

What can research evidence tell us about:

## Enhancing youths' role in the mitigation of climate change effects on Sexual and Reproductive Health

### Key messages

- ➔ The increase in climate change-related disasters has worsened inequities in communities:
  - Girls are 14 times more likely to be hurt, and one in every five girls or women is exposed to Gender-Based Violence (GBV) during climate change disasters.
  - Poverty, low educational attainment, physical disabilities, and internal displacement increase vulnerability to climate change disasters.
- ➔ Strategies to enhance youth's role in mitigating climate change effects on Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) include.
  - Enhance youths' especially girls' education by building girls' green skills through Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) education.
  - Enhance financial empowerment for youths to reduce their vulnerability to climate change effects by strengthening technical and vocational skills for girls and women, as well as supporting projects for the rural poor and those living within areas most likely to be affected by climate change.
  - Build youth capacity in leadership, communication, and engagement to effectively participate in governance, advocacy, and decision-making processes through role modelling and mentoring in communities and schools.
- ➔ The strategies must be multi-sectoral and context-specific to reflect the priorities and situational differences of youths, especially girls, the disadvantaged, and youths living with disabilities.

## Where did this Rapid Response come from?

This document was created in response to a specific question from a policymaker in Uganda in 2023.

It was prepared by the Center for Rapid Evidence Synthesis (ACRES) at the Uganda country node of the Regional East African Community Health (REACH) Policy Initiative.

### + Included:

- **Key findings** from research
- **Considerations about the relevance** of this research for health system decisions in Uganda

### ✗ Not included:

- Recommendations
- Detailed descriptions



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## Summary

**Background:** The impacts of climate change on sexual and reproductive health include increases in GBV, strained access to SRH services resulting in unwanted pregnancies, and sexually transmitted diseases, among others. Furthermore, these are accelerated in vulnerable groups, including young people and women. Policy actions and climate change responses in most countries, including Uganda, neglect issues regarding sexual and reproductive health (SRH) and primarily address climate-sensitive diseases, hunger, and malnutrition. To further advocate for the integration of Sexual Reproductive Health in Climate Change mitigation plans in Uganda, Ngabo Youth-Friendly Services Centre requested evidence on what strategies can enhance youths' role in the mitigation of Climate change effects and Sexual Reproductive Health.

**Rapid Response Question:** *What strategies can enhance youths' role in the mitigation of climate change effects on Sexual and Reproductive Health?*

**Findings:** Generally, there are limited evaluations of strategies enhancing youth's roles in the mitigation of climate change effects on SRH. To inform this brief, we draw on information related to strategies for mitigation of climate change effects on SRH, and youth engagement in democracy, rights, and governance. Strategies that can enhance youths' role in the mitigation of Climate change effects on Sexual and Reproductive Health must be multi-sectoral and context-specific to reflect priorities and situational differences among youths, especially girls, disadvantaged youths, and youths living with disabilities, and these include.

- Enhance youths' especially girls' education by building girls' green skills, through Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) education.
- Enhance financial empowerment for youths to reduce their vulnerability to climate change effects by strengthening technical and vocational skills among girls and women and supporting projects for the rural poor and those living within areas most likely to be affected by climate change.
- Build youth capacity in leadership, communication, and engagement to effectively participate in governance, advocacy, and decision-making processes through role modelling and mentoring in leadership in communities and schools.
- Enhance youths' knowledge and skills in mitigating the effects of climate change on SRH through sensitization in workshops, youth clubs and sports and games.
- Support youths' access to Sexual Reproductive Health services to reduce their vulnerability to climate change effects.

For effective youth engagement, consider the following: engage youths in solutions and decision-making processes, give leadership roles to girls and young women, promote trust between youths and their leaders and institutions, provide incentives and subsidies to youths, involve boys and young men as agents of change, build relationships with others members of the community such as local leaders, parents, cultural and religious leaders, as well as encourage public-private partnerships for sustainable support to youths.

