**OHCHR Questionnaire**

1. *Please describe, in your view, the relationship between climate change and the enjoyment of the rights of the child, and any human rights obligations to mitigate and adapt to climate change that can be derived therefrom. Please also share any examples of how the realization of the rights of the child can contribute to more effective climate action.*

Children are among the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Despite carrying the least responsibility for the rapidly changing climate, children will be left to bear the brunt of its impacts. Children’s unique physical, cognitive and physiological conditions mean they can be more at risk from intense drought, recurring floods, the impact of climate variability on livelihoods and other weather-related disasters. This has serious implications for securing their rights: impacts range from malnutrition as seasonal changes affect food security, higher mortality rates from extreme weather events, susceptibility to climate-induced diseases, and disruption of their education. In developing countries, climate change is projected to exacerbate the top five causes of death for children under five.

The relationship between climate change and the enjoyment of the rights of the child, as enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), is thus increasingly symbiotic.

Most fundamentally threatened by climate change are the children’s rights to survival and development (Art. 6), nutrition and health (Art. 24) and education (Art. 28). In its 15th General Comment, the Committee on the Rights of the Child recognized climate change as “one of the biggest threats to children’s health”. The CRC’s provisions on non-discrimination (Art. 2), the best interests of the child (Art. 3), participation (Art. 12), protection (Art. 19), standard of living (Art. 27), education on the protection of the environment (Art. 29), and leisure, recreation and cultural activities (Art. 31) are also pertinent. 196 governments ratified the CRC and are obliged under the Convention to respect, protect and fulfill these rights. As their fulfillment is increasingly endangered by the changing climate, obligations to act on adaptation and mitigation can be derived from these provisions.

Yet children’s rights, and children themselves, continue to be largely overlooked in climate policies and discussions - despite the fact that a number of examples now illustrate how the realization of children’s rights can simultaneously contribute to more effective climate action. Most prominently is the realization of Art. 12: the children’s right to participate in matters that affect them. A number of German development cooperation projects have shown that not only do children have a fundamental right to contribute in the realm of climate change adaptation and mitigation, they also have invaluable contributions to make.[[1]](#footnote-1) From local level community-based disaster risk reduction interventions, to global level engagement in climate change decision-making, children all over the world are now showing their interest, capacity and valuable role in strengthening resilience to climate risks. A number of best practices from German development cooperation illustrate this great potential. In Peru, a project on “green education” has empowered children and youth so that now they are active partners in the environmental management of their schools, thereby directly contributing to the adaptation efforts of their communities. In the Southeast Asian region, the “Fit For School” initiative educates children on water, sanitation and hygiene, increasing their health as much as their resilience as inhabitants of this disaster-prone region. Additionally, there are a number of projects addressing disaster risk management that have shown that increasing the resilience of the public is best achieved through community-based sensitization measures - and that such measures are especially powerful when they are incorporated into the school curricula of children. Thus, involving children has increased effectiveness and enhanced impact, proving that children and young people’s active engagement is fundamental to achieving long-term positive change.

1. *Please share a summary of any relevant data as well as any related mechanisms to measure and monitor the impacts of climate change on the enjoyment of the rights of the child, especially the rights of children in particularly vulnerable situations.*

Robust data on the relationship between climate change and children’s rights is steadily increasing. Most recently, the UNICEF Report “[Unless we act now: The impact of climate change on children](https://www.unicef.org/publications/index_86337.html)” (2015) provides a multitude of relevant and up-to-date data on the impacts of climate change on the enjoyment of the rights of the child. It shows that the number of children potentially exposed to climate risks and their effects is alarming. Today, over half a billion children live in extremely high flood occurrence zones, and nearly 160 million live in high or extremely high drought severity zones. Most of them live in some of the world’s poorest countries with the least capacity to manage these environmental risks. This *double disadvantage* means that out of the nearly 530 million children living in extremely high flood occurrence zones, over 270 million children also live in countries with low access to improved sanitation, more than 6 million children also live in fragile contexts, and over 300 million children also live in countries where half or more of the population lives on less than US$3.10 per day. Similarly, of the nearly 160 million children living in areas of high and extremely high drought severity, almost 60 million children live in countries with low access to safe water and 70 million with low access to improved sanitation. Overlapping crises, such as floods combined with conflict and/or poverty can thus be particularly detrimental. This also drives increased displacement, migration and urbanization, all of which push more children into poverty and put them at greater risk of having their rights violated.

