**Recommendations for Action:**

***1. Recognise the unique needs, rights and capacities of children***

***2. Engage children in adaptation decision-making, implementation and monitoring***

***3. Provide children access to the global stage – and listen to them***

***4. Build a climate change and adaptation literate generation***

***5. Focus on the most vulnerable***

***6. Prioritise community-based adaptation***

**Children in a Changing Climate coalition**

The Children in a Changing Climate (CCC) coalition is a partnership of five leading child-centred development and humanitarian organisations: ChildFund Alliance, Plan International, Save the Children, UNICEF and World Vision International. We have a commitment to share knowledge, coordinate and work with children as agents of change, in full recognition of their capacity to prepare for and respond to shocks and stressors. The mandate of the CCC coalition is to advocate for and promote the rights of children in global agreements.

As child-centred organisations, CCC coalition members believe that addressing climate change is fundamental to safeguarding children’s rights. Strong and urgent action is required if we are to ensure our children inherit a world with greater opportunities for prosperity and wellbeing. And, with serious impacts now unavoidable, we believe that child-centred adaptation should be a key component of the global response to climate change.

While many governments and development partners, including the United Nations, have worked to address climate change, children have been under-represented in multilateral and national discussions to date. This must change if we are to enact the words contained in the Agenda 2030 agreements and empower children to create a better world. Members of the CCC coalition will continue to work with and for children to ensure their voices are heard, their needs met and their rights and capacities to act strengthened as the world strives to address the threat of climate change.

**Climate change and children**

*Climate change is happening now*

Climate change is not a challenge for the distant future. Its impacts are already being felt by the most vulnerable around the world. At least 400,000 deaths each year are directly linked to its effects.[[1]](#endnote-1) As impacts intensify, this number will rise – with those living in poverty in developing countries the most affected. Unaddressed, climate change threatens to undermine progress in poverty reduction and risks committing a third of the world’s population to a life in extreme poverty by 2050.[[2]](#endnote-2) Climate change and poverty are inextricably interlinked. As such, international goals to reduce poverty cannot be met in the absence of action on climate change.

Extreme weather events and climate-related hazards are increasing in frequency and intensity – from floods and cyclones to droughts and heatwaves[[3]](#endnote-3) – resulting not only in rising economic loss and impact, but also lasting development setbacks. For example, climate-related extreme events are often the catalyst for the spread of diseases as well as widespread malnutrition.[[4]](#endnote-4)

Understanding the context is important for developing appropriate adaptation responses as contexts evolve over time. For example, more than half of the global population now live in urban areas, many of which are characterised by rapid, unplanned development.[[5]](#endnote-5) This means that the majority of people affected by extreme weather events are now located in urban environments.[[6]](#endnote-6) Addressing the adaptation needs of children in urban areas is a significant new challenge.

In this context, it is crucial for world leaders to take bold and concerted action to support communities to adapt to the changing climate while agreeing, and establishing mechanisms, to substantially reduce greenhouse gas emissions.[[7]](#endnote-7)

Governments must take strong action to protect children from the impacts of a changing climate. Countries will need to implement their commitments without delay if we are to avoid dangerous climate change. Children need to be at the centre of implementation efforts.

*Children are disproportionately affected*

Children[[8]](#endnote-8) are among the most vulnerable groups to the impacts of climate change.[[9]](#endnote-9) In developing countries, climate change is projected to exacerbate the top five causes of death for children under five (acute respiratory illness, diarrhoea, malaria, malnutrition and neonatal deaths); including up to an 8 per cent increase in diarrhoeal disease for every 1°C temperature increase, and up to a 28 per cent increase of malaria exposure in Africa this century.[[10]](#endnote-10) The burden of climate-related diseases already falls predominately on children in developing countries and this will only worsen as impacts increase.[[11]](#endnote-11)

At its core, climate change is an issue of equity, both within the current generation and across generations.[[12]](#endnote-12) Children are the least responsible for climate change, but will be left to bear the brunt of its impacts – a future with increasingly extreme climate change effects poses challenges to sustainable development and human rights. Despite their vulnerability, children are often excluded from decision-making processes on climate change and denied access to information and resources that would help them to engage. How communities and governments plan for and respond to the impacts of climate change through policies and practical actions today will have a lasting effect on children’s futures.

