Photo: Gaia Squarci/WeWorld

On Our Lands, On Our Bodies.

Climate Change, Gender, and Sexual and Reproductive Health in Rural and Indigenous Communities in Brazil, Kenya, and Tanzania

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Launched during COP30 in November 2025, this report highlights the **crucial links between climate change and sexual and reproductive health and justice (SRHJ), with a particular focus on Indigenous and rural communities.** Hosted in Belém — at the heart of the Amazon — COP30 provides a powerful backdrop to emphasise that **climate justice must also entail gender justice**, and to centre those who have long safeguarded vital ecosystems and are now among the most affected by the climate crisis. Far from being solely an environmental concern, **climate change has emerged as a multi-dimensional public health crisis**, with its most severe impacts disproportionately affecting women and girls in low- and middle-income countries.

The study examines these dynamics across three regions: **Ceará state in Brazil, the counties of Isiolo, Kwale, and Narok in Kenya, and the island of Pemba in Tanzania**. Despite differences in geography and culture, these areas face comparable challenges—such as drought, erratic rainfall, land degradation, and rising sea levels—which exacerbate pre-existing inequalities in access to healthcare, food security, economic opportunity, and bodily autonomy. The research was carried out by a joint team from **WeWorld and ARCO**, working closely with WeWorld's **local teams in Brazil, Kenya, and Tanzania.**[1]

These local teams were instrumental throughout the project, from shaping research questions and collecting data to developing policy recommendations. Their deep community knowledge and long-standing relationships ensured that **the research remained relevant and responsive to local priorities.**

Adopting a feminist, decolonial, and intersectional approach, and grounded in participatory research methodologies, **this report provides robust evidence to support integrated, community-led responses**. It calls for SRHJ to be recognised as a key and cross-cutting pillar of just and sustainable climate action. The study presents valuable evidence, testimonies, and potential pathways for action in dedicated sections for each country, while also offering overarching recommendations to promote integrated and inclusive responses to the complex challenges identified. The research process has also significantly strengthened the skills and capacities of the local teams involved.

Building on this solid foundation, WeWorld intends to use the study's insights to strategically inform and shape future programmes, ensuring that interventions are responsive to community needs, culturally relevant, and effective in advancing both climate resilience and sexual and reproductive health and justice.

Photo: WeWorld

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1 In Brazil, the research was conducted with the support of Avuar Social

BRAZIL: How Environmental Stress Affects Intra-Household Power Dynamics and Gender Relations Among Indigenous Communities in Ceará

In Brazil, the study was conducted in collaboration with Indigenous communities in the state of Ceará. The study focuses on **how the effects of climate change are reshaping intra-household power dynamics, particularly in relation to sexual negotiation, family planning, early marriage, gender-based violence, and access to care and information**. Given the complexity and sensitivity of these issues, the study deliberately prioritises qualitative insights over quantitative data, placing greater value on the detailed narratives and lived experiences of community members; this approach allows for a deeper understanding of the social realities and nuances that numbers alone cannot capture. Indeed, three main qualitative tools have been integrated: 24 biographical interviews to women aged 18 and above, 6 focus group discussions in six Indigenous villages, involving a total of 59 women, and 11 key informant interviews.

Key Findings

- Climate change is destabilising family farming and severing historical ties to the land, knowledge, and seasonal cycles, while land insecurity and extractive activities threaten ecosystems, Indigenous sovereignty, and community stability.
- Environmental degradation, including poor water quality and food insecurity, is having a severe impact on Indigenous health—particularly for women and children—leading to higher rates of respiratory, gastrointestinal, and chronic illnesses.
- Extreme weather events and damaged infrastructure are restricting access to healthcare services, including prenatal and specialist care, especially during the rainy season.
- Indigenous women are increasingly taking on leadership roles in family and community decision-making, yet male dominance in areas such as reproductive health and contraception often persists.
- Early cohabitation and pregnancies are widespread, driven by poverty, cultural expectations, and gendered domestic responsibilities, despite rising awareness and access to contraception among younger generations.
- Gender-based violence—rooted in patriarchal norms and exacerbated by climate stress, male migration, and economic pressures—is present and sometimes hidden, while informal women's support networks, though emerging, remain fragile, especially in more conservative communities.

