



Ensuring rights and choices for all since 1969

# UNFPA and the CLIMATE CRISIS

Strengthening Resilience and Protecting  
Progress within the Decade of Action

## **The new future: Climate change and the rights and resilience of women and girls**

The impacts of climate change are already being felt and are projected to get significantly worse during the Decade of Action. Just 1.5 °C of warming above pre-industrial levels (the world is currently at 1.1 °C and rising) will mean significant increases in average temperature, extremes of heat that will push some areas beyond habitability, huge increases in precipitation in some regions, and major droughts in others. We are already facing these kinds of impacts. The ongoing drought in eight countries in Southern Africa has been worsened by warming on the African continent that has outpaced the global average, with massive implications for the protection and health of women and girls. Desert locusts are swarming across the Greater Horn of Africa, exacerbated by climate change and threatening huge increases in food insecurity. In the Lake Chad basin and in multiple countries in the Arab States region, climate change is speeding resource depletion and exacerbating drivers of conflict, leading to widespread risk of displacement, food insecurity and disruption in service provision. Water stress is growing rapidly in Central Asia.

In Asia and the Pacific in 2019 and 2020, cyclones battered coastlines, people died in floods and landslides, and fires, droughts and heatwaves threatened lives, livelihoods and natural resources. Small island developing states in the Caribbean and Pacific have been hit progressively harder by storms of increasing intensity, with less time and limited resources to rebuild between disasters, and some face existential threats from sea level rise. No one and nowhere is safe from climate change, and all efforts for sustainable development must grapple with this reality.

## **Climate change will undermine the achievement of the three transformative results**

Climate change is a major threat to the vision of human-centered sustainable development outlined in the ICPD Programme of Action and reinforced by the Nairobi Summit on ICPD25. Climate change is a multiplier of existing health vulnerabilities, including through insufficient access to safe water and improved sanitation, food insecurity, and impacts on access to health care and education. Climate-related displacement and livelihood impacts are challenging both the protection and the realization of human rights.

## **UNFPA has committed to three transformative results by 2030:**

- Ending preventable maternal mortality
- Ending unmet need for family planning
- Ending gender-based violence and harmful practices

The rapid pace of climate change in the next decade will make each of these transformative results more difficult to achieve. There are direct and indirect pathways of impact, which continue to be the basis of research and implementation. Heat worsens maternal and neonatal health outcomes, with research suggesting that an increase of one degree Celsius in the week before delivery corresponds with a six per cent greater likelihood of stillbirth. Increased poverty and food insecurity driven by climate-related loss of livelihoods will also impact maternal mortality. Climate-related emergencies cause major disruptions in, access to health services and life-saving commodities including contraception. Climate-related loss or change of livelihoods, as well as displacement and migration, increase risks of gender-based violence and harmful practices including, child marriage. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has noted the likelihood that both climate change and gender-blind climate-change interventions could worsen gender inequality.

# A

## Cost of inaction: Women and girls will be left behind

Current efforts to adapt to climate change are simply not sufficient, nor are they always designed, to prevent disproportionate impacts on women and girls, as well as other populations in vulnerable or marginalized situations. There is a strong basis for action, including the integration of gender and sexual and reproductive health in the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and the widespread recognition of the life-saving importance of sexual and reproductive health and measures to address gender-based violence in emergencies, yet this progress has not been matched in the arena of climate change.

While gender and climate change has been a significant area of work under the formulation and implementation of the Paris Agreement, much of the focus of the UNFCCC Gender Action Plan has been on increasing women's participation, while substantive and sectoral issues that are central to ensuring gender-responsive adaptation have been missed. A recent review of gender in Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs, the primary national instrument for implementing the Paris Agreement) shows significant gaps in many critical sectors such as disaster risk-reduction, agriculture and climate finance.

Health is an important component of both NDCs and adaptation plans, yet the most common frameworks give limited attention to maternal and child health, and the strategic emphasis has focused on air pollution and health co-benefits from climate change mitigation. According to a WHO review, health adaptation commitments in current NDCs lack the comprehensive range of actions needed to build climate-resilient health systems. Climate financing has not accounted for necessary health actions: the Green Climate Fund, for instance, currently funds very limited work on health and climate change. Furthermore, young people are largely absent from climate change decision-making, particularly given that there is currently no stream of work within the UNFCCC specifically addressing or making the space for young people.

