

A woman in a purple and blue patterned dress and a headwrap stands in a landfill, carrying two children. One child is on her back, and the other is in front of her. The background is filled with large, colorful plastic bags of waste under a cloudy sky.

Are climate change policies child-sensitive?

A GUIDE FOR ACTION: SUMMARY

Are climate change policies child-sensitive?

A GUIDE FOR ACTION: SUMMARY

Acknowledgments

This summary document is based on a more in-depth forthcoming paper. Overall guidance on the shaping of this summary was provided by Jasmina Byrne. Thanks is given to Laurence Chandy and Zoe Pelter for their review.

Authors

Joni Pegram, Cristina Colon

Copy editor

Eric Zuehlke

Designer

Kathleen Edison

The Office of Global Insight and Policy serves as UNICEF's internal think-tank, investigating issues with implications for children, equipping the organization to more effectively shape the global discourse, and preparing it for the future by scanning the horizon for frontier issues and ways of working. With dedicated expertise in seven policy areas — digital technology, human capital, governance, the environment, society, markets, and finance — the Global Insight team assists the organization in interpreting, and engaging in, a rapidly changing world.

Office of Global Insight and Policy
United Nations Children's Fund
3 United Nations Plaza, New York, NY, 10017, USA

© United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), December 2019
Cover photo ©UNICEF/UN0212516/Noorani

This is a working document. It has been prepared to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and to stimulate discussion. The text has not been edited to official publication standards and UNICEF accepts no responsibility for errors.

The statements in this publication are the views of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the policies or the views of UNICEF. The designations in this publication do not imply an opinion on legal status of any country or territory, or of its authorities, or the delimitation of frontiers.



This document is interactive and designed for digital viewing.



Please consider the environment and refrain from printing.

Key messages

1

Climate policies are not addressing children...

Only **42 per cent** of all Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) contain direct reference to children or youth while only 20 per cent mention children specifically.

11 of 13 National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) explicitly refer to children or youth, with emphasis as a vulnerable group and as beneficiaries in terms of education and health interventions.

2

...but 2020 NDC revisions and new NAPs offer opportunities for change.

As countries gear up to submit new or update their current NDCs by the **2020 deadline**, they have the opportunity to enhance their ambition for reducing emissions as well as strengthen adaptation measures and other elements to bring their NDCs into closer alignment with the goals of the Paris Agreement.

NAPs are "continuous, progressive, and iterative" processes which follow a country-driven, gender-sensitive, participatory and fully transparent approach.

As such, in both instances, there is space to ensure the needs of those most impacted by climate change are addressed.

3

Child-sensitive climate policies need to be structured around the following principles:

Ambitious and urgent

Ambitious mitigation and adaptation measures that protect the rights and best interests of the child from harm caused by climate change.

Rights-based

Explicit and meaningful references to children and youth, considering them as rights-holders and important stakeholders.

Holistic and multi-sectoral

Address children's specific risks and vulnerabilities through specific sector interventions.

Inclusive

Informed by, and provide for, the systematic consultation and meaningful participation of all children, including children of different ages, gender and social backgrounds, at every step of the climate policy-making process and at all levels.



Save
our
Future



It's our
Planet
Too!

On 20 September 2019 in New York City, youth climate activists join in a demonstration calling for global action to combat climate change. Similar actions took place in more than 150 locations worldwide.

Why this report?

The scientific community has sounded the alarm. Climate change is a global emergency and we have little more than a decade to undertake the urgent and unprecedented action required to limit global temperatures to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. Beyond that time, the risks of deadly drought, flooding, heatwaves, extreme weather and poverty will significantly worsen for hundreds of millions of people.¹

Children will continue to suffer the most under the impacts of climate change. With this in mind, UNICEF has set out to examine current national climate policies/plans to ascertain how child-sensitive² they are and provide recommendations on how to strengthen the focus on children's rights, including actionable and measurable results for children.

Despite the many ways climate change impacts them, children are consistently overlooked in the design and content of climate policies and related processes.

In order to overcome this lapse, this report assesses the current landscape of national climate change policies and plans and the degree to which these are child-sensitive. To that end, UNICEF analyzed 160 NDCs³ and 13 NAPs comprising a quantitative and qualitative assessment, based on:

- A systematic search of key words to capture any direct or relevant reference to children and youth in the policy.⁴
- An assessment of the nature of the reference to evaluate whether this was 'substantive' or 'passive'.⁵

FOCUS ON NDCs AND NAPs

This report has focused on NDCs and NAPs, which provide a consistent baseline for analysis across countries, as well as a clear reference point against which future progress can be assessed.

Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) outline the post-2020 climate actions that countries intend to take to reduce national emissions in line with the Paris Agreement's goal of limiting warming to under 2°C.⁶ While their focus is on mitigation, Parties are invited to include a more comprehensive view of national climate policies, strategies and action plans, including adaptation and means of implementation.⁷ Given this comprehensive coverage, and the role of NDCs in setting out State Parties' national commitments on climate change, these provide a useful indication of national priorities and the degree to which these are child-sensitive.

