



**Real Choices,  
Real Lives**

# Climate Change and Girls' Education

Insights from Benin, Togo  
and Uganda

## Real Choices, Real Lives Cohort Study Map

Since 2007, Plan International's *Real Choices, Real Lives* study has been following a cohort of girls from nine countries, including Benin, Togo and Uganda. The study has tracked their lives from birth, in annual interviews with family members, and, once they reached the age of five, with the girls themselves, using age-specific participatory methodologies. This year the analysis and the interviews have centred on climate change, which, according to the RCRL girls and their families, has, over the last decade, presented a growing challenge to their lives and livelihoods. This year's research findings illuminate its particular impact on girls' education and on progress towards gender equality.

- 
- Togo
  - Benin
  - Uganda
  - Dominican Republic
  - El Salvador
  - Brazil
  - Cambodia
  - Vietnam
  - Phillipines



The names of the girls and young women in this report have been changed to ensure anonymity. Photos used in this report are not of research participants.

This report, a detailed look at the research from Africa, is taken largely from the *Real Choices, Real Lives: Climate Change and Girls' Education* nine country report found at <https://plan-international.org/publications/climate-change-girls-education/>

Cover photo: A girl in Uganda holds the world in her hands.  
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A Ugandan girl stands in doorway of her school classroom.  
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# Summary

## The 2023 *Real Choices, Real Lives* research in Benin, Togo and Uganda, focuses on climate change.

### What are its direct and indirect impacts on the lives and educational opportunities of the adolescent girls taking part in this longitudinal research?

- **Infrastructure is one of the first casualties of climate change:** floods and storms destroy roads, make journeys to school more hazardous and take their toll on school buildings. The cohort girls are more likely to drop out of school or go less frequently.
- **Family income decreases:** drought and unseasonal weather mean crops fail and families, often already living close to subsistence level, become poorer.

### As a result:

- **Girls' education suffers:** girls are pulled out of school as families can no longer afford fees and other costs.
- **The cohort girls' domestic responsibilities increase,** as parents and carers are forced to take on extra jobs to try and make ends meet. Additionally, girls often do paid work outside the home so that, even if they do stay in school, their schoolwork suffers as time to study is squeezed out.
- **The rates of child and early forced marriage and unions (CEFMU),** which families may feel forced to adopt to improve their financial situation, are on the rise.
- **Mounting poverty means rising crime rates:** girls and young women are more vulnerable to violence, often on school routes, which makes families reluctant to send them there.

Boys' education may suffer too, but in many of the cohort families their education is still seen as more important than girls' – boys stay at school, girls help at home. With the loss of education their life choices are increasingly limited.

### Girls' rights to education are being restricted by climate change but so too is their ability to help their communities deal with it.

- Schools are the main source of education about climate change and when girls are not at school their opportunities for learning are reduced.
- This in turn has an impact on the resilience of their families, and communities struggle to cope with the effect of climate shocks.
- Adolescent girls are active in their communities: planting trees, recycling, helping to repair roads and raising awareness about climate change.
- They are critical of the quality of climate change education that they are receiving – often their teachers are hardly trained and have little knowledge of the subject. Girls want to learn and do more.

### To help them with this they have three major recommendations:

1. **Make schools safe:** by repairing infrastructure damage as quickly as possible and having robust gender- and age-aware disaster planning in place.
2. **Improve climate change curricula:** by embedding gender-transformative climate change education into school curricula and improving the knowledge and teaching skills of the staff who deliver it.
3. **Create better conditions for climate change adaptation and education:** by providing loss and damage finance to benefit families whose incomes have been affected by climate change so that increased poverty does not threaten girls' education. And by working with schools and local communities to ensure that the voices of adolescent girls are heard in climate change decision-making at all levels, so that their rights are respected and their specific needs are acknowledged and met.



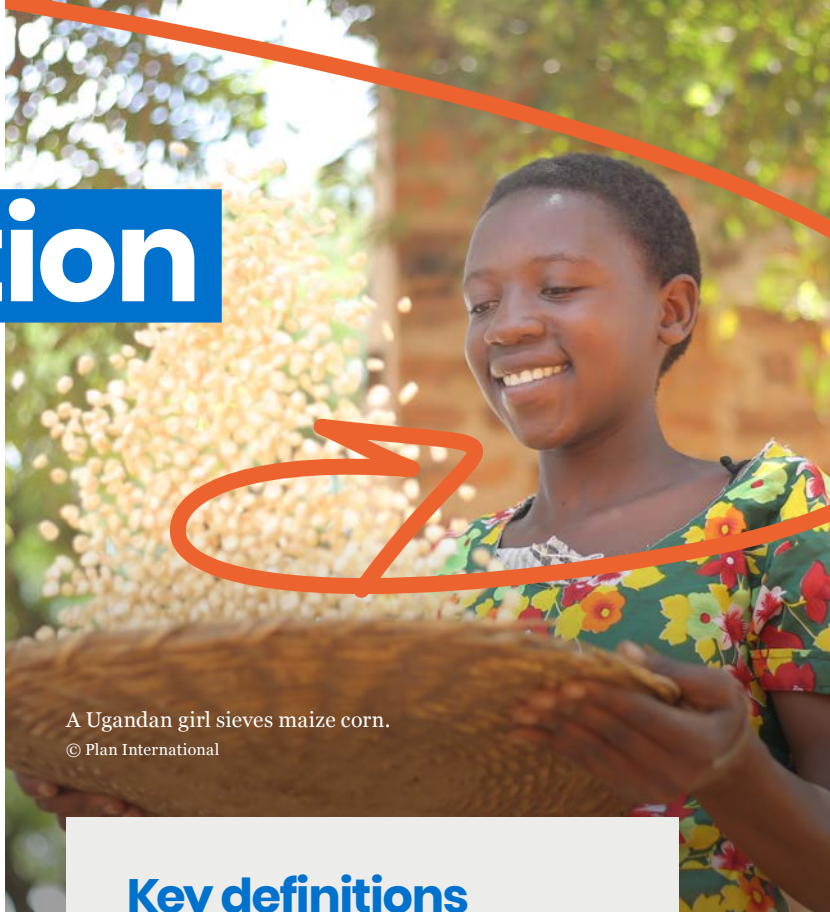
# Introduction

In 2006, Plan International began a unique research study following a group of 142 girls from nine countries across three continents. The aim of the study, *Real Choices, Real Lives*, was to track the cohort girls from their birth to when they turn 18 to have a better understanding of the reality of their daily lives. The study documents in detail the experiences of the girls, their individual families, and the environment they live in and helps to put a human face on the available statistics, theories and academic discussions.<sup>1</sup> Nearly 18 years later we have a wealth of information, centred on the voices of the girls themselves, describing not only their daily routines and experiences but their opinions, hopes, dreams, and aspirations.

“My life is going to be different from that of my mother because I have studied and reached where my mother did not reach ... her life is not good.”

Nimisha (11, Uganda)

Over the years the RCRL study has focused on education, health, family income, gender roles and on the attitudes and resources within the family and the wider community. This current report is based on research undertaken in Benin, Togo and Uganda, and is focused very specifically on the impact of climate change on girls' education and on their day-to-day lives. The 16 and 17-year-olds, and their parents and carers, reflect on the struggle to stay in school and what climate change means to them. Climate change has many potential victims and, as families grapple with difficult choices, one of these is gender equality.



A Ugandan girl sieves maize corn.

