



An Advocacy Brief: Post 2015 Development Agenda

CLIMATE CHANGE AND SEXUAL REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS

Introduction

Globally, we are already witnessing and experiencing the onset of climate change. There is mounting evidence that climate change will have disastrous consequences for people and the planet.¹

Climate change is one of the central challenges of our time. It refers to the increasingly erratic weather patterns, rising sea levels and extreme events such as cyclones, floods, droughts, desertification, and heat waves that may be attributed to human activity and the greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions that have created global warming.

The effects of climate change extend beyond the environment and come with a broader set of socio-economic and political consequences. Climate change will exacerbate already precarious developmental concerns, and could potentially reverse progress on the Millennium Development Goals. It will be a severe impediment to efforts aimed at eradicating poverty and promoting sustainable methods of production and consumption.

Moreover, human rights, including sexual and reproductive rights, will be adversely impacted if swift action is not taken to mitigate the human impact of climate change. Climate change also has significant impact on human health. It puts pressures² on the fundamental requirements of good health—clean air, safe drinking water, adequate sanitation and sufficient food³. As the world continues to experience incremental yet unpredictable climate change, the inter-linkages with sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) is an emerging issue that needs to be addressed in the context of sustainable development. This brief will consider how climate change will affect universal access to SRHR and that the implications have profound ramifications for the new developmental era.

As discussion progresses in the post-2015 development process, and as member states redefine a new set of strategic priorities in the post-MDG era, it is critical that member states consider how climate change will influence their own development. It remains critical that their efforts at curbing climate change do not erode their commitments towards universal access to SRHR.

Within the climate and environment discourse, it is essential to ensure that local and national and regional voices that employ a gender and rights approach are being heard. The international communities understanding of climate change impact is very different today than 20 years ago when these global goals and commitments were agreed to in Rio in 1992 and in Cairo in 1994, however some of the challenges remain and there is an unfinished agenda on SRHR. Civil society and some government's demands include a call for sustainable development goals and post-2015 development framework that has gender equality and SRHR at its core.

The fifth assessment of the IPCC released in March 2014 argues that provision of reproductive health may have important health co-benefits, reduce the risk of climate change and have positive effect on health. Programs that provide reproductive health for all women are seen as a way to slow population growth and its associated energy demands, with the co-benefit of reducing the number of maternal deaths.⁴ The 13th session of the Open Working Group for Sustainable Development Goals which recently concluded in New York, proposed the following goal which includes Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH), proposed goal 3. *“Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.”*⁵ The Open Working Group also proposed the following for SRH under goal 3.7: *“By 2030 ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health care services, including for family planning, information and education, and the integration of reproductive health into national strategies and programs.”*⁶

As discussion progresses in the post-2015 development process, and as member states redefine a new set of strategic priorities in the post-MDG era, it is critical that member states consider how climate change will influence their own development. Women, who are most affected by climate change should receive *“fair access to resources for climate change adaptation and mitigation”*⁷ and more importantly that climate change adaptation and mitigation solutions do not curtail achievement of their sexual and reproductive health and rights

Context Analysis

In 2012, the Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED), in 2012, reported an occurrence of 552 disaster events, worldwide, of which 364 of them categorized as natural disasters.⁸ Since 2003, China, the United States, the Philippines, India and Indonesia together form the top five countries that most frequently experience natural disasters.⁹ Africa is particularly vulnerable to climate change related disasters simply because of the continent’s limited capacity to adapt to the effects of climate change.¹⁰ The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change reports that in Africa and other parts of the developing world climate change will severely affect economic prosperity and the survival of already vulnerable populations and the African continent’s unique ecological system coupled with limited infrastructure further exacerbates its vulnerability to climate change.¹¹ In a continental context, with limited gains made on the advancement of universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights, climate change can further lead to an unfavorable environment for sexual and reproductive health and rights. Climate change can compound any progress made on sexual and reproductive health and rights in a climate of continued regression on women’s rights, in Africa. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change refers to Africa’s climate change challenges under the umbrella term of *“multiple stresses”*¹², which most prominently refer to wide-scale poverty, a complex set of institutional barriers as well as the continent’s limited capacity.

