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Policy Brief

ADVANCING SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS IN THE HEALTH SECTOR NATIONAL ADAPTATION PLAN (HNAP)



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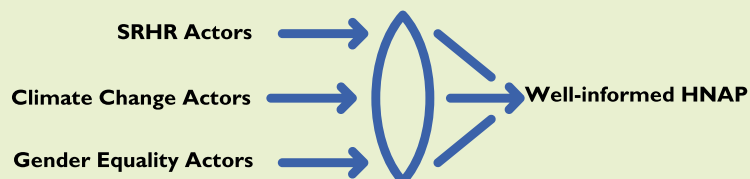
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KEY MESSAGES:

- Sexual and Reproductive Health and the Rights of women and Girls are under threat as climate change impacts continue to unfold. Urgent action is required to protect their rights and enhance their resilience to the ever-changing climate.
- Overlooking SRHR in climate action policy frameworks has multiple implications such as increasing women and girls' vulnerability to the impacts of climate change and perpetuating gender inequality.
- Realization of SRHR can lead to improved health outcomes, enhanced resilience among vulnerable groups, and promote gender equality which is a crucial element of gender-responsive climate action.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Mainstreaming SRHR components in the Health Sector National Adaptation Plan (HNAP). This would be possible by incorporating the SRHR lens in Vulnerability Assessment and Gender Analysis.
- Ensuring a meaningful involvement of relevant gender and SRHR actors during the HNAP review process and decision-making spaces to ensure women's and girls' needs are assessed, prioritized, and addressed
- Strengthening capacity building on the nexus of SRHR and climate change among policymakers, healthcare providers, research institutions, and other stakeholders such as NGOs, CSOs, and FBOs.



BACKGROUND

Climate Change and SRHR

Tanzania is experiencing dual challenges related to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and climate crisis. Extreme weather events such as prolonged dry spells, droughts, extreme temperature conditions, rainfall variability, and floods have been observed to increase in various parts of the country (URT, 2018; URT, 2021). Such events have been found to increase the burden on the health system as they have been associated with increased prevalence of vector-borne diseases, water-borne diseases, and zoonosis. Concurrently, the country confronts hurdles in the provision of sexual and Reproductive Health services and Rights which are marked by increased teenage pregnancies, unintended pregnancies, and maternal mortality rates (Choonara et al., 2024; Moshi & Tilisho, 2023; Ooms et al., 2022; Tesha et al., 2023).

Almost 30 years ago, 170 countries adopted the program of action that prioritized women's Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) during the landmark International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) held in Cairo, Egypt (United Nations, 1994). Despite noticeable gains since then, the intensifying impacts of

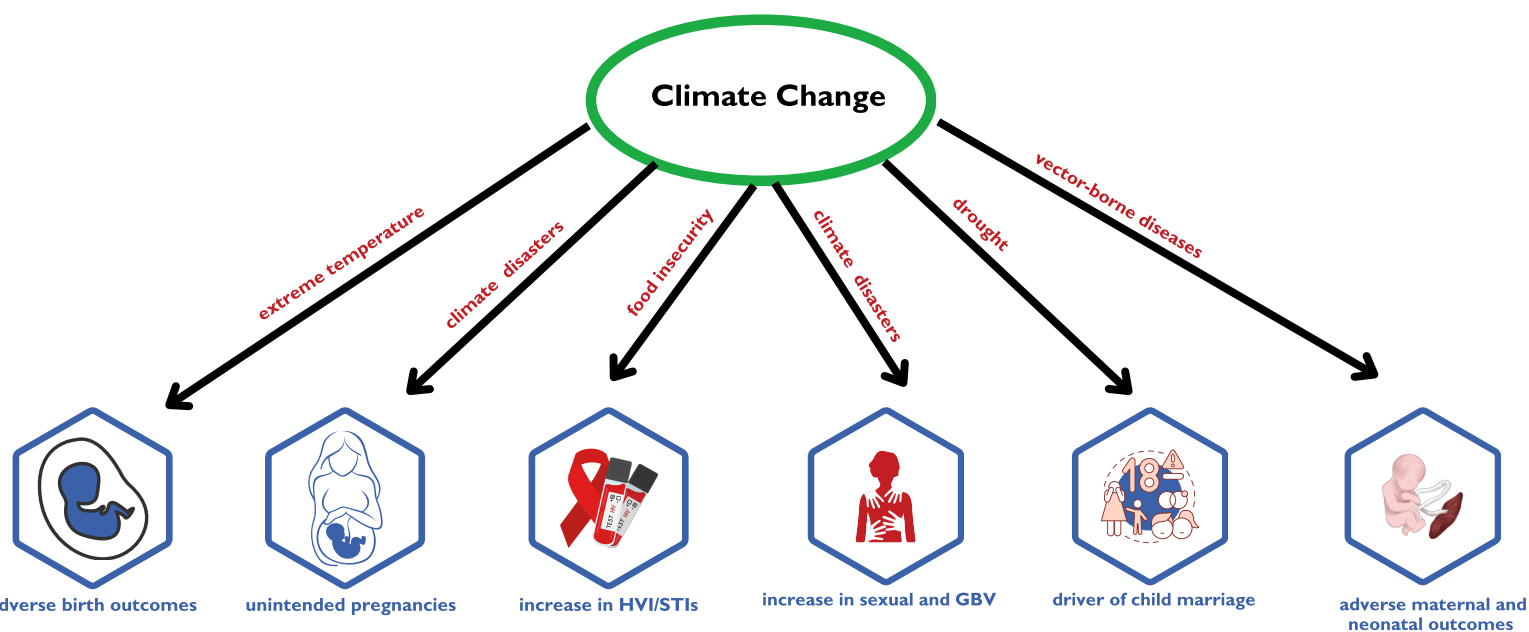
climate change have put SRHR under serious threat as women and girls' vulnerability has significantly increased. Yet, climate change policies have turned a blind eye to SRHR. The growing concerns have caught global attention as urgent action is needed to safeguard women and girls by prioritizing SRHR components in climate change policy frameworks (NAP Global Network & Women Deliver, 2020).



