



barnfonden

# Barnfonden's 30th Anniversary Conference

2021 – The Climate Crisis is a Child Rights Crisis!

*Photo: Jake Lyell*

# Barnfonden's 30th anniversary conference

Welcome to the summary of our recent conference, "Climate is a child rights issue – and should be treated as such!". We staged this conference in response to Barnfonden turning 30 this year. This is an important milestone for us, but also sobering. For 30 years we have worked with passion and vigilance to end suffering for children, but back when we started we had little idea of the impact of climate change, and how quickly its repercussions would be felt by the communities who have the least ability to bounce back. With 30 years of experience working closely with children and partners around the world, Barnfonden can clearly see how children are affected by climate change and its downstream effects. Fighting to eradicate all forms of violence against children (SDG 16.2) we witness how climate change is putting more children at risk of child labour, child marriage, sexual exploitation, and neglect.

This conference also recognises Barnfonden's new strategic plan 'Keeping Children Safe in a Changing Climate', which has seen an increased focus on the impact of climate change, as it affects children in Barnfonden's programme and advocacy work.

The Barnfonden conference was held on 1 December 2021 at Studio Meetingpoint, Malmö and online. The conference featured presentations from leading SMHI climatologist, Erik Kjellström; Thomas Rebermark, Head of Corporate Partnerships at Wateraid and former Barnfonden chair; Rickard Ignell, Professor of Chemical Ecology at SLU, as well as country directors from ChildFund offices in Kenya, Cambodia, Ethiopia and India, and children also from these countries. We also spoke to Jonas Kanje Editor-in-Chief, Sydsvenskan, and Caroline Englund Digital project manager, Nya Wermlandstidningen, about why the children's perspective is not visible in the media's climate coverage.

Our endnote speaker, Mattias Goldmann VD, of Goldman Sachs, was dubbed the Most Powerful in Sustainability Sweden. He has been knighted by the President of France for his climate work and appointed as Future Politician of the Year. His book, Klimatsynda! (or Climate Sin), suggests that it is possible to turn the climate fight into a stimulating challenge instead of a sacrifice.

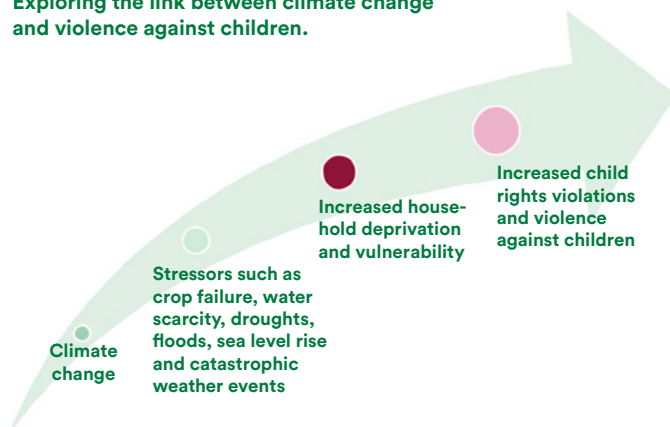
The conference centres around the core principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which recognises that all children are equal, that the best interests of the child should always come first. The CRC specifies children's right to survival and development, and stresses the importance of adults seeking out and genuinely listening to their opinion. Children need to be at the heart of development actions: their rights, and their well-being. These actions must be integrated, multi-sectoral and multi-level – always keeping children at the centre.

Please read the contributions in this folder, which will be added to as more summaries are available. We hope this will encourage you to not only consider the importance of placing children at the core of all development actions, but to become active climate activists promoting climate justice, and encouraging governments to work with speed to meet Paris Agreement targets.



Photos: Jake Lyell

## Exploring the link between climate change and violence against children.



Click [here](#) to view the full conference.

# Barnfonden's one Clear Ask



The results of the conference Barnfonden held to celebrate its 30th anniversary are clear: Governments need to urgently pursue a climate policy from a child rights perspective with the Convention on the Rights of the Child as their guide.

The conference clearly demonstrated the link between child rights and issues affected by climate change: child protection, water, health and disasters.

As countries globally strive to meet the Sustainable Development Goals – the 17 goals with targets to promote a peaceful, healthy and prosperous world – governments, the private sector and civil society need to better incorporate understandings related to climate change and child rights into their planning.

