



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

**AN EAST AND SOUTHERN AFRICA
REVIEW SUMMARY**

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



INTRODUCTION

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

The East and Southern Africa (ESA) region faces a wide range of intensifying climate change impacts, from increasing frequency and intensity of droughts, floods and tropical cyclones to food insecurity and malnutrition. Increasing temperatures and rainfall are changing disease patterns, with tens of millions more people anticipated to be exposed to vectorborne diseases. Furthermore, sub-Saharan Africa is projected to have the largest proportion of the 132 million people who will be pushed into extreme poverty by 2030 due to climate change. The ESA region has made significant progress in advancing sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR); however, in recent decades, investment in SRHR has been insufficient to address the growing and unmet needs of the population. The population of ESA continues to have high maternal mortality rates and unmet needs for family planning and is experiencing increasing cases of gender-based violence (GBV) and child marriage. Furthermore, the region has the highest rates of HIV and AIDS globally, with 15 per cent of preventable maternal AIDS-related deaths.

Climate change directly and indirectly impacts women and girls and their sexual and reproductive health. Heat, air pollution and climate-related diseases have adverse impacts on


maternal and newborn health outcomes. In addition, climate-related loss of livelihoods increases poverty and food insecurity, which further impacts 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. The ESA region is prone to extreme climatic events such as cyclones and droughts, and there is a need for region-specific interventions that address the underlying structures and vulnerabilities, which, 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 the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) 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 the 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 their more meaningful inclusion 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, youth, and human rights and participation) in NDCs submitted in or after 2020.



The UNFPA East and Southern African Regional Office covers 23 countries; however, only 19 countries were included in the review, as four countries (Botswana, Eritrea, Lesotho



and Madagascar) did not have an NDC or an NDC update published in or after 2020 at the time of completion of the analysis in August 2022.

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FINDINGS

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

Eight of the 19 NDCs reviewed include issues related to SRHR and GBV. Most of these references are centred around maternal and newborn health, HIV and AIDS and GBV.

Specifically, there are three references to maternal health, three references to HIV and AIDS, one reference to adolescent health, one reference to sexual orientation, one reference to information and awareness and two references to GBV. There is no mention of harmful practices across the NDCs reviewed. Seychelles made references to more than one of these SRHR areas. The references vary by descriptions of impact, intervention and other relevant mentions.

The analysis shows that, while some countries only referred to aspects of SRHR and GBV in their situational analysis, others acknowledged the impacts of climate change on SRHR and GBV but without addressing specific programmes or interventions. Some countries went beyond references to impacts to include a description of actions and interventions related to the impacts of climate change on SRHR and GBV, including through the description of programmes or the inclusion of budget lines. However, this was 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 specific references to harmful practices. Although this 2021 review was global, it primarily focused on countries in ESA, in which only two countries had references to SRHR. In this 2022 review, there are eight references to both SRHR and GBV from ESA countries, showing some progress in the inclusion and prioritization of SRHR in the region.

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

- The Comoros includes SRHR interventions in its National Emergency Preparedness and Response Plan. It incorporates mechanisms for monitoring, raising awareness of and preventing different forms of abuse, violence and sexual exploitation among displaced populations, particularly women and children (the Comoros NDC, 2021: p. 11).



