



Rural woman picking tea leaves—Bangladesh, June 2022 (Jahidul-hasan / Shutterstock)

## Pioneering Solutions: Climate Finance, Gender Equity, and Sexual and Reproductive Health Services

A warming world is leading to new challenges for communities and countries around the globe. The significant impacts of climate change on global health, and on women and girls, are well-documented. Yet despite the evidence, funding for climate responses that focus on health or gender remains relatively low. In the rare instances where climate finance provides funds to improve health services, sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services—which are critical to women’s full participation in society and decision-making—are largely neglected.

In many parts of the world, women’s and girls’ lives are constrained by gender inequities and lack of access to essential health care, including SRH services. Not only do these constraints compound the negative impacts of climate change on women, they also make it harder for women to help their families and communities build resilience to climate change. From households and farms, to international conferences and the C-suite, women are key to informing and implementing climate solutions that increase community resilience, economic prosperity, and peace. To strengthen women’s resilience to climate change and facilitate their leadership on climate action, climate finance mechanisms and the projects they support should include SRH services.

---

*This brief was prepared by Sarah Barnes, Claire Doyle, Deekshita Ramanarayanan, and Lauren Risi, with contributions from Angus Soderberg, and with the generous support of the Population Institute. It was informed by a June 2024 private roundtable discussion focused on the importance of investments in gender equality and sexual and reproductive health services in the climate sector.*

This policy brief:

- Explores the relationships between climate finance, gender equality, and sexual and reproductive health;
- Identifies missed opportunities for including SRH services in climate financing mechanisms and projects; and,
- Offers recommendations for how to meaningfully integrate health and gender considerations into climate finance mechanisms and projects.

## GENDER, SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH, AND CLIMATE FINANCE

To ensure that climate financing is effective and efficient, policymakers need to understand how gender, health, and climate resilience are connected—including the often overlooked and underappreciated role of SRH services.

### How climate change affects women and girls

Women and girls face heightened threats to their health, safety, and livelihoods as a result of climate change. For example, the impacts of climate change on [agriculture and water availability disproportionately hurt women](#). Globally, women and girls are responsible for fetching up to 80% of the water for households who lack direct access to water sources. Women comprise about 43% of the agricultural labor force in developing countries, and up to 80% in some African countries.

For pregnant women, extreme heat exposure increases [the risk of preterm birth](#) and the [risk of hypertension and gestational diabetes](#). Exposure to extreme weather events, such as cyclones or hurricanes, can

### Key Terms

**Climate finance:** Funding for initiatives that reduce greenhouse gas emissions (mitigation) or increase resilience to the impacts of climate change (adaptation). This financial support is provided by governments (through domestic, bilateral, and multilateral channels) or the private sector in many different forms, including loans, grants, green bonds, and more.

**Climate Conference of Parties (COP):** The Climate COP is the decision-making body for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and includes all the countries that are parties to the UNFCCC.

**Gender mainstreaming:** Integrating a gender equity perspective at all stages and levels of policies, programs, and projects.

**National Adaptation Plans (NAPs):** At COP16, countries agreed to produce National Adaptation Plans that identify their adaptation needs and outline strategies and programs to address them. Developing countries use their NAPs to secure funding for adaptation activities.

**Sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services:** Sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services are wide-reaching, and include access to information and services like contraception, safe childbirth, and comprehensive sexuality education. SRH services also include comprehensive family planning; infertility prevention and treatment; prevention and treatment of reproductive cancers and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV and AIDS; and the prevention of gender-based violence, including the elimination of harmful practices such as female genital cutting and child marriage.

**Women:** This brief uses “women” to include any person who identifies as a woman, as well as non-binary and transgender people who are perceived to be women or that have female reproductive systems and therefore experience similar risks related to climate change and their sexual and reproductive health.





Pregnant women waiting for an ultrasound scan at the Kolonyi hospital—Uganda, October 2016 (Dennis Wegewijs / Shutterstock)

contribute to [pregnancy complications](#), including an increased number of cesarean sections. Heat stress and extreme weather events also [increase the risk of gender-based violence and harassment](#).

During extreme weather events such as flooding, storms, or wildfires, damage to health infrastructure [can leave women without access](#) to adequate maternal and reproductive health services. For example, Typhoon Haiyan limited access to [antenatal care in the Philippines](#), while flooding in Bangladesh reduced the [availability of contraceptives](#). Women's poor maternal health outcomes reached an all-time high during [recent floods in Pakistan](#), and a global study in *Nature* in 2024 found [links between flood exposure and pregnancy loss](#).

Climate change and extreme weather events have also been linked to [increases in HIV and sexually transmitted infections](#), particularly in adolescent girls and young women. In some countries, when climate shocks stress household finances, women and girls face increased risks of [early marriage, trafficking](#), and other forms of sexual and gender-based violence.

