

Policy Briefing SB60 & the Expert Dialogue on Children and Climate Change

Background

Children are profoundly and disproportionately impacted by climate change due to their unique physiological and developmental characteristics. For example, a staggering 88% of the global disease burden associated with climate change is [borne by children](#) under the age of 5. Those living in poverty, the youngest (under five years of age), displaced children, adolescent girls and children living with disabilities face the most serious climate consequences. These risks imperil development gains for children over the years and deepen the inequities they face around the world. At the same time, a [large body of evidence](#) confirms that protecting child development outcomes is both cost-effective and critical for strengthening human capital and the resilience of communities more broadly.

Parties to the Paris Agreement 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 – comprising 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. According to indicators developed by UNICEF to assess child-sensitivity in Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), [less than half](#) meet this threshold, and just [2.4 per cent](#) of key global climate funds can be classified as supporting programmes specifically targeting children.

In this context, under the outcome of the first global stocktake, Parties requested the Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI) to hold an **expert dialogue on children and climate change at its 60th session to discuss the disproportionate impacts of climate change on children and relevant policy solutions in this regard**, engaging relevant United Nations entities, international organizations and non-governmental organizations in this effort (Decision 1/CMA.5, para. 182). The tentative date for the dialogue is 4 June. On 25 April 2024, the SBI Chair issued a [call for inputs](#), inviting Parties and observers to share their experience in, and examples of, the disproportionate impacts of climate change on children and relevant policy solutions, no later than three weeks before the dialogue.

Executive Summary

The Expert Dialogue on children and climate change marks a historic milestone, as the first instance in the 30-year history of the UNFCCC that the unique and acute vulnerabilities of children are considered under the process. UNICEF strongly encourages Parties to use this opportunity to advance specific and actionable recommendations on how climate policies and action at all levels can be informed by, and address, the disproportionate impacts of climate change on children and uphold [children's right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment](#). This briefing identifies entry points for Parties' consideration with respect to NDCs and National Adaptation Plans (NAPs), as well as UNFCCC agenda items on mitigation, adaptation, loss and damage, climate finance, just transition, action for climate empowerment and gender.

In particular, the briefing underscores the need for a follow-up process from the Dialogue to COP29 and beyond. For the sake of the world's 2.4 billion children and future generations, it is essential to maintain focus and momentum, the sharing of good practices and capacity building of Parties on the integration of children's distinct needs and perspectives in climate policies, actions, and finance.

Key Recommendations for the Expert Dialogue and SB60 Negotiations

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Adaptation

Drastic emissions cuts are vital, but children are already experiencing climate-related harm, and urgent adaptation to address these impacts is critical. This involves enhancing the climate resilience of essential services that are critical for children’s survival, development and health, including water, sanitation, health, education, nutrition and child and social protection services. Children’s continuous access to functioning essential services before, during and after climate-related shocks is a cornerstone for broader community resilience. Research indicates that meeting [nearly 70% of SDG targets](#) by 2030 entails implementing adaptation measures.

The expert dialogue and negotiations on adaptation during SB60 can recommend:

- The development of [child-sensitive metrics](#) under the UAE Framework for Global Climate Resilience, particularly in relation to its thematic targets for climate-resilient social sectors, as well as children’s participation. Consideration of the education sector, human mobility and mental health are also critical for addressing impacts on children.
- That work by the Least Developed Countries Expert Group (LEG) to update technical guidelines for the National Adaptation Plan process integrates guidance and tools for addressing the specific needs and perspectives of children at all stages of the adaptation policy cycle.
- The rollout of inclusive, child-responsive multi-hazard early warning systems to ensure children and their communities are protected.
- The collection and use of age-, gender- and disability-disaggregated and child-specific data as part of national adaptation plans and strategies, as well as in reporting via Adaptation Communications and other national reporting.
- A participatory approach to adaptation, guided by principles for locally-led adaptation, including the perspectives of children, particularly those from marginalized groups.

Loss and Damage

Loss and damage caused by the climate crisis is one of the greatest intergenerational injustices that children face today. Forms of [loss and damage incurred by children](#) include heightened rates of mortality and irreversible climate-related impacts on their cognitive and physical development, mental health, education, and exposure to violence, exploitation and abuse, amongst others.

The expert dialogue and negotiations on loss and damage during SB60 can recommend:

- Greater attention to the disproportionate impacts of economic and non-economic loss and damage on children in the third review of the Warsaw International Mechanism (WIM), including the work of its thematic expert groups, and the Santiago Network.
- Incorporation of child rights as a guiding principle for all loss and damage finance.

