



POLICY BRIEF

Climate Change and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR)

Climate Change, Gender and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR)

Malaysia's existing institutional framework on climate change continues to provide a multitude of discourses that influence actions in addressing a growing range of adaptation, mitigation and development issues. This policy brief provides the analysis of the National Scoping Study on Climate Change and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR)¹. As an emerging issue, the study found interlinkages between climate change and SRHR. The findings further revealed that differing views had impeded attention to include gender-responsive approaches and SRHR issues into climate change matters. This greatly hampers disaster management and adaptation actions. The study further highlights the need to recognize women's leadership and participation in the decision making process towards building climate resilient communities. This is significant as the existing institutional imbalances undermine women's perspectives and needs, thus making them invisible in climate change discussions and actions.

Why is this issue important?

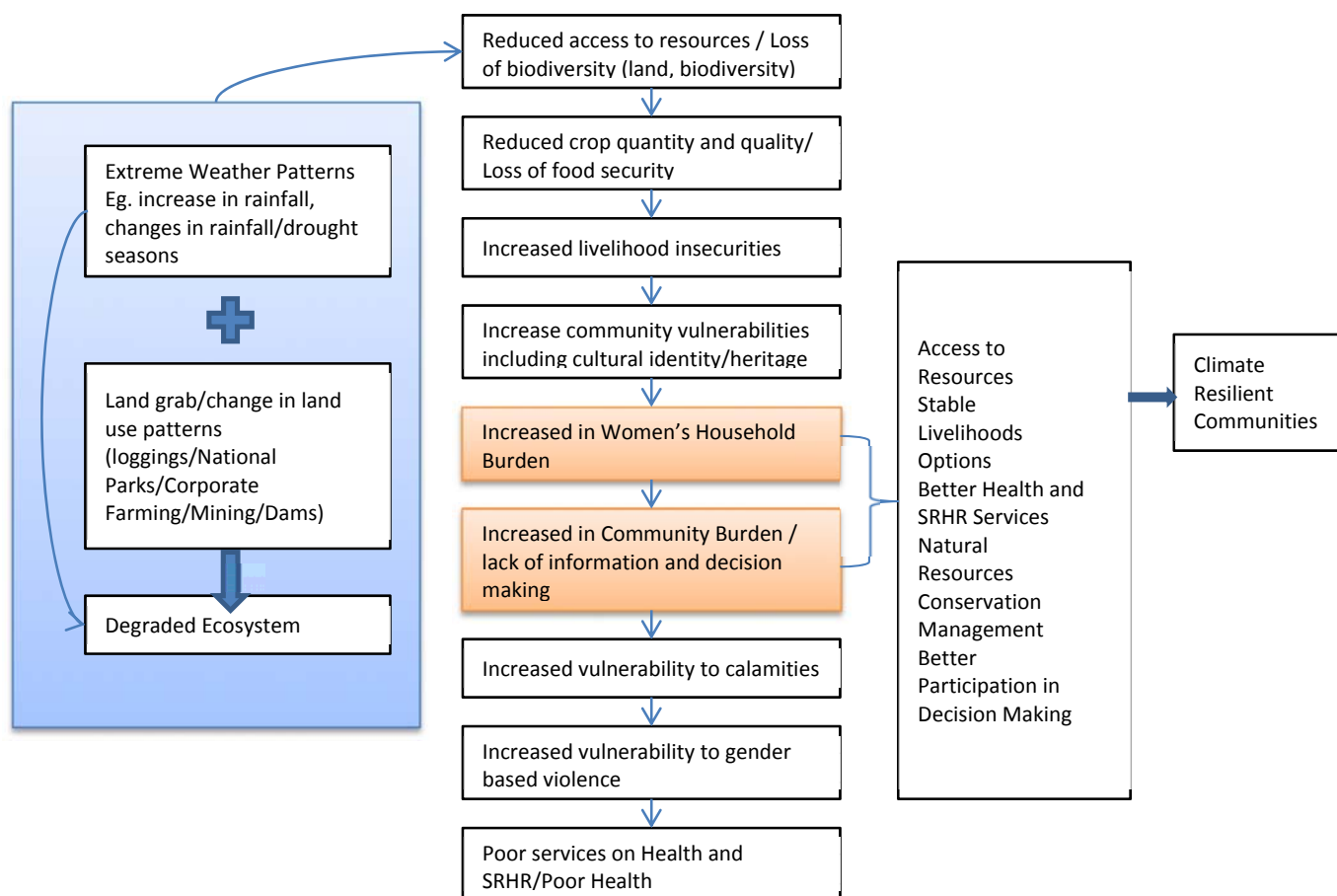
There is a shared sense of concern on the lack of gender perspectives in the areas of disaster preparedness, relief efforts, as well as adaptation and mitigation decision making as reflected in access to healthcare, environmental degradation, natural disasters, food security, migration and economic impacts. The call is for climate change matters to be gender responsive with safeguards in place for the inclusion of SRHR.

Studies on disaster, risks and climate change highlight the broad impacts of exposure on human population and the population's capacity to respond². The issues of vulnerability and resilience are differentiated by location and socio-economic circumstances that influence the level of preparedness³.

