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Policy Brief

**CLIMATE CRISIS AND SEXUAL REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH:
Mainstreaming Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) into
National Adaptation Plan (NAP)**



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SUMMARY:

KEY MESSAGES:

- Climate change has direct and indirect implications on sexual reproductive health and rights (SRHR) in multiple ways, the realization of SRHR in the National Adaptation Plan (NAP) is imperative as it may result in dual benefits of improved health outcomes and strengthened community resilience against climate change.
- Overlooking SRHR in climate action policy frameworks will continue to jeopardize health outcomes, particularly for women and girls, and impede efforts to build resilience to climate change impacts and sustainable development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

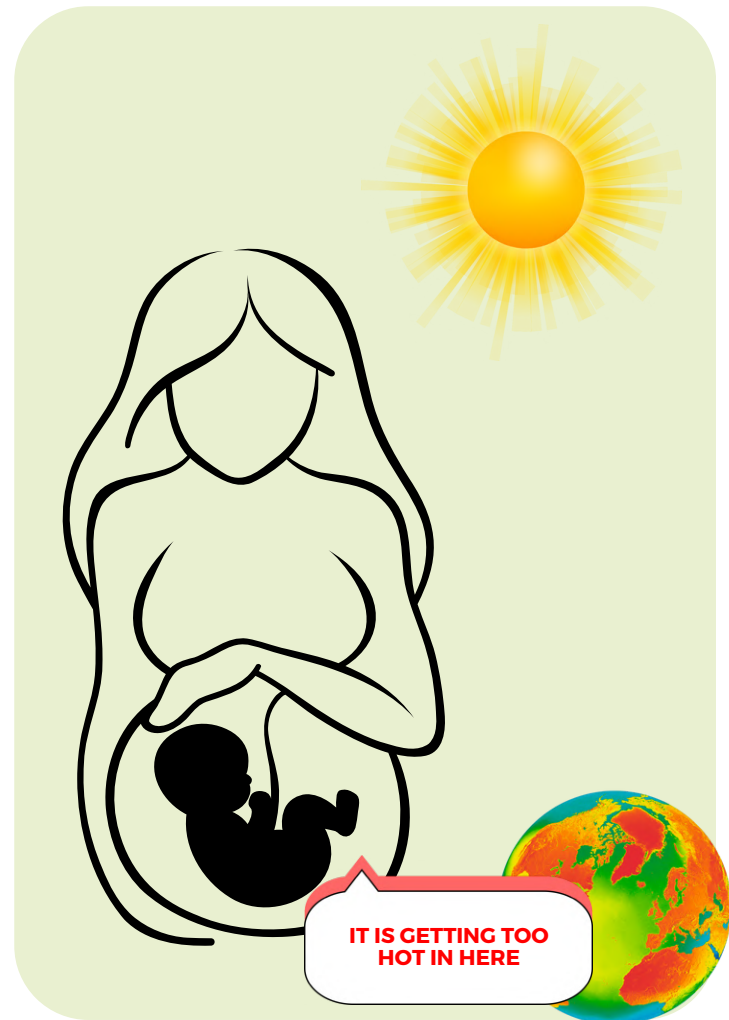
- In crafting its first National Adaptation Plan, the Tanzania government should consider taking on board SRHR components. This can be achieved by applying the SRHR lens in vulnerability assessment and gender analysis that will illuminate more on the interlinkage between the two issues.
- There should be a greater alignment between NAP and HNAP to ensure Tanzania's Health system becomes more resilient in the face of climate crisis.
- Capacity building to policymakers, frontline healthcare providers and other relevant stakeholders such as CSOs, NGOs, FBOs who are working on SRHR initiatives is needed to raise their understanding on the nexus between SRHR and Climate change.

INTRODUCTION

Understanding the Urgency of SRHR in Climate Change Adaptation.

Climate change is undoubtedly the greatest threat to most developing countries, having devastating impacts that go beyond environmental degradation and ecosystems, affecting human health and well-being (Akhtar, 2024). In this context, the need for climate change adaptation measures has become a top priority, as these countries are advancing their National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) to decrease their vulnerability and strengthen capacities to adapt to the impacts of climate change. In recent years, there has been increased attention on the nexus of climate change adaptation and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), which comprises maternal and newborn health, contraceptives, and gender-based violence (Starrs et al., 2018). Growing evidence indicates the climate crisis has far-reaching implications affecting directly or indirectly SRHR such as influencing negative maternal health outcomes and disrupting access to these essential services during disasters. On the flip side, the realization of SRHR has been linked to enhancing resilience, especially to women and girls against the changing climate.

Despite this clear linkage, the SRHR dimensions have been overlooked or poorly incorporated into climate adaptation policy frameworks. The review of country-level climate adaptation plans



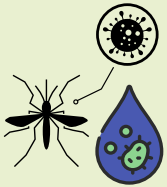
done by NAP Global Network and Women Deliver has illuminated this policy gap (Angie Dazé, 2021). The exclusion of SRHR from climate change policies can exacerbate existing vulnerabilities and inequalities and missed opportunities to implement effective adaptation strategies, especially for women and girls. Therefore, this policy brief aims to provide a concise overview of the links between these two domains and present best practices from other NAPs and recommendations for policymakers to integrate SRHR into the National Adaptation Plan (currently under development) in Tanzania.

