

Climate Change Brief

Adolescent Girls Resource Pack



VIOLENCE
AGAINST
WOMEN
AND GIRLS
HELPLESS

Overview

Adolescent girls are directly affected by both the impacts of and responses to climate change. Evidence suggests that climate-related crises increase the inequalities faced by adolescent girls. Girls often become 'societal shock absorbers', where they face increased rights violations and more unpaid care responsibilities. Social norms and practices that impact girls' lives often spike during the slow or sudden onset of a climate related disasters. Risks intensify further when a girl faces multiple forms of marginalisation by society, for example girls living with disabilities.¹

Adolescent girls' voices and perspectives are often invisible within climate strategies and action. Girls represent a tremendous engine for transformational change in climate and gender work. They are rights holders who deserve a seat at the decision-making table and can make their own informed choices about responding to the climate crisis. Every girl is a powerful agent of change and has an essential part to play in transformative adaptation, mitigation and resilience strategies. Their leadership in local, regional and global actions is essential.

Programming on adolescent girls and climate change is at an early stage, but key learning is beginning to emerge. Access to quality education and life skills increases girls', and their communities', resilience to climate-related shocks and stressors. It prepares them to participate in the 'green' or 'low carbon' economies of the future. A 'girl-centred' approach is required to prevent the roll back of girls' protection and rights and to ensure the ability of societies to bounce back after climate-related crises.

KEY FIGURES

- Globally, at least **200 million** adolescent girls live on the frontlines of the climate crisis.²
- **15 million** girls are married before the age of 18, and this is especially prevalent in countries impacted by climate change.³ In Malawi alone 1.5 million girls are likely to be married early as a direct result of climate change.⁴
- For every extra year of schooling a girl receives on average, her country's climate resilience is expected to improve by 3.2 points.⁵
- There is a significant gender imbalance amongst climate decision-makers globally: as of 2015 only **12%** of federal environment ministries were headed by women; only 3 of 160 'Nationally Determined Contributions' to reduce emissions make reference to girls.⁶

Context

Violence against women and girls (VAWG)

- Over 70% of women in crisis situations have experienced one or more types of violence.⁷ In both slow and sudden disasters, there is an increased prevalence of **domestic violence**,⁸ **sexual harassment**,⁹ **grooming and sexual abuse** by older men,¹⁰ and an increased prevalence of **rape and abduction** of adolescent girls¹¹, e.g. for **trafficking**.¹² Adolescent girls, especially those who are unmarried, are at particular risk of violence inside and outside the home. After a sudden disaster, girls become exposed to risks in relief shelters, which often fail to implement basic protection measures, and by staying in the disaster affected area often in the sudden absence of family.¹³
- The ten countries with the highest rates of **child, early, and forced marriage** are also ten of the most severely affected by the climate crisis. Child marriage often becomes a negative coping mechanism in crises, with the aim to safeguard girls'

access to housing, food and protection, and to reduce their perceived burden on the household.¹⁴

- **Sex work and transactional sex can be survival strategies** in slow onset climate-related crises where livelihoods and economic security have progressively worn away. In sudden disasters, immediate shelter and food needs may be sought through sex work and transactional sex.¹⁵ In the ongoing Southern Africa food crisis, there are reported trends of girls engaging in transactional sex, sometimes for less than the price of a loaf of bread.¹⁶
- **VAWG weakens adolescent girls' resilience and adaptive capacity.** Everyday violence must be addressed at individual, community and household level so that girls can build resilience.¹⁷

Health

- **Increased mortality of girls**, especially in floods. In Nepal, data from climate-related floods show that girls had a mortality rate

of 13.3 per 1000 people, compared to 9.4 for boys, 6.1 for women, and 4.1 for men.¹⁸

- **Impact on physical and reproductive health**, for example, increases in skin rashes and infections of the reproductive system after disasters because girls are not able to wash their menstrual cloths effectively and cannot access traditional plant-based or other menstrual hygiene products¹⁹; increased risk of urinary tract infections due to avoiding sanitation areas/facilities for fear of sexual violence²⁰; and girls are also at increased risk of miscarriage and premature birth due to unsanitary conditions and lack of access to healthcare professionals.²¹
- **Differential psychological impact** of climate-related impacts on girls than boys, women and men: due to their social and economic marginalisation, girls appear to be less emotionally resilient in times of shock and stress.²²
- **Greater heat stress** affects adolescent girls in some contexts, and young pregnant and lactating women overall, due to gendered division of labour,²³ biological differences in body temperature regulation and, sometimes, cultural clothing requirements.²⁴
- **The increased burden of unpaid work** can affect the health of adolescent girls during times of crisis,²⁵ e.g. unsanitary post-disaster environments can expose girls to waterborne and vector-borne diseases.²⁶

