



CLIMATE CHANGE

FOCUS ON GIRLS & YOUNG WOMEN

PLAN INTERNATIONAL POSITION PAPER

Interim

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PLAN INTERNATIONAL POSITION STATEMENT:

CLIMATE CHANGE:

FOCUS ON GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN

Plan International believes all children and young people should enjoy full and equal access to their rights, and this should not be hindered by the threat of climate change. Climate change is the greatest global, intergenerational, gender and social injustice of our time. It impacts the rights of the most marginalised the most severely and magnifies gender inequalities, especially for girls. Upholding girls' rights and strengthening their meaningful participation in climate decisions and action must therefore be a priority.

CLIMATE SCIENCE

- In line with scientific consensus, Plan International believes that the alarming rate of climate change we are experiencing is due to human activity. Climate change is amplifying risks to humanity, creating new risks and undermining the sustainable development agenda.
- We recognise the role of climate change in amplifying risks that may contribute to or worsen loss and damage, poverty, natural resource depletion, environmental degradation, migration, urbanisation, conflict and health problems.
- Plan International recognises the scale of the problem. The imminent threat of a global human rights and climate crisis cannot be understated. Climate change is impacting the economic, political, social and cultural fabric of every state, and the human rights of current and future generations.
- Solutions require both mitigation of the causes of climate change and adaptation to its impacts. Without urgent, far-reaching and unprecedented action across all of society, irreversible impacts will continue to threaten the lives and rights of evermore vulnerable populations. This is what we mean when we say climate action.
- The urgency of climate action applies to all parties. Plan International and all international non-governmental organisations must take responsibility and make the required changes in behaviour to play our part in limiting the further impacts of climate change.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND CHILDREN

- Plan International recognises that climate change has disproportionate impacts on children, particularly girls, and especially those from the most vulnerable, poorest communities who have the fewest resources to cope. This is seriously threatening their rights.
 - Climate change is the most significant intergenerational equity issue of our time. Children and future generations are bearing, or will come to bear, the brunt of its impact on a polluted, degraded planet.
 - For marginalised populations it is the slow and steady erosion of the environment around them that will destroy livelihoods, make their birthplace uninhabitable for future generations and irrevocably threaten their human rights.
 - Plan International recognises the importance of conservation in safeguarding children's futures.
 - We acknowledge that children will face the huge burden of finding solutions to adapt to and mitigate catastrophic impacts, if urgent action is not taken now.
 - Plan International recognises the enormous potential for girls and boys to play decisive roles in identifying practical solutions to address climate change. We also recognise their concern about climate change and that their voices should be elevated and listened to.
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CLIMATE CHANGE AND GIRLS

- Plan International recognises that age and gender make some children more vulnerable to the impact of climate change. Entrenched social and gender norms dictate behaviours, limit mobility and access to rights, and reduce capacity to deal with uncertainty for the young and female.
- The particular vulnerability of girls, and especially adolescent girls, to climate change due to the combined effects of age and gender discrimination has serious implications for many of their rights. Climate change magnifies the inequalities they already suffer and their unequal access to health, sexual reproductive health and rights, education, participation and protection.
- It is inaccurate and dangerous to directly equate population increase with more emissions. Wealthier countries with lower population growth have higher levels of emissions and conversely those with high population growth tend to be poorer and have lower per capital emissions. When girls and women are fully empowered to control their own fertility and have children by choice not chance, this has the positive effect of reducing unplanned pregnancies and slowing population growth. When they are denied this right sometimes populations grow beyond coping capacities of families and communities. Therefore, girls completing quality education and being able to enjoy their sexual and reproductive health and rights empowers them to contribute to more resilient and adaptable societies and greener economies. Services that realise girls' rights to education and sexual reproductive health and rights are therefore of the highest priority and must be integral to climate change plans and actions.

GLOBAL AND NATIONAL CLIMATE STRATEGIES

- Plan International believes all countries should ratify and remain in the Paris Agreement, collectively reach the higher goal of 1.5°C in line with the principle of historical climate responsibility, and hold each other to account for reaching this goal in an equitable way. It is vital the more ambitious target of the Paris Agreement be achieved because of the significant number of lives at risk due to half a degree extra warming.
 - We believe that climate change is a global issue which requires commitment and action from all countries. While some countries have higher levels of responsibility for the causes, all must now work together to find solutions through global collaboration and cooperation.
 - Current pledges by countries (Nationally Determined Contributions) to limit temperature increases are inadequate to meet the goal of limiting climate change to even 2°C. States must be pushed to raise and take action to achieve their pledges and targets to match the scale of the challenge.
 - We believe that responsibility for reducing emissions and financing climate action must be fairly shared by those who have benefited most from economic development. States must uphold their commitment of delivering \$100 billion per year in climate finance to developing countries by 2020.
 - Plan International recognises that climate change exacerbates gender inequality, but that climate action can be a pathway to greater equality and to improve the rights of girls.
 - We believe girls' rights must be explicitly recognised in national climate strategies. States should explicitly identify and implement actions to address the disproportionate impacts on girls and ensure their participation in developing, implementing and monitoring them. States should address gender-specific barriers to participation in climate action and policy processes, creating enabling environments that facilitate the meaningful participation of girls throughout their childhood, adolescence and adulthood.
 - We recognise the importance of age and gender accessible climate and disaster information and policy frameworks and the states' role in providing this. Information should promote human rights and gender equality and challenge entrenched gender norms that impact girls' rights and resilience.
 - We believe girls should be explicitly recognised in implementation of the Gender Action Plan under the Lima Work Programme of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.
 - We recognise that there will be residual loss and damage that cannot be overcome by adaptation and mitigation efforts. These are borne by the most vulnerable countries and they should be supported in a fair and just manner.
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CLIMATE CHANGE AND EDUCATION

- Plan International recognises that climate change significantly impacts children's right to quality education and that this right should be protected before, during and after extreme weather events. Increased investment in and political support for resilience strengthening, risk reduction, preparedness and education in emergencies, is vital in supporting the continuous functioning of the education system to support the right to education.
- We believe that education is crucial in building knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours needed for adaptive capacity, engaging in and developing climate policies, supporting the green economy and encouraging individual environmental responsibility. It is one of the most effective and cost-effective contributions to adapting to climate change and can support mitigation through improved life skills, green skills and more environmentally responsible decision-making.
- Plan International recognises that inclusive quality education that is gender transformative is an essential component of the global response to climate change. We believe that urgent action is needed to reach SDG target 4.7, which commits governments to ensure all learners acquire knowledge and skills to promote sustainable development. We recognise that education plays a crucial role in empowering girls to take up leadership roles in climate justice movements and that girls' education is often the most significantly impacted by climate change.

THE JUST TRANSITION TO A GREEN ECONOMY

- Plan International believes that the transition to a green economy offers a significant opportunity to advance gender equality through deploying systemic changes which are transformative for both climate and gender injustices.
- Plan International believes that discriminatory gender norms which dictate the division of labour and assign lower value to women's work must be challenged to support the just transition. This work is often in low emissions, low waged, informal sectors that subsidise current economic systems.

- Plan International recognises that climate change, decent work for all, gender equality and poverty eradication are intrinsically linked and that empowering girls with capacity to take a leading role in the just transition through green life skills can ensure no girl is left behind.
- Plan International believes all states should recognise the importance of girls' and women's equal participation and contribution to green energy policies. This has broad mitigation, adaptation and development benefits.
- Plan International recognises the importance of renewable energy in climate adaptation and mitigation and in contributing to greater equality for girls.