- The deployment of new and additional funding for loss and damage, provided as grants rather than loans, targeting and accessible to children and their communities (Decision 5/CMA.5, Annex II, para 18), and tailored to address children’s heightened and context-specific climate vulnerabilities.
- Significant allocation of targeted funding to rebuilding and recovering child-critical services including education, health, nutrition, water and sanitation, child protection and adaptive social protection, and inclusion of child-specific indicators in monitoring and evaluation.
- Development of effective social, environmental and human rights safeguards and mechanisms to ensure access to justice for children and families to hold financial contributors and implementing entities accountable. These safeguards should include processes for child rights impact assessments.
- The meaningful engagement of children in all their diversity in design, implementation and monitoring of loss and damage responses (Decision 5/CMA.5, Annex I, paras 29, 62).
- That funding and plans to *address* loss and damage are coordinated with redoubled efforts to *avert and minimize* loss and damage through investing in child-responsive early warning and anticipatory action, adaptive social protection, effective humanitarian action, disaster risk management and broader adaptation and mitigation strategies and financing.

Mitigation

The transition to renewable energy is urgent and critical for children. A child born in 2020 will experience a [two-to-sevenfold increase](#) in extreme events, particularly heatwaves, compared with people born in 1960, under current climate policy pledges. Furthermore, ambitious mitigation action can deliver significant co-benefits for children. Outdoor and indoor air pollution, linked to the burning of fossil fuels, vehicle emissions, the burning of waste and the use of coal and wood for cooking and heating, are directly linked to pneumonia and other respiratory diseases that account for [nearly one in 10](#) under-five deaths.

The expert dialogue and negotiations on mitigation during SB60 can recommend:

- An urgent and equitable phase out of fossil fuels and investment in renewable energy, energy storage and energy efficiency, based on the best available science.
- Enhanced attention to children’s needs and perspectives in mitigation action, including through the Sharm el-Sheikh mitigation ambition and implementation work programme and the revision of countries’ NDCs, including efforts to harness co-benefits of mitigation for children’s survival, development and health.
- Greater attention to emissions reductions across social sector infrastructure and services, including sanitation and wastewater treatment processes as an overlooked but important source of methane and nitrous oxide.

Climate Finance

Research from the Children’s Environmental Rights Initiative (CERI) coalition presenting the first-ever child-focused review of allocations by Multilateral Climate Funds serving the UNFCCC finds that over a 17-year period, [just 2.4% of climate finance](#) from these can be categorised as supporting projects incorporating child-responsive elements. Some funders have recognized this critical gap and are undertaking encouraging efforts. For example, the Green Climate Fund is actively working with partners to bridge the climate finance gap for children in the areas of health and education. The World Bank has highlighted the [large body of evidence](#) that investment in protecting child development outcomes is both cost-effective and critical for strengthening human capital and the resilience of communities more broadly. In particular, [less than 10%](#) of all climate finance is allocated to adaptation, with funding well below the estimated [US\\$ 212 billion per year](#) needed by developing countries through 2030 alone.

The expert dialogue and negotiations on climate finance during SB60 can recommend:

- The urgent provision of scaled-up climate finance, placing children and child-critical social services at the forefront of such efforts. Climate finance should be new and additional and delivered primarily in the form of grants, particularly for adaptation and loss and damage.
- That the **new collective quantified goal (NCQG)**:
 - Prioritizes the human rights of people and communities on the frontlines of climate change, including the rights of children, Indigenous Peoples, gender equality and intergenerational equity, as guiding principles.
 - Incorporates a qualitative goal on delivering child- and gender-responsive climate finance at the scale required.
 - Delivers an urgent increase in finance for adaptation through a dedicated thematic sub-goal, prioritizing climate resilient child-critical essential services. Specifically, the NCQG should allocate significant funds towards the thematic targets agreed under the UAE Framework for Global Climate Resilience on health, water and sanitation, food security and nutrition, and adaptive social protection. Children's education and child protection must also be prioritised.
 - Incorporates a dedicated thematic sub-goal on loss and damage finance, prioritizing funds to rebuilding and recovering child-critical essential services.
- That the **Standing Committee on Finance** considers the role and benefits of child- and gender-responsive climate finance for accelerating climate action and resilience, including through its technical reports, the SCF Forum, its workplan and associated reporting, and engagement with frontline communities, ensuring that climate finance addresses the needs of the most vulnerable children in different regions.
- That the **long-term climate finance goal** and the assessment of developing countries' needs and priorities consider children's disproportionate vulnerabilities and specific needs, including climate-resilient essential services.
- Issuing clear **guidance to the GCF, Adaptation Fund, the GEF, the Loss and Damage Fund and Multilateral Development Banks** on the need to adopt/integrate child-responsive provisions in their policies, strategies and technical implementation guidance, including child-specific objectives, associated indicators, reporting requirements and safeguards at all stages of the project cycle. Instituting a child marker to rate the contribution of activities to child-responsive outcomes would be an important step.
- Integrating the **meaningful engagement and participation of children** in all their diversity, in climate finance decision-making processes at all stages and levels.

Just Transition

A just transition must prioritize the future and livelihoods of all community members, especially children. No child must be left behind. The transition must not only do no harm, but actively enhance the enjoyment of children's rights. Additionally, the substantial contributions made by caregivers, a pivotal part of our care economy, must not be overlooked.

