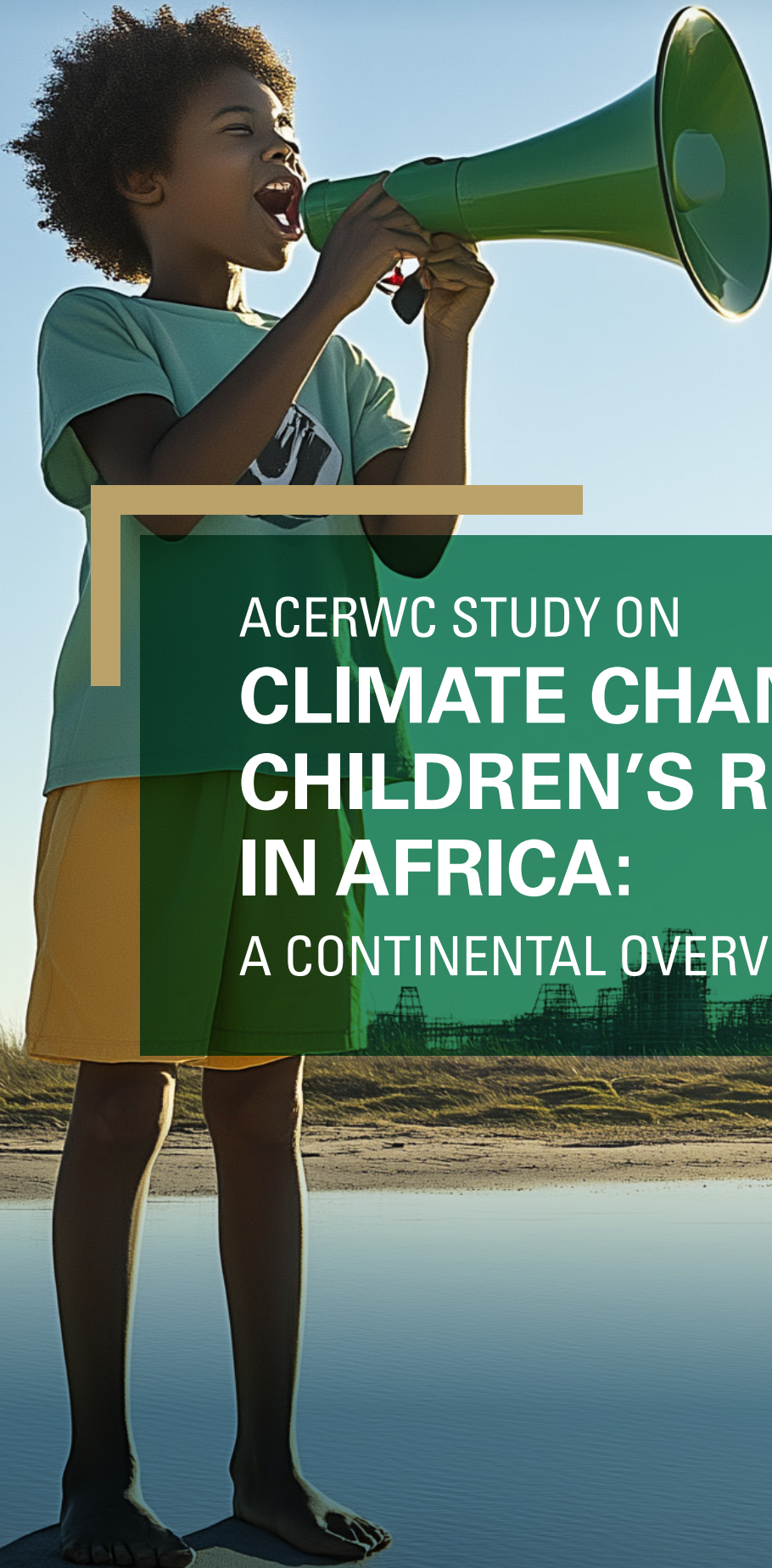




**ACERWC**  
African Committee of Experts on  
the Rights and Welfare of the Child



ACERWC STUDY ON  
**CLIMATE CHANGE &  
CHILDREN'S RIGHTS  
IN AFRICA:**  
A CONTINENTAL OVERVIEW

An Organ of the

**African  
Union**

# SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



“the climate crisis is ...  
an African child rights crisis.”

## BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The climate crisis is accelerating, and contributing to the violations of the rights of the child in Africa in an unprecedented manner. This necessitated the urgent need to understand the nexus between climate change and child rights in Africa, and the need to devise interventions. Accordingly, the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child decided to commission a continental study on link between climate change and children’s rights in Africa, and adopted the report of the Study during its 42nd Ordinary Session, November 2023.

