

COP17 Policy Statement -- Global Youth Support Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights for a Just and Sustainable World

Today, nearly half the world's population— more than 3 billion people— are under the age of 25. Collectively, we as young people have a critical role to play in adapting to climate change, helping mitigate climate change, holding our governments accountable to targets set in Durban, and shaping a just and sustainable world.

Climate change disproportionately affects women, especially young women, who are often the stewards of their area's natural resources—as they must walk farther to collect water, work harder to produce crops from dry soil, and cope with drought, flooding, and other natural disasters and disease. At the same time, empowered women can be particularly strong agents for sustainable change in their communities. An effective approach to climate change mitigation and adaptation must support young people's sexual and reproductive health and rights, as doing so is essential for adaptation while contributing to reducing the impact of future climate change.

At least 215 million women worldwide have an unmet need for family planning. In some regions, young women ages 15-19 are twice as likely to have an unmet need for family planning as women over twenty. Furthermore, unmet need for family planning services will significantly increase as the world's largest generation of young people enters into their reproductive years. Lack of access to family planning and reproductive health services can have dire consequences. For young women ages 15 to 19 in low- and middle-income countries, complications from pregnancy are the leading cause of death.

The ability to access sexual and reproductive health information and services is a human right that empowers young people to make healthy choices for themselves and their families. Women who are empowered to manage the timing of their childbearing will be able to invest more resources in their children¹.

What can we do?

Educating girls and boys, empowering women, meeting the demand for voluntary family planning, and ensuring access to comprehensive, youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health services not only play an important role in supporting human rights—but also in climate change mitigation and adaptation. Yet, there is a gap between awareness and action on the connections between sexual and reproductive health and rights and climate change. Of the 41 National Adaptation Programs of Action (NAPAs) that Least Developed Countries submitted to the UNFCCC in 2009, 37 identified population growth or high density as a factor making them more vulnerable to climate change. However, only six of them identified family planning as part of their adaptation strategy, and only one proposed an adaptation project that actually includes reproductive health and family planning.

There is growing evidence that responding to the unmet need for family planning and supporting girls education are much less costly than low-carbon energy development options, including solar, wind, and nuclear power, second-generation biofuels, and carbon capture and storage. For every \$1 spent on international family planning efforts, governments save up to \$31 in health care, water, education, housing, and other costs because women who are in good health are better able to get the education and resources they need to provide for themselves and their familiesⁱⁱ. Governments have committed to delivering these services through a number of international agreements.¹ What we need now is action.

We, young people from around the world, believe that:

- All people, including young people have the right to make informed choices about their sexual health, including the number, timing, and spacing of their children and the right to the highest attainable standard of health.
- Everyone, regardless of age or marital status, should have access to sexual and reproductive health services, which include access to safe, effective, affordable, and youth-friendly family planning services of their choice, including: contraception, pre-natal and post-natal care, obstetric care, safe and legal abortion services, and post-abortion care.
- Family planning is an already-in-demand, cost effective method of increasing communities' resilience to climate change impacts and meeting the health and development needs of people around the world, while also promoting social justice. As such, ensuring universal access to family planning services should be part of a comprehensive response to climate change.
- Gender sensitive policies (incorporating the particular needs and capacities of both women and men) are necessary to effectively mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change.
- Climate change is an intergenerational issue and therefore, young people must be meaningfully involved as leaders in all mitigation and adaptation strategies.

We, young people from around the world, urge governments, particularly UNFCCC member states, to take the following actions:

- Include and prioritize sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) programs, particularly for young people, as a strategy to address climate change adaptation in the outcome document of the COP17.
- Include and fully fund sexual and reproductive health and rights and family planning programs for women and youth in national strategies, such as the NAPAs and National Adaptation Plans (NAPs), that address short-term adaptation needs while building long-term sustainability, reducing environmental pressure, and strengthening people's resilience to climate change.
- Ensure that NAPAs, NAPs and future adaptation projects are aligned with long-term sustainable development planning principles: projects should incorporate a multisectoral approach and they should mix short-, medium-, and long-term strategies to better reflect how people live.
- Ensure that the Adaptation Fund, Green Climate Fund, Special Climate Change Fund and other funding mechanisms include and prioritize sexual and reproductive health and rights programs as a part of a comprehensive strategy to addressing climate change.
- Invest in rights and evidence-based comprehensive sexuality education and youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health services, including access to contraception, to support young people's ability to make informed, responsible decisions about their sexual and reproductive health.
- Provide universal access to voluntary family planning services and ensure meaningful community and youth participation in the planning, design and implementation of such programs and services.
- Guarantee education for women and girls as an empowerment tool, as well as a catalyst for community development and poverty alleviation that will lead to more sustainable and resilient populations.
- Integrate gender perspectives in all climate change policies, strategies and implementation activities to ensure that women and men can equally contribute to and benefit from climate solutions.
- Ensure meaningful youth participation in the planning, design, and implementation of program and policies.

¹ Including the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Program of Action, the Beijing Platform for Action, CEDAW, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, among others.

With half the world's population under the age of 25, young people's choices today will directly determine the well-being of people around

**the world for generations to come.
Young people's rights must be acknowledged to ensure a just and sustainable world.**

Sources:

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Endorsing organizations for COP17 Policy Statement – Global Youth Support Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) for a Just and Sustainable World:

