

Submission by UNICEF on behalf of members of the Children’s Environmental Rights Initiative (CERI) Coalition and the Children’s Rights Climate Coalition to the UNFCCC first Global Stocktake on the approach to the consideration of outputs component of the first global stocktake

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Introduction

The Global Stocktake (GST) referred to in Article 14 of the Paris Agreement is crucial for enhancing the collective ambition of action and support towards achieving the purpose and long-term goals of the Paris Agreement (Decision 19/CMA.1).

The UNFCCC was signed more than 30 years ago. Through the Paris Agreement, Parties agreed that States should, when taking climate action, respect, promote and consider, *inter alia*, the rights of children, as well as the principle of intergenerational equity. Yet consideration of children remains minimal or non-existent throughout the vast majority of UNFCCC workstreams, despite their acute vulnerabilities and stake in the future outcomes of present decisions.

As the Paris Agreement “report card”, the GST presents a critical opportunity to acknowledge this omission, and to “course-correct” towards achieving the long-term goals of the Paris Agreement in such a way that children’s rights, including their right to a healthy environment, are upheld.

This submission seeks to identify current challenges, opportunities for further action and specific recommendations towards the GST output component.

Executive Summary

- **The climate crisis is a child rights crisis. The GST output must recognize the specific and heightened vulnerabilities of children and young people, and be informed by age- and gender-disaggregated data on climate impacts.** Children represent almost one-third of the world’s population, and are disproportionately vulnerable to the impacts of climate change due to a range of physiological and developmental factors. While stabilizing levels of greenhouse gas emissions at safe levels remains the only long-term solution to tackling climate change, the mitigation measures required are off track and will come too late for protecting children that are already experiencing unprecedented impacts. Urgent investment is required to enhance adaptation for children and communities most at risk.
- **The GST output should adopt an intersectional approach, in light of the additional risks and discrimination faced by certain children experiencing intersecting and compounding forms of discrimination and marginalization.** Such groups include girls, children discriminated against on the basis of their sexual orientations, gender identities and expression (SOGIE), Indigenous children, children in peasant, small-scale and other rural communities, children with disabilities, and displaced children. Additional measures may be required to ensure that these children’s rights are respected and protected in the context of climate change impacts and climate action.
- **The GST output must be strongly informed by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), as well as the universal human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment and the principle of intergenerational equity.** The UNCRC has been ratified by virtually every State in the world, in widespread recognition of the specific and heightened needs of children. Detailed forthcoming guidance from the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child with respect to children’s rights and climate change (General Comment No. 26), to be launched in September 2023, will further clarify the obligations of States to uphold children’s rights in their implementation of climate policies and action, leading to more integrated, holistic, ambitious and equitable approaches.
- **The GST output should result in a work plan to implement a human rights-based and intersectional approach to climate action, including cross-cutting, concrete and dedicated targets that provide collective, global pathways towards protecting children’s specific rights in all climate action.** Children’s rights are consistently overlooked in legislation, policies, programmes and finance to address climate change, and children face extensive barriers to meaningful engagement in climate policy-making at all levels. The GST output can “course correct” this omission, and commit to targets/milestones for protecting children from the impacts of climate change, including through measures to enhance focus on, and meaningful engagement of, children and young people in planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of climate action, paying particular attention to marginalized groups of children. Further details with respect to mitigation, adaptation, loss and damage, finance, and inclusion/participation, are provided in this submission.

- **The GST output must put us on track to rapidly bend the curve down on emissions, including commitment to equitably phase down of all fossil fuels, in line with what the best available science tells us is necessary, while being guided by the rights of children and other groups most at risk.** Where possible, strong preference should be given to nature-based (land- and ocean-based) solutions that comprehensively support children's right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, contributing to climate, environmental and sustainable development objectives essential for children's well-being.
- **The GST output must set out milestones for an enhanced focus on child-sensitive adaptation, including through the framework of the Global Goal on Adaptation.** A child-sensitive approach to adaptation:
 - Considers the specific risks faced by children in a changing climate and ensures that children's needs, voices and capacities are central to adaptation planning and implementation, including through strengthening the climate-resilience of social services that reach children and communities most at risk, such as water and sanitation, health, mental health and psychosocial support, education, nutrition, social and child protection services.
 - Prioritizes nature-based (land- and ocean-based) solutions that comprehensively support children's right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment.
 - Is locally-led and informed by the views of children and their communities, engaging children in adaptation decision-making, implementation and monitoring.
 - Is informed by age- and gender-disaggregated data on climate impacts and adaptation benefits for children and other vulnerable groups.
 - Strengthens data and monitoring mechanisms to track/measure the resilience of essential services as well as their contribution to building community resilience.
 - Is coherent with relevant SDG and Sendai Framework targets, indicators, and monitoring mechanisms.
- **The GST output must embed concrete actions to ensure that children's rights are explicitly and systematically considered with respect to loss and damage, including:**
 - The urgent implementation of effective multilateral mechanisms to address the impacts of loss and damage on children's rights, including through the Warsaw International Mechanism and the Santiago Network, and the newly-established Loss & Damage Fund, as well as clear recognition of the role for humanitarian emergency response.
 - Commitment to ensuring that these mechanisms have the ability to deliver timely and accessible support for those most affected, at the scale required.
 - Global agreement on a set of overarching principles for all loss and damage finance, incorporating children's and human rights, and gender equality.
 - The provision of new, additional, public grants and needs-based finance through the new Loss & Damage Fund to address and remedy the impacts of loss and damage, to be structured and delivered in ways that are gender-transformative and which respect, protect and promote children's rights. The new Fund should establish specific policies and guidance on children's rights and safeguards in this respect.
- **The GST output should commit to enhancing child-sensitivity of climate finance, including by:**
 - Delivering on the commitment to double adaptation finance by 2025, as a step towards meeting the estimated \$340bn required each year by 2030.