The study examines the intersection between climate change and children’s rights in Africa, highlighting the disproportionate impact on children due to their vulnerability. It underscores the urgency of climate action, linking it to human rights obligations under the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC). The study provides an evidence-based analysis of climate change’s effects on child rights, identify gaps in legal and policy frameworks, and recommends actions for African governments and other stakeholders. The findings of the study underline that climate change will continue to erode fundamental child rights, if urgent action is not taken.



## KEY FINDINGS AND REFLECTIONS

### 1. CLIMATE CHANGE AS AN AFRICAN CHILD-RIGHTS CRISIS

Climate change induced and exacerbated extreme weather and natural disasters such as water scarcity, food insecurity, air pollution, increase in vector-borne and infectious diseases etc all have negative impacts on overall wellbeing and development of children. These effects are more pronounced on children given their physical and cognitive vulnerabilities; unique pathways of exposure and sensitivity to climate hazards, their immature physiology and metabolism, and high intake of air, food, and water relative to their body weight as compared with adults. Climate change is a “threat multiplier”; in general, children’s vulnerability to harm, exploitation and violence increases in the context of disasters that are climate induced. Of the 33 countries ranked by UNICEF as ‘extremely high risk’ for children, 25 are in Africa, making the continent a focal point for climate-induced child-rights crises.

According to the findings of the study, droughts and floods are the two main climate change related disasters that affect the rights of the child in Africa the most. Droughts have affected more than 1.4 billion people between 2000-2019, with Africa being home to the highest number of droughts, 134, where 70 of which happened in East Africa. The predictions indicate that by 2040, one in four children will be living in areas with extreme water shortages, a majority of whom will be in Africa. Africa accounts for 44% of all severe droughts recorded globally in the past century. On the other hand, during 2022, the Republic of Congo, Chad, Liberia, Nigeria, and Niger were some of the most affected countries in the world due to floods. 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. A similar analysis can be shared in respect of droughts as 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.



#### **44% SEVERE DROUGHTS**

**AFRICA ACCOUNTS FOR 44% OF ALL SEVERE DROUGHTS RECORDED GLOBALLY IN THE PAST CENTURY.**

## 2. CLIMATE-CHANGE INDUCED VIOLATIONS OF CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

**Right to Life, Survival and Development:** Droughts and floods, the most severe climate events in Africa, directly threaten children's lives and well-being. The number of climate-related child deaths continues to rise due to exposure to extreme weather conditions. Studies estimate that children make up about 80% of the total deaths caused by climate-related disasters globally. For instance, flooding in Nigeria in 2022 resulted in over 600 deaths, many of them children. Furthermore, climate change is exacerbating children's food insecurity, particularly in climate-vulnerable regions. Even meeting the Paris Climate Agreement goal of keeping rising temperatures to 1.5 degrees of pre-industrial levels is not going to guarantee adequate food security and therefore, preparing for worsening food insecurity and extreme weather events would be needed. According to UNICEF, 58% of children under five in Africa suffer from stunted growth due to chronic malnutrition, a problem worsened by climate-induced food shortages.

**Right to health:** Climate change increases exposure to vector-borne diseases, respiratory illnesses due to pollution, and malnutrition from food insecurity. The spread of malaria, dengue fever, and respiratory ailments is exacerbated by climate change. For instance, in Mozambique, malaria cases have surged following severe flooding events. As a result, climate change puts into question almost all the objectives of the right to health recognized in Article 14 of the ACRWC: namely reducing infant and child mortality; providing adequate nutrition and safe drinking water; and developing preventive health services or combating disease and malnutrition.

**Right to Education:** Climate change disrupts schooling due to displacement, infrastructure damage, and increased household economic burdens. Schools are frequently destroyed in climate disasters, and children, particularly girls, drop out due to food and water scarcity. UNICEF reports that more than 2 million children in Africa are at risk of dropping out of school due to climate-related disasters. This not only impacts their right to education but also limits their future opportunities, perpetuating cycles of poverty. In South Sudan, prolonged flooding in 2021 submerged over 200 schools, leaving thousands of children without access to education.

**Right to Protection from Violence:** Climate disasters heighten risks of child trafficking, forced labour, and child marriage, particularly for girls. The lack of safe housing for displaced families increases children's vulnerability to exploitation and abuse. In Madagascar, prolonged droughts have forced families to migrate, exposing children to increased risks of child labour and trafficking.

**Right to Social Protection:** Existing social safety nets are inadequate to shield children from climate-induced economic shocks. Cash transfer and food aid programs are insufficient to meet growing needs, leaving many children vulnerable. In Kenya, the government's Hunger Safety Net Program (HSNP) provides financial aid to drought-affected families, but it remains underfunded.

### 3. DISPLACEMENT AND MIGRATION

The number of climate-induced displacements in Africa is rapidly increasing. Floods, droughts, and rising sea levels force families to migrate in search of safety, often leading to children becoming internally displaced or refugees. Displacement disrupts children's access to education, healthcare, and protection, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation, trafficking, and abuse. Countries like Somalia, Ethiopia, and South Sudan are frequently affected by droughts and floods, with children constituting a significant portion of the displaced populations. According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), over 2.6 million children were displaced by climate-related disasters Africa in 2021.



