**Submission on Questionnaire in relation to Human Rights Council Resolution A/HRC/RES/38/4 on Human Rights and Climate Change**

**by the Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women (ARROW)**

**Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia**

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ARROW is a regional non-profit women’s NGO based in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Since it was established in 1993, it has been working to advance women’s health, affirmative sexuality and rights, and to empower women through information and knowledge, engagement, advocacy, and mobilisation. ARROW envisions an equal, just and equitable world where every woman enjoys her full sexual and reproductive rights. ARROW promotes and defends women’s rights and needs, particularly in the areas of health and sexuality, and to reaffirm their agency to claim these rights.

ARROW has recognised that as the world continues to experience increasing and more intense extreme weather events resulting from climate change, the interlinkages with sexual and reproductive health and rights is an issue that needs to be addressed in the context of sustainable development. With good health--including sexual and reproductive health which is part of Sustainable Development Goal 3—as well as their resourcefulness, women and girls will then be able to participate actively to address climate change challenges to build resilient communities.

ARROW’s partners from eight countries in Asia (Bangladesh, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and the Philippines) were involved in a 3-year project to generate evidence for interlinkages in climate change and sexual and reproductive health and rights issues/solutions in the Asian region beyond the discourse of population dynamics and to identify areas of policy and programme interventions in climate change adaptation and advocacy work specifically related to improving women’s sexual and reproductive health and rights. Based on the findings generated from the above project on the interlinkages of sexual and reproductive health and rights, ARROW will hereby submit our evidence in accordance to the questions below to the Human Rights Council for consideration.

1. Please describe the impacts of the adverse effects of climate change on the full and effective enjoyment of the human rights of women and girls. Where possible, please share specific example and stories.

In Asia, climate change exacerbates the existing gender inequalities, poverty, and vulnerabilities faced by women and girls. Due to their gender prescribed roles, women and girls face additional burden and responsibilities in managing their household and taking care of family members to the extent that they often neglect or are forced to disregard their health, particularly their sexual and reproductive health. The examples and stories of how the right to health of women and girls, particularly their sexual and reproductive health and rights, are adversely affected by climate change are highlighted below:

1. ***Case studies on waterborne diseases and health problem due to water scarcity***

**Bangladesh -** Almost all the rural women surveyed in selected communities by Khan Foundation highlighted problems of water and food security in relation to climate change and sexual and reproductive health. These communities and households are negatively impacted by climate change related events. Flooding and cyclones have not only become more frequent but have also increased in their intensity levels. As a result of flooding, there is a shortage of safe and clean water both for consumption and usage. Women and girls are more susceptible to illnesses and diseases that might arise from the consumption and use of polluted water. For women and girls of reproductive age, especially those who are pregnant, the exposure to polluted water and high salinity water negatively affects their health and pregnancy.

*Source: Excerpt from: Khan Foundation. Bangladesh Scoping Study*—*Building New Constituencies for Women’s SRHR: Climate Change and SRHR. Women’s SRHR and Climate Change: What is the Connection? 2015.* <http://arrow.org.my/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Climate-Change-and-SRHR-Scoping-Study_Bangladesh.pdf>

**Lao PDR** – Chanpin, a 38-year old mother of eight from the Ahan community of Thateng, lost her ninth child from the prolonged stress of walking long distances to collect water for her family during prolonged drought seasons resulting from climate change. Women like Chanpin do not have access to sexual and reproductive health services and having to bear the brunt of the added hardships that climate change bring due to their ascribed gender roles.

Source: *Excerpt from postcard produced by ARROW and University of Health Sciences (UHS) as part of a regional partnership working together on building the interlinkages of climate change and SRHR*.

**Maldives** - Maldives is experiencing increased precipitation, flooding and sea level rise due to climate change which has brought a multitude of difficulties, especially around issues of water contamination for the local population. Outlying islands do not have access to adequate health facilities. During climate change, vulnerable groups such as women and children face added health risk, especially when compounded with unsafe drinking water which can cause miscarriage, disabilities, and severe undernutrition. Forty-year old Faiza Murushid who lives on a small outlying island, has witnessed how the lack of health services in particular has put the lives of women and children at risk as there is no specialist care to treat increasing waterborne diseases in these small outlying islands. Travelling to another island to access health care services during rough weather at sea will put the lives of women and children at risk.

*Source: Excerpt from postcard produced by ARROW and Huvadhoo Aid as part of a regional partnership working together on building the interlinkages of climate change and SRHR.*

1. ***Case study on menstrual hygiene practices***

**Nepal** – ARROW’s partner in Nepal, Women’s Rehabilitation Centre (WOREC), documented that during weather extreme events the burden of work on women and girls generally increases due to their gender ascribed roles, thus affecting their health and well-being, including their menstrual hygiene. For example, during climate change disasters and environmental stress, women and girls have added burden since they have to take care of the young and old, and sick members of their family as well as walk far distance to fetch water and look for food or firewood. The increase in workload encroaches upon their time to pay attention to their sanitation which consequently affected their health. Also, when clean water supply is scarce women and girls are inclined to save water for household needs rather than use it for their own personal needs, including menstrual hygiene practices.

