



POLICY BRIEF
**Climate Change and Sexual
and Reproductive Health
Rights (SRHR) Education and
Information for
Policymakers**

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

- BCCSAP: Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan
- CBO: Community Based Organization
- CC: Climate Change
- CESC: Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
- CRE: Climate related event
- COP: Conference of the Parties
- CSO: Civil Society Organization
- CEDAW: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
- GBV: Gender based Violence
- GGCA: Global Gender and Climate Alliance
- IPCC: Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
- NAPA: National Adaptation Programme of Action
- NEP: National Environment Policy
- NHP: National Health Policy
- NPDM: National Plan for Disaster Management
- NWDP: National Women's Development Policy
- NCCC: National Climate Change Commission
- NAP: National Action Plan
- OHCHR: Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
- SHIRIM: Share-Net International Rapid Improvement Model
- SNBD: Share Net Bangladesh
- SRHR: Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
- UNFCCC: United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
- WGC: Women & Gender Constituency
- RR: Reproductive Rights
- UNDP: United Nations Development Programme
- UNFCCC: United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“Women hold up half the sky, there is no way you can manage change climate which is the sky without women.”- Chinese Phrase

Access to sexual and reproductive health services is often disrupted or non-existent in climate related events. This policy brief will outline the impacts of climate disaster on sexual and reproductive health services, the effects of service disruptions, and best practices to mitigate harm in future climate crises. It is crucial to identify and establish the linkage between climate change and SRHR in the context of Bangladesh, given the urgent need to understand and establish how gender and SRHR related information and message could provide a positive impact to the huge number of women and young girls living at the risk of climate vulnerability. Particularly, policymakers, experts and donors who work in climate change, often do not see this linkage. International Center for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD) and ShareNet Bangladesh (SNBD) is pleased to publish this Policy Brief that explore the inextricable linkages between climate change, gender equality, and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and propose recommendations for decision-makers. What follows are some initial guidelines for those who recognize SRHR as relevant to the climate discourse and want some information as how to begin or to deepen their work in this area. This is intended to be just an initial brief, not all steps will be relevant to all organizations and some organizations will undertake these steps in a different structure.

1.1. ABOUT ICCCAD:

The International Centre for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD) is one of the leading research and capacity building organizations working on climate change and development in Bangladesh. ICCCAD’s mission is to generate and disseminate knowledge on climate change with specific attention to capacitate future leaders on climate adaptation and development issues. ICCCAD provides capacity building, policy support and knowledge management services in areas such as loss and damage, climate finance, SDGs, adaptation, LLA, NBS and migration. By focusing on such work in Bangladesh, ICCCAD allows international participants to gain direct knowledge of the issues in a real-world context. Through the expertise of ICCCAD and its local partners, international organizations will be exposed to relevant and grounded knowledge that can be shared and transmitted around the world for the benefit of other LDCs, and their governments, donors and international NGOs.

1.2. ABOUT REDORANGE AND SHARE-NET:

RedOrange is an international organisation creating impact through, knowledge management, strategic communications, programme implementation and content creation. RedOrange’s work includes innovative communication campaigns, knowledge management and capacity building. We work in several areas such as climate change, health, education, water management, human rights, gender, compliance, digitalization, agriculture and aquaculture. RedOrange team consists of strategists, project managers and content creators working together on all levels ranging from creating communication strategies, implementing various programmes, awareness and social media campaigns, and finally creating effective and innovative materials and tools such as audio-visual materials, programme toolkits, documentaries and infographics. RedOrange is based in Bangladesh and the Netherlands.

Share-Net Bangladesh is one of the initiatives hosted by RedOrange. It is the country hub of Share-Net International, a Knowledge Platform focusing on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR). Share-Net Bangladesh is the first of Share-Net International's country hub, drawing on the years of experiences and interventions by practitioners, researchers, and policymakers in the field of sexual reproductive health, especially placing SRHR at the centre of human rights. Share-Net Bangladesh aims to bring together the Communities of Practice (CoP) that consist of social and medical researchers, development practitioners, health workers, government officials and legal experts to engage with one another to find solutions and take critical issues forward.