**Without scaled-up action to address gender and health inequalities in climate change financing, policies and interventions, women and girls - already disproportionately impacted - will continue to be left behind.**



# B

## Building resilience while facing a global pandemic

Prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the humanitarian system was over-stretched with responding to climate and other emergencies, undermining readiness and response measures. The pandemic is now directly impacting life-saving health, including sexual and reproductive health, and is widening inequalities for women, dependent young and older persons, racial minorities and other marginalized groups.

The socioeconomic impacts of lockdowns are significant and growing, undermining individual and community resilience and resources to cope with expected changes to the climate.

Government and international response capacity and the resources and planning necessary to prepare for climate impacts over the coming decade and beyond, are at risk. Meanwhile, climate change is projected to double the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance by 2030.

Building climate resilience and adaptive capacity has become more urgent and more difficult. UNFPA can help to meet this challenge by contributing to individual and community resilience-building, systems-strengthening, preparedness, early action and humanitarian response, and providing data for targeted action.

## Framework for ICPD-based Action on Climate Change

The UN Secretary General has stated that, "*The Decade of Action will see special amplification around three challenges: eradicating poverty and reducing inequality; driving climate action and supporting a healthy planet; achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.*"

Each of these is central to the ICPD and UNFPA's mandate. For UNFPA, limiting the impact of climate change on the achievement of our transformative results and increasing the resilience of people and systems to cope with climate change are foremost concerns within the Decade of Action.

In 2019, UNFPA organized an International Symposium on SRHR, Gender and Climate Change Resilience to share knowledge and identify programmes to reduce the impacts of climate change and build the resilience of communities in vulnerable settings. The resulting Future Africa Call to Action outlines both the impacts of climate change on the achievement of universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights and the contributions that the ICPD community can make to building climate resilience. It puts forward a programmatic framework with four pillars connecting the promise of ICPD25 and the achievement of climate change adaptation and resilience.

# CLIMATE CHANGE RESILIENCE & THE PROMISE OF ICPD25

CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACTS



HEALTHY,  
EMPOWERED  
POPULATIONS  
INCLUDING  
WOMEN,  
GIRLS AND  
YOUNG PEOPLE



CLIMATE-  
RESILIENT  
SYSTEMS:  
HEALTH,  
PROTECTION,  
EDUCATION



REDUCED  
RISK,  
BETTER  
PREPAREDNESS,  
STRONG  
EMERGENCY  
RESPONSE



POPULATION,  
HEALTH AND  
GENDER  
DATA ON  
VULNERABILITY,  
IMPACT  
AND RESILIENCE

TRANSFORMATIVE RESULTS

POLICIES, PROGRAMMES, PARTNERSHIPS & FINANCING



# 1

## Healthy, empowered populations including women, girls and young people

In order to ensure effective programmatic responses to climate change emergencies, we need to strengthen individual and community resilience by: **investing in a healthy, educated, empowered population whose sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights are addressed and fulfilled.**

**Climate resilience should be rights-focused, gender-sensitive and people-centered; a hallmark of ICPD-based approaches.**



Young people, as global and local leaders on climate change as well as ICPD champions, need support in building their own resilience and supporting those around them.

Equally important is assuring expanded opportunities for young people, who are stepping up to the advocacy and innovation challenge of climate change. The rights and aspirations of key populations, indigenous peoples, disabled persons and other marginalized groups should be addressed and fulfilled.

Through cross-sectoral engagement, building on and scaling up successful models, sexual and reproductive health, including family planning, should be integrated and embedded in resilience building to climate change, and as part of local environmental sustainability.



## 2

### Climate-resilient health, protection and education systems

Existing systems are not ready for the array of new and more severe challenges posed by climate change.

To address gaps in health system strengthening related to climate change, climate resilience should be mainstreamed into health sector policies and plans, health management information systems should incorporate indicators of climate stress linked to major health impacts, including those related to reproductive, maternal, neonatal, child and adolescent health; and early warning systems should better enable early action to reduce impacts of climate hazards on health and wellbeing.