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## Key definitions

**In this research, climate change is defined as:** “a change of climate, which is attributed directly or indirectly to human activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere and which is in addition to natural climate variability observed over comparable time periods.”<sup>2</sup> It can alter rainfall patterns around the globe and increase the frequency and intensity of climate-related disasters. This includes floods, droughts, landslides, wildfires, tropical storms, and extreme temperatures.<sup>3</sup>

**Adaptation to climate change** refers to long-term changes in social, political, and economic practices and processes, to moderate (or benefit from) the effects of climate change.<sup>4</sup>

**Coping strategies are short-term adjustments** at the individual and household level such as diversifying avenues of income or utilising available capital, to minimise the effects of sudden climate-induced shocks and stresses.<sup>5</sup>

1. For detailed methodology for this study, please see the original research report '[Climate Change and Girls' Education: Barriers, Gender Norms and Pathways to Resilience](#)' published in November 2023.
2. UNFCCC (1992) *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change*. Available at: [https://unfccc.int/files/essential\\_background/background\\_publications\\_htmlpdf/application/pdf/conveng.pdf](https://unfccc.int/files/essential_background/background_publications_htmlpdf/application/pdf/conveng.pdf).
3. Plan International (2021) *Climate Change, Young Women, and Girls*. Available at: <https://plan-international.org/uploads/2021/12/climate-change-young-women-girls-plan-and-sei-final.pdf>.
4. UNFCCC (n.d.) *Adaptation and Resilience*. Available at: <https://unfccc.int/topics/adaptation-and-resilience/the-big-picture/introduction>
5. Berman, R, et al. (2015) Identifying drivers of household coping strategies to multiple climatic hazards in Western Uganda: implications for adapting to future climate change, *Climate and Development*, 7:1, pp.71-84.

## Plan International and climate change

Plan International recognises that the climate crisis is an intergenerational and gender injustice. Our work in communities, in humanitarian crises, and in disaster risk reduction (DRR) focuses on and acknowledges the particular risks to girls and women. Plan International is committed to a rights-based approach for understanding and mitigating girls' experiences of climate change. This approach involves: (1) that girls' rights must be explicitly recognised in national climate strategies; (2) that girls have the right to age and gender accessible climate and disaster information; and (3) that girls' participation in decision-making on climate change is fundamental to age- and gender-responsive policy making to address girls' needs and wellbeing.<sup>6</sup> Finally, Plan International believes that climate change action provides a significant opportunity to advance gender equality and girls' rights by promoting transformative systemic changes that address both climate and gender injustices.

To this end we work with children and their communities to reduce climate risks, adapt to climate change and strengthen resilience. We support their meaningful participation in decision making and in leading climate action in their communities. Innovative, games-based and experiential learning approaches are used, which we integrate into community and school systems to maximise long-term impact.

## In their own words

The research for this report, conducted with adolescent girls in Benin, Togo and Uganda, explores how climate-induced shocks and stresses have, and will continue to have, an impact on their education, and the decisions they are able to make about their lives. With their help, it also aims to understand the extent to which education supports girls' and young women's ability to adapt and how this, in turn, supports climate change adaptation in their families and wider communities.

**The rare access on which this report is based paints a far more nuanced picture of how climate change is affecting girls and young women and presents an opportunity to hear from them, not just about their experiences, but about their ideas for mitigation and adaptation – what might make their lives better?**

The research is guided by the Comprehensive School Safety Framework,<sup>7</sup> which outlines three core pillars for disaster risk reduction<sup>8</sup> and resilience-building. These support access to safe, continuous and quality education in the face of climate change and form the foundations for our research findings. They are:

- the need for safe schools
- the need to ensure education continuity in times of crisis
- the need to promote the knowledge and skills of all community members to ensure risk reduction and resilience.<sup>9</sup>

The importance of education about climate change cannot be over-stated: the interviewees state clearly that climate change education is a key factor influencing girls' confidence in their ability to help their communities adapt and encouraging overall climate resilience.

“ [The teachers] also told us that the ozone layer is destroyed when there is a lot of heat and that one of the consequences of the scarcity of rain is the felling of trees. To avoid this, we need to stop bushfires, stop burning tyres and avoid deforestation. ”

**Catherine (16, Benin)<sup>10</sup>**

6. Plan International (2019) *Climate Change – Focus on Girls & Young Women: Plan International Position Paper*. Available at: <https://plan-international.org/publications/climate-change-focus-on-girls-and-young-women/>

7. GADRRRES (2022) *Comprehensive School Safety Framework 2022–2030*. Available at: <https://www.gadrrres.net/>.

8. Disaster risk reduction aims to prevent new risk, reduce existing disaster risk and manage residual risk, all of which contribute to strengthening resilience and therefore to the achievement of sustainable development.

9. GADRRRES (2022) *Comprehensive School Safety Framework 2022–2030*.

10. Unless otherwise stated all quotes from the girls and their caregivers are from the 2023 data collection.



## REAL CHOICES, REAL LIVES

During the research the cohort girls were also asked about their recommendations for change: how would they envision a future in which they are able to thrive despite the ravages of climate change? How might they adapt? What international, national, and local strategies would make a difference to their lives and to the prosperity and wellbeing of their communities? This report not only seeks to understand and amplify the views and experiences of the cohort girls as they face the daily impacts of climate change but also to support their vision for a better way forward.

“I feel good because I am being equipped with knowledge to avert drastic weather conditions.”

Sylvia (17, Uganda)



A girl in Uganda has set up her food stall after joining the Girls Advocacy Alliance project, which is funded by Plan International Netherlands.

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# Setting the scene

Research on climate change in general and its particular impacts on women and children is vast and ongoing, reflecting the urgency of the global situation. It is a situation that is only going to get worse: the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) predicts a further increase in the frequency and intensity of the severe weather already affecting many countries around the world.<sup>11</sup> Globally, natural hazards are occurring “almost five times as frequently as 40 years ago.”<sup>12</sup> As temperatures continue to rise, the increase in the frequency and severity of extreme weather events is making many people poorer. This loss of income falls heavily on children’s health and wellbeing with both direct and indirect disruption to their education: girls are particularly at risk.<sup>13</sup> As daily life becomes more and more difficult, especially for those living in agricultural communities in low- and lower-middle-income countries, hopes and plans for a better future begin to disintegrate.

Inevitably, these changes are affecting the girls taking part in the RCRL study in Benin, Togo, and Uganda: for many of them the unpredictability of extreme weather, the overall lack of support, their exclusion from any form of decision-making, and family poverty enhances their vulnerability to the climate crisis. They are not being helped to adapt, to build their own resilience, and to help their communities but see their opportunities dwindle as their families struggle.

“The school should teach their students about the weather changes so that these students will be able to teach their parents who might not have had an opportunity to go to school. This will help them overcome some extreme weather conditions.”

- **Beti (17, Uganda)**



A young girl on her way to school in Benin.

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11. Lawler, J. and Patel, M. (2012) ‘Exploring children’s vulnerability to climate change and their role in advancing climate change adaptation in East Asia and the Pacific’, *Environmental Development*, 3:1, pp.123-136.
12. Rees, N. et al. (2015) ‘Unless we act now: The impact of climate change on children,’ UNICEF. Available at: [https://www.unicef.org/media/50391/file/Unless\\_we\\_act\\_now\\_The\\_impact\\_of\\_climate\\_change\\_on\\_children-ENG.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/media/50391/file/Unless_we_act_now_The_impact_of_climate_change_on_children-ENG.pdf)
13. Sims, K. (2021) Education, Girls’ Education and Climate Change, K4D Emerging Issues Report 29. *Institute of Development Studies*, p.2

In 2021 UNICEF introduced a Children’s Climate Risk Index (CCRI). It measured the rate of environmental shocks against the levels of child vulnerability, to come up with an analysis of children at risk.<sup>14</sup> Two of the RCRL Africa countries – Benin and Togo – are experiencing extremely high levels of environmental shocks and all three have extremely high levels of child vulnerability. Unsurprisingly, Benin and Togo are among the countries categorised as having a CCRI severity rating of very high. Additionally, according to the Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative (ND-GAIN) which ranks the impact of climate change, Uganda and Benin are among the most vulnerable countries and Togo is not far behind.<sup>15</sup> This index, which analyses a country’s economic, governance and social readiness to improve resilience, is useful in demonstrating that the impact of climate change can be mitigated by robust preparedness planning. But it can also be aggravated by inaction and in Uganda and Benin, in particular, a lack of readiness is causing greater vulnerability for the countries’ inhabitants.

