

**UNFPA Consolidated Submission to the Special Rapporteur on the issue of human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment**

UNFPA - Technical Division

October 19, 2022

**Background**:

UNFPA operates in over 150 countries to strengthen comprehensive sexual and reproductive health (SRH) systems and care, including access to contraception, maternal health services, prevention of unintended pregnancy, prevention of unsafe abortion and postabortion care, HIV prevention, and comprehensive sexuality education. UNFPA also works to prevent and address gender-based violence (GBV), and harmful practices (HPs) including female genital mutilation and child, early, and forced marriage, and son preference (gender biased sex selection). All areas of UNFPA work are dedicated to advancing gender equality and to empower women to decide freely on their fertility and sexuality free from coercion, discrimination and violence.

This UNFPA submission has been developed in response to the call for inputs issued by the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment, Professor David R. Boyd, to inform the upcoming report on *“Women, Girls and the Right to a Clean, Healthy and Sustainable Environment*” to be presented at the Human Rights Council in March 2023.

UNFPA has committed to three transformative results by 2030: (1) ending preventable maternal deaths, (2) ending unmet need for family planning, (3) and ending gender-based violence (GBV) and other harmful practices. The rapid pace of climate change over this decade will make each of these transformative results more difficult to achieve. As access to resources, including social and economic, diminish as a result of climate change, the resilience and adaptive capacity of women and girls, as well as the communities in which they reside is simultaneously eroded. Cyclical and protracted crises only serve to exacerbate these risk factors perpetuating reduced access to quality, acceptable and available health services and care. When a climate-related disaster strikes, women and girls are also at greater risk of gender-based violence. With increasing drought, women and girls are expected to travel longer distances to collect water and firewood, exposing them to increased risk of gender-based violence. A loss of livelihood can lead to increases in exploitative and transactional sex and the risk of teenage pregnancies. Families spiraling in poverty as a result of reduced access to economic resources will use girls as commodities to support family survival resulting in increased child marriage or trafficking. During times of disaster, health services are often limited and at times not available, which means that more women give birth without much-needed medical support. The disruption of health systems leads to unavailability of commodities including contraception which increases the risk of early, unintended pregnancies

UNFPA supports governments to ensure that national climate policies incorporate SRHR and GBV issues in the design of climate policies and solutions, with women, young people and vulnerable groups at the heart of developing innovative solutions to improve climate resilience. Moreover, UNFPA is working to address the evidence gap by investing in gender analyses and gender disaggregated data to strengthen understanding of and action on the SRHR linkages with climate change.

Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) are the national vehicle through which States demonstrate their contribution to global efforts to address climate change. A lack of specific interventions in the NDCs which address the underlying structure of inequalities are likely to result in essential gender and health inequalities and impacts insufficiently addressed. From this aspect, women and girls, already disproportionately impacted, will continue to be left behind.

In order to determine the global contribution of countries to gender-responsive climate action,[[1]](#footnote-1) including access to health care, UNFPA in collaboration with Queen Mary University of London, undertook a global review of 112 NDCs submitted in and after 2020 through the lens of integration of references to SRHR and related thematic areas. Of this total, 26 NDCs were reviewed in Asia Pacific,[[2]](#footnote-2) 15 in Arab States,[[3]](#footnote-3) 19 in Eastern and Southern Africa (ESA),[[4]](#footnote-4) 17 in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC),[[5]](#footnote-5) and 22 NDCs were reviewed in the West and Central Africa (WCA) region.[[6]](#footnote-6)

The results of this analysis provides an entry point for dialogue and action on the ways climate change and SRHR intersect and allows for the identification of areas for greater and more meaningful inclusion of aspects of SRHR in climate policy. This submission is informed primarily by input from that analysis.[[7]](#footnote-7)

In the following pages, this document will address two questions posed by the Special Rapporteur in the Call for Inputs: *Question No. 1* and *Question No. 5*. It is worth noting however that some relevant examples of ‘good practices,’ as requested by Question No. 9, were included throughout the responses.

**Question No. 1: How are the climate, pollution, and biodiversity crises adversely impacting women and girls? What are the principal barriers facing these rightsholders’ realization of the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment?**

Emerging evidence shows the direct and indirect impacts of climate change on women and girls and their sexual and reproductive health and rights. Heat, air pollution and climate-related diseases have adverse impacts on maternal and neonatal health outcomes, while climate-related loss of livelihoods increase poverty and food insecurity which further negatively impact maternal health. Climate change also results in decreased access to essential services, and increases gender-based violence and harmful practices such as child marriage. Importantly, these impacts are disproportionately impacting upon women, girls and groups in vulnerable and marginalized situations.