2. WOMEN, CLIMATE CHANGE AND SRHR:

The risk of climate change disasters and its impact on local people is increasingly determined by health, economic, and security inequalities. These inequalities are gendered and intersectional specific. Despite expanding research on the economic, social, and health effects of climate change on women, only two governments (Liberia and Peru) have special legislation addressing the nexus of climate change and gender. In terms of sexual and reproductive health care, rights, and services, none of the 190 INDCs examined by the WGC included the right to access sexual and reproductive health services in the aftermath of climate change and climate change-related catastrophes.

2.1. CLIMATE CHANGE:

For the first time, the IPCC's Sixth Assessment Report provides a more detailed regional assessment of climate change, including a focus on useful information that can inform risk assessment, adaptation, and other decision-making, and a new framework that helps translate physical changes in the climate – heat, cold, rain, drought, snow, wind, coastal flooding and more – into what they mean for society and ecosystems.

2.2. SRHR

Defined at ICPD as “certain human rights that are already recognized in national laws, international human rights documents, and other consensus documents. These rights rest on the recognition of the basic right of all couples and individuals to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing and timing of their children and to have the information and means to do so, and the right to attain the highest standard of sexual and reproductive health. It also includes their right to make decisions concerning reproduction free of discrimination, coercion and violence, as expressed in human rights documents”.

The Guttmacher-Lancet Commission on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights defines SRHR as “a state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being in relation to all aspects of sexuality and reproduction, not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction, or infirmity. Therefore, a positive approach to sexuality and reproduction should recognize the part played by pleasurable sexual relationships, trust and communication in promoting self-esteem and overall well-being. All individuals have a right to make decisions governing their bodies and to access services that support that right. Achieving sexual and reproductive health relies on realizing sexual and reproductive rights, which are based on the human multiple rights of all individuals to: including the right to life, the right to be free from torture, the right to health, the right to privacy, the right to education, and the prohibition of discrimination.

2.3. WHY DO WE NEED SRHR AND GENDER-RESPONSIVE CLIMATE ACTION?

The impacts of climate change have a detrimental direct and indirect effect on an individual's SRHR. Climate change directly impacts on sexual and reproductive health (SRH) among girls and women. SRH, according to the Guttmacher-Lancet Commission, refers to “the state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being in relation to sexuality and reproduction”.

National Learning session 1 and 2, by SNBD reports highlighted specific findings and make the relevant recommendations to decision-makers and advocates to generate effective, rights-based policies and programs across sectors, including:

1. Enhancing partnership among various actors working on climate change, health, and women's rights.
2. Financing in capacity building to fill evidence gaps and integrate the analysis of SRHR and climate data.
3. Advocating gender-transformative climate action plan that addresses the linkages between climate change and SRHR.
4. Supporting health system specially on SRHR to address the underlying causes of vulnerability to climate change.
5. Understanding how intensifying emergencies and intersecting identities influence vulnerability and resilience to climate change and SRHR to make sure climate actions do not impair inequalities.

2.4. WHY DO WE NEED INFORMATION ON CLIMATE CHANGE (CC) AND SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH RIGHTS (SRHR) EDUCATION?

Inadequate access to SRHR services increases women's risk of physical, mental and psychological harm; it also impacts on their ability to build capacity and resilience to climate change. Providing people with knowledge about climate change and how it relates to their health is part of empowering and equipping them to be active in the response that climate change requires. This policy brief helps the policy makers explain climate change and how it links to gender and sexual and reproductive health and rights.

This knowledge product provides an overview on how SRHR can be integrated into national plans to adapt to climate change and its goal is to achieve gender equality. It also aims to promote an integrated and inclusive approach that moves countries forward on the mutually supportive objectives of resilience to climate change and realization of SRHR. Evidence shows that climate funders and policy makers have not integrated sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) within their strategies.

The main objectives of this policy brief are to support more SRHR organizations and advocates to engage in climate change advocacy to develop stronger partnerships with those already working on the connections between climate change and SRHR.