GIRLS' LEADERSHIP AND VOICE

- Plan International recognises that access to quality education and age and gender responsive climate information is an essential factor in enabling girls and women to become leaders in climate action and to participate in climate change decision-making. Safe spaces and training need to be established for girls to build their confidence and skills for meaningful engagement in climate change processes.
- Plan International believes there is an urgent need for more gender-balanced leadership in climate policy and decision-making to ensure climate change investment and action at all levels is gender transformative. We also recognise the State's role in creating the opportunities for participation especially in decision-making and negotiation processes.

YOUTH ACTIVISM

- Plan International supports children and young people from all countries to raise their voice for climate justice and to hold leaders to account for their future.
- Plan International believes in partnering with young people to support their collective action on climate change, in particular supporting the voices of the most marginalised, bringing their messages to the political level, consulting them to understand how we can best add value and supporting them to affect the changes they seek.

CONTENTS

Foreword.....	1
1. Impacts of Climate Change	2
1.1 Getting warmer.....	2
1.2 Impact on children	4
1.3 Impact on girls	5
2. Policies and Frameworks	7
2.1 Global frameworks.....	7
2.2 National level responses	7
3. Areas of focus.....	10
3.1 Plan International’s added value	10
3.2 Education	10
3.3 The just transition to a green economy	13
3.4 Girls’ voice and leadership	16
4. Youth activism	18
References	19

FOREWORD

“I don’t want you to be hopeful. I want you to panic. I want you to feel the fear I feel every day. And then I want you to act,” Greta Thunberg

We are witnessing a human-induced climate crisis and unless we implement urgent, far-reaching and unprecedented changes across all aspects of society it will continue to undermine development, worsen humanitarian crises and exacerbate gender inequality¹.

The world has already warmed by approximately 1°C since the industrial revolution, but the increase is likely to reach 1.5°C by between 2030 and 2050 and 3°C by the end of the century. There is global consensus under the Paris Agreement on the need to limit global mean temperature rises to 2°C (ideally 1.5°C) above pre-industrial times. It is estimated that a 2°C warmer world would lead to more heat-related deaths, smaller crop yields, worse extreme weather events, slower economic growth, more people in poverty, higher sea-level rise and increase the population facing water stress by up to 50%, leaving no country unscathed. Preventing irreversible damage, extinction and a depleted and degraded planet requires the leadership, action, support and empathy of every government, organisation, business leader, scientist and individual.

Climate change is a social injustice; those who have contributed least to the problem, are most impacted by it; “the poorest half of the global population – around 3.5 billion people – are responsible for only around 10% of total global emissions attributed to individual consumption yet live overwhelmingly in the countries most vulnerable to climate change”. Climate injustice means those with the least, stand to suffer the most. While climate change is non-discriminatory, the extent of impact is not uniform even within countries, and depends on vulnerabilities, including the capacity to adapt to impacts.

Women and children are among the most marginalised in society due to entrenched social and gender norms and stigma influencing their roles, capacities and coping strategies, behaviours, expectations, opportunities, access to recourses, rights and justice, and mobility, all of which increases their vulnerability. The intersection of age and gender often means girls and young women will feel the greatest impacts of climate change, yet do not have equal access to resources to adapt or cope with the consequences.

This creates a double injustice: climate injustice is compounding gender injustice. However, there are opportunities to address gender-based vulnerability

and gender inequality through investment in adaptation, mitigation, and particularly in the types of transformational shifts in economies and societies needed to address climate change. For climate action to be successful, girls and women need to have their voices heard, be active participants in decision-making and have equal access to knowledge and natural resources.

Purpose of the paper

Plan International understands the urgency of taking climate action. This policy position paper supports the organisation to have common messaging and language on climate change, identifies areas where Plan International can add value and provides position statements on key issues. It is the core document that the organisation should refer to regarding our position on climate change. It is for an internal audience and will form the basis for our advocacy and other influencing activities on issues related to climate change. It is evidence-based and draws on Plan International’s own experience of working on climate change programmes and influencing. The content of the paper can be used by staff across Plan International to develop external facing documents to support influencing work. It can also be used as a resource by programme staff to understand key areas of focus.

The paper does not cover everything related to climate change, such as recommendations about Plan International’s environmental footprint, nor is it prescriptive. Programming and influencing implications will be covered in subsequent guidance.

The paper provides an introduction to what climate change is and how it affects our work. It connects children’s rights and specifically girls’ rights to national level climate policies and their implications. It gives an in-depth exploration of three areas that are often excluded from global and national climate strategies and where Plan International can provide added value – i) education, ii) the just transition to a green economy, and iii) girls’ voice and leadership.

Plan International's added value

Organisations working on climate change often focus on either women or children with few focusing on the intersection between age and gender. Plan International is well placed to respond to a unique gap in the climate change field. We are well established in some of the world's most vulnerable areas. We have a decade of experience in strengthening community resilience to climate change and influencing global, national and local climate policies. Plan International can advance the rights of girls through explicitly linking climate change and the denial of girls' rights, by addressing how climate change drives gender inequality, and the actions needed to rectify this. By working with the most vulnerable communities we can also bring local data and realities to global conversations and can raise marginalised girls' voices.

1. IMPACTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

1.1 Getting warmer

Robust, scientific evidence from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), shows the climate is changing at a faster rate than at any other time, and this is largely a result of human activities (notably the continued burning of fossil fuels releasing greenhouse gases). The global mean temperature is still rising, and is projected to continue, highlighting that current action to reduce fossil fuel consumption is insufficient.

Temperature rises are causing increased extreme weather events, rainfall variability and changes in seasonality. These processes impact human life and rights, especially for those communities which are already suffering from poverty. Scenarios project the global population to reach 9.8 billion by 2050 and a peak of 11.2 billion by 2100² posing major challenges to food production, clean water, and safe urban planning, which are only exacerbated by depleting natural resources linked to climate change. Furthermore, climate change is interacting with and multiplying existing social, environmental, political and economic risks³. This is why climate change requires social, economic and

The response to climate change falls into two areas: **climate change mitigation** (actions designed to reduce or eliminate greenhouse gas emissions to stop or slow temperature rise) and **climate change adaptation** (actions to deal with current or future effects).

However, there are already impacts causing losses (such as human lives, habitats and species) and damages (these can be repaired, such as infrastructure). Globally, mitigation and adaptation have so far been inadequate - there will inevitably be further loss and damage due to human-induced climate change. Developing countries, especially small island developing states (SIDs), continue to push for a response to loss and damage, as they arguably have the most to lose – sometimes their entire country. The Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage^a was developed to support this agenda.

political responses as well. On the social level action is needed to address gender norms and inequality and how this is linked to climate change. On the economic level action is needed to transition to a fairer and more just global economic system and on the political level action is required to establish political leadership which is representative of the rights and voices of those most impacted by climate change.

