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CanWaCH GEWG Complex Issues Brief #3

Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) and Climate Change (CC)

What is a complex issue?

An issue with multiple and interconnected parts, a quick fix is not possible. Instead, complex problem solving requires innovation, multiple, sometimes competing, perspectives. It involves considering the impact of the solution on the surrounding environment and individuals.

Defining SRHR and Climate Change

1. Sexual and Reproductive Health refers to a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being in all matters relating to the reproductive system. Rights further expand on this concept to ensure that, in reference to sexual and reproductive health, women, in all their diversity, have the ability, free from discrimination and penalty of law, to make the best choices for their SHR health, including the number of children they have, if any, the spacing between their children's births and access to safe and legal abortion.
2. Climate Change refers to long-term shifts in temperatures and weather patterns. These shifts may be natural, such as through variations in the solar cycle. But since the 1800s, human activities have been the main driver of climate change, primarily due to burning fossil fuels like coal, oil and gas.

Why are SRHR and Climate Change complex issues?

SRHR

- Influenced by a web of factors (behaviour, attitudes, biological risk, physical and systems environment)
- Poor SRH status linked to poverty
- Harmful gender norms impact SRHR
- Addressing SRHR at all level requires integrated interventions underpinned by:
 - Understanding of sexuality, gender norms, power dynamics
 - Supportive and resourced legal, policy and regulatory environments
 - Claiming human rights and poverty reduction

Climate Change (CC)

- Influenced by a web of interactive factors with no one activity root cause
- Different effects on temporal/spatial scale
- Unlimited set of potential solutions (cascading +/- feedback loops that may trigger new problems)
- Capitalism is a major driver and barrier to climate change
- CC disproportionately impacts those who already experience intersectional gender-based inequality, power imbalance and poverty
- Claiming human rights and poverty reduction

Impacts of CC on Women and Girls

- Impacts of climate change and climate related disasters exacerbate pre-existing development and emergency challenges,
- Climate change compounds vulnerabilities and inequalities, including for women/girls and those experiencing intersecting forms of oppression
- For women and girls this means that they:
 - are most reliant on natural resources for their livelihoods,
 - have the least capacity to prepare for or respond to climate-related disasters due to limited access to and control over finances and assets; less opportunity for education and training; higher care burdens; and physiological profiles that increase vulnerability (pregnant/postpartum/lactating women);
 - face higher risks and greater burdens from the impacts of climate change in situations of poverty; and
 - have unequal rights and opportunities to participate in decision-making processes or contribute to climate-related planning, policy making and implementation.

Three Key Issues Areas

1. Policy Alignment

There is insufficient recognition of climate & SRHR interconnections in global and national climate policies, including national adaptation plans (NAPs) and national determined contributions (NDCs).

2. Evidence, Data and Monitoring & Evaluation

There is a lack of investment in data collection, research, and learning that address the evidence gaps in SRHR and climate change.

3. Climate and Gender Rights & Justice

Those who suffer from social injustice are disproportionately affected by climate change, and as a consequence, they have more difficulty coping with and responding to climate change.

Discussion and Recommendations for Practitioners

Build Climate Resilient Health Systems

- Include impacts of climate change on SRHR in Gender Analysis; for example, consider the rupture in the value chain for contraception during a climate disaster.
- Advocate for maintenance and/or prioritisation of SRHR services during climate disaster.
- Draw links to additional crises compounding SRHR and CC like Covid 19 or conflict and plan to ensure continuum of care for SRHR.
- Support the training, recognition, and valorisation of skilled birth attendants to continue their work despite CC disaster or increased insecurity.
- Localize solutions and recognize interconnected services that address SRHR and CC challenge; for example, providing SRH services while supporting climate-resilient livelihood initiatives.

Increasing Adaptation Research for Health

- Include the systematic identification of vulnerable groups in research initiatives on adaptation research to nuance the specific challenges for SRHR in the face of CC; for example, pregnant or lactating women's nutrition in drought or famine.
- Ensure SADD (sex, age and disability disaggregated data) in any data collection for SRHR initiatives to better understand how age (youth in particular) are facing CC or a CC disaster.
- Recognise harmful gender norms and practices as underpinning vulnerabilities in SRHR and CC; for example, child marriage incidence increasing in CC as a maladaptation.