National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) identify medium- and long-term adaptation needs of countries and strategies/programmes to address them.⁸ Since NAPs represent countries' strategic approach to adaptation, and address issues that are fundamental to children's rights in developing countries, the degree to which they are child-sensitive provides an important insight into whether governments understand, recognise and prioritise the specific needs and capacities of children and youth.

There is no such thing as a child-neutral policy. Whether intended or not, every policy positively or negatively affects the lives of children.

EU-UNICEF (2014). Child Rights Toolkit: Integrating Child Rights in Development Cooperation

BACKGROUND

How does climate change affect children?

Children bear a disproportionate share of the burden imposed by climate change. Extreme weather events, flooding, droughts and increase in temperatures pose unique threats to children's health and well-being including potential erosion of much of the progress made in child health and development over recent decades.⁹ This impact is most evident among children under 5, an age with rapid and unique physiological and emotional development.¹⁰

1 in 4 children will be living in areas with extremely limited water resources by 2040.



Children require more **food and water** per unit of bodyweight than adults, rendering them particularly vulnerable to food and water scarcity. Droughts lead to crop failures and rising food prices, which for the poor mean food insecurity and nutritional deprivations that can have lifelong impacts. Around 600 million children — or 1 in 4 children worldwide — will be living in areas with extremely limited water resources by 2040.¹¹



They are also more likely to succumb to **vector- and water-borne diseases** such as malaria, dengue and cholera, which are increasing in prevalence with climate change, and are major causes of child mortality globally.

In addition, evidence is mounting of the short- and long-term impacts of dealing with repeated disasters on children's **mental health**. Disasters form part of what pediatricians call adverse childhood events (ACEs), that can lead to adverse health outcomes through toxic stress including earlier death, higher rates of cancer, and engaging in more risk-taking behaviour.¹²

Climate change affects a child's **ability to learn**. Extreme weather events destroy schools and transportation infrastructure. In addition, extreme heat can affect a child's ability to learn, and exposure to higher-than-average temperatures as well as associated health impacts is linked with fewer years of schooling.¹³



Climate-related **displacement and migration** brings increased vulnerability, including separation from family members, and **violence, exploitation and abuse**.¹⁴ Girls are at increased risk of violence and exploitation, including sexual and physical abuse, and trafficking during and after extreme weather events. These risks are heightened when collecting food, water and firewood or when staying in temporary shelters or refugee camps. In addition, when a family is faced with economic hardship caused by climate change, studies suggest that the risk of child marriage can increase.¹⁵

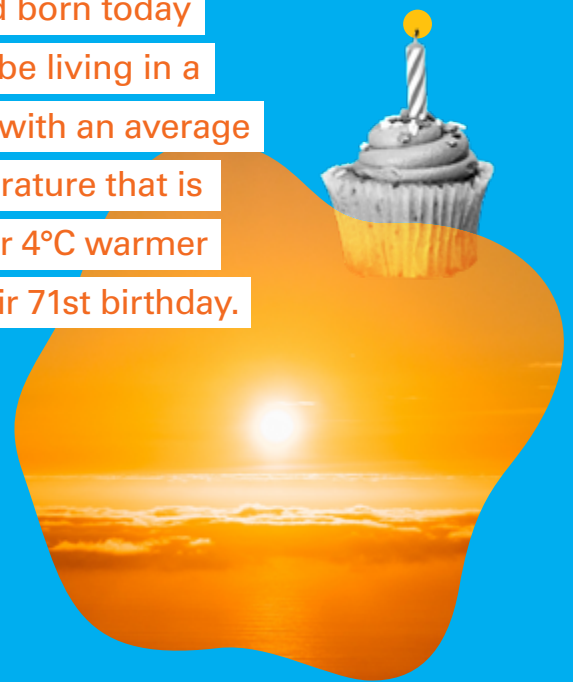


Children are acutely vulnerable to the impacts of **air pollution**, which both contributes to, and is exacerbated by, climate change, and is a major contributing factor in the deaths of approximately 600,000 children under age 5 every year.¹⁶

The most disadvantaged children face the greatest risks, as climate-related impacts threaten to overwhelm their limited coping capacity and further compound inequity.¹⁷

As children will live longer, they will also bear the brunt of **escalating harm and instability** linked to rising temperatures in the years to come. A recent report by *The Lancet* highlights that if the world continues to produce the same amount of carbon emissions, a child born today could be living in a world with an average temperature that is 7.2 degrees Fahrenheit (4 degrees Celsius) warmer by their 71st birthday.¹⁸

A child born today
could be living in a
world with an average
temperature that is
7.2°F or 4°C warmer
by their 71st birthday.



