

The Impact of Climate Change on Children's Health


DANIELA MARRANI



Introduction

Children are particularly vulnerable to the impact of climate change

Different reasons:

- their stage of physiological and cognitive development
 - most common children's diseases causing death are highly sensitive to climatic conditions (acute respiratory infections, diarrhoea, malaria...)
 - the world's least developed countries which are likely to bear the brunt of climate change have large child population
 - conflicts originating from the intersection of climate change with social, economic and political stresses
 - the loss of livelihood will have an economic output making more difficult to achieve the Millennium Development Goals
- 

Climate change and environmental degradation

The main concerns have regards to:

- Air pollution
- Contamination of water supplies on children
- Food safety and food security

Reports

Unless we act now: The impact of climate change on children (UNICEF, New York, November 2015)

https://www.unicef.org/publications/index_86337.html

Sustainable Development Goals

GOAL 13 TARGETS


Strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters in all countries

Integrate climate change measures into national policies, strategies and planning

Improve education, awareness-raising and human and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning

Implement the commitment undertaken by developed-country parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to a goal of mobilizing jointly \$100 billion annually by 2020 from all sources to address the needs of developing countries in the context of meaningful mitigation actions and transparency on implementation and fully operationalize the Green Climate Fund through its capitalization as soon as possible

Promote mechanisms for raising capacity for effective climate change-related planning and management in least developed countries and small island developing States, including focusing on women, youth and local and marginalized communities



Children as “future generations”

Our common future (Brundtland Report)

Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development 1987

“Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It contains within it two key concepts:

the concept of 'needs', in particular the essential needs of the world's poor, to which overriding priority should be given; and

the idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment's ability to meet present and future needs.”



Children's rights

Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted nov. 1989, 1577 UNTS 3

<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CRC.aspx>

Art. 24(2)(c)

Article 24

1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health and to facilities for the treatment of illness and rehabilitation of health. States Parties shall strive to ensure that no child is deprived of his or her right of access to such health care services.
2. States Parties shall pursue full implementation of this right and, in particular, shall take appropriate measures:
 - (a) To diminish infant and child mortality;
 - (b) To ensure the provision of necessary medical assistance and health care to all children with emphasis on the development of primary health care;
 - (c) To combat disease and malnutrition, including within the framework of primary health care, through, inter alia, the application of readily available technology and through the provision of adequate nutritious foods and clean drinking-water, taking into consideration the dangers and risks of environmental pollution;

Climate Change and Human Rights

Many HRs are affected by climate change: the right to life, the right to health, the right to food

The State's responsibility in the harmful effects of climate change is difficult to attribute

States contribution to greenhouse gas emissions is different (principle of common but differentiated responsibilities).

Developing countries have less responsibilities because they have not a high level of industrialisation, technological development, etc.

Small islands are disappearing following to climate change: who cares? Who is paying for new houses for those peoples?

The solution is not reparation

The OHCHR Report on Climate Change and Human Rights (2009)

J. H. Knox, Linking Human Rights and Climate Change at the United Nations, Harvard Environmental Law Review, vol. 33, 2009, pp. 477- 498

• • •

States have duties to protect their people from threats to human rights even when the states are not directly responsible for those threats

States obligations extend to those beyond their territory, not just those within it

States also have duties with respect to other threats beyond their control, such as natural disasters

Determining if climate change is (or is not) a human right violation may not be the key issue as States have legal duties concerning climate change

UN Resolution: Human rights and climate change (2016)


Resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council on 1 July 2016

(A/HRC/RES/32/33)

“Expressing concern that [...] the adverse effects of climate change are felt most acutely by those segments of the population that are already in vulnerable situations owing to factors such as geography, poverty, gender, age, indigenous or minority status, national or social origin, birth or other status and disability”

“Recognizing that children are among the most vulnerable to climate change, which may have a serious impact on their enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, access to education, adequate food, adequate housing, safe drinking water and sanitation”

“Welcoming the Paris Agreement adopted under United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, which acknowledged that climate change is a common concern of humankind, and that parties should, when taking action to address climate change, respect, promote and consider their respective obligations on human rights, the right to health, the rights of indigenous peoples, local communities, migrants, children, persons with disabilities and people in vulnerable situations and the right to development, as well as gender equality, empowerment of women and intergenerational equity”



• • •

“Noting the work of the United Nations Children’s Fund related to environmental sustainability for children, including its work to improve the enjoyment of rights by children, especially the most disadvantaged, and to promote children as critical agents of change, including its report on how children, particularly those in most vulnerable situations, are affected by climate change and the concrete steps needed to be taken to protect them”

“2. Emphasizes the urgent importance of continuing to address, as they relate to States’ human rights obligations, the adverse consequences of climate change for all, particularly in developing countries and the people whose situation is most vulnerable to climate change, especially children in a situation of extreme poverty, and deteriorating livelihood conditions;”

3. Calls upon States to continue and enhance international cooperation and assistance for adaptation measures to help developing countries, especially those that are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change and persons in vulnerable situations, including children most at risk;

4. Decides to incorporate into its programme of work for the thirty-fourth session, on the basis of the different elements contained in the present resolution, a panel discussion on the adverse impact of climate change on States’ efforts to realize the rights of the child and related policies, lessons learned and good practices;

A new perspective

States have positive duties in respect to Human Rights

The main goal is to create the real conditions for full realization of Human Rights

Anticipatory approach (Precautionary principle)

The means are traditional means of cooperation not only on voluntary basis but also based on a “duty to cooperate” affirmed at the international level (see Rio Declaration)

One of such means is technological transfer from industrialised countries to developing countries

Full implementation of the Paris Agreement is a strong response to fight against adversial effects of climate change

Involving many actors in that task is also crucial



The Human Rights & Climate Change Working Group

To prevent further harm, the UNFCCC has explicitly recognized (but not yet operationalized) the need to protect human rights in all climate action.

The Human Rights & Climate Change Working Group engages in the following ways:

Within the UNFCCC, we advocate for human rights in the development, implementation and monitoring of the climate policies, institutions and mechanisms established under the UNFCCC.

Within Other International Processes, including the post-2015 agenda for the Sustainable Development Goals and Human Rights Council. We advance the linkages between human rights and climate change.

At the National and Regional Levels, we provide technical support with respect to the implementation of rights-based policies and actions on the ground.

At the Community Level, we help to build capacity and provide support to peoples and communities seeking to hold state and corporate actors accountable for the adverse impacts of climate policies and actions.



Children as protagonists in the response to climate change

Integrated collaborative approaches with children as key partners

Intersectoral collaboration in the areas of health, education, nutrition and public works

Community partnership

Empowering villages, towns and neighbourhoods to cope with threats will entail greater investment in traditional areas of child development, such as nutrition, health care, education, and water, sanitation and hygiene.

UNICEF

Initiatives in various countries:

Sierra Leone: 15,000 young people are participating in a volunteer programme that trains them to better run their farms

Morocco, a World Bank assisted project aimed at reducing the burden of water collection on girls