

THE LINK BETWEEN SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS AND THE EUROPEAN GREEN DEAL



OVERCOMING THE CHALLENGES OF THE CLIMATE CRISIS AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION IS A KEY PRIORITY FOR THE EU, INCLUDING IN ITS INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION.

The European Commission has recognised this, amongst others in the [2020 Communication on the future EU – Africa Strategy](#) that specifically states the EU and Africa should work towards healthy ecosystems, limiting and halting global overheating, reducing vulnerabilities and enhancing opportunities for people and ecosystems to adapt. This requires stepping up efforts on climate crisis mitigation and resilience as well as taking adequate adaptation measures in a socially sustainable way¹. This is in line with the European [Green Deal](#), presented in 2019, which contains an action plan on how the EU wants to address these challenges. It foresees actions in different domains (including climate ambition; clean, affordable and secure energy; industrial strategy for a clean and circular economy; sustainable and smart mobility; ...).²



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The Pacific nation of Kiribati is extremely vulnerable to the climate crisis and other disasters such as storm surges and king tides. In Pacific nations such as Kiribati, minor emergencies can overwhelm national capacity, significantly affect communities and the economy, and impact their long-term development agendas. As the sea levels rise and regularly flood the coastal homes, the population of Kiribati are conducting preparedness work to ensure the SRH needs of women, girls and vulnerable populations are met during emergencies.

While not specifically addressed, **there are several linkages between sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and the issues included in the European Green Deal**. As it would lead too far to address all of these issues, this factsheet will focus specifically on the climate crisis and environmental degradation.



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¹ European Commission, 2020. Towards a comprehensive strategy with Africa. https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/communication-eu-africa-strategy-join-2020-4-final_en.pdf

² European Commission, 2019. Communication on the European Green Deal. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:b828d165-1c22-11ea-8c1f-01aa75ed71a1.0002.02/DOC_1&format=PDF



THE IMPACT OF THE CLIMATE CRISIS AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION ON SRHR

The climate crisis and environmental degradation have a significant impact on people all around the world, especially in low income and least developed countries. In addition, they are also inequality amplifiers: **women are disproportionately affected by the results of the climate crisis and environmental degradation, due to gender discrimination and socially constructed roles.** The effects of the climate crisis such as rising sea levels, increasing temperature and extreme weather conditions (floods, heavy storms, severe droughts) tend to hit women and girls harder. Women tend to be overly burdened with household work and caring for children, the sick and the elderly. For example, during the Asian tsunami in 2004 (70 percent of the victims were women), many women and children were trapped inside their homes while most men were out in the open³. In the aftermath of a disaster there is a risk that girls are pulled from school to take care of the household and when there is food stress and water shortage people will marry younger and there is higher risk of girls ending up in early, forced and child marriages. In addition, the climate crisis affects the availability of surface water, and as a result rural women and girls, who are usually given the task of fetching water, have to cover greater distances to collect the water, increasing their already substantial workload and putting them at increased risk of gender based violence.

The climate crisis and its consequences also erode the advancement of SRHR. There is a clear risk of a disrupted healthcare infrastructure and service delivery, including SRHR services, during and in the aftermath of a crisis. Extreme weather events can damage hospitals and clinics and floodings will exacerbate the spread of waterborne disease, overwhelming health care systems with sudden spikes in diseases like cholera. Droughts on the other hand will result in insecurity for already malnourished populations. Universal Health Coverage will be perpetually out of reach. As a result, the SRHR of women and girls is threatened and often not met in the face of the climate crisis.



THE IMPORTANCE OF SRHR IN INCREASING RESILIENCE TO THE CLIMATE CRISIS AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION

SRHR increases the ability of communities to adapt and become resilient to the climate crisis. The climate crisis results in increased shocks and pressures on the environment with impacts on natural resources, economies and societies. In the last two decades, there has been a clear increase in climate-related emergencies, with floods accounting for more than 40% of disasters – affecting 1.65 billion people - storms (28%), earthquakes (8%) and extreme temperatures (6%)⁴. **Access to SRHR, including family planning, reduces vulnerability to these shocks by enhancing women's autonomy.** When women and girls are able to decide over their own bodies, and make decisions about their sexual and reproductive health and well-being, they and their families are better able to react to their contexts. **Therefore, ensuring universal access to SRHR services should be part of a comprehensive response to the climate crisis.**

As powerful agents of change, women should play a critical role in the climate crisis responses and programmes related to adaptation and resilience. However, while being disproportionately affected by the climate crisis and possessing specific knowledge and skills to contribute to more effective and sustainable climate crisis action, women are largely under-represented in decision-making processes at all levels. Women's participation at the political level has resulted in greater responsiveness to citizen's needs, often increasing cooperation across party and ethnic lines. Within the household, women carry the overwhelming burden of unpaid labour and caring work, which affects their ability to be active outside the home and participate in public and political life. SRHR plays a key role in women's empowerment and in building the capacity of women to participate individually and collectively across social, economic, political and public life.

³ UNDP, 2016. Overview of linkages between gender and climate change.

⁴ UN News, 2020. 'Staggering' rise in climate emergencies in last 20 years, new disaster research shows. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/10/1075142>

BEST PRACTICES

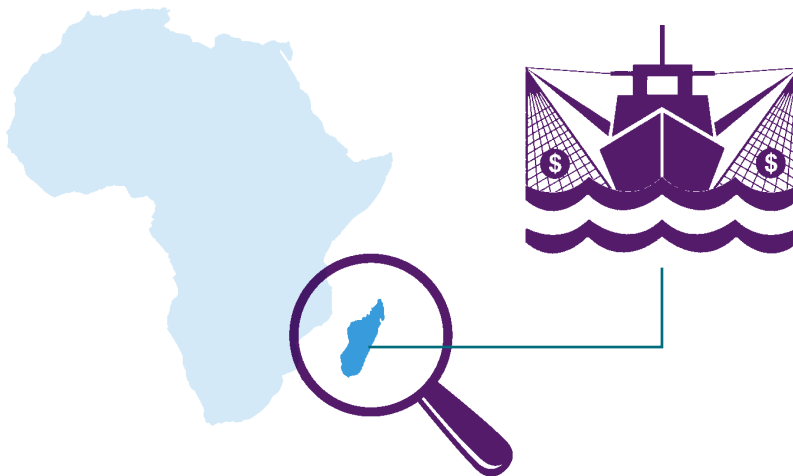
CIVIL SOCIETY SUPPORT FOR SRHR AND THE CLIMATE CRISIS



One type of programmes addressing these interlinkages between SRHR and the climate crisis are the 'population, health, and environment' – programmes (PHE). They are designed to address multidimensional challenges facing isolated rural communities living in areas of high biodiversity and/or natural resource dependence with limited access to health services. These programmes typically integrate voluntary family planning, sexual and reproductive health and other health services with community based natural resource management efforts.

In Madagascar, overfishing and the climate crisis are degrading the marine environment on which people depend for their survival. Blue Ventures, has teamed up with Population Services International and Marie Stopes

Madagascar to set up a programme providing reproductive health and family planning services for women and training them as community health workers, while at the same time setting up community managed aquaculture to stop the overfishing and its damaging environmental impact. Instead of damaging the coral reefs by overfishing, they are now harvesting seaweed in a sustainable manner. This approach is supported by education and communication strategies, sharing information and messages on both sexual and reproductive health and essential livelihood activities. As a result, women are being empowered to take responsibilities with regards to natural resource management and conservation and they become more resilient to the effects of the climate crisis.⁵



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⁵ Blue Ventures. Safidy the freedom to choose. <https://discover.blueventures.org/safidy-10-years/#1>



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