The **Asia Pacific** region, where the Rim of Fire is located, is a region that is facing more severe impacts of climate change than other regions. SRHR was integrated into 8 out of 26 (8/26) NDCs, and included references to maternal and neonatal health, GBV, early child marriage, sexual orientation and gender identity. The way SRHR issues were addressed in the NDCs varied, with some NDCs acknowledging the impact of climate change on SRHR and others including adaptation measures with associated metrics for measuring progress. In those NDCs addressing the impact of climate change, **Cambodia** for exampledescribes how climate-related food crises lead to additional time to source water or pasture which can in turn influence time available for exclusive breastfeeding, and that increased workloads and climate change related stress during pregnancy could contribute to low birth weight ([Cambodia NDC, 2021: p30-31](https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/NDC/2022-06/20201231_NDC_Update_Cambodia.pdf)) while **Vietnam** describes the negative impacts of climate change on women’s health including increased prevalence of diseases and epidemics, especially among pregnant women ([Vietnam NDC, 2020: p:14](https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/NDC/2022-06/Viet%20Nam_NDC_2020_Eng.pdf)). GBV is another domain of SRHR described in NDCs. **Cambodia** describes how ‘by exaggerating gender inequality, climate change also reinforces a structural root cause of violence against women and girls’ ([Cambodia NDC, 2020: p40](https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/NDC/2022-06/20201231_NDC_Update_Cambodia.pdf)), while **Vietnam** states that family livelihood pressures from climate-related stresses ‘increases the risk of domestic violence and violence towards children’ ([Vietnam NDC, 2020:](https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/NDC/2022-06/Viet%20Nam_NDC_2020_Eng.pdf) p14). **Marshall Islands** (2018) provides a recommendation from its’ second NDC ‘to eliminate GBV and increase protection and care of survivors’ ([Marshall Islands NDC, 2018: p57, 59](https://unfccc.int/NDCREG)). Early child marriage is referenced once among the 26 countries analysed, with **Vietnam** describing how climate change can lead to a higher risk of early marriage as a means of reducing economic burdens for families ([Vietnam NDC, 2020: p14](https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/NDC/2022-06/Viet%20Nam_NDC_2020_Eng.pdf)).

The **Arab States** region is also vulnerable to climate change on account of its water scarcity, with the region containing 14 of the world’s 20 most water-stressed countries. The region is also a hotspot for many of the world’s conflicts and in 2019 it was home to 40 million displaced persons, of which 9.3 million were refugees and asylum seekers. Ongoing conflict and continuous political unrest and resulting humanitarian crises overwhelm health care systems and shift priorities away from SRHR. Furthermore, the wide diversity in income levels, cultural norms and political systems are reflected in the SRHR indicators, with vast intra-regional discrepancies in maternal mortality rates, and unmet need for family planning, among others. References to SRHR and GBV were identified in 5/15 NDCs, but they were mostly brief. Three countries referenced GBV as a key intersection between SRHR and climate change. **Somalia’s** NDC states that 70-80% of internally-displaced persons and camp-based refugees are women who are exposed to GBV (Somalia NDC, 2021:p12) while both **Jordan** and **Tunisia** include a measure to support women exposed to GBV as a health-related adaptation measure [(Jordan NDC, 2021: p54](https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/NDC/2022-06/UPDATED%20SUBMISSION%20OF%20JORDANS.pdf); [Tunisia NDC, 2021: p66](https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/NDC/2022-06/Tunisia%20Update%20NDC-french.pdf))

The **East and Southern Africa (ESA)** region is facing a wide range of intensifying climate change impacts, from increasing frequency and intensity of droughts, floods and tropical cyclones to food insecurity and malnutrition. Increasing temperatures and rainfall is changing the pattern of diseases, with tens of millions more people are anticipated to be exposed to vector-borne diseases. Furthermore, sub-Saharan Africa is projected to have the largest share of the 132 million people pushed into extreme poverty by 2030 due to climate change. References to SRHR and GBV are in 8/19 NDCs, mostly centering around maternal and neonatal health, HIV/AIDS and GBV. **South Sudan** reflects that climate change, heat exposure and malnutrition will increase infant and maternal mortality and birth complications and worsen maternal and child health overall ([South Sudan NDC, 2021: p41](https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/NDC/2022-06/South%20Sudan%27s%20Second%20Nationally%20Determined%20Contribution.pdf)), while **Uganda** mentioned reproductive health care as part of the recipients of its proposed climate intervention on integrated health ([Uganda NDC, 2022: p24](https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/NDC/2022-09/Updated%20NDC%20_Uganda_2022%20Final.pdf)).

**Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC)** is among the regions most challenged by climate change globally, with the effects including rising temperatures, extreme rainfall leading to floods and landslides, shrinking glaciers, rising sea levels, increasing food insecurity and droughts. An example is Chile’s mega-drought, which spans the entire region from the Amazon to the Andes and from the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans to the snowy peaks of Patagonia. References to issues related to SRHR and gender-based violence are identified in 6/17 NDCs (**Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay** and **Venezuela**). **Mexico** and **Costa Rica** referenced sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characertistics as a subgroup that feel a disproportionate impact of climate change. **Mexico** recognizes sexual minorities as a vulnerable group to the adverse effects of climate change ([Mexico NDC, 2020: p9)](https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/NDC/2022-06/NDC-Esp-30Dic.pdf). **Costa Rica** included transgender people ([Costa Rica NDC, 2020](https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/NDC/2022-06/Contribucio%CC%81n%20Nacionalmente%20Determinada%20de%20Costa%20Rica%202020%20-%20Versio%CC%81n%20Completa.pdf): p.13, p.111, p.112) and the transsexual community ([Costa Rica NDC, 2020: p.50](https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/NDC/2022-06/Contribucio%CC%81n%20Nacionalmente%20Determinada%20de%20Costa%20Rica%202020%20-%20Versio%CC%81n%20Completa.pdf)) as particularly vulnerable populations to climate change, and goes on to state that consultation with these populations occurred in the development of the NDCs ([Costa Rica NDC, 2020: p.94, p.100](https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/NDC/2022-06/Contribucio%CC%81n%20Nacionalmente%20Determinada%20de%20Costa%20Rica%202020%20-%20Versio%CC%81n%20Completa.pdf)).

**West and Central Africa (WCA)** region is home to most of the dry and hot Sahel, where climate change is worsening the region’ existing challenges of droughts, desertification, food insecurity, longstanding crises, terrorism, social unrest, and human displacement. As one of the regions with the highest levels of human mobility due to its tradition of trade, pastoralism and migration for livelihood diversification, climate change serves to disrupt traditional migratory patterns, increases rural-to-urban migration and increases vulnerability of migrants. Despite remarkable progress, WCA contains some of the poorest performing health indicators, including SRHR, obstetric fistula, child marriage and FGM globally. References to issues related to SRHR and GBV are identified in 7/22 NDCs although not all of these are directly linked to climate change; some of the NDCs refer to aspects of maternal and newborn health. Reproductive health is used in the context of describing groups vulnerable to climate related temperature increases. Thus, **Côte d’Ivoire** ([Cote d’Ivoire NDC, 2022: p.21](https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/NDC/2022-06/CDN_CIV_2022.pdf)) draws attention to the risk for women in the process of menopause, **Togo** ([Togo NDC, 2021: p.39](https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/NDC/2022-06/CDN%20Revis%C3%A9es_Togo_Document%20int%C3%A9rimaire_rv_11%2010%2021.pdf)) mentions people living with HIV-AIDS as a group at increased risk of higher mortality and highlights its progress from the previous NDC in increasing access to integrated family planning and HIV services. Finally, **Benin** ([Benin NDC, 2021:](https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/NDC/2022-06/CDN_ACTUALISEE_BENIN2021.pdf) p.27, 57) describes women of reproductive age as a group vulnerable to malnutrition. The latter has established projects to increase food security and build resilience among these groups.

