

## **Group of Friends on Children and the SDGs**

Meeting on 6 March, 2020 at UNICEF House

CFAs Statement

Executive Director Fore, Excellences, Colleagues,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today about children's participation in climate action. I am Meg Gardinier, Secretary General of ChildFund Alliance, and I speak on behalf of ChildFund, Plan International, Save the Children, SOS Children's Villages and World Vision.

Although they are the least responsible for the world's unfolding climate crisis, children are disproportionately vulnerable to climate-related impacts, while possessing little to no resources to take action.

Beyond affecting children's rights to life, survival, development and health, climate change also threatens their right to education. Extreme weather events damage and destroy schools. Climate-related impacts on their nutrition – along with their physical and mental health – affect children's ability to learn. Loss of family livelihoods is also correlated with loss of education, as children are required to assist with household tasks, or seek work, which in turn leads to increases in child labor, child marriage, and other violations of their rights.

More specifically, as families attempt to manage financial burdens due to deteriorating livelihoods impacted by climate change, adolescent girls are at greater risk of human rights abuses such as human trafficking, sexual violence, gender-based violence and exploitation. They may also engage in negative coping strategies such as child, early and forced marriage.

Children are acutely vulnerable in the context of climate-related migration and displacement, and in some instances, children are forced into labor. Girls, poor children, indigenous children, minorities, children without parental care, and children with disabilities, are also extremely vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

International and national frameworks on climate change largely ignore children's right to be heard. They are absent from key policy processes under the United Nations Framework on Climate Change, (UNFCCC) including core work streams and major decisions. They are also highly restricted from participating in the yearly annual negotiations. The inclusion of children's rights in the preamble of the Paris Agreement represents a critical step forward but it has not been operationalized. Targets under SDG 13 on Climate Action include a welcome focus on youth as a group that should be considered, but this does not ensure that children's specific rights, needs and vulnerabilities are addressed.

Recommendations for your consideration include:

- Adopt and advocate for the strongest possible ambition in countries' revised national climate plans. (Nationally Determined Contributions), in order to align with the Paris Agreement targets.
- Ensure that international and national level government representatives understand children's rights, and how to consult children in decision-making processes, including child initiated activities.

- Fulfill climate finance pledges to poorer countries and commit to invest in child-centered climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction measures.
- Integrate a stronger focus on children's participation in all framework and processes. These processes should be consultative, inclusive and free from existing patterns of discrimination. Adults have a responsibility towards children with whom they engage to minimize their risk from all forms of violence associated with their participation.
- Ensure that children's right to environmental education is reflected and embedded in decisions under the Action for Climate Empowerment (ACE) UNFCCC dialogue and associated decisions.
- Develop accessible climate frameworks, conferences and processes in which children and young people, particularly girls and young women, are able to engage.
- Build the capacity of girls and young women, supporting them to develop the skills and knowledge they require to navigate the climate crisis.
- Include children in the development, implementation and monitoring of nationally determined contributions (NDCs) and National Action Plans (NAPs).