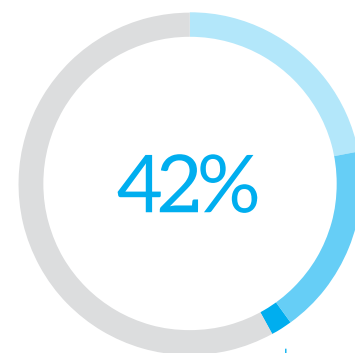
Representing approximately one-third of the global population, and facing an increasingly **uncertain and unstable future**, it is impossible to overstate children's stake in effective climate policies and action. Furthermore, children are passionate about environmental issues and climate change. According to a UNICEF poll of children conducted in more than 60 countries, 77 per cent of children think that climate change is one of the most pressing issues for young people, and 98 per cent think that governments need to take urgent action to tackle this issue.¹⁹

Recent events, and the global climate **#FridaysForFuture** school strikes, have revealed the depth of frustration that children feel at this intergenerational form of injustice, as well as their courage and willingness to challenge the status quo.

What do national policies say about children?

NATIONALLY DETERMINED CONTRIBUTIONS

- **42 per cent of all NDCs directly reference children or youth while only 20 per cent mention children (under 18) specifically.** The term ‘children’ is often mentioned in connection with women as one of the most vulnerable groups in a population. Whereas the word ‘young’ is often used to describe the situation and livelihoods of young persons in their respective countries, ‘youth’ appears to be connected to capacity-building and increased youth empowerment. The term ‘infant’ appears infrequently, notably with regard to health issues, including malnutrition and other health impacts. Just two countries (Malawi and Zambia) call attention to gender dimensions among children, and consideration of differential impacts on girls.
- **Of the 42 per cent of NDCs that include a direct reference to children or youth, many of these cannot be considered ‘child-sensitive’.** The nature of the reference is often merely descriptive and/or not developed or translated into meaningful or targeted climate-related commitments and action. The number of NDCs that can be considered ‘child-sensitive’ is therefore considerably lower.
- **Just three countries (<2 per cent) explicitly mention the rights of children. A further five countries refer to human rights in the context of intergenerational equity or future generations.²⁰** NDCs that include references to human rights and/or intergenerational equity contain more relevant and substantive focus on children/youth and climate change. This is unsurprising as rights-based approaches add significant depth and strength to climate-related policies by considering human rights obligations as fundamental to policy-making processes of governments and relevant entities.
- **60 per cent of NDCs address education in the broad sense,²¹ however only 24 per cent specifically target or consider the education of children and young people, for example with respect to school curricula, facilities or associated infrastructure.** The term is often referred to as one of several sectors (similar to the economy or agriculture, for example) which will be impacted by climate change. The term is also often related to public education, awareness-raising and capacity-building more broadly.



Less than **2%** mention the rights of children.

- **Almost one-quarter (23 per cent) of NDCs do not mention children or youth or child-relevant terms such as education at all.**²² Highly-developed countries²³ fall predominantly into this category, representing a stark contrast between developed and developing countries when it comes to the content and extent of NDCs with reference to the socio-economic dimensions of climate change. This is likely due to the fact that developing countries are traditionally not the largest emitters (emissions being the focus of developed country NDCs) yet are acutely experiencing the effects of climate change and as such are much more focused on its impact on their populations and adapting to those effects.

NATIONAL ADAPTATION PLANS²⁴

- **11 of 13 NAPs explicitly refer to children or youth. The remaining NAPs (Chile and Sri Lanka) do not mention children but include either ‘school’ or ‘education’ as child-relevant key terms.** Generally, children/youth are referred to as being among the most vulnerable groups which will be disproportionately affected by climate change. This is the case for all 11 of 13 NAPs that directly refer to children or youth. In particular with respect to health and climate change risks and adaptation, children are almost always mentioned as a particularly vulnerable group. Here, some NAPs place an emphasis on the particular exposure of children to air pollution, respiratory diseases or poor drinking water quality.²⁵
- **Only two NAPs refer to children as rights-holders. Three NAPs recognise the rights of future generations, and only one NAP refers to the concept of ‘intergenerational equity’.**²⁶
- **The second-most mentioned child-relevant term (after vulnerable groups) is ‘education’ which appears in 12 of 13 NAPs and is directly linked to children/youth in the majority of NAPs.** References to ‘education’ and ‘schools’ are generally related to the resilience of building and social infrastructure against extreme weather events.²⁷ The term ‘education’ is also used synonymously with awareness-raising and capacity building, and frequently linked to ‘climate change education’, where this relates to curricula and/or enhancing knowledge of local communities about the consequences and adaptation practices related to climate change.

NDCs fall far short of what is required in terms of the extent to which they directly address children, particularly those submitted by high-income countries. While governments are not mandated to consider or provide information on children within their NDCs, (unfortunately, governments rejected proposals to integrate child and human rights in the guidance for the Paris Agreement ‘Rulebook’²⁸), children are also omitted from technical guidance for NAPs.²⁹ Yet this analysis reveals that NAPs do address children, even if the emphasis is on children as a vulnerable group and as beneficiaries in terms of education and health interventions in particular. Though this inclusion is welcome, further progress is required to recognise the status of children as rights-holders and active stakeholders, and the critical role that they can play as powerful agents of change.

“The vast majority of climate strikers taking action today aren’t allowed to vote. Imagine for a second what that feels like. Despite watching the climate crisis unfold, despite knowing the facts, we aren’t allowed to have a say in who makes the decisions about climate change.”