The expert dialogue and negotiations on just transition during SB60 can recommend:

- That just transition pathways include specific provisions for protecting and promoting children's rights, focusing on the socio-economic impacts of climate policies on children, particularly those from marginalized and disadvantaged groups.
- The role of adaptive social protection in supporting families during workforce transitions and protecting child rights, including prevention of child labour.
- Investment in children's climate education and green skills, and youth training and employment opportunities in emerging green sectors.

- Explicit inclusion of children, families and community representatives in participatory approaches to just transitions.
- Access to effective remedies for children and families affected by climate policies or transitions, including accountability mechanisms that are accessible to children.

Action for Climate Empowerment

Climate change deeply affects children’s education – from impacts on school infrastructure, to inability to concentrate due to heatwaves, or dropping out of school related to impacts on family livelihoods. At the same time, children’s rights to education, access to information and meaningful participation play an instrumental role in protecting children in the face of climate change and empowering them. Resilient education systems are better able to protect children and adolescents from the impacts of climate change. This is especially true for girls; research reveals that every additional year of schooling for girls leads to significant improvements in a country’s resilience to climate-related disasters.

The expert dialogue and negotiations on Action for Climate Empowerment during SB60 can recommend:

- That “guidelines and good practices with respect to child education on and empowerment in climate action, with special consideration given to gender equality and inclusion of persons with disabilities” (activity C.2 of the [ACE Glasgow Work Programme](#)) be widely disseminated and considered by all Parties and relevant stakeholders at national level, including in the context of countries’ updates to NDCs and National Adaptation Plans.
- Children’s climate change education is integrated in all curricula and teacher training, increasing children’s awareness and preparedness for climate change as well as their agency and ability to contribute to the just transition.
- That children’s views are proactively sought and considered in the design and implementation of climate policies, action and finance, ensuring age-appropriate, safe and accessible mechanisms for children to be heard in decision making processes affecting them.
- That accurate climate-related information is widely-disseminated and made available in formats that are accessible to children.

Gender

Climate change is not gender neutral, rather it amplifies already existing gender inequalities with the most marginalized communities experiencing the greatest impacts. As a result of entrenched social and gender norms, women and girls often shoulder increased domestic burdens, such as water and fuel collection, which increase substantially due to climate-related impacts. Girls’ education and safety are particularly at risk in the context of climate-related disasters and resource scarcity, which may disrupt schooling, force them into child, early and forced marriage or child labour, and increase the risks of sexual and gender-based violence.

The expert dialogue and negotiations on Gender during SB60 can recommend:

- That climate policies, action and finance address the unique and heightened vulnerabilities of girls, adolescent girls and young women to climate change impacts and amplify the perspectives and solutions from girls-led organisations. This focus should inform countries’ preparation of their NDCs, NAPs and national reporting.
- An enhanced focus on girls in particular under the review of the Lima Work Programme and five-year Gender Action Plan

Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) 3.0

The lack of [children's representation in NDCs](#) (NDCs) undermines efforts to address the disproportionate climate change impacts on children. Less than half of current NDCs globally incorporate child-sensitive elements and a mere 3% were developed through a participatory process involving children.

The expert dialogue and relevant discussions during SB60 can recommend:

- The integration of children's rights, wellbeing and perspectives as central elements in the development, implementation and monitoring of revised NDCs 3.0.
- The incorporation of child-sensitive financing strategies in NDCs, including for mitigation and adaptation measures with respect to provision of low-carbon, climate-resilient essential services for children and their communities.

Addressing data and knowledge gaps

The IPCC holds a critical role in setting the research and policy agenda for climate change adaptation and mitigation, yet its reports contain a striking lack of focus on children, who are often described as a vulnerable group without further disaggregation of findings by age, gender or other factors.

The expert dialogue and relevant discussions during SB60 can recommend:

- Enhanced focus on key data/knowledge gaps that hinder Parties' ability to address the disproportionate impacts of climate change on children, and measures to strengthen collection of age-disaggregated data and research.
- An invitation to the IPCC to integrate research and evidence on the disproportionate impacts of climate change on children, as well as effective interventions, in its Seventh Assessment Report (AR7) and Special Reports.

Next Steps on the Dialogue – sustaining attention to children & relevant solutions

Following the Dialogue, it will be critical to maintain focus and momentum on emerging recommendations, including at COP29 and beyond, for example by agreeing to continue discussions in 2025 and 2026 and with a view to informing the second global stocktake in 2028. Parties can agree to continue considering relevant data and evidence, share good practices, and enhance capacity with respect to child-responsive climate policies, action and finance.

At the national level, Parties can commit to accelerating inclusive, child- and youth-centred climate policies and action by joining the nearly 50 government signatories of the [Declaration on Children, Youth and Climate Action](#) providing a framework for national dialogue and action.

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