Children are placed in an extremely vulnerable situation as a result of the effects of climate change. Increases in child-related disease, hunger, education, vulnerability and violence deserve more specific space and attention in government planning and funding. Structures and systems are needed that show and explain the link between climate change and child rights, as governments develop their mitigation and adaptation strategies.

According to the Children's Climate Risk Index by Unicef (2021f), approximately 1 billion children (nearly half of the world's children) live in countries at high risk to the impacts of climate change. We have urgent work to do to ensure that the public and those in power have both the knowledge and the will to make child rights a primary consideration. Why? Because...

- Climate change exacerbates social inequalities.
- Climate change impairs basic life needs, such as housing, access to water and food, and so it is considered as one of the biggest challenges for human health and surviving.
- Climate change impacts children's and youth's mental health: it may cause post-traumatic stress disorders, depression, panic attacks, anxiety and sleep disorders, cognitive deficit, learning disability and impaired language development.

Climate change has an impact on children's physical, psychological, social and cognitive growth. This will have repercussions on their adult life, making it harder to fulfil their potential and truly exercise their capabilities. Such effects in turn could diminish their ability to look after future generations and exercise of sustainability, creating an intergenerational vicious circle impeding human development (WeWold Index 2021).

## What Barnfonden does

Across all of our work, we strive to:

- Be a global voice with and for children on the threat of climate change to child rights and violence against children, in both development and humanitarian settings.
- Prioritize the needs and voices of vulnerable children in climate change adaptation efforts through global, regional and national advocacy engagement.
- Strengthen resilience and support communities in anticipating climate risks, and in adapting to the changing climate and thereby reducing vulnerability and the risk for violence against children.

We have developed our own approach to ensure that the way we engage with the communities we work with is always conducted in a climate-informed and climate-prepared way.



Photo: Jake Lyell



Photo: Boas Opedun

## Child Rights at risk

## Climate Risk and Interface with Climate Change (CC)

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <p><b>Article 2</b><br/>Right to non-discrimination</p>                         | <p>The impacts of CC on vulnerable communities discriminates against children; for example, because of their physiology they are more susceptible to certain impacts. CC exacerbates inequity because impacts often hit children the hardest. To ensure this right is upheld, priority need to be paid to children in climate change responses and policy. Moreover, poorly implemented CC responses can continue to put this right at risk. For example, opportunities to discriminate and infringe equal rights arise with regards to adaptation investments and cases of displacement due to CC. This right can be threatened if decisions do not recognise the special needs of children, different needs of girls and boys, or do not give equal rights to refugee children, children of foreign origin, children of indigenous or minority groups.</p> |
| <p><b>Article 3</b><br/>Basic interests of the child must be a top priority</p> | <p>CC can be seen to work in opposition to the best interests of children in vulnerable countries. For example, through increased risk of diseases of the growing risk of natural hazards disrupting education and impacting child protection.</p>   |
| <p><b>Article 4</b><br/>Protection of rights</p>                                | <p>The multiple impacts of CC affect child rights. Action to tackle climate change is therefore essential to fulfil the rights of all children. Inadequately responding to climate risks infringes on this principle.</p>  |
| <p><b>Article 6</b><br/>Right to survival and development</p>                   | <p>A child's right to survival is directly challenged by increasing climate related disasters and increased risk of disease and hunger as a result of CC.</p>  |
| <p><b>Article 12</b><br/>Right to a voice</p>                                   | <p>Decisions on CC at the local, national and international level will impact on children now and continue to do so in the future. Children will also bear the social, economic and environmental impact of inadequate and unambitious CC decision making today. Limiting their opportunity to voice opinions and provide solutions inhibits this</p>  |
| <p><b>Article 22</b><br/>Right to refugee protection</p>                        | <p>CC is leading to increased migration from areas which become dangerous or uninhabitable due to CC. Children are negatively affected when they are displaced, meaning their right to refugee protection is increasingly necessary due to CC.</p>   |
| <p><b>Article 24</b><br/>Right to health</p>                                    | <p>A child's right to health is directly and indirectly threatened by CC. 85 per cent of the burden of disease from CC affects children, risks of water-borne diseases, vector-borne diseases and complications of malnutrition increase due to CC.</p>  |
| <p><b>Article 24 2c</b><br/>Right to health sustaining conditions</p>           | <p>A child's right to health is infringed when health-sustaining conditions, such as clean water and nutritious food, are compromised by CC. Increasing greenhouse gas emissions including CO<sup>2</sup> contribute directly to air pollution, which in turn drives climate change. Air pollution directly contributes to increased respiratory diseases amongst children and challenges fulfilment of a child's right to health.</p>   |
| <p><b>Article 26</b><br/>Right to social protection</p>                         | <p>Due to CC, developing countries have addition needs for resources to ensure children are able to cope. This right is increasingly at risk due to slow progress by developed countries to provide additional funds to help vulnerable countries adapt to CC.</p>   |
| <p><b>Article 27</b><br/>Right to adequate standard of living</p>               | <p>Climate-induced sea-level risk, flooding and extreme weather events destroy housing and create unsafe conditions for children.</p>  |
| <p><b>Article 28</b><br/>Right to education</p>                                 | <p>Every child has the right to an education. Children are kept from attending school when family livelihoods and financial resources are negatively affected by CC. Additionally, children's access to education can be disrupted when schools are damaged or destroyed by climate-related disasters.</p>   |
| <p><b>Article 30</b><br/>Right to indigenous culture and language</p>           | <p>Indigenous populations are often marginalised, live in highly climate sensitive eco-systems (such as the Arctic) and are often amongst the most vulnerable to climate related impacts. Loss of traditional species, land and induced migration due to CC can impact a child's right to identity (including language and culture) for minority populations and children.</p>   |
| <p><b>Article 34-35-36</b><br/>Right to protection from exploitation</p>        | <p>CC will induce stress on livelihoods and communities that can potentially result in children being at risk of exploitation and violence, for example increased child labour, abduction, recruitment into fighting forces, sexual violence, and labour migration. Increased climate related disasters only increase the protection risks to children before, during and after climate-related disaster events.</p>   |



