

SUBMISSION BY THE AFRICAN COMMITTEE OF EXPERTS ON THE RIGHTS AND WELFARE OF THE CHILD (ACERWC) WORKING GROUP ON CLIMATE CHANGE AND CHILDREN IN AFRICA

TO

THE BONN CLIMATE CHANGE CONFERENCE 2024 (SB60)

Climate change and the rights of the African child

Background

At the 60th sessions of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Subsidiary Bodies (SB60) in Bonn, parties will convene to set out the groundwork for decisions to be made at COP29 in Azerbaijan on central topic of significance to the African Child such as climate technology mechanisms, climate finance, capacity building, climate awareness and access to information. Also, a new platform named Expert dialogue on the disproportionate impacts of climate change on children and relevant policy solutions will feature at the SB60 for the first time in the history of the UNFCCC process.

1. Introduction

Based on the preamble of the Paris Agreement, parties have agreed that States should, when taking climate action, respect, promote and consider the rights of children, as well as intergenerational equity. Despite this, children – forming one-third of the global population, and half of those living in extreme poverty – are often overlooked in countries' responses to climate change, and in deliberations and guidance emanating from the intergovernmental UNFCCC process. Compared to adults, children in Africa require more food and water per unit of their body weight, are less able to survive extreme weather events, and are more susceptible to temperature changes and diseases, among other factors.

According to UNICEF's Children's Climate Risk Index (CCRI), children in Africa are subject to "extraordinarily high levels of exposure and vulnerability to the effects of climate change and environmental degradation".¹ A disproportionately large number- 25 of the 33 countries that have been ranked as "extremely high risk" for children - are in Africa. Diseases like malaria which are exacerbated by climate change affect African children more than any other demographic group, followed by pregnant women (which inevitably also affects the unborn child).² In 2017, '93% of global malaria deaths occurred in Africa'.³ In addition to worsening the prevalence rate of malaria, warming in highland areas of Africa led to malaria carrying mosquitos to expand to those areas, thereby endangering new groups of population who were never faced with this challenge and hence are ill prepared to adopt.⁴ During the Africa Climate Summit in September 2023, it was acknowledged that Africa accounts for 44% of all severe droughts recorded globally in the

¹ UNICEF "Time to Act: African Children in the Climate Change Spotlight" (2023)

² World Metrological Organization 'State of the Climate in Africa' (2019) 24.

³ World Metrological Organization 'State of the Climate in Africa' (2019) 24.

⁴ World Metrological Organization 'State of the Climate in Africa' (2019) 24.

past century. According to UNICEF, out of the total of 19.7 million child displacements due to floods throughout the world between the years 2016 and 2021, Somalia, Ethiopia, South Sudan, Nigeria and Sudan feature in the top 10 countries in absolute numbers. Additionally, a total of 1.3 million child displacements took place due to droughts between 2017-2021 with Somalia, Ethiopia, Angola, Burundi, Madagascar and South Sudan featuring on the top 10 in absolute terms list.

Climate change impacts, as listed above, have implications for the rights of children in Africa, recognized in the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, including the right to education, the right to health, the right to food and nutrition, the right to water, the right to recreation, the right to housing, the right to a family life, protection from abuse and violence and the right to survival and development. A child rights-based approach with standards and principles that prioritize the best interests of the child, non-discrimination, survival and development, equity, social and climate justice, and inclusivity, are integral to ensuring that the decisions at the SB60 lead to more effective and sustainable outcomes in the interest of the African Child.

2. Climate technology and financial mechanisms

Children in Africa are growing up where the effects of climate change hit the hardest. While increasing extreme weather events worldwide such as heatwaves, hurricanes and wildfires as a result of climate change underline the crucial importance of innovative adaptation technologies, the African Child remains at the periphery of the design and benefits of climate change technology mechanisms. We submit that this development needs to urgently change so that they may have a central role in driving and benefiting from innovative climate technologies to adapt to the impacts of climate change.

Furthermore, while there are various funds being discussed and operationalized to address climate change, especially, to empower populations to adapt to climate change,

children in Africa are not direct beneficiaries of these funds. A numerical indication of this gap can be found in climate finance. The total annual climate finance flows in Africa for 2020, domestic and international, were only USD 30 billion, or 12% of the amount needed.⁵ What is more concerning is that even the grossly inadequate international climate finance does not prioritize children. Latest data by UNICEF shows that only 2.4 per cent of the multilateral climate funds (MCF) allocated to projects that are child responsive.⁶

Hence, we call upon states to ensure that funds such as the Adaptation Fund and Loss and Damage Fund are implemented to reach children for building resilience and cope with adverse consequences of climate change. Significantly, upscaled public finance provision from developed to developing countries based on the needs of developing countries and children, and using a rights-based approach must be at the core of discussion and negotiations.