Food security

- Women and girls are facing the **frontline impacts of climate on agricultural production**: women and girls comprise 43% of the agricultural labor force across the world, and this increases to 50-60% in parts of Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.
- In protracted droughts, **female-headed households are typically significantly less food secure** than male-headed,²⁷ due to their lower adaptive capacity. Research in the 2016 El Nino drought in southern Mozambique, found that 92% of female headed households could not produce food to meet household needs beyond 11 months.²⁸
- **Girls and older women are often the most food insecure**, because families perceive that they need less food than others and social norms that male household members are the most important and productive.²⁹
- **Girls may be seen as a burden to feed and shelter in some contexts**, which directly contributes to the negative coping strategy of early marriage. The invisibility of girls' needs and increased work burdens (in obtaining food, water and cooking) can have psychological impacts as well as physical impacts on health.³⁰

Education

- **Girls are typically the first to be taken out of school**, as climate impacts affect household income, to take up extra work to keep the household afloat, or for early marriage.³¹
- **Adolescent girls are often required to offer unpaid agricultural and household labour** during climate-related shocks and stresses.³²
- **Droughts have a particular impact on girls' school attendance**, because water shortages at home and at school prevent them from being able to manage their menstrual hygiene effectively.
- **Girls' access to quality education can play a critical role in adaptation and resilience**. One study argues that for every additional year of average schooling for girls, a country's climate resilience can be expected to increase by 3.2 points.³³

Ensuring a just transition

- Out of 160 'Nationally Determined Contributions' (NDCs) to reduce mitigations, **only three NDCs make reference to girls**.³⁴
- 'National Adaptation Plans' largely homogenise girls and frame them largely as victims, rather than critical change agents.
- Despite demonstrating leadership and sustained energy to contribute to the climate change agenda, adolescent girls continue to be excluded from decision making fora at all levels.³⁵
- On the whole, international, regional and national climate processes have failed to include women's leadership at all levels. While 38% of delegates were women at COP24, only 22% were heads of delegation.³⁶ At COP25, despite calls from the Gender Action Plan to ensure women's meaningful participation, several countries brought male only delegations.³⁷
- Climate finance has not managed to reach women and girls on the frontlines. Up until 2016, Only 2% of gender-responsive bilateral climate aid went to civil society based in the Global South.³⁸
- Without the inputs, and leadership of women and girls in climate action, the solutions are likely to be framed through patriarchal lens. Such solutions are thus likely to exacerbate rather than tackle gender inequalities

GLOBAL POLICY

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) has gradually integrated gender concerns through:

- **The Lima Work Programme (LWP)** was launched at COP 20, to "achieve gender-responsive climate policy", through gender mainstreaming and women's participation in the negotiations.
- **In 2017 The LWP** was extended, and a '**Gender Action Plan (GAP)**' was developed. **The most recent version, the renewed GAP**, includes language around girls' rights, related to their resilience and 'participation and leadership in science, technology, research and development'. Gaps remain on implementation within countries, and on monitoring and evaluation.
- **The Green Climate Fund (GCF)** aims to raise US\$100 Billion per year to support developing countries adapt to low carbon economies. It has a new **Gender Policy and Action Plan for 2020-2023**, which calls for greater participation of girls.
- **The Adaptation Fund** finances adaptation projects and programmes in developing countries vulnerable to climate impacts. Its **Gender Policy and Action Plan** aims to systematically integrate access and equity principles, including gender equality.
- These global processes provide opportunities to identify areas for preemptive investment where girls' vulnerability to rights abuses (e.g. child marriage) intersects with climate vulnerability.³⁹
- The **Women and Gender Constituency** support adolescent girls from the global south to attend COPs. Young feminists have also formed groups, e.g. **Young Feminists for Climate Justice Global Network**, founded at COP 21, which has hundreds of members.
- **Generation Equality Forum** - UN-Women and allies announced an **Action Coalition on Feminist Action for Climate Justice 2020-25**.
- **UN Climate Action Summit (UNCAS, 2019)** - A **gender equality initiative** was announced. More information is to come in 2020.