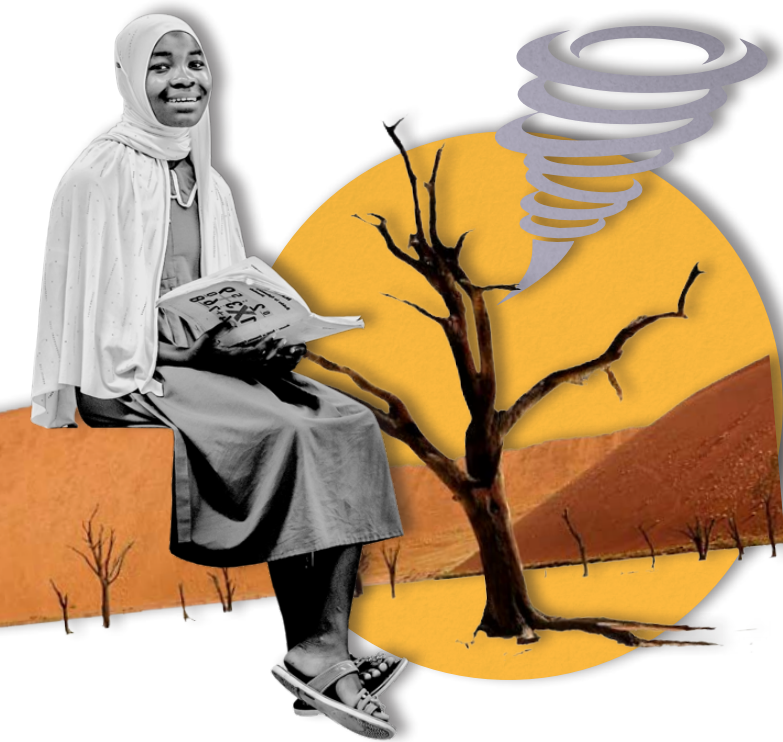


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Health

All 19 of the NDCs integrate aspects of health, with all referencing health surveillance, 18 referencing extreme weather events and/or disasters, 17 referencing climate-related diseases and 17 recognizing the health sector as vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

Gender

All the NDCs reviewed include some degree of gender mainstreaming, with 13 recognizing women as disproportionately vulnerable to climate change impacts, 16 integrating gender with respect to empowerment and capacity-building and 10 reflecting on the importance of women’s participation and/or involvement in decision-making.

- 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).
- South Sudan highlights the risk that climate change will further increase infant and maternal mortality and birth complications and exacerbate poor reproductive health. In particular, South Sudan acknowledges that the impacts of infectious diseases, extreme environmental conditions, malnutrition and heat exposure will lead to serious health risks for mothers and children (South Sudan NDC, 2021: p. 41).



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TABLE 1: Nationally Determined Contributions from East and Southern Africa cited in this brief			
Country	NDC reviewed	Submission date	Original language
Comoros (the)	Updated NDC	05/11/21	French
Seychelles	Updated NDC	30/7/21	English
South Sudan	Second NDC	21/9/21	English

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Population dynamics, human mobility and urbanization

All 19 NDCs reviewed include population dynamics, with 14 referencing migration, urbanization or human displacement.

Youth

Nearly all (17 out of 19) of the NDCs integrate the youth dimension to some degree. Ten refer to youth in relation to education and awareness, 10 recognize youth as particularly vulnerable to climate change and five describe youth in relation to health.

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

All 19 of the NDCs contain some reference to public participation in climate policy and/or action, with five describing public participation in sustainable local resource management. In addition, 12 consider a section of their population as vulnerable, four of which are in relation to communities depending on natural resources, and six countries refer to human rights.





RECOMMENDATIONS

General 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-responsive 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 climate impacts 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 their inclusion 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 and GBV.** This includes ensuring the inclusion of SRHR and GBV 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 persons 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, youth, people with diverse SOGIESC, Indigenous peoples' groups, older persons, persons with disabilities and others as relevant.

Human rights and leaving no one behind

9. Improve the understanding of the impacts of climate change on SRHR and GBV for people with diverse and underrepresented SOGIESC. There is insufficient understanding and recognition of the impacts of climate change on people with diverse SOGIESC. 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 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 persons and persons 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.

Region-specific reflections

14. Incorporate SRHR in empowerment and capacity-building programmes for women. Empowerment and capacity-building of women and girls is an important theme

throughout the ESA region, described by nearly all NDCs. Use strategies to empower women through economic and social means as a pathway for women and girls to gain autonomy over their SRHR and enjoy a life free of GBV.

15. Further strengthen the meaningful inclusion of young people, including increasing participation, creating opportunities for employment and livelihoods and including SRHR in youth and health linkages within NDCs in the ESA region.

The impacts of climate change on young people are referenced across some ESA NDCs but there is scope for more. Some NDCs, make links between young people, climate and health, but not with direct reference to SRHR or GBV. Ensuring high-quality, accessible and acceptable SRH and GBV services is essential for youth resilience. Young people represent a substantial portion of the ESA population and climate-related economic and workforce transitions should be gender- and youth-responsive.



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