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ADVANCING THE INTEGRATION OF FAMILY PLANNING AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH INTO CLIMATE CHANGE POLICIES AND PROGRAMMING IN RWANDA

Building Capacity for Integrated Family Planning/Reproductive Health (P/RH) and Population, Environment and Development (PED) Action (BUILD) Project

POLICY BRIEF

RWANDA



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Key Message

Climate change response initiatives require a comprehensive approach. Integrating gender, youth, population dynamics, family planning, and reproductive health (FP/RH) into Rwanda's climate change and development policies, strategies, and actions is a pathway to success with long-lasting impact. By acknowledging the interplay between population dynamics, FP, RH, and climate resilience, Rwanda can forge a more robust and sustainable response to the challenges posed by a changing climate.

Introduction

Rwanda, a low-income country whose Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has been growing steadily over the years and is now at \$12.33 billion, is not exempt from the ravages of climate change, which frequently manifests through droughts, floods, and landslides. The global phenomenon is projected to negatively affect Rwanda's nature-based economy in five key sectors: agriculture, human health, water resources, ecosystems, and energy. Agriculture, predominantly practiced by women (86%), is Rwanda's main economic activity and contributes to more than 30% of the country's GDP. The sector employs over 70% of the total population, most of whom practice subsistence farming, and generates approximately 50% of Rwanda's export revenue. However, due to its reliance on rain-fed agriculture and in view of forecasted climate trends, Rwanda is likely to experience food insecurity in future. The country is ranked the 18th most vulnerable to climate change, according to the Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative (ND-GAIN, 2024). ND-GAIN Index of Selected East African Countries.

With a population of about 14.4 million people and a land area of just 26,338 km², Rwanda is the second most densely populated country in Africa, with about 438 people per square kilometer. Rwanda has a total fertility rate (TFR)¹ of 3.6 and a 14% unmet need for FP² among married women aged 15-49 years. The population is growing at a rate of around 2.4% per annum. By 2050, Rwanda's population is projected to reach 25.8 million, resulting in a projected population density of about 1,000 people per square kilometer.

Over 78% of its current population is composed of youth (14-35 years). Moreover, an adolescent birth rate of 50 per 1000 aged 15-19 indicates ongoing challenges in RH education and services for youth. Maternal health remains a concern and is critical to Rwanda's healthcare agenda, as reflected in the maternal mortality ratio of 203 per 100,000 live births.

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The rising population has increased pressure on natural resources pushing farmers into marginal land, prompting deforestation and cultivation on steep slopes with minimal terracing, increasing runoff, and the possibility of landslides.

Unfortunately, the climate crisis is not “gender neutral”. Rwanda has made commendable strides in addressing gender equality, with a gender equality index of 80.5%, ranking it seventh globally. Nonetheless, Rwandan women and girls are disproportionately affected by climate change, amplifying pre-existing gender inequalities between men and women. For example, much of the smallholder farming is carried out by women in mountainous and hilly areas, putting them at greater risk of exposure to landslides.

BUILD conducted a rapid desk review of Rwanda's national climate action, youth, health, FP/RH, gender, and development plans, policies, strategies, and financing mechanisms. The purpose was to assess the integration of FP/RH, population dynamics, youth, and gender into these policies and frameworks. The resulting policy brief identifies gaps, challenges, and opportunities for integrating population dynamics, FP/RH, youth, and gender into these policies, strategies, and plans.

Key Findings

▪ **Rwanda Updated Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) (2021)**

The NDCs consider high population density as one factor that amplifies the impacts of floods, droughts, and soil erosion in prone areas. However, FP is notably absent as an intervention within the NDCs. Furthermore, the NDCs lack any reference to sexual reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and maternal newborn health (MNH), overlooking critical components integral to comprehensive healthcare. Importantly, the NDC considers gender mainstreaming as a priority at all levels of policy implementation and integral to Rwanda’s sustainable development process. However, the youth’s role in the NDC is not articulated.