Greta Thunberg, Anna Taylor and others in *The Guardian*



In the Bekaa Valley, Lebanon, a Syrian refugee stands in a flooded informal tented settlements struggle with dire conditions that have worsened after a strong storm hit Lebanon, January 2019.

How should national policies address children's issues?

Given such stark absence of children's rights and needs in national policies, is there anything states can do? Countries have an opportunity to address this through their revised NDCs (to be resubmitted every five years starting from 2020), in their NAPs as 'iterative' processes, and in other relevant national climate policies. We therefore propose several key principles that can be applied when such policies are developed or revised.

PRINCIPLE 1: AMBITIOUS AND URGENT

A child-sensitive climate policy must set out sufficiently ambitious mitigation and adaptation measures to protect the rights and best interests of the child from actual and foreseeable harm caused by climate change.

- The level of commitments contained in the NDCs — even if fully implemented by all countries — places the world on a path to a devastating 3°C of global warming by 2100, breaching Paris Agreement commitments to limit warming to 'well below' 2°C. Child rights obligations demand that developed States and other large emitters must, at a minimum, reduce their emissions in line with these international commitments. At 1°C of warming, climate change is already negatively affecting hundreds of millions of children around the globe. The IPCC notes that the aspirational 1.5°C target — currently considered a 'best case' scenario — "is not considered 'safe' for nations, communities, ecosystems and sectors and poses significant risks to natural and human systems as compared to the current warming of 1°C."³⁰ Yet the IPCC has also found that the impacts experienced at this temperature — while grave — will be significantly lower than those encountered at 2°C.³¹
- Limiting warming to 1.5°C will require a 45 per cent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, and 'net zero' emissions by 2050, necessitating "rapid, far-reaching, and unprecedented changes in all aspects of society."³² Furthermore, since climate-related impacts are already occurring, a sharp increase in child-sensitive adaptation measures and associated resources are also necessary.

"The kind of changes that need to happen mean everyone recognising that this is a crisis and committing to radical transformations."

Greta Thunberg, Anna Taylor and others in *The Guardian*

PRINCIPLE 2: RIGHTS-BASED

A child-sensitive climate policy must contain explicit and meaningful references to children and youth and consider them as rights-holders and important stakeholders.

- To the extent that they are mentioned at all, children are overwhelmingly positioned as part of a vague ‘vulnerable group’, rather than rights-holders and important stakeholders. Climate change affects children and adults differently, and policies that explicitly recognise and meaningfully consider the particular needs, rights, vulnerabilities and capacities of children, including their perspectives, are more likely to deliver stronger and more effective outcomes.
- To be considered child-sensitive, children should be positioned as a cross-cutting priority, and identified as both beneficiaries and stakeholders, recognising their specific needs, vulnerabilities, rights and agency.

PRINCIPLE 3: HOLISTIC AND MULTI-SECTORAL

A child-sensitive climate policy must address children’s specific risks and vulnerabilities through specific sector interventions.

Referencing children in a policy is not enough. Policies must also cover interventions targeted at children in areas that are most material to children’s needs and rights in the national context. Since children face specific and heightened risks in the context of climate change impacts, it is vital that policies integrate measures to address these risks through a holistic and multi-sectoral approach to low-carbon, climate resilience that encompasses education, health, food security, water and sanitation, housing and social protection.

For example, climate change and environmental education has a vital role to play in creating an enabling environment for child-sensitive climate policy-making. Article 29 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that one of the principles aims of education “shall be directed to... the development of respect for the natural environment.” Enhancing children’s knowledge and skills in this area empowers them to both protect themselves from risks and to advocate and participate meaningfully in related decision-making, as agents of change in their own right. Education in this area is therefore fundamental to guaranteeing their right to be heard and other ‘access rights’. A powerful illustration of the role that climate change education can play is the young climate activist Greta Thunberg’s description of the transformative effect learning about this in school had on her and her subsequent journey to strike from school, sparking a global movement.³³

“I am joining this strike to demand that decisions are more future-focused and that policy will reflect our environmental rights as written in our constitution.”

Dona Van Eeden, 21, Cape Town, South Africa

“I feel that a subject so serious should be introduced to children at school, and teachers and children should openly talk about it — and the adverse effects of climate change should be shown to children by taking them on field trips.”

Harshini Dhara, Hyderabad, India in *The Guardian*

PRINCIPLE 4: INCLUSIVE

A child-sensitive climate policy must be informed by, and provide for, the systematic consultation and meaningful participation of all children, including children of different ages, genders and social backgrounds, at every step of the climate policy-making process and at all levels.³⁴

- Despite the obligations referenced in the UNFCCC, the Paris Agreement, the SDGs and adhered to in the Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, the views of children and youth — particularly those of younger children — are consistently overlooked in climate policy-making.
- Empowering children with the knowledge and tools required to tackle climate change is a fundamental investment in a country's resilience, well-being and prosperity, and is one of the most simple and effective strategies for strengthening mitigation and adaptation pathways, and sustainable development more broadly.
- The international [#FridaysForFuture](#) school strike movement³⁵ has done much to place children's voices and demands squarely on the agenda of decision-makers, but many countries have not yet established child-friendly mechanisms and platforms to facilitate formal engagement in the policy process. Such forums could include Children's Parliaments, Children's Councils, standing consultative committees that include children's perspectives,³⁶ and the involvement of child representatives in State institutions at different levels.³⁷

“We might not have votes, but we certainly have a voice.”