**2.6 MILLION**  
CHILDREN WERE DISPLACED BY  
CLIMATE-RELATED DISASTERS  
AFRICA IN 2021.

## 4. THE VICIOUS CYCLE OF DEBT AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Many African countries are burdened by high external debt, which limits their ability to invest in climate resilience and child welfare programs. Research indicates that over 38 of the 63 most climate-vulnerable countries, including Niger, Chad, Rwanda, Uganda, Kenya, Mozambique, and Ghana, are forced to spend a significant portion of their revenue on debt servicing rather than public services. More than two-thirds of climate finance arrives in the form of loans, which exacerbate existing debt crises and force countries into austerity measures that reduce spending on essential services like health and education. Countries such as Ghana and Ethiopia have struggled to balance climate adaptation projects with debt repayment, limiting the scope of child-focused interventions. While in Zambia, debt servicing consumes a large share of national revenue, reducing available funds for climate adaptation projects. The vicious debt cycle is exacerbated by the severely inadequate climate finance for mitigation, adaptation and loss and damage flowing to Africa. The lack of climate finance forces African governments to divert funds from essential services like health and education, deepening the crisis.



## 5. INSTITUTIONAL AND LEGAL GAPS

The integration of children's rights in climate policies and adaptation plans are severely limited in the continent. The following are key among the various gaps identified.

- Lack of climate-specific child protection frameworks, leaving children without adequate legal protection.
- Lack of incorporation of child rights considerations in climate policies such as Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) and others.
- Weak child participation mechanisms in climate decision-making, preventing children from advocating for their rights and influencing policies that impact them.
- Insufficient legal frameworks for access to environmental information, which is essential for community preparedness and response.
- Limited access to justice for children in the context of climate change cases owing to four elements- restrictive standing criteria, periods of limitation, lack of access to information, and cost.

Many African countries rank low on the Environmental Democracy Index (EDI), reflecting weak legal frameworks for public access to climate information. Without transparent disclosure of environmental risks, communities, including children, are unable to prepare for or mitigate climate-related disasters. Restrictions on climate information sharing in several countries prevent communities from receiving timely and accurate updates, exacerbating their vulnerability to climate shocks.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- Prioritize child-rights based adaptation, loss and damage mechanisms, and climate finance in the African context.
- Prioritize addressing drought, floods, temperature increases, and other major hazards in Africa.
- Climate governance should integrate scientific evidence with indigenous knowledge and prioritize harm prevention.
- Climate change responses must consider intersectionality across sex, race, disability, and socio-economic status.

## RECOMMENDATIONS TO MEMBER STATES

- African countries that are categorized to be at extremely high risk and high risk by UNICEF's Children's Climate Risk Index should consider declaring a climate emergency and adopt urgent action to address the grave impacts of climate change to children in their jurisdictions.

## INTEGRATION OF CHILD RIGHTS IN CLIMATE GOVERNANCE

- States should embed child rights in climate policies, such as NDCs, NAPs, and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) plans, with a focus on adaptation.
- Strengthen collaboration among child-rights actors in climate governance.
- States should implement child protection frameworks to prevent harm from climate action.
- Enforce laws regulating fossil fuel industries to protect child rights.



## **ACCESS TO JUSTICE AND NON-DISCRIMINATION**

- Review laws to ensure children have effective remedies for climate-related rights violations.
- Strengthen access to justice, focusing on legal standing and support for climate-affected children.
- Ensure climate measures respect children with disabilities through tailored interventions.
- Recognize Indigenous Peoples' land rights for sustainable climate measures.

## **PARTICIPATION, PROTECTION, AND PROVISION**

- Enhance child participation in design and implementation of climate policies.
- Ensure decisions consider both short-term and long-term best interest of children.
- Include climate change education in curricula and promote sustainable practices in schools.
- Support peer-led climate education and integrate climate change with child protection, including addressing violence and armed conflict.
- Improve air quality regulations and reduce children's exposure to pollutants.
- Ensure resilient services like health, water, and sanitation in climate-affected areas.
- Provide life-saving services to children in extreme weather-affected regions.

## **DATA COLLECTION**

- Collect disaggregated data on the impact of climate change on children, focusing on key concerns.
- Develop a database on children displaced by climate change to ensure access to services.

## RECOMMENDATIONS TO OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

- The African Union Commission should prioritize children's rights in climate initiatives and coordinate relevant bodies for climate governance.
- Regional Economic Communities should collaborate on cross-border climate issues like droughts and floods.
- Development partners must adopt a human-rights approach in cooperating with African states on climate action .
- Civil Society Organizations should focus on integrating climate impacts into children's rights and welfare programs.
- National Human Rights Institutions should build evidence and undertake advocacy on the link between climate change and children's rights.



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