- Setting out steps to quantify the financial needs for, and measure existing financial flows going to, the protection and promotion of children's rights in climate action. This includes consideration of the significant adaptation costs of social sectors on which children depend and which are not currently factored into estimates of adaptation costs, as well as nature-based solutions.
- Setting out commitment to urgently incorporate children's rights, needs, voices and equity in the policies and guidelines of existing funds, including the Green Climate Fund, Adaptation Fund, and Global Environment Facility, and of their accountability/redress mechanisms, as well as in the development and operationalization of the Loss and Damage Fund.
- **The GST output must recognize children's status as rights-holders and agents of change, and provide clear recommendations on the measures required to enhance their equitable participation in climate governance at all levels, including through:**
 - Global commitment to ensure that new or existing consultation mechanisms at local, national, regional and global levels support the safe and meaningful participation of children and young people in climate-related decision-making, implementation and monitoring.
 - Global commitment to quality, inclusive environmental education.
 - Commitment to enact legislative and administrative frameworks to guarantee the rights of children to participate as well as access to justice, including by ratifying the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child on a Communications Procedure.
 - Paying particular attention to ensuring safe, meaningful and effective participation of marginalized groups of children that face intersecting forms of discrimination, and who are particularly at risk of the impacts of climate change.
- Suggested targets include:
 - Further specify the emission trajectory, with a view to meeting the reduction target of 43% by 2030, based on 2019 levels.
 - Increase the proportion of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) that are child-sensitive to 100%.
 - 100% of new or updated National Adaptation Plans are child-sensitive.
 - Substantially increase investment in nature-based solutions that comprehensively support children's right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, contributing to climate, environmental and sustainable development objectives essential for children's well-being.
 - Double adaptation finance by 2025, as a step towards meeting the estimated \$340bn required each year by 2030.
 - Quantify needs for, and measure existing financial flows going to, the protection and promotion of children's rights, including consideration of adaptation costs of social sectors and for nature-based solutions.
 - Children's rights are incorporated in the policies and guidelines of all multilateral climate funds.
 - Significantly enhance investment in strengthening the climate-resilience of essential services for children and communities most at risk, including water and sanitation, health, mental health and psychosocial support, education, nutrition, social and child protection services.

- 100% of children are protected by multi-hazard early warning systems and have access to information concerning climate-related risk.
- All countries take steps to strengthen data and monitoring mechanisms to (i) capture age- and gender-disaggregated data on climate impacts and benefits of climate action for children and other vulnerable groups, and (ii) to track/measure the resilience of essential services, as well as their contribution to building community resilience.
- Effective multilateral mechanisms are in place to address the impacts of loss and damage on children and other groups most at risk, including provision of timely, adequate and accessible support for those most affected.
- Overarching global principles for loss and damage finance are established, incorporating children's and human rights and gender equality.
- The new Loss & Damage Fund provides new, additional, public grants and needs-based finance to address and remedy the impacts of loss and damage, and is structured and delivered in ways that are gender-transformative and which respect, protect and promote children's rights.
- All countries take urgent steps to address barriers to the equitable participation of children and young people in climate governance, ensuring that new or existing mechanisms support their safe and meaningful participation in climate-related decision-making, implementation and monitoring.
- Quality, inclusive environmental education for all.

1. The climate crisis is a child rights crisis: key data and evidence

The Children's Climate Risk Index (CCRI)

Children represent almost one-third of the world's population. The climate crisis affects or will affect all children, everywhere, especially those in climate vulnerable countries, in often significant, life-changing ways, throughout their lives. Drought, flooding, extreme weather events, heat waves, and chaotic seasonality directly undermine a broad spectrum of children's rights, including their rights to health, education, protection, an adequate standard of living, and their right to life, survival and development.

