



Echoes of Resilience

**Amplifying Voices on the Nexus
Climate Change and SRHR**

COP28: REGIONAL ADVOCACY BRIEF



The Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women (ARROW) with funding support from Women's Fund Asia commissioned three scoping studies through its national partners; Badabon Sangho in Bangladesh; National Indigenous Disabled Women's Association Nepal; LILAK: Purple Action for Indigenous Women's Rights in Philippines; conducted regional desk research on the nexus of climate change and SRHR in Asia as well as held three-country consultations organised with 26 individuals from civil society organisations (CSOs) in Bangladesh, Nepal, and the Philippines. These CSOs work on issues of climate change, gender and SRHR, and represent diverse identities including but not limited to women, SOGIESC, young people, women with disabilities and indigenous peoples. These CSOs discussed and defined the regional priorities on the intersections of climate change, gender and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), with an aim to demand accountability from decision makers at various national, regional and global spaces that negotiates and decides climate actions. The findings and demands will also be disseminated at the upcoming 28th Conference of Parties (COP28) in line with the theme of Health, Recovery & Peace.

OVERVIEW

The Asia and the Pacific regions are at the forefront of experiencing the impact of climate change and its related disaster (IPCC-AR5 2014a), with a significant number of countries in this region facing susceptibility to climate-related risks and disasters, and several ranking among the world's most vulnerable countries according to global risk assessments (IPCC-AR5 2014b). According to the IPCC 2022 report, global hotspots of high human vulnerability are found particularly in regions like South Asia, and Small Island Developing States. The report also informs us that the vulnerability is higher in locations with poverty, governance challenges and limited access to basic services and resources; and conflict.

The impact of climate change is not gender-neutral though it affects everyone. Women and girls, in all their diversities including indigenous women, women and girls with disabilities, individuals with limited financial resources, inadequate education, restricted access to technology and other resources, and those residing in hazard-prone areas, are disproportionately vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change¹. These disproportionate impacts are a manifestation of gender inequality, which underscores climate solutions with poor gender lens². The impacts sometimes have irreversible consequences on health systems including on their SRHR and on the socio-economic factors. The pre-existing inequality is rooted in a complex interplay of social, cultural, legislative, and institutional factors that create barriers for building climate-resilient societies with women, in all their diversities, as equal partners and beneficiaries³. These inequalities are exacerbated during climate change and related disasters.

Women and girls are even more vulnerable to sexual and gender-based violence. ARROW's studies have shown that in countries like Bangladesh, Nepal and the Philippines- climate change is a driver for communities to resort to early, child and forced marriages. In Nepal, when climate extreme events happen oftentimes young girls are among the first to be affected to the extent that they are forced to drop out of school. The increasing workload in the household and economic hardship experienced by the family would cause parents to withdraw their daughters from schools so that they could either help out at home or on the farm, or to find a job to supplement the household's income⁴.

ARROW's studies have found that technical documents and strategies for gender mainstreaming at country policy level are inadequate, and the ones that exist do not have sufficient practical information. In the Philippines, marginalised women are more vulnerable to SRHR violation due to lack of services, especially contraceptive services⁵. Studies in all countries have found that women and girls have largely been missing as key actors in the climate negotiations. Indigenous women, women and girls with disability are even more vulnerable by many folds. Indigenous women are also affected by extractive industries which is one of the major drivers of environmental degradation. There has been either no or extremely inadequate data and study focusing on the impact of climate change and related disasters on the SRHR of indigenous women and women and girls with disabilities.

According to the estimates by the UNESCAP Asia-Pacific Disaster Report in 2019, the Asia and Pacific region has its annual loss of \$675 billion due to climate-induced disasters (ESCAP 2019).⁶ The ramifications of climate change also impact food security and trigger conflicts over key resources: arable land, water, food and energy sources. These impacts are a manifestation of gender inequality and lack of SRHR priorities specially for women, girls and non-binary people, which is only exacerbated by gender-blind climate solutions.

Since 2019, the Asia-Pacific region has experienced an acceleration of inequality fueled by the COVID-19 pandemic, exacerbated by climate change and conflict in the region. During this uncertain period, governments in the region also undertook undemocratic, control measures under the guise of 'health measures', causing civic space and accountability avenues to shrink further. Women and marginalised communities suffered the worst outcomes (due to pre-existing inequalities) during this triple crisis and had least recourse to speak up and speak out on the injustices faced, or to offer solutions. Women faced increased violence including sexual violence, girls forced to drop out of schools and jobs, figured least in recovery packages and programmes of government. This limits access to information including CSE and that further hinders their empowerment. For girls and women who are displaced and living in humanitarian settings, lack of access to SRH services including maternal health, contraception and safe abortion services is the leading cause of death.

Governments and policymakers will have to adopt a gender and SRHR lens when responding to the climate crisis, and ensure inclusive and meaningful participation of the most affected and marginalised communities in decisions related to climate change at all levels of the planning, development, implementation and monitoring processes. This includes but is not limited to women and girls in all their diversities as well as civil society organisations with local and grassroots-specific knowledge, that can contribute to gender analysis and policy development.

The gender-specific needs of women and young people in all our diversities to adapt and build resilience to climate change need to be prioritised. It is important to incorporate gender-responsive approaches and SRHR in planning and implementation of climate change resilience and disaster risk reduction (DRR).

IMPACTS OF CLIMATE CRISIS ON SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS IN SOUTH ASIA AND SOUTHEAST ASIA

Minimal/ Limited Access to Sexual and Reproductive Health Services

Extreme weather events, particularly floods and landslides, can disrupt critical infrastructure such as clinics and highways, impeding access to sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services and resulting in adverse sexual and reproductive health outcomes. Individuals with diverse gender identities, especially those displaced and residing in humanitarian settings, face heightened mortality risks due to the lack of access to SRH services. Women, girls, and individuals with diverse gender identities, often experiencing greater poverty and caregiving responsibilities, bear a disproportionate impact over both the short and long term in the aftermath of disasters.

