

TAKING STOCK:
SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE
HEALTH AND RIGHTS
in CLIMATE
COMMITMENTS

**A WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA
REVIEW SUMMARY**

Sexual and reproductive health and rights and rights-based approaches
in national climate documents: **A review of Nationally Determined
Contributions since 2020 in West and Central Africa**



INTRODUCTION

Climate change has lasting impacts on human health and disproportionately affects women and girls.



West and Central Africa is home to most of the dry and hot regions of the Sahel, and climate change is worsening the existing challenges of droughts, desertification, food insecurity, long-standing crises, terrorism, social unrest and human displacement. As one of the regions with the highest levels of human mobility owing to West and Central Africa's tradition of trade, pastoralism and migration for livelihood diversification, climate change is also disrupting traditional migratory patterns, increasing rural-to-urban migration and increasing the vulnerability of migrants. Despite progress, West and Central Africa has some of the poorest-performing health indicators, including sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), obstetric fistula, child marriage and female genital mutilation globally. In recent decades, progress has been made in reducing maternal deaths; however, such deaths remain significantly higher than the global average. Maternal deaths, alongside increased rates of gender-based violence (GBV), a high unmet need for family planning and weak health-care systems, as exposed by the Ebola outbreak and the COVID-19 pandemic, demonstrate a region in urgent need of renewed health and social protection, as well as gender equality and investment in women's and girls' empowerment.

Climate change directly and indirectly impacts women and girls and their sexual and reproductive health. Heat, air pollution and climate-related diseases all have

adverse impacts on maternal and newborn health outcomes. In addition, climate-related loss of livelihoods increases poverty and food insecurity, which worsen maternal and newborn health and well-being. The impacts of climate change often result in disruptions to essential services while simultaneously creating conditions of vulnerability that increase the risk of GBV and harmful practices such as child marriage. As a region highly prone to droughts, food insecurity and human displacements, there is a need for region-specific interventions that address the underlying structures and vulnerabilities, which, if left unaddressed, are likely to further worsen existing gender and health inequalities.

A Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) is a national climate plan, submitted by all signatories of the Paris Agreement, for reducing carbon emissions and adapting to and building resilience to climate change. As the NDCs support countries in a transformative shift towards a more sustainable future, they have the potential to create greater social inclusion and address the disproportionate impacts of climate change on women and girls.



PURPOSE OF THE STUDY



This study, commissioned by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in collaboration with Queen Mary University of London, aims to provide an overview of the integration of SRHR, GBV, harmful practices and related themes in the NDCs.

The findings provide an entry point for dialogue and action at the global, regional, national and local levels on the intersections between climate change, SRHR, GBV and harmful practices. This study also

identifies the necessary actions for their more meaningful inclusion in climate policy and action, highlighting gaps, opportunities and best practices to allow for stronger language on the aspects of gender and climate negotiations at the global level.

METHODOLOGY

This review involved a systematic content analysis of the inclusion of SRHR, GBV, harmful practices and five related thematic areas (health, gender, population dynamics, youth and human rights and participation) in NDCs submitted in or after 2020.

The UNFPA West and Central Africa Regional Office covers 23 countries; however, only 22 were included, as one country (Equatorial Guinea) did not have an NDC

or an NDC update published in or after 2020 at the time of completion of the analysis in August 2022.



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FINDINGS



Sexual and reproductive health and rights, gender-based violence and harmful practices

The review of the NDCs shows that six out of the 22 reviewed include issues related to SRHR and GBV. Most of these references acknowledge the impacts of climate change on SRHR and GBV. Only a few outlined specific interventions and/or initiatives to strengthen resilience to climate change through SRHR or GBV services. There were four references to maternal health and one to menstrual hygiene. In addition, there were seven references to SRHR, two references to GBV and no reference to harmful practices across the NDCs. Four of the SRHR references were to maternal and newborn health.

Examples of best practices include the following (see table 1):

- Benin strengthens its health system by including SRHR through its measure to improve the quality and accessibility of health services for mother and child health (Benin NDC, 2021: p. 60).
- Guinea includes an intervention to improve stoves to reduce wood collection time in its NDC, thereby reducing the risk of violence women face when collecting fuelwood (Guinea NDC, 2021: p. 28).
- Sierra Leone highlights how the creation and enforcement of legislation can effectively address domestic violence alongside women’s land, marriage and divorce rights (Sierra Leone NDC, 2021: p. 16).



