

# The Right Climate to Learn



The right to education is the cornerstone of sustainable development. This is why quality, safe and inclusive education systems are critical in facing and fighting climate change, particularly for the most marginalised communities in the poorest countries. Yet, education for all is being negatively impacted by climate change, and education is neglected as part of the global climate response.

The Send My Friend to School coalition is calling on the UK government to seize the opportunity it has in 2020 as host of the Conference of the Parties 26 (COP26), and as a respected world leader in global education, to take decisive action to stop climate change undermining the right to education and strengthen education's role in the global climate response.

‘Young people in the UK are marching for their future, but climate change is my present’

Isaac, 17, Malawi, Send My Friend to School  
Young Ambassador, UK climate strike 2019



Millions of young people around the world have joined a global climate change protest. Their action tells governments that they will not accept paralysis in the face of the climate crisis, and proves their power as effective and important agents of change. Children and young people will bear the brunt of our failure to act on climate change. And, as Isaac's quote reminds us, it is marginalised children in the poorest countries, such as girls, children with

disabilities, migrants, refugees and internally displaced children, who are the most vulnerable to climate change and who suffer its gravest consequences.

Of these marginalised children, 262 million are locked out of education.<sup>1</sup> When children are dispossessed of their right to a quality and inclusive education they are left unprepared for, and vulnerable to, a changing climate.

Photo: As part of the Send My Friend to School, Steve Sinnott Foundation, and National Education Union 'Young Ambassadors Project', in 2019 Jessy and Isaac travelled from Malawi to the UK to be spokespeople for the challenges facing education in their community. Addressing the global Youth Strike for Climate in London, they spoke about how the impact of climate change, including unpredictable and extreme weather, is exacerbating the barriers to their education. © Watipaso Kailwo/Oxfam GB



## Education is critical for an effective global climate response

Education systems must be fit to cope with our changing climate and contribute to tackling climate change. There are three key contributions education systems can make towards an effective global climate response in facing and fighting climate change.

### 1. Education builds children's and the communities', resilience and adaptive capacity in a changing climate.

The poorest children and young people in developing countries are most at risk in the climate crisis because poverty means they are more vulnerable to, and less likely to be able to adapt to, the impacts of climate change.<sup>2</sup> Quality, safe and inclusive education contributes to poverty reduction by paving the way to better work, health and livelihoods: each additional year of education can enable a 10% increase in income and, if all children and young people left school being able to read, we would see a 12% reduction in world poverty.<sup>3</sup>

Quality, safe and inclusive education also provides children and young people with the basic and higher order skills needed as our climate changes. A changing climate contributes to unpredictability and complexity in the world around us. Quality, safe and inclusive education provides children and young people with the critical life skills and knowledge to navigate this.

### 2. Education is protective, life-saving and life-sustaining during climate related disasters and displacement.

Climate change is increasing the severity and frequency of natural hazards and disasters,<sup>4</sup> and therefore contributing to the rate of climate induced migration. In times of crisis and displacement, education is an essential protective measure. This is because it is a critical platform for delivering health services and information, it boosts children's adaptive capacity, provides psychosocial support, and protects them from the increased risks of violence, abuse and exploitation they face in times of crisis.

### 3. Education empowers children and young people to create a more sustainable future.

The sustainable goal on education includes a target promising that by 2030 all learners will acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development. Education can contribute to a more sustainable world because it can develop the skills and mindsets needed for building and contributing to a green economy and the promotion of sustainable communities.

Education improves the capacity of children and young people to be active citizens and agents of change who are better able to take action on climate change and hold governments and other powerful decision makers to account on climate issues.



## Education neglected in global climate response

Despite the importance of education in the global climate response, it is being neglected.

