Plan International Policy Brief | SB60 Expert Dialogue on Children and Climate, and Negotiations, June 4, 2024

The climate crisis disproportionately impacts girls, especially the most marginalised, exacerbating existing inequalities and threatening girls’ rights. However, girls are also powerful climate advocates, leaders and innovators on action to address the climate crisis.

“The time to act is now. The climate crisis is weighing heavy on the shoulders of us children and youth, burdening us with anxiety and fears for our future – how can we dream of a tomorrow if it is being destroyed today?” Ineza Umuhoza Grace, Youth Climate Activist, Rwanda.

Executive Summary

In advance of the 60th session of the UNFCCC Subsidiary Bodies (SB60), Plan International has developed this policy brief to contribute to the Expert Dialogue on Children and Climate as well as key negotiation tracks related to Action for Climate Empowerment, Adaptation, Loss and Damage, and Finance.

Plan International’s submission and policy recommendations are informed by analysis and evidence of the disproportionate impact of the climate crisis on girls’ education, protection risks and health in stable, fragile and conflict affected contexts. It is framed by girl’s lived experiences and their calls for action.

Plan International urges the SB60 Expert Dialogue on Children and Climate and negotiations in Bonn to advance COP28 commitments to gender-responsive and intergenerational approaches to climate policy and action. Decisions must be informed by the perspectives and priorities of girls in all their diversity.

Introduction

One billion children are at extremely elevated risk to impacts of climate change.1 The climate crisis will significantly increase the number of disasters yearly— from 400 in 2015 up to 560 by 2030.2 Climate change impacts the rights of the most marginalised the most severely and magnifies gender inequalities, especially for girls.3

Plan International believes girls, in all their diversity, including the most marginalised, should enjoy full and equal access to their rights, and this should not be hindered by the threat of climate change.

Girls are also powerful climate advocates and leaders on climate action. Plan International promotes a ‘Feminist Participatory Action Research’ approach, where girls and young women conduct the research themselves in their communities, to develop the evidence base on how climate change is reshaping the lives and futures of girls. The girls are generators of knowledge and not subjects of research. It is about their stories, their experiences and how they interpret the reality that they live in and witness.
1 | Climate crisis: Disproportionate impacts on girls

1.1 Disproportionate impacts on girl’s education

Climate-related disasters disrupt girls’ access to education; it is often the first thing families sacrifice when faced with impacts of the climate crisis. Girls are pulled out of school to help their families find food and water or take care of siblings. This begins from early childhood. It exacerbates girls’ burden of unpaid care and perpetuates cycles of poverty and gender inequality. Climate-related disasters also lead to a loss of green spaces and safe spaces to play, as well as impacting children’s time to play — particularly for girls, which impacts their ability to build essential life skills for development and learning.

Climate-related events in 2021 are estimated to have prevented at least four million girls from completing their education in low and middle income countries. If trends continue, climate change will contribute to preventing at least 12.5 million girls from completing school each year by 2025.

“Heavy rains are pouring down. We are unable to move around, play or even access schools. Our schools are leaking and we hope our school infrastructure allows for us to continue studying despite the rains.” Hamda, age 12, Somaliland.

“Climate change exacerbates the challenges girls face in accessing education. Prolonged droughts, erratic monsoons, and extreme weather events disrupt their daily lives, making the journey to school perilous. Household responsibilities, intensified by climate-induced disasters, force many girls to drop out of school to support their families.” Chetana and Samikshya, Adolescent girls, Nepal.

“I don’t think parents will ask their boys to drop school because usually boys can’t be like girls, boys can’t take care of their family as much as girls.” Uyen, Vietnam, age 16.

1.2 Disproportionate impacts on protection risks for girls

Child protection risks are exacerbated by climate change shocks and stressors. Child marriage is used by families to cope with economic hardships caused by climate change. This puts millions of girls at risk of sexual and physical abuse, early pregnancy and maternal death. The impacts of climate change can also be a driver for migration, alongside conflict, which puts girls’ safety at risk. These risks are worse when girls are collecting natural resources and when staying in temporary shelters.

