

Sexual and reproductive health and rights in the Nationally Determined Contributions

Only seven countries mention dimensions of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) in their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), even though about a third link climate change and population growth. Predominantly developing and least developed countries express concern about the links between changes in climate and a growing population, while most developed countries are silent on the matter.

By Johanne Brok, the Danish Family Planning Association, October 31st, 2018

The NDCs are voluntary under the UNFCCC and express the intentions of national governments on how they will contribute to tackling global climate change. In 32 % of the 164 examined NDCs¹, population growth is linked to climate change adaptation, mitigation or both.

A study screening the NDCs for references to analyses and action related to population, fertility rates, family planning, and SRHR maps the links between these dimensions and climate change in the NDCs. In this way, the study helps form a basis for assessing the potential for advocating for SRHR as a climate adaptation strategy in a national, developing/developed country and broader UNFCCC context.

At the national level

Zooming in on particular countries' NDCs, Kiribati stands out as the small island state known for being among the most vulnerable in the world to rising sea levels as a result of climate change. In Kiribati's

Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC)

NDCs are non-legally binding intentions of national governments under the UNFCCC. Each Party to the Paris Agreement of 2015 communicate their highest ambition to tackling climate change, taking into account differentiated responsibilities and different capabilities of countries. Developed countries are encouraged to take the lead in terms of mitigation of climate change through reduction in GHG emissions, while developing countries are given more space to peak later to accommodate their future development.

The next revision of the NDCs is in 2020.

¹ There are 190 NDCs submitted to the UNFCCC, but as the study was limited to the NDCs available in English, and some countries have shared NDCs e.g. the European Union, 164 NDCs were studied.

NDC: "The following factors are contributing to the nation's vulnerability to climate change [...] a high population and growth rate [...] which is due to: a high proportion of children and youth, high levels of fertility, low rates of contraceptive use [...] all affecting the resilience of the population and natural ecosystems." ² In 2009, Kiribati had a total unmet need for family planning of 28%³. If Kiribati made an effort to meet this need, using a human rights-based approach of fulfilling the sexual and reproductive rights of all girls and women, the country might be able to increase its resilience towards the effects of climate change and ensure a more sustainable development, as access to modern methods of contraception will reduce the no. of unplanned pregnancies and births, leading to lower population growth rates, which again influences the demand for natural resources, food security and adaptive capacity of especially women and girls.

Other national examples are Egypt and Niger, who describe 'population growth' as an impediment for sustainable development, and whose NDCs include clear ambitions to reduce population growth. Strict attention needs to be paid to Egypt, who might be walking down a dangerous road due to the following stated national NDC objective: "Focus efforts on controlling population growth."⁴ The aim of ensuring sustainable development cannot be obtained by compromising sexual and reproductive rights, since human rights are indivisible and thus cannot be ranked as more or less important than the other.

Developing and developed countries

Looking more broadly into the NDCs, 17% connect population growth with climate adaptation including 23% of the Least Developed Countries. The most cited adaptation issues related to population growth are inadequate food production systems, fresh water scarcity and inhibited resilience and adaptive capacity.

Even though the link between dimensions of SRHR and climate change is less than common in the NDCs, there is a potential for advocating for the integration of SRHR/human rights-based family planning leading up to the revisions of the NDCs in 2020.

² Republic of Kiribati, Intended Nationally Determined Contribution.2015.

³ Kiribati Demographic and Health Survey 2009

⁴ Egyptian Intended Nationally Determined Contribution. 2015

Population growth (or demographic growth)	Number of countries (n = 164)	Countries
Not mentioned	103	
Mentioned only as a statement of fact	8	Bahrain, Central African Republic, DR Congo, Eritrea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Palestine, Turkey
Identified as linked to mitigation	25	Andorra, Australia, Azerbaijan, Benin, Brazil, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, Guinea, India, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Liechtenstein, Moldova, Niue, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Rwanda, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Samoa, Switzerland, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uruguay
Identified as linked to adaptation	23	Belize, Cabo Verde, Dominica, Egypt, Kiribati, Lebanon, Malawi, Malaysia, Mali, Mauritius, Mongolia, Morocco, Mozambique, Niger, Senegal, Seychelles, Solomon Islands, Somalia, Tajikistan, Timor-Leste, Togo, Tonga, Yemen
Identified as linked to both mitigation and adaptation	5	Algeria, Nigeria, Pakistan, Uganda, United Arab Emirates