WHY SHOULD THE NAP PROCESS CONSIDER SRHR?

There is evidence that the climate crisis affects sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) both directly and indirectly;



Exposure to extreme temperature conditions has been reported to influence gestational cardiovascular events, negative birth outcomes such as preterm birth, stillbirth, low birth weight, and neonatal mortality (Afzal et al., 2024; Ha, 2022).



Increased prevalence of climate-sensitive diseases such as Malaria and water-borne infections has been found to have more complications to maternal and newborn health (Ha, 2022).



Access to essential healthcare services such as maternal healthcare, safe deliveries, safe abortion services, and contraceptives may be limited due to climate-induced disasters such as floods and storms (Burns & Mutunga, 2024; UNFPA, 2021; van Daalen et al., 2022).



Climate-related food insecurity and malnutrition are associated with increased risks of birth defects, low birth weight, preterm labor, and gestational hypertension (Ha, 2022).



Incidences of early marriage have been reported to increase following climate disasters as local families' livelihoods are compromised which compels them to marry off their young girls as a coping strategy (Burns & Mutunga, 2024; McLeod et al., 2019).



Sexual and Gender-based Violence has been reported to increase during the climate crisis. 84% of participants in a study in Bangladesh reported women are more likely to experience gender violence during disasters (Pathfinder International, 2022)



Climate-induced food insecurity can indirectly contribute to higher risks of contracting HIV/STIs. Women are reported to engage in transactional sex as a coping strategy due to climate shocks such as food insecurity. This can contribute to the increased prevalence of HIV/STIs (De Walque et al., 2014).

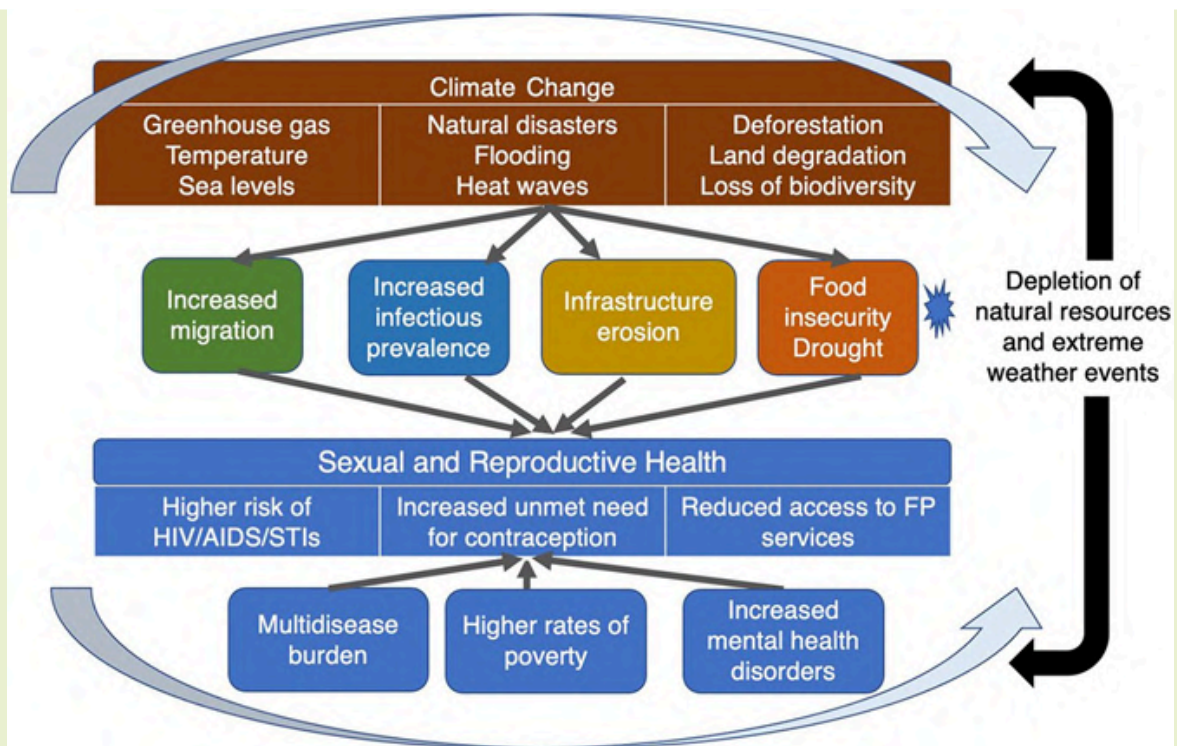


Figure 1: Framework illustrating the links between climate change and SRHR. Adapted from (Burns & Mutunga, 2024).

Enhance Resilience and Adaptation.

Also, the realization of SRHR has been reported to enhance resilience and adaptive capacity against the impacts of climate change. For example, a study done in South Africa have found that family planning services play a crucial role in managing population growth which in turn reduces pressure on climate-sensitive resources such as land and water and creates smaller households that are more resilient to climate change (Husain & Patierno, 2016).