In the Asia-Pacific region, home to 60% of the world’s population and is also one of the most vulnerable contexts to climate change.¹³ More than 100 million people are affected annually by climate-related events that include typhoons, droughts, and cyclones. By global comparison, people in the region constitute 83% of all those affected by droughts, 97% of all those affected by floods, and 92% of those affected by storms.¹⁴ Over the last 40 years, the annual average number of people affected by flooding alone has increased from 29.5 to 63.8 million and an estimated 120.7 million

people are living in cyclone-prone areas.¹⁵ Disasters and climate change are closely related. The Asia Pacific Disaster Report 2012 contends that “the Asia-Pacific region is the most disaster-prone area of the world and it is also the most seriously affected one. Almost 2 million people were killed in disasters between 1970 and 2011, representing 75 per cent of all disaster fatalities globally.”¹⁶

While no one can escape the negative impacts of climate change, the most vulnerable groups such as children, young people, women, the poor and the marginalised in developing countries will be impacted the most. Meanwhile, in the developed world, those who will bear the most impact are the poor, those belonging to racial minorities, and the marginalised, including women and the elderly.¹⁷ The effect of climate change further threatens to erode human freedoms and limit choices.¹⁸ The effects of climate change go far beyond the environment, and have a wide-range of socio-economic and political consequences, exacerbating existing issues of poverty, livelihoods, and inequities, and having profound implications for social justice and gender equality.¹⁹

In the Asia-Pacific region, the relationship between climate change, gender equality, and SRHR is marked. Evidence from the ground demonstrates how climate change will not only exacerbate already challenging developmental contexts which form the basis for SRHR, but also how climate change continues to erode gender equality and the advancement of SRHR. It should be noted that there is a re-emergence of the population discourse that attempts to make direct and simplistic connection between climate change and population growth. In order to fully respond to the health risks of climate change of women and young people, there is a need to expand our understanding of the specific health risks from climate change, and to distinguish between sexual and reproductive health and the reproductive role of women and girls.

Below are just some of the ways in which gender equality and SRHR can be affected by climate change:

Table 1. Some Examples on How Climate Change Impacts Women and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

Climate Change Impact	Gender Equality	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
Extreme weather events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of access to education and information about extreme weather events • Restricted ability to respond due to restrictions on women’s mobility • Lack of survival skills, such as swimming and tree climbing, often taught to boys and men, not girls and women • Women’s exclusion from planning and disaster recovery decision-making • Increase in household expenses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to SRH services constrained • SRH services excluded as priorities from disaster recovery • Increased health risks with pregnancy and childbirth • Gynecological problems due to unhygienic water use

Drought	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased women and girls work burden and time spent gathering water, food and fuel due to availability of water and other resources For girls, increasing tasks may affect their capacity to attend school Loss of land tenure for women with restricted access to land 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> With women traveling further distances to collect fuel and water, increased risk of sexual violence Water-logging prevents women from accessing sexual and reproductive health care and services
Food security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased hunger and calorie reduction for women Malnutrition and micronutrient deficiencies Compromised food safety 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low weights births, increase in miscarriage, perinatal mortality
Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased burdened of care for women caregivers, both in households and as care workers Limited access to health services Increase in infectious, water borne or vector-borne diseases 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maternal malaria increases the risk to spontaneous abortion, premature delivery, stillbirth and low birth weight Some evidence of relationship between pre-eclampsia and increased incidence during climatic conditions Saline contamination of drinking water linked to pre-eclampsia, eclampsia and hypertension among women
Migration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The priorities of migrant and displaced women are not prioritized Increased violence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trafficking and exploitation Loss of access to services due to migrant status
Conflict	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Internal displacement due to conflict over resources Violence against women 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited access to sexual and reproductive health services and supplies Limited access to post-exposure prophylaxis, counseling and STD and STI testing, abortion services in cases of sexual violence
Economic impacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Loss and reduction of livelihoods and assets Limited resilience and coping mechanisms Feminization of poverty, especially in urban and peri-urban areas 	

This table is directly copied from the source with approval from the publisher. Source: Woods, Z. (2014). "Identifying opportunities for action on climate change and sexual and reproductive health and rights in Bangladesh, Indonesia, and the Philippines." Kuala Lumpur: ARROW.

