

A Call to Action for COP: Essential Decisions for Protecting Children's Futures

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ChildFund
Alliance

“We cannot create a future fit for our grandchildren with a system built by our grandparents.” – UN Secretary General speaking at *Summit of the Future*, September 2024

This document was prepared by the ChildFund Alliance Climate and Environment Working Group and includes messages to:

- The 16th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP 16)
- The 29th Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP29)
- The 16th Conference of the Parties (COP16) of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)



ChildFund Alliance is a global network of 11 child-focused development and humanitarian organizations reaching more than 32 million children and their family members in 70 countries.

Our members work to end violence and exploitation against children; provide expertise in emergencies and disasters to ease the harmful impact on children and their communities; and engage children, families and communities to create lasting change.

Our commitment, resources, innovation and expertise serve as a powerful force to help children and their families transform their lives.

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Front and back cover images: Philippa, age 17, is a climate and environment champion from Sierra Leone. In 2023 and 2024, ChildFund has supported her attendance at COP events, ensuring that, through her, the voices of children and youth have the opportunity to reach world leaders as crucial decisions are made. She is relaying messages to governments globally about the urgent need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and transition to a clean energy economy.

ChildFund calls for a comprehensive implementation of the Declaration on Future Generations from the Pact for the Future 2024 as critical COP decisions are made at the Rio Conventions: CBD COP16 on biodiversity, UNFCCC COP29 on climate change, and UNCCD COP16 on desertification.

We urge global leaders to:

Increase Child-centered Climate Finance

Urgently increase the share of climate finance for adaptation, particularly for children, supported by predictable, additional, and quality financing mechanisms. Prioritize specific funding for child-centered climate adaptation and resilience programs, ensuring resources reach the communities most vulnerable to climate impacts, where children's lives are at greatest risk. Ensure loss and damage finance prioritizes funds for resilient recovery and rebuilding of essential services for children and their communities.

Mandate Transparent Monitoring & Accountability for Climate Finance Impact on Children

Ensure that climate finance transparency frameworks include qualitative, gender and age-specific indicators to track how investments are responding to the disproportionate impacts of climate change on children, and how they are supporting their empowerment through targeted measures.

Governments should commit to regular reporting on how climate funds are being utilized to build child resilience and adaptation capabilities, making children a central part of their long-term climate strategies.

Establish financial mechanisms that prioritize climate education and green/blue skill development for youth, preparing them for a sustainable and just economy and empowering them as climate action leaders.

Integrate Children's Rights into Biodiversity and Sustainable Land Use Policies

Incorporate children's rights into all decision-making and policies, utilizing global child rights frameworks and the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's General Comment No. 26 for guidance.

Ensure that all biodiversity and land protection and/or restoration initiatives explicitly include children's needs, emphasizing safe and sustainable environments that support children's health, education, and development aligned with their right to a clean and healthy environment (CRC/GC/26).

Policies and solutions should promote long-term ecological recovery and secure the well-being of future generations.

Establish Inclusive Child Participation Mechanisms in Decision-making Processes

Recognize the indispensable role of children as sustainable "agents of change," thus urging leaders to place children at the heart of the 'green and just transition' agenda.

Create inclusive platforms for children and youth to engage in policy discussions and implementation strategies at national and international levels, ensuring that their voices contribute meaningfully to shaping future climate and environmental commitments.

Encourage child and youth-led environmental stewardship initiatives and education that support children and youth in actively participating in ecosystem protection and/or restoration, building sustainability skills while addressing ecological challenges.

Strengthen Social Protection Systems against Environmental Risks

Build robust safety nets and social protection systems that recognize child specific risks, and that are specifically designed to protect children from climate-induced and other environmental disasters and economic instability, linking these systems with global efforts like the Loss and Damage Fund.

Support policies that provide safe, inclusive and resilient schools and other communal infrastructure as part of broader adaptation strategies, ensuring that children's education and social development is not interrupted by climate-induced or other environmental impacts.

Strengthen child protection systems, recognizing the 'threat multiplier effect' of climate change and environmental degradation on violence against children.

Support children's mental health, as they are confronted by the impacts of climate change, biodiversity loss and desertification, including displacement, loss of community, loss of cultural identity, urban pollution, and the anxiety and uncertainty about their futures.