- **Mortality from extreme weather events** - Between 1997 to 2016, there were 11,000 extreme weather events resulting in approximately 524,000 deaths and damages equivalent to USD3.16 trillion⁴. While it is difficult to attribute individual weather events to climate change, extreme weather events such as heatwaves or typhoons are likely increasing in frequency and intensity due to climate change, putting more people's lives at risk.
- **Poverty** - Climate change is likely to push more than 100 million people back into poverty by 2030, due to extreme weather events and impacts on agriculture, health and labour, with the poorest regions of the world hit the hardest⁵.
- **Natural resources** - Climate change is causing natural resource shortages (water, food, energy) on which 75% of those living in poverty rely in order to survive⁶. Climate shocks and stresses pushed another 29 million people into situations of acute food insecurity in 2018, the majority of which were in Africa, where nearly 23 million people in 20 countries were acutely food insecure due to climate shocks⁷.
- **Environment** - Climate change is causing environmental problems beyond food and water insecurity. Environmental degradation is both a driver and result of climate change with the potential to trigger an 'extinction cascade'. A 1.5°C average rise may put 20-30% of species at risk of extinction, many of which perform key functions in their habitats⁸. Many ecosystems are already struggling to adapt to deforestation, pollution and over exploitation, with almost all ecosystems at risk in a 2°C warmer world. Coral reefs will be all but destroyed with this level of warming, a significant issue for the half a billion

people who rely on fish from coral reefs as their main source of protein⁹. Both sub-Arctic boreal forests and tropical rainforests such as the Amazon are likely to be particularly badly affected causing biodiversity loss. The environment is being destroyed for political and economic gains, for example through mining, agribusiness, illegal logging and dam building. This puts those who are already marginalised and excluded from politics and who are dependent on the environment, most at risk. There has been an increasing frequency of attacks on environmental human rights defenders who are trying to protect their community's land, natural resources or wildlife, especially for future generations,

- **Traditional livelihoods** - Seasonality and rainfall variations are changing cropping patterns. People no longer know when to harvest, extreme weather events are wiping out crops and livestock have limited water and fodder. Over 95% of the people in South Sudan are reliant on climate-sensitive sectors for their livelihoods¹⁰ and climate change could have a major negative impact on their income. As the availability and quality of natural resources decline, so does the security of livelihoods, requiring significant adaption; traditional livelihoods may no longer be viable in many areas.
- **Migration** – Climate change is recognised as a key driver of migration¹¹, and there are an increasing number of examples where climate migration is driving rural to urban migration¹², mass migration within and from small island states (SIDs) and across countries. In 2017, 61.5% of total displacements were due to climate-related disasters¹³. By 2050, it is estimated climate change will create up to 86 million additional migrants in sub-Saharan Africa, 40 million in South Asia and 17 million in Latin America as agricultural conditions and water availability deteriorate¹⁴. People living in less developed countries without the ability to adapt to impacts associated with climate change are those most likely to migrate.
- **Urbanisation** – In places where agricultural livelihoods are becoming increasingly challenging to sustain, people are moving from rural areas to nearby towns and cities to seek alternative livelihood options¹⁵. Cities are reliant on rural areas for natural resources and food security, and heavily dependent on reliable delivery of utilities which when in limited supply can cause urban dwellers to be more vulnerable than rural areas.¹⁶ Rapid urbanisation is increasing pressure on already vulnerable urban

systems, such as transportation or waste management. Further, many cities are located in coastal areas amplifying the number of people exposed to sea level rise; 147 to 216 million people live on land that will be below sea level or regular flood levels by the end of the century¹⁷.

- **Conflict** – Of the 76 countries that deteriorated in peacefulness in the past year, 91% have high or very high risk to a single climate hazard¹⁸. Eight of the 25 least peaceful countries¹⁹ have ten per cent or more of their population in high climate hazard areas, amounting to 103.7 million people at risk.²⁰ Climate change can *indirectly* increase the likelihood of violent conflict, insecurity and fragility through its impacts on resource availability, livelihood security and migration²¹. Consequently, non-state armed groups can take advantage of increased fragility often filling the gap left by the state. Further, with deteriorating livelihoods as a result of climate change, community members often have little choice in making ends meet, turning to non-state armed groups for alternative livelihoods and income opportunities. Recent research from Lake Chad suggest that climate change is a key driver in the political instability and insurgency²².
- **Health** – Climate change is recognised as the greatest threat to global health in the 21st century²³. and can increase vector and water borne diseases, cardiovascular diseases, malnutrition, mental illnesses, respiratory diseases and injuries. Keeping temperatures to below a 2°C rise has been cited as the most effective global public health tool of this century²⁴. Climate change also has an impact on air quality. By the end of the century, more than half of the world's population will be exposed to increasingly poor air quality with the tropics and subtropics bearing the brunt²⁵. Poor air quality causes an estimated 2.6–4.4 million premature deaths per year²⁶.

Plan International's position on climate change:

- In line with scientific consensus, Plan International believes that the alarming rate of climate change we are experiencing is due to human activity. **Climate change is amplifying risks to humanity, creating new risks and undermining the sustainable development agenda.**
- We recognise the **role of climate change** in amplifying risks that **may contribute to or worsen** loss and damage, poverty, natural

resource depletion, environmental degradation, migration, urbanisation, conflict and health problems.

- Plan International recognises the scale of the problem. **The imminent threat of a global human rights and climate crisis cannot be understated.** Climate change is impacting the economic, political, social and cultural fabric of every state, and the human rights of current and future generations.
- Solutions require **both mitigation** of the causes of climate change and **adaptation** to its impacts. Without urgent, far-reaching and unprecedented action across all of society, irreversible impacts will continue to threaten the lives and rights of evermore vulnerable populations. This is what we mean when we say climate action.
- The urgency of climate action applies to all parties. Plan International and all international non-governmental organisations **must take responsibility, and make the required changes in behaviour to play our part in limiting the further impacts of climate change.**

1.2 Impact on children

“We don’t inherit the earth from our ancestors; we borrow it from our children”
David Brower

There is growing evidence and concern on the current and future impacts of climate change on girls and boys, and particularly on their rights to survival, protection and development²⁷. Children are one of the groups most vulnerable to the effects of climate change because of their physical, cognitive and physiological immaturity²⁸. Climate change can have disproportionate impacts on children, particularly girls, and serious implications for their rights.

- Children’s education and protection are jeopardised due to economic instability, unsafe air quality, migration, conflict and during and after climatic shocks and stresses²⁹
- The most disadvantaged children are also the most likely to live in poor and environmentally degraded environments
- Increases in child hunger and malnutrition are expected as a result of decreased food production and loss of livelihoods
- Progress on reducing child mortality is threatened by changes in disease patterns, most acutely felt by children under five³⁰

- Pollution in urban areas, caused by many of the same sources linked to climate change, is also having huge health implications, particularly on children

Therefore, while climate change and environmental issues are not explicit within the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), there is evidence that climate change is likely to adversely affect the ability of governments to comply with their obligations under the CRC.

Current and future generations should not expect to inherit a world where they have less access to their rights than previous generations have enjoyed. The principle of intergenerational justice has fundamental implications for how to tackle climate change³¹. We know that today’s adult generation will determine, on an unprecedented scale, the world that later generations will inherit³². Policies and debates are not adequately considering the intergenerational responsibility³³, ignoring the rights of future generations who are unable to have a voice in current debates.

However, observations from the communities in which we work and recent youth climate activism, suggest that globally children have an active interest in and concern about climate change recognising the impact of this crisis on their lives, and are keen to take action.³⁴

Plan International’s position on climate change and child rights:

- Plan International recognises that **climate change has disproportionate impacts on children, particularly girls**, and especially those from the most vulnerable, poorest communities who have the fewest resources to cope. This is **seriously threatening their rights**.
- Climate change is the **most significant intergenerational equity issue of our time**. Children and future generations are bearing, or will come to bear, the brunt of its impact on a polluted, degraded planet.
- For marginalised populations it is the slow and steady erosion of the environment around them that will destroy livelihoods, make their **birthplace uninhabitable for future generations and irrevocably threaten their human rights**.
- Plan International recognises **the importance of conservation** in safeguarding children’s futures.