Australian child human rights defenders and environmental activists meeting with [The Committee on the Rights of the Child](#).



Nur, 16, turns on a solar power light in her home after a day learning about installing and repairing solar panels that are ubiquitous in Kutupalong-Balukhali mega-camp, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, June 2019.

Leading the way



SPOTLIGHT | PRINCIPLE 1: AMBITIOUS AND URGENT

Kiribati's Nationally Determined Contribution

Despite being one of the smallest emitters (representing just 0.0002 per cent of global emissions), and an LDC Small Island Developing State, Kiribati's NDC sets out both mitigation and adaptation targets, and notes that the country has already undertaken significant efforts to reduce fossil fuel imports and increase domestic renewable energy use. Many of the anticipated interventions with respect to mitigation have highly-relevant social co-benefits for children, including providing solar lighting on rural islands, and ambitious plans to increase renewable energy by between 40-100 per cent for rural public infrastructure and institutions, including hospitals, schools and households, and to install a solar water desalination plant for vulnerable rural communities (conditional on funding).

In terms of adaptation, Kiribati notes that "adaptation is not an option — but rather a matter of survival", acknowledging that the effects of climate change "are felt first and most acutely by vulnerable and marginalised populations, including women, children, youth, people with disabilities, minorities, the elderly and the urban poor."

PHOTO

Tietaeikae, 12, sits on a felled tree as her four-year-old sister Tauno plays with the roots in Eita, South Tarawa, Kiribati (January 2016). Eita regularly floods at high tide. Sea water cuts access to the main road and children sometimes have to swim or use floating devices to go to school.





SPOTLIGHT | PRINCIPLE 2: RIGHTS-BASED

The Zimbabwe National Climate Change Response Strategy (NCCRS)

The Zimbabwe NCCRS incorporates a specific and cross-cutting strategic focus on children and youth, outlined in one of 12 strategic objectives, to “mainstream gender, children and youth, people living with HIV/AIDS and other vulnerable groups into all climate change interventions.” This is further elaborated as a commitment to:

- Understand the impacts of climate change on children and youth in Zimbabwe and to create an enabling environment that protects them from harm.
- Ensure the inclusion of children and youth in the policy formulation process for climate change, and in adaptation and mitigation activities.

Consideration of the impacts of climate change on children and youth are integrated throughout the strategy, including in sector-specific analysis and proposed actions, particularly in relation to energy, natural resources, health and education. A dedicated section on children and youth explores their increased risk to disease, under-nutrition, water scarcity, disasters and the collapse of public services and infrastructure linked to climate change. It also recognises children’s right to participate in decisions that affect them and calls for children and youth to be recognised as key actors on the climate change agenda rather than as passive observers or victims.

PHOTO

Schoolchildren work in the garden at Biramahwe Primary School in Magunje, Zimbabwe (March 2017).





SPOTLIGHT | PRINCIPLE 3: HOLISTIC AND MULTI-SECTORAL

Republic of Fiji National Adaptation Plan

The Fiji NAP focuses in particular on the context-specific needs of “low-income and otherwise disadvantaged groups.” Importantly, these groups are explicitly identified as children, people with disabilities, elderly, women, and the LGBTQ community. The NAP also recognises that members of these groups must be identified as “active agents of change,” and mandates planning processes “which proactively empower and support disadvantaged groups to be able to assert their rights.”

It then sets out specific child-sensitive measures with respect to needs assessments and action plans, health and protection measures in the context of extreme weather events and climate-sensitive diseases, as well as empowerment and awareness-raising for youth, building the resilience of school infrastructure, and ‘great emphasis’ on the need to update formal and non-formal educational curriculums, including the review and updating of primary, secondary, tertiary and vocational education curricula “that allow and encourage students to participate in research and risk reduction activities in their local area.”

PHOTO

Destruction caused by Category 5 Tropical Cyclone Winston; Makelesi, 7, standing in what remains of the Nabau District School library in Ra Province, Fiji (February 2016).





SPOTLIGHT | PRINCIPLE 4: INCLUSIVE

Youth Delegates in the UNFCCC

Countries such as Finland, the Netherlands and Norway are setting a positive example by including official Youth Delegates in their Party Delegations, providing a direct line of access to negotiation processes. These delegates represent valuable assets for both YOUNGO and the Parties themselves, as they form a vital bridge between young people and the UNFCCC, raising awareness at home, and showcasing domestic youth-led climate initiatives at the international level. Dutch Youth Delegates, for example, are mandated to engage at least 2,000 youth at the national level each year. YOUNGO has called on more countries to adopt Youth Delegate programmes at the UNFCCC, and to learn from and improve on current practice.³⁸

While the above is indeed encouraging, more needs to be done to ensure that youth delegates are given actual opportunities to contribute to the negotiations as opposed to being token representatives.