## How sexual and reproductive health services reduce vulnerability to climate change

Engaging women and girls in [climate change adaptation and resilience](#) is key to success. Women contribute up to half of the world's food production, take on unpaid care responsibilities in their households and communities, and serve as leaders in local, national, regional, and global climate movements. By allowing women to choose the number and timing of their children, as well as protecting their health and welfare, SRH services make it more possible for women to [take active roles in adaptation actions, planning, and decision-making](#).

In many developing countries, vulnerability to climate change and lack of access to SRH services combine to make [women's lives more challenging](#). Strikingly, 19 of the 30 countries with the [highest fertility rates](#) (ranging from 3.9 to 6.7 children per woman) are ranked in the bottom 30 of the [ND-GAIN Index](#), which combines climate vulnerability





A husband and wife walk through floodwaters in Bangladesh (amdadphoto / Shutterstock)

and readiness to adapt to measure a country's climate risk. In addition, of those 30 countries with the most climate risk, 19 have the least gender equality, according to the UNDP [Gender Inequality Index](#). And 15 countries fall at the bottom of all three measures, having the highest fertility rates, the lowest gender equality, and the most vulnerability to climate change. This correlation underscores a [complex interplay between climate vulnerability, lack of SRH services, and gender inequality](#), highlighting the urgent need for integrated approaches to address these interconnected challenges.

Evidence suggests that providing SRH services can boost climate change resilience for women, their families, and their communities. In western Tanzania, for instance, the [Tuungane Project](#) works to advance the health of communities, forests, and fisheries. Since it was launched in 2012, the

project has responded to 150,000 requests for reproductive health services and has reduced maternal and neonatal deaths by upgrading health clinics. A [2018 study of the project](#) found a strong positive correlation between access to family planning, maternal and child health care, and most aspects of climate resilience.

**These 15 countries appear simultaneously in the top 30 rankings for climate risk, gender inequality, and total fertility rates.**

Afghanistan	Guinea-Bissau	Sierra Leone
Benin	Liberia	Somalia
Burkina Faso	Mali	Sudan
Chad	Niger	Uganda
Republic of the Congo	Democratic Republic of Congo	Yemen





Climate advocate Georgina Kerubo speaks at a gathering in Dubai—December 2023. (Leo Alfonso, International Labour Organization / Flickr)

## Climate finance is growing, guided by country plans

Climate finance for adaptation is delivered through both public and private channels. Public funding for climate adaptation includes [bilateral financing](#), which makes up a large portion of adaptation funding; domestic financing from internal budgets; and [multilateral financing](#) from development banks, like the World Bank Group or African Development Bank, and from several mechanisms and funds linked to the UNFCCC, including the Green Climate Fund (GCF), the Global Environment Facility (GEF), and the Adaptation Fund.

After a slow start, developed countries' funding for climate mitigation and adaptation projects in developing countries has grown significantly in recent years. In 2022, [developed countries provided \\$115.9 billion](#), mostly from public funds, which finally surpassed the goal of \$100 billion per year initially targeted for 2020. Of this amount, \$32.4 billion was for climate adaptation.

## Multilateral Climate Funds

- The Green Climate Fund (GCF) is the largest single fund, with a current portfolio of \$14.9 billion and 270 projects across 130 countries.
- The Global Environment Facility (GEF), a multilateral family of funds, has provided more than \$25 billion over the last three decades and more than \$2 billion specifically for adaptation since 2001. In its latest funding cycle, the GEF received a record \$5.33 billion in pledges from 29 countries—30% more than the previous cycle.
- The Adaptation Fund has committed over [\\$1.2 billion since 2010 for climate adaptation and resilience](#), with roughly half of its projects currently located in least developed countries or small island developing states.





Community meeting on health and water hygiene—Nigeria, July 2021 (Oni Abimbola / Shutterstock)

National Adaptation Plans (NAPs)—which have been developed by 58 countries to date—are an important tool that countries can use to solicit and secure climate finance for adaptation activities. Several climate funds, including the Least Developed Country Fund under the GEF, are specifically mandated to help implement NAPs.

Climate vulnerability and risk assessments play a key role in determining how climate finance is allocated, particularly for mechanisms like the GCF, which prioritizes vulnerable countries like small island states and least developed countries. These assessments inform the NAPs by helping to identify funding priorities. Although often overlooked, lack of SRH services is increasingly recognized as a factor that heightens vulnerability, especially for women and girls in the face of climate change.