“As girls, when the rains destroy our houses, our parents seek shelter on our behalf in the neighbourhood. While there, we are taken advantage of by boys and men living in that house where we will be sheltered” Girl, Zambia.

“Sometimes, in order to find food, girls give themselves over to boys, and the taste for adventure leads girls to drop out of school.” Reine, 17, Togo.
1.3 Disproportionate impacts on girl’s health

Climate change poses significant health risks for girls, including on sexual and reproductive health and increased vulnerability to infectious diseases, malnutrition and poor mental health. 88% of the global disease burden associated with climate change is borne by children under the age of five.13 The economic costs to health due to the climate is estimated to reach USD 2-4 billion per year by 2030.14

Climate change threatens food and water security, disproportionately affecting girls’ nutrition and well-being. Nearly half of the world’s 345 million people facing acute hunger are children.15 By 2040, almost one in four children are projected to live in areas of extremely high water stress.16 During food shortages, girls are more likely to go hungry - eating least and last, leading to hunger and malnutrition.

“\[quote\]I sometimes feel my bones aching. Some nights we go without food. After such nights, I cannot wake up to go to school, my body fails me. It’s painful to be in school sometimes. I have sharp stomach pains.\] [quote] Beauty, age 13 from a community in Zimbabwe that suffers from food shortages due to droughts. She gets up at 4am to fetch water before walking 9km to school every day.\]17

“\[quote\]It is hard for people who rely on land… For those who rely on water, it is hard to fish… if they have money, that is no problem as they can buy at the market but if we don’t have much money, it is hard for them to find food on their own because it is so hot.\] [quote] Leakhena, Cambodia, age 16.\]18

“Because of low rainfall received we now share water with animals and that contaminates it making it difficult to maintain a good health and menstrual hygiene.” Girls focus group in Zambia.19

1 |Climate Policy Solutions: Entry points to address the disproportionate impacts on girls

1.3 Action for Climate Empowerment

“\[quote\]Climate education is important because it promotes climate action more than anything else. The ‘Children’s Climate Cards’ were useful in educating young learners on the most pressing climate challenges facing us and our world, and how to deal with it.\] [quote] Abdirhman Yusuf Nuur, Principal of Gatiitaley Primary School, Togdheer, Somaliland.20

“We should also be provided with more spaces for participation…within our own authorities alongside the people who can open up these initiatives. But also, where our opinions and thoughts are listened to, and we can share our suggestions, and that these are also taken into account and count as part of the solution to a problem”. Joselim, Peru, age 16.21

“Children and young people need to be part of decision-making committees, like at [the] local level, we need to be attending council meetings and be able to hold decisions. Decision makers to be held accountable.” Dalitso, Zambia, age 14.22
Girls have a right to participate in the decisions that impact them, to address the disproportionate impacts of the climate crisis. Yet they are often excluded from climate decision-making processes, limiting their ability to contribute to solutions and shape their future. In a 2021 Plan International survey, 91% of adolescents and youth said it was difficult for them to participate in climate change policy decision-making processes. Only 5% knew how to engage in the negotiations related to the implementation of the Paris Agreement. Despite this, girls—as activists and members of youth and girl-led organisations and networks—are actively campaigning on climate issues.

Climate education is key to promote girls leadership and meaningful participation in climate policy and action, and resilient education systems are better able to protect children from the impacts of climate change. This is especially true for girls; research reveals that every additional year of schooling for girls leads to significant improvements in a country’s resilience to climate-related disasters. Education under ACE must include both ensuring continuous access to education and climate education in curriculum. The Comprehensive School Safety Framework provides guidance for safe, equitable and continuous access to a quality education for all, alongside resources to promote child-led climate action.

