



SRHR AND THE CLIMATE CRISIS: PERSPECTIVES FROM CAMBODIA

Cambodia is ranked as one of the most at-risk countries when it comes to climate change.¹ Cambodia relies heavily on climate-sensitive sectors including agriculture, land, water resources, forestry and fisheries. Heavy rains, floods, typhoons and droughts have already caused severe damage to communities and individuals. It is estimated that climate change could reduce Cambodia's GDP by almost ten percent by 2050, mostly due to reduced worker productivity as a result of temperature increases, impacts on infrastructure and a loss of crops.² Limited existing infrastructures, in regards to health and SRHR, risk putting women, girls, persons with diverse SOGIESC, and other marginalized groups, at most risk of struggling with the climate crisis.³ This is especially true for young people under 30 years old, who comprise two-thirds of Cambodia's population, as they have been found to be at a higher risk of poverty and violence, particularly gender-based violence.⁴

“ It would change the country if SRHR is properly addressed before the climate crisis worsens. ”

Rachana, Executive Director, Klahaan

¹In the Global Climate Risk Index 2021 for 2000-2019, Cambodia is ranked the 14th most vulnerable country in the world.

²Climate Risk Country Profile: Cambodia, World Bank, Asian Development Bank, (2021), p. 2.

³There have for example been particular recommendations to ensure investments in coverage, as well as maternal and child health. Asanta, A. et al., (2019). Who benefits from healthcare spending in Cambodia? Evidence for a universal health coverage policy., Health Policy and Planning. 34(Suppl 1):i4-i13.

⁴Key Issues affecting Youth in Cambodia, OECD.

THE CLIMATE CRISIS RISKS WORSENING EXISTING HARMFUL STEREOTYPES

Klahaan is an organization campaigning on issues that affect women's rights in Cambodia, and predicts that the climate crisis could exacerbate existing harmful norms, gender roles and stereotypes. Klahaan's research has found that existing gender stereotypes and norms in Cambodia severely limit women's and LGBTQI-persons' bodily autonomy and decision-making power. They claim that "a key function of Khmer culture has been to set out and maintain 'complementary' and mutually dependent (but largely unequal) roles between women and men, within which men hold a greater share of power and privilege at all levels of the community".⁵ Klahaan has also found that in Cambodia, women have been disciplined to uphold "a detailed set of teachings, norms and customs in order to become 'proper' women, and bring honor to the family".⁶ As per one Khmer proverb, women are said to "belong to the kitchen stove".⁷



While Klahaan has seen that time does change harmful norms and gender stereotypes, traditional norms and customs that severely limit women's and LGBTQI-persons' SRHR still play a very active role in Cambodian society today. These were exacerbated during the Covid-19 pandemic and several challenges surfaced in regards to SRHR, such as a significant increase in the burden for women. Expectations of educating children in the face of school closures, an increased pressure on women to be responsible for all family members, elders and the home, as well as an expectation on girls to conduct household chores, materialized.⁸

There was also an increase in the number of intimate-partner violence incidents. Sexual and reproductive health service providers closed their clinics. Although digital health interventions were introduced, these were not accessible to all and there were instances where online providers were not trained in SRHR and compounded harmful gender stereotypes and norms. Learning from the pandemic, any climate crisis resilience strategies and policies must therefore incorporate strategies to enhance SRHR to ensure that women and other marginalized groups are not denied their rights by toxic gender stereotypes.



SRHR MUST BE INCLUDED IN CLIMATE CHANGE POLICIES AND DECISIONS

There is not yet a clear link made between the need to incorporate SRHR in climate crisis policies and plans on the national level in Cambodia, but Klahaan underscores the urgent need to do so. Core SRH-services such as contraception and the right to safe and legal abortion, will be even more difficult to access during crisis and risk only on the immediate provision of food and shelter. Strengthening SRHR will enhance gender equality and has the potential to transform communities to be resilient in the face of climate crisis. Any responses to the climate crisis must therefore perceive SRHR as a central component.

⁵ A Perception Study on Virginity Culture in Cambodia, p. 9.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ UNESCO Covid-19 Response: How many students are at risk of not returning to school?, (2020).

