

CHILDREN AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Introduction

Climate change has been identified as the defining issue of our time. What does this mean for the children in our world? These are questions that need to be answered if we want children to continue to survive and develop in the face of the challenges posed by climate change, and to avoid undermining many of the gains achieved for children's health and well-being in the last 60 years.

Context – Why is it important to speak about children and climate change?

It is true that many governments and development partners, including the UN, have been working hard over the last few decades to address climate change. However, children, whose future is at stake because of climate change, have been largely ignored to date.

Main messages on children and climate change

- 1. Children's future is at stake – there are only 15 years left (one generation) to start bending the emissions curve downward¹ and make the transition to a low-emission, climate resilient global society a reality.**
 - Based on the latest projections by the IPCC (2014), it is clear that current commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions are unlikely sufficient to stay within the globally agreed maximum temperature increase of 2°C relative to the pre-industrial level.² To be on track with the 2°C target, the global greenhouse gas emissions need to be 40-70% lower by 2050 compared to 2010.
 - Today's children will be the most affected and will have to play a key role both in transitioning to a low-carbon society and in adapting to a world impacted by climate change. The time to prepare this generation for this transition is now, and it will require significant upscaling of efforts and investments in awareness, training and education around the world. This will require action from all stakeholders, including governments, private sector and the general public.
- 2. Climate change is an equity issue that has a disproportionate impact on children, especially the most disadvantaged.**
 - Climate change impacts, including an increase in frequency and magnitude of climate related disasters, gradually occurring impacts such as spreading of vector borne diseases, water scarcity, and rising sea levels are already taking place.³ These impacts will undermine efforts to realize children's, including those related to survival, education, health, water and food. Children from the poorest families, including those with disabilities, look set to be affected the most.
 - Many of the countries that are highly vulnerable to climate change are also the ones that have the highest number of children as a share of their overall population.⁴ In the coming decades, shifts in child demographics will likely further exacerbate this, with more of the world's children living in Africa and South Asia than ever before.⁵
 - While global emissions have to fall drastically to constrain the rising in global temperature, many children in developing countries still have little access to energy at all. And if they do, the energy

¹ IPCC (2014) Summary for Policy Makers. In Climate Change 2014: Mitigation of Climate Change. Contribution of Working Group III to the Fifth Assessment Report of the IPCC.

² The Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), is calling for the inclusion of "below 1.5°C" as a long-term temperature goal.

³ IPCC (2014) Summary for Policy Makers. In: Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Fifth Assessment Report of the IPCC.

⁴ Climate Change Vulnerability Index (CCVI) 2015 (Maplecroft); UNICEF (2015) State of the World's Children

⁵ UNICEF (2014) Generation 2030 | Africa

source often has deleterious effects. For example, in 2012 over half a million child deaths under 5 were attributable to household air pollution.⁶

3. Children as agents of change should be empowered and their voices must be heard.

- Key decisions to be taken in the coming years on reducing greenhouse emissions and strengthening climate resilience will have major implications for the current generation of children and their successors.
- Children are powerful agents of change and should be actively involved at global, national and community level on discussions on and solutions to climate change. They should have the opportunity to participate, including the most vulnerable such as adolescent girls and children with disabilities.

4. Climate change adaptation should prioritize strengthening the resilience of the most vulnerable children.

- Most national policies on climate change adaptation make little to no reference to children and have little analysis on identifying the children most at risk and actions to be taken to strengthen their resilience are urgently needed. Such analysis and references need to be included in national policies on climate change adaptation, and translated into programmed and budget allocations.
- Climate change is already having an impact on humanitarian disasters, and climate change is projected to increase the displacement of people throughout this century.⁷ It is important to align and coordinate on climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction policies, programmes and investments, including humanitarian operations.

5. Children should be prioritized in policies and investments related to sustainable energy.

- Sustainable energy is of critical importance to children's development and well-being⁸ and provides significant opportunities for improved results. Health centers and schools require energy for lighting, cooking, heating, cooling and ICT. Children, including those with disabilities, need safe, clean and affordable transportation to school.
- Street lighting is important for children's safety, especially girls, after dark. Household air pollution, largely caused by the use of solid fuels and unimproved cook stoves, contributes to over half a million child deaths under 5⁹. Amongst children, girls are primarily responsible for collecting fuel and are often at serious risk of sexual violence particularly in emergency contexts.