**Question No. 5: Please identify specific ways in which the rights of particularly marginalized or vulnerable women and/or LGBTI persons are (or should be) recognized and protected to enable the realization of the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment without discrimination based on sex or gender.**

Despite some salient examples across the regions that are mentioned below, there is insufficient understanding and recognition of the impacts of climate change on the health and rights of various groups. Climate policy and action must achieve the global commitment to gender-responsive climate action, as agreed in 2016 (Paris Agreement) which requires a recognition that the women who already face barriers to SRH services and realization of their sexual and reproductive rights are likely to be disproportionately affected by climate change. Across all regions analyzed, there are several needs that require attention, for example: to ensure inclusion and a minimum standard of representation (for women, people with diverse sexual orientations, identities and expressions, young people, Indigenous, elderly, people with disabilities etc) in the development and implementation of climate policy at multiple levels; to scale up and strengthen gender-transformative climate action through the inclusion of SRHR issues; and to mobilize and support young people, to name a few of the findings.

In **Asia Pacific** several NDCs highlight women as particularly vulnerable to the health effects of climate change, with some countries such as **Cambodia, Pakistan** and **Nepal** ([Nepal NDC, 2020: p8](https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/NDC/2022-06/Second%20Nationally%20Determined%20Contribution%20%28NDC%29%20-%202020.pdf)) describing actions to collect gender-disaggregated data to identify, highlight and create measures to address the disproportionate impacts. Increasing women’s participation is mentioned in 13/26 NDCs, with some countries providing targets and indicators for the minimum number and/or proportion of female participants, and eight countries reference capacity-building and empowerment of women. Most NDCs describe sections of their population as vulnerable (21/26), with women, children, people with disabilities, and the elderly most commonly included as vulnerable groups, although other sections of society are included to varying degrees. Some reference to public participation in climate policy or action is included in every NDC. The detail of participation and engagement varies widely, for some this is a simple reference to an inclusive and participatory process, for others this is a more detailed description of which groups were involved at which stages. Participatory strategies for sustainable resources management are mentioned in 13/26 NDCs, which include social forestry programmes (**Bangladesh, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea**), marine fisheries (**Fiji, Indonesia, Maldives, Myanmar, Sri Lanka**), coral reef restoration (**Maldives**), land use restoration (**Nauru**), mangrove restoration (**Pakistan, Myanmar**), snow leopard habitat protection programs (**Pakistan**). Nepal and PNG both describe female participation in sustainable forestry ([Nepal NDC, 2020: p5](https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/NDC/2022-06/Second%20Nationally%20Determined%20Contribution%20%28NDC%29%20-%202020.pdf); [Papua New Guinea NDC, 2020: p32](https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/NDC/2022-06/PNG%20Second%20NDC.pdf)).

In the **Arab States** region the majority (11/15) of NDCs include vulnerable groups of society as an important consideration in the development of the NDC. Nearly all (14/15) NDCs mention the participation of the population in climate policy and/or NDC development, and although most describe the development process as participatory, far fewer give detail on the actual process. Eleven countries describe various participatory initiatives in natural resource management such as coral reef and mangrove restoration, fisheries and forestry, and three NDCs make reference to human rights. **Palestine** for example, highlights the Action for Climate Empowerment (initiative) as an ideal opportunity to engage youth, women and other vulnerable groups in NDC development and implementation ([Palestine NDC, 2021](https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/NDC/2022-06/Updated%20NDC_%20State%20of%20Palestine_2021_FINAL.pdf): p30), and **Jordan** demonstrates the importance of inclusion of vulnerable groups in its NDC by describing four core groups (children, refugees, unemployed, and disabled persons) and mentioning interventions to target their respective vulnerabilities such as the development of green infrastructure in urban areas including disabled-friendly options and integration of disabled person in green skilled labor through opportunities created by virtual working environments ([Jordan NDC, 2021](https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/NDC/2022-06/UPDATED%20SUBMISSION%20OF%20JORDANS.pdf): p25).

In **ESA** all 19 NDCs contain some reference to public participation in climate policy and/or action, with five NDCs describing public participation in sustainable local resource management. 12 NDCs consider a section of their population as vulnerable, 4 of which are in relation to communities depending on natural resources, and six countries reference human rights. Some examples of good practices include: **Angola** describes an initiative, the KWENDA program, that recognises the impacts of climate change on vulnerable groups and provides a fixed monthly income of 8,500 kwanzas to vulnerable families, alongside including them in income-generating activities ([Angola NDC, 2021](https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/NDC/2022-06/NDC%20Angola.pdf): p22). The **Mauritius** NDC describes an intervention aimed at strengthening the involvement of the public, in particular vulnerable groups, in the NDC development process. They prepared an awareness raising strategy and communication plan to sensitize stakeholders to the NDC via women’s associations, youth leaders, senior citizens, fishers, planters, academia, professionals, students, civil society and NGOs, and the final version of the NDC was communicated through videos, a dedicated website and translate into the local language of Creole ([Mauritius NDC, 2021](https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/NDC/2022-06/Final%20Updated%20NDC%20for%20the%20Republic%20of%20Mauritius%2001%20October%202021.docx): p11).

