

Plan International, Inc.

SUBMISSION TO THE SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN, ITS CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES

Plan International has developed this submission to inform the Special Rapporteur's report on violence against women and girls in the context of the climate crisis, including environmental degradation and related disaster risk mitigation and response.

[Plan International](#), Inc. is an independent non-governmental organisation and is in General Consultative Status with ECOSOC. Plan International strives to advance children's rights and equality for girls in both development and humanitarian contexts. Working with children and young people in more than 75 countries around the world, it tackles the root causes of inequality faced by children, especially girls.

Responses to objectives 1 and 2

The climate crisis poses a gender, social, intergenerational, and racial injustice, deepening existing inequalities and rolling back progress made on human rights and social justice. Discriminatory social and gender norms mean that girls and women, as well as those marginalized by race, sexuality, gender identity, disability, ethnicity, economic status, are often more affected by climate impacts and have the fewest resources to cope. Indigenous women and girls face intersecting and reinforcing forms of gender-based and other violence that are often a result of racism, socio-economic and political marginalisation¹.

Climate impacts routinely place girls, especially during adolescence, at increased risk of exploitation and GBV. Climate-induced disasters are recognized as a key driver of forced displacement² which exacerbates existing gender and social inequalities, leaving girls and women at increased risk of violence and exploitation whilst also facing barriers in accessing vital systems and services, including those which prevent and respond to violence. Furthermore, many communities face droughts, floods, and poor harvests as a result of climate change, leading to a lack of vital resources, as well as loss of livelihoods and income. There is a well-documented correlation between scarcity of resources and increases in GBV,³ with food and income shortfalls driving increases in the number of girls and young women engaging in negative coping strategies such as sexual exploitation in exchange for food or money and child, early and forced marriage.⁴ In times of crisis, economic stress also often causes an increase in violence within the home as the role of men as breadwinners comes under pressure and household frustrations escalate.

In recent research undertaken in food-insecure areas of Southern Zimbabwe, Plan International found that the key concerns of adolescents include poverty and food insecurity, lack of education, adolescent pregnancy, parental migration, and child protection concerns (e.g., abuse, physical and sexual violence and abandonment by parents).⁵ Adolescent girls living with disabilities, particularly cognitive disabilities, face heightened sexual violence risks. The lived experiences of adolescents seem to be partially shaped by their contexts of socio-economic inequality, gender inequality, COVID-19 containment measures, and extreme and recurrent food insecurity that hinder adolescent girls from accessing resources. Parental migration and adolescent-headed households were two interconnected themes that resonated strongly as key concern of adolescents. Participants shared how parents' migration deprived adolescents of supervision and guidance, factors which lead to child marriages. Moreover, adolescent-headed households were associated with high risks of sexual violence and exploitation against adolescent girls.

In addition to exacerbating the drivers of gender-based violence, climate change weakens and erodes societal structures and systems which are essential for preventing and responding to GBV. For girls and young women in

¹ Comey et al (2020). [Gender-based violence and environment linkages: The violence of inequality](#).

² [IDMC | GRID 2021 | 2021 Global Report on Internal Displacement \(internal-displacement.org\)](#) and [Data on statistics on environmental migration \(migrationdataportal.org\)](#)

³ (2021) IUCN. Report: [Gender-based violence and environment linkages](#).

⁴ CARE International (2016). [Hope dries up? Women and Girls coping with Drought and Climate Change in Mozambique](#).

⁵ 2022. Plan International and WRC. Girl-led and community-driven research on child marriage in the [Philippines](#) and Zimbabwe (Zimbabwe report forthcoming).

particular, who are often not prioritized in times of crisis and unable to access age and gender responsive services, this leaves them unprotected, without safeguarding and reporting mechanisms or access to vital services.

Testimony from a SheLeads⁶ youth activist:

“My experience suggests that the impacts of climate change on GBV are varied. Women and girls under stress and uncertain situations may adapt to the impacts of climate change in a more conservative way or from customary patriarchal practices. In addition, situations induced by the climate crisis like extreme stress, property, and communal loss, and scarcity of food and water, may contribute to community conflict over resources and increase incidents of male violence, including GBV. Some specific drivers of GBV related to climate change are displacement, increase in poverty, dependency on relief distribution, and lack of protective services for the prevention and response of GBV.”

Girl and youth activists and girl and youth-led groups who advocate on the climate crisis and defend environmental causes may face threats or violence, both on and offline, as a result of their activism.⁷ Moreover, indigenous girls and young women disproportionately suffer from the impacts of climate change⁸ yet are under-represented in decision-making processes and suffer large-scale retaliation and violence in response to their active participation in protecting natural resources.⁹

Adolescent Girls in the Climate Crisis research: Voices from Zambia and Zimbabwe¹⁰

Recent research shows that adolescent girls feel climate change has made gender inequality worse and increased their risk of sexual violence. It found that girls were subject to increased violence, harassment and exploitation owing to factors such as travelling longer distances for water or firewood, homes being destroyed and girls being forced to shelter in unsafe places, and limited opportunities of redress for survivors as resources become increasingly limited.

In response to this, adolescent girls called for healing and justice for survivors and the rehabilitation of perpetrators. They urged decision-makers to take GBV seriously and ensure Child Protection systems had measures in place to adapt and respond to climate change, such as links to early warning systems.