Plan International recommends that the Expert Dialogue and negotiations on Action for Climate Empowerment at SB60 commit to:

- Ensure girls’ meaningful participation in all forms of climate action and policy processes at local, national, regional and international levels
  
  a. Allocate additional budget and strengthen capacity of governments at all levels to ensure effective engagement of girls and young women in climate-related decision making.
  b. Increase public education and awareness on gender equality, climate change and disasters, to create a welcoming, open civic space for girls to lead climate movements.
  c. Create and maintain formal mechanisms to encourage girls to participate in policymaking and implementation including through youth climate councils.
  d. Explicitly recognise and facilitate girls’ right to participation in all forms of climate action, in a meaningful and safe way by:
     i. Addressing gender and age specific barriers to participation in climate action and policy processes, creating enabling environments that facilitate the meaningful participation of girls
     ii. Ensuring adolescent girls have opportunities to meaningfully engage in the development, review, implementation and monitoring of climate policies and programmes.
  e. Ensuring information on disaster risks, climate impacts, risk reduction and policy frameworks is accessible, gender-responsive and acknowledges the governments’ role to provide this.
  f. Ensure strengthened resilience of education systems and improved climate education in school, through the Comprehensive School Safety Framework, highlighting it as a key tool in the ACE Dialogue (Action C, Glasgow Work Programme on ACE on tools and support)
  g. Ensure the Comprehensive School Safety Framework, Operational Guidance, Targets and Indicators, and key case studies especially on gender are included in Action C2.
  h. Ensure education is central to the Expert Dialogue on Children and Climate Change, given the child rights nature of education. This must include both the impact climate change has on children’s right to education and safety, and the lack of quality climate education in schools.
1.4 | Adaptation

“As girls we are not passive victims of the climate crisis. We are ready to lead early action. Through our
girl-led networks, we are leading climate education projects and moving learning to action. But we can’t
do it alone. We need support to connect our voices and action with early action systems.” *Esther, Sierra
Leona speaking at COP28 Presidential Round Table.*

“As leaders of the ‘Because I am a Girl Movement, we are not here to give up. We are strong, we are
brave and we are ready for action. Through our networks and in collaboration with Plan International
Ecuador and Education Cannot Wait, we are leading a project on education in emergencies and climate
change. One of our results is a fanzine that seeks to position quality climate education in Ecuador with
child friendly messaging on anticipatory actions during a crisis.” *Wenddy, young Venezuelan migrant at
the Global Dialogue Platform on Anticipatory Action, 2023.*

Urgent, child and gender-responsive adaptation of basic services - including education, protection and
health systems – is critical to ensure continuous access and respond to girls’ specific needs. Enabling
environments for locally-led and girl-led adaptation are key to build climate resilient societies.

Child and gender-responsive anticipatory action is also crucial to achieve disaster resilience for all.
Anticipatory action refers to actions taken ahead of a hazard to reduce the expected impacts. It refers
to interventions implemented between an early warning being made, based on a forecast (the ‘trigger’),
and the onset of the hazard, or its peak impacts being felt (e.g. during a drought). Girls have a right to
inform anticipatory action processes, to ensure it responds to their needs.

Funding for adaptation remains inadequate. Only 27% of global climate finance was allocated to
adaptation, compared to 60% for mitigation in 2021.26 UNEP estimates that there will be a USD 215–
387 billion gap in adaptation finance per year by 2030, without further investment.27

Plan International recommends that the Expert Dialogue and negotiations on Adaptation at
SB60 commit to:

➢ Integrate strategies to strengthen gender-responsive, climate resilience across
education, child protection and health systems in plans at all levels - aligned with
locally-led adaptation and included in National Adaptation Plans.

