

Earth Child Institute Discussion Paper

Bridging an intergovernmental agreement on climate change with the Convention on the Rights of the Child



**Empowering and engaging with children
*As key stakeholders to combating climate change***



Executive summary

In November-December 2014, Parties from the world over gather to negotiate a post-2015 climate change agreement, while concurrently focal points from these same States gather to recognize the importance of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) at its 25th anniversary. Aligned with both international conventions, Earth Child Institute (ECI) has prepared this discussion paper as a bridge between these important and pertinent references, each of which provides guiding principles to the decision makers of our world. Participatory formal education for children in pre-school, elementary and secondary levels as well as actions related to water stewardship, tree planting and clean green development in non-formal settings is foundational to the future of our planet and the social fabric of all beings everywhere. Education in early years of a child's schooling is proven to be one of the most effective ways to ensure that present and future generations are informed and empowered to take action as the climate changes.

The UN CRC, ratified in 1989, by nearly all States,¹ provides clear direction in several relevant areas that include children's rights to health, adequate nutritious food and clean drinking water, in the prevention of accidents and the risks of environmental pollution, and in the promotion of education designed to develop respect for the natural environment. The CRC specifies general principles that guide considerations of any children's rights issues, and these are pertinent to the issue of climate change and children. Of particular interest among these principles are, Article 12 of the CRC that emphasizes the respect of the views of the child and the involvement of children in decisions affecting their lives, and Article 24 that incorporates the provision of (access to) adequate nutritious foods and clean drinking water, taking into consideration the dangers and risks of environmental pollution. The assurance that all segments of society, in particular parents and children, are informed, have access to education and are supported in the use of basic knowledge of child health and nutrition... environmental sanitation and the prevention of accidents, is an important aspect of the Article 24.

Given challenges that need to be addressed in the 21st century, covering issues of education, training, public participation, public awareness and access to information, encourages Parties to raise public awareness about climate change through education. Therefore, recognizing that the children and young people of today, who comprise nearly one-third of the global population, play a vital role as full stakeholders in both adaptation to and mitigation of climate change, is essential. Integration of national commitments to the CRC combined with efforts to combat climate change will lead to systemic capacity building through school curricular development, thereby engaging and empowering students and their families toward sustainable lifestyles for present and future generations. There is an urgent need for wide-spread financing of community-based projects that engage children, their families, and schools, particularly those in most vulnerable regions to accomplish these goals.

As an international NGO committed to the rights, needs and capacities of children related to the environment, Earth Child Institute (ECI) calls on States, the international community, in particular UNICEF, UNESCO, the UN CC:Learn (the One UN climate change learning partnership convened by UNITAR), multilateral donors including the Global Environment Facility, Green Climate Fund, REDD+ and the Global Action Platform on Education for Sustainable Development, as well as private sector donors, to prioritize children's formal and informal education on climate change.



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ECI is an international NGO with Special Consultative Status to the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), Association with the United Nations Department of Public Information and as a Civil Society Observer to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

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¹ United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified in 1989 by all countries except United States of America and Somalia, www.unicef.org/crc
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Children and youth as stakeholders

Children under the age of 18, a population of 2.2 billion are significantly affected and will be increasingly faced with severe natural disasters and forced migration as a result of climate change² - impacting their right to a healthy, productive and dignified life. It has been recognized that children represents the most vulnerable group to the effects of climate change, and among them, girls and children with disabilities can be at the greatest risk. However, children should not only be seen as victims but also as future citizens with the capacity to advance change. By 2025, the 2.2 billion children of today will represent more than half of the world's workers and leaders³, and will be major decision-makers in their communities and countries.⁴ The international community, therefore, needs to start treating children as stakeholders in climate change policy.

The latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report states that building the capacity of individuals, communities and governance systems to adapt to impacts of climate change is both a function of dealing with developmental deficits (e.g. poverty alleviation, reducing risks related to famine and food insecurity, enabling/implementing public health and mass education and literacy programs) and of improving risk management.⁵ This assessment is consistent within current thinking on climate change within the UN, such as the role of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Children need to be included as a centerpiece of capacity building measures in order for adaptation and mitigation policies to be effective.

