SDG 13: CLIMATE ACTION FOR CHILDREN AFFECTED BY CLIMATE CHANGE

At the 2019 High Level Political Forum (HLPF), the overarching theme will be *Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality*. Additionally, *Sustainable Development Goal 13, Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts*, is one of the six goals being examined in depth. The HLPF in combination with the Secretary General’s Climate Summit in September 2019 provides a particular opportunity to recognize and include children and young people as key stakeholders in climate change.

Climate change and environmental degradation are equity issues that undermine the rights of every child, especially the most disadvantaged. As the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) recently reported, urgent action is needed to combat climate change and its impacts on current and future generations.

It is more and more evident that realizing children’s rights as embedded throughout the SDGs – access to economic opportunity, nutrition, health, education, equity, water, energy, and peace – are contingent on taking action to address and adapt to climate change.

**KEY ASKS FOR 2019 SDG VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEW S**

**UNICEF encourages governments conducting a Voluntary National Review (VNR) to ensure their reports on SDG 13 are:**

- Linked to national plans, budgets and accountability frameworks;
- Informed by relevant, disaggregated data, including on children;
- Inclusive of children’s voices on climate, energy and environmental issues, for instance through conducting consultations with children and youth;
- Action-oriented on the following priority areas for child rights and climate:

*Reduce greenhouse gases and promote sustainable energy investments* so that global temperature increases are limited ideally to 1.5 degrees Celsius. Greenhouse gas emissions are rapidly increasing and the world is not on track to meet its commitments to avoid global warming. It is certain that the current and future generations of children and young people will bear the brunt of the pernicious effects of climate change. Ambitious targets and actions to curb emissions will benefit hundreds of millions of children. Prioritising sustainable energy and low carbon solutions, such as decentralized solar energy, cleaner cooking fuels and energy conservation practices in public facilities, will not only assist in curbing greenhouse gas emissions but simultaneously ensure access to clean, reliable and modern energy services.

*Address environmental degradation and reduce the effect of harmful pollutants on children:* Emerging and alarming evidence is beginning to show the direct impact of air pollution on children. Exposure to toxic indoor and outdoor air pollution kills over 600,000 children under the age of 15 every year. Every day approx. 93 per cent of children under 15 – a full 1.8 billion young people - breathe dangerously polluted air. Increasing evidence suggests it also affects children’s cognitive development. This is further perpetuating poverty and inequity, with the most disadvantaged children and communities often at the greatest risk. Air pollution is exacerbated by the use of fossil fuels – a key driver of climate change.

**Accelerate and scale up investment to strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity of children to climate impacts.** The SDGs and Sendai framework specifically reference the urgent need to strengthen resilience to natural and climate related disasters and shocks (drought, floods, epidemics and storms). Climate adaptation, climate related disaster risk reduction measures must be implemented for and with children: climate resilient school structures in vulnerable zones, youth dialogue to enhance social cohesion, and participatory climate risk mappings are examples of working for and with children to achieve climate resilient development in risk-prone settings. Ensure climate-disaster response includes investments in child protection, education, health, nutrition and WASH.

**Reduce inequity to promote resilience to climate change.** The poorest children and their families will be most affected by climate change. Programmes to develop policy, raise awareness, build institutional capacity and support communities to adapt to climate change and strengthen their resilience must prioritize the poorest and most marginalized children, families and communities who are disproportionately affected. Reducing inequities now – providing access to safe water and adequate sanitation; good nutrition and food security; strong and accessible health systems; and well-functioning child and social protection systems– will give disadvantaged children a better adaptive capacity to cope with climate impacts.
MONITORING THE SITUATION OF CHILDREN, ADOLESCENTS AND YOUTH

To accelerate strategies and actions on the above priority areas for children and climate action, data is necessary. Climate change related data/evidence on areas most relevant to children is scarce, specifically on interlinkages between climate and child health, nutrition, education, displacement, migration, etc. Collecting and disaggregating SDG 13 Targets and Indicators is vital in understanding how and where children are being left behind in the context of addressing climate change.

INVESTING IN CHILDREN, ADOLESCENTS AND YOUTH

Recent estimates suggest that the cost of climate inaction is trillions of dollars more costly — and deadly — than the financial costs of cutting carbon pollution.¹ Increasing the money available to deal with climate change is both urgent and necessary. It will provide the resources to protect children from the worst impacts of climate change through adaptation, and will also ensure a safer future for all generations through low carbon development. Long-term climate finance must be distributed and targeted in such a way that those most vulnerable, such as children, benefit from adequate investment to cope with the growing impacts of climate change. UNICEF encourages governments to:

- Allocate climate funding (domestic/international) to promote and scale up investments/actions for children.
- Work in partnership with the private sector to develop and incentivize innovative approaches and technologies to benefit children most at risk from climate impacts and environmental degradation.

INCLUDING CHILDREN, ADOLESCENTS AND YOUTH

We encourage governments to improve climate education, awareness and participation especially among children and adolescents. Personal behavior changes are central to popularizing more sustainable choices around the globe — including through household energy use, transportation and food choices, recycling and waste-reduction behaviors, and other climate-friendly decisions.

Oftentimes, educating and engaging children, adolescents, and youth leads to wider household and community changes and therefore is a critical intervention to result in wide-scale shifts. Empowering young people with knowledge can also lead to innovations — including through technology or creative approaches to reduce greenhouse gases or otherwise promote climate action.

Their education and engagement on the issue as current change agents and future decision makers, entrepreneurs, consumers, teachers and parents will help ensure the sustainability of our efforts.

Children, adolescents and young people can already be some of the fiercest advocates for climate action and environmental sustainability. Time and again, young people have voiced their concern about climate change. A UNICEF poll conducted among more than 5000 children and adolescents across over 60 countries found that almost 80% considered climate change to be one of the most pressing issues facing them today. This signals an unprecedented level of interest and willingness among children, adolescents and youth to take and help shape climate action.

UNICEF encourages national partners to involve and empower children, especially the poorest and most vulnerable, in processes regarding the implementation and review of SDG 13 through participatory means including to:

- Integrate children’s interests, perspectives and needs into national climate change policies (e.g., National Climate Change Adaptation Plans, Nationally Determined Contributions). Identify the children most at risk, solicit their feedback and strengthen their resilience.
- Establish formal mechanisms to support children’s and young people’s full and meaningful participation in discussions and decision-making on climate change, with a particular focus on elevating the voices of the most vulnerable such as adolescent girls, displaced and migrant children/youth and those with disabilities.
- Enhance efforts on education (formal/in-formal) and life-skills for living in a climate-resilient and low carbon world among children and youth and prepare current and future generations for shifting societies towards sustainable practices and in advocating for the environment. The World’s Largest Lesson is an existing tool for bringing the SDGs into the classroom through freely available, multilingual creative and educational content. Comics Uniting Nations also develops supplementary educational materials on the SDGs through comic books.

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¹ WHO, 2018