a. Increase the availability and use of child-specific, age and gender disaggregated data as part of
national adaptation plans and strategies, and in adaptation communications and reporting.
b. Include climate education and comprehensive school safety targets and indicators, in the Global
Goal on Adaptation/ UAE Framework for Global Climate Resilience, monitoring framework.
c. Address age and gender barriers to girls’ participation and leadership in design, implementation
and monitoring of adaptation programmes across education, protection and health.
d. Promote the rollout of gender and child-responsive multi-hazard early warning systems and
anticipatory action to ensure continuous access to basic services - education, protection, health.
   i. Invest in cross-sectoral coordination to ensure anticipatory action is child-responsive
   ii. Mobilise innovative financing mechanisms for interagency collaboration on child-responsive
      anticipatory action - such as by Children in a Changing Climate Coalition
1.5 | Loss and Damage

“It is very important for children to participate in decision-making when it comes to loss and damage because the children themselves are experiencing it firsthand. If we only have leaders at the top, deciding everything about the Loss and Damage Fund and how the fund should be spent, then they won't fully understand how children are experiencing loss and damage.” George, Zambia, age 16.

“Children bear the severe brunt after each disaster. The Loss and Damage Fund could support the establishment of temporary learning spaces and a child-friendly environment. In the aftermath of disasters, these spaces could provide education and psychological support, and a sense of normalcy for children amid the chaos.” Arushi, India, age 16.

A gender-transformative, inclusive process and mechanism to respond to loss and damage is key to address the specific impacts on girls. Loss and damage, caused by climate, is one of the greatest intergenerational injustices girls face today. Forms of loss and damage incurred by children include increased mortality and irreversible impacts on cognitive and physical development, mental health, education, and exposure to violence, exploitation and abuse. Girls are disproportionately affected, including by displacement, loss of livelihoods, gender-based violence and psychosocial trauma. By 2030, the financial cost of loss and damage for developing countries is estimated at between $290-580 billion (USD) annually. By 2050, the cost is estimated to reach $1 to $1.8 trillion (USD) yearly.

Plan International recommends that the Expert Dialogue and negotiations on Loss and Damage at SB60 commit to:

- **Embed girl’s rights as a guiding principle for all loss and damage finance governance and decision-making processes, to promote gender and climate justice**
  
  a. Greater attention to the disproportionate impacts of economic and non-economic loss and damage on girls in the third review of the Warsaw International Mechanism (WIM), including the work of its thematic expert groups, and the Santiago Network.
  
  b. Incorporation of girls’ rights, as a guiding principle for all loss and damage finance.
  
  c. The meaningful engagement of girls in all their diversity, in design, implementation and monitoring of loss and damage responses (Decision 5/CMA.5, Annex I, paras 29, 62).
  
  d. The deployment of new and additional funding for loss and damage, provided as grants rather than loans, targeting and accessible to girls and their communities (Decision 5/CMA.5, Annex II, para18), and tailored to address girls’ heightened and context-specific climate vulnerabilities.
  
  e. Significant allocation of funding to rebuilding and recovering child and gender-responsive education, protection and health systems, and inclusion of gender and age specific indicators.
  
  f. Development of effective social, environmental and human rights safeguards and mechanisms to ensure access to justice for girls and families, to hold financial contributors and implementing entities accountable. Safeguards should include processes for girls’ rights impact assessments.
  
  g. That funding and plans to address loss and damage are coordinated with redoubled efforts to avert and minimise loss and damage through investing in child and gender-responsive early warning, anticipatory action, adaptive social protection, humanitarian action, disaster risk management and broader adaptation and mitigation strategies and financing.
1.3 Climate Finance: To address the disproportionate impacts on girls

“To ensure child and youth empowerment, directly fund child and youth organisations and ensure accessibility of materials for young people.” Girl activists, Global She Leads Climate Cohort.

“We are working hard to adapt and mitigate risk, but now the challenge for the region lies in implementation and obtaining the financial resources required to move from plans to action.” Salomé, Costa Rica.