To recognize children and adolescents as stakeholders in the climate change policy process, the international community must not only take measures to protect children and young people from the adverse impacts of climate change, but also provide the tools for them to become empowered environmental stewards. This is achieved through environmental education in sustainable development. These programmes encompass curricular innovations that are guided by scientific knowledge reported by the IPCC, yet they should also be tailored to address the diverse impact of climate change in different regions.

There is a direct relationship between vulnerability to climate change and the level of development. In less developed countries, there exists limited capacity to mitigate as well as to adapt to climate change.⁶ This is particularly true in poor communities where there is a lack of education and weak state institutions.⁷ In these settings, children face increased risk of climate-related injury and illness, especially related to water, nutrition and heat.⁸ "Most assessments indicate that poor and disenfranchised groups will bear the most risk and, globally, the greatest burden will fall on poor countries, particularly on poor children . . ."⁹ Children's education on climate change becomes especially important in this context in order to help mitigate climate related vulnerabilities.

Environmental education programmes in the early years

Aside from inclusion of young people more integrally as active participants in the decision making and negotiations process at local, national and international levels, states are also called to recognize the importance of developing holistic, life skills based curriculum on climate change for sustainable development. Globally, states have accepted responsibility to educate children at least at the elementary level as a part of their common identity and function¹⁰. In the current institutional structure of most countries, one of the most systematic and thorough ways that global awareness of climate change can be achieved is through the national educational systems. A national curriculum on climate change can offer a combination of scientific knowledge and practical skills to all citizens at the earliest of ages, thereby ensuring that those who will represent a majority of decision makers in the future are informed on the issue of global climate change.

² The Power of One Child + 1 Tree, 2012 <http://www.earthchildinstitute.org/the-power-of-one-child-one-tree/>

³ UNICEF, State of the World's Children 2011. "Adolescence: An Age of Opportunity" <http://www.unicef.org/sowc2011/>

⁴ Power of One Child+ 1 Tree, 2012 <http://www.earthchildinstitute.org/the-power-of-one-child-one-tree/>

⁵ Final Draft, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, Working Group II Assessment Report 5, Chapter 20. Climate-Resilient Pathways: Adaptation, Mitigation, and Sustainable Development, p. 9

⁶ Ibid, p.3.

⁷ Final Draft IPCC, Working Group II Assessment Report 5, Chapter 20. Climate-Resilient Pathways: Adaptation, Mitigation, and Sustainable Development, p. 9.

⁸ Final Draft IPCC, Working Group II Assessment Report 5, Chapter 11, 2014, p. 8.

⁹ Ibid, p. 37.

¹⁰ Boli, John and George Thomas (eds.). 1999. "INGOs and Organization of World Culture" in *Constructing World Culture*, Stanford University Press.

Today, the thinking around policy related to climate change, with and for children as key stakeholders and through capacity building, participation and mainstreaming into basic education curricula at national level has been carried out on a country by country/case by case basis. Relative to Education, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Doha Work Programme on Article 6 of the Convention¹¹ encourages Parties “to Cooperate in, promote, facilitate, develop and implement formal and non-formal education and training programmes focused on climate change at all levels, targeting women and youth in particular...” While concurrently, many of the United Nations Joint Framework Initiative on Children, Youth and Climate Change, are largely attributable to civil society involvement. Good practices of national mainstreaming of climate change education can be found in countries which have been supported through the “One UN Training Service Platform on Climate Change (UN CC:Learn)” including: Benin, Malawi, the Dominican Republic, Indonesia and Uganda and other countries where National Focal Points for Article 6 of the UNFCCC have taken initiative, such as has been the case in Brazil, Nepal and Seychelles. Still, worldwide, it is noted that capacity building measures at the Regional and National levels in regard to the rights, needs and capacities of children who comprise more than half the population in many developing countries, has been very limited, despite the promise that these programs would reach out to all citizens globally.