- We acknowledge that children will face the huge burden of finding **solutions** to adapt to and mitigate catastrophic impacts, if urgent action is not taken now.
- Plan International recognises the enormous **potential** for girls and boys to play decisive roles in identifying practical solutions to address climate change. We also recognise their concern about climate change and that their voices should be elevated and listened to.

1.3 Impact on girls

“What will we do with a gender equal world if that world doesn’t survive? We must care for the environment”, Girl, Plan India’s Youth Advisory Panel Member

As highlighted, climate change is having differential impacts on children. Evidence and analysis show that the impacts are also highly gendered. There is a wealth of research highlighting the link between gender and climate change, with responses focusing on women’s empowerment. Despite these efforts, the 2019 Equal Measures 2030 SDG Gender Index highlights SDG13 on climate action as one of the goals that is furthest behind on gender equality issues³⁵.

It is the *intersection* of age and gender impacts that makes girls, especially adolescent girls, particularly vulnerable to climate change, with serious implications for many of their rights. Girls and women are already suffering from gender inequality and climate change is magnifying these inequalities. Gender-related discriminatory norms and stereotypes underpin other gender-related realities of girls’ lives³⁶ such as time spent in unpaid domestic labour and care work and often dictate the behaviour and receptivity of policy makers to girls’ participation, resulting in gender- and age- blind policy and programme design for climate change adaptation³⁷. Forced displacement can exacerbate existing gender inequalities and discrimination, leaving girls and women extremely vulnerable whilst also facing barriers to assistance and protection. Girls and young women often have to take on extra responsibilities and duties when men are forced to migrate to look for better work.

- **Sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR)** – Whilst population, economic growth and production and consumption patterns are all factors related to climate change, it is inaccurate and dangerous to equate this with a simple assumption that ‘more people equals more emissions’. Inequality between countries is central in this equation. Countries responsible

for higher levels of consumption and emissions are wealthier, with slow population growth or decline. Conversely those with high population growth are the poorest countries, with low per capita consumption and emissions³⁸. “Ultimately, it is the level and type of consumption, rather than number of people and population growth per se, that increases emissions and contributes to climate change.”³⁹

When girls and women are empowered to freely control their own fertility and have children by choice not chance, this has the positive effect of reducing unplanned pregnancies and slowing population growth. However, when they are denied this right, populations grow, sometimes beyond the coping capacity of families and communities. Completing a quality education and having the ability to freely control one’s sexual and reproductive life empowers girls to contribute to more resilient and adaptable societies and greener economies. Having services that realise girls’ rights to education and SRHR are therefore of the highest priority and must be integral to climate change plans and actions.

There are potential human rights risks to seeing curbing population growth as an optimal climate mitigation solution. Rights are most at risk when poorly developed policies and **actions threaten rather than protect** the sexual and reproductive rights of girls’ and women. Girls and women from the Global South must not be made to **bear responsibility for climate change** nor for its mitigation through population control policies, especially as they are least responsible for its cause. **Ensuring the promotion, protection and fulfilment of all girls’ and women’s SRHR must be the highest priority in any policy or intervention.**

During extreme weather events, which are becoming more intense and frequent due to climate change, disruption to health services further increases the chances of unplanned pregnancies and sexual and reproductive health complications. Additionally, a lack of comprehensive sexuality education before, during and after extreme weather events can limit girls’ understanding of and access to SRH information and services.

- **Child marriage and gender-based violence** - Anecdotal evidence points to climate change as a driver of child, early and forced marriage (CEFM) in many communities in Global South countries due to deteriorating, unsustainable livelihoods putting pressure on family income resulting in negative coping strategies. Families

often believe a daughter's marriage will lessen the financial strain on the family and mean she is better provided for. Evidence shows that adolescent girls face further protection issues after disasters and when migrating as they are particularly susceptible to violence and exploitation – including rape, sexual and gender-based violence and abuse, and trafficking. These protection issues are particularly heightened when collecting natural resources, and when staying in temporary shelters with adolescent girls in particular complaining of the lack of privacy around sleep, washing and dressing⁴⁰.

- **Education** - Climate change causes additional gender-based obstacles in accessing education and remaining in school as a result of deteriorating livelihoods and negative coping strategies. Girls' lack of access to education – a denial of their rights – compounds their vulnerability as they have limited information about climate change, what to do in a disaster and access to information and timely and life-saving early warnings^a.
- **Participation** – Girls' participation in decision-making is increasingly recognised as fundamental to age- and gender-sensitive policy making to better address girls' needs and well-being⁴¹. As observed by Plan International's children-centred climate change adaptation (4CA) programme⁴², girls in particular have an important role to play in reducing risk and, when adequately supported and empowered, can effectively communicate risk and drive change in their communities⁴³.
- **Malnutrition and health** - Girls are more likely to go hungry – they are “particularly vulnerable as they are often the last member of the household to eat and the first to go hungry when food is in short supply”⁴⁴. Water-borne and vector-borne diseases may also affect girls more than boys if they are already suffering from malnutrition with an increased impact on young pregnant women and girls and/or young mothers at different lactation stages. In some regions affected by droughts or extreme weather events, clean water supply might be affected and in areas with no nearby boreholes or traditional wells, women are forced to collect water from natural springs, also used by animals. This lack of clean water supply exposes girls to additional health risks as dirty water is used for cooking,

washing and laundry. The risks are particularly high during menstruation and pregnancy⁴⁵.

Plan International's position on climate change and girls

- Plan International recognises that **age and gender make some children more vulnerable to the impact of climate change**. Entrenched social and gender norms dictate behaviours, limit mobility and access to rights, and reduce capacity to deal with uncertainty for the young and female.
- The particular **vulnerability of girls, and especially adolescent girls, to climate change due to the combined effects of age and gender discrimination has serious implications for many of their rights**. Climate change magnifies the inequalities they already suffer and their unequal access to health, sexual reproductive health and rights, education, participation and protection.
- It is inaccurate and dangerous to directly equate population increase with more emissions. Wealthier countries with lower population growth have higher levels of emissions and conversely those with high population growth tend to be poorer and have lower per capital emissions. When girls and women are fully empowered to control their own fertility and have children by choice not chance, this has the positive effect of reducing unplanned pregnancies and slowing population growth. When they are denied this right sometimes populations grow beyond coping capacities of families and communities. Therefore, completing quality education and girls' ability to enjoy their sexual and reproductive health and rights empowers them to contribute to more resilient and adaptable societies and greener economies. **Services that realise girls' rights to education and sexual reproductive health and rights are therefore of the highest priority and must be integral to climate change plans and actions.**

^a This will be covered more in [section 3.2](#)

2. POLICIES AND FRAMEWORKS

2.1 Global frameworks

The Paris Agreement

The Paris Agreement brought 195 Parties⁴⁶ under one landmark, legally-binding agreement to limit temperatures rises to 2°C (ideally 1.5). To date, 185 Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) have ratified the Agreement⁴⁷. The Agreement sets global goals for limiting global warming and cutting emissions, adaptation to climate change and provision of climate finance. It recognises that countries have different levels of responsibility and capability and different national circumstances. The difference between countries has been a contentious issue, as no country wants to take responsibility for climate change as it has financial and legal implications⁴⁸.