This policy brief will help:

1. To ensure climate policies at national and international level, will better support and promote SRHR.
2. To ensure funding for SRHR is expressly eligible under climate funding mechanisms.

3. To mobilize new allies and alliances between organizations and specific sectors.

The fact is international and national climate policies do not effectively mainstream gender-specific requirements into their frameworks. SRHR services are, therefore, excluded from all level frameworks and it is a continuation of reproductive injustice.

2.5. KEY OBJECTIVES

1. Understanding SRHR from Climate Change perspective and scope of policy and legislation
2. Framework for National Action Plan linking for climate change and SRHR for policymakers

2.6. WHY IT IS HIGH TIME TO FOCUS ON SRHR

Ensuring young women and girls understand their right to sexual and reproductive health and have control over their lives and bodies are critical to achieving gender equality. When people are informed about sexual and reproductive health and rights they are provided with the knowledge, confidence, and skills to make autonomous and healthy decisions about their SRH.

2.7. KEY FUNCTIONS

Establishing connections with key local, national, and global partners, stakeholders to build network, who are working on SRHR and CC.

Generating knowledge to address priority research and intervention gaps on SRHR and CC.

Disseminating knowledge and ideas through effective communication tools.

Finding solutions by creating space and supporting advocacy.

Enabling the gap between all involved in SRHR policy, services related, and CC related.

Using and sharing existing SRHR and CC knowledge

2.8. INCORPORATE SRHR INTO CC DISCOURSE

If we are to effectively integrate SRHR into the climate discourse, we need each of us of our community to consider how they can best support a collective approach.

These are merely a handful of potential ways to do so:

Seek changes to national plans and elevate reproductive choice as relevant to climate change adaptation and resilience within the national discourse. Some civil society organizations, specializing in climate and environment, provide technical advice to governments and climate negotiators.

Seek changes in UNFCCC policies and processes, as well as at other international fora.

Persuade donors to make such work expressly eligible under climate funding mechanisms.

Use (or generate) programmatic data to further the evidence base of the connections between sexual and reproductive health and climate change

2.9. SRHR: SOME FACTS

Women's sexual and reproductive health is related to multiple human rights, including the right to life, the right to be free from torture, the right to health, the right to privacy, the right to education, and the prohibition of discrimination. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) have both clearly indicated that women's right to health includes their sexual and reproductive health.

This means that States have obligations to respect, protect and fulfill rights related to women's sexual and reproductive health, therefore, women are entitled to reproductive health care services, and goods and facilities that are:

CEDAW (article 16) guarantees women equal rights in deciding "freely and responsibly on the number and spacing of their children and to have access to the information, education and means to enable them to exercise these rights."

CEDAW (article 10) also specifies that women's right to education includes "access to specific educational information to help to ensure the health and well-being of families, including information and advice on family planning."

The Beijing Platform for Action states that "the human rights of women include their right to have control over and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality, including sexual and reproductive health, free of coercion, discrimination and violence."

The CESCR General Comment 22 recommends States "to repeal or eliminate laws, policies and practices that criminalize, obstruct or undermine access by individuals or a particular group to sexual and reproductive health facilities, services, goods and information."

Human rights standards in this area are summarized in the OHCHR information series on sexual and reproductive health and rights.

2.10. GOVERNMENT CLIMATE POLICY IN BANGLADESH

Bangladesh has ratified several international frameworks including the UNFCCC, Kyoto Protocol, and the 2015 Paris agreement (Climate Centre, 2021). Bangladesh has also developed a national biodiversity strategy and a National Adaptation Programme for Action (NAPA) in addition to these ratifications. In 2008, many of the strategies of the NAPA were adopted into the Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan (BCCSAP)—a cross sectoral 10-year programme (2009-2019) to build resilience to climate change impacts.