**Table 1** Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative (ND-GAIN) Index in RCRL countries in Africa.<sup>16</sup>

Country	ND-GAIN Index	Country ranking
Country with lowest ND-GAIN (most vulnerable): Chad	27.0	185
Uganda	35.1	173
Benin	39.3	153
Togo	42.9	128
Country with median ND-GAIN: Bhutan	48.4	93
Country with highest ND-GAIN (least vulnerable): Norway	75.0	1

In terms of the relationship between climate change and girls’ education, the Malala Fund’s Girls Education and Climate Challenges Index (GECCI), has established that in all three countries girls face threats to their education due to climate change.<sup>17</sup> Girls in Benin and Togo are among those most likely to have their education disrupted.

**Table 2** Girls’ Education and Climate Challenges Index (GECCI) in RCRL countries.<sup>18</sup>

Country	Ranking
Most vulnerable: Nigeria	1
Benin	6
Togo	8
Uganda	29
Least vulnerable: Timor Leste	77

Climate change affects everybody but, clearly, it does not affect everyone equally. Currently, it is those living in low- and lower-middle-income countries – girls and other marginalised children in particular – whose lives and livelihoods are most damaged. Yet, despite this, their voices and perspectives are seldom included or considered in the decisions and policy-making which are fundamentally shaping their future. Not only are their vulnerabilities largely ignored, but this lack of consultation is also a violation of their right, under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, to participate in the decision-making that affects their lives.<sup>19</sup>

The experiences of the RCRL participants bring the impacts of climate change into detailed focus. In Benin, Togo and Uganda they come from countries and communities largely dependant on rain-fed agriculture and live-stock.

**Benin:** the country is facing desertification (north), torrential rainfall and flooding (south), drought, soil degradation, high winds, increase in pests and disease, rising sea levels, coastal erosion, and temperature increases.

**Togo:** climate change has caused agricultural yields to reduce by up to 25% and is associated with increasing health concerns, including malnutrition, malaria, meningitis and vector- and water-borne diseases like cholera

**Uganda:** an average of 200,000 Ugandans are affected by climate events. Average temperatures have increased by 1.3°C since the 1960s, with significant reduction in annual and seasonal rainfall.

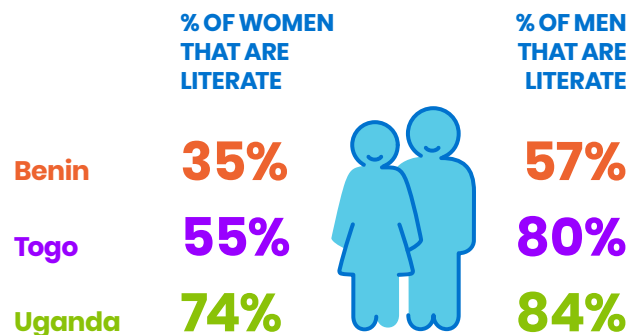
14. UNICEF (2021) ‘The Climate Crisis is a Child Rights Crisis: Introducing the Children’s Climate Risk Index’. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/reports/climate-crisis-child-rights-crisis>  
 15. University of Notre Dame (2021) ‘ND-GAIN Index Country Rankings’. Available at: <https://gain.nd.edu/our-work/country-index/rankings/>  
 16. Ibid.  
 17. Malala Fund (2021) A Greener, Fairer Future: Why leaders need to invest in climate and girls’ education. Available at: <https://malala.org/newsroom/malala-fund-publishes-report-on-climate-change-and-girls-education>, p.11.  
 18. Ibid.  
 19. UNICEF (2023) Falling short: Addressing the Climate Finance Gap for Children, Available at: [www.unicef.org/media/142181/file/Falling-short-Addressing-the-climate-finance-gap-for-children-June-2023.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/media/142181/file/Falling-short-Addressing-the-climate-finance-gap-for-children-June-2023.pdf)

For many households, poverty, the lack of access to credit, limited formal education, lack of alternative employment or governments subsidies, and the, often overwhelming, nature of the climate shocks they are experiencing, means it is impossible to adapt. For the cohort girls will this lead to lives limited by lack of education, rising violence and all-consuming domestic responsibilities.

## What does this mean for women and girls?

The three RCRL countries in Africa all have some policies, action plans, and nationally determined contributions (NDCs) for addressing climate change – demonstrating varying degrees of government commitment to building adaptation and resilience. However, there is limited monitoring and evaluation data available to demonstrate progress and the political will to ensure these plans are actually carried out is limited. Additionally, until recently gender has been largely neglected in international climate policy and resilience-building work. This is changing, with studies from around the world pointing to a greater understanding around the necessity for gender-specific policies and the need for women to be integrated into the various strategies and action plans.<sup>20,21</sup> This growing realisation should help improve national competence in tackling the overall challenge of climate change.

It is easy to see why the inclusion of women and girls in climate crisis policymaking and planning is so important. Vulnerability to climate change is not uniform or static. It is shaped by age, gender, education, income, and geography<sup>22</sup> and is subject to a range of social, economic, and political circumstances.<sup>23</sup> Women and children – and particularly adolescent girls – are among the most vulnerable. They start from a lower base: they are more likely to be living in poverty, to have less access to knowledge and education, and are more likely to be malnourished.<sup>24</sup> Women and girls constitute the majority of the world's poor and are often dependent on natural resources for their livelihoods.<sup>25</sup> They are also more likely to have fewer financial resources and lower levels of education than boys and men.<sup>26</sup>



**Crises of all sorts tend to provoke an increase in violence: adolescent girls and young women living in climate crises are at greater risk of sexual and gender-based violence (GBV), domestic abuse and intimate partner violence (IPV).<sup>27</sup>**

Additionally, when livelihoods are disrupted and money is in even shorter supply, CEFMU is often viewed as a way of improving a family's financial situation. It reduces the number of people within the household who need to be fed, and, in communities that practice bride price – paid by the groom's family to the bride's family – it can be a source of income.<sup>28</sup> Climate shocks also disrupt girls' education which is widely understood to be a protective factor against child marriage.<sup>29</sup>

20. Feitosa, C. and Yamaoka, M. (2020) 'Strengthening climate resilience and women's networks: Brazilian inspiration from agroecology', *Gender & Development*, 28:3, p468.
21. Tran, V.T., et al. (2022) 'Nuanced assessment of livelihood resilience through the intersectional lens of gender and ethnicity: Evidence from small-scale farming communities in the upland regions of Vietnam', *Journal of Rural Studies*, 92:1, pp.68–78.
22. Muttarak, R., and Wolfgang, L. (2014) 'Is Education a Key to Reducing Vulnerability to Natural Disasters and hence Unavoidable Climate Change?', *Ecology and Sociology*, 19:1, pp.1–8.
23. Lawler, J. and Patel, M. (2012) 'Exploring children's vulnerability to climate change and their role in advancing climate change adaptation in East Asia and the Pacific'.
24. Plan International (2021a) *Climate change, young women, and girls*, p.9.
25. UN WomenWatch (n.d) Factsheet: *Women, Gender Equality and Climate Change*, Available at: [www.un.org/womenwatch/feature/climate\\_change/downloads/Women\\_and\\_Climate\\_Change\\_Factsheet.pdf](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/feature/climate_change/downloads/Women_and_Climate_Change_Factsheet.pdf)
26. Ibid.
27. van Daalen, K.R. et al (2022) 'Extreme events and gender-based violence: A mixed methods systematic review', *Lancet Planet Health*, 6:6.
28. UNFPA (2021c) *Child Marriage and Environmental Crises: An Evidence Brief*. Available at: <https://esaro.unfpa.org/en/publications/child-marriage-and-environmental-crises-evidence-brief>
29. Girls Not Brides (2022) *Girls' Education and Child Marriage*. Available at: <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/resource-centre/girls-education-and-child-marriage/#resource-downloads>.