Developed countries have committed to mobilise \$100 billion a year in climate finance by 2020. In the Paris Agreement, developed countries committed to providing new and additional resources, to be equally allocated to mitigating climate change and to adapting to its impacts. With regard to adaptation, it was agreed that the most vulnerable countries would take precedence. Currently, the majority of climate finance is in climate mitigation activities, with only 20% allocated for climate change adaptation and only 18% of climate finance allocated to least developed countries.⁴⁹ This means climate finance is inadequately supporting those already feeling the impacts. Moreover, climate finance should not increase the debt of developing countries, recognising that loans are not accounted for as climate finance and that climate finance should be new and additional, not from a country's existing development budget. Many organisations call for a minimum of 50% of climate finance to be channelled for adaptation and resilience for the most at-risk communities, with least developed countries, SIDs and African countries taking precedence, and should support gender equality.

Age and gender in the Paris Agreement

The Paris Agreement refers to human rights, and specifically to the rights of children and women, in its preamble, but otherwise provides no mention of children in the text⁵⁰. Countries have agreed to 'respect, promote and consider' their human rights obligations when taking action to address climate change. While this recognition of human rights as part of the framing text is important, human rights language in other parts of the Agreement, including in its 'Purpose' (Article 2) is not strong. References to intergenerational equity, a key demand of young people, were also scaled back to a single reference

in the preamble. The Agreement reaffirms the important role of climate change education.

The Paris Agreement failed to take the gender discourse forward, with only two explicit references to "gender-responsive" approaches in the sections on adaptation and capacity-building. It failed to acknowledge women's capabilities to mitigate and provide just and community-driven solutions given appropriate financial and technological support⁵¹. Even though the Paris Agreement does not include gender in all relevant articles, the Gender Action Plan adopted in 2017⁵² recommends gender mainstreaming in all processes. It encourages gender balance in decision-making as well as responsiveness to gender issues in the development, implementation and monitoring of climate change policies and actions.

Other global frameworks

Climate change is an integral component of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, both as a standalone goal (SDG13) and a cross-cutting issue that underpins the achievement of the entire agenda. Climate change is also recognised in the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, a global framework for reducing loss and damage from disasters. It is important to recognise the links between these three global frameworks and promote their coherence. Adapting to climate change and strengthening resilience of communities will contribute to the goals of all agendas.

2.2 National level responses

2.2.1 National climate strategies

The Paris Agreement was only the first step; the global commitments must be enacted at national level. Nationally determined contributions (NDCs), each country's efforts to reduce national emissions and adapt to the impacts of climate change, are mandatory under the Paris Agreement and need to be developed and submitted to UNFCCC by 2020, then continually assessed and revised, with a global stocktake every five years. The NDCs are vital in achieving the targets of the Paris Agreement, and embody efforts by each country to reduce national emissions and adapt to the impacts of climate change⁵³. However, current pledges made are insufficient in meeting the scale of the challenge and are far from reaching even the 2°C target.

Reducing emissions alone will be insufficient, especially for the most vulnerable and therefore National Adaptation Plans (NAPs)⁵⁴, each country's identification of medium- and long-term adaptation needs and strategies to address those needs, are also important in combatting climate change. The

strategic process of developing and revising relevant national policies should ideally be done in partnership with local stakeholders, be ambitious, support the most vulnerable and be aligned with human rights laws and gender policies.

In most countries, NDCs, NAPs and other national climate strategies and plans⁵⁵ focus climate responses on water, energy (biomass, rural electrification, renewables etc.), forestry, agriculture, transportation, housing, infrastructure and urban planning, health, risk management, fisheries, coastal protection, manufacturing, food security, and ecosystem-based adaptation. Very few focus on other types of sectors/activities such as social protection, inclusion or empowerment of vulnerable groups. Social sectors are often not part of the response and therefore social implications are not adequately recognised.

2.2.2 Gender and national climate strategies

NDCs, NAPs and other national climate strategies present an opportunity to contribute to gender equality and uphold girls' rights. However, over half of the NDCs do not include gender at all. A comprehensive review of NDCs from a gender perspective conducted by Women's Environment and Development Organisation (WeDo) in 2016, found that only 64 of 190 countries included gender considerations in their NDCs, and this is often only in the context of the country's broader sustainable development strategy rather than in relation to climate specific policies. The majority of mentions were related to adaptation indicating that gender is rarely seen as relevant in mitigation strategies.

2.2.3 Girls' rights and national climate strategies

There is limited analysis available on the extent to which age is considered in national strategies; this is a major gap in terms of identifying and analysing if and how girls' rights are being recognised in mitigation, adaptation and financing plans. Generally, strategies seem to refer to women, children and youth as vulnerable groups disproportionately affected by climate change, and this is mainly in the overview and background, with very few, if any, mentions at sector level response or with any in-depth analysis. There are exceptions. For example, Burkina Faso's⁵⁶ national climate strategy breaks down how children and women are adversely affected in different sectors and in their actions.

From a gender *and* age perspective it is clear that girls' rights are not being addressed at all in adaptation and mitigation at national policy level. National climate strategies inadequately respond to those most vulnerable to climate change, barely recognising the social implications of the problem.

There are significant gaps at national climate policy level in how girls' rights are being addressed, often because they focus more on hardware or infrastructure that do not systematically consider gendered impacts and responses. Even adaptation responses, which lend themselves more to social responses, tend to focus on hardware and infrastructure, such as building dykes, completely neglecting the social side of building adaptive capacity. Agriculture and forestry are seen as key to responding to climate change as they can be both mitigation and adaptation responses. Agriculture is extremely gendered and therefore the response must consider gender too. Otherwise, in responding to climate change and developing key actions to deal with it, national strategies are reinforcing gender inequality rather than seeing it as an opportunity for change. Research continues to highlight education and access to information as a key response in strengthening resilience and adaptive capacity⁵⁷, however, education and other sectors that can advance girls' rights are almost non-existent in national responses to climate change.

Co-benefits of girls' rights and climate action

Tackling climate change requires urgent transformation across all sectors and industries through the development of transformative policies and financing, which can also support gender transformative outcomes. **Including girls' rights in national climate strategies can have mutual benefits** for both climate action and gender equality, and this is currently a significant missed opportunity by national governments to advance two vital agendas. It is important that any activities to reduce climate change also contribute to gender equality and that activities to achieve gender equality do not contribute to climate change. Responses to climate change can offer an opportunity to tackle barriers to achieving gender equality. For example, tackling increased urbanisation and pressure on public services, upgrading urban infrastructure to deal with flooding or addressing the need for 'greener' transport can all create opportunities to make services safe for girls and improve access to them. Climate action can therefore produce co-benefits for progressing equality for girls, if done in a gender transformative way.

Plan International's position on global and national climate strategies

- Plan International believes all countries should **ratify and remain in** the Paris Agreement, **collectively reach the higher goal** of 1.5°C in line with the principle of historical climate responsibility, and **hold each other to account** for reaching this goal in an equitable way. It is

vital the more ambitious target of the Paris Agreement be achieved because of the significant number of lives at risk due to half a degree warming.