*Children as agents of change*

Children are much more than passive victims of climate change – they are powerful agents of change, active at all levels, from the community, national, to international arenas. With access to knowledge and skills development, children can make a strong contribution to risk reduction, adaptation and building the resilience of their communities. Engaging and empowering children today lays the foundations for a culture of safety, risk management, and environmental sustainability. The case studies in this publication illustrate a diversity of ways in which children are engaged in and leading on climate change adaptation.

The challenge is clear. Our children’s present and future are at stake – the world is running out of time to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions and transition to a low-emission, climate resilient global society. In the face of unavoidable impacts for the next generation, child-centred adaptation is a necessary aspect of the global response.

**Why focus on children?**

In 2015, around 30 per cent of the global population was under 18 years of age.[[13]](#endnote-13) This rises to nearly 50 per cent in Least Developed Countries.[[14]](#endnote-14) There are 33 countries with a median age of 18 years or younger – all in climate-vulnerable developing countries, overwhelmingly in Africa.[[15]](#endnote-15) And, globally, there are nearly twice as many children under 15 as there are adults over 60.[[16]](#endnote-16) Despite this, children’s voices are often not heard in key decision-making forums, where their future is being shaped.

Children’s rights to participate in decisions that affect them are enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.[[17]](#endnote-17) It is essential that children actively participate in, and contribute to, adaptation planning and implementation at local, national and international levels. Young people are best placed to identify their own risks, needs and capacities. Involving children in adaptation will increase effectiveness and enhance impact, particularly at the local level.[[18]](#endnote-18)

But children can’t do it alone. They need to know their ideas and opinions will be taken seriously and that their needs and capacities will be included in adaptation planning and implementation at all levels. They need adults to fulfil their commitments to children’s rights – to ensure children have access to age-appropriate information and resources and that they are provided access to, and participation in, safe decision-making forums. Children have a right to be at the centre of decisions on issues that affect them now and shape their future. Climate change is one of those issues. Taking a child-centred approach to adaptation will ensure this happens.

**The child-centred approach to adaptation**

**Adaptation and *child-centred* adaptation**

The UNFCCC defines adaptation as ‘adjustments in ecological, social, or economic systems in response to actual or expected climatic stimuli and their effects or impacts… [resulting in] changes in processes, practices, and structures to moderate potential damages or to benefit from opportunities associated with climate change’.[[19]](#endnote-19)

Taking a child-centred approach to adaptation means:

* focusing on the specific risks faced by children in a changing climate;
* ensuring children’s needs and capacities are central to adaptation planning and implementation; and
* increasing the voice and agency of children in adaptation decision-making processes.

The child-centred approach is not only about strengthening the wellbeing of children – it is equally about working with children, young people, households, communities, local and national governments, and international organisations, to reduce or mitigate the risks that directly impact children’s lives.

The approach focuses on the particular risks girls and boys face in their specific contexts, and ensure their voices and opinions are central in the effort to build their resilience to a changing climate. As children do not form one homogenous group, and their needs and capacities differ across age, gender, geography and socio-economic status, it is important to ensure all children are able to meaningfully participate in the adaptation process.

There are two aspects of child-centred adaptation: adaptation *for* children, where the capacity of caregivers to focus on children’s needs and capacities is enhanced; and adaptation *with* children, where children are centrally involved in the decision-making, planning and implementation of adaptation at all levels.

*Mainstreaming child-centred adaptation into development*

Given the inter-linkages between climate change and poverty, measures to improve child well-being should take into account the impacts of climate change to ensure outcomes are sustainable. Governments at all levels should be integrating risk reduction and resilience building into development programmes across all sectors by mainstreaming adaptation into development processes. Research shows that development programmes are more likely to be effective if climate and disaster risks are taken into account at the very early stages of the planning cycle.[[20]](#endnote-20) Mainstreaming is proving to be among the most viable ways to ensure adaptation happens where needs are greatest.[[21]](#endnote-21)

Taking a child-centred approach to adaptation mainstreaming means:

* children are a key part of the process of identifying risks and resilience-building options when planning and implementing development programmes;
* children’s specific needs and capacities are included in the vulnerability assessments and planning processes that inform climate-smart development programmes; and
* children are included in the processes of monitoring and evaluation of programmes and initiatives that affect them

*Reducing risk, increasing resilience – seeing the benefits*

Investing in the resilience of children will pay dividends. Research shows there are economic benefits to child-centred adaptation across at least three areas:

* Low cost. Many child-centred adaptation options have low upfront costs, including insecticide-treated mosquito nets, water, sanitation and hygiene training, and disaster preparedness education.
* Economies of scale. Children represent one of the largest at risk groups. By targeting their specific needs, we have the chance to reduce the impacts of climate change across a significant proportion of the vulnerable population. Child-centred adaptation also helps children develop the skills they will need as adults in a climate-changed world.
* Economic gains. Avoiding degradation in children’s health, education and protection could substantially offset projected losses and increase communities’ ability to engage in economic activities. The cost burden for households can be reduced by adaptation actions that increase children’s health and education outcomes. Furthermore, the future pay off for ensuring children’s access to these essential services is a brighter future for not only the children themselves, but the families they will grow to establish, as well as their communities. [[22]](#endnote-22)

Across all sectors, where children are engaged in risk reduction and resilience building actions, our agencies have seen whole communities benefit through increased understanding and action on climate variability and change.

**Recommendations**

Children should be a focus of efforts to address climate change, and be active participants in the decision-making processes that shape their present and future. The Children in a Changing Climate coalition call on governments to commit to six priority actions in the implementation of their climate change related commitments.

***1. Recognise the unique needs, rights and capacities of children***

Child-centred approaches to adaptation should be included prominently in local and national climate change and development planning processes. Existing adaptation policies, guidelines and strategies should be reviewed to ensure that children are visible, that their rights are being respected, and that the root causes of girls’ and boys’ vulnerability are addressed. Newly developed plans should include child-centred approaches and ensure that children’s rights are integrated into policy implementation.

***2. Engage children in adaptation decision-making, implementation and monitoring***

Children are capable of developing and implementing innovative solutions to complex problems. Local and national decision-makers should provide the space and resources for children to contribute to adaptation actions as well as to develop their own solutions to the specific local climate change impacts that affect them. Children’s views and ideas, and their right to participate in decisions that affect them, must be respected.

***3. Provide children access to the global stage – and listen to them***

As countries implement commitments under Agenda 2030 children should be closely engaged in the design, implementation and monitoring of actions. Children’s monitoring role should include a facility through which they are able to report back to future platforms to help the numerous 2030 Agenda policies track progress and promote cross-learning between nations.

***4. Build a climate change and adaptation literate generation***

Under Article 6 of the UNFCCC, governments have agreed that educating, empowering and engaging all stakeholders, including children and young people, is an essential part of the response to climate change. Climate change and risk reduction education helps increase the adaptive capacity of children and their communities, fosters environmental stewardship and contributes to effective adaptation actions. Increasing children’s understanding of the risks of climate change empowers them to influence decisions that affect their safety and wellbeing. Governments should work to integrate climate change and adaptation into school curricula and ensure teacher training programmes include up-to-date and locally-relevant climate change information.

***5. Focus on the most vulnerable***

Adaptation efforts should focus on the most vulnerable groups, including children.. Actions should be based on meaningful, gender-sensitive and inclusive consultations and participatory design processes that result in programmes that fully address the needs of the most vulnerable. Adaptation funding allocations should be based on need, with more funding flowing to local level actions in particularly vulnerable communities and high-risk areas.

***6. Prioritise community-based adaptation***

Governments should prioritise local-level adaptation actions when framing and implementing National Adaptation Plans. Adaptation needs are greatest at the local level, where vulnerable people will be most affected. To date, the majority of adaptation funding has flowed to national-level projects. It is critical that funding for community-based adaptation is significantly scaled up to address priority needs and start closing the adaptation deficit. The specific needs, rights and capacities of children should also feature prominently in local-level vulnerability assessments and community responses.

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Children in a Changing Climate Coalition website: [**http://www.childreninachangingclimate.org/**](http://www.childreninachangingclimate.org/)

**Annex: Recommendations for Action for the Committee for Children’s Rights and the Environment**

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