According to the evidence there are two key factors influencing the disproportionate impact of climate change on girls' education:

- **gender norms** which devalue educational attainment for girls, in favour of reproductive and care labour within the home,<sup>30</sup>
- **poverty** which can have the effect of forcing parents facing financial hardship to remove children from school as a negative coping mechanism.<sup>31</sup>

This combination informs the decision to take girls out of school, rather than boys: girls are considered to be more useful at home and can take on paid work outside of the home as well.<sup>32</sup>

**The impact of climate change on children – and girls in particular – can be severe and long lasting: it often increases girls' domestic responsibilities to the detriment of their studies, puts them at greater risk of violence as escalating poverty means crime rates soar, and any reduction in family income can make them more vulnerable to being pulled out of school and to early and forced marriage or unions.<sup>33</sup>**

## Education matters

There is a growing body of research supporting the importance of education in the context of climate action and resilience. In particular, girls' education has been identified as key to reducing vulnerability to the impacts of climate change:<sup>34</sup> evidence suggests that countries that have focused on girls' equal access to education have suffered far fewer losses from droughts and floods than those with lower levels of girls' education.<sup>35</sup> In 2014, eleven studies carried out across a range of different contexts, concluded that long term defence against the consequences of climate change can be developed through education: by strengthening skills and knowledge, and the understanding of risk, as well as by indirectly reducing poverty, improving health, and increasing access to information.<sup>36</sup>

In August 2023, the UN Committee on the Rights of Child released a general comment on children's rights and the environment, calling on states to ensure age-appropriate, safe, and accessible mechanisms for children's views to be heard "regularly and at all stages of environmental decision-making processes."<sup>37</sup> Where they are heard, children's views do have an impact: child-to-parent intergenerational learning has been identified as the way forward, "inspire[ing] adults towards higher levels of climate concern, and in turn, collective action".<sup>38</sup>

**Overall, current research makes it clear that education is a critical means of addressing climate change: it links to skills development, awareness raising, behaviour change and building children's agency. It is these factors that make up the everyday leadership that is exhibited by the RCRL girls: it is not so much about them having access to, and taking up, platforms with decision-makers, but about taking part in the vital climate adaptations that can be made within their own communities.**

A young girl is one of the best students in her school in Benin.

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30. Theirworld (2020) 20 reasons why, in 2020, there are still 260m children out of school. Available at: <https://theirworld.org/news/20-reasons-why-260m-children-are-out-of-school-in-2020/>

31. UNGEI (2021) Out Call for Gender Transformative Education to Advance Climate Justice. Available at: <https://www.ungei.org/news/our-call-gender-transformative-education-climate-justice>

32. Nelson, V. (2011) 'Gender, Generations, Social Protection & Climate Change: A thematic Review,' Overseas Development Institute, Available at: <https://odi.org/en/publications/gender-generations-social-protection-climate-change-a-thematic-review>

33. Plan International (2021) Climate change, young women, and girls, p.4.

34. Ibid.

35. Plan International (2019) Climate Change: Focus on Girls and Young Women, Plan International Position Paper. Available at: <https://plan-international.org/publications/climate-change-focus-on-girls-and-young-women/>.

36. Muttarak, R., and Lutz, W. (2014) 'Is Education a Key to Reducing Vulnerability to Natural Disasters and hence Unavoidable Climate Change?'

37. UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2023) General Comment No.26 (2023) on children's rights and the environment, with a special focus on climate change. Available at: [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRC%2FC%2FGC%2F26&Lang=en](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRC%2FC%2FGC%2F26&Lang=en).

38. Lawson, D.F. et al (2019) Children can foster climate change concern among their parents, Nature Climate Change, 9:6.

# What the girls have told us

The adolescent girls taking part in the study live in different countries; their cultures, economies and community and family lives vary but climate change affects them all. Its influence on lives and livelihoods has been apparent for some time and, as demonstrated in our previous years' evidence, is increasing. The interviews with the girls and their families paint a picture of unseasonal weather, poor harvest yields which are worsening almost every year, reduced household incomes, increased costs of living, and families seeking extra sources of income. These changes, common across the RCRL Africa cohort, are becoming unmanageable for agricultural communities who could previously anticipate seasonal changes and plan accordingly. The impact on families – and on girls' education in particular – is far-reaching.

**From 2011 onwards, it is evident from the data, that overall, communities have been facing unpredictable, intensifying, and more frequent and unusual weather events.<sup>39</sup> The historical evidence demonstrates that these weather events are beyond normal parameters: it is clearly climate change.**

The analysis of the 2023 research findings takes a close look at both the direct and indirect impacts of climate change on girls' education and opportunities. It starts with the immediate impact of extreme weather on learning environments and then proceeds to the longer-term effects as incomes dwindle and families resort to potentially harmful coping strategies. The report also analyses the role of education in preparing for and adapting to climate change – the loss of girls' education reaches into their communities to the detriment of their future happiness and prosperity.



A girl in West Africa plants in the school garden.  
© Plan International

“When she is sent back home for school fees, I feel bad – and when I get money for her school fees, I feel good because she is going back to study.”

**Amelia's mother (Uganda)**

39. The data review process was limited to 2011 – 2022, as we were interested in investigating climate change effects that intersect with the girls' schooling. 2011 was the earliest year some participants in the RCRL cohort would have started school.



## Girls' education is being disrupted by climate change: the impact on learning, lives and livelihoods

Across all three countries, girls describe the impact of climate change on their education. Intense heat can affect their ability to study and getting to school at all can be challenging. Physical barriers are thrown up by storms battering school buildings, rain washing away roads and winds making journeys to schools and colleges too hazardous to undertake. In **Uganda**, Nimisha is in her final year of secondary school. She goes to boarding school, a long way from home, and the journey back after a visit to her family is often impossible:

“Floods makes roads inaccessible which makes my journey to school difficult and at times [I'd be] missing school.”

Nimisha (17, Uganda)

In **Benin** also, the girls' journeys to school are disrupted by rain and flooding. Thea says that sometimes the rainwater comes up to her knees, and recently she heard of a student swept away by flooding. Alice, Barbara and Annabelle explain that they are often late when it rains because of the poor road conditions:

“If there is a heavy rain and I am at home, it is difficult for me to go to school because the rainwater degrades the road ... When it rains and there are a lot of absentees in class, the teachers redo the lessons because they know that the track is not in good condition to be used by the students when it rains.”

Alice (16, Benin)

Amelia, who, like Nimisha, goes to boarding school in **Uganda**, also discusses absenteeism: saying that while the rains haven't affected her attendance, her teachers sometimes arrive late, or not at all. In **Togo**, nearly all the cohort girls comment on road conditions: Azia must cross a stream on her way to school and sometimes the water is too high, and she is unable to get there. Also in Togo,

Ladi says that she sometimes falls behind on her studies because she misses class when “the roads become impassable during the rainy season”. Both Azia and Fezire describe school buildings that have collapsed or been damaged:

“The roofs of the classrooms were damaged by the wind. This meant that the classrooms had to be twinned in order to repair the damage.”

Azia (16, Togo)

In **Benin**, Barbara says that the weather events have “become more serious” in the last few years, and this has caused damage to school buildings, with Annabelle commenting that students were taken out of class to do repair work when “the rain made holes in the school compound and we filled them with sand”.

Other impacts on girls' access to education are more subtle: money for education becomes scarcer as harvests fail, homes need repairing and health issues increase. Family incomes are falling, and food prices are increasing, as unpredictable weather patterns make earning a living particularly difficult for the sort of agricultural and fishing communities in which many of the girls live.