SRHR AND THE CLIMATE CRISIS: PERSPECTIVES FROM KENYA

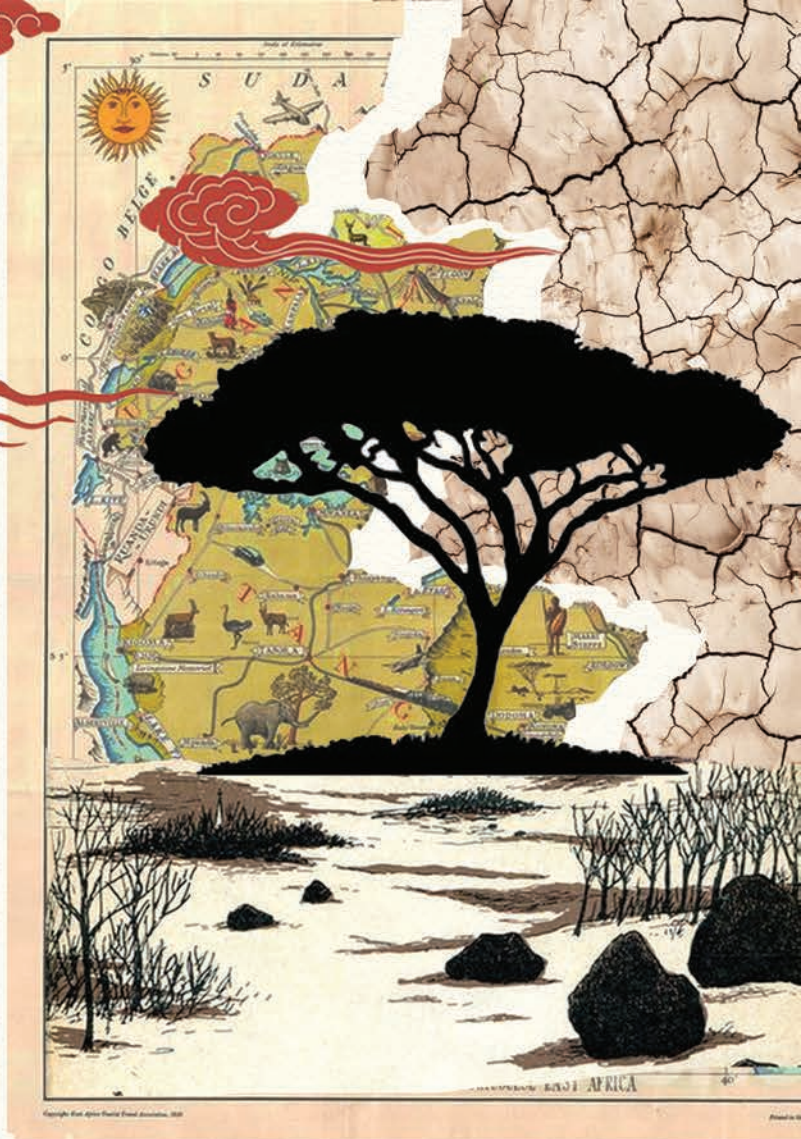
Kenya is inherently prone to droughts and floods due to its geographic location. The impacts of climate change have already exacerbated existing inequalities and challenges related to water and food security, as well as economic growth.⁹ More extreme weather events, especially in terms of droughts and flooding, currently last longer than usual and there is an increase in unpredictable rainfall.¹⁰ These events have had large socio-economic impacts and high economic costs as many livelihoods and economic activities in Kenya are vulnerable to climate change. Over 70 percent of natural disasters in Kenya are attributable to extreme climate events and across all emission scenarios, temperatures in Kenya will continue to rise according to predictions.¹¹ Droughts have the most severe impact on the country's arid areas. The effects on the agricultural sector is significant as the arid and semi-arid areas comprise 18 out of 20 of the poorest counties and are at particular risk of drought.¹² Additionally, adverse impacts on health and SRHR increase as temperatures change. Progress made in these areas are at a great risk of being undermined by the climate crisis, if interventions are not introduced quickly. This is particularly important as Kenya's vulnerability to the climate crisis has increased, due to the country's inequality and poverty levels.¹³

⁹ Climate Risk Country Profile: Kenya, World Bank, (2021), p.2.

¹⁰ Ibid p. 21.

¹² Ibid p. 10.

¹³ Ibid p. 2.