Raising Voices of Most Affected to Advocate for Justice and Stronger Ambition

- Facilitate space for women led or youth organisations (WEDO or WGNRR for example) to be represented at policy level or decision making discussions
- Male engagement to understand and support SRHR either for their spouses, in their families or male health professionals and humanitarian workers.

Recommendations and Examples for Practitioners

1. **Policy and Advocacy:** Ensure that SRHR is kept on the radar of policy and program makers and push for the integration of SRHR into National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) and National Climate Policies.
 - Ex. In the context of COVID-19 response programming progress would be compromised if it was not continuously highlighted as an issue area. What helped to keep this agenda on the table was developing partnerships and integrating programming with women's rights organizations and youth groups.
2. **Program Development**
 - Social Safety Net Programs are beneficial because they identify who is vulnerable and determine how these programs can best support governments to develop and implement policies that support these vulnerable populations.
 - If climate isn't necessarily thought of as an issue, framing it through a vulnerability lens may create the opportunity to develop linkages.
 - Additionally, leveraging actions of other drivers (for ex. COVID-19) to beef up social safety programs and how they are developed to create synergy with climate policies.
3. **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Further, integrating SRHR indicators that are gender responsive/aware within larger policy or monitoring frameworks is beneficial. In particular, data around:
 - Age disaggregation - often adolescents are missed and when feasible collecting SRHR data from adolescents (usually 14 years up with parental consent).
 - Who is using / accessing programs and services available.
 - With better data collection, especially around age, practitioners can better understand who is accessing services so that in an environment where there may be impacts from climate context (such as drought or a disaster) where these tension points / challenges multiply there is information / data to support responsive programmatic shifts.
4. **Leveraging Existing Networks:** Finally, getting engaged with existing gender transformative climate action as inroads for better integration for SRHR.
 - For example, the Paris Agreement (on GE and Climate Change Issues) is an already well-established mechanism that is available to practitioners and policy makers and is one area of focus to better get this integration to the fore.

Resources

Policy Alignment

- How are Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Represented in Climate Change Policy? (https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ndc_report_summary_final.pdf)
- Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) in National Adaptation Plan (NAP) Processes (<https://napglobalnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/napgn-en-2021-srhr-in-nap-processes.pdf>)
- Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in National Climate Policy (https://esaro.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/ndc_report_final.pdf)

Evidence, Data and M&E

- The Link Between Climate Change and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights: An Evidence Review (<https://womendeliver.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Climate-Change-Report.pdf>)
- Exploring linkages between climate change and sexual health: a scoping review protocol (<https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/11/10/e054720.info>)

Climate and Gender Rights & Justice

- Issues Brief: Climate Justice and SRHR (https://womengenderclimate.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/WGC_IssueBrief_SRHR_EN_corrected.pdf)
- Video recording of COP26 panel discussion: Women and Gender Constituency and the SRHR & Climate Justice Coalition (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J23pTW09rfl>)
- IPPF position paper: The climate crisis and sexual and reproductive health and rights. (http://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/CSW/66/EGM/Expert%20Papers/IPPF_CS66%20Expert%20Paper.pdf)
- Oxfam Media Briefing: Confronting Carbon Inequality (<https://oxfamlibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/621052/mb-confronting-carbon-inequality-210920-en.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>)

Other General Resources

- The Lancet Countdown on health and climate change: ensuring that the health of a child born today is not defined by a changing climate ([https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(19\)32596-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(19)32596-6))
- Intersections of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights and Climate Change: A Postcolonial Feminist Analysis (https://helda.helsinki.fi/bitstream/handle/10138/332009/Lammensalo_Linda_tutkielma_2021.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y)
- Case Report: Another Burden to Bear: The Impacts of Climate Change on Access to Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights and Services in Bangladesh (<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fclim.2022.875515/full>)
- Gender Climate Tracker (<https://genderclimatetracker.org/>)