A complete village is flooded after rainfall in Uganda.  
© iStock – Dennis Wegewijs





Across all three countries, it is the unpredictability that is the greatest challenge:

“Crop failures are more frequent now. We grow crops but they don’t produce well.”

Fezire (17, Togo)

In **Uganda** communities are experiencing drought, which Amelia’s mother says is a new phenomenon: “before we used to get moderate rainfall, the harvest was good and reliable unlike now”. The drought is also having an impact on livestock:

“When rainfall does not fall, people’s crops do not grow well but just end up drying up ... When there is less rainfall, grass is scarce, and animals starve leading [to] death.”

Miremba (16, Uganda)

Conversely, heavy rains and flooding are also destroying crops. Rain is now rarer, but when it does rain it is often torrential:

“Sometimes it rains heavily, and people are deceived into believing that it is for the benefit of the crops, only for it to rain so heavily, thus destroying crops.”

Shifa (17, Uganda)

The same thing has been observed in Togo and Benin. Communities can no longer depend on the rainy season: crops are either withered from too little rain or saturated by too much.

In **Togo**, Ala Woni, Reine and Djoumai describe animal deaths caused by drought, and Ayomide and Fezire have both observed an increase in disease among animals since the drought started. Margaret in **Benin** says that five of her family’s sheep died this year because of the heat. Droughts are having an impact on fisheries, too. Larba in Togo and Catherine in Benin both say that the rivers in their local area have dried up.

Everywhere, participants tell a similar story: poor yields, livestock losses, dried up rivers and unpredictable seasons are having a devastating effect on family incomes as shortages increase the cost of living.

Weather events have affected farmers and infertility of the land has caused crop failure, which has made things expensive in life. All food products have become equally expensive.”

Annabelle’s mother (Benin)

Not only is agricultural income affected as crop yields deteriorate, but so too are families’ other sources of income. In **Uganda**, Amelia’s mother has a business selling clothes, which is experiencing reduced sales as people have less money to spend. In **Benin**, Thea has noticed the same thing – that the knock-on effect of farmers’ livelihood losses is that people have less money to buy products from shops and businesses, affecting incomes across the community. In **Togo**, some of the girls note that women are most affected by this issue, as they are more likely to participate in the informal economy, and have limited access to savings, credit and loans.

Across all three countries, girls comment that food scarcity and rising prices are causing famine in their communities. In Uganda, Sylvia thinks that those most affected by the shortage of food are children at school “because they are not able to concentrate in class due to hunger”. Many also note that malnutrition is causing other health problems. In Togo, Fezire has observed a correlation between the decrease in household incomes and the worsening health of people in her community. She says that people are resorting to traditional medicines instead of going to health clinics which they can no longer afford. Alice in Benin agrees that “people can’t go to health care because they don’t have money due to crop failure”. In Uganda, too, participants see a link between hunger and ill-health:

“... due to poor feeding even, their health will be poor, their immunity will be low leading to frequent sicknesses in the household, leading to crowding in hospitals and health centres.”

FGD participant (male religious leader, Uganda)

As climate change takes its severe toll on livelihoods, adolescent girls report that their parents are struggling to pay for their school fees or for their travel to and from school. Others report having to seek paid employment outside of school hours to help contribute to their family income. They also describe how difficult it is to juggle school and work and feel that their education is suffering.

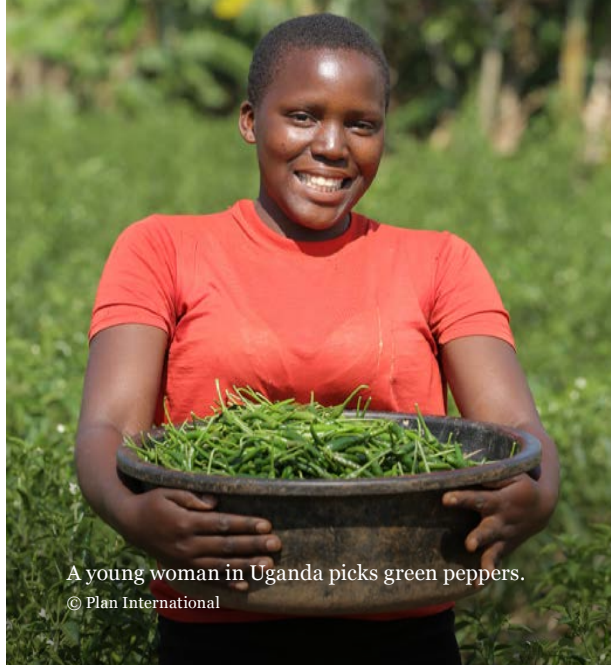
In **Togo**, Larba, 17, has taken on a part-time job to pay for her school fees, which her parents can no longer afford due to climate change-related livelihood losses and the rising cost of living. Larba feels as though she doesn't have enough time to learn outside school hours because at weekends she works in the fields and it's only when she gets back at night that she can study. Of the 29 girls in Africa who participated in interviews in 2023, 19 are currently attending school: five in Benin, eight in Togo, and six in Uganda.

All six of the girls currently attending school in **Uganda** state that they are struggling to pay the fees, and they often miss school when they cannot make the payments. Sylvia says that her attendance has been disrupted because of this, explaining that *"sometimes I would be sent back home for school fees then I miss school assignments"*. Beti explains that the lack of rainfall has affected her school attendance over the past year as her family's bean harvest was poor which meant she couldn't afford the fees. Beti, too, is sent home from school when the school fees have not been paid.

**“Mum used to grow [many] beans and take I [them] to school where I study as part of my school payments but due to the poor yield this has not been possible and as a result could be asked to go back home to pick school fees balance.”**

**Beti (17, Uganda)**

Also in Uganda, Nimisha comments on the stress associated with her family's financial situation, and the unpredictability of whether her parents will be able to afford her school fees or not. She says that she spends time in class worrying about this *"instead of focusing on what they are teaching"*. Nimisha is concerned that there will not be enough money for her to complete her education and about the impact this will have on her career prospects.



A young woman in Uganda picks green peppers.  
© Plan International

Other families, like Sheila's in Uganda, are having to make difficult decisions when they cannot afford to keep all their children at school. When asked how she feels about not going to school, Sheila's disappointment is clear:

**“I feel bad really. First of all, my friends that I studied with are still in school yet for me I cannot. Besides that, sometimes they pass by me and make false allegations that I refused to study. In those moments, it hurts me.”**

**Sheila (17, Uganda)**

School dropout rates are particularly high in **Togo**, with Nana-Adja, Nini-Riki and Reine all indicating that poverty and unwanted pregnancy are two of the main reasons girls are leaving school. Of the six RCRL girls who have been forced to drop out, five attribute their leaving primarily to financial pressures. Djoumai says that her parents couldn't afford the school fees, or her breakfast, and that things are easier now that her parents don't have worry about these expenses. Despite this, she would like to return to school and envies her friends who still go:

**“A girl's education is important because she has a better chance of getting a job and she can help her community, her parents and her friends when she succeeds.”**

**Djoumai (17, Togo)**

Nini-Rike claims that poverty affects girls in a unique way as it can sometimes lead them to drop out of school to seek money and/or food from boys and men which another of the Togo participants describes as “*bad behaviour*”. There is another side to this – girls may also turn to boyfriends to help with school expenses which comes, as Sheila explains, with strings attached:

“If I am in need and request my mother to provide for me specific needs yet she is incapable of providing, I may be tempted to get a boyfriend who may in turn make me pregnant. That becomes quite a huge challenge because when a man gives you money, he may need something in return.”

**Sheila (17, Uganda)**

Additionally, increased poverty often leads to more crime. This in turn can have a particular impact on girls' school attendance. They are vulnerable on the way to school and families are of course reluctant to send them. In Benin, several girls reported the roads to be unsafe due to high crime rates. One girl, Barbara, says she does not attend school unless her brother can accompany her, because the route is so dangerous.