PHOTO

Youth Delegates participate in a panel discussion at COP25 in Madrid, Spain, December 2019





In Mongolia, (left-right) Ariunzaya and Bat-Orshikh stand outside their home with their three children and their nephew, June 2018.

Transforming principles into action, measurement and impact

Applying the principles to policy is not enough. Supporting the principles and child-sensitive climate policy-making also requires the following.

ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR ACTION

Political will and high-level leadership: According to gender advocates, high-level political support and leadership from Heads of State, Ministers, key government negotiators, leaders in the UN and champions within the UNFCCC Secretariat has been a ‘key driving force’ behind formalising mandates on gender mainstreaming in UNFCCC decision-making and policies, which has in turn helped to bolster progress with respect to national climate change mitigation and adaptation policies.³⁹ Similarly, integrating children’s rights into national climate action will require political will from high-level leaders and senior decision-makers. Such leadership often comes from the national/central level but can also come from the district or city level. Indeed, in the past several years we have seen a growing number of cities taking bold climate action and paving the way to a more sustainable future even when national governments are lagging.⁴⁰

Knowledge, awareness-raising and capacity building of climate policy-makers: Research suggests that the majority of climate policy-makers feel ill-equipped to understand and apply human rights standards and principles in their work,⁴¹ representing a major impediment to child-sensitive policies in this area. Similarly, gender mainstreaming advocates have identified awareness-raising, training and guidance among climate policy-makers as a vital intervention for ensuring that the social dimensions of climate change are considered and addressed in climate policies, including through the integration of rights-based approaches to both mitigation and adaptation.⁴²

Child-sensitive budgeting: Evidence suggests that public finance that is child-sensitive yields higher social and economic returns, since investments during childhood are relatively cost-effective, contributing significantly to adult outcomes by increasing the health, education and well-being of a population, and reducing inequalities.⁴³ In addition, States have obligations under the UN CRC to invest all necessary resources ‘to the maximum extent’ available — including through international cooperation — in public policies and programmes to fulfil children’s rights.

“We have reached a point in history when we have the technical capacities to solve poverty, malnutrition, inequality and of course global warming ... whether we succeed or not depends on our political will”

Eyal Weintraub, 18, and Bruno Rodriguez, 18, Argentina

MEASUREMENT, TARGETS AND IMPACT

Collection and assessment of disaggregated data: Weaknesses in data collection and an over-reliance on averages fails to capture the specific and differential impacts of climate change on children based on their age, sex or other socio-economic characteristics, and compromises effective policy planning and equitable implementation of climate action and children's rights. Understanding the challenges that climate change poses to children is essential to inform and prioritise policies, plans and targeted measures, and to underpin the elaboration of child-sensitive targets and indicators as well as monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

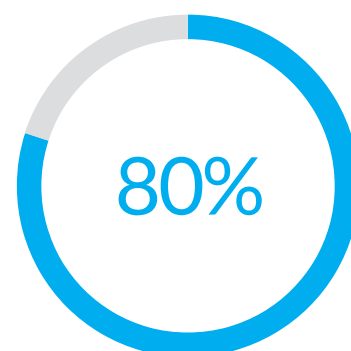
For example, efforts to improve disaggregated data on SDG 6 on clean water and sanitation have revealed the extent to which the burden of water collection and treatment falls on women and girls. Survey data for 61 countries shows that in 80 per cent of households that lack access to water on premises, women and girls are responsible for water collection particularly for the poorest households in rural areas.⁴⁴ By including survey questions on time spent on water collection and information on the role of individual household members, these data were able to shed far more light on gender roles and the disproportionate impacts of increasing water scarcity on women and girls than if the questions had been limited to water quality alone.

Replicating such approaches more broadly to collect and assess disaggregated data on the climate risks for children under 5, under-18, and boys and girls, along with other grounds of discrimination (such as gender, household income, disability and migration status), would help to inform child-sensitive vulnerability and needs assessments for climate policy-making.

Child rights impact assessments: Impact assessments help to bring the connections between child rights and issues to light and inform more effective policy-making, helping to ensure that children are not excluded from benefits, and that policies do not inadvertently undermine the rights of those they seek to protect. For example, while the connection between policies covering issues such as renewable energy or green infrastructure and children's well-being may seem marginal, the effects of programmes in these and other areas of climate policy on children and young people are profound. In fact, sustainable energy solutions in households and the education, health and water sectors can provide major opportunities in terms of improving children's health, well-being and development.

The Scottish Government's Child Rights and Well-being Impact Assessment (CRWIA)⁴⁵ illustrates a national approach for ensuring that children's rights through the UN CRC are embedded in all policies and legislation as well as requiring reporting on progress to Parliament.