# Climate change: Extreme weather, drought and heat



The earth's average temperature has warmed by around one degree since industrialization and the rapid population growth – and consequent CO<sub>2</sub> emissions – that followed. Even this seemingly small temperature change has led to an increase in extreme weather and a global warming that affects every continent, region and ocean on earth. The hydrological cycle which relies on the interplay between water, snow and oceans and lakes has become compromised, and we are seeing more intense and erratic precipitation and more frequent drought. Warm extremes have become more intense with more pronounced heat waves. At the same time, cold extremes are greatly reduced. This is impacting biodiversity, and contributes to accelerating the rate of species extinction. Such impacts have grave repercussions for humankind.

WeWorld Index 2021:

*“Since children’s physiological protection systems are not fully developed yet, they turn out to be more vulnerable to the direct effects of heat waves, drought and natural disasters. They are often victims of injuries, environmen-*

*tal toxin inhalation or infectious, gastrointestinal and parasitic diseases, which will prevail as temperatures rise and rainfall increases.”*

## What will happen in the future?

According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the speed at which atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> has increased since the industrial revolution (1750) is at least ten times faster than at any other time during the last 800,000 years, and between four and five times faster than during the last 56 million years. The Paris Agreement is a global agreement to avoid dangerous climate change by limiting global warming to well below 2°C and pursuing efforts to limit it to 1.5°C. If we reach the 2°C mark (and we are currently on track for higher) instead of succeeding to limit it to 1.5°C we will see:

- 420 million more people exposed to extreme heatwaves
- The risk of drought increasing, especially for the Mediterranean and southern Africa
- Up to fifty percent more people exposed to water scarcity
- Increased and changed risk of vector-borne diseases such as malaria and dengue fever
- A greater risk of malnutrition
- 10 million more at risk from sea level rise by 2100

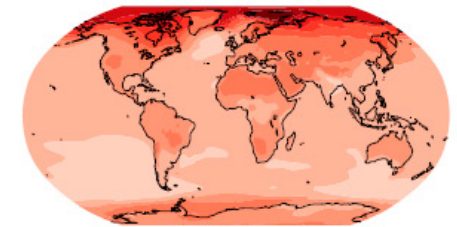
- Several hundred million more people exposed to climate-related risks and poverty by 2050

Adaptation measures can reduce risks, but they cannot eradicate risk entirely. We need to help people build resilience now and we need to fast-track new technologies. We need to consider how land is used and protect critical infrastructure. We need to plan how we will produce food for people globally with many unable to rely on agriculture as they have in the past. And we need to limit global warming! Governments will need to robustly manage these risks, but there is no silver bullet.