Ensuring a functional protection system that can enable prevention and response to gender-based violence as climate-related stresses on livelihoods, security of place, mental health and other factors grow, is vital to resilience at household, community and societal level.

Protection systems need to monitor and account for climate risk and impacts and prioritize both risk reduction and continuity in case of crisis. Young people today are stepping up to the challenge of climate change and their involvement in combating climate change is crucial in order to ensure that the young people are fully empowered, education in and out of schools should integrate climate change and SRHR in curricula. Life skills and family life education that integrate comprehensive sexuality education could be an entry-point for building climate resilience among young people.



# 3

## Risk reduction, enhanced preparedness and strengthened emergency response

With climate impacts expected to double humanitarian need by 2030, and projections of widespread displacement, the demands on the humanitarian system to address the sexual and reproductive health and gender-based violence needs of those impacted by climate crises will grow substantially.

Building knowledge, awareness and capacity for the links between climate-related emergencies and sexual and reproductive health, gender-based violence, child marriage and other harmful practices, is critical.

Meeting expanded humanitarian needs will also require ensuring that SRHR interventions are included in national disaster reduction plans and national contingency plans and that midwifery curricula and other relevant training materials, especially focused on emergencies including the Minimum Initial Service Package (MISP) for Reproductive Health in Crises, incorporate climate risks and impacts, including new severity and extremes. Emergency responses should be implemented in a way that contributes to long-term strengthening of the health system and building back better.

Programmatic approaches for early warning, preparedness and early action on gender-based violence linked to climate impacts need to be adapted and implemented, especially to address seasonal and cyclical emergencies where existing long-term or emergency interventions are insufficient.

**Applying a nexus approach to both immediate responses and longer-term outcomes can reduce the impact of cyclical or recurrent climate-related shocks and stresses, as it enables focus on the work needed to coherently address people's vulnerability before, during, and after crises.**





# 4

## Strong data systems for climate vulnerability and adaptive capacity

Early warning and response for all relevant sectors should be built on strong evidence and data systems, national and sub-national projections, responsive planning and ability to support data and information flow through climate-related impacts and crises.

Climate-related vulnerability assessments and actions must be informed by disaggregated, spatially referenced population data, including the location, characteristics and mobility of populations in areas exposed to current and projected climate change hazards. The 2020 round of censuses will provide such data, and their use for improving climate change actions on the ground must be maximized. Further, use of new remote sensing technologies and new data platforms will enhance options for integrating data across sectors, and enable more frequent assessments of rapidly changing circumstances on the ground. Climate-related vulnerability assessments must also take into account overall impacts on harmful practices, sexual and reproductive health, and gender-based violence risks and protective measures.

Assessments need to incorporate clear recommendations for action and be used for adaptation, resilience-building, emergency response, preparedness and recovery.



# C

## Moving forward on core climate change objectives

As a UN organization with a development, humanitarian and peace mandate, working before, during and after crises in the most urgent climate hotspots in the world, UNFPA will continue working to ensure that:

1. Our transformative results can be achieved and sustained amidst the climate crisis;
2. Through our mandate we are contributing to building the climate resilience of the individuals and communities we serve, and the systems we help to strengthen;
3. As the world seeks to reduce greenhouse emissions, the links between population and emissions are correctly understood and addressed based on the principles of human rights and equality, including gender equality, embedded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the ICPD Programme of Action;
4. UNFPA's operations and programming have as low an environmental and climate footprint as possible, in line with UNFPA's Environmental Efficiency Initiative and Social and Environmental Standards.



Achieving these core climate change objectives depends on a series of critical actions by the end of 2021. Over the next 18 months, the following areas of engagement will ensure that UNFPA Country Offices have clear guidance for integrating ICPD and climate change at national level, with effective support from regional and global levels, to set the stage for an expanded UNFPA focus on climate change in the 2022-2025 Strategic Plan and during the Decade of Action.

It is critical to continue to strengthen the evidence base on how climate change interferes with the transformative results and how UNFPA's mandate and investments are essential for building climate resilience. Significant work is underway, by UNFPA and a wide array of researchers, and will be accelerated.