**Education systems serving the children and young people most at risk are not preparing them with the skills, knowledge, behaviours and attitudes needed in a changing climate.**

262 million children remain out of school,<sup>5</sup> and millions more children who do access school are not acquiring the foundational skills needed to survive in our increasingly complex and changing world. A staggering 387 million children of primary school age will not achieve minimum proficiency levels in reading; two-thirds of them – 262 million – are in school.<sup>6</sup>

Unless the learning crisis is addressed, more than 750 million young people in low and middle-income countries will not have the skills to participate in tomorrow's economy, and 1.5 billion adults in 2030 will have no education beyond primary school.<sup>7</sup>

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) has received increasing attention since UNESCO launched its 'Decade for Education for Sustainable Development' in

2004,<sup>8</sup> however, ESD is still not adequately integrated into many curricula around the world, and teachers' capacity on delivering ESD is not being supported or strengthened. Globally, little over 20% of reporting countries dedicate enough teaching hours to ESD, while few countries incorporate ESD into in-service teacher training.<sup>9</sup>

**Education systems serving children and young people most at risk are too often not prepared to cope with climate related disasters, slow-onset climate impacts and displacement.**

Nearly 40 million children a year have their education interrupted by natural disasters and subsequent disease outbreaks following extreme weather events.<sup>10</sup> This is because schools that serve poor and marginalised communities are more likely to have inadequate infrastructure, including routes to school, that are easily destroyed during disasters. In addition, the physical and psychological trauma children often experience during disasters and displacement also makes it difficult for them to attend school or to learn when they are there.

Climate related disasters and slow-onset climate impacts can also

contribute to a deterioration of livelihoods associated with shifting weather patterns and changes in seasonality. Families' descent into poverty as a result of this means children are more susceptible to disease and hunger, and it also affects household-level decisions about sending children to school.

Marginalised children and young people are particularly vulnerable. Increased burdens of water and fuel collection as a result of deteriorating livelihoods disproportionately fall on girls keeping them out of school.<sup>11</sup> Girls are also less likely to return to school after a disaster – in Pakistan, after the 2010 floods, 24% of girls in Grade 6 dropped out of school, compared with 6% of boys.<sup>12</sup> Children with disabilities are often invisible and overlooked in emergency relief operations,<sup>13</sup> and increasingly pressurised budgets mean less resources are available for accessible and affordable services.<sup>14</sup>

Without adequate protection and intervention, climate-related disasters and extreme weather events will increasingly interrupt education systems around the world, meaning that the most marginalised children will not be able to access school.

Photo: Miranda, 11, lost her classroom, and her home was damaged when the cyclone Idai hit. "Many of my classmates never came back to school...school is very important, we all know that". Many children spend up to 50 per cent of their waking hours in school, yet all too often schools are not constructed or maintained to be disaster-resilient. © Saman Saidi / Save the Children



## A mandate for action

As host of COP26, in 2020 the UK Government has a real opportunity to take decisive action to stop climate change undermining the right to education and strengthen education's role in the global climate response. Ahead of COP26, governments are expected to set themselves more ambitious targets to stop climate change. The UK has already committed to ending its contribution to global warming by 2050 and must now take action by COP26 to put itself on track to deliver rapid action to cut emissions as quickly as possible, and bring other leaders and countries on board.

The UK is also a respected leader in global education. DFID's 'Get Children Learning' policy (GCL) recognises the urgency needed to tackle the learning crisis.<sup>15</sup> Yet, GCL fails

to consider this in the context of a changing climate and therefore does not sufficiently consider what education systems need to cope with and tackle climate change. If DFID is to deliver its pledge to tackle the global education crisis, it must prioritise a comprehensive approach to supporting climate sensitive and transformative education systems around the world.

Children around the world have made their voices heard on climate change, it is time we listen and take action. In the next few months, the Send My Friend to School coalition will launch a detailed report on climate change and education that will set out concrete steps that the UK Government can take to build resiliencies that will safeguard children and their right to education in our changing climate.

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This brief is endorsed by: Christian Aid, EIS, Humanity & Inclusion, Leonard Cheshire, NASUWT, NEU, Oxfam, Plan International UK, RESULTS UK, Save the Children UK, Sense International, Sightsavers, VSO, UNICEF UK

Photo: Children at a reading club in Kampong Chan District, Cambodia, which they attend as part of Save the Children's First Read programme. (Photo: Hanna Adcock/Save the Children)

\* All children's names have been changed to protect their identity