CASE STUDIES

The Philippines

Climate change is already affecting the Philippines and all predictions point to deteriorating environments for the country and its citizens as a result of climate change. One of the most hazard-prone countries in the world, located in what is known as the Pacific Ring of Fire, the country is exposed to floods, typhoons, drought, earthquakes, and volcanic eruptions. On average, 20 tropical cyclones enter the Philippine area of responsibility and 9 make landfall each year. In November 2013, Typhoon Haiyan struck the Philippines and became the strongest typhoon ever to make landfall. With unprecedented strength and impact, it killed over 6 thousand people and almost one million people were affected.²⁰ Over the last decade, almost 80% of the disasters occurring in the country have been weather-related.

With a population of 107 million, 52% of which are under 24 years old, the Philippines faces numerous challenges in meeting the needs of its population. Approximately 49% of the population live in urban areas, a figure that is likely to increase as the rate of urbanization increasing at an average of 2% per year. The maternal mortality rate in 2010 was 99 deaths/100,000 live births and the total fertility rate is 3.06, with a contraceptive prevalence rate of 48.9%.²¹ Access to sexual and reproductive healthcare and services is a precondition to women's empowerment, a right that has been severely curtailed for Filipino women. Despite having the strongest rates of economic growth in the region, more than a quarter of the population lives below the poverty line. Weak social services for the poor, including health systems, are further compromised by migration of qualified service providers, including health workers. Since the 1970s, the Philippine government has promoted migration of Filipino workers resulting in 1 out of every 10 Filipinos working abroad. As a result, remittances account for 10% of GDP and consumerism is a major driver in the economy.²²

The Philippine National Climate Change Commission recognizes that climate change is a cross-sectorial issue and has agreed that the priorities around climate change should be framed in the context of climate change adaptation.²³ The Climate Change Action Plan supports climate financing for local governments and communities.²⁴ The longer-term goal as explained in the National Climate Change Action Plan seeks to reduce the risks of women and men and other vulnerable groups from climate related disasters.

The non-inclusion of sexual and reproductive health in the National Climate Change Action Plan is an example of the challenge faced by many countries when it comes to policy coherence and implementation of gender equality commitments.²⁵ In the Philippines, climate change will challenge an already weak health system posing significant challenges for SRHR, including the resourcing of reproductive health, women's health, STI and STD screening and services, and HIV prevention,²⁶ testing, counselling, and treatment. While the Philippine Climate Change Commission conducts regular consultation among stakeholders, the participation of women's groups is limited.

The national climate change adaptation action plans of the Philippines recognises the importance of addressing gender-related vulnerabilities by mainstreaming gender and identify population issues including population pressures and migration.²⁷ The climate change adaptation plan has set out priorities aimed at improving information systems, building resilient infrastructure, having robust disaster management, and ensuring access to appropriate technology. A critical deficit remains in that the link to SRHR as an integral part of addressing existing gender inequality and vulnerability.²⁸ A common institutional challenge is the on-going task of bolstering the credibility of climate change governance and coordinating mechanisms that are fairly new compared with more established and critical agencies such as ministries on environment and forest, science and technology, public infrastructure, and health, among others.²⁹

Ethiopia

In Africa, Ethiopia is one of the most vulnerable countries to the impacts of climate change due to a variety of political, socio-economic and environmental factors. Currently 25% of women in Ethiopia have an unmet need for family planning.³⁰

A study published in the *African Journal of Reproductive Health*, defined women and children as the most vulnerable groups to climate change in Ethiopia.³¹ This was precisely because the burden of care placed on women was exacerbated by the climate crises and women expended more time on activities such as water collection and various activities related to social reproduction. As Ethiopia's vulnerability to climate change is marked by several cases of drought, the persistence of drought-cycles in the country can exacerbate the workload of women leading them to travel longer distances to find water. This can subsequently increase their exposure to physical harm and sexual violence. In this way there is a direct linkage between sexual violence and climate change as climate change will lead to conditions which perpetuated sexual violence.³²

In Ethiopia, women are finding it tremendously difficult to cope with the onset of major climate related events and are making it more difficult for their families to cope with the stresses of climate change³³ unless the government is willing to allocate specific provisions for sexual and reproductive health in the National Adaptation Plan.