- We believe that climate change is a **global issue** which requires commitment and action from all countries. While some countries have higher levels of responsibility for the causes, all must now work together to find solutions and through global collaboration and cooperation.
- Current pledges by countries (Nationally Determined Contributions) to limit temperature increases are inadequate to meet the goal of limiting climate change to even 2°C. States must be pushed to raise and take action to achieve their pledges and targets to match the scale of the challenge.
- We believe that responsibility for reducing emissions and financing climate action must be fairly shared by those who have benefited most from economic development. States must **uphold their commitment** of delivering \$100 billion per year in climate finance to developing countries by 2020.
- Plan International recognises that **climate change exacerbates gender inequality, but that climate action can be a pathway to greater equality** and in improving the rights of girls.
- We believe **girls' rights must be explicitly recognised in national climate strategies** (including NDCs and national adaptation plans (NAPs)). States should explicitly identify and implement actions to address the disproportionate impacts on girls and ensure their participation in developing, implementing and monitoring them. States should address gender-specific barriers to participation in climate action and policy processes, creating enabling environments that facilitate the meaningful participation of girls throughout their childhood, adolescence and adulthood.
- We recognise the importance of **age and gender accessible climate and disaster information and policy frameworks** and the states' role in providing this. Information should promote human rights and gender equality and challenge entrenched gender norms that impact girls' rights and resilience.
- We believe girls should be explicitly recognised in the Gender Action Plan implementation under the Lima Work Programme of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.
- We recognise that there will be **residual loss and damage** that cannot be overcome by adaptation and mitigation efforts. These are borne by the most vulnerable countries and they should be supported in a fair and just manner.

3. AREAS OF FOCUS

3.1 Plan International's added value

Girls have the most to gain or lose from the societal changes needed to address climate change and girls' empowerment is vital for driving these transformative, systemic changes. Three key areas have been identified which address the lack of focus on girls' rights within national climate strategies:

1. education
2. issues related to a just transition to a green economy
3. girls' voice and leadership

3.2 Education

All girls and boys have the right to high-quality education as enshrined in Article 28 of the UNCRC; however, in 2015, an estimated 39 million girls were out of school because of war and disasters⁵⁸. There is a significant gap in concrete, verifiable data on the number of girls out of school due to climate change, however anecdotal evidence of the impact of climate change on girls' education exists. Education can contribute to increasing the adaptive capacity of children and their communities, fostering environmental stewardship and sustainability and developing children's capacity to be agents of change and active citizens. Girls' education is one of the most important sectors as it underpins all of the SDGs, and investments in education yield the highest social returns, especially as an effective, low-cost approach to combat climate change⁵⁹. Rather than being a mitigation or adaptation action in itself, education is a way to transfer knowledge, skills and behaviours which must then be put into practice to take action against gender inequality and climate injustice.

Girls are more likely to be out of school than boys due to child marriage, for example, or to support household income and unpaid housework, or because of attacks on girls' education in conflict-affected states. These risks are magnified in a changing climate, especially for those households that rely on natural resources for income. A deterioration of livelihoods associated with shifting weather patterns and changes in seasonality affects household-level decisions about sending children to school. Increased burdens of water and fuel collection, which disproportionately fall on girls, are also likely to have implications for education⁶⁰. Girls' attention, cognitive ability to learn and performance are all impacted due to their heightened risk of malnutrition and their unpaid work reducing their learning time. Further, extreme weather events cause more children to miss school because of damaged schools and access routes,

the use of school buildings as evacuation centres, psychosocial impacts, and injuries. Girls are more likely not to return to school after a disaster - in Pakistan, after the 2010 floods, 24% of girls in Grade 6 dropped out of school, compared with 6% of boys⁶¹.

Girls' limited access to quality education puts them at further risk as they have less access to information, knowledge on climate and disaster risks, and skills on how to prepare, anticipate, reduce, adapt to and respond to these. Opportunities to gain important life skills may be missed, and many cultural and religious beliefs prevent girls from learning key survival skills such as swimming. The ultimate result of girls' reduced access to quality education can be injury or death in extreme weather events. Despite this, the majority of children want education; according to a report 99% of children in 17 different crises saw education as a high priority⁶².

Schools have a unique role in children's development and protection, and in teaching them to express themselves, listen to others and resolve conflict. In schools, children can exercise their right to freedom of expression, develop their opinions and learn to be active citizens of society. Education should go beyond the school walls and include civic education, such as environmental issues.

Education has wider benefits for societies' ability to adapt to climate change. For example, research by Brookings Institute shows for every additional year of girls' schooling on average, a country's level of climate resilience is improved⁶³. Other research of 187 countries shows that education⁶⁴ influences the number of deaths from disasters more than economic growth⁶⁵.

Education for girls' adaptive capacity

Evidence shows that ensuring girls' access to quality education is a sustainable and cost effective⁶⁶ tool for building societies' resilience to climate change. Countries that have focused on female education have suffered far fewer losses from droughts and floods than countries with lower levels of girls' education⁶⁷.

Education can increase understanding and skills in risk identification, reduction and mitigation, early warning systems, contingency planning, life-saving information and skills, and response and adaptation actions to extreme weather events. Learning about climate change, the causes, possible impacts, future scenarios and differential impacts on members of society supports adaptive capacity. These skills and improved knowledge on climate

change also enable children to adapt lives and future livelihoods to climate scenarios and challenges brought about by rapid environmental change⁶⁸, especially for girls who often have less opportunity to receive vital information and skills. Better integration of financial literacy into education content and methods will empower girls to calculate the costs of climate change impacts on how they spend their time and income and will help them better prepare future livelihood strategies. Education can also support girls in securing other rights, through increased access to information and services. Accessing their rights is a vital way of strengthening their resilience to climate change.

Education for mitigation

Education can be an effective approach to mitigate climate change as it can develop positive attitudes and behaviours on sustainable choices and lifestyles and promotes a sense of ecological responsibility⁶⁹. It can increase awareness of the sustainable use of natural resources and about improving food security in changing conditions, both of which will have positive impacts on girls' well-being. Climate change education can also build the skills girls need for future green jobs⁷⁰ and climate-resilient livelihoods, which can be both an adaptation and mitigation strategy for combatting climate change.

Education can explore topics such as social injustice, political processes, environmental degradation and link to human behaviour and attitudes. This can promote positive practices and attitudes and a better understanding of how climate change is unjust from social and gender perspectives. Inequality in accessing education and gender norms which begin before and during primary school reinforce the gender divide in the workforce with men often depicted as scientists or doctors and women in the service industry. With fewer girls and women involved in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and the renewable energy industry^b, educating girls and breaking down gender norms is vital in supporting climate action.

While significant progress has been made around the world in education for sustainable development (ESD)⁷¹, the approach must be scaled up to promote a healthy planet for future generations.

Gender transformative education

Gender transformative, quality, inclusive education is key for addressing the structural causes of vulnerability to climate change, including breaking down discriminatory gender and social norms. Children and young people, particularly girls, are at the forefront of global and local climate justice movements. Inclusive quality education that is gender transformative supports children and young people to understand and address the impact of climate change, encourages changes in their attitudes and behaviour, helps them adapt to climate change-related trends and teaches them skills and competencies they need to take civic action and demand climate justice. It also helps them understand the intersections of gender equality and climate justice.

Of particular importance is SDG target 4.7 which commits governments to ensure all learners acquire knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including among others through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development. This will require investments in developing education policies and plans that promote gender transformative education for sustainable development, adapting learning environments, building the capacity of educators and other school stakeholders and most importantly, supporting student/ youth movements.

Education also supports gender-balanced leadership for climate action,⁷² empowering girls to take up leadership roles in climate justice movements. Life skills such as self-esteem, confidence and ability to challenge power structures which often limit girls' potential, and which can be nurtured at school, are critically important for improving girls' and women's participation and engagement in decision-making from household to national level. Further, girls and women often have to fight harder for a seat at a negotiation table on climate policy and therefore require skills in negotiation, communication, confronting power structures, critical thinking, problem identification and problem solving. There are untapped opportunities in supporting girls and their allies to better connect gender equality and climate justice initiatives in and through education.

