

IDS IN FOCUS POLICY BRIEFING

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CHILDREN IN A CHANGING CLIMATE:
LESSONS FROM RESEARCH AND PRACTICE
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Rights, Needs and Capacities of Children in a Changing Climate

Children have contributed the least to climate change but are already disproportionately affected by its impacts – the same will apply to future generations of children. Children have a right to adaptation support and a right to participate in decisions and actions which will affect their future. Understanding children's capacity to participate in decision-making and take adaptive action on climate change – and their value in this process – is crucial to ensuring fair and equitable adaptation policy and programming. This briefing introduces some of the critical issues and areas of action for children in a changing climate.

Child rights and Intergenerational justice

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child provides a clear moral framework from which child rights in relation to climate change adaptation can be understood, articulated and measured. Intergenerational justice perspectives extend those rights to cover tomorrow's children as well as today's.

Taking a child rights approach to climate change could radically transform the policies and commitments of those in power. There is a need for ongoing sensitisation of decision-makers to recognise child rights and value the role of children's voices in decision-making.

Communicating climate and disaster risks

Well supported children's groups have the potential to make tangible contributions to climate change responses and have been doing so. Yet to date their capacity as active citizens and agents of change has been largely overlooked.

Ongoing research is building an evidence base for children's involvement in climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction that improves understanding of children's capacity to take adaptive action and participate in decision-making.

Community-based adaptation strategies are strengthened through an understanding of local circumstances and of how different groups – including children – are affected and can respond.

Children's involvement in climate change debates

There is a need for ethical approaches and sensitive facilitation to ensure children's voices are heard in policy arenas and programme formulation.

Child agencies and policymakers can support children to engage through approaches which:

- deepen child understanding of issues whilst recognising they have valuable local and child-focussed knowledge;

Children in a Changing Climate

Children in a Changing Climate (CCC) is a global coalition of leading research and child-centred development organisations committed to sharing knowledge and working with children as agents of change. It aims to make climate change policies and programmes deliver fair, equitable and effective responses to children's needs.

CCC is building an evidence base to support child involvement in climate change policy and practice, looking at children's rights, capacities and needs. Research aims to empower children and support them in their role as agents of change. Building their knowledge and capacity for action and advocacy around climate change adaptation is central to the approach.

- are sensitive to children's needs;
- build confidence in their own capacity;
- support them to articulate their needs by bringing their voices to policy spaces.

Mainstreaming children in national adaptation spaces

Although there is a strong case for putting children at the forefront of climate change adaptation policies and programmes, evidence shows that this has rarely happened at the national level.

Guiding frameworks for implementing national adaptation programmes are still under development. This presents an opportunity for integrating child perspectives and refining national adaptation policies and programmes so that they are not 'child-blind'.

Existing experience of child-rights, child-led and child-sensitive approaches to development could greatly contribute to national responses to climate change.

The importance of child-centred participatory research for adaptation

Different children within communities have different perceptions of risk and which risk-reduction actions need prioritisation. The views of young people are particularly important to ensure adaptation approaches take account of the needs of different children and should underpin policy-making and programming for adaptation.

Taking a participatory action research approach with children supports them to identify and articulate their own vulnerabilities, capacities and needs. It also contributes to knowledge building and child capacity development and has a proven potential to become part of the empowering process that supports and enables child action on climate change.

Policy Implications

- Policymakers from local to global levels need to understand and apply child-rights frameworks and perspectives to policies and programmes in order to increase the resilience of children and their communities to climate change and provide a firm base for adaptation.
- Fair and equitable climate change policy and programming requires pathways such as direct dialogue and participatory research to connect children's views, rights and capacities (now and in the future) to political spheres of influence.
- Child agencies need to sensitise the policy and programming arena at national and international levels to support dialogue between children and power holders in order to shape policies and programme frameworks which respond to children's priorities.
- Child-centred participatory research can provide policymakers and practitioners disaggregated information on impacts of climate change on children that embrace the different needs and potentials that exists within 'child' groups whilst enhancing their capacity to take action.
- Child agencies should work with children alongside parents and community leaders to improve the understanding of children's issues in a changing climate and avoid misplaced perceptions of children as powerless victims of climate change.

Credits

This *In Focus Policy Briefing* was written by **Fran Seballos**, IDS Climate Change and Development Centre, with input from Children and a Changing Climate coalition partners.

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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Haynes et al. (forthcoming 2009), *Child-Centred Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change Adaptation in Indonesia: the Roles of Gender and Culture*. CCC Research Working Paper 1, Brighton: IDS

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Children in a Changing Climate (2008) *A Right to Participate: Securing Children's Role in Climate Change Adaptation*

Tanner, T. et al. (forthcoming 2009), *Children's multiple modes of participation in community based disaster risk reduction and adaptation to climate change* Participatory Learning and Action 60: Community Based Adaptation to Climate Change, London: PLA