In **LAC** the majority (14/17) of NDCs recognize the disproportionate impact of climate change on particular population groups with women, young people, indigenous groups, Afrodescendant populations, older persons, those with disabilities and sexual minorities most commonly mentioned. Nearly all (16/17) NDCs acknowledge the importance of a participatory process in climate policy and/or NDC development, most (13/17) countries reference community participation in sustainable local resource management such as reforestation, mangrove restoration, and fisheries, and 10 NDCs reference human rights. **Costa Rica** includes an intervention to address the vulnerable groups through the development of specific training programs for indigenous people, people of African descent, women and young people and other groups historically excluded from the labour sector, to facilitate access to green jobs ([Costa Rica NDC, 2020:](https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/NDC/2022-06/Contribucio%CC%81n%20Nacionalmente%20Determinada%20de%20Costa%20Rica%202020%20-%20Versio%CC%81n%20Completa.pdf) p48). **Honduras** adopts a human-rights based approach by centering its NDC on legislative instruments such as the Law on Equal Opportunities for Women (2000), the National Policy of Women, the National Youth Policy and Public Policy Against Racism and Discrimination for the Comprehensive development of Indigenous and Afro-Honduran Peoples and Social Protection Policy ([Honduras NDC, 2021](https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/NDC/2022-06/NDC%20de%20Honduras_%20Primera%20Actualizaci%C3%B3n.pdf): p10).

In **WCA** 20/22 countries highlight some level of vulnerability in sections of their population, all 22 NDCs contain some reference to public participation in climate policy and/or action, with seven NDCs describing public participation in sustainable local resource management and five countries reference human or civilian rights. **Sierra Leone** includes an intervention to address population vulnerability by strengthening adaptive capacity of the most vulnerable groups and communities through social safety nets and insurance schemes ([Sierra Leone NDC](https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/NDC/2022-06/210804%202125%20SL%20NDC%20%281%29.pdf), 2021: p41). **Gambia** demonstrates the importance of utilising legislation to protect human rights, such as The Women’s Act of 2010 to that includes a special provision on the rights of women in rural communities ([Gambia NDC, 2021](https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/NDC/2022-06/Second%20NDC%20of%20The%20Republic%20of%20The%20Gambia-16-12-2021.pdf): p34).

**Addendum:**

**UNFPA’s efforts to advance attention to and action on the rights of women and girls in the context of climate change**

To advance attention to and action on the rights of women and girls in the context of climate change, UNFPA is taking the following steps:

1. Developing two seminal guidance tools for addressing GBV in the context of disasters. The essential services package for women and girls subject to violence; and the Minimum Standards for GBV in emergencies. This will help development and humanitarian practitioners navigate the space between development and emergencies and ensure the highest level of preparedness to mitigate the impact of disasters and increase resilience of women.

2. Geospatial mapping of population vulnerability to assist preparedness efforts - including vulnerability of women to violence.

3. Partnership with London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine in the development of methodologies to support rigorous evidence based on the impact of climate change on the experiences of women and GBV in particular.

4. Identifying global best practices and national climate change policies which explicitly identify GBV as an area of focus.

5. Forthcoming technical paper to support country development of gender - responsive climate action (as it relates to SRHR and GBV) across policy, law, programmes and governance mechanisms.

6. Developing regional research with programmatic guidance on the impact of climate change on GBV in OIC countries and on the impact of climate change on UNFPA’s three transformative results in the Arab region.

1. *Adoption of the Paris Agreement* FCCC/CP/2015/10/Add.1 (UNFCCC, 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, Fiji, Indonesia, Japan, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Maldives, Marshall Islands, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nauru, Nepal, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Tonga, Vanuatu, Viet Nam. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Angola, Burundi, Comoros, DRC, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Rwanda, Seychelles, South Africa, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Venezuela. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cabo Verdo, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Côte d’Ivoire, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Sao Tome, Senegal, Sierre Leone, Togo. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. UNFPA & Queen Mary University, *forthcoming*. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)