Similarly, the [World Health Organization](http://www.who.int/bulletin/volumes/87/12/09-073445/en/) (WHO) has provided data on the way climate change infringes on the children’s right to health (CRC, Art. 24). WHO estimated that 88% of the diseases attributable to effects of climate change occur in children under 5 years of age. This is due to their particular vulnerability in the early stages of life. When it comes to the spread of disease influenced by climate change, the risk falls squarely on children.[[2]](#footnote-2)

The most recent climate-related report from UNICEF, “[Clear the air for children](https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/UNICEF_Clear_the_Air_for_Children_30_Oct_2016.pdf)” (2016), looks at how children, particularly the most disadvantaged, are affected by air pollution. It points out that around 300 million children live in areas where the air is toxic (exceeding international limits by at least six times) and that children are uniquely vulnerable to air pollution, breathing faster than adults on average and taking in more air relative to their body weight. Air pollution is a major contributing factor in the deaths of around 600,000 children under age 5 every year and threatens the health, lives and futures of millions more.

These reports illustrate the close interlinkage between climate change and child rights. Most strikingly, the data provides evidence that climate change is fundamentally undermining children’s rights to life, health and an adequate standard of living for survival and development, as enshrined explicitly in Articles 6, 24 and 27. Mechanisms to measure and monitor the effect of climate change on children are primarily provided by [UNICEF’s Data and Analytics Section](https://data.unicef.org/), the [World Health Organization Global Health Observatory Data Repository](http://www.who.int/gho/database/en/), the [United Nations Environment Programme Environmental Data Explorer](http://geodata.grid.unep.ch/), the [Children in a Changing Climate Coalition](http://www.childreninachangingclimate.org/), the [Center for International Earth Science Information Network](http://sedac.ciesin.columbia.edu/data/collection/gpw-v4) (CIESIN) and a number of research institutes and journals (such as the [Harvard School of Public Health; Center for Health and the Global Environment](http://www.chgeharvard.org/topic/climate-change-and-health-children)). However, in general there are still significant data and surveillance gaps which urgently need to be addressed in order to better understand the scale of impact on children’s rights as well as how to adequately respond to these threats to our future generation.

1. *The best interests of the child should be taken into consideration in all matters concerning the rights of the child, including environmental decision-making. Please describe existing commitments, legislation and other measures adopted by states and other duty-bearers, such as businesses, in climate change mitigation and adaption which are designed to protect the best interests of the child. In particular, please share information related to implementation of commitments to address climate change while simultaneously contributing to the realization of human rights and the rights of the child, the promotion of gender equality, and the protection of future generations. Please also note any relevant mechanisms for ensuring accountability for these commitments.*

The principle of the “Best Interests of the Child” is the underpinning rationale of the CRC. States and other duty-bearers must ensure that the best interests of the child are a primary consideration in climate change policy and program responses. In addition to the CRC, the legal framework is complemented by the International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights (Art. 6), and on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Art. 12). The 2030 Agenda adds important targets on the realization of child rights throughout its 17 goals (e.g. SDG 1 on child poverty, SDG 2 on malnutrition, SDG 3 on child mortality and health, SDG 4 on education, SDG 6 on safe drinking water and sanitation, SDG 8 on child labor, SDG 16 on violence against children, among many others). SDG 13 adds a specific target (13.3) regarding climate change education. Moreover, young people are explicitly named as “critical agents of change” for the realization of the SDGs.

According to the Paris agreement, Parties should respect, promote and consider their respective obligations on children among others when taking action to address climate change (§11) [[3]](#footnote-3). Hence, protecting the environment while providing for the health, survival and development of children are mutually inclusive goals. The Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk reduction also recognizes the role of children as agents of change and need to give them space and modalities to contribute to disaster risk reduction, in accordance with legislation, national practice and educational curricula (36(a)(ii)). Nevertheless, there is still room for enhanced consideration of the CRC in national and international climate-related policies, action, investments and dialogue.

For businesses and other duty-bearers addressing climate change mitigation and adaptation, a concrete measure to protect the best interests of the child is the integration of child protection policies and instruments. Such *child protection policies* aim to keep children safe from harm, neglect and abuse by placing children’s best interest at the heart of all decisions and actions affecting them. While NGOs such as Plan International, Save the Children and terre des hommes, who are all active stakeholders in climate action, have specific child safeguarding measures, such mechanisms are still predominantly absent regarding other duty-bearers in the realm of climate change mitigation and adaption.

