

Climate proof children: Putting the child first in climate finance



Why prioritise children?

Climate change is an urgent challenge for the world's children. It is estimated that over the next decade, approximately 175 million children a year will be affected by climate-related disasters.¹ Children are the least responsible for the causes of climate change and yet are the most vulnerable to its impacts. Climate change presents numerous challenges to child development: increased child malnutrition through changing agricultural yields; greater risk of disease and death through the higher frequency and intensity of natural disasters; and the disruption of education due to natural disasters and forced migration.

Increasing the money available to deal with climate change is, therefore, both urgent and necessary. It will provide the resources to protect children from the worst impacts of climate change through adaptation, and will also ensure a safer future for all generations through low carbon development.

The international community, and in particular developed countries, have recognised this need. At the Copenhagen Climate Summit (COP 15) in December 2009, developed countries agreed to provide 'new and additional climate finance' that must reach \$100 billion per year by 2020. This will be

allocated, in equal measures, for climate adaptation in countries most vulnerable to the impacts of change, and for low carbon development in emerging economies to help provide a long-term sustainable path to development.

It is vital that developed countries commit a sufficient amount to the collective goal of \$100 billion a year, and that this money be sourced from new, innovative finance mechanisms. Currently, developed countries have made no movement or progress towards these goals. UNICEF UK's recently published report *The \$100 billion question* explores what the UK Government should do to mobilise long-term climate finance for the world's children to have a climate-resilient future. Mobilising climate finance and making sure that it is both new and additional is, however, only one part of providing a safer future for all children. Long-term climate finance must be distributed and targeted in such a way that those most vulnerable, such as children, have adequate programming in place to cope with the growing impacts of climate change.

Once mobilised, climate finance allocation must pay due attention to children's rights, so that they can survive and thrive in the changing climate. This paper explores some of the issues.

A. Child rights and climate change

Children's vulnerability to climate change, as a result of their particular physical, social and psychological characteristics, threatens the realisation of many their rights as stated in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and other human rights instruments.

Climate change particularly impacts:

- the right of a child to have his or her best interests be a primary consideration in all actions concerning him or her (*Article 3*)
- the right to life; Governments should ensure that children survive and develop healthily (*Article 6*)
- the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health (*Article 24*)
- the right to education (*Article 28*).

The existence of these rights in a legally binding treaty means that governments are obliged to remove any barriers to their fulfillment. Almost every country has ratified the Convention, which serves as a framework for protecting child rights in climate change-related policies.²

Women's rights and climate finance: expanding a growing debate

The structure of suitable mechanisms to benefit the most vulnerable groups through climate-change financing is a growing debate. Most notably, Oxfam

has made a convincing case that women should be a key consideration in the design of the Green Climate Fund and its processes to administer climate finance.³ Specifically, the organisation argues that that 'to be an effective and legitimate tool in the fight against climate change, the Green Climate Fund must have the concerns of women at its heart'.⁴

Other NGOs, UN agencies such as the United Nations Development Programme and UN Women, and the UK Government have also made the case for the prioritisation of women's rights in climate finance delivery at Transitional Committee meetings.⁵ More specifically, the UK Government has argued that previous distribution mechanisms, such as the World Bank's Climate Investment Funds, did not integrate the rights and vulnerabilities of women and girls sufficiently, and that this should be at the forefront of the Green Climate Fund's principles.⁶

It is absolutely essential to give precedence to women's rights in climate finance allocation. Women are both highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and important actors in adaptation. Providing adequate support to women also helps mothers to support their children.⁷ For example, women in agriculture-dependent communities are often key contributors to household income, which has a direct impact on the food and schooling received by children. With climate change challenging the nature of agricultural yields and rainfall, women's ability to support their children could be undermined.



Where are we now?

In December 2010, the Cancun Climate Summit (COP 16) mandated the creation of new multilateral organisation, the Green Climate Fund. The Fund will administer the new and additional long-term climate finance to be mobilised by developed countries from 2013 onwards.⁸

Over the course of 2011, the Fund's Transitional Committee is establishing the architecture and structure of the organisation, as well as the rules to govern climate finance distribution. The Transitional Committee will present their findings to COP 17 in Durban in December 2011, and the final work establishing the procedures and governance of the Fund is expected take place over 2012. The Fund should be fully operational by the end of 2012.⁹

The UK Government sits on the Transitional Committee and plays a proactive role in shaping the Fund. It has, furthermore, highlighted that the Green Climate Fund should be the main channel through which developed countries' long-term climate finance be distributed. As a result, the design of the Green Climate Fund will determine the global system of governing and allocating climate finance.

With the design of the Green Climate Fund underway, it is timely to highlight the importance of considering the impacts of climate change on children in regard to climate finance allocation.

However, whilst the above mentioned bodies are right to call for greater gender considerations in climate finance, this alone will not be sufficient to guarantee that child rights will be addressed, and that children will survive and thrive in a changing climate. Just as women have specific vulnerabilities to climate change, and can make positive contributions to adaptation strategies, so too can children.