Key Policy Directions

As highlighted above, climate change will worsen an already precarious environment for gender equality and the achievement of SRHR³⁴. To accelerate progress and reduce the impact of climate change-related disasters on women and girls, we recommend that the ICPD beyond 2014 and post-2015 processes address the following:

- The Post-2015 process should endeavour to eliminate social, political and economic barriers to women's enjoyment of their human rights as these barriers cause or increase their vulnerability to the impact of climate change.³⁵
- Governments should continue to fulfil their international commitments towards gender equality. Addressing the root causes of gender inequality which have a stake in women's access to decision making structures and resources remains at the heart of efforts to achieve gender equality.³⁶
- Policy coherence between government policies and commitments to gender equality, SRHR and climate change plans and budgets is essentially to ensuring that post-2015 is equitable and underpins the goals of gender equality.³⁷
- Strategies aimed at addressing climate change should not override the States' responsibility and commitments in achieving and advancing universal access to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights. These strategies should address the "deep-seated inequities and inequalities to be effective and meet the needs of those most at risk from climate change's negative impact".³⁸
- Gender assessments, analysis, and gender equality indicators should be integrated into mitigation and adaptation programmes to identify where "specific vulnerabilities to climate change lie, and where opportunities for mitigating and adapting to climate change can be found."³⁹
- It is critical that women's leadership and participation remains a priority for international climate change processes and that women are at the forefront of decision making around climate change.⁴⁰

Key Definitions

Adaptation: Actions by individuals or systems to avoid, withstand, alleviate adverse impacts, or take advantage of current and projected climate changes and impacts.⁴¹

Climate change: The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) defines climate change as any change in climate over time, whether due to natural variability or as a result of human activity.⁴²

Mitigation: Actions to reduce or prevent greenhouse gas emissions. Mitigation efforts range from the use of new and renewable technologies, developing energy efficient technologies, or changing management practices or consumer behaviour.⁴³

Resilience: The capacity of social, economic, and environmental systems to cope with a hazardous event or trend or disturbance, responding, or reorganising in ways that maintain their essential function, identity, and structure, while also maintaining the capacity for adaptation, learning, and transformation (IPCC).⁴⁴

Vulnerability: The propensity or predisposition to be adversely affected. Vulnerability encompasses a variety of concepts and elements including sensitivity or susceptibility to harm and limited capacity to cope and adapt (IPCC).⁴⁵

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² Woods, Z. "Identifying opportunities for action on climate change and sexual and reproductive health and rights in Bangladesh, Indonesia and the Philippines. ARROW, p. 3, Available from, <http://arrow.org.my/download/Scoping%20Study%20-%20Climate%20Change%20and%20SRHR.pdf>

³ UNDP. 2012. Asia-Pacific Human Development Report. One planet to share: Sustaining human progress in a changing climate. Bangkok: UNDP. 242p. Available at: http://asiapacific-hdr.aprc.undp.org/sites/default/files/files/UNDP%20%28Book%29_Low%20resolution.pdf

⁴ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). (2014, March 29). *IPCC Fifth Assessment Report, Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability*. Retrieved from Working Group II IPCC: <http://ipcc-wg2.gov/AR5/report/final-drafts/>

⁵ 13th Session of the Open Working Group for Sustainable Development Goals, Final Outcome Document Available at, <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/focussdgs.htm>

⁶ 13th Session of the Open Working Group for Sustainable Development Goals, Final Outcome Document Available at, <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/focussdgs.htm>

⁷ Silliman, J. 2009. "In search of climate justice: Refuting dubious linkages, affirming rights." ARROWs For Change, Vol. 15 No. 1. P.2. Available at <http://arrow.org.my/home/images/publications/AFC/v15n1.pdf>

⁸ Guha-Sapir, D., Hoyois, P., & Below, R. 2013. Annual Disaster Statistical Review 2012: The Numbers and the trends. Center for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED), Institute of Health and Society, (IRSS) and Universite Catholique de Louvain, Brussels, P. 1, Available at, http://cred.be/download/download.php?file=sites/default/files/ADSR_2012.pdf,

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- There is a range of definitions of vulnerability and no agreement on a universal definition. For the purpose of this paper, all three definitions are useful, with the UNDP definition being more relevant to women and girls as it is more human centered.