Ill health, another by-product of climate change, is also having an impact on school attendance. Some of the girls in Uganda report having missed long periods of school due to illnesses: which they attribute to malnourishment, the dust and heat, or diseases carried by floods. Amelia says that she has missed three months of school due to malaria, while Justine has missed one month because of typhoid.

Despite all the pressures, families are often supportive. They really want their girls to go to school and understand the need to prioritise studying. Many of the girls too are fully aware how crucial education is:

“Girls' education is useful because girls also have the right to learn and find work in the future, and as our parents didn't go to school, we have to go.”

**Essohana (17, Togo)**

Nevertheless, the impact of climate change on family income has brought to the fore many of the age-old gendered attitudes to girls' education. Climate change affects boys' lives and education too but not, perhaps, as much.

**When poverty escalates it is often girls' education that suffers: girls are more useful at home to deputise for mothers who have moved away for work or are working longer hours, families fear for their safety and keep their daughters at home, they encourage early marriage to ease the burden on family budgets.**

Additionally, girls take on paid work to contribute to family income and their schoolwork deteriorates. Contraceptives become too expensive and pregnancy rates increase: girls' dreams of college and careers disappear as domestic responsibilities, including a rise in CEFMU as a negative coping strategy, take over. In some communities, attitudes to girls' education remain ambivalent – often it is not really valued.

“Here, girls' education is not valued because parents say that a girl at school is useless.”

**Anti-Yara (17, Togo)**

A focus group in Togo supports this view: while they value education and do not agree with girls being taken out of school, they acknowledge that this is something that often happens in their community. Ayomide, Nana-Adja and Larba, also from Togo, say that early and forced marriage, on the increase as family incomes deteriorate, is the biggest challenge facing girls in their neighbourhoods. Participants in Benin and Uganda have similar comments:

“Girls face forced marriage. Parents take money from men in exchange for their daughters.”

**Margaret (17, Benin)**



The picture is complex. Many girls in the RCRL study have already left school due to financial stress, illness, early marriage, or pregnancy. Despite this, many of their parents and caregivers continue to report valuing girls' education, not least because they recognise it is an economic investment in a better life for the girls and their families.

“A girl's education is valued by the community because if she earns a living, she supports the family more than a boy. She can also help others, and all the families here send their daughters to school.”

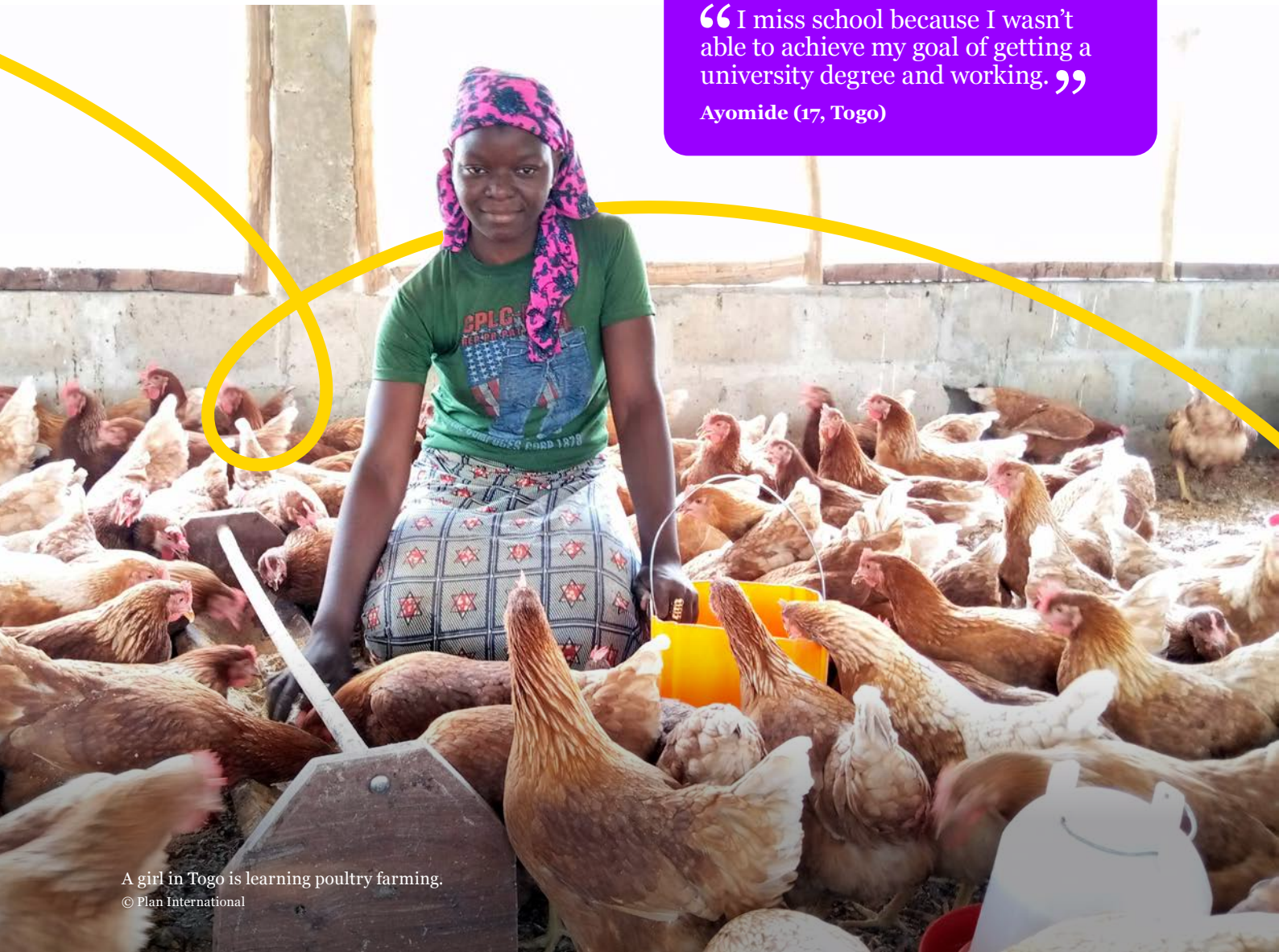
Folami (17, Togo)

Nimisha's father can see the value of his daughter's education to her and to him – her future earnings “*can be a great help to you when you are old and all your strength is gone*”. In Benin Annabelle's mother and father, too, are fighting to keep their daughter in school, “*doing everything we can to make sure she develops further*”, including limiting the time she spends on paid work and household chores.

However, worsening financial situations appear to be driving families to make difficult decisions. They are forced to sacrifice a more stable financial future in order to survive today. Girls' educational prospects are abandoned as families struggle to find food and fund their daily lives.

“I miss school because I wasn't able to achieve my goal of getting a university degree and working.”

Ayomide (17, Togo)



A girl in Togo is learning poultry farming.  
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## 2 The role of education in preparing for and adapting to climate change

Another casualty of pulling girls out of school is the loss of their input in tackling climate change. It is at school that they are most likely to learn about climate change – its causes and how to adapt and survive. It is clearly crucial both to embed quality climate change education into school curricula and to make sure that girls remain in school to benefit from it.

**Our research indicates that where schools have a strong climate change curriculum, the girls demonstrate more knowledge about climate change, greater confidence in applying adaptation strategies, and provide more detailed recommendations. In countries where climate change education is limited, the girls report having less understanding and confidence about the topic.**

Among the 29 girls in the RCRL cohort in Africa, all but three say they had heard of the term 'climate change' but they struggle to define it, or to explain its causes. Notably, the girls in Uganda, where climate change content has been embedded in the lower secondary school curriculum since 2012, had a greater knowledge than their peers in Togo and Benin. Amelia, for example, had learned in school that changes to the climate "*are attributed to the activities of man*" – elaborating that these activities include deforestation, monocropping,<sup>40</sup> and other agricultural practices.