Alongside calls for gender considerations, there should be accompanying considerations of children, which should be based on their vulnerabilities and

contribution, and focus on clear child rights principles (see Box A). In this way, climate finance will maximise outcomes for children. Due consideration for children should be at the forefront of international climate finance debates and in the construction of the allocation principles of the Green Climate Fund.

The UK Government should use its role as a key player in climate finance debates, and as an influential member of the Transitional Committee, to be a leading advocate for children.



B. The case in India

Natural disasters devastate millions of lives and livelihoods in developing countries each year. Millions of children and women already suffer from the effects of natural disasters and this is predicted to worsen as storms, floods and drought become more severe and frequent because of climate change.

In 2000, floods in West Bengal affected over 21 million people, leaving nearly 1,500 people dead or missing. Around 2 million homes, 2 million hectares of farmland, and 300,000 farm animals were lost. After the floods, local and international humanitarian organisations worked with children to establish action plans to prepare for future disasters. Children worked with their communities to determine high-risk and low-risk areas and identify the most vulnerable people in their village: the elderly; disabled and sick; lactating mothers; pregnant women; and young children. Children also received education on disaster preparation, such as evacuation procedures and actions for when floods hit.

Villagers organised themselves into groups to take care of flood warning, rescue, evacuation, first aid, water and sanitation. Each family learned to prepare a survival kit and safe keeping of valuables and important documents

In 2004, when massive floods occurred again, this child-centred approach was credited for saving lives and livelihoods. In one village of more than 6,000 families:

- No people or livestock died as a result of the flood, compared to 11 people killed and 700 farm animals lost in 2000
- No family lost valuable documents, compared to 3,000 families losing valuable documents in 2000
- Every family had enough food to meet their needs for 10 days and there was no outbreak of disease.

This community-based approach shows that involving children leads to positive adaptation for children, their families and the wider community. A well-prepared community can help save children's lives, reduce malnutrition and disease, and exercise some control over the scale of the impacts. Ultimately, the community becomes more resilient in the face of climate change.

unicef.org.uk/climatechange/india



How to ensure children are prioritised

The specific risks and vulnerabilities faced by children highlight the strong case for prioritising children. Whilst the processes to design the Green Climate Fund are underway and parallel discussions on developed countries' contributions to long-term climate finance are taking place, it is important that such child-centred arguments are at the forefront of the debate. The following steps could be taken to safeguard this.

1. Child rights as a guiding principle

The Green Climate Fund should take account of children's vulnerabilities to climate change. This could include a specific 'thematic window' for children and the inclusion of child rights in all climate finance considerations.¹⁰ On a practical level, this could mean the creation of specific funding and evaluation criteria or guidelines, to monitor and ensure that the risks to children are adequately addressed by long-term climate finance.

2. Ensure children's rights and vulnerabilities are considered

Adaptation programming will need to take a range of forms. It is undeniable that some large-scale 'infrastructure' responses will be needed to protect the most vulnerable countries: sea walls; relocation projects; and raised buildings and roads. But, more localised adaptation will also be needed to ensure the protection of vulnerable communities: school-based disaster risk reduction education; rainwater harvesting systems; and food security projects. The right balance must be found between large-scale and localised adaptation.

Localised adaptation can be child-centred to address the risks specifically faced by children through the provision of disaster-reduction education in schools, on flood preparation for example. Likewise, wider community adaptation can also have a positive impact on children (see Box B). Large-scale adaptation projects can also help. Creating sea walls to protect local schools, for example, will therefore safeguard children's right to education.

If not properly considered, large-scale adaptation can, however, have negative impacts on children and often disregard their rights. Mass relocation projects in the Pacific Islands, for example, can potentially have negative impacts on children (see Box C). Similarly, initiating community-based adaptation without proper consideration of the impacts on children may not have as great an adaptive impact or could exclude children from its benefits.

There must, therefore, be a balance between different 'types' of adaptation, which consider

different needs, including those of children in climate-vulnerable countries. When long-term climate finance is allocated for adaptation it must be balanced. Moreover, all adaptation must consider the potential impacts on children before it is initiated.

3. Ensure children's voices are considered

It is important to recognise the specific vulnerabilities faced by children, but children must also be seen as agents of change who can give meaningful contributions to adaptation strategies. In this way, children can help make sure that climate adaptation addresses the risks that they and their peers face (see Box C). Child participation in large-scale adaptation projects takes their needs into account and results in positive impacts on children.

The participation of children is, therefore, critical for adaptation to be correctly designed, and does not ultimately create more challenges for children. Long-term climate finance could, in this way, be allocated where relevant to strategies that can incorporate child participation.

4. Ensure equity for children

Climate change is a fundamental equity challenge for children. In countries most vulnerable to climate change (see Table 1), it is the most marginalised children who often suffer the worst impacts of climate change; children who do not have access to basic education or food security will find their situation exacerbated by the impacts of climate change.