6
countries integrate sexual and reproductive health and rights
out of **22**
total Nationally Determined Contributions

Number of Nationally Determined Contributions that integrate sexual and reproductive health and rights, gender-based violence and harmful practices issues out of the 22 Nationally Determined Contributions reviewed in the West and Central Africa region

TABLE 1: Nationally Determined Contributions from West and Central Africa cited in this brief			
Country	Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) reviewed	Submission date	Original language
Benin	Updated NDC	12 October 2021	French
Guinea	Updated NDC	28 July 2021	French
Sierra Leone	Updated NDC	31 July 2021	English

Health

All 22 NDCs integrate aspects of health, with 16 describing food security and/or malnutrition, 15 referencing climate-related diseases, 12 including health surveillance and early warning systems and four describing the need for further research on the health impacts of climate change.

Gender

Gender features prominently in the NDCs, with 21 out of 22 including gender references and 17 out of 22 integrating some degree of gender mainstreaming and responsiveness. Common references to gender include women and agriculture (17 out of 22), the disproportionate impacts of climate change on women (16 out of 22) and women’s participation and decision-making (14 out of 22).

Population dynamics, human mobility and urbanization

All 22 NDCs include aspects of population dynamics. Out of these, 10 NDCs mention migration, displacement and urbanization.

Youth

Nearly all (17 out of 22) of the NDCs refer to youth to some degree. Notable youth references include 10 NDCs that describe youth participation, 10 that mention job and income-generation actions targeting young people and nine that recognize young people as particularly vulnerable to climate change.

Leaving no one behind: human rights, participation and consideration of vulnerable groups

Of the 22 NDCs, 20 highlight some level of vulnerability in segments of their population, all 22 contain some reference to public participation in climate policy and/or action, seven describe public participation in sustainable local resource management and five reference human or civilian rights.





RECOMMENDATIONS

General recommendations

Data and evidence

1. Strengthen the national-level evidence on the impacts of climate change on SRHR, GBV and harmful practices. This should include improving data systems to better account and forecast for the differentiated impacts of climate change on SRHR, GBV and harmful practices, including through the conduct of gender-responsive climate vulnerability and risk assessments that integrate SRHR and GBV. Detailed country-level research, preferably led by local researchers, on the intersections between climate, SRHR and GBV is required to better support communities at the local and national level but also to contribute to the global evidence base.

2. Scale up efforts to collect and use disaggregated data and account for the differentiated impacts of the climate crisis. The demonstration of such efforts in the NDCs is encouraging. Gender-disaggregated data supports the identification of groups that are more vulnerable to climate impacts and can help mobilize more sensitive and accurate climate action. This better represents the differentiated impacts of the climate crisis while supporting research, data, planning and intervention to reach better outcomes. This also enables gender-sensitive budgeting, including for components related to SRHR and GBV.

Financing and accountability

3. Increase support, funding and evaluation for adaptation and resilience-building efforts, including within NDCs and in the development of climate policies. While adaptation sections are increasing in frequency and detail within NDCs, greater support, evaluation and financing are required to ensure these policies reflect the needs of underserved populations and topic areas, such as SRHR and GBV.

4. Strengthen the integration of costed SRHR and GBV interventions across sectors in climate policy and action. Include SRHR and GBV issues in domains such as gender and health, as these represent entry points for their inclusion in national climate policies. Costed action, tied to monitoring and indicators that reflect impacts on gender, health and SRHR and GBV, requires more financial and technical support. Many existing interventions, particularly related to gender and health, could begin to provide or increase the integration of programming on SRHR and GBV.



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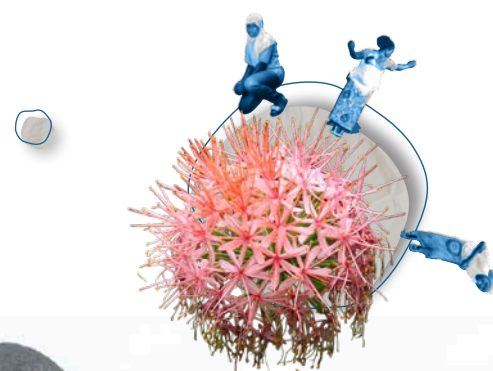
5. Strengthen health systems' resilience to climate change by ensuring the inclusion of SRHR and GBV. This includes ensuring the inclusion of SRHR and GBV in vulnerability risk assessments, disaster preparedness plans and health information management systems. Ensure appropriate human resources are available for health, monitoring and evaluation indicators, the allocation of funds and a coordination mechanism.

Gender equality and representation

6. Scale up and strengthen gender-transformative climate action through the inclusion of SRHR, GBV and harmful practices issues. This includes the appointment and strengthening of the role of a National Gender and Climate Change Focal Point (NGCCFP) to be placed in the relevant ministry, as recommended by a decision of the 2019 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP25); the review of existing gender-related climate policies; and the integration of gender-transformative approaches in all aspects of climate change policies and programmes/interventions, based on a solid foundation of context-specific analysis.