**Conclusion:** It is important to engage youths in strategies aimed at mitigating climate change effects on Sexual Reproductive Health; enhance education - especially for girls; enhance youths' leadership skills in governance, advocacy, and decision-making processes; empower youths to create self-employment opportunities; and also consider enhancing collaborations among youths, enhancing their knowledge and skills through workshops and increasing access to sexual and reproductive health services. However, the strategies must be multi-sectoral and context-specific to reflect priorities and situational differences among the youth, especially girls, disadvantaged youths, and youths living with disabilities.

## Background

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Climate change has been observed to cause negative impacts on sexual and reproductive health (SRH) including poor menstrual practices during floods and droughts, increases in Gender-Based Violence, and lack of access to SRH services that further increases unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases, and infections. Malnutrition among pregnant mothers due to lack of access to food and water affects fetal growth and results into low-birth weight and pre-term births [1-3]. Additionally, most young people are unaware of the negative impact of climate change on sexual and reproductive health and lack knowledge on how to respond to such situations. However, it has been realized that policy actions and climate change responses in most countries, including Uganda, neglect issues regarding SRH and only address climate-sensitive diseases, hunger, and malnutrition [4-7].

Ngabo Youth-Friendly Services Centre, and a group of Civil Society Organisations in Uganda, have been advocating for the integration of Sexual Reproductive Health in Climate Change mitigation plans since 2018. Upon this background, Ngabo Youth-Friendly Services Centre requested evidence on what strategies can enhance youths' role in the mitigation of Climate change effects and Sexual Reproductive Health. This evidence will be used for advocacy during the National Youth Festival and Global Youth Conference 2023.

**Rapid Response Question:** What strategies can enhance youths' role in the mitigation of Climate change effects on Sexual and Reproductive Health?

## Summary of findings

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Generally, there are limited evaluations of strategies enhancing youths' roles in the mitigation of climate change effects on SRH. To inform this brief, we draw on information related to strategies for mitigation of climate change effects on SRH, and youth engagement in democracy, rights, and governance.

### How climate change affects Sexual Reproductive Health

Climate change is attributed to direct or indirect human activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere over time. Drivers of Climate Change in Uganda include rapid population growth, unplanned urbanization, industrialization, and deforestation, among others. Changes in the Climate have further resulted in changing weather patterns, drops in water levels, and increased frequency of extreme weather events like floods as well as drought [8].

Climate-related disasters have negative impacts on maternal health, increase Gender-Based Violence (GBV), and strain access to SRH services, such as:

- Rising temperatures and droughts can affect access to food and water, causing undernutrition among pregnant women, further resulting in miscarriages and low-weight births.

### How this Rapid Response was prepared

After clarifying the question being asked, we searched for systematic reviews, local or national evidence from Uganda, and other relevant research. The methods used by the SURE Rapid Response Service to find, select and assess research evidence are described here:

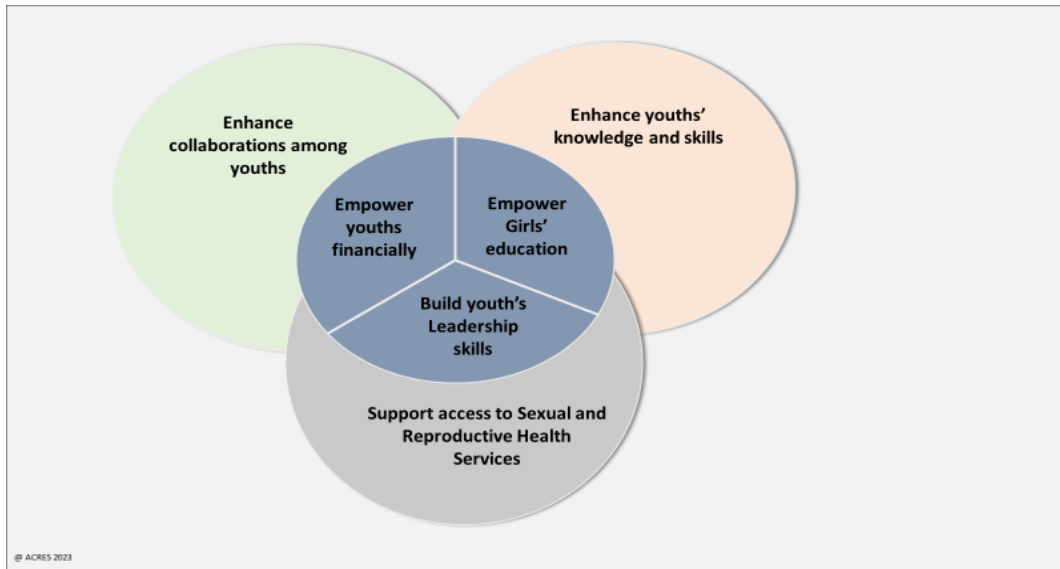
[www.evipnet.org/sure/rr/methods](http://www.evipnet.org/sure/rr/methods)