Innovative financial mechanisms can also be leveraged to strengthen SRH services in climate-vulnerable communities. Climate insurance could help health facilities rebuild after disasters, while catastrophe bonds—a security that pays the issuer

when a specified disaster occurs—could fund SRH services in vulnerable regions. Microcredit programs can [increase rates of health service utilization](#), and municipal bonds can finance local health infrastructure. Green bonds could fund projects that improve both environmental resilience and health outcomes. For instance, the World Bank has issued green bonds for climate-related projects that could encompass health services.

### **Climate finance supports health and gender-related projects, but few incorporate sexual and reproductive health services**

There has been some progress in recent years in integrating gender equality and health in NAPs and climate finance portfolios.

[Almost all existing NAPs \(98%\) now mention gender](#), a sharp increase from just [one NAP in a 2018 review](#), and almost 30% mention women as agents of change. *How* gender is included varies, from gender as a guiding principle to gender equality as an objective.





Women grinding millet—Bandiagara, Mali, August 2011 (Teo Tarras / Shutterstock)

Most NAPs identify health as a priority sector for adaptation, and [60% of NAPs specifically mention aspects of SRH](#), including gender-based violence, pregnancy and maternal health, and HIV/AIDS. For instance, [Suriname’s 2019-2029 NAP](#) notes “after disasters, the threat of physical and sexual violence often increases; this threat is being increased in shelter camps. One way of combating this is to include gender awareness training for volunteers working in disaster areas including crisis management and sexual and gender-based violence.”

Adaptation finance portfolios are also likely to incorporate gender and health, but [major funds like the GCF and Adaptation Fund do not yet fund SRH-specific programming](#), even though aspects of SRH are increasingly mentioned in NAPs.

The Adaptation Fund provides guidance highlighting gender considerations, holds

[regular trainings on gender mainstreaming](#), and produces research and communications on gender. These steps have increased the incorporation of gender considerations—but not SRH services—into projects seeking financing from the Adaptation Fund.

When it comes to health, the Adaptation Fund—the first climate fund to partner with the World Health Organization—endorsed the *Guiding Principles for Financing Climate and Health Solutions*, which were launched in 2023. But SRH services are not mentioned in the *Guiding Principles*.

The GCF’s portfolio includes funding for projects related to “health, food, and water security,” such as a [project to strengthen the climate resilience of health systems in Laos](#) and a [project addressing climate-related community health challenges](#) in the Cook Islands—but neither of these projects incorporate SRH services.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

Taken together, the following recommendations provide a pathway for climate finance to be more impactful by closing the gap between gender equity, sexual and reproductive health services, and climate resilience.

- 1. Include gender and SRH experts and practitioners in climate adaptation planning, especially in the development of NAPs:** While climate policies are more likely than before to integrate gender considerations, this has not always translated into inclusive climate projects. Engaging gender and SRH experts and practitioners in the planning, design, and implementation of climate projects will help ensure that these projects [build women's and girls' resilience](#). Similarly, NAPs should include more input from gender and SRH experts, so that they address climate-related health risks for women and marginalized groups.
- 2. Include gender equity and SRH services in climate vulnerability assessments:** Since climate change disproportionately affects women and girls, efforts to assess a community's vulnerability to climate change should also assess gender inequities and access to SRH services. By identifying these disparities, policymakers can target climate financing more effectively, ensuring that interventions address the unique needs of women and girls, promote gender equality, and improve access to essential health services, leading to more resilient communities.
- 3. Support research on the connections between gender, SRH services, and climate change:** The most recent assessment by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)—which is used by the COP to set financing agendas for mechanisms like the GCF, the GEF, and the Adaptation Fund—discusses the impacts of climate change on health and on women's caregiving, migration, and social structures and cultural practices. However, it does not discuss any research on gender-related health issues, including sexual and reproductive health. Since the IPCC reports prioritize peer-reviewed research, building the evidence base connecting SRH services to climate resilience will help shape funding priorities.
- 4. Connect research to policy and practice:** To ensure that this research reaches climate scientists, adaptation planners, and climate finance decision-makers, researchers should develop robust dissemination plans that target these audiences and work with think tanks, media, international fora, and others that can bridge the gaps between these fields.
- 5. Leverage innovative financial mechanisms to support SRH services:** Climate insurance, green bonds, and catastrophe bonds could support SRH services in areas vulnerable to climate shocks and ensure that these services are included in disaster preparedness and response plans. By utilizing these financial instruments, countries could strengthen SRH services, increase gender equity, and build community resilience to climate impacts.