7. Recognize the impacts of climate change on the drivers of GBV and harmful practices. Support the development of best practices for responding to GBV and harmful practices, and for ensuring the resilience, including financial, of essential services to prevent and respond to GBV. This can be achieved through partnership with gender and rights actors such as organizations of persons with disabilities, women-led organizations, Indigenous peoples, youth-led organizations and front-line responders.

8. Ensure inclusion and a minimum standard of representation in the development and implementation of climate policy at multiple levels. This includes the inclusion and representation of women and people with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and expression and sex characteristics (SOGIESC), youth, Indigenous peoples, older persons, persons with disabilities and others as relevant.



Human rights and leaving no one behind

9. Improve the understanding of the impacts of climate change on SRHR and GBV for people with diverse and underrepresented SOGIESC.

There is insufficient understanding and recognition of the impacts of climate change on people with diverse SOGIESC. Increasing this understanding will require specific, local and sensitive action that is participatory, accountable and calls on existing best practices.

10. Mobilize and support young people.

Support youth climate networks and establish a permanent youth engagement mechanism on climate change at the national level to ensure the mainstreaming of youth priorities across the design and implementation of national climate policy and action.

11. Take an intersectional approach to develop, review and implement climate policy that recognizes the structural drivers of inequality and accounts for multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination.

Climate policy and action must recognize how many of the people who already face barriers to SRHR and GBV services and the realization of their reproductive rights are likely to be disproportionately affected by climate change.

12. Enhance recognition of climate change impacts on GBV and harmful practices in NDCs and relevant climate policies.

National climate policies should more meaningfully account for the delivery of GBV services during climate-related events. This includes strengthening the engagement with national gender/GBV-focused mechanisms (e.g. ministries, parliamentary caucuses, civil society networks) as well as climate-focused national mechanisms to present regional

and national analysis of the interlinkages between climate change, GBV and harmful practices and collectively develop a consensus on policy advocacy and programming strategies and interventions. This could be achieved through the creation of a common platform for meaningful dialogue, with key mechanisms, networks and leaders engaged in addressing GBV and climate change.

13. Ensure that climate policies are based on human rights and reflect the principles of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Programme of Action, including protecting the rights of women, children, refugees, displaced persons and persons with disabilities, in climate policy development.

A human rights-based approach that supports individuals to make the reproductive choices that best suit their personal circumstances is core to achieving SRHR. Population dynamics are relevant for climate policy and planning and the NDCs reflect on urbanization, changing population size and structure and the need for population dynamics analysis for forward planning.





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Region-specific reflections

- 14. Women's participation and decision-making in climate policy and action presents an opportunity to address gender-related harmful practices and bodily autonomy issues.** The West and Central Africa region is observing high rates of gender-related harmful practices such as female genital mutilation and child marriage. While evidence indicates that exposure to the impacts of climate change can exacerbate the risk of female genital mutilation and child marriage, these harmful practices were absent from the NDCs. As more than half of the NDCs commit to women's participation and decision-making in climate policies, for example, through structured dialogues, consultations and representative bodies, there is an opportunity to empower women to amplify their lived experiences related to social norms and bodily autonomy in future climate policies.
- 15. Integrating SRHR and GBV components into existing food security, livelihoods, economic and energy interventions within climate programmes is feasible within West and Central Africa.** The NDCs recognize a range of interventions and programmes that could include programmatic components related to SRHR and GBV, such as clean energy technology

transfer, including reusable cookstove interventions, or livelihood and economic security projects related to agriculture. There is precedence for integrated interventions that could be scaled up within climate programming. For example, as food insecurity is a challenge recognized in almost two thirds of the NDCs, this can be a starting point to address the social and cultural norms that increase GBV in times of food scarcity. Guinea-Bissau is one country that addresses food insecurity from a gender perspective through actions on resilience credits and entrepreneurship.

- 16. A holistic approach to SRHR and GBV in humanitarian preparedness, climate change policies or strategies is required.** The West and Central Africa region is affected by multifaceted humanitarian emergencies, including climate-related droughts and desertification, food insecurity, social unrest and human displacement. Urgent action is needed to address SRHR and GBV holistically in all humanitarian preparedness activities, accompanied by a budget and an accountability framework to strengthen climate adaptation and resilience.
- 17. Adopt gender-responsive actions to future migration trends in the region to reduce women's vulnerabilities and risk of GBV and strengthen access to reproductive health services.** Many West and Central Africa NDCs address climate-related migration and forced displacement, but few include measures to tackle future challenges and only the Congo and the Niger present actions on gender and migration, including gender inclusion in resettlement and research activities. There is a need to strengthen data and research on high-impact responses addressing gender vulnerabilities related to migration. Building the resilience of pastoral populations and reducing women's vulnerabilities and risk of GBV in forced and voluntary migration is key.



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