

# COP16 Policy Statement—Global Youth Support Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) 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 Cancun, 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, [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 (SRHR), as doing so is essential for adaptation while contributing to reducing the impact of future climate change.

At least 215 million women worldwide want to limit or space their births, but don't have access to modern family planning methods. UNFPA estimates that this unmet need for family planning is twice as great for young people. 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. Unmet need for family planning will significantly increase as the world's largest generation of young people enters into their reproductive years.

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, as well as helps determine whether the world will have 8 or 11 billion people in 2050. Meeting the SRHR needs of young people around the world can help stabilize population and contribute to comprehensive strategies to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emission. Ground-breaking evidence shows that by meeting the demand for voluntary family planning, global emissions will be reduced by between 8 and 15 percent.

## 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 SRHR-climate connections. Of the 41 National Adaptation Programs of Action (NAPAs) that Least Developed Countries submitted to the UNFCCC, 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 addressing SRHR solutions can increase resilience to climate change and slow population trends that exacerbate poverty and climate change impacts, empower young people to exercise their rights and contribute to achieving a more just world. Governments have committed to delivering these services through a number of international agreements.<sup>1</sup> 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:

- Fully fund NAPAs that address people's short-term adaptation needs while building long- term sustainability, reducing environmental pressure and strengthening people's resilience to climate change effects.
- Ensure that NAPAs 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. This includes prioritizing sexual and reproductive health in climate change adaptation strategies.
- 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, especially those relevant to SRHR and climate change.

**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.**

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.

# Endorsing Organizations for COP16 Policy Statement—Global Youth Support Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) for a Just and Sustainable World:



## Sources:

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