The CRWIA in particular is used to assess whether policies and legislation will realise children's rights and help protect and promote the well-being of children and young people. The Government is also committed to monitoring progress. Public authorities must report every three years on the steps they have taken to implement the UN CRC. Important and notable, sa2018 report on progress since 2015 includes a dedicated section on steps the Government is taking to tackle climate change



In 80% of households that lack access to water on premises, women and girls are responsible for water collection particularly for the poorest households in rural areas .

and air pollution, with a particular focus on children and young people's specific needs and views, and measures to raise their awareness.⁴⁶

Integrating child-sensitive targets and performance indicators: Incorporating clear targets and performance indicators in policies enhances clarity and transparency, while facilitating the design of follow-up plans and action and decisions on budget allocations, as well as accountability in terms of monitoring and evaluation. Countries should strive to incorporate measurable child-sensitive targets and indicators that reflect their particular needs and rights, as well as indicators related to enabling processes.

Examples⁴⁷ of child-sensitive targets and indicators:

- Share and number of children with improved access to sustainable energy
- Number of children reporting a significant reduction in time spent collecting water or fuel
- Share and number of children with decreased exposure to water or food insecurity and health-related hazards
- Share and number of children gaining access to adequate resilient infrastructure (water supply, sanitation, flood protection, housing, schools, energy access)
- Number and share of children receiving formal and non-formal education on climate change and responses

Examples⁴⁸ of indicators related to enabling processes:

- Seeking children's views
- Including children's specific needs and capacities in climate vulnerability assessments and planning processes
- Collecting disaggregated data
- Conducting child impact assessments
- Child-sensitive budgeting and finance

Child-sensitive monitoring, evaluation and accountability mechanisms:

Establishing effective child-sensitive measures and mechanisms to improve monitoring and reporting systems — based on disaggregated data, and linked to child-sensitive targets, performance and monitoring indicators — is essential for tracking the resilience and wellbeing of children, and therefore evaluating the impact of climate policies on the ground.

Additional measures and mechanisms that can be considered within the framework of climate policies to strengthen monitoring, evaluation and accountability include:

- Measures to raise awareness among children, civil society and other key stakeholders of the policy's goals, targets and associated plans and measures, progress with respect to implementation, and opportunities to participate in implementation as well as monitoring and evaluation of programmes and initiatives that affect them.
- Provisions to support children's access to justice for harm related to climate action (and inaction), such as child-friendly complaints procedures/mechanisms and assistance to access the courts to seek redress if they are harmed by mitigation and adaptation measures.

SDG 13: TARGET 13.B

Promote mechanisms for raising capacity for effective climate change-related planning and management in least developed countries and small island developing States, including focusing on women, youth and local and marginalized communities.

[United Nations SDGs](#)



© UNICEF/UN0212516/Noorani

The way forward

A lack of guidance, tools and sustained advocacy for child-sensitive climate policy-making has contributed to children being left out of climate policy. But as political attention to the demands and voices of children and youth increases, there is an opportunity — and indeed a moral and legal obligation — for decision-makers to address this glaring gap. The key principles and approaches identified in this paper can inform decision-makers and other key actors involved in climate policy processes on the steps required, contributing to urgent efforts to tackle the climate crisis and ensuring that no child is left behind.

