

WHAT DO SEXUAL RIGHTS HAVE TO DO WITH THE CLIMATE CRISIS?

No one is immune from the devastating consequences of climate change. It concerns everyone and everywhere. The vision of RFSU is a world in which everyone is free to make decisions about their own bodies and sexuality. This vision is, however, threatened by the climate crisis.

THE CLIMATE CRISIS IS UNJUST

The climate crisis is underpinned by grave injustice. Those that contributed least to the climate crisis are most severely affected by its impacts. Within countries, risks stemming from climate change are greater for people who are already discriminated against, including indigenous peoples who are often dependent on ecosystems that are particularly prone to its impacts.

CLIMATE DISASTERS: HOW ARE PEOPLE'S SRHR AFFECTED?

At a very practical level, the climate crisis can impede **access to sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services**. When clinics and roads are destroyed in extreme weather events, this can prevent people from accessing maternal health services and safe delivery and maternal morbidity and mortality will increase. Lack of access to **clean water**, such as in the aftermath of extreme weather events, hinders the provision of a range of quality SRH services, including during pregnancy.

Risks of sexual and **gender-based violence** are heightened during crises and in times of displacement, that can be expected to increase as a result of more frequent extreme weather events. Further, due to their frequent marginalization, **sexual and gender minorities** are often more severely affected by disasters associated with natural and other hazards.

“**Between 1990 to 2015, the richest 10% in the world were responsible for 52% of the cumulative carbon emissions.**”

SRHR MAKES SOCIETIES MORE RESILIENT TO CLIMATE CHANGE

Addressing gender inequality and other forms of marginalisation is crucial to reducing vulnerability to climate change. SRHR contributes to gender equality which further strengthens the capacity of women, girls, and discriminated communities to participate in the development and implementation of measures for climate change adaptation and mitigation.

CONTRACEPTION MUST NEVER BE A STRATEGY FOR CLIMATE CHANGE MITIGATION

Different stakeholders have pointed to contraception as an important intervention for climate change mitigation. The argument is that contraception will reduce fertility, which will lower population growth, resulting in decreased levels of greenhouse gas emissions. The predominant focus of such narratives – explicitly or implied – is the fertility of women and girls in lower income countries, where rates of fertility are comparatively high.

Promotion of contraception as a solution for climate change instrumentalized women's and girls' bodies. It places emphasis and responsibility for tackling the climate crisis on those least responsible for contributing to it. It is a deeply unjust and harmful distraction from countries' responsibilities to address the structural drivers of the climate crisis. Policies and practices driven by a desire to stem population growth have led to countless human rights violations. The urgency of the climate crisis must not serve as justification for harmful and coercive population control narratives, policies, and practises.



WAY FORWARD – RFSU'S POSITION

- First of all, addressing the climate crisis is about addressing the root causes of inequities; it requires fundamental shifts in distribution of resources, voice, and decision-making power among countries and across societies. There is a particular responsibility of high-emission countries to take decisive steps to lower their greenhouse gas emissions.
- Human rights and gender equality, and an intention to alleviate existing inequalities must be at the center of the efforts to address the climate crisis. SRHR should be recognized and supported as critical to climate change adaptation and resilience by governments and other stakeholders.
- Climate policy processes should be inclusive. Effective and responsive climate action requires the meaningful participation of civil society working with communities affected by the climate crisis.
- More and better evidence is needed on how the climate crisis may negatively affect the realisation of SRHR, as well as on how SRHR may positively contribute to adaptation and resilience.