- During conditions such as droughts and floods, young girls and women walk long and unsafe distances to access clean water and food which exposes them to rape and sex trafficking. Also, related economic stress increases the vulnerability of young girls and women to GBV in their homes.
- The lack of clean water also disrupts menstrual hygiene management.
- Climate change also hinders access to SRH services resulting into unsafe abortions, teenage pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases and infections.
- Lastly, the impacts of climate change on SHR are accelerated on vulnerable groups such as young people, girls and women, poor socio-economic status, unemployment, low educational attainment and disability, among others [1-4, 9].

### **Strategies that can enhance youth's roles in the mitigation of climate change effects on Sexual and Reproductive Health .**

Youths in Uganda (18-30 years) form a large number of the population (24%)[10] and are a vulnerable group to the negative effects of climate change specifically girls, disadvantaged youths, and youths living with disabilities. It is therefore important to leverage the growing number of young people in Uganda, their energy and enthusiasm to reduce the effects of climate change [11]. Therefore, strategies must be multi-sectoral and context-specific to reflect priorities and situational differences. Figure1 below shows that empowering girls' education, empowering youths financially and building their leadership skills are the cross-cutting strategies that can enhance their role in mitigating the effects of climate change on SRH in relation to enhancing collaboration among youths, enhancing youths' knowledge and skills and supporting access to SRH services. The details are in Table 1 below: [7, 12-17]

**Figure1: Strategies that can enhance youths' role in the mitigation of Climate change effects on Sexual and Reproductive Health.**



**Table 1: Strategies that can enhance youths' role in the mitigation of Climate change effects on Sexual and Reproductive Health.**

Strategies	Contextual Considerations
<b>Create an enabling environment for youth to express their voices on the effects of Climate Change on SRH</b>	
<p>1. <i>Build youth capacity in leadership, communication and engagement to effectively participate in governance, advocacy and decision-making processes. This empowers youths within processes of recognition and representation for relevant authorities to consider youth-responsive climate change action plans that address SRH issues.</i></p> <p>a) <i>Legally protect youths, especially girls who are at higher risk of intimidation, and GBV because some societies look at women in leadership as stepping out of their traditional roles.</i></p> <p>b) <i>Encourage youths to participate in the co-production of research and policies to identify gaps that strengthen arguments for policies and plans based on evidence.</i></p> <p>c) <i>Build trust and relationships between youths, their leaders and institutions as some youths may see tribalism, intimidation, corruption, social and political exclusion as barriers to participation.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthen reporting structures in the communities (political and social structures) for potential victims of threats, discrimination or harm.</li> </ul>
<p>2. <i>Strengthen collaborations to enhance youths' voices and engagements with policymakers, for example through joint youth working groups such as Civil Society Organizations, associations, and networks. This encourages sharing of ideas and knowledge from a diverse network of youths to ensure SRH is integrated into climate adaptation measures. Also encourage youths to serve as peer educators, youth ambassadors, young researchers, counselors, and advisors.</i></p> <p>a) <i>Enhance youth volunteerism by establishing and maintaining volunteer structures.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote positive examples of youths in leadership in communities and schools to increase their interest, involvement, and participation.</li> <li>• Leverage on social connections of youths with family, friends, communities, religious institutions, and schools. Evidence suggests, young people have been found to be more likely to volunteer when their schools emphasize and promote the importance of participation.</li> <li>• Increase access to information about the available volunteering activities through platforms such as radio, television, campaigns, and social media. Young people who are directly approached or invited are four times more likely to volunteer than those who have to create and navigate their own volunteering opportunities.</li> </ul>