3. Climate change and capacity building

Capacity building is often, if not always, essential components of climate change adaptation initiatives. The capacity and capability of the African Child to cope with climate change will only improve if the resilience of social services that these children rely upon is safeguarded in the climate debate and negotiations. Hence, it is imperative that at SB 60 attention of states is turned to increasing investment in climate adaptation and resilience in key services for children in Africa, such as access to resilient water, sanitation and hygiene, climate-smart health services, resilient schools and education systems and climate-responsive social safety nets.

⁵ Climate Change “Forecast for Africa 2024” (2024) <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/climate-change-foresight-africa-2024/>

⁶ <https://www.unicef.org/esa/documents/time-to-act>

4. Children and climate change education and public awareness

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) supports the widely held view that formal education, public awareness, and training are all critical elements in community response to the challenges of climate change. A Report issued by UNICEF, Exploring the impact of climate change on children in South Africa, confirmed that children are willing and able to confront issues related to climate change that have an impact on their own well-being and that of their communities.⁷ Accordingly, adequate financial support should be made available to enable States in Africa integrate climate change awareness projects and programmes into their curriculum. Children should be regarded as an agent of change and involved in awareness about climate change issues in their communities.

5. Children and access to information

Investing more into climate education of children is necessary to boost their access to information. States should consider investing in gadgets for all children that go to school. We are moving into the digital age where blended learning is now being integrated into most schools; children in Africa should not have to suffer to get ahold of a gadget that will positively contribute to their awareness and knowledge in the context of climate change. Gadgets should be specifically designed for educational purposes on climate change. They could also develop a platform where children can write and publish articles from their perspective and lived experiences on climate change and make such a platform easy and free to access. Furthermore, investments in low-tech and low-cost information and communication gadgets should be prioritized so as to insure inclusion of majority of African children. Child-friendly information regarding climate change should be included in media outlets with widest coverage, primarily radio.

⁷. https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/141178/SAF_resources_climatesummary.pdf

6. Recommendations for SB60

Based on the foregoing, the ACERWC wishes to submit following recommendations to the SB60.

6.1 The ACERWC urges parties to use this opportunity to advance specific and actionable recommendations on how climate policies and action at all levels can be informed by a child rights-based approach to climate action in Africa, especially as highlighted by the ACERWC in [Resolution N° 18/2022](#) of its working group on children's rights and climate change. The resolution called upon states to ensure that the specific risks faced by children and the full spectrum of their rights are considered in the development and implementation of climate policies and programmes.

6.2 African states should prioritize child-centered adaptation efforts in order to protect children from the adverse impacts of climate change and put in place mechanism to address loss and damage. The international community in general and countries with significant historical contribution to GHG emissions, should discharge their obligation for international cooperation under the UNCRC by partnering with African States in increasing finance and resource for adaptation and by establishing effective loss and damage mechanisms that are guided by human rights.

6.3 States should be guided by the principle of the best interest of the child, as the primary consideration, in all climate action directly or indirectly affecting children. This should include the short term, medium term and long-term best interest of children, in relation to grave impacts of climate change that are already manifesting and the future impacts predicted by the best available knowledge and scientific evidence.

- 6.4 States should note CRC [General Comment No. 26 \(2023\)](#) on children's rights and the environment, as well as the provisions spelt out by, the [Maastricht Principles on the Human Rights of Future Generations \(2023\)](#), which require States to respect children's human rights in the present as well as in the future.
- 6.5 States should significantly upscale climate finance to Africa, in the form of grants, and not loans, to meet the needs of children. Climate finance in Africa should be primarily targeted to adaptation and loss and damage.
- 6.6 States should uphold the right of children in Africa to participate in climate action by opening up the civic space for their involvement in effective climate action and climate-related and environmental decision-making.
- 6.7 States should publicly recognize the crucial role of children of Africa as environmental human rights defenders and respect, protect and fulfill their rights by guaranteeing a safe and enabling environment for them to carry out their essential work.
- 6.8 States should take tangible measures to ensure the meaningful and effective participation of children of Africa, especially those most affected and marginalized, in climate-related and environmental decision-making at local, national, continental and global levels.