**“I am from a family of famers. Sometimes, instead of cutting down trees, we leave them thus keeping the environment green.”**

**Amelia (16, Uganda)**

Amelia's family are particularly committed and well informed: her mother says the household has adopted reforestation practices, and she is calling for increased environmental conservation and is concerned about increasing rates of deforestation for charcoal production. She also emphasises the importance of using modern farming methods, such as fertilisers and irrigation, to adapt to changing

climate conditions. Amelia's mother is happy with her daughter's climate change education, outlining the different coping strategies that Amelia has learned at school and started to practice at home:

**“I think she was taught about reforestation, sanitation and hygiene, clearing stagnant water whereby they act as bleeding areas for mosquitos caused by heavy rainfall.”**

**Amelia's mother (Uganda)**

Many of the girls and their families have strategies to cope with climate crises: parents have financial plans in place to deal with loss of income and the girls have practical suggestions to deal with flooding, heat or drought. Mirembe and Nimisha, both in Uganda, actively engage in tree-planting initiatives, and encourage others to get involved. In Togo, Reine, Larba and Fezire have all participated in tree-planting efforts, learning about the benefits of reforestation at school. Many of the girls and their schools are involved in tree-planting activities and they learn also about re-cycling, waste disposal and how to prepare for floods. In all three countries, they talk too about raising awareness in their communities, repairing damaged roads, creating irrigation systems and generally being prepared.

**“Preparing in time and knowing about the weather forecast can help because it will not be abrupt when it is shining or raining – you will always be prepared.”**

**Justine (17, Uganda)**

**These activities demonstrate that girls are exercising leadership and using their initiative in their everyday lives and that they are keen to do what they can to combat climate change.**

40. Monocropping is the practice of planting the same crop for multiple seasons, without rotating through other crops on the land.

## “It is not enough ...”

Despite what they are doing and what they have learned, a number of the girls – particularly those in Uganda – express dissatisfaction with the level of climate change education they are receiving. Amelia, Justine, Nimisha, Beti and Shifa all have criticisms about the curriculum content, the knowledge base of their teachers and the practical strategies discussed. Amelia has learned about climate change in both primary and secondary school and is able to identify causes of climate change as well as coping and adaptation strategies. However, she thinks that poor teacher training on the subject is a barrier to her education:

“I think it is not enough because every teacher has a limit to what they know and that is what pass on to us.”

**Amelia (16, Uganda)**

When asked if she feels prepared to deal with the impacts of climate change, or to cope with extreme weather events, Amelia says no – and she thinks that her community has “nothing to show” for years of education and preparation for climate change. She is disappointed that her school has not done anything to prepare for, or respond to, climate change, and thinks that the school community need external advisors to help them.

Beti rates her climate change education as a four out of ten, saying that “some things are not taught to us” – she would particularly like to learn about agricultural



Girls learning at school in Kamuli, Uganda.

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techniques and strategies for coping with drought, such as irrigation. Shifa is the most confident about her climate change education, rating it as an eight out of ten. She says that she has been taught different farming techniques, including crops and husbandry, and about weather forecasting which will help with predicting the best times for planting. However, Shifa, too, still thinks there is more to learn.

Their comments are echoed in Benin where several of the girls are critical of their climate change education:

“It’s not enough. I want us to learn about the damage that can be done and also about many of the things that climate change creates, but we don’t go into them in depth in school lessons.”

**Annabelle (17, Benin)**

Their dissatisfaction is unsurprising, given the limited literature available on Benin’s climate education curriculum: it does not seem to be a priority for the education sector and the girls are calling out for more knowledge. Annabelle would particularly like to see more practical lessons included in the curriculum, explaining that “*theoretical courses are given but no practical courses, no experiments*”. Alice agrees that there are “*a lot of things missing*” from the curriculum.

Girls in Togo, with some exceptions, show the most satisfaction with their climate change education. Azia, Anti-Yara, Nana Adja, and Essohana all rate their climate change lessons as 10 out of 10. Azia explains her reasoning for giving this score: “*because I have enough information*”. Anti-Yara comments that she has learned about the causes and consequences of climate change, the solutions, and ways to prepare. Anti-Yara also notes that her teachers explain everything to them, and as a result, she believes that what she has learned is enough. Ayomide and Larba disagree:

“What we are learning is not enough and I think we need more information about climate change.”

**Larba (17, Togo)**



# Conclusion

This report provides rare access to the daily lives and experiences of girls, their families and communities, as they struggle with the impact of climate change, with what appears to be little outside support. It is a unique addition to the research about climate change and its particular impact on girls because it comes from the girls themselves: from their experiences and observations, of how climate change is affecting them every day, and how it will reach into, and limit, their future lives and opportunities. Listening to what the girls have to say, it is clear they deserve better from their schools, communities and governments. Their willingness to learn, and to act, to help themselves and their communities in the struggle to mitigate the worst effects of climate change, is unquestionable.

**Their ideas are worth hearing and supporting: the impact of climate change should not be allowed to fall unfairly on girls and young women because of their age and gender.**

Though the families in Benin, Togo and Uganda are not yet suffering the very worst impacts of climate change, which include displacement, starvation and death, the research tracks the worsening daily deprivations and often overlooked consequences, particularly the impact on girls' education. The findings demonstrate clearly the crucial importance of information acquired at school. It enables adolescent girls to understand climate change and to be active in adapting to and mitigating its effects.

**“For every additional year of schooling a girl receives on average, her country's resilience to climate disasters can be expected to improve by 3.2 points on the ND-GAIN Index, which measures country-level vulnerability to climate change alongside readiness to improve resilience.”<sup>41</sup>**

If they are supported to stay at school, girls will put their knowledge to good use in the service of their communities. In all three countries, however, schools, and governments education departments, could do better.



Girls parade through streets in Uganda.  
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41. Kwauk, C & Braga, A (2017) 3 platforms for girls' education in climate strategy, Brookings, accessed September 2023 [www.brookings.edu/articles/3-platforms-for-girls-education-in-climate-strategies/](https://www.brookings.edu/articles/3-platforms-for-girls-education-in-climate-strategies/)

“ [schools should] inform us the different preventative measures by teaching us to desist from activities that trigger climate change. ”

Shifa (17, Uganda)

Schools are the primary source of information about climate change - some of the girls who have left school are learning from their friends who are still there. However, radio, television, and social media play a part in spreading knowledge and inspiring discussion and action and, particularly in Uganda, girls are also learning from their families and communities. Families discuss rising prices and in all three countries the girls can see clearly how agricultural livelihoods are affected.

**Education and information, whatever its source, is key to the girls' adaptation efforts at the individual level and a crucial component of their climate resilience.**

It is clear from the research that girls' education, and gender equality, are victims of climate change: many of the girls in the study are taking on additional responsibilities as families respond to the impact of climate change on their lives and livelihoods. In many cases parents struggle to keep their daughters in school and the daughters in turn struggle with juggling studying, domestic chores and often paid jobs outside the home as well.

Decisions taken now to enable families to cope have the capacity to blight lives well into the future. Girls themselves have suggestions that could change this and reduce the damage to livelihoods and infrastructure. They feel that it is not yet too late to rescue the planet and repair some of the destruction: every little helps and they are keen to contribute. But they are clear too that individual action will not solve the problem: governments, schools and local communities have their part to play. They call for more government support in raising awareness, and in supplying information and financial support to communities who are struggling:

“ Governments should support by supplying seedlings; subsidise the price of products such as fertilisers. ”

Nini-Rike (16, Togo)



An adolescent girl selling banana chips in Togo.

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Suggestions range from subsidising school fees and health care to supplying experts to help with agricultural issues: what to plant, when, and how to diversify. They point also to the role of governments and local authorities in repairing and maintaining infrastructure. And they want their local communities to be more proactive:

“ Community members should be reforesting, raising awareness and doing community work. ”

Essohana (17, Togo)

In all three countries, there is a sense that girls' abilities to help combat the impacts of climate change are being dismissed and their knowledge and skills are not being properly developed. One of their main asks is for teachers to be better trained to deliver an improved climate change curriculum and for schools to provide energy and leadership in the struggle to understand, adapt to, and mitigate, where possible, the fundamental changes brought about by global warming.