<i>Strategies</i>	<i>Contextual Considerations</i>
<p><i>b) Give leadership roles to youths, especially to girls and young women to motivate them and encourage participation.</i></p> <p><i>c) Promote accountability and build trust between youths and their institutions.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A multi-country study on youth perspectives on civic engagement showed that youth in Rwanda felt more motivated to participate in community activities when they have greater leadership roles.</li> <li>• Involve parents and communities to encourage youth to get involved in civic society but not ignore household work or income-generating activities.</li> <li>• Create volunteering activities after school as some youths have more free time after school.</li> <li>• Use common platforms such as social media, radio and TV to project all the positive contributions by youths</li> </ul>
<p><b><i>Enhance youths' knowledge and skills in mitigating the effects of climate change on SRH.</i></b></p>	
<p><i>1. Develop targeted programs that sensitize youths to promote a supportive environment including talks on climate change mitigation measures, positive sexual behavioural changes and improved life skills through open dialogues and workshops.</i></p>	
<p><i>a) Find youths where they are.</i></p> <p><i>b) Provide incentives to encourage participation and attendance.</i></p> <p><i>c) Provide safe spaces for youths to express themselves.</i></p> <p><i>d) Involve and empower boys and young men to be agents of change.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use already existing community events and spaces such as sports activities, youth/school clubs and social media to encourage participation and reduce community negative perceptions about locations chosen by adults.</li> <li>• Consider facilitating youths for their time spent and costs of travel</li> <li>• Consider social networks such as extracurricular activities in communities and schools where boys are alone and girls are alone, but activities are supervised by adults. This has been shown to increase confidence in civic participation and leadership, especially among girls.</li> <li>• Place boys and young men at the centre of communication in schools, conferences, campaigns, sports, debate clubs, and other communication platforms to create awareness of the damage caused by gender stereotypes,</li> </ul>

Strategies	Contextual Considerations
<p>e) <i>Train facilitators on content delivery and how to engage youths of different ages.</i></p> <p>f) <i>Build relationships with parents, local, religious, and cultural leaders is crucial in getting local community buy-in on the content and approach.</i></p> <p>g) <i>Enhance youths' education especially girls' education to enhance problem-solving skills and knowledge for better climate change coping, responsive and mitigation mechanisms.</i></p> <p>2. <i>Consider Girls' education especially secondary education to address societal inequalities, increase access to SRH services and women empowerment.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>Girls' education, particularly secondary education, has been identified as the most important socioeconomic determinant in reducing vulnerability to weather-related disasters and extreme weather.</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Direct effects of education on reducing vulnerability to climate change include enhanced problem-solving skills and knowledge with improved responses to climate-change effects, use of ICT to access information including weather forecasts, warnings and e-health care services</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Indirectly, education will enhance the development of leadership skills, empower political and civic engagement, promote social capital and reduce vulnerability to poverty with the ability to access SRH services even during climate related disasters</i></li> </ul>	<p>societal norms, and attitudes. This has been shown to improve interaction and create friendly relationships between boys and girls including reflections treating girls with more respect and supporting girls as leaders.</p> <p>• Strengthen public-private partnerships with government, schools, funders and development partners to create an enabling environment that provides technical expertise in terms of teacher training, financial resources and design of the curriculum that is tailored to the learners' needs.</p> <p>• It is expected that building girls' green skills, through Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) education will enable the transition to a green and low carbon economy [18].</p>