*Source: Lim, Hwei Mian. Women’s Health and Climate Change. Kuala Lumpur: ARROW, 2017,* [*https://arrow.org.my/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/1RB-WHCC-WEB.pdf.pdf*](https://arrow.org.my/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/1RB-WHCC-WEB.pdf.pdf)

1. ***Case studies on undernutrition that affects women’s health***

**Lao PDR** – Climate change might have some impact on the sexual and reproductive health and rights of women during pregnancy. For example, newborns to mothers affected by climate change disasters might register low birth weight and slow growth development. In addition, the mothers’ inability to eat and sleep has an impact on their pregnancy such as premature delivery before 36 weeks.

*Interview with female staff from the provincial department of maternal and child health, 57 years old.*

*Excerpt from: University of Health Sciences. Lao PDR Scoping Study*—*Building New Constituencies for Women’s SRHR: Climate Change and SRHR. Linking Climate Change and SRHR for Public Health Policy Approach in Lao PDR. 2015.* <http://arrow.org.my/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Climate-Change-and-SRHR-Scoping-Study_Lao-PDR-1.pdf>

**Nepal** - ARROW’s partner in Nepal, Women’s Rehabilitation Centre (WOREC), found that household food hierarchies is a common practice in the community. Women and girls suffer from hunger and undernutrition because of this practice where women and girls are expected to feed all male family members and eat only the leftovers. Their food insecurity and undernutrition will be exacerbated during climate extreme events when food is scarce.

*Source: Lim, Hwei Mian. Women’s Health and Climate Change. Kuala Lumpur: ARROW, 2017,* [*https://arrow.org.my/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/1RB-WHCC-WEB.pdf.pdf*](https://arrow.org.my/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/1RB-WHCC-WEB.pdf.pdf)

**Pakistan** – ARROW’s partner in Pakistan, Sindh Community Foundation, found that the Sindh province had the highest level of undernutrition even before the floods. Due to floods, women who were involved in agriculture lost their livelihoods because the water took a long time to recede. This resulted in a poor crop yield the next year. Flood affected districts having poor food crop yield will experience hike in food prices, which will impact on the food insecurity of poor households. This will exacerbate women’s and girls’ food insecurity which then affects their nutritional and health status.

*Source: Excerpt from: Sindh Foundation. Pakistan Scoping Study*—*Building New Constituencies for Women’s SRHR: Climate Change and SRHR. Understanding Climate Change Impact on Women’s Reproductive Health: Post-Disaster Interventions in Sindh Province, Pakistan. 2015.* http://arrow.org.my/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Climate-Change-and-SRHR-Scoping-Study\_Pakistan.pdf

1. ***Case studies on early/child marriage***

**Bangladesh** – Twenty-one year old Sumitra from Satkhira, Bangladesh was encouraged by her parents to enter into an early marriage during a post-flood devastation period in the hope that it would safeguard her future. She got pregnant soon after her marriage but had a miscarriage because she was unable to access proper food and adequate medical care. Abject poverty seen in Bangladesh is currently being exacerbated to an overwhelming degree by climate change related devastation, such as flooding, which has created serious concerns around food security in poor households. Climate change related disasters are forcing poor families to find quick solutions to their poverty struggle, and one common solution is the practice of early/child marriage amongst their daughters. This shows that climate change can exacerbate the phenomenon of early/child marriage for girls.

Early marriage can reduce the economic burden on a family but it is often never favourable to the women or girls involved. Sumitra’s story speaks of the need to increase awareness around this harmful practice that limit sexual and reproductive health rights of women and girls.

*Source: Excerpt from postcard produced by ARROW and Khan Foundation as part of a regional partnership working together on building the interlinkages of climate change and SRHR.*

**Nepal** – Kali, a 72-year old woman from Dang, a district prone to drought, was forced into marriage at the age of 14 by her parents. Her experience with early marriage had brought more harm to her health and well-being. Kali recalls how stress, in addition to poor nutrition, affected her reproductive health causing abdominal pain and irregular menstruation. In recent years, Kali observed young girls going through similar harmful traditional practices.

She emphasises that early marriages cannot be the solution for people to escape the increasing poverty that climate change brings. Climate change related disasters in Nepal—such as frequent crop failures, untimely droughts, frequent heavy rainfall and flooding—are increasing the occurrences of harmful traditional practices, such as early and forced marriage. This is driven by the hope of families to attain economic stability during these unpredictable times.

*Source: Excerpt* *from postcard produced by ARROW and Women’s Rehabilitation Centre as part of a regional partnership working together on building the interlinkages of climate change and SRHR.*

1. ***Case studies on gender-based violence***

**Bangladesh** – ARROW’s partner in Bangladesh, Khan Foundation, found that salinity intrusion and drought prone areas where freshwater is in short supply puts additional stress on women who bear the responsibility to supply water to their families. Majority of the women respondents had to collect water from far distances and more than two-thirds of the respondents had to collect water even when they were pregnant. It means that the entire burden of ensuring water supply to the household falls on the women. This puts them at risk of gender-based violence as well as impairing their health.