KENYA: Climate Challenges on Sexual and Reproductive Health: Insights from Isiolo, Kwale and Narok Counties

In Kenya, the study focused on **how climate change-related factors affect reproductive and maternal health, particularly through the interconnected pathways of poverty and infrastructural disruption.** It was conducted across three counties—Narok, Isiolo, and Kwale—using a mixed-methods design. This included two focus group discussions per county (one with women under 25 and one with women over 25), each involving 6 to 10 participants; six key informant interviews; and a structured quantitative questionnaire administered to 50 women aged 18 and above in each county.

Key Findings

- Climate-related hazards such as drought, flooding, and extreme heat are widely felt across Narok, Isiolo, and Kwale, with 85% of women reporting significant changes in climate conditions, impacting water access, crop yields, and livestock health.
- Climate change is severely disrupting food systems and increasing the burden of unpaid labour for women, as 64% report difficulty accessing nutritious food due to declining agricultural productivity, rising prices, and income loss.
- Water scarcity is a critical issue, affecting not only food and income security but also women's health, hygiene, and safety—particularly in relation to menstrual and reproductive health.
- Women face compounded vulnerabilities, with 91% reporting reduced access to health services, 89% experiencing negative impacts on pregnancy, and 83% facing worsened menstrual health management under climate stress.
- Structural and environmental barriers—such as damaged infrastructure, lack of transport, and long distances—are severely limiting access to maternal healthcare, contributing to widespread pregnancy-related complications.
- More than half of respondents (52%) still exercise reproductive autonomy, primarily through long-acting contraceptives—although male permission, economic hardship, and limited information continue to restrict access to family planning.

TANZANIA: Exploring the Relationship Between Climate Change and Maternal Health on Pemba Island

In Tanzania, the study was conducted on the island of Pemba, specifically in the areas of Konde, Micheweni, and Majenzi, to examine **how climate change influences maternal health—particularly through its impact on socioeconomic conditions**. A mixed-methods approach was adopted to gain a comprehensive understanding of these complex dynamics; this included interviews with 10 key informants, 5 biographical interviews, and a structured quantitative questionnaire administered to 100 women aged 18 and above.

Key Findings

- Extreme heat and drought are the most commonly reported climate phenomena, with significant consequences including damage to homes, loss of livestock, and reduced agricultural and fish yields.
- Water access is a major challenge, with 58% of women reporting difficulty and 81% forced to travel long distances to obtain water—posing risks to their health, particularly during pregnancy, and safety.
- Although 97% of women now give birth in health facilities, traditional birth attendants continue to play a vital role in early labour and postpartum care, illustrating an evolving synergy between cultural and biomedical maternal care practices.
- Gender norms continue to limit women's reproductive autonomy, with male relatives often controlling decisions around childbirth and contraceptive use, while pregnant women remain heavily burdened with unpaid domestic labour.
- Climate-induced food insecurity—driven by rising prices and reduced fish availability—is negatively affecting maternal nutrition and breastfeeding, with over half of women (56%) struggling to access nutritious food.
- Environmental stress is exacerbating maternal health risks by increasing vulnerability to climate-sensitive illnesses and weakening social support systems through migration, while also influencing family planning decisions amidst economic uncertainty.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings reveal both unique and shared and interconnected challenges across Brazil, Kenya, and Tanzania. While these must be situated within their distinct geographical, historical and cultural landscapes, several salient themes resonate across all three regions: **climate change intensifies existing inequalities and exacerbates women's workloads through resource scarcity; cumulative burdens lead to psychological and health impacts, in particular on pregnant women; economic strain fuels household stress and gender-based violence; damage to infrastructure obstructs access to essential SRHR services; and migration induced by resource depletion fractures social networks**. These findings underscore that gender emerges as a critical, cross-cutting lens through which climate change impacts are experienced and mediated. Therefore, **gender-transformative analysis is essential to climate justice.**