▪ **National Environment and Climate Change Policy (2019)**

The policy acknowledges that population growth will increase pressure on limited environmental capital resources such as wetlands, forests, rivers, lakes, forests, and agricultural land. Notwithstanding that forecast, the policy also views population growth as an opportunity in case the country implements strategies to harness the demographic dividend. However, it does not specify any actions to improve access to FP for good SRHR and MNH outcomes. Although the policy mentions the importance of including women and youth in climate change action, it does not spell out concrete roles for these groups, particularly in relation to climate change, FP/RH, and sustainable development. Rwanda does not have a national adaptation plan; instead, climate change is mainstreamed into sectoral plans coordinated by an Inter-Ministerial Coordination Committee (IMCC) drawn from the Social Cluster Ministries (Ministry of Local Government, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources, Ministry of Education, and

Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion). Consequently, some specific climate change-related interventions are funded, including the One Health approach.

- **Rwanda Vision 2050 (2020)**

Rwanda Vision 2050, the country's long-term development plan, acknowledges the role of population dynamics in Rwanda's sustainable development. The plan projects that the share of the working population will grow from 61% in 2017 to 65.7% in 2050. Rwanda intends to harness this demographic dividend by employing an integrated approach to ensure that requisite investments in human capital development and economic reforms accompany the decline in fertility. The plan includes specific targets for population growth rate, fertility rate, and maternal mortality rate. However, there is a lack of explicit indicators for FP/RH in the report, which raises concerns about how these issues are addressed in the broader development framework. A more explicit incorporation of FP/RH indicators into this national development plan would reflect a commitment to RH and contribute to achieving broader development goals, ensuring the holistic advancement of the population's health and rights. To its credit, the policy commits to leaving no one behind on the path to sustainable development, including women and young people. However, the Vision is not clear what role women and the youth will play in the population, health, climate change, and development nexus.

- **The One Health Strategic Plan (2021)**

The One Health Strategic Plan is premised on Rwanda's high human density, the human activity in the environment, and the human and animal interface. This nexus puts Rwanda at risk of the occurrence and spread of infections, which disproportionately increase the risk to health among women and children and hinder socioeconomic growth. The One Health Strategic Plan (2021-2026) omits explicit references to youth, FP/RH, and population dynamics. Integrating specific strategies and indicators related to gender, youth, FP/RH, and population dynamics into the One Health Strategic Plan would enhance its comprehensiveness, ensuring a more holistic approach to health challenges that recognizes the intricate relationships between human health, environmental factors, and population dynamics. This inclusion would contribute to a more robust and nuanced understanding of the health landscape, fostering more effective and inclusive interventions.

- **The National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Policy (2023)**

The policy's overall goal is to ameliorate and avoid possible losses from disasters, ensure timely and suitable assistance to disaster victims, and achieve rapid and effective recovery. Despite the evidence showing that climate change has detrimental effects on maternal and child health and creates conditions that result in increased gender-based violence (GBV) and deleterious practices such as early marriages, the policy lacks explicit integration of aspects of gender, youth, FP/RH and population dynamics in response to climate change-induced disasters. Additionally, even with the policy commitment to ensure gender equality and equity across its implementation, it does not acknowledge that women and girls are disproportionately affected by climate change-induced disasters and may require interventions or actions targeting essential components of RH. Furthermore, there is a conspicuous absence of provisions addressing MNH in the policy, an

omission that is particularly significant given the vulnerability of pregnant individuals and newborns during disasters.

- **Rwanda Youth Policy (2015)**

The vision of the Rwanda Youth Policy is to achieve a healthy aptitude/attitude, patriotism, productivity, and innovation (HAPPi) generation. The policy enunciates that the main problems affecting the youth are related to SRH, which are further compounded by rapid population growth. This puts tremendous pressure on natural resources leading to environmental problems such as soil erosion and loss of soil fertility. It acknowledges the need to conserve finite natural resources and use them in a sustainable and rational manner. However, the solutions proposed, such as increasing awareness of climate change among the youth, promoting RH, creating green jobs, and implementing comprehensive sexuality education and FP, are fragmented and independent activities. The Rwanda Youth Policy misses a prime opportunity to implement an integrated approach that incorporates the role of gender, youth, FP/RH, and population dynamics while tackling climate change.