⁶ WHO (2014a) Burden of disease from household air pollution for 2012

⁷ IPCC (2014) Summary for Policy Makers. In: Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Fifth Assessment Report of the IPCC.

⁸ [UNICEF \(2015\) Why sustainable energy matters to children: The critical importance of sustainable energy for children and future generations](#)

⁹ WHO (2014) Burden of disease from household air pollution for 2012

Annex I

What is UNICEF doing in the context of climate change?

The Run Up to COP21

- UNICEF is sharing messages on the importance of addressing climate change for children at relevant global and regional meetings and conferences, and also sharing them with its private sector partners.
- UNICEF is engaging youth and bringing children's voices and messages to COP21 via digital platforms, such as Voices of Youth and U-report, both in the run up to COP21 and at a high-level side event and various other events taking place at COP21.
- UNICEF is continuing to populate its [Voices of Youth digital map on climate change](#).

Youth Engagement

- Several country offices (Azerbaijan, Bolivia, Malaysia, Peru and Turkmenistan) are involved in organizing/facilitating child/youth participation in national consultations such as "World We Want", where climate change and the environment figure prominently in the discussions.
- UNICEF Zimbabwe has supported the Government in designing a [child-sensitive national climate change response strategy](#) in collaboration with children.
- UNICEF's [Unite4Climate Zambia](#) trains 200 children per year to be climate ambassadors, supporting them to use media, debates, peer education and advocacy efforts to engage with their communities and leaders on the issue of climate change.
- UNICEF India supported the construction of child friendly schools, which included, among other elements, making buildings cyclone and earthquake resistant and accessible for the physically challenged. Children were also engaged in planting trees and growing school gardens wherever possible, and schools were used to demonstrate water conservation.
- UNICEF National Committees have coordinated youth participation at the J7 Summit, in the run-up to the G7 Summit, where climate change is one of the key issues they will be advocating on with world leaders.

Adaptation and Vulnerability:

- In order to identify and address children's risks, UNICEF offices have been advancing tools such as: a Child-centered Risk Analysis on children's vulnerability to natural hazards (PNG), a study on climate change impacts on WASH services and its impact on children (Kenya), child-centered vulnerability/capacity assessment in disaster-prone regions (Uganda) and Child Centered Risk Mapping initiatives (India, Indonesia, Nepal).
- UNICEF is working in more than 100 countries to support the poorest communities with making water and sanitation investments climate resilient. UNICEF has recently developed a Framework for WASH Climate Resilient Development in order to influence action at the country level and improve local resilience.¹⁰
- UNICEF support has allowed 1 million people in Bangladesh to store clean rainwater underground to manage risks from raising sea levels and salt water intrusion.

¹⁰ http://www.unicef.org/wash/files/Strategic_Framework_WEB.PDF

- [UNICEF Mali](#) is supporting children with strengthening their climate resilience through the provision of the access to safe drinking water in drought-prone areas, funded by the Mali Climate fund.
- UNICEF is also supporting governments with integration of climate change and disaster risk reduction in national curricula and school life.

Innovative sustainable energy solutions for children.

- In Burundi, UNICEF's [Project Lumière](#) provides safe, clean and low-cost lighting providing a model of renewable energy for some of the world's most vulnerable children.
- In Bangladesh, UNICEF's [first carbon finance project](#) provides 40,000 low-income families from over 2,000 villages across the country with more efficient, lower pollution cook stoves.
- In Angola, solar-powered water supply systems have been installed in remote communities critically affected by drought benefitting 32,000 people.
- In [Uganda](#), solar energy is being used to distribute water.
- In Somalia, fuel-efficient stoves and the manufacture of biomass briquettes are promoted as part of UNICEF's Safe Access to Firewood and alternative Energy (SAFE) programming.
- In Zimbabwe, UNICEF is undertaking an in-depth assessment of the sustainable energy needs of children in the context of their health and education and is designing interventions to meet these.
- The UNICEF Innovations Center is increasingly using solar energy powered solutions for children, for example for powering Youth Kiosks (robust computer systems) and MobiStations ("school-in-a-box") with preloaded educational materials.