There are more than a handful of exemplary country-wide initiatives striving to provide a holistic approach to sustainability education which provide a lens into good practice for us all. Madagascar¹² integrates climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction across a range of subjects in the school curriculum. For example in grade seven, students learn measurement and scale through studying areas of forest devastation as well as consult and use maps to measure the impact of climate change. In Malawi¹³, Life Skills Education was introduced as a subject where psycho-social skills, such as problem solving, creative thinking and interpersonal relationships are developed through the exploration of issues such as global warming and natural disasters. In Uganda, a Memorandum of Understanding between the Climate Change Unit within the Ministry of Water and Environment with the National Curriculum Development Center (NCDC) unit within the Ministry of Education has led to system-wide curriculum integration of climate change education in the lower secondary curriculum. School-based rainwater catchment, combined with the participation of children in Seychelles have led to lower utility bills both water and electricity) to communities and children and families who are more resilient to natural hazards.

Further, we note that there are numerous education projects that aim to improve resilience in the face of climate change-related disasters, but they are limited to regionally based approaches. In the Reach Out to Asia (ROTA) project in Nepal¹⁴, the project aims to build capacity of teachers and students to improve teaching and learning environments, school governance and to enhance knowledge of climate change and disaster risk reduction. The project is especially laudable because it focuses on the development and learning of young girls. However, the project has only been implemented in two municipalities. In Bangladesh¹⁵, girls are trained to become facilitators in transferring crucial knowledge in terms of early warning dissemination to their communities. It has been found that communities respond well to these girls based on their community membership as well as their spirit in helping. Furthermore, these girls are actively involved in a tree-planting campaign in Kenya in schools as well.¹⁶

Civil society based youth and children’s initiative programs are rarely based in the classroom, especially at the elementary levels. The program that the Earth Child Institute initiated in Ghana, Cameroon, Malaysia and Togo through the Power of One Child + One Tree = A Sustainable Future for All¹⁷ programme is a participatory, rights-based example of a holistic curricula being implemented in a school setting at the early stages of education. The Power of One Child + One Tree programme empowers students to immerse themselves in environmental education through experiential learning in school-based tree nurseries, which are then able to provide saplings to community members. Through this programme, students develop the capacity to understand ecological processes through hands on experience beyond an academic understanding of climate change issues.

¹¹ UNFCCC/CP/2012/8/Add.2

¹² UNICEF. Disaster Risk Reduction in School Curricula: 30 Case Studies, 2012, p. 128.

¹³ Ibid, p. 128.

¹⁴ INEE “Improving the Quality of Education and Building Disaster Resilience in Schools”. INEE Toolkit on Key Thematic Issues: Disaster Risk Reduction: <http://toolkit.ineesite.org/toolkit/Toolkit.php?PostID=1097>.

¹⁵ Jones, N., Harper, C., Watson, C., Espey, J., Wadugodapitiya, D., Page, E., & Clench, B. (2010). “Stemming Girls’ Chronic Poverty: Catalysing Development Change by Building Just Social Institutions”. *Chronic Poverty Research Centre Working Paper*. P. 64

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 64.

¹⁷ The Power of One Child + 1 Tree, 2012 <http://www.earthchildinstitute.org/the-power-of-one-child-one-tree/>

Knowledge sharing, connectivity and collaboration

Sharing knowledge and lessons learned are inherent and proven resources for effective education and adaption of innovations to local challenges and situations. To seek participation and share knowledge and experiences across different schools and communities in different social, cultural, and economic settings, ECI initiated a pilot project, Global Action Classroom (GAC), with financial support from external sources. GAC is an international initiative developed by ECI focusing on connecting children from different countries around the world who are taking action to improve their local environments. This campaign is led by youth and seeks to connect these children to share ideas and stories through digital exchange. ECI provides cameras to the community partners and schools (as applicable) so children can document their stories and can upload the videos for ECI to share. It also creates an online interactive classroom where children in different countries can connect directly over a video conference call. The main goal of the GAC is to cross borders digitally, to foster learning and collaboration on a global scale. At present, GAC network includes Brazil, Cameroon, Ghana, Malaysia, Mozambique, Nepal, Nigeria, Qatar, US and Seychelles. GAC is encouraging kids to work together, collaborate, share experiences, impact policy makers and develop a cultural understanding that reaches beyond national borders and empower them to deal with the challenges related to climate change.