- **Revised National Gender Youth Policy (2021)**

Through this policy, Rwanda envisions achieving gender equality and equity as it strives for national and sustainable transformation. The policy identifies climate change as the main environmental problem in the country, followed by soil erosion, landslides, destructive rains, loss of soil fertility, and floods. Consequently, the Rwandan government pledges to strengthen the capacity of both men and women to adapt to climate change. It also notes that over time, there has been an improvement in Rwanda's maternal and reproductive health indicators. However, the percentage of women using modern family planning methods remains low, while 14% of currently married women have unmet needs for FP services. The policy also proposes to harness the demographic dividend by ensuring quality health for all Rwandans, improving efforts to raise awareness of FP/RH among men and women, and establishing and strengthening adolescent sexual and reproductive health (ASRH) clubs. It further pledges to institute youth-friendly SRH services in health centers. While the proposed policy actions are commendable, the policy does not expound on how it will improve the adaptive capacities of both genders and youth to climate change. It also does not acknowledge the interconnectedness of population, FP/RH, and climate change. Lastly, even though climate change can cause soil erosion, landslides, destructive rains, floods, and loss of soil fertility, it is notable that the policy identifies climate change as an independent environmental problem separate from the aforementioned.

- **Seven (7) Years Government Programme: National Strategy for Transformation (NST1) (2017)**

The Strategy sets three priorities to promote a transformation in the country, i.e., economic transformation, social transformation, and transformational governance. It is the most comprehensive Rwandan national guiding document with respect to PHED, recognizing that health, environment, population dynamics, FP/RH, and gender equity are instrumental to the socio-economic transformation of the Rwandan population. The Strategy prioritizes harnessing the demographic dividend by ensuring access to quality health care and education for the

Rwandan population. **Rwanda Ministry of Health Fourth Health Sector Strategic Plan July 2018 – June 2024**

The health sector strategic plan was developed to fulfill Rwanda's health commitments in the constitution, the national strategy for transformation, the health sector policy 2015, and is linked to the SDGs. It has detailed reproductive, maternal neonatal, child, and adolescent health (RMNCAH) baseline and projected indicators including on the unmet need for FP, maternal mortality rate, and the teenage pregnancy rate, alongside strategies to increase ASRH services by adolescents and the youth. The strategic plan also advocates for a gender sensitive approach to FP/RH and pledges to mainstream gender equity in the health sector by addressing women's fertility rate, teenage pregnancies, and GBV. In addition, it plans to mainstream environment and climate change issues in health activities.

- **Rwanda Maternal New-born and Child Health Strategic Plan (2018–2024)**

The plan provides a framework for addressing maternal, neonatal, and child health challenges to achieve national and international targets. It is very specific and inclusive on reproductive, maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health (RMNCAH) interventions such as the benefits of FP, and the role of gender mainstreaming on RMNCAH intervention outcomes. Furthermore, there is a specific emphasis on the development of youth-friendly universal access to quality MNCH services. It also advises that climate change policies should include RMNCAH.

- **National Family Planning and Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health (FP/ASRH) Strategic Plan (2018–2024)**

The plan serves as a comprehensive and evidence-based roadmap for advancing FP and enhancing the SRH of adolescents in Rwanda. Additionally, the plan outlines targeted interventions and objectives to ensure that FP services are accessible and effective and address the diverse needs of individuals and couples nationwide. Besides contraception and FP, it encompasses other components of SRH, including pre-natal care, antenatal care (ANC), safe delivery, post-natal care and treatment, gender-based violence (GBV) prevention and management, and gender mainstreaming, information and counseling on ASRH and post-abortion care. Through its link with a Demographic Dividend Study, the plan articulates priority policy and program options that should be implemented to enhance Rwanda's chances of maximizing the demographic dividend for its youthful population and achieving its medium- and long-term socio-economic development aspirations. The plan also emphasizes adolescents' unique challenges and requirements and recognizes the importance of tailored approaches to empower them with accurate information and resources for making informed decisions about their SRH.

