

BLOG POST

WHEN CLIMATE PLANS MEET REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH: LESSONS FROM KASESE DISTRICT, UGANDA

Climate change is often discussed in terms of rising temperatures, unpredictable rainfall, damaged crops and communities struggling to recover from extreme weather. But behind these visible disruptions are other health needs that can easily be overlooked, including sexual and reproductive health and the inequalities that shape people's ability to cope with climate risks. In Kasese District, western Uganda, an initiative led by Reproductive Health Uganda (RHU) is helping bring these concerns into local climate planning.

For communities here, climate change is not a distant forecast; it is a recurring disruption to livelihoods and access to basic services. Yet climate adaptation planning has often focused on infrastructure such as embankments, drainage, and roads, while overlooking what happens to people, particularly women and girls, when disasters strike. Displacement and economic hardship can interrupt family planning and maternal health services, raise the risk of gender-based violence, and widen existing inequalities.

Under the Programme to Improve Sexual and Reproductive Health and Services Environment (PROMISE) Phase II implemented by Reproductive Health Uganda (RHU), set out to change that in Kasese by making sure sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and gender equality (GE) were integrated into the district's climate action plan and budget from the start.

The Gap

Uganda's Climate Change Act, 2021 under section 8(1), provides a national framework for climate action, including the development of district-level plans that identify local adaptation needs and priorities. But national commitments do not automatically translate into action on the ground. District governments must determine which risks require attention, which interventions deserve priority, how different sectors can work together, and what resources will be needed to deliver their plans.

For Kasese, one of the country's most climate-exposed districts, developing a District Climate Action Plan (DCAP) was a matter of urgency. The challenge was not simply to produce another policy document. It was to develop a plan that reflected local needs, strengthened coordination, and connected adaptation priorities to budgeting decisions. RHU and its district partners approached this challenge by supporting the development of a costed DCAP, incorporating SRHR and gender equality into the planning process. This was significant because climate adaptation and reproductive health can be addressed through separate institutional structures, even though people's health needs do not fall neatly into sectoral categories. Bringing them into the same planning conversation created an opportunity to make local climate action more responsive to health and gender priorities.

Bringing every sector to the table

The DCAP was developed through a multisectoral process that brought together departments responsible for health, environment, planning, gender and community development. This ensured that climate risks were viewed through several lenses at once, and that SRHR and gender equality were discussed as shared responsibilities rather than as the concern of the health department alone.

Rather than drafting the plan externally, RHU and its partners supported district technical teams to lead the process themselves. This allowed local adaptation priorities, grounded in the district's own experience of floods and other climate shocks, to shape the content of the plan, and it built ownership among those responsible for implementing it.

Crucially, the plan was costed with an estimated budget of USD14.75 million, of which approximately 90% is allocated towards climate adaptation interventions. Attaching budgets to proposed interventions turned commitments into items that could be considered during the district's budgeting cycle. The district council approved the completed DCAP and it was formally launched in September 2024, giving it official standing as a guide for local climate action.



Key stakeholders at the launch of the Kasese DCAP, including the Director of Programs at RHU, Prime Minister of Obusinga Bwa (Kingdom of) Rwenzururu, Kasese District Chairperson, Deputy Speaker of the District Council, and Deputy Danish Ambassador to Uganda.

What Changed

According to the initiative's reported results, integrating SRHR and gender equality into Kasese's DCAP improved the coherence of district planning, sharpened budget prioritisation, and strengthened coordination across sectors for locally led adaptation. The clearest sign of impact is financial: the district has increased its budget allocations for SRHR and gender-related interventions. This shows genuine policy uptake, with national frameworks translated into district-level decisions about where public money goes. It also demonstrates that the localisation of national climate policy is achievable when districts are supported with the right process.

Roadblocks Along the Way

The process was not without obstacles. Limited funding within local government slowed the development of the plan, as districts had few resources to convene stakeholders, gather data, and complete the costing work. This reflects a wider reality across Uganda, where the National Climate Change Act, 2021 places new planning obligations on districts, but the resources to meet them do not always follow. Sustaining implementation of the plan will depend on continued budget commitments and on the ability to attract additional climate finance.

Lessons for Government and Policymakers

1. Climate risks and health needs are interconnected, but government planning can be fragmented. Bringing relevant sectors together during plan development can help identify shared priorities, reduce the risk of disconnected interventions, and strengthen coordination around local adaptation needs.
2. Localise, don't just legislate. National climate laws only change lives when they are translated into district plans with clear priorities and responsibilities.
3. Costing proposed interventions can help policymakers assess resource requirements and make more informed budget decisions. However, costing must be accompanied by realistic financing strategies and follow-through to support implementation.

A model Worth Replicating

Kasese's experience offers a practical template for other Ugandan districts working to meet the requirements of the climate change Act. It shows that inclusive, locally led and costed climate planning is possible even under tight budgets, and that when women's health and gender equality are built into adaptation from the start, communities are better placed to withstand the climate shocks ahead.

Case Study: When Climate Plans Meet Reproductive Health: Lessons from Kasese, Uganda. Shared as part of the CAPCHA case study collection by Muhereza Dancan a Project Officer-Climate Change, Under the PROMISE II programme, Reproductive Health Uganda.

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