Despite the clarity with which they observe the changes affecting and afflicting the communities they live in many of the RCRL participants continue to hope: that cleaner energy will slow climate change, that their education will equip them for a better future, that rain will fall and trees will be planted, that all is not lost.

“ My orange tree that I planted is a hope for me because I know that when it produces a lot of oranges, I will sell them and get money to meet my needs. ”

Barbara (16, Benin)

# Recommendations

The recommendations below have been developed directly from the research findings across the nine RCRL focus countries – including the ideas, opinions, and recommendations from the RCRL girls themselves, and from their families, and members of their wider communities. Their input will help governments, policy-makers and community leaders improve society's resilience to climate change: notably by enhancing the quality of education in schools, particularly the climate change curricula, and ensuring girls' participation in it.

## Calls to action

### 1 Make schools safe

Ministries of Education, Environment, Finance, and Meteorology should collaborate at all levels to:

“Governments should take truck-loads of sand to backfill areas that are flooding, make bridges and gullies.”

Margaret (17, Benin)

- **Prioritise investments** that strengthen the resilience of **school infrastructure and routes to school** to withstand extreme weather events, including the construction and maintenance of climate-resilient roads that are less susceptible to flooding and damage.
- **Develop, resource, implement and monitor gender-responsive school safety policies and plans**, in line with the Comprehensive School Safety Framework. This includes developing **school disaster risk reduction (DRR) plans**, informed by a gender- and age-responsive risk assessment that recognises and accounts for children and girls' specific vulnerabilities and adaptation capacities. As a guiding principle, **children should be actively engaged in co-developing DRR and adaptation plans to ensure they meet their specific needs, and have the opportunity to engage in the, implementation and monitoring of those plans.** They should be recognised as rights-holders and active participants in decision-making.
- **Invest in education continuity** plans to ensure that, if weather events disrupt access to schools, learning can continue in other ways. This may include distance learning, or the use of alternative sites. Anticipatory Action approaches should be included in education policies, plans and actions at all levels.
- **Fund and implement inclusive, gender-responsive** anticipatory action in education. Take anticipatory action ahead of a crisis to reduce the impact of forecasted shocks and stresses on children's access to education, particularly that of girls, and ensure departments of education and schools have access to timely hydrometeorological data, predictive analysis and vulnerability data to inform and fund schools to take anticipatory action that has been **pre-agreed by at-risk communities.**
- **Invest in services that contribute to children's equal access** to schooling: including free school meal programmes, financial support for tuition and school supplies, child-safe transportation to schools, sexual and reproductive health, and mental health services.



## 2 Improve climate change curricula

### Ministries of Education, together with Ministries of Environment, should:

“No, I’m not sufficiently prepared, I lack a lot of information.”

Ayomide (17, Togo)

- **Mandate climate change education** that is evidence-based, contextually relevant, gender-transformative and inclusive, age-responsive, and includes Indigenous knowledge and rights.
- **Take a gender-transformative approach** to curriculum reform that can change norms and attitudes and build the skills necessary to shift the way children are taught to think about the world around them. A holistic approach to climate change curriculum reform should equip learners with an understanding of the intersecting social injustices that shape different vulnerabilities and adaptation capacities.
- **Invest in teacher training** on climate change by mandating and funding comprehensive climate change modules in training courses. This must include providing teachers with access to up-to-date reliable data and facts and running ongoing professional development programmes to support their effective delivery of a transformative climate change curriculum.

### Schools should:

“I need to learn more about like how it will be solved, more terms and solutions that will be taken on to ending climate change and the preventive measures.”

Justine (17, Uganda)

- **Promote action-oriented learning** which supports children and girls to develop collective action in climate change adaptation skills and pro-environmental behaviours, including tree-planting initiatives, growing vegetable gardens, writing letters to government, community organising, campaigning and recycling drives.
- **Ensure the meaningful participation** of children, including girls in all their diversity, in the development of action-oriented learning plans to ensure these address their specific and contextual needs.
- **Support the development of girls’ climate change leadership skills** by providing opportunities (such as school clubs) for girls to exercise and practice their leadership capabilities in relation to climate change adaptation.
- **Educate girls on climate change decision-making processes** at all levels – local, national, regional, and global – and on how they can meaningfully engage in these processes.

### 3 Create enabling environments for climate change adaptation and education

#### Governments should:

“The government should ensure that it reaches out to people through different services as food, health and all other social commodities for her people. The government should boost the monetary support it has started. More money should be availed to the communities.”

FGD participant  
(male religious leader,  
Uganda)

- **Review and update** core institutional **policies, strategies, adaptation plans and guidance notes** to include education access, resilience, and continuity.
- **Develop or update education sector plans** that are participatory, gender- and child-responsive and prioritise resilience and climate change adaptation.
- **Increase funding** for the implementation and monitoring of education policies that address climate change, including the development, delivery, and evaluation of climate change curriculum.
- **Advance climate-resilient development**, by **strengthening participation of youth-led organisations** as key actors to ensure Nationally Determined Contributions and National Adaptation Plans include climate education.
- **Create an enabling environment for children and young people's engagement** in climate change decision-making at all levels, giving them a real opportunity to participate in and influence decision-making.
- **Provide loss and damage finance**, made available by high-income countries, to enable immediate relief for students following a sudden onset event or disaster as well as build long-term resilience for children, including those affected by slow onset events. Loss and damage finance should include provision for rebuilding school infrastructure destroyed by extreme weather events to ensure it is sufficiently robust to withstand climate-induced damage.
- **Allocate loss and damage financing for child-critical social services**, including education.
- **Ensure** that loss and damage response is informed by **existing inequalities and disaggregated data**, including by age, gender, and disability status, in order to capture the specific impact of the climate crisis on different groups of children. Ensure loss and damage data related to education, for example lost school days, is disaggregated by gender, age, and disability.
- **Ensure child and girls' rights** are guiding principles of loss and damage funding.
- **Increase social protections** by investing in alternative livelihoods and closing the adaptation gap by providing funding for losses and damages. Climate finance should be delivered in the form of grants. Funding for loss and damage should be decentralised and tailored to meet children's context-specific climate vulnerabilities.

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## Community leaders should:

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“I think the community should plant more trees instead of cutting them and also the preserve the wetlands instead of destroying them by building houses.”

**Beti (17, Uganda)**

- **Promote a commitment** to social norms change on how girls' education, participation and leadership is valued, both broadly, and specifically relating to climate change adaptation.
- **Develop gender-responsive community adaptation plans** that provide a fund for community-level financial support for households facing climate change-related livelihood losses.
- **Develop gender- and age-responsive disaster response plans** that consider intersecting social inequalities that contribute to community members' different levels of vulnerabilities and ability to respond to a climate shock.
- **Promote climate change awareness** and behaviour change in relation to community collective, pro-environmental actions, such as planting trees, recycling, and other household/community level actions.



A girl in West Africa dries tree leaves she has harvested to be made into a porridge.

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## Until we are all equal

### About Plan International

Plan International is an independent development and humanitarian organization that advances children's rights and equality for girls. We believe in the power and potential of every child but know this is often suppressed by poverty, violence, exclusion, and discrimination. And it is girls who are most affected.

Working together with children, young people, supporters, and partners, we strive for a just world, tackling the root causes of the challenges girls and vulnerable children face. We support children's rights from birth until they reach adulthood and we enable children to prepare for and respond to crises and adversity. We drive changes in practice and policy at local, national, and global levels using our reach, experience and knowledge. For over 85 years, we have rallied other determined optimists to transform the lives of all children in more than 80 countries.

**We won't stop until we are all equal.**

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