Support Innovative Intergenerational Knowledge Transfer and Environmental Education

Integrate child-friendly climate and environmental education into school

curricula, providing children with the knowledge and skills needed to adapt to and mitigate climate change and other environmental degradation-induced impacts while fostering ecological stewardship and sustainable land management from an early age.

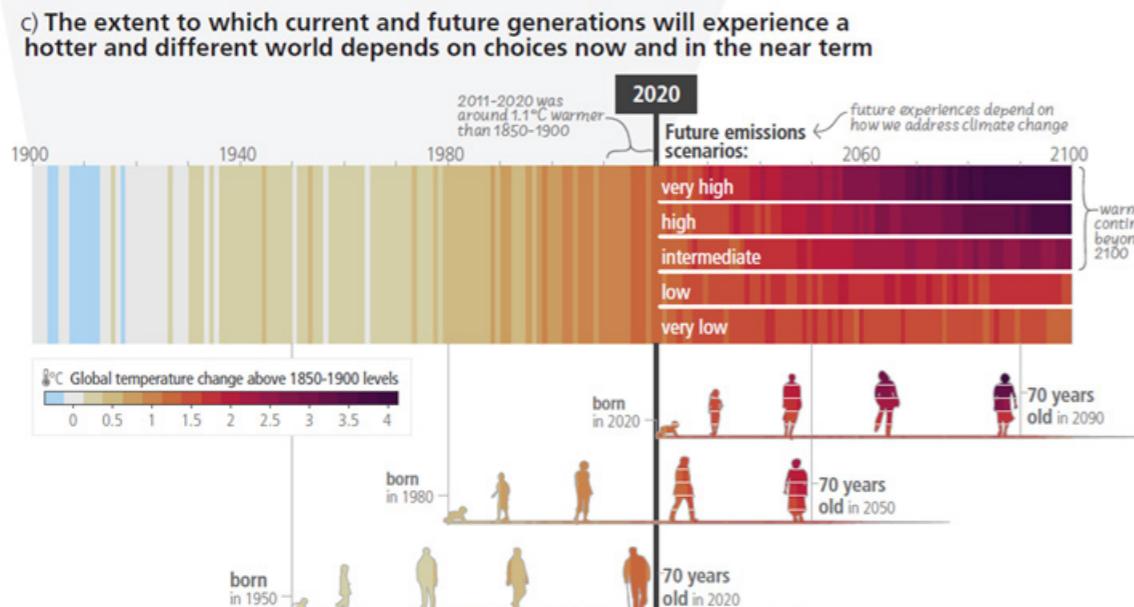
Promote programs that link older generations with youth to transfer knowledge and foster collaboration on sustainable practices and climate resilience measures.

Recognize that all efforts are part of a continuum. They are not one-off nor siloed. Bridge the gap in platforms from local to national levels, and ensure that what happens at COP translates to tangible actions post-COP.

Draw upon Local Leadership

Draw upon local and indigenous knowledge and leadership to build resilience, capacity and agency at all levels for locally led climate and environmental degradation adaptation, mitigation, and response.

Policies should ensure that children and youth are engaged in these processes in empowering and transformative ways, with opportunities to learn from elders, participate in decision-making, and lead initiatives that combine traditional knowledge with modern conservation and adaptation practices.



The IPC's diagram, above, coupled with the Timeline Story (right), provides a clarion call on the need to act now!

Make child-responsive finance a primary focus during COP

On the occasion of the gatherings of the three interrelated Rio Convention/United Nations conferences in 2024:

- the 16th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP16), October/November in Colombia
- the 29th session of the Conference of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP29) in November in Azerbaijan
- the UN Convention to Combat Desertification COP16 in Saudi Arabia in December

and recognizing the interconnectedness between land use, climate change, biodiversity and development and its impact on children, we call upon Global leaders to heed the recommendations in this document.

Climate and environmental risks have a devastating impact on the fulfilment of child rights, as described in the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's General Comment No. 26 on children's rights and the environment, with a special focus on climate change (GC26). Not least is the fact that children are uniquely impacted due to their physiological and developmental characteristics.

