

Climate change engagement: A guide for SRHR organisations

Traditionally, climate funders and policy makers have not integrated sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) within their strategies. The aim of this guide is to support more SRHR organisations and advocates to engage in climate change advocacy, to secure climate finance and to develop stronger partnerships with those already working on the connections between climate change and SRHR.

We hope this guide will help:

1. Ensure that climate policies, at national and international level, better support and promote SRHR.
2. Ensure that funding for SRHR is expressly eligible under climate funding mechanisms.
3. Mobilise new allies and alliances between organisations and sectors.



Working in reproductive choice is working in climate change

Reproductive choice is foundational to gender equality and to a future where women and girls take their rightful place in all aspects of society. Climate change is already negatively impacting reproductive choice. For instance, in 2022, heavier than usual monsoon rains and the melting glaciers which followed Pakistan's severe heat wave led to Pakistan declaring a state of emergency because of climate induced flooding. The World Health Organization estimated that, by 3 September, almost 634,000 people were living in camps and 1,460 health facilities were affected or destroyed.¹ The full extent of this humanitarian disaster will not be known for many months, but due to structural gender inequality the impacts will be worse for girls and women.

Whilst Pakistan's climate related floods have devastated health systems and access to sexual and reproductive health services, the diversity of climate related impacts on SRHR are many and varied. Recent MSI Reproductive Choices research, across 26 climate impacted countries, has shown that, since 2011, an estimated 11.5 million women have had their access to contraception disrupted due to climate-related displacement. Modelling indicates this figure will rise over the next decade to an estimated 14 million. MSI also estimates this could lead to an additional 6.2 million unintended pregnancies, 2.1 million unsafe abortions and 5,800 maternal deaths. It is clear that working in reproductive choice means working in climate change. There are many other connections between SRHR and climate change, which are covered in resources provided in the Annex.

[FP2030](#) is the global platform and partnership to further family planning in those areas around the world with the greatest unmet need. Dr Samukeliso Dube, Executive Director at FP2030, sets out why FP2030 is looking at emergency preparedness and response (EPR) in the context of climate change, "Humanitarian crises are becoming more complex, frequent and prolonged. The dramatic increase in climate driven disasters demonstrates that every country is vulnerable to some form of crisis and often to many simultaneous crises. Its impact on health and societal well-being depends on how well countries and communities prepare for, respond to, and recover from emergencies. For FP2030, the investment in EPR strategies is essential to help cope with crises, and limit gaps in the provision of essential sexual and reproductive health services. As part of our new EPR strategy, we seek to reduce silos by fostering partnerships with climate adaptation, resilience, pandemic preparedness, and disaster risk management actors. By including EPR for SRH in new FP2030 commitments and climate action commitments, countries work on building more resilient health systems."

SRHR are foundational to supporting and strengthening both gender equality and climate resilience. SRHR advocates and providers must ensure these issues are not overlooked or side-lined in climate discussions. If we want to bring about transformative change it is essential that we go beyond merely highlighting the negative impacts on SRHR and, urgently, increase the recognition of reproductive choice as part of adaptation and resilience building in climate policy, climate funding and climate action.

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and its processes can, at first, be overwhelming to organisations considering engagement. But few people or organisations can honestly claim to be experts in "climate change" - because the topic is so huge. In reality, climate scientists, non-governmental organisations, businesses and other stakeholders are experts in certain *elements* of climate change. It is not necessary to be an expert in renewable energy, carbon pricing and the difference between the Paris Agreement and the Kyoto Protocol to work in climate change. If you work in SRHR, you are already working in climate change.

This guide seeks to support SRHR organisations to take some further next steps, as well as encourage them to share their experiences and ask for support, as we navigate this new and fast developing area together.