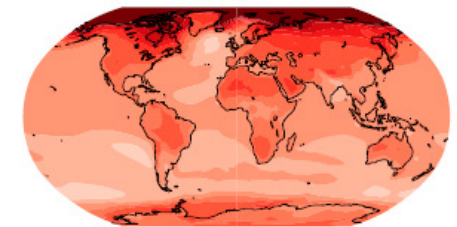
For Sweden, observations have been made of increased heatwaves and a reduction of cold snaps. Looking forward, climate models show that both warm extremes and wet extremes will increase – some summers will be extremely warm and others extremely wet. Increased risk level in warmer climates entails multisectoral risks such as access to water and energy, risk of drought, heat waves and extreme heat, risks to ecosystems and failing agriculture with diminishing harvests.

*(To the right) chart: SMHI.*

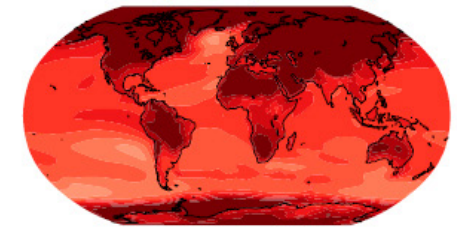
Change at 1.5°C global warming



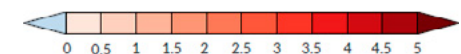
Change at 2°C global warming



Change at 4°C global warming



Change (°C)



Erik Kjellström is a professor in climatology at the Swedish Meteorological and Hydrological Institute (SMHI). Watch Erik talk about extreme weather, drought and heat [here](#).

# Water gives life

People have always sought out and settled near water. It is a prerequisite for life and for our health and development. Water use has increased sixfold over the past century and is rising by about 1 per cent a year.

Despite this, today, 771 million people still lack access to clean water. Two billion – that's one in three people – do not have access to a proper toilet and four out of ten health clinics do not have access to clean water.

Water is a prerequisite for health, cooking, income, personal hygiene, patient care and waste management. Women and children are the most affected by lack of clean water – not only health-wise, but through the time lost spent collecting water and as a result, through loss of education. In most cases, it is women and children who are responsible for the family's water supply. At the same time, they rarely have influence over local decisions concerning access to clean water.



## What are the consequences?



**800 children die every day due to diarrhoeal diseases caused by unsafe water, lack of sanitation and hygiene.**



**Girls and women risk harassment and rape when they fetch water or wait until night to "go to the toilet".**



**Women and girls can spend hours fetching water. Walking long and carrying heavy. A full jerrycan weighs 20 kg.**



**Many girls quit school when they get their period if there are no toilets in school.**



**38% of health care facilities do not have access to clean water. 35% do not have water and soap for handwashing.**



**50% of malnutrition amongst children is due to diarrhoea caused by unsafe water, lack of sanitation and hygiene.**



*Photo: Jake Lyell*

Climate change is particularly noticeable through water – either too much, or too little. Extreme and erratic weather events have increased, leading to catastrophic impacts on the lives of children and adults. Weather phenomena often compromise the quality of water and destroy the infrastructure related to water and sanitation delivery, which in turn makes it impossible for people to maintain their hygiene. As a consequence of lack of clean water, disease spreads more easily and the downstream effect is more likely to impact children. Not only are they at greater risk of falling ill and dying, but their education suffers when they cannot attend school, locking them in a cycle of poverty. Lack of water also leads to conflict as people encroach on other people's land in search of water for themselves and their animals, creating an unsafe environment for children.

*Picture: Wateraid.*

Effective, government-led plans are needed to help countries anticipate and prepare for water issues, to reduce vulnerability to a crisis which will worsen due to climate change.



Thomas Rebermark is the Head of Corporate Partnerships at Wateraid. Watch Thomas talk about the importance of water in a changing climate [here](#).

# Climate change and mosquito-borne diseases

Diseases such as malaria, dengue and the West Nile virus are spread by mosquitoes. Despite a drastic decrease in the number of deaths due to malaria since the introduction of major prevention efforts launched in 2000, the decline has stagnated in recent years. Still, we are seeing that 350-500 million clinical cases of malaria are reported around the world every year. Children under the age of five are most affected by malaria: every two minutes, a child under the age of five dies from malaria, predominantly in sub-Saharan Africa.

Climate, including increased temperature and erratic rainfalls, affects the conditions for the mosquitoes to breed and survive. As a result, the geographical distribution of malaria-spreading mosquitoes will change, resulting in a general increase in the spread of the disease. While malaria in sub-Saharan Africa is predominantly spread within rural areas, climate change has allowed the establishment of *Anopheles stephensi*, the Asian malaria mosquito in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, as species that thrive in urban environments. With continued climate change, malaria is predicted to affect many more people.