Climate change is a centerpiece of the recently adopted Bangladesh Delta Plan 2100 lays out a 100-year roadmap for achieving sustainable growth through an adaptive delta management process. The Mujib Climate Prosperity Plan, under finalization, leverages the Eighth Five Year Plan 2021-2025 of Bangladesh, Vision 2041 and Bangladesh Delta Plan 2100 to unlock a pathway for the fast-tracked delivery of Bangladesh's Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. It also builds on synergies with the Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan, National Adaptation Plan and Nationally Determined Contributions submitted in 2020. Meaningful citizen engagement and locally led climate actions are a cornerstone of this Plan and envisioned as a transformative pathway to addressing the country's critical climate challenges.

National Action Plan (NAP) for climate policies play a key role in determining responses to climate change, including plans to build adaptive capacity and resilience. An evaluation of NAP and its climate policies with a specific focus on health, including sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) issues, can provide important information on gaps and areas of potential improvement to ensure healthy and resilient communities.

The two last decades, there has been a growing interest in the field of sexual and reproductive health and rights. SRHR has been prioritized in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 3, 4, and 5) which are committed to “leaving no one behind”. The importance of leaving no one behind is the key to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). However, people who lack reproductive choice are already being left behind.

2.11. ACCESS TO SRHR IN BANGLADESH

Bangladesh is ranked 162 out of 181 nations in the Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative, which measures a country's vulnerability to climate change and other global challenges combined with its potential to enhance resilience. For Bangladeshi women, availability, and access to SRHR and services are often limited, and during climate disaster, these services almost become inadequate. In the absence of national frameworks and policies addressing SRHR services, it is necessary to understand whether key actors are responding and addressing the vulnerabilities women face during and post disaster or in any emergency situation. It is important to identify that discussions around SRHR are private, stressful, and uncomfortable in our society.

2.11.1. INFRASTRUCTURE & ACCESS TO RECOURSE

Infrastructure and access to resource have a big role to play on how women are impacted by climate change. Women suffer more during disasters and are displaced. The socio-cultural norms mostly limit women's accessibility during times of disaster or post disaster situation.

Older women and pregnant women are at risk of death and injury during disasters. Our cyclone shelters are not gender neutral. Most of the shelter center are not usually women friendly. However, the stairs are reportedly steep and unfriendly for the elderly women, children, disabled women, and pregnant women. Almost no cyclone shelter has a ramp to safely carry the disabled persons and pregnant women or sufficient support system. Necessary SRH services, hygiene products and supplies are not just constrained but unavailable during disasters. There are data gaps on post disaster situation of the women who experienced the situation as mentioned here.

2.11.2. GENDER BASED VIOLENCE OR ABUSE

Women are more likely to become victims of GBV right after any disaster occur. Eco anxiety and stress is likely to be heightened after disasters, particularly where families are displaced and have to live in emergency settings or transitional shelter place. Overcapacity, the collapse of regular routines and livelihood patterns, unusual living, privacy issue can contribute to temper loose, frustration and violence, with children and women most vulnerable. It is crucial to understand the local cultures and the social contexts that exist in Bangladesh. Many people could not understand the exact terms, SRH and SRHR (in Bengali also). An understanding of gender sensitivities as well as SRHR issues need to be ensured and a willingness to talk about these issues although they are sensitive subjects.

Evidence on the SRH beliefs, practices, needs, service-seeking behavior, and service utilization related barriers experienced by young males in Bangladesh is also extremely limited. There is a culture of silence around

discussion on SRHR in Bangladesh which largely stems from shame, stigma, and taboo associated with SRH. This is a trend in South Asia, where knowledge of SRHR is highly reported, but details of SRH processes is limited. These challenges highlight the deeply gendered cultural norms and beliefs associated with sex and sexuality in our societies.

There is gap identified in different areas,

1. Gap Identified Corrective actions.
2. Gaps in assessment phase
3. Gaps in design
4. Gaps in implementation
5. Gaps in response monitoring

3. RECOMMENDATION

To step up improvement and lower the impact of climate related disasters on women and girls, this brief offers the following recommendations:

Eradicate all forms of social, political, and economic barriers which is the cause or increase women vulnerability to the impact of climate change on women's SRH.