Addressing these complex issues requires centring Indigenous, rural, and marginalised voices in rights-based, resilient solutions. Accordingly, we offer targeted recommendations for international and local key stakeholders:

FOR DONORS AND INTERNATIONAL FUNDERS

- Channel resources directly to local feminist and women-led organisations, ensuring funding bypasses bottlenecks at international intermediaries and reaches grassroots actors.
- Provide long-term, flexible, core funding that allows local and international organisations to adapt to evolving climate–SRHR challenges beyond short-term project cycles.
- Invest in interdisciplinary and intersectional research connecting climate, gender, SRHR, race, class, and geography, with priority for justice-oriented and participatory approaches.
- Create dedicated funding windows for SRHR within climate portfolios, recognising reproductive health as essential to resilience and adaptation.

FOR POLICYMAKERS (National Governments, COP30 Delegates, Multilateral Institutions)

- Institutionalise women's leadership in climate governance by addressing structural barriers to participation and ensuring that Indigenous, young, and marginalised women have meaningful roles in decision-making.
- Integrate SRHR into national climate adaptation and mitigation strategies, embedding sexual and reproductive healthcare and justice within broader resilience frameworks.
- Adopt rights-based, intersectional climate frameworks that explicitly recognise and address with targeted interventions the links between gender inequality, health disparities, environmental degradation, race, class, and origin.
- Establish transparent monitoring and accountability mechanisms, including gender-responsive budgeting and SRHR-sensitive indicators, to track whether gender justice commitments are fulfilled in both policy and practice.

FOR CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS (CSOs)

- Innovate localised adaptation solutions that centre women's and girls' reproductive health needs, while addressing broader structural issues such as food insecurity, water scarcity, and the increasing burden of unpaid care work.
- Claim political space by demanding structured and ongoing participation in national delegations, COP processes, and climate financing mechanisms.
- Strengthen accountability mechanisms by tracking financial flows, monitoring the implementation of commitments, and mobilising affected communities to hold donors and governments to account.
- Build transnational solidarity to amplify local struggles on global platforms, making visible the interconnectedness of reproductive and climate justice across different geographies.
- Drive intersectional advocacy by forging coalitions across feminist, Indigenous, youth, health, and environmental movements to shift dominant narratives and influence global climate–SRHR agendas.
- Generate and legitimise alternative knowledge by amplifying community-based practices, Indigenous epistemologies, and feminist approaches to resilience.

WeWorld

WeWorld is an independent Italian organization engaged in development cooperation and humanitarian aid projects over the last 50 years, operating today in more than 20 countries.
Over the last year, WeWorld has carried out over 160 projects, reaching over 5.6 million people, in Afghanistan, Benin, Bolivia, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, Jordan, Italy, Kenya, Lebanon, Libya, Mali, Moldova, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Niger, Palestine, Peru, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Syria, Thailand, Tanzania, Tunisia, and Ukraine.
Children, women, and young people, agents of change in every community, are at the centre of WeWorld's projects and campaigns in the following areas of intervention: access to water hygiene, and sanitation; education; food security, livelihoods and local development; gender and protection; environment and climate.

Mission

We work alongside individuals on the geographic, economic or social margins to overcome inequalities together and build a fairer future which respects the dignity and diversity of people and the environment. We support people and communities with humanitarian assistance in crisis contexts and support pathways to self-determination and development, to contribute to structural change and generate opportunities for all people.

Vision

We strive for a better world in which everyone, especially children and women, have equal opportunities and rights, access to resources, to health, to education and to decent work.
A world in which the environment is a common good to be respected and preserved; in which war, violence and exploitation are banned. A world where no one is left behind.

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