UNFCCC

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change ([UNFCCC](#)) is an intergovernmental treaty providing a framework within which the world is seeking to address the challenges of climate change. The 198 signatories are the “Parties” to UNFCCC, a convention which seeks to stabilise greenhouse gas concentrations at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system.ⁱⁱ The Parties, 197 countries and the European Union, meet annually at a Conference of the Parties, or COP, where they take stock of progress implementing their obligations and consider future action. After following an application process, non-governmental organisations and intergovernmental organisations can gain “Observer Status”, enabling them to engage in UNFCCC processes too. Following UNFCCC processes, Parties develop national plans, providing advocates with opportunities to advance their policy priorities within those plans and/or use those plans within their resource mobilisation efforts. With a growing number of SRHR organisations recognising the partnership, policy and funding potential of engaging in the climate discourse, having some knowledge of UNFCCC, the primary intergovernmental treaty on the topic, is a useful first step, even if you decide to not seek Observer Status.

Last year the UN declared worsening climate change as fuelling the first human-made famine in Madagascar. MSI is helping women and girls to access contraception in Androsy and Ambovombe in the south of the country, helping them to build resilience to climate shocks. Women and their children return home after collecting food donations distributed by an NGO fighting malnutrition in this region of Madagascar. © Rija Randrianasolo



Why it is time to highlight reproductive choice

Millions of women cannot access the health services they want to transform their lives. Those working in reproductive choice and bodily autonomy are well versed in highlighting the transformative effects on girls, women and their families of being able to choose freely if, when and with whom to have children. Reproductive choice is also a powerful climate adaptation and resilience building strategy. A recent policy brief, [Girls' Education and Family Planning: Essential Components of Climate Adaptation and Resilience](#), states some of the evidence supporting this.

Climate change gains more global media attention, and has more public awareness, than any other policy topic. This is a product of the severity of the challenge climate change presents us, but also means that there are additional avenues to highlight the importance of SRHR within this agenda.

The growing public attention and policy focus on health, gender and rights presents us with an opportunity. It means that adaptation and resilience building strategies, such as removing barriers to family planning and barriers to girls' education, will be important to many donors and policy makers. Whilst it is important that a whole plethora of climate adaptation measures must be implemented urgently, many adaptation and resilience building strategies (e.g. green roofs and reducing paved areas) lack the direct positive and profound wider impacts as increasing access to reproductive choice. This is a reality which can be used to promote SRHR within climate policy, resource mobilisation, and when seeking new partnerships.

Climate finance is both extraordinarily complex and exceptionally significant in scale. The much-discussed goal of USD 100 billion per annum in climate finance being just one statistic. Using existing evidence-based connections between reproductive health and climate change adaptation and resilience is one way which funding could be mobilised. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change noted, in its Fifth Assessment Report, the value of family planning, the UN Environment Programme's fifth Global Environment Outlook calls for greater access to family planning programmes along with women's education, and their 2021 report Making Peace with Nature echoes these arguments. The International Union for Conservation of Nature resolution, passed at 2021's World Conservation Congress, "Importance for the conservation of nature of removing barriers to rights-based voluntary family planning" is a further example of recent recognition of the connections, which could be used in efforts to encourage adequate resourcing from climate funding mechanisms.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) remind us of the importance of leaving no one behind. We know that people who lack reproductive choice are already being left behind. Target 3.7 of the SDGs states that we must "ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services, including for family planning, information and education, and the integration of reproductive health into national strategies and programmes". This target does not limit its call for inclusion of family planning, information and education merely into "national *health* strategies and programmes" but rather into "national strategies and programmes". Advocates can use this target to highlight the need to gain reference in *climate* strategies and programmes, as well as those focussed more narrowly. If we are truly to leave no one behind, we must ensure that SRHR is given greater and broader policy recognition.