Incorporate gender assessments, evaluation, analysis and gender equality indicators into mitigation and adaptation strategy to identify where specific existing vulnerabilities to climate change, and where opportunities for mitigating and adapting to climate change can be found.

Need to offer multiple roles and responsibilities to be given to women to organize separate disaster risk management consultations and planning specially in SRH framework.

Ensure existing policy coherence between government policies and commitments to SRHR, equal opportunity for men and women, and climate change plans and budgets.

Ensure the participation of women in disaster risk reduction management, including in the planning, implementation and monitoring and evaluation processes.

Develop a gender specific strategy plan for SRHR, including resource needs and monitoring tools.

Review and strengthen NAPs to include SRHR, including integration into adaptation and disaster responses.

Build the capacity of government bodies leading on climate change to integrate gender analysis, tools for mainstreaming, indicators, and best practice into their work.

Loss and damage assessments must go beyond using an economic lens and include a broader social perspective that considers and responds to gender inequalities exist in SRH and to the different roles played by men and women.

Conduct comprehensive assessments on the effect of climate change on women's health, including their sexual and reproductive health.

Create mechanisms that guarantee women's equal access to negotiating, developing, managing, and implementing adaptation and mitigation financing.

Various steps should be taken to mitigate the harms of disrupted access to sexual and reproductive healthcare and services because of emergency settings and prolonged crises, and to proactively prepare and respond to future issues.

1. There is a need to integrate and provide coherence among the various policies that have incorporated gender mainstreaming exist in isolation.
2. Existing policies and programs, need to be implemented through proper allocation of human and financial resources.
3. To establish the SRHR within the context of climate change, it is also important for governments to recognize, implement and deliver on the commitments already made.
4. Government should improve the overall data collection and management system.
5. Responding to the sexual and reproductive health needs of persons with a mental or physical disability.
6. Donors of SRHR initiatives could also support an electronic library where civil society organizations could present their work and publish their reports to make them more accessible for researchers as well as the public and policy makers.
7. Individuals disproportionately impacted by the effects of natural disasters and crises should be represented and centred in policy spaces.
8. We need to prepare a national SRHR Index to analyse health policies, programming, and funding streams and generate grades that compare what is being done with what can and should be done to promote SRHR within government health assistance.

4. CONCLUSION

Bangladesh government can play a catalytic role in effective climate mitigation and adaptation. However, lack of prioritization has resulted in minimal SRHR service availability in Bangladesh. This has rendered into a lack of climate policy addressing SRHR. Although recommendations to include women in disaster risk reduction management planning were made, there is no element of how the government intends to do this. Many of the reports and available data analyzed were economic development, recovery, or relief-based responses to climate related catastrophes.

This Policy brief confirmed that climate change negatively impacts almost all SRHR outcomes and leaves vulnerable women and girls at higher risk of being left behind. More collaboration between the IPCC, government bodies, Go, NGO and local women's groups is crucial.

Women of Bangladesh are most likely to be affected by climate change related emergencies and already experience high levels of gender inequality. There is an urgent need for national frameworks concerning climate change to take up the issue of SRHR to facilitate discussion and inclusion of the reproductive justice framework at the national level.

Who work in SRHR are already working in climate change. This policy brief was aims to suggest some further meaningful actions which build on education and information on SRHR and CC. It was designed to be used by decision-makers and climate change, humanitarian and gender equality advocates to better understand the linkages between sectors and align efforts to generate effective policies and programs.

5. ANNEX: RESOURCES

Climate-Change-and-SRHR-Scoping-Study_Working-Paper_2014.pdf

Damavandi, S., (2022). The Critical Importance of Sexual and Reproductive Healthcare During Emergency Settings: Recommendations for the U.S. Government and Global Humanitarian Organizations. Washington D.C.: International Center for Research on Women.

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Related Resources

Toolkit for a Gender-Responsive Process to Formulate and Implement National Adaptation Plans (NAPs)

Advancing Gender-Responsive Climate Action Through National Adaptation Plan (NAP) Processes | NAP Global Network Synthesis Report, 2019–2020

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