ENDNOTES

- 1 IPCC, (2018). *Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C. Sustainable Development, Poverty Eradication and Reducing Inequalities*.
- 2 Child-sensitive is defined as when the particular needs, vulnerabilities, rights and agency of the child are considered and used to inform policies, in line with the norms and standards set down in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- 3 On the NDC registry website, 184 NDCs are listed, but only 160 NDCs were mapped. The discrepancy can be explained by the fact that a) the 28 countries of the European Union submitted a single joint NDC; b) two NDCs from the registry could not be searched (Oman — only in Arabic, and Timor Leste — format prevents searching); c) six additional NDCs that were not available on the UNFCCC registry were found elsewhere online ([Iran](#), [Kyrgyzstan](#), [Lebanon](#), [Philippines](#), [Senegal](#), and [Yemen](#)).
- 4 The following 14 key words were searched in English, French and Spanish: ‘child’, ‘youth’, ‘young’, ‘adolescent’, ‘infant’, ‘baby’, ‘girl’, ‘boy’ (direct references), and ‘vulnerable’, ‘rights’/‘human rights’, ‘intergenerational equity’, ‘mother’, ‘school’, and ‘education’ (child-relevant key terms to capture consideration of heightened vulnerability, a rights-based approach, and child-targeted interventions, even where a direct reference to children may not appear).
- 5 The methodology was adapted in particular from approaches adopted by the Gender Climate Tracker, developed by the Women’s Environment and Development Organization (WEDO), the Global Gender and Climate Alliance, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland. See: www.genderclimatetracker.org
- 6 To date, 183 countries (of 196 State Parties) have submitted their first NDC to the UNFCCC Secretariat, and are expected to communicate or update these by 2020 and every five years thereafter.
- 7 See UNFCCC (2014). Decision 1/CP.20.
- 8 To date, 13 out of 153 developing countries have submitted their plans.
- 9 UNICEF (2015). *Unless We Act Now*.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 UNICEF (2017). *Thirsting for a Future*.
- 12 Public Radio International, “How climate change affects children's health,” September 2019.
- 13 UNICEF (2015). *Unless We Act Now*.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Plan International (2019). *Effects of Climate Change on Girls’ Rights*.
- 16 UNICEF (2016). op.cit.
- 17 UNICEF (2015). *Unless We Act Now*.
- 18 N. Watts et. al., (2019). The Lancet Countdown on health and climate change: ensuring that the health of a child born today is not defined by a changing climate, *The Lancet*, 394 (10211).
- 19 UNICEF (2016). U-Report poll on climate change disseminated to more than 5,500 children.
- 20 Indonesia, Lesotho, Uruguay — Indonesia and Lesotho references are quotes of the Paris Agreement preambular language on the rights of children; and Armenia, the Philippines, Tuvalu, Venezuela and Zimbabwe respectively.
- 21 Search terms: education/school.
- 22 Key search terms: vulnerable/rights/intergenerational equity/school/education.
- 23 Australia, the European Union, Iceland, Japan, Lichtenstein, Monaco, New Zealand, Norway, Singapore, Switzerland and the United States.
- 24 NAPs to date: Brazil, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chile, Colombia, Ethiopia, Fiji, Kenya, Saint Lucia, Sri Lanka, State of Palestine, Sudan, Togo.
- 25 See Fiji, Brazil, Burkina Faso.
- 26 The NAPs of Fiji and Kenya refer to children’s rights; the NAPs of Colombia, Fiji and Sudan refer to the rights of future generations; and Fiji’s NAP also refers to intergenerational equity.
- 27 See Fiji, Sri Lanka, Cameroon
- 28 Center for International Environmental Law (2018). *Katowice COP24 Outcome Incompatible with Paris Agreement*.
- 29 UNFCCC (2012). *National Adaptation Plans: Technical guidelines for the national adaptation plan process*.
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 IPCC (2018)/ Press release 2018/24/PR, “Summary for Policymakers of IPCC Special Report on Global Warming of

1.5°C approved by governments”.

- 33 Jonathan Watts, (11 March 2019). ‘Greta Thunberg, schoolgirl climate change warrior: ‘Some people can let things go. I can’t’, *The Guardian*.
- 34 UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2017). *Outcome Report on 2016 Day of General Discussion on Child Rights and the Environment*.
- 35 FridaysForFuture, www.fridaysforfuture.org
- 36 OHCHR (2017). A/HRC/35/13, *Analytical Study on the Relationship between Climate Change and the Full and Effective Enjoyment of the Rights of the Child*.
- 37 OHCHR (2019). *Input from a child rights perspective to the United Nations High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development*.
- 38 YOUNGO (2017). op.cit.
- 39 UN-Women, UN DESA, UNFCCC Secretariat (2015). *Background Paper, Gender Mainstreaming Practices in the Context of Climate Responses* (EGM/GR-CR/BP.1).
- 40 Anne McKibbin (2019). “Cities Take the Lead on Climate Action,” Elevate Energy. www.elevateenergy.org/cities-take-lead-climate-action
- 41 MRFCJ (2016). *Rights for Action*.
- 42 UN-Women, UN DESA, UNFCCC Secretariat (2015). *Background Paper, Gender Mainstreaming Practices in the Context of Climate Responses* (EGM/GR-CR/BP.1)
- 43 ODI (2011). *Investment in Children: Report Commissioned by Save the Children Child Rights Governance Initiative*.
- 44 UN Women (2018). *Turning Promises into Action: Gender Equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*.
- 45 See: www.gov.scot/policies/human-rights/childrens-rights
- 46 Scottish Government (2018). *Progressing the Human Rights of Children in Scotland: 2018 report*.
- 47 Adapted from various sources including: Green Climate Fund and UN Women (2017). *Mainstreaming Gender in Green Climate Fund projects*; ADB (2012). *Guidelines for Gender Mainstreaming Categories of ADB Projects*; GenderCC – Women for Climate Justice (2009). *Gender into Climate Policy*, and GAMMA Tool, see: www.unfccc.int/sites/default/files/gendercc-gamma-tool.pdf
- 48 Adapted from various sources including: Green Climate Fund and UN Women (2017). *Mainstreaming Gender in Green Climate Fund projects*; ADB (2012). *Guidelines for Gender Mainstreaming Categories of ADB Projects*; GenderCC – Women for Climate Justice (2009). *Gender into Climate Policy*, and GAMMA Tool, see: www.unfccc.int/sites/default/files/gendercc-gamma-tool.pdf

UNICEF works in the world's toughest places to reach the most disadvantaged children and adolescents — and to protect the rights of every child, everywhere. Across 190 countries and territories, we do whatever it takes to help children survive, thrive and fulfill their potential, from early childhood through adolescence. And we never give up.

Office of Global Insight and Policy
United Nations Children's Fund
3 United Nations Plaza, New York, NY, 10017, USA

© United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), December 2019