

Assessing Women's and Girls' Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights through a

**Climate
Justice
Lens**

Ipas

The Impact of Climate Change on Women's and Girls' Sexual and Reproductive Health, Decision-Making, Behavior, and Outcomes in Char, Haor, and Slum Areas of Bangladesh



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Background

Climate change is intensifying global health inequities, with women's and girls' sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) among the most vulnerable yet overlooked. Climate-related hazards such as floods, river erosion, cyclones, salinity intrusion, and drought disrupt healthcare, displace communities, and limit access to contraception, antenatal care, safe delivery, postnatal care, and menstrual health services. These challenges increase unintended pregnancies, unsafe abortions, maternal complications, early marriage, and gender-based violence (GBV).

Bangladesh, the world's 7th most climate-affected country, is especially at risk due to its geography, high population density, and dependence on climate-sensitive livelihoods. Women and girls in coastal, char, haor and urban slum areas face the greatest risks, where climate impacts intersect with poverty and gender inequality to intensify SRHR challenges.

Building on Prior Research

A qualitative study conducted by Ipas Bangladesh in Khulna's coastal area during 2020-2021, revealed that climate-induced cyclone, salinity intrusion, flooding, and displacement severely disrupt SRHR services. Women and girls reported lack of contraception, unsafe abortion, unsafe childbirth conditions, and compromised menstrual health. Building on these findings and recommendations, Ipas Bangladesh in collaboration with Naripokkho conducted a subsequent study in 2024-2025 covering other climate-vulnerable areas such as chars, haors, and urban slums which confirmed that geographic, socio-economic, and gendered vulnerabilities collectively magnify SRHR risks in these settings.

Methods Overview

This study employed a phased, participatory, and qualitative research design to explore the impact of climate change on women's and girls' SRHR, including decision-making, behaviors, access to services, and overall well-being. The study examined three climate-vulnerable areas of Bangladesh- char (riverine islands), haor (wetland basins), and urban slums (informal vulnerable settlements) in Dhaka. The study involved key informant interviews with local health workers, women's rights leaders, and climate experts, alongside in-depth interviews and community dialogue meetings with women and girls of reproductive age (15-49) across the three areas. Data collection took place between November and December 2024. The study was grounded in an intersectional and gender-transformative framework to analyze the interlinkages between gender, social norms, structural inequality, and climate vulnerability. The data was coded and managed using Dedoose software. Ethical approval was provided by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the Institute of Health Economics, University of Dhaka (IHE/IRB/DU/55/2024/Final).

22 Key Informants with 10–14 years' experience.

27 in-depth interviews and 18 community dialogue meetings with a total of 206 women and girls, primarily married (96.6%), predominantly housewives (77%), with nearly 20% lacking formal education.

Key Findings

Findings show that climate change acts as a critical amplifier of risks to women's and girls' SRHR in Bangladesh. Across diverse ecological settings, climate stresses such as flooding, riverbank erosion, drought, and displacement disrupt access to contraception, antenatal care, safe delivery, postnatal care, safe abortion services, and menstrual health. These disruptions drive unintended pregnancies, unsafe abortions, miscarriages, and rising maternal morbidity. At the same time, women and girls face heightened exposure to GBV, child marriage, early pregnancy, diminished reproductive autonomy, and deep psychological distress during and after climate shocks.

“During disaster, this (family planning) just isn't possible. In such times, are you supposed to save your life or worry about this (family planning)? There's no income, how are we supposed to afford these things...” (IDI_Woman_Haor)



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Women's and Girls' Vulnerabilities at the Intersection of Norms and Climate Hazards

Women's and girls' SRHR access is constrained by male authority, mobility limits, financial dependence, poor service availability, and weak communication and transportation systems, especially during climate-related disruptions. Adolescent, unmarried, pregnant, widows/separated, person with disabilities, and migrant women and girls face added risks of exclusion, harassment, and neglect in climate responses.

Climate Shocks, Violence, and Threats to Women's and Girls' SRHR

Climate shocks heighten risks of GBV, reproductive coercion, child marriage, and unintended pregnancy. Displacement, unsafe living condition/shelters, and economic stress increase exposure to sexual assault and domestic abuse, further undermining women's and girls' safety, autonomy, and reproductive choices.