Strategies	Contextual Considerations
<p><b>Enhance financial empowerment for youths to reduce their vulnerability to climate change effects.</b></p>	
<p><i>Empower youths to create self-employment opportunities in business, vocational and key climate-related sectors such as agriculture. This not only results into climate resilience actions but also reduces unemployment and financially empowers youths especially young women and girls to feed their families, access menstrual products, SRH services and not be subject to domestic violence.</i></p>	
<p>a) <i>Recruit disadvantaged youths such as youths from slums, out-of-school youths and youths living with disabilities.</i></p> <p>b) <i>Support women's economic empowerment by adopting measures to protect their income-generating activities in case of disasters and to aid a quick recovery.</i></p> <p>c) <i>Encourage youths to participate in tree planting and other green agendas/programs.</i></p> <p>d) <i>Provide youth, especially those out-of-school with market-demand technical skills.</i></p>	<div style="background-color: #cccccc; height: 20px; margin-bottom: 5px;"></div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthen technical and vocational skills among girls and women.</li> <li>• Consider directing projects to the rural poor and those living within areas most likely to be affected by climate change.</li> </ul> <div style="background-color: #cccccc; height: 20px; margin-bottom: 5px;"></div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide subsidies to buy equipment, seedlings, and access to credit support services.</li> </ul> <div style="background-color: #cccccc; height: 20px; margin-bottom: 5px;"></div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider strengthening collaborations with donors, development partners and the private sector to provide funding, technical support, and design of a suitable curriculum to mentor youths.</li> <li>• Promote job placement assistance, free training, internships to encourage participation.</li> <li>• Integrate the curriculum with fun activities for the youths to encourage participation.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Support youth's access to Sexual Reproductive Health services to reduce their vulnerability to climate change effects.</b></p>	
<p><i>Increasing youth reproductive health awareness and access reduces the vulnerability of youths especially girls to teenage pregnancies, HIV, sexually transmitted diseases and poor menstrual hygiene during climate change and weather-related disasters.</i></p>	

<i>Strategies</i>	<i>Contextual Considerations</i>
a) <i>Model youths' efforts in other related disasters or epidemics like COVID-19 and Ebola.</i>	Engage youths in identifying public-private partnerships, donors, community initiatives, a supportive private sector players, and development partners to enhance the provision of SRH kits and WASH facilities even when climate disasters arise.
b) <i>Train youths especially girls about online safety and on-line SRH care seeking.</i>	
c) <i>Provide youth-friendly reproductive health services including counselling.</i>	Train and retrain health care workers to give advice and lessons on sexual health to the youth without discrimination and stigmatization including victims of climate disasters
d) <i>Reduce stigma to enhance youth's access to SRH services through outreach and media campaigns.</i>	
e) <i>Build relationships with cultural and religious leaders to for buy-in during advocacy for access to reproductive health services among youths.</i>	

## Conclusion

It is important to engage youths in strategies aimed at mitigating climate change effects on Sexual Reproductive Health. Enhance education especially for girls, enhance youths' leadership skills in governance, advocacy, and decision-making processes, empower youths to create self-employment opportunities and consider enhancing collaborations among youths, enhancing their knowledge and skills through workshops and increase access to sexual and reproductive health services. However, the strategies must be multi-sectoral and context-specific to reflect priorities and situational differences among youth especially girls, disadvantaged youths and youths living with disabilities.

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## What is a Rapid Response?

Rapid Responses address the needs of policymakers and managers for research evidence that has been appraised and contextualised in a matter of hours or days, if it is going to be of value to them. The Responses address questions about arrangements for organising, financing and governing health systems, and strategies for implementing changes.

## What is ACRES?

**ACRES** – The Center for Rapid Evidence Synthesis (ACRES) is a center of excellence at Makerere University- in delivering timely evidence, building capacity and improving the understanding the effective, efficient and sustainable use of the rapid evidence syntheses for policy making in Africa. ACRES builds on and supports the Evidence-Informed Policy Network (**EVIPNet**) in Africa and the Regional East African Community Health (**REACH**) Policy Initiative (see back page). ACRES is funded by the Hewlett and Flora foundation. <http://bit.do/eNQG6>

## ACRES' collaborators:



## Regional East African Community Health Policy Initiative



## EVIPnet

## Glossary

of terms used in this report:

[www.evipnet.org/sure/rr/glossary](http://www.evipnet.org/sure/rr/glossary)

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**Conflicts of interest**

None known.

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