^b This will be covered more in [section 3.3](#)

Plan International's position on education

- Plan International recognises that **climate change significantly impacts children's right to quality education** and that this right should be protected before, during and after extreme weather events. Increased investment in and political support for **resilience strengthening, risk reduction, preparedness, and education in emergencies**, is vital in supporting the continuous functioning of the education system to support the right to education.
- We believe that education is crucial in **building knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours needed for adaptive capacity, engaging in and developing climate policies, supporting the green economy and encouraging individual environmental responsibility**. It is one of the most effective and **cost-effective contributions to adapting to climate change** and can support mitigation through improved life skills, green skills and more environmentally responsible decision-making.
- Plan International recognises that **inclusive quality education that is gender transformative is an essential component of the global response to climate change**. We believe that urgent action is needed to reach SDG target 4.7 , which commits governments to ensure all learners acquire knowledge and skills to promote sustainable development. **We recognise that education plays a crucial role in empowering girls to take up leadership roles in climate justice movements** and that girls' education is often the most significantly impacted by climate change.

3.3 The just transition to a green economy

Although the world economy has quadrupled in size in the last 25 years, 60% of all goods and services that underpin livelihoods have been produced with non-replaceable resources⁷³. The issues of energy and economic development are central to the climate debate. In order to avoid catastrophic climate change and limit global warming to 1.5°C, economic systems must become carbon-free and environmentally sustainable. Of particular importance to this debate is the growing concern for the '*just transition*' - how the transition from a fossil fuel dominated economy to a green economy should not leave anyone behind. Such a transition is an opportunity to advance gender equality. That is dependent on recognition of the need to deconstruct discriminatory gender and social norms, the important role of women and the need to equip girls and young women with skills and knowledge to navigate the transition.

These norms start from early childhood, across adolescence and into adulthood, dictating future livelihood and career paths. Girls and women are often perceived as unsuitable for careers in STEM which can limit their access to training in skills which enable their participation in green jobs later in life⁷⁴. This is demonstrated in the renewable energy industry which remains a highly gender imbalanced sector, with women making up just 20-25% of the workforce⁷⁵ and often limited to financial, administrative or human resource roles⁷⁶.

Many women work in informal sectors in developing and lower middle-income economies. Those in rural areas are increasingly affected by climate change as they are highly reliant on the environment for livelihoods, particularly on agriculture (crop cultivation, fisheries, livestock). Women produce over half of the world's food, playing a key role in food security.⁷⁷ Their livelihoods directly depend on natural resources (rainfall, fodder, water), the availability of which is affected by climate change. The result is lower agriculture production, less income and prevention of accumulation of assets.

Norms also dictate household roles. Girls and women usually have primary responsibility for household duties, such as cooking, cultivating vegetables in home gardens, child-rearing, caring for other family members, low-income or unpaid labour, and energy and water collection. Further, child marriage often means adolescent girls become responsible for managing their own households and have primary responsibility for the above activities. Climate change directly affects many of these household duties, thereby increasing the unpaid workload of girls and women. Women contribute twice as much unpaid care work as men, often on top of their paid work (in India up to 10

times more)⁷⁸ with some activities such as energy collection becoming more challenging, taking up girls' time as they help their mothers.

Forty percent of the world's population relies on locally sourced biomass (wood, charcoal or animal waste) for basic energy needs such as cooking and heating;⁷⁹ these resources are particularly susceptible to climate shocks and stresses. More than a billion people still lack access to electricity while more than two in five people around the world depend on traditional biomass for heating and cooking.⁸⁰ Unreliable access to energy, also known as '*energy poverty*' has gender dimensions due to rural girls and women being primary energy providers for the household. In India, 92 percent of rural domestic energy needs are provided by women gathering firewood, crop waste and cattle dung⁸¹. Energy poverty has implications for other aspects of girls' and women's well-being or livelihoods - more time spent finding energy sources means less time available for school work, paid work and increased health risks. Indoor pollution from cooking stoves is a serious health concern for women and children - it will likely cause more than 1.5 million deaths per year by 2030⁸². Girls and women are also susceptible to harassment, abuse or rape while walking to collect wood and water. In some areas of Mozambique, prolonged drought has increased the length of time to collect water from 2 hours to 6 per day, resulting in girls' absences from school and increased risk of sexual violation during their water collecting journeys⁸³.

Lack of access to land rights further increases women's vulnerability; if women are excluded from inheriting land, or their rights go unrecognised by local authorities or male family members, this may result in loss of land and loss of income/food source. Unequal access to land rights and therefore limited access to credit and decision-making impacts women and their communities⁸⁴ and reduces their economic growth and self-reliance. Women's vulnerability to climate change can be increased as they have no control over land use (crop variety, planting times, livestock, technology). Research highlights that if the land gender gap was reduced, women could increase yields on their farms by up to 30% and reduce the number of food-insecure people by 12-17%⁸⁵. At its best, this would mean that 150 million people would be spared from undernourishment in these countries⁸⁶. Further, even if access to land rights is improved, the land which girls inherit is likely to be less productive due to environmental degradation and climate change.

Men largely control the finances, confining women to a domestic role without the opportunity to influence household decisions. This lack of power to influence decisions and take on leadership roles

impacts all aspect of their life and continues to undermine women's potential to secure decent work. Girls and women are often less educated with fewer life skills than male counterparts; this results in less ability to break away from low wage informal employment or to change employment. Exclusion of girls and women in energy plans and policy processes further exacerbates women's lack of engagement in decision-making, particularly as the informal and biomass economic sectors tend to be overlooked in national energy policies⁸⁷. The result is gender-blind energy policies that neglect girls' and women's needs and possible solutions. If women were recognised by and worked in the energy sector, the energy needs of women would be better represented and addressed, in turn improving health conditions of children and women affected by indoor pollution.

Opportunities for girls' and young women's rights through a just transition

The very essence of a transition suggests systemic changes in society that have the potential to be transformative, especially in supporting gender transformative outcomes, decent work and regulations, and improved skills. The just transition should also recognise and support the transition of girls from childhood to adulthood, especially when they start taking on responsibility for their own household and livelihoods.

Any transition needs to challenge the status quo of girls' and women's roles in domestic and care work and rethink the gendered division of labour. Improving girls' and young women's access to STEM, green skills, leadership skills and confidence to drive this agenda and ensure they are not left behind, can promote decent work for women, promote gender equality and the empowerment of girls and young women. Strengthening girls' skillsets in a diverse range of activities offers them more choice when seeking employment, enabling them to engage with sustainable livelihoods, manage natural resources and reduce exposure to risks. These approaches can strengthen resilience, meeting immediate development needs while contributing to longer-term capacity development that will create a basis for reducing future vulnerabilities.

Renewable energy can have multiple benefits, especially in communities reliant on natural resources for their energy. Not only does renewable energy support sustainable development and climate mitigation, it can also be seen as an adaptation approach, especially for vulnerable communities. It can improve health of populations exposed to high pollution levels (often in urban areas of the Global South) and reduce poor cooking and heating practices; cut fresh water use; create

jobs and develop new industries and skills; lower energy costs especially for the poor; and keep energy revenue local⁸⁸, all of which can support economic development. In addition, renewable energy can contribute to achieving greater gender equality, given energy poverty most acutely impacts girls and women. Renewable energy supports girls' education by reducing time spent collecting fuel and water, and enabling school study in the evenings due to improved electricity provision. It also provides economic opportunities through green enterprises managed by women and by powering businesses beyond daylight hours, as well as improving girls' and women's safety due to improved lighting⁸⁹.