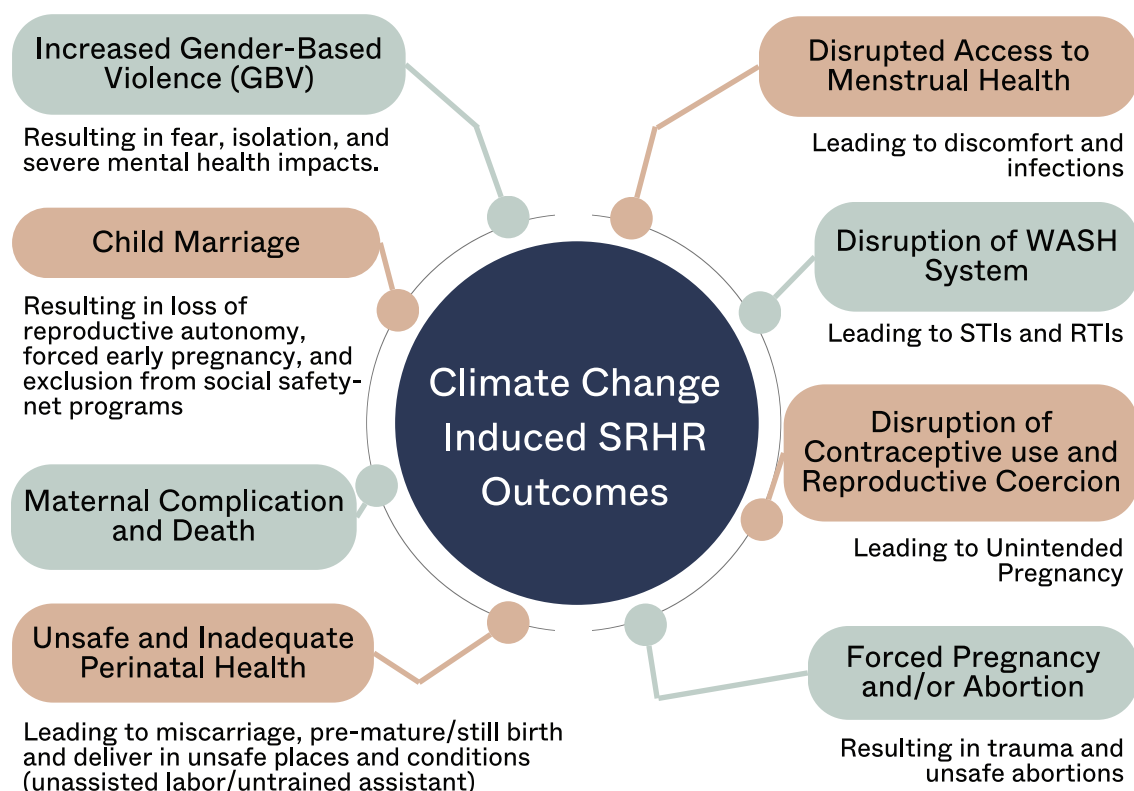
Everyday Resilience: How Women and Girls Adapt and Protect Their SRHR in Climate Crises

Women and girls cope through peer networks, health innovations, and intergenerational knowledge. Community health workers and midwives provide vital care, while women and girls reinforce shelters, plan fertility, and save secretly to navigate reproductive and financial challenges during crises.

"Women going to the hospital is not looked at favorably here. Unless absolutely necessary, no one goes. And for young or unmarried girls, there's nothing more to say. Why did she go, what happened... so many things." (KII_Char)

"There is physical abuse. Husbands do beat us. Whenever he gets angry, he hits me. If there's no work, he says things like, 'You're useless...' The beating happens... and during times of disaster, it gets worse. With no work and all the stress, things become harder, and that's when he beats me." (IDI_Woman_Char)

"What are we supposed to do with so many children, if we can't even secure their future? When we can't even build proper homes because of disasters, how are we supposed to feed all those children? That's why people choose to have fewer kids..." (IDI_Woman_Haor)





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Recommendations

Drawing on the evidence and grounded in a rights-based framework, a set of cross-cutting recommendations for advancing SRHR within the context of climate resilience and gender justice are made.

Sustain and scale community-based SRHR and climate resilience programs.

Invest in women's and girls' leadership to strengthen response and advocacy.

Design inclusive services for marginalized and vulnerable women and girls.

Promote gender norms change to transform inequalities, expand rights, and prevent GBV.

Ensure institutional accountability through coordination and feedback.

Integrate SRHR into climate policies with dedicated budgets and plans.

Develop and implement climate-resilient SRHR interventions across systems.

Conduct quantitative research to strengthen evidence-based policy and programming.

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