

Policy Research on Climate Change and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) in Khulna Division of Bangladesh

Nexus of Climate Change and SRHR of Women and Girls Living in Coastal Areas



OVERVIEW

Badabon Sangho is a grassroots women's rights organisation. They use a feminist approach by engaging women who face the worst forms of violence and discrimination regarding land ownership. Women in Bangladesh are prone to discrimination due to cultural stigmas over race and gender, making it increasingly hard to recover from natural disasters. This often leads to women being expelled from their own lands. They are forced to remain silent instead of demanding their rights. In 2023 Badabon Sangho with support from Asian Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women (ARROW) commissioned a scoping study on the plight of women in Bangladesh.

BANGLADESH CONTEXT

Bangladesh has been classified as 'ground zero' by scientists in the wrath of climate change. The country loses an estimated 100 square kilometres of land to river erosion every year. Two-thirds of Bangladesh is less than 15 feet above sea level increasing the threat of rising sea levels. By 2050, one in every seven people in Bangladesh will be displaced climate change. Up to 18 million people may have to migrate because of sea-level rise alone. Sea-level rise isn't just a problem because of outright land loss. It's also a problem because of salinization: the process by which salt infiltrates agricultural land, hinders crop growth by limiting their ability to take up water.

On top of increasingly ruining crops, salinization threatens the drinking water supplies of tens of millions of people in coastal communities. Consuming this salty, contaminated water can expose populations to health problems like cardiovascular diseases. Climate change is making rainfall more erratic and often more intense. This phenomenon of stronger downpours, combined with rising temperatures melting the Himalayan glaciers that feed rivers around Bangladesh is leaving massive swaths of the country far more prone to devastating floods. Increasingly, supercharged water levels in the Ganges-Meghna-Brahmaputra River Basin are destroying entire villages and hundreds of thousands of livelihoods. Devastation that contributes to over 10m Bangladeshis already being climate refugees.

Bangladeshi Women and Girls, Climate Change and SRHR:

Social norms often require women to act as providers of food, water and other essentials, even though they have less capacity to adapt to climate pressures. Positive side of women playing a greater role in preparing for, and responding to, floods or storms could be that it allows them to assume a more active role in society. Rural families in Bangladesh are using the bulk of their money to protect themselves and their homes from climate change, especially households headed by women who are allocating up to 30 percent of their spending for that purpose. Water logging disrupts land based productive system, which in turn aggravates women's malnutrition in affected areas due largely to gender-biased intra-household food distribution.

Water logging compels women to stay in marooned conditions for several months a year. Prolonged exposure to filthy water causes severe skin diseases and gynaecological problems to women. The sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) of women are progressively worsened during and post climate change related events. Insufficient access to health services can indirectly decrease the use of contraceptives, limit counselling and psychosocial support for young mothers, limit post-abortion care for crisis-affected communities (if previously available), and decrease treatments and testing for HIV infections and increased counts in STIs can cause adverse long-term health implications (i.e., infertility, tubal ectopic pregnancy, cervical cancer, etc.) for women if left untreated sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

FINDINGS

Climate change is impacting the livelihood and earnings of the people which is leading to severe poverty. Due to poverty, people are more inclined to marry off their minor girls in order to cut their expenditures. Additionally, there are not many options available for alternative livelihood in order to mitigate the loss due to the climate change on the agriculture, fishing and other common livelihood that existed there from ages.

Gestational hypertension and pre-eclampsia in pregnant women are attributed to consumption of saline water. This condition poses a substantial threat to maternal health, increasing the likelihood of maternal mortality and stillbirth.

Due to the pressure of surviving in the aftermath of a disaster, some men resort to violence in the home which can include intimate partner violence (IPV). It is estimated that IPV affects 47% of women in Bangladesh, with rates even higher in the aftermath of natural disasters.

The lack of adequate access to healthcare services can have indirect consequences, such as decreased use of contraceptives, resulting in unwanted pregnancies.

Restricted access to post-abortion care for communities affected by catastrophes (if previously accessible) poses a significant concern for women in these communities.

Socio-culturally biased norms and factors that are based on patriarchal mindset (i.e., conservative attitudes towards sexuality and gender roles) significantly contribute to the limited access and utilization of SRHR services.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 Strict compliance and implementation of the National Action Plan to End Child Marriage.
- 2 Allocate additional funds towards the welfare of women and children and establish a dedicated monitoring mechanism under the direct supervision of the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA) to monitor the impact of climate change on women and girls especially regarding their SRH and gender-based violence.
- 3 Immediate steps need to be taken to establish special SRH services (i.e. well-equipped satellite clinics) for women and girls in the severely impacted areas that are easily accessible for women and girls coming from remote areas with flexible hours for service delivery time.
- 4 Raise awareness regarding gender-based violence and existing support systems like, victim support centre, one stop crisis centre, and legal aid system among the marginalized communities.
- 5 Promote awareness and disseminate information regarding reproductive health services to women and girls and the impact on climate change on SRHR.
- 6 It is important to inform patients about a viable, lawful substitute for unsafe abortion procedures, as well as provide guidance on accessing such services and understanding the permissible timeframe for undergoing medication abortion related to their most recent menstrual period. Therefore, the service providers in the health facilities need to have all required equipment and awareness materials to enhance their services.

Front Cover Photo: Jahangir Alam Onuchcha/Shutterstock.com

Telephone : 00 603 2273 9913/9914

Fax : 00 603 2273 9916

Email : arrow@arrow.org.my

Website : arrow.org.my

Facebook : [ARROW.Women](https://www.facebook.com/ARROW.Women)

Twitter : [arrow_women](https://twitter.com/arrow_women)

Instagram : [ARROW_Women](https://www.instagram.com/ARROW_Women)

Youtube : [ARROWWomen](https://www.youtube.com/ARROWWomen)