- **Rwanda National Land Use and Development Master Plan (NLUDMP) (2020).**

The NLUDMP is a nationwide sectoral document aimed at guiding the optimal use of land. It recognizes the impact of population dynamics, climate change, and gender mainstreaming on land use and states that the projections are valid only if population growth is stabilized. However, the plan failed to specify the role of FP/SR and RMNCAH interventions in contributing to land use projections.

Integration of FP/RH into Climate Financing, Budgets, Proposals and Programs

In Rwanda, various climate funding programs, such as the landscape approach to forest restoration and conservation (LAFREC), the Green Amayaga project, the Second Rwanda urban development project, and the poverty-environment action for the SDGs, play instrumental roles in addressing environmental challenges and fostering sustainable development. However, it is notable that these projects often overlook the integration of crucial components related to FP/RH. Despite their commendable focus on environmental concerns, the absence of FP/RH issues in these initiatives underscores a missed opportunity to address the comprehensive needs of the population.

Implications

- The lack of FP/RH and youth integration in the NDCs represents a missed opportunity to address aspects of RH in the climate change Framework. Equally significant is the omission of MNH, which is indicative of a missed opportunity to integrate essential health considerations, particularly for vulnerable populations, within the broader context of climate change strategies, including women and youth.
- The absence of explicit FP/RH indicators in the indicators matrix of the Rwanda Vision 2050 raises concerns about potential oversight in addressing the comprehensive health needs of the population. It also raises alarm regarding the explicit inclusion of RH considerations in the broader development framework. FP/RH is an integral component of sustainable development, contributing to healthier societies, gender equity, and improved overall well-being.
- The current fragmented implementation issues related to population dynamics, FP/RH, gender, youth, and climate change hinder the country's ability to holistically and comprehensively address the interconnected challenges. Moreover, inadequate mechanisms for integration and coordination between climate change and FP/RH stakeholders will result in overlaps and inefficiencies in implementing programs and projects.

Recommendations

1. Integrate FP/RH into climate change action plans

It's crucial to take advantage of any opportunities in Rwanda that aim to integrate population dynamics, FP/RH, gender, and youth considerations into climate change action plans, strategies, and development policies. This integration should cover planning, budgeting, implementation, and monitoring processes. This approach is essential for accelerating progress towards the demographic dividend. It may involve setting specific objectives, targets, and metrics related to these areas within the framework of climate change policies, plans, and strategies.

2. Advocate for cross-sectional collaboration

There is a need for a more inclusive approach, recognizing the interconnectedness of FP/RH, gender equity, and climate resilience for a more holistic and effective sustainable development outcome in Rwanda. Advocacy efforts should focus on facilitating dialogue between the health, reproductive rights, and climate change sectors. Coordination platforms that facilitate joint discussions and collaborative planning have the potential to dismantle organizational barriers and improve coordination among these pivotal domains. Significantly, Rwanda's policies and institutional structure give room for more collaboration. FP/RH inclusion can be mainstreamed into sectoral plans coordinated by an IMCC that meets quarterly to review progress. Climate change actions can serve as a platform for mobilization and sensitization of both men and women on the linkages between population growth and natural disasters for their buy-in to FP/RH as part of Climate Change impact mitigation and adaptation

3. Leverage climate financing for health initiatives

Given the limited financing initiatives tailored to health, FP/RH within Rwanda's climate change frameworks, there is an opportunity to advocate for the earmarking of funds for projects that explicitly address these intersections. This could involve engaging with climate finance institutions to emphasize the co-benefits of investments that address both climate change and health-related challenges. For the available resources, deliberate attempts should be made to make the funding more flexible and accessible to vulnerable groups, including women, youth, and persons with disabilities, to build their resilience.