Gender Equality

There is a close linkage between SRHR and gender equality. SRHR is acknowledged as fundamental human right and precondition for achieving gender equality in the world,

therefore their reflection in the Tanzanian National Adaptation Plan (NAP) process aligns with international frameworks such article 7 of the Paris Agreement which calls for a gender-responsive climate action (UNFCCC, 2015).

Synergies with sustainable development goals (SDGs)

The inclusion of SRHR in climate action policies can contribute to the achievement of multiple SDGs such as poverty reduction (SDG 1), zero hunger (SGD 2) health and well-being (SDG 3), gender equality (SDG 5). and climate action (SGD 13). Neglecting SRHR in climate policy overlooks an opportunity for holistic, rights-based approaches to address climate change impacts and promote sustainable development.

CONTEXT: CLIMATE ACTION POLICY FRAMEWORKS IN TANZANIA

Tanzania is most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change which are marked by prolonged dry spells, drought, floods, extreme temperature conditions, and variations in precipitation. To address the adverse impacts of climate change, the government of Tanzania has developed several policies and strategies to guide adaptation efforts including the National Climate Change Strategy, Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC, 2021), the National Climate Change Communication Strategy, and the Health National Adaptation Plan (HNAP). These national-level documents were reviewed with careful attention to SRHR components. The key findings from the review are as follows;

- 1. There is attention to gender perspectives;** Gender dimensions have been recognized in some of the existing climate policy frameworks including the NDC.
- 2. Women have been identified to be the most vulnerable to climate change impacts,** however, the specific actions for adaptation are either lagging or no evidence of being implemented especially those highlighted in HNAP 2018-2023.
- 3. Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR) dimensions are not explicitly incorporated in the existing climate action policy frameworks**

The lack of SRHR dimensions in existing climate policy frameworks is due to limited understanding of the links between climate change and health, particularly on SRHR.

Golden opportunity for Action.

Tanzania is currently undertaking its first National Adaptation Plan (NAP) process, which is coordinated by the Vice-President's Office Division of Environment. This national-level document will detail the country's vulnerabilities to climate change, potential risks across all sectors including health, and relevant strategies to adapt to the changing environment. The ongoing NAP process presents a timely opportunity to ensure that the SRHR dimensions are prioritized and integrated in the process considering their crucial role in enhancing resilience, especially for women and girls who are reported to be most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

BEST PRACTICE**SRHR in National Adaptation Plan: A Case of Bangladesh**

Bangladesh is a country in South Asia, ranking seventh in the world among countries suffering from extreme weather events. Tropical cyclones, tornadoes, floods, droughts, and landslides are the major climate-induced disasters that frequently hit Bangladesh. Concurrently, the country faces challenges in the provision of Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), a situation that becomes worse when the country is struck with climate-induced disasters. These extreme weather events have been reported to affect women's reproductive health in multiple ways including limiting access to lifesaving SRHR services, increasing gender-based violence, and child marriage incidences (Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 2022).

To address these SRHR-related challenges, the Bangladesh government has developed a comprehensive National Adaptation Plan (NAP) 2023-2050 that has prioritized some issues relating to SRHR in adaptation actions such as the establishment of climate-resilient cyclone and flood shelters with lactation and maternity facilities, halting early marriage and domestic violence induced by climate crisis through awareness creation, collect and use data and indicators disaggregated by gender, age for monitoring and evaluation. Inclusion of SRHR dimensions in Bangladesh's National Adaptation Plan (NAP) has been possible through acknowledging the devastating impacts of the climate crisis on SRHR, but also through meaningful inclusion of vulnerable populations such as women in decision-making spaces to ensure their needs are assessed, prioritized and addressed (Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 2022).

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Mainstreaming SRHR components in Tanzania National Adaptation Plan (NAP) process

to enhance community resilience to climate change. This could be achieved by applying an SRHR lens in vulnerability and gender analysis which will help to unveil how SRHR are impacted by climate change in the Tanzania context and identify appropriate adaptation actions.

2. The NAP process should align with the Health National Adaptation Plan (HNAP).

Evidence indicates some of the health issues especially SRHR were prioritized in Fiji and Ethiopia HNAP, but they were missing in the overarching NAP documents of the respective countries (Women Deliver, 2021). Therefore to enhance health system resilience to the impacts of climate change, the NAP (currently under development) and HNAP (currently under review) should not exist in silos.

3. Strengthening capacity-building policymakers, healthcare providers, and other relevant stakeholders

such as CSOs, and NGOs working on the SRHR arena to increase their understanding of the interconnectedness of the SRHR and climate change.

4. Involvement of diverse stakeholders especially gender experts and sexual and reproductive health actors

in all NAP processes including the consultative workshops and decision-making spaces to ensure the most effective adaptation planning process with diverse recommendations from different perspectives.

5. More investment in research initiatives

to close the evidence gap that currently exists on the nexus of climate change and Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) is needed. The findings generated from the research studies should inform adaptation planning in Tanzania.

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