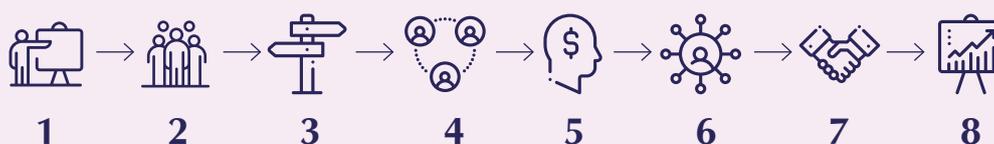


In Uganda, the Margaret Pyke Trust trains healthcare professionals in sexual and reproductive health. Ethnographic research undertaken locally has demonstrated a deep and widespread understanding of the connections between climate impacts, livelihoods, health and environment among the community members who are calling for better health services. Community education which incorporates topics beyond pure health messages is proving a valuable way to engage and reach more people on sexual and reproductive health. © Margaret Pyke Trust/Mark Baron

Taking first steps

What follows are some initial suggestions for those who recognise SRHR as relevant to the climate discourse and want some ideas as to how to begin or to deepen their work in this area. This is intended to be merely an initial guide, not all steps will be relevant to all organisations and some organisations will undertake these steps in a different sequence.

Steps



Step 1: Identify your primary motivations



Different organisations will have different motivations for engaging in this work. The primary reasons could be some or all of the following:

- Responding to requests from service users, communities, partners or donors.
- Recognising that climate funding is a resource mobilisation opportunity.
- Wanting existing programmatic designs to better take into account existing and likely future climate events.
- Recognising the potential opportunity of influencing climate policy.
- Wanting to build deeper governmental relationships, for instance by building relationships with departments engaged in climate, conservation or the environment.
- Wanting to ensure that climate change programmes are grounded in the principles of SRHR as set out in the International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action.

Step 2: Your team



Given the extent to which climate change is, and will continue, to impact health systems and SRHR, most SRHR organisations will, over time, need to build the capacity of those involved with programme design, policy and advocacy, monitoring and evaluation and resource mobilisation. An initial scoping exercise might include:

- Identifying an internal focal point and consider whether job descriptions and responsibilities require tweaking.
- Considering whether direct climate change expertise and/or cross-sector knowledge should be a requirement in future hiring decisions.
- Considering including climate related objectives and goals within strategic documents, work plans and key performance indicators for relevant staff.
- Undertaking internal capacity building actions on the climate / SRHR connections and determining the extent to which financial resources should be budgeted to facilitate this (and other) actions.



Step 3: Inform your approach

There are many useful tools and resources that will influence and inform an organisation's approach, such as:

- Your national context in relation to climate change policies, strategies, ambitions, commitments and objectives. Supportive policies can be used in resource mobilisation efforts, less supportive policies could provide important entry points for advocacy.
- Nationally Determined Contributions (**NDCs**). NDCs are national climate action plans, containing the commitments of a Party to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to climate change. Use the [UNFCCC NDC Registry](#) to view your NDCs.
- [National Adaptation Plans \(NAPs\)](#). NAPs identify medium- and long-term adaptation needs, informed by climate science. NAPs follow a continuous iterative process that is country-driven, participatory and transparent.
- Reviewing a country's NDC and NAP will highlight the extent to which health systems, reproductive choice, demography, gender and other topics relevant to SRHR are already considered by a Party. This is likely to highlight potential entry points for national advocacy and action. For instance, NDCs frequently state adaptation measures relating to health systems strengthening and building the capacity of health professionals, but could go much further in relation to actions relating to reproductive choice. You can get in touch with your national UNFCCC focal point to find out when your country's most recent climate policy documents were submitted and when they are due to be reviewed and updated.
- Considering resources (see the Annex for some suggestions) to build up background knowledge on climate change, the connections between climate and SRHR and evidence on why removing barriers to reproductive healthcare and barriers to girls' education is a climate adaptation and resilience building response.



Climate change has led to coastal erosion in Senegal from rising sea levels, increasing the influx of seawater into the mangroves, and threatening the livelihoods of the communities who have depended on them for centuries. MSI has partnered with Greenpeace to provide the girls and women with reproductive choices, to be better equipped to manage their reproductive autonomy. © MSI Reproductive Choices



Step 4: Consider governmental contacts

Given the UNFCCC has been signed by 197 government “Parties”, find out who the relevant governmental representatives are and in which department.