Dengue also increases as the temperature rises. Dengue is spread through Aedes mosquitoes, that mainly are found in tropical and subtropical regions, in urban and peri-urban environments. Dengue is a viral disease and reports show that 100-400 million people contract the disease every year, of which 1 per cent will die. This surge of this disease is of particular concern since there is no cure for dengue. The WHO report that climate change may also affect transmission, as dengue mosquitoes reproduce more quickly and bite more frequently at higher temperatures.

West Nile fever is also affected by temperature, as it impacts the survival rate of the mosquito vector. Since 2010, there have been annual outbreaks of West Nile fever in South-eastern and Eastern Europe. Several of the mosquito species capable of spreading the disease are currently present globally, including in Sweden, and the disease is gradually expanding northwards each year.

## It is not just mosquitoes that are affected

Desert locust plagues occurred in a vast area from West Africa to India in 2020; an area equivalent to about 16 million square km. These plagues were triggered by heavy successive rains in the seasonal breeding areas of these insects. The rains caused these usually solitary insects to form swarms that can move through an area and strip vegetation bare, decimating thousands of hectares in a single day. In 2020, approximately 20.2 million people faced severe acute food insecurity in East Africa alone due to locust invasions.

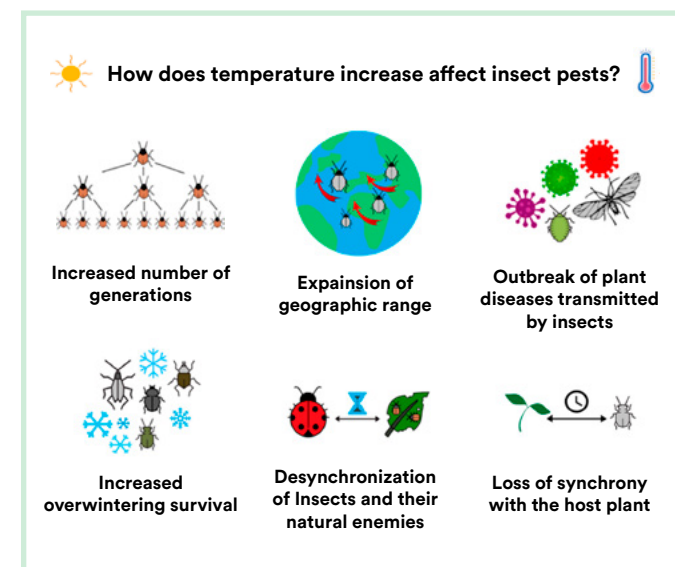
At a temperature change of two degrees, agricultural losses due to all pests combined are estimated to increase by:

- 59 billion kilos of wheat (more than the entire U.S. wheat production in 2017)
- 92 billion kilos of rice (3/4 of all China's rice consumption in 2017)
- 62 billion kilos of maize (total maize harvest of Kenya and Uganda in 2017)

## But not only are mosquitoes increasing in numbers, we are also losing other species of insect and animal life

A key message from activists at COP26 is that not enough is being done to stop biodiversity decline. Between a third to half of all species may be lost to extinction by the end of this century. This is largely caused by habitat destruction and chemical pollution, but also by climate change, which worsens the effects of these drivers. It is important to encourage climate change innovation; to encourage and provide the conditions for young people to stay in rural areas and to help them learn about, protect and care for their environment. It is also important to support ecosystem-promoting activities such as bee keeping.

We need to use science more, protect the environment, and stop fires, logging, mining and urbanisation. Governments play an important role in protecting biodiversity and in restoring and building environmental resiliency through policies and law. But all of us as individuals have a role to play, too, in raising our voices about these issues and to move quickly to a world that rejects behaviours and consumption patterns that lead to ecosystem imbalance.



Picture: SLU.



Rickard Ignell is a professor of integrated plant protection and head of pathology lab at SLU. Watch Rickard talk about mosquito-borne diseases [here](#).





*Photo: Jake Lyell*



*Photo: Jake Lyell*



# The Risk and Challenges of Climate Change – Cambodia

Cambodia ranks the world's 46th most vulnerable out of 163 countries, which is in the top third of countries with a high risk to climate change. Issues the country is facing, according to the Department of Climate Change, include food insecurity caused by climate uncertainty and disruptions to cropping calendars of smallholder farmers. Agricultural practices in Cambodia are mostly rainfed systems which increases farmers vulnerability to floods and droughts, pests and disease outbreaks. Rice productivity – a staple food of the Cambodian population – will be affected by climate change, as will fisheries.