According to UNICEF's Children Climate Risk Index (CCRI), **almost every child (>99%) is now exposed to at least one climate or environmental shock.**¹ These hazards will increase in severity as the impacts of climate change accelerate. Accompanying analysis reveals that approximately **1 billion children live in one of the 33 countries classified as at extremely high risk of the impacts of the climate crisis.** Children in these countries face a deadly combination of exposure to multiple climate and environmental shocks with a high vulnerability due to inadequate essential services such as water and sanitation, healthcare and education.

The report also reveals that:

- **240 million** children are highly exposed to **coastal flooding**
- **920 million** children are highly exposed to **water scarcity**
- **2 billion** children are highly exposed to **air pollution** that exceeds 10ug/m3

¹ UNICEF (2021), The Climate Crisis Is a Child Rights Crisis: Introducing the Children's Climate Risk Index. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/media/105376/file/UNICEF-climate-crisis-child-rights-crisis.pdf>. The CCRI is the first child-focused climate index that ranks countries based on children's exposure to climate and environmental shocks, as well as their vulnerability to those shocks, based on their access to essential services.

Children are disproportionately vulnerable

Children are more vulnerable to climate and environmental shocks than adults for a number of reasons²:

- **Physical vulnerability:** Children are less able to withstand and survive shocks such as floods, droughts, severe weather and heatwaves.
- **Physiological vulnerability:** Toxic substances, such as air pollutants that contribute to climate change, affect children more than adults, even at lower doses of exposure.
- **Disease susceptibility:** Children are more at risk of death than adults from diseases that are likely to be exacerbated by climate change, such as malaria and dengue.
- **Developmental impairment:** Any deprivation or harm caused by climate and environmental degradation at a young age can result in a lifetime of hardship and lost opportunity.
- **Psychosocial implications:** Recent research has documented the mental health implications of climate change and suggests that climate anxiety is growing particularly rapidly among children and adolescents.³

Climate change is deeply inequitable

Children from countries that contribute the least to climate change will suffer the greatest consequences. Children from groups experiencing intersecting forms of discrimination, such as girls and children discriminated against on the basis of their sexual orientations, gender identities and expression (SOGIE), Indigenous children, children in peasant, small-scale fishing and other rural communities, children with disabilities, children on the move, and children living in poverty, face particularly acute challenges. New data from Save the Children has revealed that 774 million children – a third of all children – face the dual threat of poverty and high climate risk.⁴

Recommendations

- **The climate crisis is a child rights crisis. The GST output must be informed by age- and gender-disaggregated data on climate impacts, recognizing the specific and heightened vulnerabilities of children and young people.**
- **The GST output should adopt an intersectional approach, in light of the additional risks and discrimination faced by certain children experiencing intersecting and compounding forms of discrimination and marginalization.**

2. How can children's rights inform the GST and implementation of the Paris Agreement?

A child rights-based approach leads to better outcomes for people and planet⁵

Children are uniquely vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, so tailored interventions to meet their specific needs are critical. In addition, if children's rights are not taken into account when designing climate actions, there is a risk that measures designed to alleviate the impacts of climate change inadvertently create climate injustices that negatively affect children's lives. For example, climate projects that lead to the forced displacement of people and communities due to land-intensive activities such as hydroelectric

² UNICEF (2021), The Climate Crisis Is a Child Rights Crisis: Introducing the Children's Climate Risk Index. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/media/105376/file/UNICEF-climate-crisis-child-rights-crisis.pdf>

³ Hickman, C., Marks, E., Pihkala, P., Clayton, S., Lewandowski, R. E., Mayall, E. E., Wray, B., Mellor, C. & van Susteren, L. Climate anxiety in children and young people and their beliefs about government responses to climate change: a global survey. *The Lancet* 15, 863-873 (2021).

⁴ Save the Children (2022), Generation Hope: 2.4 billion reasons to end the global climate and inequality crisis. Available at: [Generation Hope: 2.4 billion reasons to end the global climate and inequality crisis | Save the Children's Resource Centre](#)

⁵ Excerpt from CERl (2022): Incorporating Child Rights into Climate Action, available at: <https://ceri-coalition.org/child-rights-into-climate-action/>

reservoir construction, forest protection, plantation development for bioenergy or carbon sinks, and ocean-based climate action, represent a threat to children's rights.

It is important to underline that while children are exceptionally vulnerable, they also have the capacity to be powerful agents of change, as demonstrated through their climate protests, movement building, social media activity and community and civic engagement. Children's right to be heard in all matters affecting them is enshrined in Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). By upholding this right, children can play a critical role in pushing for the rapid reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, raising awareness about climate change, and in preventing and reducing the impacts of sudden and slow-onset climate-related events on them and their communities.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment

Children's rights are enshrined in the UNCRC - the most widely ratified global human rights treaty, to which 196 countries are a Party. The UNCRC sets out the rights that must be realized for children to develop to their full potential, offering a vision of the child as an individual and as a member of a family and community, with rights and responsibilities appropriate to his or her age and stage of development.

