



4TH INTERNATIONAL
CONFERENCE ON
**Small Island
Developing States**
27-30 MAY, 2024
ST. JOHN'S, ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA

SIDS4 Conference Side Event

Making waves: Sustainable health solutions for women and girls at the forefront of climate crisis

New York / Antigua Tue 29 May 2024 5-6.30 pm
Sydney Wed 30 May 2024 7-8.30am

Organized by: International Health Awareness Network and UNICEF Australia

Background on the event

Climate change is not gender neutral. While women and girls bear the brunt of the climate crisis, they are also at the forefront of leading change. The unique rights, needs and perspectives of women and girls must be central to climate policies, investments and actions – particularly in Small Island Developing States (SIDS).

Across all the SIDS, climate change and biodiversity loss are rapidly exacerbating the social determinants of health, which is felt disproportionately by women, girls and children. This event brought together a diverse group of panelists to share their lived experience of climate change in SIDS, the latest research and evidence on the impacts of climate change on the health of women and girls, and to highlight successful approaches to address gendered aspects of the social determinants of health in a changing crisis. Speakers included:

- Dr. Sorosh Roshan, Founding President, and Dr. Gabrielle Casper; President and CEO, International Health Awareness Network
- Alice Hall, Chief of Staff, UNICEF Australia
- Professor Diana Lynne Madden, Professor of Population and Planetary Health, Notre Dame University Australia
- Rashmi Venkatraman, Senior Health Program Advisor, Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
- Kayson Pore, Vanuatu, Youth President, Presbyterian Churches in Vanuatu and University of South Pacific
- Marta Carlos, Timor Leste, Timor-Leste Youth Peace Network and UNICEF Timor-Leste

Key Issues discussed

- The panel discussed the intersection of climate change and health. Climate change leads to increased health risks, particularly for vulnerable groups, whilst also disrupting the capacity of the health system to deliver healthcare.
- The trends in climate change impacts across SIDS was discussed. SIDS experienced the highest number of days of health threatening temperatures attributable to climate change annually in 2018-2022 and climate change lengthens the transmission seasons of mosquito borne diseases. Despite this, SIDS was the least studied region exploring the links between health and changes.
- The impacts of climate change on vulnerable groups were discussed. Pregnant women face increased health risks due to climate change, with higher instances of complications for pregnant women from heat stress and infectious disease.
- Children have particular vulnerabilities due to their age and development stage. These vulnerabilities are physiological, as children are affected by the risks of climate change differently. They are also social, with access to quality health care, nutritious food and positive early stimulation for brain development all relying on the provision of climate resilient social services.
- The gendered impacts of climate change were explored. Women and girls face increased risk of food insecurity, malnutrition and water insecurity due to climate change, and are more exposed to domestic air pollution. Women and girls face increased risk of gender-based violence in disaster settings. Climate change is pushing more women and girls into extreme poverty.
- Two young people from the Pacific spoke about their lived experience of climate change. Kayson from Vanuatu spoke about the impact of climate change on his health and his education, and his worries for himself and his family. Marta from Timor-Leste spoke about the impact of climate change on livelihoods and farming practices, and the disruption to education due to climate change – young people must travel further to collect water before school or work, impacting the time and energy they can spend on school, and disruption in internet and electricity due to flooding impacts both access to education and access to functioning medical facilities.
- The response of the Australian Government through its aid program was explored. Gender and climate change are core priorities in Australia's international development policy, with investments aligned to building both health and climate resilience.

Key recommendations for action

- Governments should prioritise integrated investments across health, gender and climate that target the needs of vulnerable groups, particularly women, girls and children.
- Investments should be made in preventative measures such as community-based education and awareness, with particular focus on vulnerable groups.
- Children and young people must be included in climate decision making and in the design of climate resilient health systems and other social services, to ensure that they are safe and inclusive and meet their specific needs.
- National Adaptation Plans and Nationally Determined Contributions should be child sensitive, and governments should engage children and young people in their design and implementation.