

# Sexual and reproductive health and rights in the Nationally Determined Contributions

Only seven Parties to the Paris Agreement mention sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) – such as voluntary family planning - 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.

By Johanne Brok, the Danish Family Planning Association, October 31<sup>st</sup>, 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 NDCs<sup>1</sup>, population growth is linked to climate change adaptation, mitigation or both.

17% of Parties to the Paris Agreement 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.

A study screening the NDCs for references to population dynamics, fertility rates, voluntary family planning and SRHR in the problem analyses and related action maps the links countries make between these dimensions and climate change. By doing so, the study forms a basis for assessing the potential for advocating for SRHR as a climate adaptation strategy.

At the national level

Zooming in on particular countries' NDCs, Kiribati stands out with the most advanced integrated problem analysis. In Kiribati's 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*

## 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.

<sup>1</sup> 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.

*of fertility, low rates of contraceptive use [...] all affecting the resilience of the population and natural ecosystems."*<sup>2</sup>

Kiribati does not present a plan or strategy related to this issue, but in 2009, Kiribati's women had a total unmet need for family planning of 28%<sup>3</sup>. If Kiribati closes this gap between demand and supply, using a human rights-based approach of fulfilling the sexual and reproductive rights of all, the country could increase its resilience towards the effects of climate change and ensure a more sustainable development. Access to modern methods of contraception would reduce the number of unplanned pregnancies and births, leading to increased adaptive capacity of especially women and girls and to lower population growth rates, which again influences the demand for natural resources and food security.

Another national example is Egypt, who finds that *"high population growth rates and densities impose huge pressure on the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development"*. Unlike Kiribati, Egypt does present a national objective and priority to solve this issue, by focusing *"efforts on controlling population growth."*<sup>4</sup> The means of achieving this objective and priority is left out of the NDC, however, sustainable development cannot be obtained by compromising human rights.

#### COP24 and the next round of NDCs

Among the COP24 negotiations is finalizing the guidelines related to the communication of future NDCs. These modalities must reflect the full vision of the Paris Agreement incl. human rights, gender equality and women's empowerment and the right to health. With these, there is a potential for advocating for the integration of SRHR/human rights-based family planning in the revisions of the NDCs in 2020.

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<sup>2</sup> Republic of Kiribati, Intended Nationally Determined Contribution.2015.

<sup>3</sup> Kiribati Demographic and Health Survey 2009

<sup>4</sup> Egyptian Intended Nationally Determined Contribution. 2015

**Table 1. Extent of reference to population growth among the 164 NDCs**

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