The commitments made to children by virtually every State in the world can provide an important guiding framework for States parties that have ratified the UNFCCC in their implementation of climate policies and action, and in particular the Paris Agreement's promise to consider, respect and promote human rights, including the rights of children and intergenerational equity in climate action.⁶

In September 2023, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child will publish its **General Comment No. 26 on children's rights and the environment, with a special focus on climate change**.⁷ The General Comment will set out authoritative guidance to States on how their obligations under the UNCRC relate to climate change and climate action, including adaptation, mitigation, loss and damage, and climate finance.

The historical global recognition by the Human Rights Council and UN General Assembly of the **human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment** also has significant implications for the protection of children's rights, and those of other groups impacted by inequality and discrimination.⁸

The principle of intergenerational equity

The scientific assessment of the IPCC WGII Sixth Assessment Report notes that the end of the century is less than a lifetime away - a child born in 2020 will be 20 years old in 2040 and 80 years old in 2100.⁹ Urgent action to reduce emissions and adapt to climate change will have a profound effect on the quality of the lives of those born today and future generations. The IPCC notes that children aged ten or younger in the year 2020 are projected to experience a nearly four-fold increase in extreme events under 1.5 degrees of global warming by 2100, and a five-fold increase under 3 degrees warming. Such increases in exposure would not be experienced by a person aged 55 in the year 2020 in their remaining lifetime under any warming scenario,¹⁰ undermining intergenerational equity.

⁶ Paris Agreement preamble.

⁷ The draft General Comment and information on the process and submissions is available here:

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/general-comments-and-recommendations/draft-general-comment-no-26-childrens-rights-and>

⁸ Human Rights Council (2021) The human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment. Available at: [A/HRC/RES/48/13](#) and United Nations (2022) The human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment. Available at: [A/76/L.75](#)

⁹ IPCC, FAQ 3: How will climate change affect the lives of today's children tomorrow, if no immediate action is taken? Available at: <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wq2/about/frequently-asked-questions/keyfaq3/>

¹⁰ Ibid.

Recommendations

- The GST output must be strongly informed by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), as well as the universal human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment and the principle of intergenerational equity.

3. Are children considered in climate policy, action and finance?

Children's needs are frequently overlooked in legislation, policies, programmes and finance to counteract climate change, and they face extensive barriers to meaningful participation in climate policy-making at all levels. The GST can serve as an opportunity to close this gap.

[Spotlight: Accelerating child-sensitive climate policies and action - the Declaration on Children, Youth and Climate Action](#)

At COP25, a group of world leaders joined youth activists to sign an Intergovernmental Declaration on Children, Youth and Climate Action. This is a first-of-its-kind commitment to accelerate inclusive, child and youth-centered climate policies and action at all levels. To date, the Declaration has been signed by more than 35 countries.¹¹

1. Child-Sensitivity of Nationally Determined Contributions

According to recent UNICEF analysis of 167 NDCs submitted between September 2019 and mid-October 2022, **41% of NDCs can be classed as child-sensitive**, meaning that they are inclusive of children and young people's rights, participation and role as stakeholders and drivers of change, and that they commit to policies and action that strengthen the climate resilience of child-critical social services, such as those relating to water, sanitation and hygiene, health, education and nutrition.¹² This is particularly the case in NDCs from countries in which young people are most at risk.

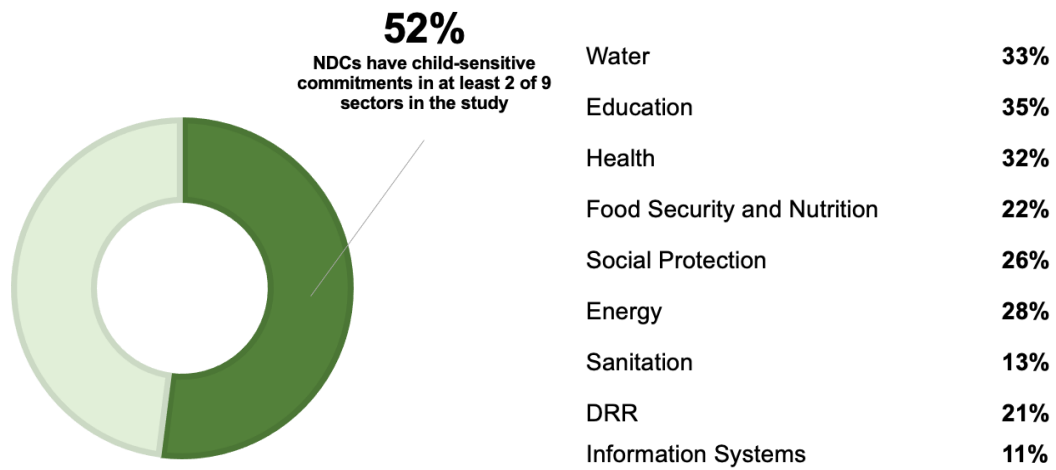
However, **59% of NDCs do not meet this threshold**, demonstrating that multiple opportunities exist to increase focus on children and their rights in climate policies, including in the key sectors that children rely on most.