The outbreaks of some diseases such as malaria and dengue fever linked to climate change, will pose significant challenges to Cambodia. Similarly, sanitation and pollution of freshwater (which occurs, for instance, as a result of flooding) are likely to increase incidences of cholera and other water-borne diseases.

## Link of Climate Change Effects and Child Protections Risks

Schools are closed more frequently due to the frequency of floods and this can lead to a high drop-out rate. Currently, in some areas, 20-30 percent of parents cannot afford to send children to school. 20 percent of girls finish at the end of primary school and do not continue further. This situation is feared to worsen with the impact of climate change.

Children bear the greatest burden of climate change. Not only are they more vulnerable than adults to the extreme weather, toxic

hazards and the diseases it causes, but the country is becoming a more dangerous place to live. The climate crisis is a child's rights crisis because it threatens all aspects of children's health and well-being in a way that humanity has never experienced before.

Due to the effects of climate change there is the risk of:

- decreased education quality and incomplete education
- increasing cases of child abuses and sexual harassment
- increased malnourishment, trafficking, early child marriages
- increased unsafe migration, child labor, prolonged sicknesses, and gender-based violence

In 1989, virtually every country in the world agreed children have the right to a clean environment to live in, clean air to breathe, water to drink and food to eat. Children also have the right to learn, relax and play.

Governments and businesses have agreed they need to work with urgency to tackle the root causes of climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions in line with the global Paris Agreement. This is children's issue. It is about their rights. They must be kept in the center of any discussion, policy, framework, indicators and budgeting on the Climate Change discourse.

## One key message

Prashant Verma, Country Director ChildFund Cambodia:

*“Stop thinking about climate change as a cross-cutting issue. This dilutes this whole important issue. It requires much greater attention and investment – especially child protection in emergencies.”*



**Chea**  
12 years old

“During the flood, I could not go to school because my village is flooded. When it rains, it is very difficult to travel. When there is drought, we don't have enough water for crops or household consumption. Wind gusts destroyed small houses and killed many people.”

I want everyone to work together to protect the forest and to reduce fuel vehicle consumption by walking when we go somewhere close. All these little things could help the environment.”

**Mei**  
12 years old



“Human beings cause natural disasters. We destroy forests, we produce harmful smoke from factories and vehicles, and even from wood-burning stoves.”

After I learned about the natural disasters I felt very frightened. When my village is flooded it is difficult to go to school and buy food. I don't have a place to play with my friends and it is difficult when I need to use the toilet. I can't swim and I'm afraid of drowning. There were children who drowned and died.”



Prashant Verma is the Country Director for ChildFund Cambodia. Watch Prashant talk about the climate-related work being done by Barnfonden in Cambodia [here](#).

# The Risk and Challenges of Climate Change – India

The increased frequency and intensity of disasters are impacting vulnerable children and their communities in India. The country is ranked fourth in the world in terms of economic loss at US\$ 79.5 billion, due to extreme climate-related events.

As a result, some or all, of the following impacts are observed:

- Basic supplies for a healthy lifestyle are affected including nutrition and water
- Children are forced to leave their homes and schools
- Children's health and family livelihoods are affected
- Families are forced to migrate to new areas
- Access to health care is limited
- Mental health is impacted
- Child safety is at risk

A child is impacted even before it is born, environmental issues can trigger an increase in premature births impacting childhood health issues and cognitive development, asthma and other complications.

## Link of Climate Change Effects and Child Protections Risks

Whenever there is a climate-related disaster, you will find children dropping out of school and there is an increase in child labour and abuse. Flooding makes it impossible to go to school. In flooding, droughts and cyclones, parents lose their livelihoods and they and/or their children may be forced to leave their homes to seek in-

come elsewhere. The situation children find themselves in can often have a severe impact on their mental health and well-being.

The impact on children is both direct and indirect, e.g. heatwaves, flooding, sea level rise and intensification of cyclones, air pollution (added by dust blowing around from land use challenges, deforestation, and agriculture) impinging on health. This creates potential decreases in food, reduction in crop yields due to unseasonal monsoons and increased flooding. Other examples of impact due to climate change are psychological pressures, loss of dignity, lost education, child labor, early marriages and trafficking.