SOURCES: Arrow, Adaptation Fund, *Environmental Challenges Journal*, Green Climate Fund, *Global Health: Science and Practice*, International Organization for Migration, *International Journal of Gynecology & Obstetrics*, International Labour Organization, *Journal of Global Health*; NAP Global Network, *Nature Communications*, Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Population and Environment*, Population Institute, Population Reference Bureau, *PLOS Currents*, *SSM Population Health Journal*, The Nature Conservancy, *The Lancet: Planetary Health*, *The BMJ*, UAE Consensus/COP 28 UAE, United Nations, UNFCCC, United Nations Development Programme, University of Notre Dame, United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction PreventionWeb, USA for UNFPA, Wilson Center, World Bank Group, Women Deliver.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

**2X Global:** [Climate Gender Equity Fund](#) grants in the most recent round were intended to help support investment funds and vehicles aligned with the [2X Criteria](#), a global gender finance standards framework.

**Climate Investment Funds:** [Harnessing Climate Finance to Advance Women's Climate Leadership](#)

**Direct Relief:** [Power for Health Initiative](#)

**Grist:** [Expecting Worse: Giving Birth on a Planet in Crisis](#)

**Harvard and CrisisReady:** [Climateverse: Unlocking the Power of Generative AI & Public Data for Improved Climate Action](#)

**Journal of Climate Change and Health:** [CrisisReady's novel framework for transdisciplinary translation: Case-studies in wildfire and hurricane response](#)

**The Lakshmi Mittal and Family South Asia Institute, Harvard University:** [Community HATS \(Heat Adaptation and Treatment Strategies in South Asia\) Project](#)

**Margaret Pyke Trust:** [Healthy wetlands for the cranes and people of Rukiga, Uganda](#)

**NAP Global Network:** [NAPTrends in Key Themes: Gender](#)

**NAP Global Network:** [Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights \(SRHR\) in National Adaptation Plan \(NAP\) Processes](#)

**The New York Times:** [Three Ideas to Beat the Heat, and the People Who Made Them Happen](#)

**Population Institute:** [Population and Climate Change Vulnerability: Understanding Trends to Enhance Rights and Resilience](#)

**Population Institute:** [Revitalizing Population and Development in the 21st Century: International Conference on Population and Development 30 Years On](#)

**United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC):** [Draft provisional programme of the 2024 Forum on accelerating climate action and resilience through gender-responsive financing](#)

**Wilson Center:** [Global Health & Gender Policy Brief: Climate Change and Maternal and Newborn Health Outcomes](#)

**Wilson Center:** [Converging Risks: Demographic Trends, Gender Inequity, and Security Challenges in the Sahel](#)

**Wilson Center:** [Population Trends and the Future of US Competitiveness](#)

**Wilson Center:** [Africa's Youth Can Save the World](#)

**World Bank:** [Placing Gender Equality at the Center of Climate Action](#)

**Y Labs:** [The Climate-SRHR Investment Framework](#)

---

**A note from the authors:** Thank you to all who participated in the June 2024 roundtable and helped to inform this policy brief. Thank you also to the Population Institute, particularly Kathleen Mogelgaard and Heidi Worley, for your review and support of this brief. And finally, thank you to Meaghan Parker for your editing and expertise.










**Environmental Change  
and Security Program**



**Maternal Health  
Initiative**







Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars  
One Woodrow Wilson Plaza  
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20004-3027

## **Wilson Center**

-  [wilsoncenter.org](https://wilsoncenter.org)
-  [woodrowwilsoncenter](https://www.facebook.com/woodrowwilsoncenter)
-  [@TheWilsonCenter](https://twitter.com/TheWilsonCenter)
-  [@thewilsoncenter](https://www.instagram.com/thewilsoncenter)
-  [The Wilson Center](https://www.linkedin.com/company/the-wilson-center)






## **Environmental Change and Security Program**

Lauren Herzer Risi, Director  
Claire Doyle, Program Associate  
Angus Soderberg, Program Coordinator

-  [wilsoncenter.org/ecsp](https://wilsoncenter.org/ecsp)
-  [ecsp@wilsoncenter.org](mailto:ecsp@wilsoncenter.org)
-  [linkedin.com/environmental-change-and-security-program](https://www.linkedin.com/company/environmental-change-and-security-program)
-  [ecspwwc](https://www.facebook.com/ecspwwc)
-  [@newsecuritybeat](https://twitter.com/newsecuritybeat)
-  [@newsecuritybeat](https://www.instagram.com/newsecuritybeat)

## **Maternal Health Initiative**

Sarah B. Barnes, Director  
Deekshita Ramanarayanan, Program Associate

-  [wilsoncenter.org/maternalhealth](https://wilsoncenter.org/maternalhealth)
-  [mhi@wilsoncenter.org](mailto:mhi@wilsoncenter.org)
-  [linkedin.com/wilson-center-maternal-health-initiative](https://www.linkedin.com/company/wilson-center-maternal-health-initiative)
-  [@maternalhealthinitiative](https://www.instagram.com/maternalhealthinitiative)
-  [@Wilson\\_MHI](https://twitter.com/Wilson_MHI)