NDCs were assessed against four criteria, based on a set of more than 40 indicators:

1. **References:** 65% of NDCs contain meaningful references to children and young people.
2. **Rights-based:** 22% of NDCs consider children and young people as rights holders and include meaningful references to children's rights or intergenerational justice and equity.
3. **Inclusive:** 23% of NDCs mention that the participatory process involved young people, but only 2% of NDCs refer to the inclusion of children.
4. **Holistic and multi-sectoral:** 52% of NDCs address the specific risks and vulnerabilities of children and young people by including child-sensitive multi-sectoral commitments.

¹¹ Read more: <https://www.unicef.org/environment-and-climate-change/climate-declaration>

¹² UNICEF (2022), Child-sensitive climate policies for every child, <https://www.unicef.org/documents/child-sensitive-climate-policies-every-child>. All data on child and youth sensitivity in NDCs is available on the [ClimateWatch platform](#). 41% of NDCs met at least 3 criteria for child-sensitivity (of 167 NDCs). 59% met no criteria (32%), one criterion (8%) or two criteria (19%).



The findings on child-sensitivity in NDCs should serve as an important baseline assessment, enabling 100% of the next updated round of NDCs to be child-sensitive.

Spotlight: Good practice examples of child-sensitive NDCs

The following positive examples of NDCs containing child-sensitive commitments are excerpts from UNICEF's report, *Child-Sensitive Climate Policies for Every Child*.¹³

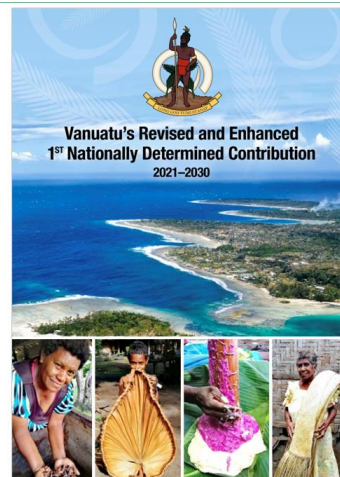
The Vanuatu NDC:

→ Identifies children and young people as an adaptation priority area in:

- **Education:** Vanuatu commits that every child, regardless of climate and disaster circumstances, must be able to access the education system.
- **Disaster Risk Reduction** Vanuatu commits that 100% of schools incorporate climate risk management activities in their School Implementation Plans by 2030 and commits to reduce gaps in relation to climate disaster responsiveness of school facilities.
- **Action for Climate Empowerment:** Vanuatu commits to enable youth to play active leadership roles in adapting to climate change, including promote programmes and projects that create awareness, skills and capacities among youth on climate action.

→ Children's and Young people's engagement and participation

Youth and other vulnerable groups were an integral part of the NDC enhancement process and Vanuatu commits to continue meaningful consultation with actors outside of government such as with women, girls, youth, children, indigenous minorities, the elderly and people with disabilities.



The Indonesia NDC includes:

→ A Children's rights and intergenerational equity approach

In line with the Paris Agreement, Indonesia respects, promotes and considers its obligation to affirm the rights of children, youth, vulnerable populations and people living with different abilities.

→ Young people's concerns reflected through sectoral

commitments, including commitments to promoting climate resilience in food, water and energy to fulfil the needs of the growing young population. And supporting improved provision of basic services in health and education, technological innovation, and sustainable natural resource management.

→ Children's participation and engagement in local planning processes

through Strengthening community engagement in natural resource development planning processes at all levels and ensuring cross intergenerational needs are included.



In addition to these criteria, it is important to emphasize the importance of **nature-based (land- and ocean-based) solutions** that comprehensively support children's right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, while contributing to climate, environmental and sustainable development objectives that are essential for children's well-being (co-benefits for SDGs 2, 6, and 14-15).

¹³ Ibid.

Recommendations

- **The GST output must put us on track to rapidly bend the curve down on emissions, including commitment to equitably phase down of all fossil fuels, in line with what the best available science tells us is necessary, while being guided by the rights of children and other groups most at risk.** Where possible, strong preference should be given to nature-based (land- and ocean-based) solutions that comprehensively support children's right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, contributing to climate, environmental and sustainable development objectives essential for children's well-being.

2. A child-sensitive approach to climate change adaptation and resilience

While stabilizing levels of greenhouse gas emissions at safe levels remains the only long-term solution to tackling climate change, the mitigation measures required are off track and will come too late for protecting children that are already experiencing unprecedented impacts. Urgent investment is required to enhance adaptation for children and communities most at risk.

The climate crisis is seriously impacting low income countries. Many countries lack sufficient climate adaptation plans or existing plans do not protect or address the needs of children. Furthermore, core UNFCCC workstreams addressing adaptation have been essentially silent on the needs and priorities of children and their rights. The first GST provides an opportunity to identify and urgently address this gap.