To deliver on the SDGs and achieve our three transformative results within the Decade of Action, we will act at scale. This includes positioning ICPD and climate change in the global arena, providing clear guidelines on adapting existing programming to better contribute to climate solutions and identifying good programming models that connect ICPD and climate change. Good policy and programming on climate change for UNFPA also requires that we ensure a rights-based approach to all family planning programmes as part of clearly articulating the correct links between population and emissions.

Success on the ground and prioritization in the international arena are mutually reinforcing. It is critical to increase attention to the links between climate change, SRHR, gender and human rights issues at regional and global intergovernmental fora on climate change, including the SDGs and Paris Agreement implementation and reporting.

Support to Member States in bringing relevant language to the negotiations will be essential for enhancing awareness and understanding of the interdependence between gender, SRHR and climate change, and for building lasting support for an integrated approach that more fully exploits these linkages and co-benefits to deliver a more sustainable world.

UNFPA will enhance its public leadership and advocacy on climate change as it pertains to our mandate, including strong messaging and strategic communications. One key area is the link between population growth and emissions, where UNFPA will articulate with evidence the accurate links between demographics and climate change, while strongly reinforcing the importance of human rights and gender equality in climate change solutions, and emphasize the importance of family planning for resilience while recognizing the possibility of long-term co-benefits for mitigation.

Other key areas for advocacy are the risks posed by climate change to maternal health, and to increases in gender-based violence. UNFPA can be a leading voice for the strategic role of women and girls and young people in climate action and for articulating the high cost of inaction: not achieving the SDGs and UNFPA's three zeros, and leaving women and girls behind.

Key advocacy messages will be developed, including a system-wide strategic offer on UNFPA's climate work in the Decade of Action, to be used at identified events and inter-governmental processes.

Progress on all fronts will require resources. UNFPA will present a clear strategic offer to donors and governments, based on this value proposition, to help position ICPD-based action in financial decision-making on climate change at national and global levels.

UNFPA will continue efforts to qualify for climate change financing mechanisms such as the Green Climate Fund and the Adaptation Fund.

Building on the success of the landmark Nairobi Summit and the 2019 Future Africa Symposium, UNFPA will strengthen a range of partnerships in the SRHR, gender, climate change and humanitarian communities, as well as across the UN and with academia, to support all aspects of this effort.

UNFPA will work closely with the broader UN system, where coalitions with leading climate agencies and work in conjunction with Resident Coordinators and UN country teams will expand success on the ground.

Partnerships with communities and local organizations, including women and youth-led organizations, will be essential, as they are on the frontlines of the human-nature interface, are leading protests on climate change around the world, and are vital for humanitarian assistance during climate-related emergencies, as stated in the Grand Bargain.

**Finally, UNFPA will continue its excellent work to date on environmental efficiency in its operations and the application of social and environmental standards to mainstream sustainability in its programming.**

In building forward better post COVID-19, UNFPA can use the experience of functioning under COVID-19 to do a radical reimagining of the environmental footprint of the organization and lead by example.



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## UNFPA's work to date on climate change

**The Fund's climate change approach builds on a history of technical, advocacy, programmatic and operational work at country, regional and global levels.**

*Key examples include:*

2009 State of World Population Report, Facing a changing world: women, population and climate.

Population Dynamics and Climate Change (UNFPA, IIED, 2009)

The Demography of Adaptation to Climate Change (UNFPA, IIED, El Colegio de Mexico, 2013)

Demographic Explorer for Climate Adaptation (DECA): An Automated Spatial Analysis Tool

Future Africa Symposium: Enhancing Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights, Gender and Climate Change Linkages to Build Climate-Resilient Communities. Pretoria, South Africa

Climate Change Signature Session, Nairobi Summit 2019

UNFPA Social and Environmental Standards in programming

UNFPA Environmental Efficiency Initiative. UNFPA Head Quarters

Advocacy on climate change, covering emissions reduction, maternal health, GBV, impact on women and girls and resilience, gender equality, role of women and young people

*-Interdivisional Technical Working Group on Climate Change.*

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