- UNFCCC updates the [contact details](#) of “national focal points” of each Party and provides information including in which ministry the focal point is based. Usually, national focal points are based in ministries such as foreign affairs, environment, climate change and trade. Consider contacting the national focal point via any existing contacts you have in government.
- Parties to UNFCCC are encouraged to appoint and provide support for a national gender and climate change focal point. The UNFCCC secretariat keeps a list of [nominated Gender Focal Points](#) who you can contact.
- Your existing relationships with government ministries will likely be with health ministries, rather than the ministry with the climate brief. But it is likely that cross-departmental structures will be in place and your existing governmental contacts might be able to provide a more direct way to engage with the climate teams.

A UGANDAN CASE STUDY

[Youth Advocacy and Development Network Uganda \(YADNET\)](#)

works at the advocacy level, bringing together 48 civil society organisations to integrate SRHR and broader health considerations in environment and climate policy. Raymond Ruyoka, CEO at YADNET, explains, “For the last six years, YADNET has worked with the Ministry of Water and Environment seeking to mainstream SRHR in climate change programmes, strategies and policies. We began engaging the Ministry as they were developing their first NDC in 2015 and have continued working with them as they prepared the revised NDC recently submitted to UNFCCC. Our experience has been positive and impactful. We believe our inputs have been warmly received, that civil society has been encouraged and empowered to engage in climate processes, not only in Uganda but also at regional and global level. YADNET representatives will, at COP27, be part of the Ugandan government’s national delegation. The collaboration is yielding results; a call for integrated health responses to climate change that include reproductive health care features under the priority Adaptation Actions in Uganda’s most recent NDC. There is also a growing network of SRHR and climate champions.”



Step 5: Consider climate finance



UNFCCC’s Standing Committee on Finance has stated “Climate finance aims at reducing emissions, and enhancing sinks of greenhouse gases and aims at reducing vulnerability of, and maintaining and increasing the resilience of, human and ecological systems to negative climate change impacts.”ⁱⁱⁱ This broad definition is necessary given climate finance ranges from development assistance from donor governments to concessional finance from development banks and multilateral funds. Initial donor mapping activities could include:

- Reviewing whether any current or recent institutional donors have additional funding lines which you have not yet pursued. For example, if donors have “climate” or “adaptation” funding streams, in addition to traditional “health” funding streams which have already supported your work, there might be additional resource mobilisation options with existing donors.
- Undertaking a similar process with governmental funding. Taking overseas development aid from the UK government, as an example, the Margaret Pyke Trust has secured funding for sexual and reproductive health service provision from the UK Government Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs, by successfully presenting the case of the climate and biodiversity connections with reproductive choice. Prior to this funding, the UK Government’s funding of SRHR programmes would only have been from health and gender budget lines.
- Reviewing the financial mechanisms under UNFCCC. The [Global Environment Facility](#), the [Green Climate Fund](#) and the [Adaptation Fund](#) could provide funding opportunities.
- Engaging with current and potential donors to reinforce the importance of integration of SRHR in climate and conservation programming. Whilst there are substantial resource mobilisation opportunities, there is also an advocacy need to further integrate SRHR within climate funding.

Step 6: Build your network



Whatever your reason for deciding to start to engage in the climate discourse, it is highly likely that organisations new to this space will want to consider potential partners, either to share information and learn, to undertake joint advocacy or to co-develop programmes. Networking opportunities might include:

- The UNFCCC lists (which both include contact details) of [Intergovernmental organisations](#) and [non-governmental organisations](#) which already have Observer Status.
- The UNFCCC list (which includes contact details) of [designated contact points for each UN Observer](#).
- Whether your organisation has allies in the [Climate Action Network \(CAN\)](#), or whether joining one of CAN's regional or national nodes would be helpful. Each node is responsible for its own governance and procedures and conducts joint advocacy work within its given country or region.
- Joining a national climate advocacy group, or liaising with national focal points, or national gender & climate change focal points.
- Using your membership, or joining, the [Women's Major Group \(WMG\)](#). WMG was created at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, where governments recognised Women as one of the nine important groups in society for achieving sustainable development. WMG engages in UNFCCC processes and [their list serv](#) can be useful.
- Other national and regional organisations could provide networking, information building and other opportunities. The [Women Environmental Programme \(WEP\)](#), for instance, has been working since 1997 to "improve the lives of women and youth" throughout Africa. With offices in Nigeria, Tunisia, Burkina Faso, Togo and Niger, WEP focuses on climate change, environment and governance issues.
- Researching other national, regional or topical alliances might bring up further opportunities for you to explore, such as the [Planetary Health Alliance](#) or the [SRHR and Climate Justice Coalition](#).
- Engaging and participating with these networks might facilitate building consortia where you can contribute SRHR knowledge and operational expertise within broader adaptation and resilience programmes.