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Photo capturing Drought in Tanzania

Unveiling the links: The nexus of climate change and SRHR



- **Evidence points to a connection between maternal exposure to extreme temperature conditions and adverse birth outcomes** such as stillbirth, low birth weight, and preterm birth (Keivabu & Cozzani, 2022; Kuehn & McCormick, 2017).
- **Disruption of lifesaving SRHR services during climate-induced disasters has been found to lead to unintended pregnancies.** A report from Mozambique has revealed more than 86 health facilities were damaged and compromised access to family planning services in the community after the country was hit by a cyclone (UNFPA, 2022).
- **Climate-induced food insecurity has been associated with an increase in HIV/STIs.** Women are reported to engage in transactional sex as a coping strategy due to climate shocks such as food insecurity. This contributes to the increased prevalence of HIV/STIs (De Walque et al., 2014).
- **Climate change intensifies sexual and gender-based violence.** Climate-induced displacement following flooding events has been reported to increase incidences of gender violence in Kilolo District, Tanzania (Joseph, 2022).
- **Drought has been reported as an indirect driver of child marriage.** A study conducted in Momba and Kilolo Districts has reported disruption of livelihoods due to drought has led to financial strains for families who are compelled to marry off their young girls as the means to secure dowries to support their families or deliberate efforts to help their girls to enter well-off families (James & Tabia, 2022; Joseph, 2022). This is consistent with the reports from Ethiopia, Somalia, and Kenya (UNICEF, 2022).
- **Increased prevalence of vector-borne diseases such as Malaria, dengue fever, and Zika virus have also been linked with adverse maternal and neonatal outcomes** including birth defects and deaths (Howard-Jones et al., 2023)
- **Realization of SRHR is linked to increased resilience to climate change, for example, access to family planning services creates smaller families that can easily cope with climate shocks and eases pressure on climate-sensitive resources.**

SPOTLIGHT: The Current Gaps in Existing Climate Adaptation Policy Frameworks

Most Sub-Saharan Africa developing countries have either developed their NAPs and HNAPS and or are in the process to do so. NAP and HNAP process must be an inclusive and concerted effort if they are to lead to a climate resilient society. Half of Sub-Saharan countries have already crafted and submitted their National Adaptation Plans to UNFCCC and the rest including Tanzania are in process. Available evidence have indicated that, despite the consequences of climate change on SRHR, many countries still pay little attention to SRHR components and are often missing in climate action policy frameworks.

To understand the context and existing gaps in climate change policy documents, NAP Global Network and Women Deliver conducted a review study that covered 29 documents (19 NAPs, 5 HNAPs, and 5 NAP readiness proposals). A report from the review has revealed Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights components are not well explicitly incorporated in the climate change policies (Women Deliver, 2021). Only 10 out of 19 NAPs contain any specific references to SRHR, and 4 NAPs have references relating to GBV.