This disparity is evident in Laos, where low utilization of reproductive health services during climate disasters, particularly in rural areas, contributes to elevated maternal, neonatal, and infant mortality rates.⁷ In the Maldives, limited SRHR-friendly facilities on certain islands compel women to travel to other islands with gynecologists, highlighting an accessibility gap.⁸ The Philippines faces challenges with limited SRHR-friendly facilities, especially in barrios and barangays, neglecting the specific needs of the youth and key affected populations during emergencies. Marginalised communities, like fishers in the Philippines, are more vulnerable to climate change effects due to the lack of SRHR services, notably contraceptive services.⁹

In Pakistan's Sindh province, women encounter difficulties accessing health services during displacement due to the absence of women doctors in camps or shelters. Cultural practices and strict male dominance in the province further hinder women's ability to seek health services independently.¹⁰ Disaster relief and humanitarian aid provided during extreme climate events often fail to address the specific needs of individuals with diverse gender identities, lacking comprehensive and timely SRH services, such as those needed for gynecological problems and pregnancy complications. This issue persists in the ongoing pandemic and worsening climate crises, where resource availability and access to services are compromised.

Adopting an intersectional lens in the planning and development of inclusive, meaningful, and sustainable policies, programs, and implementations is crucial at all levels. This approach ensures that the unique challenges faced by different groups, including those related to SRH, are recognized and addressed, leaving no one behind.

Loss of Livelihoods for Women in Agriculture

Climate change affects women farmers in Chattogram (Bangladesh), especially in hill-track areas, leading to crop loss and reduced income. This disrupts their economic independence and access to SRHR services (Islam, 2020). The coastal zones and their people, especially women, are very vulnerable, where tropical cyclones, storm surges, flooding, salinity intrusion, droughts, cold waves, water logging and bank erosion hazards cause major damage every year (UN Women, 2021).

Food Insecurity and Undernourishment

Access to food is difficult during climate change including for women and girls in all their diversities, especially their food consumption, particularly as in many countries women are already eating least and last, which leads to higher susceptibility to undernutrition and other health problems. Undernourished women are at higher risk of pregnancy and delivery complications, amenorrhea, and infertility, while girls experience delays in menarche. Climate change related disasters are forcing families to find quick solutions to their immense struggles and the unavailability of adequate medical services is adding to their burden. Climate change creates scarcity of food supply as production is damaged or destroyed. Food prices increase and it makes food more inaccessible to poor people, particularly to poor women who control homestead-based livelihoods who suffer from income losses when crops are blown or washed away. There is a possibility of suffering from chronic nutritional deficiency. Women, who are often engaged in agricultural activities, may face challenges in ensuring food security for their families due to climate-related uncertainties.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COP28

1. Climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programs must be developed and implemented with an intersectional, equitable lens, and a human right- based approach. This also means applying human rights, gender and a social-justice based approach to climate action that includes the full range of SRHR and to commit robust and feminist financing for the climate and SRHR intersection.¹¹
2. Ensure that national policies, programming and budget related to climate change and disaster risk reduction incorporate gender mainstreaming and SRHR and include gender-differentiated impact analysis of climate change disasters and gender equality. SRHR must be incorporated as a key component of environmental, climate change, and disaster risk reduction policies and programs, to ensure their success and support the achievement of gender equality and the fulfillment of the right to health.¹²
3. To advance SRHR, gender equality interventions must address the structural barriers embedded in norms, laws, and policies that contribute to inequality and injustice.¹³ This is in addition to addressing the structural and systemic factors including repealing and abolishing discriminatory practices and policies, that exacerbate gender inequality.¹⁴ This includes recognising the needs of gender diverse people and providing SRH service and facilities that cater to them.
4. Climate resilient health systems that are more likely to support and ensure SRH services in times of crisis or disaster should be prioritised.¹⁵ Strong, accessible, mobile and resilient health systems that serve the specific SRH needs of all women and girls and gender diverse people are needed, whether for contraception, antenatal care, safe abortion that are required to fulfill the right to health and to build adaptive capacity and strengthen resilience to direct and indirect climate impacts.
5. Strengthen the provision of sexual and reproductive health services, including post-abortion healthcare in all circumstances on a confidential basis, especially for rural women, women living in poverty, women with disabilities and women from ethnic or religious minorities.
6. Our governments should fulfill their commitments. This includes upholding human rights including sexual and reproductive health and rights of all people and acknowledge its co-benefits in contributing to climate adaptation, mitigation and resilience.
7. Provide capacity building of the local government and stakeholders regarding emergency preparation, policy formulation, prioritising marginalised population in response, and incorporating SRHR commodities in emergency. This is in addition to building the capacity of stakeholders to monitor and commitments of governments and hold them accountable.
8. Ensure universal access to health services and access to the Minimum Initial Service Package for Reproductive Health during emergencies and disasters
9. Promote climate-resilient farming practices, and provide women with training and resources for sustainable agriculture. Additionally, improve food security and nutrition for women and girls in affected areas by supporting local production, diversification, and preservation.
10. Ensure the participation and representation of marginalised communities in advocacy spaces and places, including UNFCCC's COP28. This is in addition to meaningful and inclusive participation in decision making spaces at all levels.

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For feedback and additional inputs, please email to arrow@arrow.org.my with subject line “Asia Regional Brief on Climate Change and SRHR 2023”

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