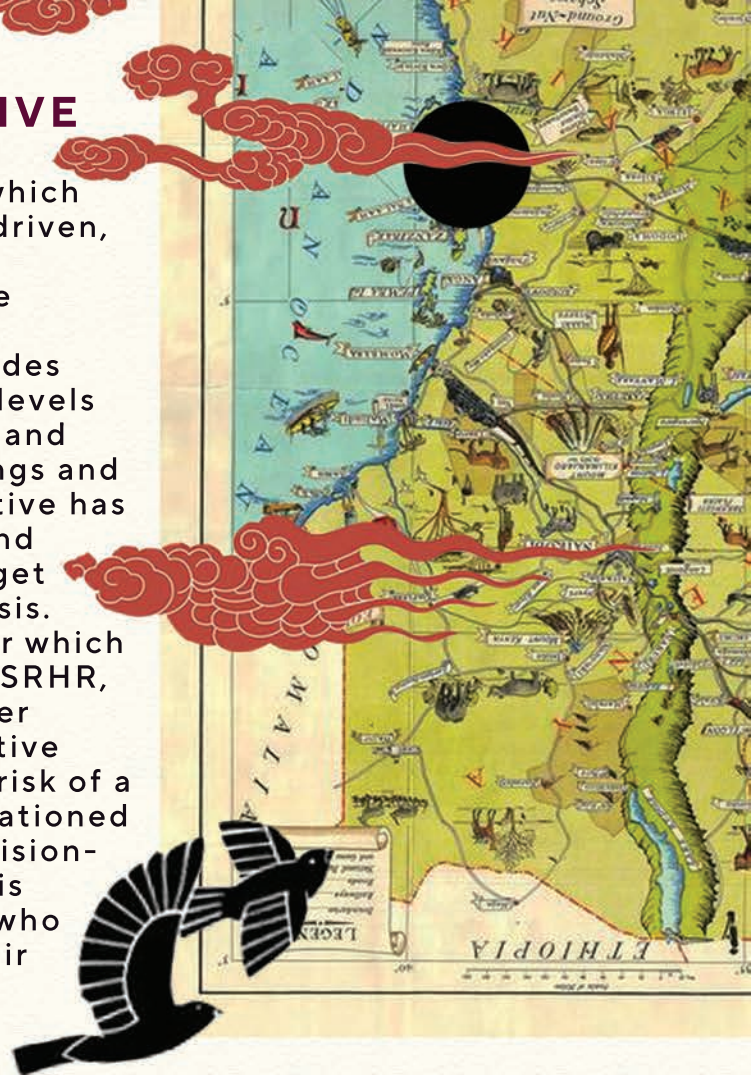


“ We risk worsening already existing inequalities caused by the climate crisis if we do not include intersectional perspectives in policy and budgetary decisions.

Kadium, Program Assistant, Q-initiative

CLIMATE CHANGE LEADERSHIP AND POLICIES MUST BE INCLUSIVE

Q-initiative, an organisation based in Kenya which works to provide a transparent, membership-driven, empowered and inclusive space for the LGBT community, underscores that there is an acute need for more inclusive climate crisis policies and decision-making processes. Its work includes enhancing accountability at local and county levels by ensuring that persons of diverse SOGIESC and young people can participate in public meetings and raise their voices. Through this work, Q-initiative has observed the lack of inclusionary processes and intersectional perspectives in policy and budget decisions related to SRHR and the climate crisis. Commitments made to greater access to water which is of critical importance for the realisation of SRHR, have in certain cases been neglected and never realised at the implementation level. Q-initiative highlights that those who are the greatest at risk of a lack of water access and a high frequency of rationed water supplies, must be represented as in decision-making and in policies, otherwise climate crisis responses risk being ineffective. When those who are at greatest risk are included and when their SRHR are considered, their resiliency to the climate crisis will be strengthened.



UNDERLYING NORMS MUST BE ADDRESSED

The ability of populations to respond to and cope with climate crisis depends heavily on their socio-economic status, norms, access to resources as well as gender.¹⁴ Effects are not gender neutral as gender-based differences in time use, treatment by formal institutions and limited access to policy discussions and decision making. For Q-initiative, this is especially evident as access to, for example, SRH-services and menstrual hygiene products become a major challenge during the drought season, when women and gender minorities often have to walk long distances to gather water. Their time to access SRH-services becomes limited and improved access, including to mobile clinics, become even more important. Policies and investments targeting the challenges that prolonged drought seasons pose, must also center SRHR.

MORE DATA AND RESEARCH IS URGENTLY NEEDED

Disaggregated data, including based on sex and diverse gender identities, is necessary for policy change to take SRHR challenges caused by the climate crisis into account. Research related to the interlinkages between SRHR and the climate crisis are lacking in general and the consequences are even more difficult to predict when disaggregated data is missing. Q-initiative underscores that although progress has been made as Kenya now collects data on intersex people, much more emphasis must be put on collecting data and ensuring that the gap in research can be rectified.

¹⁴ Ibid p.14 and 46.