*Source: Excerpt from: Khan Foundation. Bangladesh Scoping Study. Building New Constituencies for Women’s SRHR: Climate Change and SRHR. Women’s SRHR and Climate Change: What is the Connection?* 2015*.* <http://arrow.org.my/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Climate-Change-and-SRHR-Scoping-Study_Bangladesh.pdf>

**Indonesia** – ARROW’s partner in Indonesia, Yayasan Jurnal Perempuan, found that farmers were lamenting that since 2000 there has been climate chaos that made them unable to predict the time to sow. When monsoon arrives almost three months late, it influences drought and floods, making women’s access to water more difficult. Women bear the brunt of climate change as they need to travel further distances to collect water, which increases the risks of sexual violence. Apart from that, climate change has altered the economic productivity of the farming sector and other sectors that depend on natural resources and abundant water. As such women are migrating more to the urban areas to work as maids or migrant workers abroad. In worse cases, they are being trafficked, sometimes as sex workers, which puts these women at greater risks of sexual violence.

*Source: Excerpt from:* Yayasan Jurnal Perempuan*. Indonesia Scoping Study. Building New Constituencies for Women’s SRHR: Climate Change and SRHR. Interlinkages between Women’s SRHR and Climate Change: Mainstreaming Policy in Central Java, Indonesia.* 2015. <http://arrow.org.my/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Climate-Change-and-SRHR-Scoping-Study_Indonesia.pdf>.

**Nepal** – ARROW’s partner in Nepal, Women’s Rehabilitation Centre (WOREC), found that women suffered physical and psychological violence from the community as well as from their families and relatives when their husbands were away working in another town or country. Their study underscored that to escape food insecurity due to climate change about 80% of the male members from the sampled households went to India as seasonal migrant workers and the remaining 20% went to the Gulf countries to work. Seventy percent of the women reported that they were tortured by the community and family members, in particular by other male members of the community or relatives. In addition, the wives of these migrant men also experienced domestic violence from their husbands when they returned to the village. For example, when they could not make enough money through seasonal migration work these men would vent out their anger and frustration by abusing their wives. This is an example of a complex interplay between migration and the patriarchal system, and now compounded by climate change.

*Source: Excerpt from:* Women’s Rehabilitation Center (WOREC)*.* *Nepal Scoping Study.* *Building New Constituencies for Women’s SRHR: Climate Change and SRHR. Research Report on Inter-relationship between Climate Change, Agriculture, Food Security and SRH.* 2015. <https://arrow.org.my/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Climate-Change-and-SRHR-Scoping-Study_Nepal.pdf>.

1. Please describe any relevant commitments, legislation and other measures that you have taken to promote a gender-responsive approach to climate change mitigation and adaptation at the local, national, regional and international levels and to ensure the full and effective enjoyment of the human rights of women and girls impacted by the adverse effects of climate change. Please include relevant mechanisms used to promote accountability and/or implementation.

**Lao PDR** – ARROW’s partner in Lao, the University Health Sciences, Lao PDR, consistently held consultation/advocacy meetings with the Ministry of Health Lao PDR for about one year to advocate for the inclusion of women’s sexual and reproductive health (SRH) into the new **National Climate Change Health Adaptation Strategy (CCHAS)**. In late 2017, they were invited by the Ministry of Health to incorporate SRHR into the final draft of the National Climate Change Health Adaptation Strategy. The Ministry of Health is supportive of this inclusion as it would help to reduce maternal and child mortality and morbidity, which will contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goal 3 (health and well-being). The strategy was approved by the government in early 2018.

Evidence from the scoping study conducted by the University Health Sciences amongst women at the grassroots were incorporated into the drafting of the SRH component in the new national strategy. The key themes incorporated were: (1) provide primary and emergency health care services particularly on SRH to women and young girls of reproductive age during and after post-climate change-related disaster; (2) develop awareness and education on the impact of climate change on health, particularly SRH of women and girls who are vulnerable and at high risk to extreme weather events via mass media in different local languages; (3) improve women’s health services particularly SRH and its accessibility during and after disaster; (4) increase awareness campaign on the risk and impact of climate change on women’s SRH; and (5) increase collaboration and coordination with others government agencies, INGOs, bilateral and local organisations for providing and supporting services outside the disaster areas during extreme weather events.

1. Please share a summary of any relevant data that captures how the adverse effects of climate change have affected women and girls, taking into account multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination.

There is a huge data and knowledge gap on how climate change affects the health of women and girls, particularly their sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). Therefore, it is urgent that funding to support research on the interlinkages of climate change and women’s health/right to health, including SRHR, especially among marginalised and vulnerable women populations, in developing countries and least developed countries vulnerable to climate change. This should be in line with the Sustainable Development Goals related to SRHR and gender, namely Goals 3 (health and well-being) and 5 (gender equality).

There is also a need to conduct comprehensive studies on gender-differentiated impacts of climate change with particular focus on gender differences in capabilities to cope with climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies, and to provide evidence on the nuances between climate change and women’s health/right to health to convince policy-makers to incorporate this aspect into national policy on climate change or National Adaptation Plan (NAP)/National Adaptation Programmes of Action (NAPA).