“We are living firsthand all the bad that is happening, and, in the end, it is not our fault but that of the actions of the past. And it is difficult to see sometimes how we have a say in our options for improving the environment in which we live, and these options are not taken into account or don’t receive funding and continuity.” Alejandro, Guatemala, (pseudonym used).

Insufficient funding for climate adaptation and resilience exacerbates vulnerabilities for girls, perpetuating cycles of poverty and inequality. At the same time, girls on the frontlines of the climate crisis are leaders in developing effective responses and strategies to build resilience. They need to be supported, including with increased resources and accessible climate finance. Yet, global investment in climate action that integrates gender equality as a principal purpose and can be considered as child responsive is extremely low – at approximately 2.4 percent of all climate-related Official Development Assistance. Climate finance must be more ambitious and child-responsive, because even if we meet current climate policy goals, a child born in 2020 is projected to face a two- to seven-fold increase in extreme weather events, especially heat waves, compared to those born in 1960.

Plan International recommends that the Expert Dialogue and negotiations on Climate Finance at SB60 commit to:

➢ Increase climate finance -including under the New Collective Quantified Goal- that is gender-responsive and accessible to girls particularly for adaptation, anticipatory action and loss and damage

a. Ensure the urgent provision of new and additional climate finance, placing gender-responsive child-critical social services at the forefront of such efforts.

b. Climate finance should be new and additional and delivered primarily in the form of grants, particularly for adaptation, anticipatory action and loss and damage.

c. Integrating the meaningful engagement and participation of girls in all their diversity, in climate finance decision-making processes at all stages and levels.

d. Ensure that the new collective quantified goal (NCQG):
   i. Incorporates a qualitative goal on delivering child- and gender-responsive climate finance at the scale required.
   ii. Delivers an urgent increase in finance for adaptation through a dedicated thematic sub-goal, prioritizing gender-responsive, climate resilient child-critical essential services – including education, child protection and health.
iii. Incorporates a dedicated thematic sub-goal on loss and damage finance, prioritising funds to rebuilding and recovering child-critical essential services, that respond to girls needs

iv. Prioritises the human rights of people and communities on the frontlines of climate change, including the rights of children, Indigenous Peoples, gender equality and intergenerational equity, as guiding principles

e. Ensure that the Standing Committee on Finance considers the role and benefits of child- and gender-responsive climate finance for accelerating climate action and resilience, including through its technical reports, the SCF Forum, its workplan and associated reporting, and engagement with frontline communities, ensuring that climate finance addresses the needs of the most vulnerable children in different regions.

f. That the long-term climate finance goal and the assessment of developing countries’ needs and priorities consider the specific vulnerabilities and needs of girls, including gender-responsive, climate-resilient essential services.

g. Issuing clear guidance to the GCF, Adaptation Fund, the GEF, the Loss and Damage Fund and Multilateral Development Banks on the need to adopt/integrate child and gender-responsive provisions in their policies, strategies and technical implementation guidance, including objectives, associated indicators, reporting requirements and safeguards at all stages of the project cycle. Instituting a gender-responsive child marker to rate the contribution of activities to child-responsive outcomes, especially for girls, would be an important step.

1.4 | Gender

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<th>Girl Activists in the global She Leads, Climate Cohort call for gender-transformative action to:</th>
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<td>• “Create safe spaces for dialogue on climate change, including remote participation options via technology.”</td>
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<td>• “Amplify the voices of young people through partnerships with governments and youth organisations.”</td>
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<td>• “Ensure a balance between local indigenous knowledge and external expertise in co-creating solutions with young people.”</td>
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<td>• “Ensure solutions are inclusive, and design initiatives with an intersectional approach”</td>
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Gender-transformative climate action and policy - which focuses on both the root causes of gender inequality and climate crises- is critical to addressing the inequalities experienced by marginalised girls and young women.