Uganda's wetlands are under increasing threats and are vital for human health, livelihoods and act as carbon sinks. The Margaret Pyke Trust, International Crane Foundation/Endangered Wildlife Trust, Rugarama Hospital and London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine are providing a cross sectoral response to meet the complex health and livelihood needs identified by the communities. This is the first time a project including sexual and reproductive health service provision has been funded by the UK Government through "The Darwin Initiative", the UK's flagship biodiversity funding mechanism. © Margaret Pyke Trust/Mark Baron

Step 7: Become a UNFCCC Observer



It is not necessary to gain Observer Status for an organisation to engage in climate work but gaining such status can open additional opportunities. For instance, SRHR organisations might have more credibility with climate donors if they have Observer Status. Also, NGOs must be admitted by the Conference of the Parties as Observers before they can send representatives to attend any sessions or meetings of the UNFCCC. Whilst this is an essential step to seek to influence UNFCCC processes, attending climate change conferences can also be used to build networks, engage donors and build staff expertise.

GAINING OBSERVER STATUS

[PHE Ethiopia Consortium](#) is an Ethiopian NGO working at the intersection of reproductive health, social inclusion, climate resilience and environmental sustainability. In 2022 they submitted their application for Observer Status, Endashaw Mogessie, Executive Director, advised “It took us three days to prepare and submit our application but it can be completed in one day if there are readily arranged documents”.



The admission process only needs to be undertaken once, and there is no financial cost. [UNFCCC provides guidance on the process](#) in English, French and Spanish. Applications are handled through an Online Admissions System and the helpdesk contact (oas@unfccc.int) is usually timely and responsive.

If your organisation is likely to want to engage in UNFCCC sessions or meetings, it should seek Observer Status, as there will be a long delay between completing your application and gaining Observer Status. COP28 is scheduled to take place in November 2023 in the United Arab Emirates but the review cycle for submission of applications for Observer Status is already closed. The COP29 review cycle is open for NGOs until 31 August 2023.

When applying for Observer Status, applicants may ask to join one or more “constituencies” being loose groups with diverse but broadly clustered interests or perspectives. Naturally, those working in reproductive choice have historically chosen to join the Women and Gender Constituency. It could elevate the importance of SRHR if some future Observers joined other constituencies as well, such as the Indigenous Peoples Organisations Constituency or the [Research and Independent NGOs Constituency](#).

[The Women and Gender Constituency \(WGC\)](#) provides a platform to exchange information between members and with the UNFCCC Secretariat. WGC has a general mailing list “the Women’s Caucus list” for everyone generally interested in the work of WGC and also host a more restricted “WGC Advocacy list” which is open to members of civil society who agree to WGC’s advocacy principles and communication guidelines. To join this, you must fill out the form [here](#).

Step 8: Decide your strategy



The community of organisations promoting SRHR is hugely diverse in terms of geographical focus, ranging in size from youth-led grass roots organisations to major international NGOs. This guide seeks to encourage those which do not already engage in the climate discourse to start. Each organisation will have different expertise and specialisations and that is part of our sector’s strength. Collectively, we can consider our own strategies and how we can best contribute to the overall aim of ensuring girls and women and their right to reproductive choice is not forgotten in climate policy. For YADNET, this means supporting the Ugandan government to make meaningful changes to their national policies. For the Margaret Pyke Trust, this means chairing the International Union for Conservation of Nature’s Biodiversity & Family Planning Task Force, ensuring the conservation sector understands the importance of reproductive health and rights. For PHE Ethiopia Consortium, this means working with organisations all over Ethiopia from the health, agriculture, economic, gender, social, and environmental sectors promoting the importance of reproductive choice for women and girls as well as the future of the environment. For MSI Reproductive Choices this means responding to the request of country programmes to work with partners to develop this guide.