German development cooperation has committed itself to protect the best interests of the child on an institutional level as much as within the project cycle. The 2011 BMZ position paper “Young people in German development policy” sets out the position of German development policy with regard to the rights of children and youth and illustrates how the BMZ Human Rights Strategy applies to young people. Applying the Human Rights Based Approach is binding for all projects of German development cooperation, thus ensuring that when appraising, planning, implementing and evaluating development projects, the principle of the best interests of the child is continuously warranted.

1. *Please provide guidance on what further actions need to be taken to adequately integrate children’s rights within climate change mitigation and adaptation policies, practices and decisions. In particular, please describe actions needed to:*
   1. *Ensure the integration of children’s rights, including the rights to family, health, nutrition, education, participation, gender equality, water and sanitation, among others, in climate action;*
   2. *Prevent violence or conflict as it affects children and is connected with social, economic and political stressors aggravated by climate change; and*
   3. *Promote intergenerational equity.*

In order to adequately address and integrate children’s rights within climate action, the mainstreaming of child-centered climate change adaptation and mitigation must be at the heart of development processes. Applying the three pillars model for Child Rights Programming in the realm of climate change policies would imply:

1. Addressing gaps and violations of children’s rights brought about by climate change;
2. Strengthening institutional and policy mechanisms for responding to climate change so that children are not hurt and their adaptive capacity strengthened;
3. Strengthening communities, and civil society’s capacity to support children’s rights under the conditions that climate change presents.

Thus, child-centered climate action means both action *for* children, where the capacity of stakeholders to focus on children’s needs and capacities is enhanced; and *with* children, wherechildren are centrally involved in decision-making, planning and implementation. Both elements are crucial in order to integrate children’s rights in a sustainable and inclusive manner, and to address intergenerational inequities. Concrete actions would include[[4]](#footnote-4):

* Ensuring child-centered approaches in newly developed plans, including national adaptation plans. Additionally, existing adaptation policies, guidelines and strategies should be reviewed to ensure that children are visible, that their rights are respected, and that the root causes of girls’ and boys’ vulnerability are addressed.
* The analysis of climate risk and adaptive capacity disaggregated by age, gender, urban and rural. Action must be guided by children’s own analysis of their situations as well as what we know about safeguarding the rights of children in vulnerable situations.
* Participatory spaces created by, with, and for children both locally and nationally. Ensuring that the perspective of children is heard in national and international policymaking will strengthen adaptation and mitigation planning. Only then can intergenerational equity be ensured.
* More and better disaggregated research and knowledge on children and climate change. This includes child rights-based indicators for M&E, both for broad ‘enabling environment’ frameworks and specific adaptation actions. Participatory M&E is essential, as are process indicators to assess children’s empowerment and participatory governance.
* Children and youth must be provided with climate change education, awareness raising and training. In accordance with SDG target 13.3, UNFCCC Art. 6, and Art. 36(a)(ii) of the Sendai Framework, educating, empowering and engaging all stakeholders, including children and young people, is essential. Children must be at the forefront of these activities in order to build a generation well aware of climate change and adaptation Moreover, awareness-raising of the impact climate change has on children and their rights is necessary to mobilize civil society, non-state, and state actors and to push for child-centered policies and practices.
* All actions should be based on meaningful, gender-sensitive and inclusive consultations and participatory design processes that result in programs that fully address the needs of the most vulnerable.

1. *Please share any commitments and best practices for effectively engaging children or youth in climate-related decision-making processes and climate action, particularly those most impacted by climate change, and with consideration for young people of different ages, gender and social backgrounds. Please share any examples of how empowering children and youth has contributed to more effective climate action.*

It is essential that children actively participate in, and contribute to, climate change planning and implementation at local, national and international levels. Granted the opportunity to learn, to be informed, and to take part, children can be very effective agents for change. They are important actors in enhancing community’s adaptive capacities, taking action to address climate-related risks and promoting environmentally sustainable lifestyles. This potential is increasingly being recognized, which has led to a catalogue of best practices of empowering young people of different ages, gender and backgrounds from around the world.[[5]](#footnote-5)

As mentioned in Question 1, German development cooperation has been involving young people in matters related to climate change adaptation, resilience, disaster risk reduction and across climate-sensitive sectors such as health, education and water. Some examples include:

* In Algeria, a project on resource management, climate change and energy specifically ensures that the sensitization campaigns on environmental protection target and involve young people, e.g. through theater performances or interactive radio sessions.
* In cooperation with UNICEF, Germany has reached Zambian children in rural communities with a project on environmental sustainability and WASH.
* In Laos, a program on climate-related environmental education carried out informal and formal education activities to raise awareness among schoolchildren and provided youth with hands-on knowledge on environmental film making and production.

