

Summary:

Pursuant to Human Rights Council (HRC) resolution 32/33, OHCHR submitted an analytical study on the relationship between climate change and the full enjoyment of the rights of the child to the thirty-fifth session of the Council. Inputs from States, civil society organizations, international organizations and national human rights institutions were summarized in a conference room paper prepared in advance of the HRC panel discussion on climate change and children's rights in March 2017. The panel discussion, the written submissions, and independent research informed the analytical study.

The study examines the impacts of climate change on children and the related human rights obligations and responsibilities of States and other actors, including the elements of a child rights-based approach to climate action. It provides examples of good practices and concludes with several recommendations.

Key Findings

Children are disproportionately impacted by climate change due to their unique metabolism, physiology and developmental needs. The negative impacts of climate change, including the increasing frequency and intensity of natural disasters, changing precipitation patterns, food and water shortages, and the increased transmission of communicable diseases, threaten the enjoyment by children of their rights to health, life, food, water and sanitation, education, housing, culture, and development, among others. Climate change heightens existing social and economic inequalities, intensifies poverty and reverses progress towards improvement in children's well-being. All children are exceptionally vulnerable to the negative impacts of climate change, with the youngest children being most at risk.

Climate change also has a disproportionate impact on children with disabilities, children on the move, poor children, children separated from their families, and indigenous children. And girls may face heightened risks due to climate change. Some of the key impacts of climate change that affect the enjoyment of children's rights include the following:

- **Extreme weather events and natural disasters:** Climate change increases the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events and natural disasters. The immediate impacts of this include increased morbidity and mortality amongst children. Other effects include increased vulnerability to abuse, child labour, trafficking and other forms of exploitation, and decreased access to food, water and basic services such as healthcare and education. Globally, approximately 160 million children inhabit areas at risk of drought, 500 million children live in flood zones, and 115 million children are highly exposed to cyclone risk.
- **Water scarcity and food insecurity:** Climate change is already impacting water and food supplies. Shortages of safe drinking water and food will have disproportionate impacts on children, particularly the poor. For example, it is estimated that, by 2030, climate change will result in an additional 7.5 million children under the age of 5 who are moderately or severely stunted.
- **Air pollution:** In 2012 approximately 700,000 children under 5 years of age died of causes related to air pollution. Climate change can exacerbate air pollution by intensifying the toxicity of air pollutants and increasing the frequency of wildfires and droughts.
- **Vector-borne and infectious diseases:** Climate change can contribute to the spread of diseases such as malaria, dengue, Zika, leptospirosis, viral infections, meningitis, varicella, viral hepatitis, leishmaniasis and pertussis. By 2030 it is estimated that climate change will result in the death of an additional 48,000 children less than 15 years of age from diarrhoeal diseases.
- **Impacts on mental health:** Climate change and the impacts of traumatic stress connected to climate change, such as war/insecurity, sexual and physical violence and witnessing deaths and injury related to extreme weather disasters, increase the susceptibility of children to PTSD, anxiety, suicidal ideation and depression. Children may also suffer from anxiety related to fear of separation from their families and are more at risk of abuse and exploitation as a result of their family losing its livelihood due to climate related events.

States must protect children's rights from the negative impacts of climate change

Human rights commitments contained in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Paris Agreement make clear that States have affirmative obligations to take action to protect the rights and best interests of the child from the actual and foreseeable adverse effects of climate change. Failure to take adequate steps to prevent children from suffering foreseeable climate-related human rights harms breaches these obligations.

States must:

- Ensure climate mitigation and adaptation measures are the product of participatory, evidence-based decision-making processes that take into account the ideas and best interests of children as expressed by children themselves;
- Take ambitious measures to minimize the future negative impacts of climate change on children by limiting global warming to no more than 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels; and
- Focus adaptation measures on protecting those children most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

Examples of Good Practice

During consultations, stakeholders highlighted several good practices including:

- **Educational and consultative policies** that engage children with issues related to climate change, the environment and disaster risk reduction.
- **Disaster risk reduction policies** that protect children and ensure their participation in the context of emergency response.
- **Litigation** aimed at promoting accountability for the negative impacts of climate change on the rights of children and future generations.
- **Engagement by human rights mechanisms** on the issue of climate change and its impacts on children's rights.

Key Recommendations

To fulfil children's rights, governments, civil society, the private sector, international partners and individuals must collaborate to protect the environment and achieve sustainable development that meets the needs of present and future generations. Immediate action should be taken to address the impacts of climate change on the full and effective enjoyment of the rights of the child. States should, inter alia:

- Ensure children's rights considerations are integrated in their climate, disaster risk reduction and development activities. Efforts should be taken to link actions, positions and processes related to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Human Rights Council, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 in order to establish a coherent approach to sustainable development that benefits all persons, particularly children.
- Empower children to participate in climate policymaking including through climate change education and consultative mechanisms.
- Guarantee that children have access to effective remedies when they suffer harm from climate actions and inactions including by businesses.
- Improve understanding of the relationship between climate change and children's rights by collecting disaggregated data, conducting impact assessments, promoting intersectoral cooperation, and establishing consultative and reporting mechanisms focussed on the rights of children.
- Mobilise adequate resources domestically and through international cooperation for effective climate action that benefits children, particularly those most affected by climate change.