Denial of SRHR in climate change policies has the potential to impede efforts to build resilience and adaptive capacity to ever-changing climate and increase vulnerability to women. In addition, women will be left behind in the process.

CONTEXT: Tanzania National Health Adaptation Plan (HNAP) 2018-2023.

In recognition of the devastating impacts of climate change on the health sector, the Tanzania government crafted its National Health Adaptation Plan 2018-2023 (Currently under review process). This national-level document was developed to enhance resilience and build a robust health system in the country that can withstand the shocks from climate crises. The document details climate-related health risks identified through vulnerability assessment and adaptation options in each of the 10 components of the WHO Operational Framework for Building Climate-Resilient Health Systems. The review of this outdated HNAP was done to assess to what extent gender and SRHR components were addressed. The review has revealed the following key findings;

- There is consideration of gender issues in the document, as women and children have been identified as vulnerable groups for malnutrition and climate-sensitive diseases such as cholera

- Greater alignment of HNAP with existing health policies in the country such as health sector policies that aim at reducing the maternal mortality rate in the country and National Health Policy, which addresses gender issues in all health parameters as among its goals.
- There are no specific adaptation actions that address SRHR directly in the outdated HNAP (2018-2023). However, some of the adaptation actions can have positive impacts on SRHR for example, strengthening the health workforce, increasing access to basic water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH), and constructing resilient health-system infrastructure can ensure the continuity of essential healthcare services including those related to SRHR.

As the climate crisis continues to increase in terms of intensity and frequency, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) will be more under threat. Therefore, urgent action is needed to ensure these SRHR dimensions are well mainstreamed into climate adaptation policy frameworks especially in the ongoing HNAP process. Continuing sidelining SRHR in adaptation actions perpetuates women's vulnerability and gender inequality in the community.

CASE STUDY

Family Planning a Path to Climate Resilience in Ethiopia.

Ethiopia is a country found in the Horn of Africa. It is ranked second among the most populated countries in Africa. Like many developing countries, Ethiopia is also vulnerable to the impacts of climate change yet has a limited capacity to adapt. The country has observed increased incidences of climate-sensitive diseases such as malaria, dengue fever, and diarrhea diseases due to recurring droughts and floods in various regions. The rapid population growth in climate-disaster-prone areas has been reported to increase vulnerability to the impacts of climate change. Also, incidences of Gender-based Violence are increasing during the climate crisis. The Federal Government of Ethiopia developed the Health National Adaptation Plan 2018-2020 which includes promoting family planning as one among ten intervention areas across the country with special attention to the most vulnerable regions with droughts, severe land degradation, and high population density aiming at enhancing community resilience and eases pressure on the climate-sensitive natural resources.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO POLICYMAKERS



SRHR in Adaptation
planning



Meaningful
engagement



Alignment with
Gender Policies



Capacity building



Support Research
Initiatives

To ensure SRHR components are well incorporated in the Health National Adaptation Plan, the government of Tanzania is recommended to;

- 1. Mainstream SRHR in Vulnerability Assessment and Gender Analyses to inform adaptation planning.** This will shed light on how climate change can impact and exacerbate existing sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) gaps and how overlooking SRHR will likely impede climate-resilience-building efforts in Tanzania.
- 2. Ensure meaningful engagement of various stakeholders particularly SRHR and gender actors during the HNAP review process.** This will ensure there is the right mix of expertise and representation of the vulnerable population in the decision-making space and that their view and comments are well captured in the document for implementation
- 3. Ensure alignment of the HNAP with the National Gender and Development Policy of 2023.** Where the policy acknowledges the impacts of climate change on women and girls and commits to ensuring a gender-responsive climate action is in place.
- 4. Strengthen Capacity building on the rising nexus between climate change and sexual and reproductive health and rights.** There is a need to raise awareness among policymakers, healthcare providers, research institutions, and other stakeholders such as NGOs, CSOs, and FBOs on the linkage between climate change and SRHR.
- 5. Support Research initiatives to close the evidence gaps on the nexus between climate change and SRHR.** Studies on the linkage between SRHR and Climate change are lacking in the country. This a call for the Government of Tanzania to strengthen the capacity and provide resources for research institutions to conduct studies on climate change and SRHR.

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