Additionally, it is an explicit goal of German development cooperation to strengthen the participation of youth and foster international youth exchange. In preparation for the COP on the Convention on Biodiversity, Germany supported international youth summits so that young people could develop common ideas and have their voices heard in global decision-making processes. Moreover, during COP22 in Paris, German Development Minister Müller met with a youth delegation to discuss the aims and role of Germany in international climate policy and encourage their continued engagement.

UNICEF’s “Unite4Climate” project in Zambia provides another best practice. This project applied a multi-level approach, through which Zambian youth were both involved in climate action on the global level, as part of the climate conference in Copenhagen, and on the community level, as 600 youth were educated to be “climate change ambassadors” for implementing campaigns and climate actions in their own communities. In addition, throughout the past years, members of the UNFCCC observer constituency of youth non-governmental organizations (YOUNGO) have brought valuable inputs to the negotiation groups, made official statements at UNFCCC and organized a number of awareness-rising activities.

Across all sectors, where children are engaged in risk reduction and resilience building actions, it is visible that whole communities benefit through increased understanding of, and action in response to, climate variability and change. Children can positively contribute through their roles as analyzers of risk, designers and implementers of climate change interventions, communicators of risk, and mobilizers of resources and action, among many others. Additionally, experiences across the globe show the value of actively targeting the participation of girls, e.g. in community disaster management planning where previously they were not considered as an important or visible part of the community. Many more examples of the positive effects from local initiatives, youth organizations, child climate ambassador programs, etc. abound. Children’s unadulterated outlook offers valuable insight and perspective – helping to challenge the status quo and bring about change. Additionally, there is a clear economic argument for investing in child-centered approaches. Since children are one of the largest groups at risk, implementing child-led measures means skills are developed across a large segment of the population and over a longer period of time. Moreover, since children are most vulnerable, the losses associated with degradation of health, education and protection caused by climate change are high. In turn, adaptation measures to protect children have the potential to offset these losses, and realize significant economic gains. Lastly, interventions engaging children are some of the lowest cost options available and are already well established (e.g. through school curricula).

Clearly, the value of investing in child-focused approaches will differ depending on the context. There is no “one size fits all” approach, and measures will have different costs and impacts depending on the context in which they are used. However, it is clear that local and national decision-makers should provide the space and resources for children to contribute to climate actions as well as to develop their own solutions to the specific local climate change impacts that affect them. Children’s involvement must be safe, meaningful and inclusive, and it must be institutionalized at different levels. The participation of young people is no longer something to which we can simply pay lip service – it is a necessity if the interests of future generations are to be safeguarded.

1. See also Question 5 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See also: WHO and UNEP (2010) “*Healthy environments for healthy children. Key messages for Action*”,<http://www.who.int/ceh/publications/hehc_booklet/en/> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. However, there is currently no latitude under the UNFCCC to specifically address these rights in a cross-cutting manner. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. This is by no means an exhaustive list and represents only some necessary actions. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See for example: United Nations Joint Framework Initiative on Children, Youth and Climate Change: Youth in action on climate change: inspirations from around the world <https://www.unicef.org/education/files/Publication_Youth_in_Action_on_Climate_Change_Inspirations_from_Around_the_World_English.pdf>; Children in a changing climate coalition, Child Rights and Climate Change Adaptation: Voices from Kenya and Cambodia <http://www.childreninachangingclimate.org/childrens-voices-from-kenya-and-cambodia.html>; Plan International, Child-Centered Disaster Risk Reduction, Building Resilience Through Participation: Lessons from Plan International <https://plan-international.org/publications/child-centred-disaster-risk-reduction>; Children in a changing climate coalition, A right to participate: Securing children’s role in climate change adaptation <http://resourcecentre.savethechildren.se/library/right-participate-securing-childrens-role-climate-change-adaptation>; Plan International, Act to Adapt: The next generation leads the way <https://plan-international.org/publications/act-adapt-child-centred-climate-change-adaptation>; United Nations Joint Framework Initiative on Children, Youth and Climate Change, Growing Together in a Changing Climate: The United Nations, Young People, and Climate Change <https://unfccc.int/cc_inet/files/cc_inet/information_pool/application/pdf/growingtogether.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)