Adaptation responses through long-term climate finance must be delivered in an equitable way. Adaptation must not simply target the 'lowest hanging fruit', but instead focus on the most vulnerable, even if they are the hardest to reach.

C. Large-scale adaptation

Forthcoming research by UNICEF, on the effects of climate change on children in East Asia highlights the potential impacts of poorly-considered, large-scale adaptation programmes, for example the mass relocation of people from flood-prone areas planned by some Pacific Island governments.

A recent study by Doherty and Clayton states¹¹:

'Forced relocations can involve a severing of emotional ties to place, disruption of existing social networks, and attempts to maintain cultural integrity despite relocation...'

[t]hese disruptions of geographic and social connections may lead to grief, anxiety, and a sense of loss, particularly among those with a strong place or national identity.'

UNICEF argues that although adaptation policies may be created with the best intentions, there is the risk that they can lead to unexpected negative impacts, particularly if there has been little stakeholder engagement (for example, with children) in the planning process. We cite examples of wide-scale relocation in Kiribati and Vanuatu that took place without assessing the impacts on children or children's views. With relocation potentially causing psychological and social problems, this could intensify the impacts of climate change on children.

Therefore, if such large-scale adaptation is to be funded by long-term climate finance, it is important that the potential implications for children are considered in the planning process.



D. The case in Bangladesh

In Bangladesh, Plan International set up an organisation of some 30 children who mapped out the hazards (drought, tornados and hailstorms) and risks (diseases and destruction of the home) that follow in their community.¹² The children drew a map of what a safe community would look like, undertook a transect walk, prepared a risk and resource map, and drew up a timeline and seasonal calendar. They interviewed the adults in the local community in order to do this. The children then prepared a disaster matrix that ranked and prioritised the responses to the most likely disasters.

Based on the children's analysis, 23 interventions were realised, including tree planting, boat building, bridge construction, and ground raising for infrastructure.

The project found a range of benefits, including:

- Children help to challenge the social status quo and fatalistic doctrine present amongst adults. They can also identify risks not often easily visible to adults.
- Forming children's organisations and allowing them to take a leading role ensures creativity, ownership and enthusiasm not seen in adults.

By delivering adaptation through an equity lens, the most vulnerable children do not have their rights and situation hindered further by climate change. Allocating long-term climate finance to the most vulnerable can help ensure that all children are protected from climate change in the most effective way possible.

Conclusion

We must not underestimate the challenge of mobilising and allocating \$100 billion a year of new and additional climate finance. It is vital that the UK Government plays its part in mobilising this money and commits long-term new and additional funds urgently. Without this, there will not be enough available resources to build a climate-resilient future for the world's children.

However, once this money is mobilised, adaptation must protect children from the worst impacts of climate change. Long-term climate finance should be allocated in a way that guarantees child rights and delivers the best outcomes for children. Putting children at the heart of discussions on climate-finance allocation, at the same time as ensuring the mobilisation of sufficient resources, will help build a safer, more climate-resilient future for children.

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Table 1. Climate change vulnerability index and child population

Vulnerability rank	Country	Total population	Under 18 population	Under 18 population as % of total
1	Bangladesh	150,494,000	61,091,000	41 %
2	India	1,241,194,000	447,401,000	36%
3	Madagascar	21,315,000	9,759,000	46%
4	Nepal	30,486,000	12,712,000	42%
5	Mozambique	23,930,000	11,561,000	48%
6	Philippines	94,852,000	37,033,000	39%
7	Haiti	10,124,000	4,316,000	43%
8	Afghanistan	32,358,000	14,897,000	46%
9	Zimbabwe	12,754,000	6,0001,000	47%
10	Myanmar	48,337,000	16,124,000	33%
138	UK	62,417,000	13,100,000	20%



Further reading

The \$100 billion question: How do we secure a climate-resilient future for the world's children?, UNICEF UK, 2011

The economic benefits of child-centred adaptation, UNICEF UK and Plan International, 2011

Our children, our climate, our responsibility: The implications of climate change for the world's children, UNICEF UK, 2008

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- ⁹ Cancun Agreements, UNFCCC, 2010. http://unfccc.int/cancun_agreements/green_climate_fund/items/6038.php
- ¹⁰ This is currently being argued for in the context of Gender by UNDP and UN Women, see http://unfccc.int/files/cancun_agreements/green_climate_fund/application/pdf/undp_submission_on_general_submission.pdf
- ¹¹ Doherty, Thomas J., and Clayton, Susan, 'The psychological impacts of climate change on children', *American Psychologist*, Vol.66 (4), May–Jun 2011, 265-275, doi:10.1037/a0023141
- ¹² 'Taking Stock and Moving Forward', Children in a Changing Climate, 2009. unicef.org.uk/Latest/Publications/Children-and-Disaster-Risk-Reduction-Taking-stock-and-moving-forward