

Call to Action

Addressing Sexual and
Reproductive Health and
Rights (SRHR) and
Climate Change in Nepal

How this 'Call to Action' Came?

The call to action on SRHR and Climate Change was developed as an outcome of the 3rd Voluntary National Review (VNR) Consultation Program, held under the theme "Breaking the Structural Barriers in Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)-2030 Agenda." Organized collaboratively by the National Indigenous Disabled Women Association-Nepal (NIDWAN), Visible Impact, and the SDG National Network Nepal. The program brought together Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and activists to discuss pressing challenges and opportunities in achieving the SDGs. Through focused deliberations, participants highlighted the critical intersections between SRHR and climate change, emphasizing the need for inclusive and actionable solutions, which were encapsulated in the call to action.

Background

Deteriorating SRHR are not often linked to climate change. However, there are several reasons why SRHR are under threat in the face of an unstable and unpredictable environment. SRHR and climate change are interlinked through their combined impact on vulnerable populations, particularly women and girls. **Climate change exacerbates existing inequalities by increasing the frequency and severity of extreme weather events, which can disrupt healthcare infrastructure and limit access to SRHR services** (UNFPA, 2021).

In times of disaster, resources are often diverted from routine health services to emergency response, leading to a rise in maternal mortality, unintended pregnancies, and unsafe abortions (WHO, 2022). Additionally, climate-induced displacement can place women and girls at higher risk of gender-based violence and limit their access to necessary reproductive health services (UNFPA Nepal, 2020). Ensuring access to SRHR services enhances resilience by enabling individuals to make informed decisions about their health, thus contributing to overall community stability and adaptive capacity in the face of climate change.

In Nepal, the intersection of SRHR and climate change is particularly

pronounced due to the country's geographic and socio-economic context. Nepal ranks fourth globally in climate vulnerability, with its diverse topography making it susceptible to floods, landslides, and glacial melting (NPC, 2020). These climate impacts disproportionately affect rural and remote communities, where access to SRHR services is already limited by geographic isolation, cultural barriers, and inadequate healthcare infrastructure (UNFPA Nepal, 2020).

Despite legal frameworks supporting SRHR, such as the legalization of abortion under specific circumstances, many women in Nepal continue to face challenges in accessing safe and legal reproductive health services, particularly in the aftermath of climate-related disasters (UNFPA, 2021). Addressing these intertwined issues requires integrated policy approaches that enhance both climate resilience and SRHR accessibility to ensure that all individuals, particularly the most vulnerable, can exercise their health rights and maintain their well-being.

This call to action emphasizes the urgent need to integrate SRHR and climate change initiatives to build resilient communities and ensure equitable access to health and rights.

Major Issues

SRHR Issues in Nepal

SRHR issues in Nepal are multifaceted, deeply influenced by geographic, socio-economic, and cultural factors. One of the primary challenges is the lack of comprehensive SRHR information. This is particularly evident in rural areas, where limited outreach programs and linguistic barriers impede the dissemination of accurate information (UNFPA Nepal, 2020).

Geographic remoteness and socio-economic disparities further restrict access to essential SRHR knowledge, leaving many communities uninformed and vulnerable.

Cultural norms and taboos exacerbate this issue, as traditional beliefs around menstruation, childbirth, and sexuality often prevent individuals, especially women and girls, from seeking necessary SRHR services (WHO, 2022).

Cultural barriers and taboos significantly impact SRHR in Nepal, with deeply ingrained traditional beliefs fostering stigma around crucial aspects of sexual and reproductive health. This stigma is particularly severe for marginalized groups, who face heightened discrimination and additional barriers to accessing SRHR services. As a result, many individuals do not seek the care they need, leading to preventable health issues.

The persistence of unsafe abortion practices, despite legal provisions, highlights the influence of socio-cultural stigma and misconceptions. Many women resort to unsafe methods due to limited access to safe services and widespread misinformation about the legality and safety of abortion.

Compounding these issues is the chronic underfunding and lack of resources allocated to SRHR programs. This financial shortfall results in significant gaps in service provision and outreach efforts, further limiting the effectiveness of existing initiatives. The lack of trained healthcare providers and inadequate infrastructure hampers effective service delivery. Moreover, insufficient data collection and monitoring mechanisms hinder evidence-based decision-making and resource allocation, making it difficult to track service utilization and outcomes comprehensively (NPC, 2020). This gap in data impedes the development of targeted strategies to improve SRHR services and address the pressing needs of the population effectively.

Climate Change Issues in Nepal

Climate change poses a significant threat to Nepal, with a multitude of issues exacerbating the vulnerability of its population and environment. A critical concern is the lack of awareness and preparedness among vulnerable groups, including women, children, and disabled individuals. These populations often lack sufficient information about the impacts of climate change and have limited capacity for emergency evacuation and adaptation to climate-related disasters. This gap in awareness and preparedness undermines their ability to respond effectively to extreme weather events, increasing their susceptibility to harm.

Nepal is increasingly experiencing extreme weather events such as heatwaves, droughts, floods, and landslides, which cause extensive

damage to infrastructure, property, and livelihoods. These events lead to displacement and migration, disrupting communities and exacerbating socio-economic inequalities. The frequent occurrence of such disasters strains the country's resources and hinders sustainable development efforts, pushing already vulnerable populations into deeper poverty and instability.

Biodiversity loss and agricultural decline are other critical issues driven by climate change in Nepal. The country's rich biodiversity, including rare and endangered species, is threatened by changing climatic conditions, which disrupt ecosystems and the services they provide. Additionally, agricultural productivity is declining due to altered rainfall patterns and increased temperatures, severely affecting food security. This decline in agricultural output not only threatens livelihoods but also exacerbates malnutrition and health problems among the population. Moreover, inequitable climate policies and insufficient implementation of existing strategies like NAPA, LAPA, and the Climate Change Policy hinder effective climate action. Marginalized groups are often excluded from decision-making processes, and there is a lack of accountability from developed countries responsible for higher emissions, with inadequate climate finance reaching vulnerable communities in Nepal.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Integrating SRHR and Climate Change Strategies

- Disseminate CSE through schools, community centers, youth clubs, and digital platforms. Ensure curriculum covers a wide range of SRHR topics and life skills education.

- Provide comprehensive training on SRHR topics, including family planning, maternal health, and gender-based violence to healthcare providers and mobilize trained providers to underserved areas to address geographic disparities.
- Utilize Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) campaigns to raise awareness on SRHR and climate change. Conduct Value Clarification and Attitude Transformation (VCAT) sessions to address cultural norms and misconceptions.
- Promote local and indigenous knowledge for climate adaptation and disaster risk reduction. Implement climate-smart agriculture practices and water management strategies to enhance resilience.
- Establish strong monitoring and accountability mechanisms for SRHR and climate policies. Ensure inter-ministerial collaboration and stakeholder engagement for integrated and sustainable interventions.
- Prioritize SRHR and climate-related research to inform evidence-based policies and programs. Improve data collection and reporting systems to track progress and identify gaps.
- Integrate a gender lens into SRHR services and climate policies to address inequalities. Include marginalized groups in decision-making processes and ensure their voices are recognized and considered.

REFERENCES

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