Responses to objectives 3 and 4

Challenges

Plan International research conducted with youth groups and activists **found that girls and young people encounter several challenges in advocating on gender equality and climate action**, creating significant barriers to their meaningful participation and the recognition of the unique needs of girls and young women in climate policy.¹¹ These include:

- Children and young people not being sufficiently referenced as stakeholders in policy processes.
- Young people not recognised as active agents of change
- Adaptation being less prioritised in climate policies: and existing NAPs are not responsive or accountable to the needs of youth, girls, women, and marginalised groups.
- Youth-led organisations experiencing structural obstacles, such as less access to resources, media visibility, or possibilities to formalise their work. Organisations also face challenges related to a shrinking or hostile civic space, patriarchal and hierarchical cultural norms which undervalue the expertise and visions of young people, especially girls.

⁶ She Leads is a consortium that brings together child rights organisations, feminist/women’s rights organisations, and GYW-led groups in a joint effort to increase sustained influence of girls and young women (GYW) on decision-making and the transformation of gender norms in formal and informal institutions

⁷ (2021) IUCN. Report: [Gender-based violence and environment linkages](#).

⁸ Santisteban et al. (2020). [Indigenous women and climate change](#)

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Plan International (2021). [Adolescent Girls in the Climate Crisis: Voices from Zambia and Zimbabwe](#).

¹¹ Plan International (2022) [Rising Tides: Mapping Youth Movements for Climate Resilience](#).

Good practices related to disaster risk reduction (DRR) and adaptation

In 2021, Plan International UK **conducted an assessment on Anticipatory Action (AA)**¹² which provided a snapshot of all AA initiatives across Plan International and other key stakeholders. Early conclusions indicate that while there is progress in the integration of gender and protection-sensitive measures tailored for women, girls, boys, and other individuals at risk in anticipatory actions, these are not yet considered as crucial in interventions.¹³

Plan International Philippines, along with partners, has been implementing the Building Resilient, Adaptive, Disaster Ready Communities (BREADY) project since 2019. B-READY is an AA project that aims to better protect vulnerable households from natural disasters through a pre-disaster cash transfer program and to strengthen existing safeguarding mechanisms and capacities around women's and children's rights.¹⁴

Good practices related to disaster response

*Child Protection and GBV Rapid Assessment in Somalia*¹⁵

A **Child Protection and GBV Rapid Assessment of the Effect of Drought on Children and Women** was undertaken in Somalia in February 2022 amongst rural communities to respond to escalating needs caused by the current crisis and to inform CP and GBV responses. It was led by the Ministry of Employment, Social Affairs and Family in Somalia and supported by the Child Protection Working Group and the GBV Working Group, in which Plan participates.

- 25% respondents indicated increased prevalence of GBV due to the drought including rape, domestic violence, FGM (Female Genital Mutilation), sexual harassment and abuse, and child, early and forced marriage;
- Incidences of sexual violence, CEFMU, and denial of resources, including basic needs such as adequate food and water, had also sharply increased.
- Abuses occurred during population movement, collecting firewood and water and in communal areas such as latrines/showers;
- 66% respondents indicated there were no child protection/GBV services available in their location

Responses to objectives 5 and 6

Participation

Plan International found that eight out of ten survey respondents from a global online survey with 15-24 year olds¹⁶ want to participate in climate policy processes but fewer than one in ten had a chance to do so. More girls and young women (86%) were interested in participating in these processes, compared to boys and young men (81%). Despite this, participating in climate policy processes was more difficult for girls and young women than for boys and young men with girls more likely to say that barriers made it difficult for them to participate.

Climate finance

Climate finance is a vital way of addressing climate change through investments in adaptation and mitigation. Those countries who have contributed the most to climate change have committed to delivering climate finance of at least \$100billion/year by 2025. Increased advocacy is needed to ensure approaches to prevent and respond to GBV as a result of climate change are included in climate financing. For example, climate adaptation financing could support protection systems in being more resilient to climate change, including through anticipatory action, and child-centered climate change adaptation and social protection.

¹² Anticipatory Action refers to short-term disaster risk management interventions, which are implemented between an early warning trigger and the actual occurrence of hazards.

¹³ Assessment not available publicly but can be provided by Plan.

¹⁴ More information can be found on B-Ready here. [B-Ready – Building Resilient, Adaptive and Disaster-Ready Communities](#)

¹⁵ Please contact Plan International for full report.

¹⁶ Plan International (2021). [Reimagining Climate Education and Youth Leadership](#).

Recommendations

There remains significant work to be done on understanding how links between climate change and GBV should be addressed, both in climate and GBV sectors, and ensuring girls and women are meaningfully engaged in these processes. Plan International therefore recommends the following:

Impacts

- All actors, including Member States, must recognise the disproportionate impacts of the climate crisis on girls' rights, including through exacerbating GBV, by:
 - Ensuring girls' specific needs and experiences are addressed in DRR and climate policies and that approaches to prevent and respond to GBV are explicitly incorporated;
 - Institutionalising age and gender responsive risk assessments to inform, develop and monitor gender transformative DRR and climate policies;
 - Undertaking and funding further research on the linkages between GBV and climate change, including girls and youth-led research.

Approaches

- All actors, including Member States, must address the disproportionate impact of climate change on girls' rights, and include measures to prevent and respond to GBV in climate action and DRR policies. This should include strengthening the resilience of protection services through measures such as:
 - Developing multi-risk assessments
 - Ensuring protection services have access to early warning systems
 - Integrating GBV mitigation into anticipatory action plans
 - Ensuring information is available on how to access protection services before, during and after disasters
- All actors, including Member States, must meaningfully engage girls and girl-led groups in adaptation and resilience processes

Financing

- States must take measures to increase gender transformative climate finance that is age- and gender-responsive, addresses systemic gender barriers and resources girl-led and feminist organisations working on climate change and DRR. Climate financing must also be made available for strengthening resilience of systems and services which prevent and respond to GBV.
- States should increase investment in resilience, including alternative livelihoods and shock responsive, flexible social protection systems, that reduce girls' risk of exploitation and CEFMU

END