4. Build capacity and transfer knowledge

Efforts directed at improving the competencies of policymakers, program managers, and practitioners in health and climate change can contribute to a more comprehensive comprehension of the intricate connections between climate change, population dynamics, and health indicators. Through the utilization of workshops, training programs, and knowledge-sharing platforms, stakeholders can be empowered to integrate these factors into their specific policies and programs.

5. Expand public awareness and engage stakeholders

There is a need to create awareness among the public and engage various stakeholders, including civil society organizations, women and youth organizations, and advocacy groups. This can generate support for integrating population dynamics, FP/RH, gender, and youth into climate change initiatives and ensure appropriate accountability mechanisms are instituted. Public pressure and advocacy can also influence policymakers to prioritize and implement changes in regional strategies.

6. Generate multidimensional evidence and research

There is a need for further research and data collection on the specific impacts of climate change on population dynamics, FP/RH, gender, and youth to strengthen the evidence base. Robust data

can be a powerful tool for advocating policy changes and garnering support for integrated approaches.

7. Strengthening an enabling environment

The Rwanda Climate Change Policy frameworks provide long-term and medium-term vision for climate change mitigation and adaptation and guide the country and stakeholders on preparing and implementing collective measures to address climate change while ensuring sustainable social and economic development. A review of the policies, plans, and frameworks demonstrated the urgent need to strengthen an enabling environment to address threats and impacts of climate change and improve the resilience of vulnerable communities in Rwanda aligned to global frameworks under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and continental frameworks.

8. Strengthen South-South and Triangle cooperation

Recognizing the interconnected nature of global challenges, a collaborative effort will facilitate the exchange of knowledge and ideas while exploring joint funding opportunities for FP/RH integration into climate change agendas. International collaboration also allows Rwanda to tap into diverse perspectives, resources, and expertise, contributing to a more robust and globally informed approach.

Implementing these recommendations will require a concerted effort from government agencies, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders to ensure the comprehensive integration of population dynamics, FP/RH, youth, and gender into climate change policies. Plans and actions.

Annexes

A) Policies, Strategies, and Plans Reviewed

Policy	Implementation period
Rwanda Updated NDC 2021	2021-2030
National Environment and Climate Change Policy 2019	2019-date
Seven (7) Years Government Programme: National Strategy for Transformation (NST1) 2017	2017-2024
Rwanda Ministry of Health Fourth Health Sector Strategic Plan 2018	2018-2024
Maternal New-born and Child Health Strategic Plan 2018	2018-2024
One Health Strategic Plan 2021	2021-2026
Rwanda Vision 2050, Abridged Version 2020	2020-2050
National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Policy 2023	2023-date
Rwanda National Land Use and Development Master Plan (NLUDMP) 2020	2020-2050
National Youth Policy 2015	2015-date
Revised National Gender Youth Policy 2021	2021-date
National Family Planning and Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health (FP/ASRH) Strategic Plan 2018	2018-2024

B) Abbreviations

ASRH	Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health
BUILD	Building Capacity for Integrated Family Planning, Reproductive Health and Population, Environment, and Development (PED) Action Project
CCGAP	Climate Change Gender Action Plan
FP	Family Planning
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
iHAPPI	Health, Aptitude/Attitude, Patriotism, Productivity, and innovation
IMCC	Interministerial Coordination Committee
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
LAFREC	Landscape Approach to Forest Restoration and Conservation
MNCAH	Maternal Newborn Child and Adolescent Health
MNH	Maternal Newborn Health
NDCs	Nationally Determined Contributions
ND-GAIN	Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative
NLUDMP	National Land Use and Development Master Plan
NST	National Strategy for Transformation
PED	Population-Environment and Development
RH	Reproductive Health
RMNCAH	Reproductive Maternal Newborn Child and Adolescent Health
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SRH	Sexual and Reproductive Health
SRHR	Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights
STI	Sexually Transmitted Infection
TFR	Total Fertility Rate
UN	United Nations
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

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