In a comparison study of future climate change projections with the 2004 hardcore poor data⁴, the National Hydraulic Research Institute of Malaysia (NAHRIM) found that the most vulnerable states include Terengganu, Kelantan, Perlis, Kedah, Perak, Sabah and Sarawak.

These echoes the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) findings that "climate change impacts will be differently distributed among different regions, generations, age classes, income groups, occupations and genders"⁴. Research has shown that persistent structural inequalities pose greater risks to health care, food, clean water and other resources which are crucial to the enjoyment of one's sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Figure 1: Population, Health, Environment and Climate Change Nexus



Source: Adapted from PFPI's (2015, Figure 2, p.10).

What does the Scoping Study tell us?

According to women leaders of Sarawak's indigenous communities, their locality (mainly in the rural region) is experiencing significant changes in crop patterns and production and unpredictable weather patterns including changing temperature, longer drought, intense rain and stronger winds. They attributed these changes to the changes in land-use. Large acreage of the forests were converted into plantations and infrastructure development, such as large dams and urbanization. They also raise critical concerns on the lack of gender inclusion in planning and development processes ignoring the differences of priorities and needs.

The research also found that there remain persistent challenges in gaining access to basic healthcare services, in terms of delivery frequency, quality and urgency, which further impede women's SRHR affecting their resilience to natural disasters and climate change. Figure 1 summarizes the findings and framework of the study⁵.

What are the critical priority areas for intervention?

There are many opportunities to harmonize and to increase gender responsive governance in climate change and SRHR. The following highlights potential entry points.

Potential entry points at policy level

1. Third National Communications UNFCCC

The Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (NRE) has decided that the 1st Biennial Update Reports (BUR) shall be submitted to the UNFCCC by December 2015 and the Third National Communication (TNC) and 2nd BUR shall be submitted to the UNFCCC by December 2017. In the previous 2nd Communiqué, a priority of research on the climate change agenda has been identified. Item 4.7.7 highlights the need to understand all socio economic impacts and vulnerabilities. This provides an entry point to include a SRHR focus into climate change adaptation plans.

2. 11th Malaysian Plan

There is potential to ensure that this process uptakes and include SRHR as part of a climate resilience action and gender responsive governance.

3. National Steering Committee on Climate Change

The Ministry of Health (implementer of public health services) and the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development (implementer for social welfare and community development) should be included into the National Steering Committee.

4. National Adaptation Programme

The emerging issues are that vulnerability assessments should be localized. There is need to advocate for clearer data, reproductive health-related and maternity-related assessments that include gender analysis and health impact analysis.

5. Prevention and Control of Infectious Diseases Act 1988, Notification Regulation (2006)

This act provides for mandated reporting of communicable and water-borne diseases. There is need for gender-related and maternity-related assessments and explicit quantitative data with correlations to climate related impacts.

6. Towards Safer Motherhood, MOH

Maternity-related assessment and data need also to focus on climate change impacts. This can be achieved with stakeholder analyses and livelihood analysis to ensure that health services are better integrated with access for all.

7. Malaysia CEDAW Implementation

There is a need to promote climate change and SRHR as a priority in the CEDAW reports. This will support and promote the inclusion of gender into national climate change debate, discussions and actions. This process is critical as an entry point to advocate within the civil society on the importance of SRHR.

Recommendations

- Ensure gender responsive governance by applying gender methods such as gender analysis, careful stakeholder identification, livelihood assessments and gender budgeting.
- Recognize women's leadership by allocating adequate funds to enhance community disaster preparedness and resilience.
- Recognize special vulnerabilities faced by women during pregnancies or breastfeeding, by including provisions to support SRHR of women with attention and focus towards understanding the patterns of mobility.
- Introduce a gender responsive approach with respect to attitudes on risk, behaviour and attitudes, with a focus to address security issues such as gender based violence and exploitation.
- Support more research on SRHR and social issues within the national climate change research agenda. Undertake research to understand the gendered access, for example, to early warning systems or information and technology.
- More importantly, establish the reporting process of sex-disaggregated data of climate change and SRHR, with demographic, geographic, health and socio-economic insights.

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Conclusion

Climate change and environmental degradation increases the vulnerability of women in food security, fresh water supply, access to universal healthcare, access to proper settlement and access to adequate as well as affordable infrastructure.

There is an urgent need to include SRHR issues into the climate change debates, dialogues and decision making, in particular the adaptation plans towards ensuring that communities, both men, women, girls and boys can strengthen their resilience and adapt for a better future.

References

A full list of references is available from PENITA.

- ¹ PENITA Initiative Malaysia (PENITA) (2015).
- ² Adger, W., & Kelly, P. M. (1999).
- ³ Begum, R. A., Siwar, C., RDZRZ, A., & Pereira, J. J. (2011).
- ⁴ The current method used for poverty measurement in Malaysia is based on the cost of basic needs (CBN) method.
- ⁵ Cramer, W., Holten, J.I., Kaczmarek, Z., Martens, P., Nicholls, R.J., Öquist, et al. (2001).
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- ⁷ National Hydraulic Research Institute of Malaysia (NAHRIM). (2006).
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