Civil society actors and government must consider and include a child-centered approach when planning, implementing and monitoring climate change related interventions. Politicians need to look beyond short term electorate gains and address the long-term risks of climate change. The most impacted will be children: the ones least responsible for creating it. Development planning needs to be viewed with a climate change risk lens so that resource allocations and actions to address climate change vulnerability are undertaken at the local level. Government needs to prioritise and implement proactive policies towards climate change while ensuring its proper implementation with child participation. Children's voices must be counted and heard for resilience building. Children have agency and as they grow, we need to give them education, confidence and voice on climate change. We need to deploy resources and pace up solarization.

## One key ask

Neelam Makhijani, Country Director ChildFund India:

*"We need collaborative, well-resourced action, keeping children in the centre."*



**Narmadha**  
16 years old

"When it rains heavily, it floods, and water enters our house. Once the water enters, we cannot do anything. There is no way to prepare food, then electricity gets cut, so we cannot study or do our school homework. We cannot even use the toilet. It becomes very difficult... During nights, we get scared of sudden water influx. We all sit on chairs, sleepless. It gets very difficult. To avoid these situations, houses, factories or companies should not be built too close to the lakes. The lakes should be dredged before the rainy season; the drainage system should be kept clean, and we should dispose of biodegradable and non-biodegradable wastes, papers and plastics separately."

**Mohana**  
16 years old



"The impacts of climate change are increase in the frequency of rain leading to water stagnation around the house, causing the spread of various diseases. It also damages the electricity poles leading to blackouts, affecting my education. All our crops get submerged in water, affecting our livelihoods. To protect ourselves from nature, we need to protect nature. We should not go against nature. If we can shift the people from low lying areas to higher planes, we can avoid the diseases. Having a solar-powered lighting facility at home will help us continue our education without disruption. Insuring the crops will help us get compensation from the government if the crops get affected."



Neelam Makhijani is the Country Director for ChildFund India. Watch Neelam talk about the effects of climate change on child rights in India [here](#).

# The Risk and Challenges of Climate Change – Ethiopia



Ethiopia has the world's fifth-highest number of food-insecure people, with chronic food shortages typically associated with recurrent droughts and erratic rainy seasons. Over the past few decades, the frequency of severe droughts has increased from every ten years to almost every five years, and droughts have become more severe. This has a serious impact on communities, affecting farm yield, depleting ground cover and pasture, creating hunger and death to people – especially children – and livestock.

In converse, intense rain often follows a period of drought. The baked soil is simply too hard for the water to penetrate. The excess water leads to flooding and soil run-off, creating a double threat, particularly as farm land becomes more and more degraded. When families cannot even grow food for their family, parents can be forced to move away in search of work, sometimes taking their whole family with them. Children are often pulled from school

to find day labour and may never return. Without education, they are deprived of meeting their full potential. And too frequently, it can also mean children being sent to work – some as young as five years old. They will work long hours and in return, receive only one meal a day.

Another occurrence is the practice of 'give up'. The child needs food and the parent knows they cannot provide it. In some situations, families relinquish their children (not a legal process or adoption) to other households for money. They are given to a family who says they can look after that child. This child is sometimes looked after well, but sometimes they are turned into slaves, and since their parents are already paid off, these children can find themselves in appalling situations.

Then there are the ones who are married off, and once the dowry is paid, the young girl drops out of school and will soon become a mother.

Another issue is when children have to go long distances to look for fuelwood or water. When the land around them is parched, they must cover long distances and spend many hours on the task. Children also look after the animals. As grazing opportunities become scarce, they have to venture further and further away to look for pasture for the animals.

## Key asks

Lilly Omondi, Country Director ChildFund Ethiopia:

*“Protection of the natural environment is vital to ensure land and incomes are not further degraded. Invest in ensuring natural resources are sustained, such as enhanced reforestation. But let us also invest in climate-smart livelihoods.”*

## Tejitu seventh grade

“Last year was a very difficult year for us. There was no rain for long months. Our families could not produce crops due to the drought. Students could not come to school since they had nothing to eat in their home. Some of the children left the area to search for daily labour while others worked in their kebele. Until the start of the school feeding programme they could not come to school. Siraro Child and Family Development Organisation [Barnfonden's local partner] is providing a lot of support in this area. For example, the school feeding programme not only served students to resume their education, but also saved lives – at least for that period.”