Enhancing the climate resilience of essential services - water and sanitation (WASH), health, education, nutrition, social protection and child protection - can reduce climate risk for millions of children.¹⁴

Adaptation should be based on a careful assessment of both the type and nature of the climate hazards, shocks or stresses, as well as the degree to which children are vulnerable, in order to help prioritize action for those most at risk. **Such interventions should be based on a rights-based approach, with the effective involvement of children and their communities**, to ensure that solutions are tailored to local circumstances and risks. Where possible, **preference should be given to nature-based (land and ocean-based) solutions** that protect children's right to a healthy environment and contribute to the implementation of other international environmental and sustainable development objectives. **The risk of unintended consequences of adaptation measures ("maladaptation") on children, particularly children facing compounding inequalities and forms of discrimination, should be carefully assessed and mitigated against.**

The Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA) of "enhancing adaptive capacity, strengthening resilience and reducing vulnerability to climate change, with a view to contributing to sustainable development" is well-aligned with the first target of the Sustainable Development Goal 13 to "Strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters in all countries". However, coming to a common agreement of what the GGA should comprise and how it will be measured and reported is still a challenge. **It is essential that adaptation under the UNFCCC and Paris Agreement strengthens synergies between SDG13 and other relevant SDGs, as well as the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction targets and indicators**, as the globally agreed intergovernmental instruments for fostering sustainable development and strengthening resilience respectively.

¹⁴ UNICEF (2021) The Climate Crisis Is a Child Rights Crisis: Introducing the Children's Climate Risk Index. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/reports/climate-crisis-child-rights-crisis>

[Spotlight: The case for investment in water, sanitation and hygiene \(WASH\) services](#)

By 2040, it is projected that nearly 600 million children will be living in areas of extremely high water stress.¹⁵ Water is the primary medium through which we feel the effects of climate change, leading to tremendous negative impacts on water as a resource, and the basic social services that depend on it - importantly, safely managed drinking water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services. These services are essential for children's health and development, decreasing children's exposure to life-threatening risks such as diarrhoeal disease and malnutrition.

The development of a disaster- and climate-resilient, low-carbon water, sanitation and hygiene sector has the potential to significantly enhance the resilience of children and their communities by reducing human, social, environmental and physical vulnerability. It would also contribute to avoiding or reducing conflict in areas affected by water scarcity.

In parallel, it is estimated that global water use, storage and distribution - and the lack of wastewater treatment - contributes 10% of global greenhouse gas emissions, making it key to the net-zero transition.¹⁶ Significant opportunities for emissions reductions exist through improving energy efficiency of water and sanitation treatment processes (e.g. pumps and generators); by ensuring, where possible, the use of renewable energy for water and sanitation operations; by adopting sanitation and wastewater treatment processes that limit the release of highly potent greenhouse gases methane and nitrous oxide from wastewater and excreta disposal; and by introducing water conservation, efficiency and reuse measures. Despite the enormous potential, few governments are addressing potential for GHG reductions in the water and wastewater sector, for example in their NDCs.

Recommendations

- **The GST output must set out milestones for an enhanced focus on child-sensitive adaptation, including through the framework of the Global Goal on Adaptation.** A child-sensitive approach to adaptation:
 - Considers the specific risks faced by children in a changing climate and ensures that children's rights, needs, voices, capacities and equity are central to adaptation planning and implementation, including through strengthening the climate-resilience of social services that reach children and communities most at risk, such as water and sanitation, health, mental health and psychosocial support, education, nutrition, social and child protection services.
 - Prioritizes nature-based (land and ocean) climate measures that contribute to comprehensive protection of children's right to a healthy environment, while delivering co-benefits in terms of broader environmental and sustainable development objectives (e.g. biodiversity, toxics, relevant SDGs 2, 6 and 14-15). Such measures must be guided by the harm prevention and precautionary principles.
 - Is locally-led and informed by the views of children and their communities, engaging children at all stages of the adaptation policy cycle.
 - Is informed by age- and gender-disaggregated data on climate impacts and adaptation benefits for children and other vulnerable groups.
 - Strengthens data and monitoring mechanisms to track/measure the resilience of essential services as well as their contribution to building community resilience.

¹⁵ UNICEF (2017), Thirsting for a Future: Water and children in a changing climate.

¹⁶ CDP (2020), Global Water Report

- Is coherent with relevant SDG and Sendai Framework targets, indicators, and monitoring mechanisms.

3. Loss & damage

Children constitute one third of the global population, but climate change will not affect all children equally. Resilience to the impacts of climate change have many determinants grounded in levels of development and access to wealth. Further, it is well recognised that there are 'hard limits' to adaptation; some climate impacts can no longer be adapted to, or else countries and communities may have insufficient resources, capacity and financing to adapt. It is the children of low and middle-income countries that bear the brunt of losses and damage to health and human capital, land and ocean territories and their associated ecosystems, livelihoods, culture and heritage, Indigenous and local knowledge, and biodiversity as a result of climate change.¹⁷

By 2050 children will constitute more than half of the population on the African continent - a region directly on the frontlines of loss and damage. Unaddressed, climate change will harm the poorest and most vulnerable children first, hardest and longest.¹⁸

Over the last six years, UNICEF and IDMC recorded over 43 million weather-related child displacements globally, with storms and floods accounting for 95 per cent of new child displacements linked to weather-related disasters between 2016 and 2021. In 2020 alone, there were an estimated 9.8 million weather-related internal displacements of children.¹⁹

Children must be front and center of climate action, resilience, and adaptation efforts - with child displacement and suffering firmly recognised in any future commitments on loss and damages.