Supporting women to develop and manage green and renewable energy and technologies, and have ownership over land and agricultural practices, can strengthen national mitigation and adaptation plans, provide new employment opportunities, and promote women's empowerment⁹⁰.

Plan International's position on the just transition

- Plan International believes that the transition to a green economy offers a significant **opportunity to advance gender equality through deploying systemic changes which are transformative for both climate and gender injustices.**
- Plan International believes that discriminatory gender norms which dictate the division of labour and assign lower value to women's work must be challenged to support the just transition. This work is often in low emissions, low waged, informal sectors that subsidise current economic systems
- Plan International recognises that climate change, decent work for all, gender equality and poverty eradication are intrinsically linked and that **empowering girls with capacity to take a leading role in the just transition through green life skills** can ensure no girl is left behind.
- Plan International believes all states should recognise the **importance of girls' and women's equal participation and contribution to green energy policies.** This has broad for mitigation, adaptation, development benefits.

- Plan International recognises the importance of renewable energy in climate adaptation and mitigation and equality for girls.

3.4 Girls' voice and leadership

Promoting girls' leadership and political empowerment supports girls in accessing their rights, gaining knowledge and skills, and influencing climate decision-making and implementation in a fair way that contributes to greater social and climate justice. Article 12 of the CRC states that children have a right to participate in decision-making processes relevant to their lives. Not only do they have a right to be heard in the debate on climate change, it also affects them and their futures the most, and therefore it is vital that they are included.

Underrepresentation and discrimination

Prevailing gender norms and power relations often discriminate against girls and young women whose role is typically seen to be in the family rather than in the public sphere. This is exacerbated by discriminatory laws, policies and practices, a lack of women's political participation, low participation in public life more generally and requirements related to male guardianship that affect mobility. They often lack a distinct legal identity as a rights holder in the state and face climate policy makers hostile to girls' participation. The lack of ability of girls and young women to control their reproductive health and choices also serve as significant barriers to their rights, including participatory rights. Despite being the most affected due to these norms, women and children are severely underrepresented in climate policy processes. The interaction of age and gender vulnerabilities puts girls at particular risk of being overlooked. This means that many local or national policies do not adequately respond to the specific needs of girls. Further, climate empowerment and adaptation actions often focus on adult women rather than girls, neglecting the benefits of early learning and the pathway needed for girls to become future leaders.

A vital component to gender-balanced leadership and empowerment is equal access to quality information - that means information that is accurate, relevant, free from discriminatory stereotypes and in age and gender responsive language. However, climate information at all levels (climate scenarios, terminology, policies, early warning systems, financing, climate services) is often very technical and not accessible to girls or young women, meaning they do not receive the information required for adaptation and to hold leaders to account. Inaccessible information has serious implications. Typhoon Haiyan caused significant deaths as people were unaware of the term 'storm surge'⁹¹ highlighting the need for local, culturally sensitive, age and gender responsive information, which is supported by education.

Global climate conferences

Women and especially girls are significantly underrepresented at the UNFCCC organised Conference of the Parties (COPs). Women accounted for just 35% of all national Party delegates and around 26% of the Heads of Delegations in 2015 (the year the Paris Agreement was finalised) with those from Africa and the Asia-Pacific region amongst the lowest for representation of women (21%)⁹². COPs are also very age blind, with child participation almost non-existent. This clearly has huge implications on the extent to which global and national climate policies and decisions reflect gender, the realities of women and especially girls' rights. "Analysis suggests that every additional year of schooling for girls is positively associated with higher percentages of women participants in official government delegations to UNFCCC meetings and on UNFCCC boards and bodies"⁹³. COP21 made promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women a (non-legal) requirement under the Paris Agreement and although this is a great first step, progress is not happening quickly enough.

Opportunities

Strengthening girls' and women's voice and agency; ensuring their inclusion and equal participation and decision-making at community-level; supporting climate education; increasing access to age and gender responsive information; increasing access to economic opportunities, savings/capital, and safety nets; improving land rights; increasing access to, use of and involvement in clean energy and technologies; and increasing access to sexual and reproductive health education, information and services will all support in their empowerment. Tackling the root causes of gender-based discrimination, gender stereotyping and an unequal distribution of power underpins climate action.

Girls and women are already leading on climate action in their local communities and at the global level with role models such as Greta Thunberg and Christiana Figueres, but more needs to be done to ensure female leaders are not the exception but the norm. More role models like these are needed to inspire younger girls and demonstrate the lead role they can have in climate action. Through Plan International's 4CA programme we have observed extraordinary girl leaders who are active agents of change and were empowered to lead community action on climate change. Plan International's research⁹⁴ highlighted the need to create safe spaces to empower girls and young women to voice their opinions and be encouraged to participate in climate planning at different levels. Education is a vital component of girls' empowerment, providing transformative life skills such as stronger self-

esteem, advocacy for change and community leadership potential.

Everyone, from the local to global level, must invest in girls, believe in them, support them and create open spaces for them to succeed and raise their collective ambition. Only by doing this can we reach the targets of the Paris Agreement.

Plan International's position on girls' leadership

- Plan International recognises that access to quality education and age and gender responsive climate information is an essential factor in enabling girls and women to become leaders in climate action and participate in climate change decision-making and processes. **Safe spaces and training need to be established for girls to build their confidence and skills for meaningful engagement in climate change processes.**
- Plan International believes there is an **urgent need for more gender-balanced leadership in climate policy and decision-making** to ensure climate change investment and action at all levels is gender transformative. We also recognise the State's role in creating the opportunities for participation especially in decision-making and negotiation processes.

4. YOUTH ACTIVISM

Climate inaction has inspired the rise of one of the biggest global youth movements ever witnessed, uniting under a common goal to demand action on the crisis. Children do not have the vote and therefore cannot formally raise their civic voice on climate change. Often the only way children and young people can express their social and political engagement is through protests, campaigning or political action outside formal civil society institutions. They initiate social movements, new organisations and projects while developing and making use of digital tools and innovative strategies,⁹⁵ often at the expense of time in education. The self-organised climate youth movement is a clear example of this. While this is an effective way of getting issues heard by the wider public and government, not all children have the ability or opportunity to do this. In areas where education is scarce, the top priority is to attend school. However more must be done to make sure voices from the most marginalised are raised and heard in global climate movements and debates. It is also important to recognise that while the climate movement is a significant opportunity for children and young people to uphold their civic right to be heard on issues they care about, it is not the responsibility of children to solve the climate crisis.

Plan International's position on climate youth activism

- Plan International **supports children and young people from all countries to raise their voice for climate justice and hold leaders to account for their future.**
- Plan International believes in partnering with young people to support their **collective action on climate change**, in particular supporting the voices of the most marginalised, bringing their messages to the political level, consulting them to understand how we can best add value and supporting them to affect the changes they seek.

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- ¹ There is a live debate around how to refer to the climate change phenomenon, as using the term 'climate change' can understate the scale and severity of the situation. Some organisations are now referring to it as a 'climate crisis' or 'emergency'. For now we are using the politically neutral term climate change, while monitoring the debate and ensuring we do not downplay the problem.
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- ³ UN Human Rights Chief – Michelle Bachelet
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- ³⁴ For example, children from a community in the Philippines in which Plan International works were able to secure funding from a local council to support their actions in tackling climate change
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⁵⁴ Established under the Cancun Adaptation Framework

⁵⁵ Based on a brief review by Plan GH

⁵⁶ UNFCCC. See:

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Plan International's Position Paper - Climate Change

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