessments, disaster preparedness plans and health information management systems. Ensure appropriate human resources are available for health, monitoring and evaluation indicators, the allocation of funds and a coordination mechanism.

Gender equality and representation

6. **Scale up and strengthen gender-transformative climate action through the inclusion of SRHR, GBV and harmful practices issues.**

This includes the appointment and strengthening of the role of a National Gender and Climate Change Focal Point to be placed in the relevant ministry, as recommended by a decision of the 2019 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP25); the review of existing gender-related climate policies; and the integration of gender-transformative approaches in all aspects of climate change policies and programmes/interventions, based on a solid foundation of context-specific analysis.

7. **Recognize the impacts of climate change on the drivers of GBV and harmful practices.** Support the development of best practices for responding to GBV and harmful practices, and for ensuring the resilience, including financial, of essential services to prevent and respond to GBV. This can be achieved through partnership with gender and rights actors such as organizations of people living with disabilities, women-led organizations, Indigenous peoples' groups, youth-led organizations and front-line responders.
8. **Ensure inclusion and a minimum standard of representation in the development and implementation of climate policy at multiple levels.** This includes the inclusion and representation of women and people with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions and sex characteristics as well as young people, Indigenous peoples, older people, people living with disabilities and others as relevant.

Human rights and leaving no one behind

9. **Improve the understanding of the impacts of climate change on sexual and reproductive rights and on people with diverse and underrepresented**

sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions, and sex characteristics. There is insufficient understanding and recognition of the impacts of climate change on sexual and reproductive rights. Increasing this understanding will require specific, local and sensitive action that is participatory, accountable and calls on existing best practices.

10. **Mobilize and support young people.** Support youth climate networks and establish a permanent youth engagement mechanism on climate change at the national level to ensure the mainstreaming of youth priorities across the design and implementation of national climate policy and action.
11. **Take an intersectional approach to develop, review and implement climate policy that recognizes the structural drivers of inequality and accounts for multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination.** Climate policy and action must recognize how many of the people who already face barriers to SRHR and GBV services and the realization of their sexual and reproductive rights are likely to be disproportionately affected by climate change.



12. Enhance recognition of climate change impacts on GBV and harmful practices in NDCs and relevant climate policies.

National climate policies should more meaningfully account for the delivery of GBV services during climate-related events. This includes strengthening the engagement with national gender/GBV-focused mechanisms (e.g. ministries, parliamentary caucuses, civil society networks) as well as climate-focused national mechanisms to present regional and national analysis of the interlinkages between climate change, GBV and harmful practices, and collectively develop a consensus on policy advocacy and programming strategies and interventions. This could be achieved through the creation of a common platform for meaningful dialogue,

with key mechanisms, networks and leaders engaged in addressing GBV and climate change.

- 13. Ensure that climate policies are based on human rights and reflect the principles of the ICPD Programme of Action, including protecting the rights of women, children, refugees, displaced people and people living with disabilities, in climate policy development.** A human rights-based approach that supports individuals to make the reproductive choices that best suit their personal circumstances is core to achieving SRHR. Population dynamics are relevant for climate policy and planning and the NDCs reflect on urbanization, changing population size and structure and the need for population dynamics analysis for forward planning.

CONCLUSION



The results of this report will provide an opening for dialogue at global, regional and national levels on the ways that climate change, SRHR, GBV and harmful practices intersect and to identify entry points for climate action. Highlighting gaps as well as opportunities and promising practices allows for greater and more meaningful integration of aspects of SRHR, GBV and harmful practices in climate policies.

Taking action

Create a platform for stakeholder involvement at all levels and work across sectors to ensure integration of SRHR, GBV and harmful practices in relevant policy and programming.

Contribute to the national dialogue and strengthen NAPs and specific interventions to include delivery of SRHR and GBV services for women and girls as well as prevention of harmful practices.

Strengthen the evidence base for the interlinkages between climate change and SRHR, GBV and harmful practices in every country and region.

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