

# CALLING FOR CHILD-SENSITIVE CLIMATE ACTIONS

## Enhancing the Adaptive Capacity of Children in Thailand to Impacts of Climate Change

### SUMMARY

From air pollution to flooding, from wildfires to increasingly severe heat waves, environmental degradation and climate change threaten the well-being of children all over the world. Environmental degradation and climate change can have severe, far-reaching consequences on children's livelihood, physical and mental health, and education.

Thailand is no exception. The key findings from the *Impact Assessment of Climate Change and Environmental Degradation on Children in Thailand* indicate that the Northeastern and Southern regions of the country are most at-risk from climate change after incorporating children-related factors. Hence, enhancing the adaptive capacity of households with children will play a crucial role in reducing their risk from climate change, especially in these areas.

Yet, based on findings from the Impact Assessment, Thailand's current policies and plans (e.g. the Climate Change Master Plan 2015-2050 and National Adaptation Plan) do not contain measures to support climate change adaptation in areas exposed to highest climate risks, and lack specific measures to protect children from the effects of climate change and environmental degradation.

# CHILD-SENSITIVE POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE ROYAL THAI GOVERNMENT

UNICEF Thailand are calling on the Royal Thai Government to:

## 1. Enhance children's awareness and knowledge of climate change

- Children should be informed about how they might be affected by climate change so that they can prepare themselves to cope with the impacts and find ways to reduce those impacts.
- Knowledge on climate change and its impacts should be integrated into school curricula at all levels. During the revision of the Basic Education Core Curriculum, the Office of the Basic Education Commission (OBEC) should consider revisiting the subjects related to climate change to ensure that there is a progression of understanding of climate change and impacts.

## 2. Promote climate-proof school and health facility infrastructure

- Climate change, especially flooding, may cause significant damage to school buildings, impacting school properties and disrupting children's education. To help identify schools most at risk from climate change, we recommend overlaying a map showing GPS coordinate of schools in Thailand with the risk maps developed under this study. Relevant government agencies can then use this information in planning and developing measures to make schools in high-risk areas climate resilient.
- It is also essential that there should be minimum requirements in model school building codes and regulations.
- It is also important to ensure that the location of health care facilities and their building codes account for current and projected future climate risks.

## 3. Establish child-sensitive early warning systems

- Dissemination and communication through early warning systems are critical to ensure an effective and proactive response. Early warning information must be provided in the appropriate language, use appropriate communication channels, and be understandable and accessible for children so that they can take actions to reduce the possibility of injury and loss of life. To ensure that early warning messages are child sensitive, warning messages need to be simple to understand and provide clear instructions and guidance to children about actions that need to be taken during disasters or extreme weather events, such as information on local evacuation, escape routes, taking shelter, etc.
- To ensure that children are capable of following instructions and guidance from the early warning system more effectively, it is essential to include children in emergency drills based on specific climate hazards that might occur in their areas. Teachers, community members and care givers should be engaged in taking care of young children during evacuation.



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## BACKGROUND

Children are vulnerable to multiple types of hazards due to their smaller size, potentially weaker immune system at certain early ages, physiological and cognitive immaturity, and dependency on caregivers for safety and protection. Behaviourally, children are more likely to play outside, which exposes them to heat and pollutants.

The key results from the *Impact Assessment of Climate Change and Environmental Degradation on Children in Thailand* illustrate that the Northeastern and Southern regions of Thailand face the highest risks from climate change. According to the overall risk map produced by the study, the top ten provinces exposed to overall risk of climate change under the near-future time horizon (2016 to 2035), and under the RCP4.5 scenario<sup>1</sup>, are Ubon Ratchathani, Nakhon Ratchasima, Si Sa Ket, Nakhon Si Thammarat, Narathiwat, Surin, Songkhla, Buriram, Khon Kaen, and Surat Thani, respectively.

The regression analysis conducted by the Impact Assessment investigates the linkages between child-sensitive climate risk indices and the living standards dimension of the child multidimensional poverty index (MPI), which consists of housing condition, asset ownership, access to a bank account and access to safe drinking water. Enhancing the adaptive capacity of households with children will play a crucial role in reducing their risk from climate change. Households with a robust housing structure, more asset ownership, and who have access to banking accounts and closed piped water systems, tend to have a higher adaptive capacity and thus face lower overall risks from climate change.

Thailand considers climate change a high-priority issue and has incorporated climate change into the National Strategy (2018-2037), the National Economic and Social Development Plan, the Climate Change Master Plan

<sup>1</sup> Representative Concentration Pathways (RCPs) portray different scenarios of atmospheric greenhouse gas (GHG) concentration for the twenty-first century (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), 2014). RCP4.5 represents the intermediate scenario, in which GHG emissions peak around 2040 and then decline.

2015-2050 and the National Adaptation Plan. However, these policies and plans do not contain specific measures to mitigate climate risks in prioritized areas, i.e. the Northeastern and Southern regions, and do not yet contain measures to help reduce impacts of climate change on children specifically, who are among the most vulnerable groups.

The Impact Assessment highlights three gaps in climate change-related plans and policies as follows:

- I. There are no specific measures in policies to protect children from the effects of climate change and environmental degradation.
- II. There are a lack of climate change adaptation plans and measures at sub-national level, especially in high-risk provinces.
- III. There is a lack of coordination among relevant government agencies.

Therefore, a combined “top-down” and “bottom-up” approach is recommended to help close these gaps, by aligning and coordinating work on climate change at both national and sub-national levels.

**Top-down approach:** Government agencies responsible for climate change and environment policies should participate in platforms that engage children and youth to enhance the child sensitivity of climate policies and plans. Possible channels for integrating child-sensitive recommended actions include the process through which the Office of Natural Resources and Environmental Policy and Planning (ONEP) revises national climate change plans, such as the Climate Change Master Plan 2015-2050 and the National Adaptation Plan. ONEP should then communicate the child-sensitive revisions with the appropriate government agencies.

**Bottom-up approach:** At the sub-national level, Local Government Organizations (LGOs), Provincial Administration Offices, Municipalities, and Subdistrict Administration Offices can play key roles in providing platforms to organise stakeholder meetings to formulate, manage, design and implement mitigation and adaptation plans for each area to address the risk of climate change. ONEP could provide technical support to LGOs in analysing climate risk data and proposing interventions necessary to tackle climate risks. The Provincial Social Development and Human Security offices in each province can act as coordinators between provincial government agencies, helping to identify children and youth representatives of diverse backgrounds in individual areas to participate in the policy decision-making platforms, thus ensuring that children’s rights and interests are considered and protected.

## FURTHER READING

Thailand Development Research Institute and UNICEF (2022). *Impact Assessment of Climate Change and Environmental Degradation on Children in Thailand*. Available at: <https://uni.cf/3ZmERSM>

## ABOUT THE BRIEFING

*Thailand Development Research Institute (TDRI) is a public policy research institute providing technical analysis to various public agencies to help formulate policies to support long-term economic and social development in Thailand. This policy brief is based on findings from the joint research project between UNICEF and TDRI entitled “Impact Assessment of Climate Change and Environmental Degradation on Children in Thailand” conducted during December 2021–November 2022.*



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