The climate crisis is exacerbating humanitarian disasters and increasing demand for humanitarian assistance. Vulnerability to disasters emerges from the intersection of different power structures and inequalities, placing girls at heightened risk of violence, exploitation and discrimination. Girls’ experiences of a disaster - influenced by factors such as age and gender, as well as socio-economic status, education, ability and ethnicity- must be at the forefront of climate decision making. Investment in child and gender-responsive systems, processes and coordinated ways of working is urgent to respond quickly and effectively to climate-related emergencies for all. Girls’ education and safety are particularly impacted by climate-related disasters and resource scarcity, which may disrupt schooling,
force them into child, early and forced marriage or child labour, and increase the risks of sexual and gender-based violence. Commitment to advance humanitarian-development-peace nexus is required to address both immediate challenges to girls’ rights and long-term issues of gender inequality in protracted crises and fragile contexts.

Plan International recommends that the Expert Dialogue and negotiations on gender at SB60 commit to:

➢ **Prioritise gender in all UNFCCC processes and ensure an enhanced focus on girls under the review of the Lima Work Programme and Gender Action Plan**

   a. Ensure climate policies, action and finance address the specific vulnerabilities of girls and amplify girl’s and girl-led organisations’ perspectives to inform countries’ preparation of NDCs, NAPs and national reporting.
   b. Centre girls in policies and processes for gender-just climate action and decision making
   c. Meaningfully engage girls and women in policies and in adaptation, anticipatory action and loss and damage
   d. Support gender balance, participation and girls’ and women’s leadership in UNFCCC processes
   e. Strengthen coordination and collaboration of climate and humanitarian actors to address the specific needs of girls and promote gender and climate justice.

3 |Conclusion

Addressing the disproportionate impacts of climate change on girls requires urgent and concerted action that prioritises gender, intergenerational, and climate justice. By ensuring meaningful engagement and participation of girls in climate decision-making processes and investing in gender-transformative solutions, we can build more resilient and equitable societies for current and future generations.

Plan International calls on the Expert Dialogue on Children and Climate and all stakeholders at SB60 to prioritise the rights and well-being of girls, in all their diversity, in climate policy and action, advancing gender and climate justice for a sustainable future.
ANNEX | Plan International climate research and reports

Adolescent girls in crisis: Experiences of migration in Central America and Mexico, 2023
Adolescent Girls in the Climate Crisis: Voices from Zambia and Zimbabwe, September 2021
A Tough Period: Global Report, May 2023
Climate Justice: Loss and Damage Finance for Children, Transmission to Transitional Committee, August 2023
Disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation, Accessed October 2023
From the frontlines: Youth call for action to address loss and damage caused by climate change, October 2022
For Our Futures: Youth Voices on Climate Justice and Education, December 2023
Girls’ activism and leadership for climate justice in Asia and the Pacific, May 2023
Real Lives, Real Choices Climate Change and Girls Education: Barriers, Gender Norms and Pathways to Resilience, November 2023
Reimagining Climate Education and Youth Leadership, July 2021
2021 Safe Schools Global Programme - Our goals, Bangladesh, 2022
Supporting women to take the lead in renewable energy, July 2023
Young People and Green Skills: Preparing for a sustainable future, Kenya, 2022
Youth Leadership in Climate Policy Workbook
Working with young people to adapt cities for climate resilience, October 2021

5 ways the climate crisis is disrupting girls’ lives

1. Save the Children, Generation Hope: 2.4 billion reasons to end the global climate and inequality crisis, 2022.
5. Malala Fund, a greener, fairer future (2021)
   https://assets.ctfassets.net/0oan5gk9rgbh/OFgutQPKIFoi5lfY2iwFC/6b2fffd2c893ebdebee60f93be814299/MalalaFund_GirlsEducation_ClimateReport.pdf
6. Plan International blog to be published later in 2024.
18. Plan International blog to be published later in 2024.
32 Plan International, *From the frontlines: Youth call for action to address loss and damage caused by climate change*, October 2022.