A POSITIVE OPPORTUNITY



[Margaret Pyke Trust](#) is an NGO with a vision of a healthy world without barriers to family planning. Carina Hirsch, Advocacy & Projects Manager, shared her perspective, “Our experience working with the climate and biodiversity sectors is an overwhelmingly positive one. Broadly speaking there is an openness and interest to learn about why SRHR is critically important in itself, and also as part of the response to the climate and biodiversity crises. Our work across sectors is enabling us to achieve significant policy changes, secure funding from additional sources and build our allies and partnerships.”

If we are to effectively integrate SRHR into the climate discourse we need each member 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 organisations, specialising 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 as a way to further the evidence base of the connections between sexual and reproductive health and climate change.

Looking ahead

Globally, the communities contributing least to the climate crisis are suffering the most, with women in low- and middle-income countries bearing the brunt. To support women on the frontline of the crisis to adapt, we need to ensure all people can attain the highest possible level of sexual and reproductive health. It is an injustice that the communities that have contributed least to the climate crisis are suffering the most from its impacts. Water scarcity, rising sea levels, and increasing crop failures and flooding are disproportionately affecting low- and middle-income countries. The situation is urgent and requires substantive action. If you work in SRHR, you are already working in climate change. Recognising that reality is a first step, this guide aims to suggest some further meaningful actions which build on that recognition.

Annex: Resources

World Health Organization. (3 September 2022). World Health Organization Pakistan Flood Situation Report. https://www.emro.who.int/images/stories/Pakistans_2nd_sit_rep_final.pdf?ua=1

Rumaitha Al-Busaidi for TED. (October 2021). Women and girls, you are part of the solution. https://www.ted.com/talks/rumaitha_al_busaidi_women_and_girls_you_are_part_of_the_climate_solution

Project Drawdown. (October 2021). Girls' Education and Family Planning: Essential Components of Climate Adaptation and Resilience. <https://drawdown.org/publications/drawdown-lift-policy-brief-girls-education-and-family-planning>

United Nations Population Fund. (July 2021). Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in National Climate Policy: A Review of 50 Nationally Determined Contribution Documents. <https://esaro.unfpa.org/en/publications/sexual-and-reproductive-health-and-rights-national-climate-policy>

United Nations Environment Programme. (February 2021). Making Peace with Nature. <https://www.unep.org/resources/making-peace-nature>

Women Deliver. (February 2021). Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in National Adaptation Plan (NAP) Processes: Exploring a pathway for realizing rights and resilience to climate change. <https://napglobalnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/napgn-en-2021-srhr-in-nap-processes.pdf>

Women Deliver. (January 2021). 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>

International Union for Conservation of Nature Resolution. (2020). WCC-2020-Res-072-EN: Importance for the conservation of nature of removing barriers to rights-based voluntary family planning. https://portals.iucn.org/library/sites/library/files/resrecfiles/WCC_2020_RES_072_EN.pdf

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. (2014). Biennial Assessment and Overview of Climate Finance Flows. https://unfccc.int/files/cooperation_and_support/financial_mechanism/standing_committee/application/pdf/2014_biennial_assessment_and_overview_of_climate_finance_flows_report_web.pdf

United Nations Environment Programme. (2012). Fifth Global Environment Outlook: Environment for the Future We Want. <https://www.unep.org/resources/global-environment-outlook-5>

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. (1992). <https://unfccc.int/resource/docs/convkp/conveng.pdf>

ⁱWorld Health Organization, Pakistan Flood Situation Report, 3 September 2022.

ⁱⁱArticle 2 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

ⁱⁱⁱUNFCCC Standing Committee on Finance 2014 Biennial Assessment and Overview of Climate Finance Flows Report.