Guidance for policy makers and practitioners

ENTRY POINTS	RATIONALE	PROMISING PRACTICE
<p>Girl-centred approach to climate-related development and humanitarian programming</p>	<p>Girls should be given opportunities to be involved in decision-making and programming, and where appropriate, compensated.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gather critical, intersectional, data about girls within the first 45 days of an emergency.⁴⁰ 'I'm Here' provides practical tools. • Develop tailored initiatives to address the challenges and concerns of girls most at risk of rights violations.⁴¹ For example, gendered food distribution points, adequate lighting, and addressing menstruation through distribution of 'dignity kits'.⁴² • Address the disproportionate burden of unpaid work that girls absorb during a crisis, including 'domestic caretaker' work to secure access to food, cooking supplies, water, sanitation and maintain agricultural yields. • Include a diverse group of adolescent girls' voices in disaster preparedness, management, recovery and reconstruction. The 'Girls in Emergencies Collaborative' shows how girls' voices are key to service delivery.⁴³ • <i>More information and examples on a girl-centred approach to humanitarian programming can be found in the humanitarian and conflict brief.</i>
<p>Life Skills, Green Technology and Environmental Entrepreneurship</p>	<p>Girls have the potential to be change agents, supporting overall community resilience.⁴⁴</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use existing girls' clubs and safe spaces to introduce 'clean', 'green' ideas and technologies. Girl Up clubs in Uganda used life skills workshops to learn about climate change, the benefits of cleaner cooking solutions, and make a clay cookstove.⁴⁵ • Support adolescent girls' ideas and activities as agents of change. A 'Zine From Young Activists from Climate Justice' documents how a Malawian girl ignited awareness of climate justice, supported nutrition, and reduced unpaid care burdens for school girls.⁴⁶
<p>Climate adaptation, mitigation and resilience integrated into Education and SRHR</p>	<p>Voluntary family planning and girls' education were named in the top ten solutions to climate change.⁴⁷</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build 'green skills' through tailored education initiatives. Invest in girls early, ensure transition to secondary school, and promote their participation in STEM subjects that will be central to the transition to a green economy.⁴⁸ • Integrate climate education into curricula. Girls express increased confidence to adapt to climate change after learning about it in school and they share information and resilience practices at home. See Plan's Child-Centred Climate Adaptation Programmes (4CA).⁴⁹
<p>Challenge gendered social norms and inequalities</p>	<p>Programming should focus on challenging gendered social norms and barriers, including VAWG and weakened resilience.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be gender transformative and intersectional, focusing on how shifting social norms impacts the safety and security of women, men, girls and boys differentially, and address the increased barriers and discriminations faced by some girls. • Take a 'whole community' and 'root causes' approach working across the socio-ecological model, with a focus on girls' rights. Challenge root causes of weakened resilience, gender inequalities, and VAWG. • Build gender equality and VAWG prevention into resilience work, by working with local groups and leaders, especially women's rights organisations, on girls' rights; ensuring indicators include VAWG risk; dialogues on VAWG and resilience; and ensuring strong referral systems that consider girls' mobilities.⁵⁰ • Look for opportunities to shift gendered norms in the aftermath of a disaster – such as new physical, social and economic mobilities for girls,⁵¹ while mitigating for any potential backlash and continuing to challenge the norms that put girls at risk.
<p>Build and create formal and informal space for girls' leadership</p>	<p>Programmes can support girls from Southern and indigenous communities who are responding to the climate crisis in novel ways.⁵²</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring meaningful space for girls' participation is provided at local, national, regional, and global policy processes. This includes in negotiations, Nationally Determined Contributions, National Adaptation Plans, and Climate Action Plans at all levels. Donors should work with governments to ensure clear and feasible plans for participation of girls. • Supporting creative projects that provide opportunities to share, create global networks and build resilience. The Young Feminist for Climate Justice Storytelling Project provides a collection of stories, poems and illustrations from young women and girls.⁵³

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