Our plea: As these critical COP meetings are held, the Climate and Environment Working Group of ChildFund Alliance urge global leaders to be guided by the important Declaration on Future Generations adopted this September during the Summit of the Future. As described in more detail on the previous page, we further make the call for global leaders at these meetings to integrate the disproportionate impacts of climate change and environmental degradation on children, and relevant policy solutions in planning their future work, in line with their mandates:

1. Increase child-centered climate finance
2. Mandate transparent monitoring and accountability for climate finance impact on children
3. Integrate children's rights into biodiversity and sustainable land use policies
4. Establish inclusive child participation mechanisms in decision-making
5. Strengthen social protection systems against environmental risks
6. Support intergenerational knowledge transfer and environmental education
7. Draw upon local leadership

These requests do not reduce our continuous call for ambitious mitigation action! Global leaders urgently need to mobilize resources, the expertise of civil society and local governments, and emerging evidence to support children and youth to ensure their right to a promising, albeit challenging, future.

Think on the timeline

A child is born in 2015, the year the Paris Agreement is signed.

By 2025, that child is 10. With the support of local civil society organizations and local government, her community has adopted climate-smart farming and established community-level disaster risk reduction plans.

But due to insufficient investment, these solutions are only temporary. Extreme weather events intensify, and by 2030, after repeated crop failures, her family is forced to abandon their farm.

With no assets left, they migrate to the city. Now 15, the child who always attained the highest marks in her class now leaves school

to work as a rubbish collector in unbearable heat, struggling to survive in an overcrowded city that continues to swell with rural migrants.

By 2035, temperatures have become intolerable, and the child—now a young woman—gives birth. With rising heat and limited access to food, she cannot properly feed or cool her baby. Diseases, once rare, have become rampant, and her child dies—a tragedy becoming all too common in her city.

By 2040, civil unrest turns into war. Dealing with inadequate housing, scarce water, no jobs, depleted food supplies, and rising disease, she looks back and wonders: was it really so hard to do the right thing in 2024?

This year's COP events must be a turning point.

We cannot afford for this opportunity to be missed: leaders must act NOW.

Healthy ecosystems and biodiversity are crucial in climate regulation (absorbing and storing carbon emissions, for example) as well as in building resilience to environmental degradation.

The nature-positive Global Goal for Nature movement aligns with this, setting biodiversity targets akin to net-zero goals to ensure nature's recovery by 2030 and thriving ecosystems by 2050.

To achieve this, we need clear funding programs prioritizing community-level initiatives, embracing new technology and integrating indigenous knowledge and leadership and child participation. In terms of climate change, current finance gaps are significant—for example, in the case of the UNFCCC, US\$5.8-5.9 trillion for Nationally Determined Contributions and US\$4.3 trillion annually for clean energy until 2030.

Further, just 2.4% of climate finance from multilateral climate funds serving the UNFCCC and Paris Agreement (MCFs)—a cumulative \$1.2 billion, or \$70.6 million annual average (\$0.03 per capita)—can be classified as supporting projects incorporating child-responsive activities.

Investment is economically feasible and vital for future generations. The Loss and Damage Fund, operationalized at UNFCCC COP28, is a

critical step, but children need to be central in decisions that shape their futures.

Let UNFCCC COP29 be the finance COP that delivers, ensuring inclusive investments, and truly protecting the planet for future generations.

We ask leaders to stand by their Pact for the Future: Youth and Future Generations commitments, and to consider the recommendations made in this report.

Let CBD COP16 highlight the participation of new generations in biodiversity conservation efforts and promote intergenerational environmental governance. Ensure children and youth are mobilized, capacitated, and supported for conservation action.

Ensure youth have a meaningful role in shaping the sustainable land agenda by integrating the Youth Engagement Strategy and Action Plan 2024 at UNCCD COP 16 and increase efforts to accelerate progress towards prosperous and sustainable rural economies that offer quality job prospects and greater protection for their youth and help to fight land degradation.

Across all, financing for climate change, biodiversity and land management, especially for Indigenous Peoples and local communities, must be accessible and timely. This is vital to children and youth engagement and participation in mitigation, adaptation, and conservation efforts.

The importance of standing tall on these commitments NOW cannot be overstated.

To learn more about the importance of children's Right to the Future and the call for child participation, we urge you to read our ChildFund World Index Report 2024, launching 13 November 2024, which presents results from a survey involving over 10,000 children (aged 10-18) across 41 countries where ChildFund Alliance members operate.

See also the ChildFund Alliance Climate and Environment Action Brief 2023

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