Lilly Omondi is the Country Director for ChildFund Ethiopia. Watch Lilly talk about the effects of climate change on child rights in Ethiopia [here](#).

# The Risk and Challenges of Climate Change – Kenya

Kenya is facing many challenges today due to climate change. The country has been increasingly experiencing low, irregular rainfall, prolonged droughts, and frequent floods. Add to this mud slides, the Covid-19 pandemic and locust infestation. Such incidents are hitting communities again and again, threatening their lives and livelihoods while destabilizing ecosystems.

The country is also seeing a decline in supplies of freshwater, shifting vegetation and agro-ecological zones, declining biodiversity, reduced forest cover and grasslands and degraded water catchments, which further increases water scarcity. Add to this increasing environmental pollution. In all this, children are the most affected!

The Government of Kenya this year (2021) declared drought as a national disaster. There is large-scale destruction of livelihoods caused by droughts, eroding the ability of communities to cope. We are also seeing resource-based conflict and an increase of people-on-the-move due to the climate crisis.

## Link of Climate Change Effects and Child Protections Risks

There are many negative impacts of climate change on children. The economic cost of floods and droughts each year creates a long-term financial liability for families that they find increasingly difficult to claw their way out of.

Children are the most impacted in this crisis – they are left without enough to eat and at high risk of acute malnutrition.

We know that malnutrition remains one of the major causes of mortality in children under five globally. Even those who survive are at risk of stunted growth, delayed mental and physical development and have a high risk of developing other illnesses.

The right to education is most at-risk due to climate-induced disasters such as floods and drought. Floods not only impact children's ability to access school, but their health is affected due to an increase of vector-borne diseases, including malaria.

Children living in areas prone to environmental catastrophes are often the victims of resource-based, cross-border and ethnic conflicts. This manifests in trauma and absence from school. Child marriages, bidding of girls, sexual abuse, and teenage pregnancies are very common during disasters as families and youth struggle to cope by using whatever means they can to survive. Children and young girls are usually exposed to these risks due to increasing food scarcity and limited income opportunities. Girls can be given away to lighten the load on families.

Wooded areas are disappearing as places become more arid and suffer from increasing drought and deforestation. Girls are being forced to walk farther away from home to fetch firewood. Women and girls in Kenya travel an average of 3.7 miles (close to 6 kilometers) daily to fetch water for domestic use and for livestock. Walking alone on these long treks increasingly puts them at risk of being physically and sexually abused and/or abducted.

Child labour is on the rise, as many children have been forced to look for employment in towns to help fend for their families who have been adversely affected by prolonged drought.

Cases of family separation and child neglect increase during disasters, affecting children emotionally and psychologically. Preventing global warming will help stop further deterioration of the already dangerous situation due to hunger, poverty, early marriage, FGM and child abuse especially for the deprived, excluded, and vulnerable children living in most affected arid areas. Despite being victims, children are consistently overlooked in the design and content of climate change programs. They have valuable contributions to make – their experiences and ideas for solutions need to be heard.

Children's rights must be recognized and protected at all costs: They have right to life, right to education, right to health, and right to participation.

- We must prioritize investments that reduce climate risks and those that improve child rights and access to safe water and sanitation.
- Climate change investments must embed sustainability and resilience education for better education outcomes.
- We must improve access to health and nutrition by supporting access to both preventive and curative services.

## Key asks

Alice Anukur, Country Director ChildFund Kenya:

*“There is a need for global attention to prioritise ASAL: Arid and semi-arid lands as these are the most affected in terms of resources and planning. This includes promoting innovative approaches such as climate smart agriculture. And also, including children's voices!”*



Alice Anukur is the Country Director for ChildFund Kenya. Watch Alice talk about the effects of climate change on child rights in Kenya [here](#).

## We must give children a voice!

The participation of children and youth in fighting the climate crisis is paramount. Duty bearers must educate, support and involve them. They must listen directly to children and youth to understand their issues, and involve them in identifying solutions. Platforms should be established to ensure their meaningful engagement and so that their creative potential can be harnessed. Children and youth should also have access to climate finance, to ensure that solutions to their specific needs are appropriately addressed.



In partnership with Barnfonden and Solvatten, ChildFund has provided hundreds of Solvatten kits to families, providing an alternative way of boiling water thus reducing firewood use and long treks by the girls in search for potable water. Such initiatives could be scaled up in all ASAL Counties.



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Read more about the link between climate change and violence against children [here](#).