¹⁷ Save the Children (2021) Born into the Climate Crisis. Available at: <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/born-into-the-climate-crisis.pdf/>

¹⁸ This includes, but is not limited to, girls and children discriminated against on the basis of their race, sexual orientations, gender identities and expression (SOGIE), Indigenous children, children with disabilities, displaced children, and those who experience intersecting and compounding forms of discrimination and marginalization.

¹⁹ UNICEF, IOM (2022), Guiding Principles for Children on the Move in the Context of Climate Change

[Spotlight on education and protection](#)

Extreme weather events have significant impacts on education and protection. As loss and damage increase, the barriers to accessing education also increase – with more damage and destruction to schools and roads to access them. There are multiple direct and indirect costs to education due to loss and damage. Damage to school buildings and injury of students and teachers can result in children missing education days, with girls less likely to return to school. If current trends continue, by 2025 climate change will be a contributing factor in preventing at least 12.5 million girls from completing their education each year.²⁰ Girls' lack of access to education compounds their vulnerability by reducing their access to information about climate change and preparedness measures, including access to timely and life-saving early warning systems.

Girls' education is strongly linked with impactful climate action. Countries that have focused on girls' education have suffered far fewer losses from droughts and floods than countries with lower levels of girls' education. For every additional year of schooling a girl receives on average, her country's resilience to climate disasters can be expected to improve by 3.2 points on the ND-GAIN Index, which measures country-level vulnerability to climate change alongside readiness to improve resilience.²¹

Climate shocks and stresses routinely place girls, especially during adolescence, at increased risk of gender-based violence, including sexual assault, resulting in trauma and unplanned pregnancies, human trafficking and harmful practices such as child, early and forced marriage.²² These experiences can also contribute to mental health challenges later in life when left untreated. They also cause disruption in access to sexual and reproductive health, family-planning services and maternal and postnatal care.²³ Combined, these factors severely undermine their rights and abilities to strengthen resilience and recover from climate-related loss and damage.

As seen through the examples above and many more crises happening across the world, loss and damage is already harming millions of children's lives. According to the IPCC, the economic cost of loss and damage per year will be between 290 billion and 580 billion USD by 2030 alone, escalating thereafter.²⁴ These projections do not account for the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.²⁵

²⁰ Malala Fund, A greener, fairer future: Why leaders need to invest in climate and girls' education, September 24, 2021.

²¹ Brookings Institute, Three ways to link girls' education actors to climate action, 2020. See also: University of Notre Dame, ND-GAIN Country Index

²² Plan International, Effects of climate change on girls' rights, accessed August 25, 2022.

²³ Linda C. Giudice, Erlidia F. Llamas-Clark, Nathaniel DeNicola, Santosh Pandipati, and Marya G. Zlatnik, Climate change, women's health, and the role of obstetricians and gynecologists in leadership, *Journal of Gynecology and Obstetrics*, October 25, 2021.

²⁴ IPCC WG II (2022), op.cit.

²⁵ Anil Markandya & Mikel González-Eguino (2018) Integrated Assessment for Identifying Climate Finance Needs for Loss and Damage: A Critical Review

Recommendations

- **It is essential that children, their needs, rights, equity and voices, are a central consideration at this critical juncture for loss and damage.**
- **The GST output must embed concrete actions to ensure that children’s rights are explicitly and systematically considered with respect to loss and damage, including:**
 - The urgent implementation of effective multilateral mechanisms to address the impacts of loss and damage on children’s rights, including through the Warsaw International Mechanism and the Santiago Network, and the newly-established Loss & Damage Fund, as well as clear recognition of the role for humanitarian emergency response.
 - Commitment to ensuring that these mechanisms have the ability to deliver timely and accessible support for those most affected, at the scale required.
 - Global agreement on a set of overarching principles for all loss and damage finance, incorporating children’s and human rights, and gender equality.
 - The provision of new, additional, public grants and needs-based finance through the new Loss & Damage Fund to address and remedy the impacts of loss and damage, to be structured and delivered in ways that are gender-transformative and which respect, protect and promote children’s rights. The new Fund should establish specific policies and guidance on children’s rights and safeguards in this respect.

