

# TIME TO ACT: AFRICAN CHILDREN IN THE CLIMATE CHANGE SPOTLIGHT

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Climate change is here and children are disproportionately affected



In July 2023, Earth experienced its highest recorded average daily temperature, and in June the hottest ocean surface temperatures ever recorded for that month. The findings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC) are unequivocal: global warming is human induced. Adverse climate changes are causing significant damages on ecosystems and people, with the most vulnerable communities, particularly children, disproportionately affected.

The implications for children are especially troubling. They are biologically less equipped to handle weather extremes and more susceptible to pollution-induced toxins. Their vulnerability extends to diseases that climate change could worsen, like Malaria and Dengue. Further, any deprivation they face due to environmental degradation can have lifelong consequences.

Some of the severe effects of climate change are felt in Africa, a continent which has historically contributed minimally to global carbon emissions. Current projections suggest that by 2100, if global warming reaches 3°C, Sub-Saharan Africa could lose up to 8.6% of its GDP annually. Conversely, limiting global warming to 1.5°C would reduce this loss to 3.8% per year.

## Advocacy Brief

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Using the global Children's Climate Risk Index (CCRI) (see box 1), The report *Time to act* emphasizes the unique exposure and vulnerability to climate change faced by children living in Africa. Developed by UNICEF, the CCRI considers factors like children's exposure to hazards and their adaptive capacities, and it measures both children's immediate susceptibility and long-term resilience. The CCRI incorporates indicators from two pillars: one gauging children's *exposure* to environmental hazards and another assessing their *vulnerability* to such threats.

The report is supported by UNEP and advocates for urgent policy actions that progressively guarantee children's right to a safe and healthy environment. It underscores the need for focused interventions, highlighting adaptation and resilience strategies and interventions that have proven effective for the well-being of children, their families, and communities. Further, it emphasizes the inclusion of children in climate resilience planning.

The price of an inadequate response to the climate crisis is increasing every day. There is a need for urgent policy actions and focused adaptation and resilience interventions.

### BOX 1

**The Climate change risk index (CCRI)** was developed by UNICEF to provide a synthetic measurement of the unique and heightened risks faced by children due to the effects of climate change. The CCRI measures both children's immediate susceptibility and long-term resilience and it incorporates indicators from two pillars: one gauging children's exposure to environmental hazards and another assessing their vulnerability to such threats.







As the frequency and severity of climate-induced events intensifies families, communities and children in Africa, particularly vulnerable children, face a deadly combination of intensified exposure to multiple and increasingly severe shocks. The poorest and most vulnerable families find it increasingly harder to cope with and recover from shocks. Children and their families hit by one crisis may be able to absorb the shock provided the crisis is not too severe. However, when they are hit by a second, a third and other subsequent shocks within a short span of time their coping mechanisms can become exhausted. As shown in the CCRI Pillar 2 analysis, in such contexts, a crucial role is played by the ability of affected communities and children to access quality, climate-resilient essential services that can enhance their adaptive capacity, thus decreasing their vulnerability to the effects of climate change.

Starting from a young age, children and young people need 'adaptive capacity' to live their life in a climate-changed world. Education and green skills enhancement are crucial so that children and young people prepare themselves for the future. The report *Time to Act: African Children in the Climate*

*Change Spotlight* shows how climate projects often fail to treat children and young people as active stakeholders or agents of change. Investing and involving children and young people is crucial as they are Africa's greatest natural resource which can be harnessed to close the emissions gap and contribute to the transition to renewable energy. Their involvement is also crucial to ensure that their needs and rights shape accelerated action to tackle climate change.



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## International climate finance is strikingly blind to children's heightened risk



Multilateral Climate Funds (MCFs) play a vital role in channeling climate finance from developed to developing nations, including to the African continent. Recently released evidence has revealed a major shortcoming in the extent to which international climate finance is responsive to children's needs. Just 2.4% of MCF funding was found to be allocated to projects that are child responsive. This is a striking contradiction when considering the heightened exposure and vulnerability of children to climate change, as outlined by the CCRI. Beyond their higher vulnerability, children and young people are two crucial demographics for the future of any society, while at the same time representing the majority of a country's population, as is the case in many African countries. Climate finance and action that overlooks the specific exposure and vulnerability of children weakens the efficacy of climate change response measures, and risks contributing to adverse social outcomes, deepening inequalities and political instability.



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Governmental and intergovernmental institutions, business and other stakeholders have an obligation to act rapidly and decisively.



They should prioritize the following set of actions



- i. **Strengthen climate resilience of systems providing essential services, to decrease the vulnerability of children and their communities.**

Develop and implement policy frameworks and programmes that increase the coverage, effectiveness and climate resilience of social sector systems, particularly those providing essential services required to decrease the vulnerability of communities and children to climate change, namely water and sanitation, health and nutrition education and social protection.



- ii. **Provide adequate domestic and international funding to tackle the effects of climate change, including addressing the large gaps in the extent to which children are prioritized in international climate finance.**

Provide adequate funding for climate change adaptation and mitigation. Donor countries, in partnership with receiving countries need to urgently address the child-responsiveness of the international climate finance by exponentially scaling up funding to programmes that are child- and gender-responsive. Developing countries also need to ensure that an increasing part of their domestic resources is invested in climate change adaptation and mitigation that can preserve the future of their children and their nations at large.



- iii. **Equip children and young people with the knowledge and skills required to reduce the worst impacts of climate change, as well as to adapt to a changing climate and to participate in the green economy.**

In line with the Green Jobs for Youth Pact (See box), develop policies and programmes that provide children and young people with climate

change education and skills that can be taken into the workplace. This includes strengthening green skills and young people's knowledge so that more and better sustainable jobs for young people become available.

The Green Jobs for Youth Pact is a collaborative effort among the International Labour Organization, the United Nations Environment Programme, and UNICEF's Generation Unlimited. The pact aims to create 1 million new green jobs, transform existing jobs, and support 10,000 young green entrepreneurs by 2030. It focuses on three main areas: promoting youth employment in sustainable industries, education and training for green skills, and empowering youth in climate policy advocacy. Launched during COP27, the initiative involves youth in its design and implementation and seeks to close the skills gap in climate-vulnerable sectors.



- iv. **Give children and young people a voice and involve them in key decisions that affect their future and that of our planet.**

Strengthen the participation and agency of children and young people in climate and environmental related action. Provide them with the opportunity to act as agents of change so that they can contribute with innovative solutions to tackle climate change, including mitigating its effects.



- v. **Reduce carbon emissions and pollution**

Available evidence clearly indicates that if the worst impacts of climate change upon nature and people are to be avoided, then political will, technology and business model innovation, and investment are required to reduce carbon emission into the atmosphere. Developed countries must lead the way in drastically and rapidly decreasing their global emissions. All countries need to contribute by prioritizing the decarbonization of their economies through large-scale and enforced emission reduction led by the governments and business.





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