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Mainstreaming Child Rights in National Climate Adaptation Policy Spaces

A child rights approach to adaptation planning could increase the resilience of children and their families to climate shocks and provide a firm base for adaptation – as would placing a climate lens on national child rights reporting. This briefing takes existing experience of child rights, child-led and child-sensitive approaches to development and applies them to national climate change policy. It asks how policymakers can formulate and implement adaptation policies that are in ‘the best interests of the child’.

Child rights, programme effectiveness, intergenerational equity and climate justice imperatives all make the case for putting children at the forefront of national adaptation responses. Children have contributed least to climate change, yet will feel the greatest impacts if governments fail to adapt and they have the need, interest and capacity to take an active role in climate responses.

There is almost universal agreement that any policy affecting children must be made ‘in their best interests’ (Article 3, UN Convention of the Rights of the Child). However, child-focused adaptation programmes have not been prioritised to-date and there are few signs of child participation in climate change policy processes at the national level.

Research suggests that government members leading climate change adaptation programmes are rarely familiar with child rights: ‘Of course we can talk about children and climate change, just like we talk about women and climate change, but what does it mean in practice’ (representative, Cambodia Climate Change Office).

Children in National Adaptation Policy Spaces

Currently national adaptation policies tend to be either ‘child-blind’ or focus only on children’s vulnerability as passive victims. Child rights analysis would help reorient policies to see children as rights holders and identify approaches that hold those responsible for safeguarding these rights to account. It would also take into account all possible forms of child participation – from child-led projects to consultations on national policy frameworks – that will ensure that adaptation strategies reinforce child rights and capacities as well as addressing their needs.

Putting child rights into climate change policies and programmes

Guiding frameworks for implementing adaptation programmes nationally are still under development and the opportunity remains to integrate child rights within them. Such frameworks need to be appropriate to the local context in each country and integrate lessons from pro-poor adaptation approaches and child-poverty reduction strategies. They would include:

- vulnerability analysis which disaggregates within and between groups of children – including analysis of children’s knowledge and capacity relating to risk reduction and adaptation;

Children identify their rights in Kenya

Children in Kenya are aware of climatic changes in the form of persistent drought. Research shows that they are able to link their experiences of drought to their rights – identifying adaptation strategies and the roles and responsibilities of different people to implement them. Their greatest concerns were their right to food, education, protection from abuse and to participate, particularly in sustainable management of their natural resources. Their motivation and capacity to take action or take their claims to parents, elders or local authorities could be key to building climate resilience – providing impetus for mainstreaming child rights in climate change adaptation nationally.

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- participatory spaces created by, with, and for children locally and through national networks;
- child-centred resilience projects and programmes with dedicated support and resources (dealing particularly with causes of vulnerability);
- child-related progress and process indicators – both for broad ‘enabling environment’ frameworks and more specific child centred outcomes.

The strong legal framework provided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) together with new theories and improved practice on child participation and child poverty reduction – and a better understanding of, and instruments for, delivering targeted assistance – could all support a child-centred approach to adaptation.

Bringing climate change into the child rights arena

Climate change puts children at greater risk of violence, abuse and neglect by exacerbating the conditions of poverty – particularly through displacement, migration or the need for children to work more. This will be an important consideration when states and civil society are monitoring child rights progress.

Short-term economic development strategies may also be exacerbating vulnerability to climate change. Activities such as land expropriation and unsustainable resource extraction are often considered in other human rights reporting but not in relation to the CRC. The CRC reporting mechanism can provide an established child-friendly national policy space to advance a child-centred climate resilience agenda. It can also ensure that government and private interventions safeguard these rights and don't increase vulnerability to climate change.

Some child rights actors and agencies are not yet aware of the long-term implications of climate change for their work and are therefore unable to consider climate change when reporting or shadow reporting on child rights progress. Capacity building for child rights groups could improve their understanding of the relevance of climate change to their work and the short- and long-term changes and uncertainties they will need to address. This requires collaborative and well-communicated research, public awareness raising and specialist training.

Children in a Changing Climate partner UNICEF is working with the Committee on the Rights of the Child to develop guidelines on child-centred policy responses to climate change for states reporting to the Committee.

Policy Implications

- A child rights framework should guide all national adaptation initiatives. Strong national networks between inter-ministerial committees on climate change, children's ministries, civil society and international agencies will be needed to orient key actors through collaborative child rights analysis of adaptation priorities and planning.
- National frameworks must learn from existing national experiences that have supported people out of intergenerational poverty cycles and incorporated children's own perspectives on climate change.
- The CRC reporting process should consider climate change so that all government and private development interventions serve to safeguard child rights. This will increase children's resilience to climate change rather than undermining it (particularly within new mitigation initiatives).
- A continued emphasis on developing spaces for children's participation in decision-making should mean that children's experiences of climate-related shocks and stresses and their priorities for action are more influential.

Further reading

For other briefs in this series see:
www.ids.ac.uk/go/infocus13

Tanner, T. Polack, E. Stone, L. (forthcoming 2010) Intergenerational Equity in a Changing Climate: Realising Child Rights across Scales' In *The Changing Environment for Human Security: New Agendas for Research, Policy, and Action*. Global Environmental Change and Human Security Programme, Oslo.

Arts, K. (2009). 'A Child Rights Perspective on Climate Change', in Mohamed Salih (ed.) *Climate Change and Sustainable Development: New Challenges for Poverty Reduction*, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar

UNICEF (2008) *Climate Change and Children: A Human Security Challenge*
www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/climate_change.pdf

ICHRP (2008) *Climate Change and Human Rights: A Rough Guide*
www.ichrp.org/files/summaries/35/136_summary.pdf

Credits

This *In Focus Policy Briefing* was written by **Emily Polack**, IDS Climate Change and Development Centre.

The series editors are **Marion Khamis** and **Joanna Glyde**. For other briefs in this series see: www.ids.ac.uk/go/infocus13

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