Effectiveness of education on adaptation and mitigation

Environmental education programs have been shown to achieve measurable success in making children into agents for environmental change and furthering the goals of sustainable development. Educational attainment alone has been shown to have measurable effects on the understanding of the science behind climate change. The 2014 UNESCO Education for All (EFA) Global Monitoring Report revealed that as education attainment increased, so did their awareness and understanding of climate change.¹⁸ Governments and NGOs alike must provide social and financial support for environmental education programs that empower youth and enhance their abilities to cope with climate change. The following examples show how locally relevant educational activities help students' understanding of the environment and build skills to promote sustainable development, which can in turn considerably enhance governmental adaptation and mitigation efforts example of why environmental education is needed and provides strong support to the case.

Providing children with a strong foundation in the consequences of climate change has also been shown to benefit their communication and advocacy skills. When empowered with knowledge, children have been at the forefront of reducing their communities' vulnerability to environmental hazards.¹⁹ In the Philippines, the Department of Education integrated disaster risk reduction into the school curriculum. This initiative has led children to take an active role in making their communities safer. One example of this is that after the integration of disaster risk reduction into the school curriculum, children in the Southern Leyte province lobbied for the transfer of their school from an unsafe location, led school safety campaigns and participated in disaster coordinating councils.²⁰

In Dapto, Australia one urban developer directly engaged children in a neighborhood reform project. The Dapto Dreaming Project directly involved children into the planning and development of a "child friendly neighborhood" by making children co-researchers and surveyors of their environment. The project increased the children's understanding of the importance of environmental conservation to their quality of life.²¹ In addition to serving as educational and empowering, the project provided the children of Horsley with a "strong foundation for their role as environmental stewards and change agents".²² Enabling children to be directly involved in surveying their environment allowed them to internalize the importance of nature, and led the developer to make more responsible and sustainable planning decisions.²³

Finally, more generally, the effectiveness of environmental education and training for behavior change as reported in the EFA Global Monitoring Report shows that a significant relationship exists between educational training programs and the ability to develop environmentally conscious practices and behaviors. Such as Ethiopia, where it is noted that for every six years of

¹⁸ UNESCO Education for all Global Monitoring report 2013/4 "Teaching and Learning: Achieving Equality for All", p. 27.

¹⁹ UNESCO. Education for All Global Monitoring Report, 2013/4, p. 179.

²⁰ UNICEF. *Disaster Risk Reduction in School Curricula: Case Studies from Thirty Countries*. Paris/Geneva, Switzerland, 2012, p. 110.

²¹ Malone, Karen. "'The future lies in our hands': children as researchers and environmental change agents in designing a child-friendly neighbourhood." *Local Environment* 18, no. 3 (2013), p.26.

²² *Ibid*, p.15.

²³ *Ibid*, p.21.

education a farmer received, she/he is 20% more likely to adopt sustainable farming practices. It also notes that green skills training programs in East Africa significantly increased the use of sustainable farming practices and provided economic and social benefits for its citizens. Green skills training in poor rural communities not only increased economic productivity in rural communities, but also equipped citizens with skills to conserve scarce natural resources.²⁴

Conclusion

Limited capacity of many States to mainstream climate change and environmental education programmes due to financial and technical resource barriers, the international community is compelled to consider their commitments and obligations under accepted international instruments with and for children. Shortly following the ratification of the CRC in 1989, the global community adopted Agenda 21 in 1992, which recognized the importance of admitting children and young people as major stakeholders on environmental issues. The conversation around financial commitments to these programmes has been limited, therefore we propose the following recommendations:

- *States prioritize holistic environmental education at preschool, elementary and middle school levels.*
- *States develop curricula and teacher training programmes at systemic levels to address climate change issues.*
- *The international community, including Global Environment Facility, helps finance local actions of children and young people as well as material development and teacher training in countries which are most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.*
- *Youth and children, especially from poor and marginalized communities, should be treated as full stakeholders in all climate change and sustainable development policy negotiations.*

The adoption and implementation on the above recommendations is imperative to address the issues of combatting the effect and impact of climate change.

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20 November 2014, Earth Child Institute
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²⁴ Davis, Kristin, et al. "Impact of farmer field schools on agricultural productivity and poverty in East Africa." *World Development* 40.2 (2012): p. 31
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