4. Child-sensitive climate finance

Climate finance flows are far short of what is needed to limit and adapt to warming of 1.5°C. International adaptation finance flows to developing countries are 5-10 times below estimated needs and the gap is widening. Estimated annual adaptation needs are USD 160-340 billion by 2030 and USD 315-565 billion by 2050.²⁶ Yet **current estimates of adaptation costs do not include the significant climate bill facing the social sectors.**²⁷

In most countries, the only sector for which adaptation costs have been budgeted is that of health, although less than 2 per cent of total adaptation financing outlined in NDCs has been budgeted for the health sector.²⁸ Adaptation costs associated with education and social protection are not recorded in NDCs.

To be equitable, investments must be made from high CO₂-emitting countries to the lowest emitting countries. To benefit the most vulnerable children and communities, climate finance needs to be accessible, delivered as grants, and a much greater proportion of it must be dedicated to adaptation action that is focused on increasing the resilience of essential child services including health, WASH, nutrition, education, social protection, and child protection, including capacity-building projects for communities. Investment must also include quality, inclusive climate, environmental education to support children with the knowledge and skills for enhanced adaptive capacities and pro-environmental behaviour.

Forthcoming analysis by members of the CERI coalition suggests that funding from the major multilateral climate funds could be significantly more child-sensitive in allocating resources towards children and child-critical social services. A review is warranted on how the policies and guidelines of the Green

²⁶ UNEP (2022) Adaptation Gap Report 2022. Available at: <https://www.unep.org/resources/adaptation-gap-report-2022>

²⁷ UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti (2022). Monitoring the Social Costs of Climate Change for Low- and Middle-income Countries.

²⁸ Ibid.

Climate Fund, Adaptation Fund and Global Environment Facility could better support the protection and promotion of child rights. In addition, collaboration with and integration within the guidelines of these funds' independent accountability mechanisms (eg, the Independent Redress Mechanism of the Green Climate Fund) is also necessary to ensure respect for these policies.

Recommendations

- **The GST output should commit to enhancing child-sensitivity of climate finance, including by:**
 - Delivering on the commitment to double adaptation finance by 2025, as a step towards meeting the estimated \$340bn required each year by 2030.
 - Setting out steps to quantify the financial needs for, and measure existing financial flows going to, the protection and promotion of children's rights in climate action. This includes consideration of the significant adaptation costs of social sectors on which children depend and which are not currently factored into estimates of adaptation costs, as well as nature-based solutions.
 - Setting out commitment to urgently incorporate children's rights, needs, voices and equity in the policies and guidelines of existing funds, including the Green Climate Fund, Adaptation Fund, and Global Environment Facility, and of their accountability/redress mechanisms, as well as in the development and operationalization of the Loss and Damage Fund.

4. Children's right to be heard

Children's right to be heard in all matters affecting them, in line with their evolving capacities and maturity, is one of the core principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Awareness of the climate crisis is high among the young: 83 per cent of young people in low- and middle-income countries support bold government action on climate change (in comparison to 70 per cent in high-income countries).²⁹ Children have powerfully demonstrated their role as agents of change through their calls for climate justice, and transforming the global environmental movement. This agency and active participation and voice can also help to promote resilience and positive mental wellbeing among children and young people.

Quality, inclusive environmental education that supports children in understanding and appreciating a plurality of knowledges (including Indigenous and local knowledge)³⁰ and skills to engage in climate action, enables children to form and/or retain a strong connection with nature, and empowers children to participate meaningfully in climate action more broadly. This can be achieved by changing production and consumption practices, establishing more environmentally friendly policies and practices in schools and communities, becoming local, national, and global activists, and engaging in politics and in research for sustainable development/transformational change.

States should establish child-friendly mechanisms and platforms to facilitate children's safe and meaningful engagement, ensure children have access to quality, inclusive climate education and age-, gender- and ability-responsive information they need to support their participation. Particular attention should be paid to ensuring meaningful and effective participation of marginalized groups of children that face intersecting forms of discrimination, and who are particularly at risk of the impacts of climate change. Developed country Parties should mobilize funding to support these activities.

²⁹ UNICEF Changing Childhood Project, <https://www.unicef.org/globalinsight/reports/changing-childhood-project>

³⁰ Strand et al, forthcoming

Parties should enact laws that guarantee the rights of children to participate, and to ensure that children have access to justice, including by ratifying the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child on a communications procedure.

Recommendations

- **The GST output must recognize children’s status as rights-holders and agents of change, and provide clear recommendations on the measures required to enhance the equitable participation of children and young people in climate governance at all levels, including through:**
 - Global commitment to ensure that new or existing consultation mechanisms at local, national, regional and global levels support the safe and meaningful participation of children and young people in climate-related decision-making, implementation and monitoring.
 - Global commitment and support for quality, inclusive environmental education.
 - Commitment to enact legislative and administrative frameworks to guarantee the rights of children to participate and their right to access to justice, including by ratifying the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child on a Communications Procedure.
 - Paying particular attention to ensuring safe, meaningful and effective participation of marginalized groups of children that face intersecting forms of discrimination, and who are particularly at risk of the impacts of climate change.