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Educating Girls on Climate Change & Building Resilience: Why It Matters

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10–13 minutes

Recent reviews of climate, risk and capacity assessments from our programmes highlighted a concerning trend: in some contexts, **girls and women have significantly lower levels of climate change awareness and education than boys and men**. While all children need access to quality education and opportunities to understand climate change, evidence shows that marked gender inequalities in climate knowledge persist.

This matters because climate change is already reshaping children's lives and educational opportunities worldwide. An estimated 200 million adolescent girls living in low-resource settings face heightened climate-related risks, making climate education for girls more important than ever for advancing gender equality, strengthening resilience and supporting effective climate action¹.

Climate-related disasters disrupt education in ways that often affect girls disproportionately. Beyond school closures and damaged infrastructure, climate shocks can increase girls' exposure to violence, exploitation and child marriage, making it harder for them to stay in education². In parts of the Sahel in Africa, for example, girls living in areas affected by conflict and climate change often have lower awareness and understanding of climate issues than boys³. Climate hazards can also reduce girls' access to education, leading to lower educational attainment and further reinforcing existing inequalities⁴.

Addressing this gap is not only a matter of rights and equity. Girls and women play critical roles within families, communities and local economies. **Without access to climate information and education, girls are less able to anticipate risks, adapt to changing conditions and participate in decisions that shape their futures.**

WHAT CAUSES THE GAP?

Gender disparities in climate knowledge often mirror wider inequalities in education and access to information.

In Afghanistan, for example, a recent assessment found that only around one-third of children surveyed were familiar with the concept of climate change, despite many having experienced

multiple extreme weather events. The same assessment found gender differences in climate knowledge among children, teachers, parents and caregivers⁵.

In many contexts, **girls continue to face barriers to education due to poverty, discrimination, restrictive social norms, conflict and displacement**. Climate-related disruptions add another obstacle. When girls miss out on education, they also miss opportunities to learn about climate risks, disaster preparedness, environmental stewardship and climate adaptation.

The problem is compounded by the fact that climate education itself is often under-prioritised. UNESCO research found that climate change was absent from nearly half of national curriculum frameworks reviewed globally, highlighting a significant gap between the urgency of the climate crisis and what children are learning in school⁶.

As climate pressures increase, there is a real risk that girls' education could once again become deprioritised, reversing progress made over recent decades.

WHY IS THIS A PROBLEM?

Children are among those most vulnerable to climate change. Rising temperatures, flooding, droughts, environmental degradation and extreme weather events threaten their health, safety, wellbeing and education. Compared with adults, **children are often less able to cope with the physical, psychological and social consequences of climate-related shocks**⁷.

However, **climate change is not gender neutral**. Existing inequalities mean that girls often experience climate impacts differently and, in many cases, more severely. As research shows, climate vulnerability is shaped by gender inequalities and can reinforce existing power structures and social norms⁸.

During droughts, girls may spend more time collecting water and less time learning. During floods, damaged roads and unsafe travel routes can prevent them from reaching school. Climate-related economic hardship may force families to prioritise immediate survival needs, leading to girls being withdrawn from school, pushed into domestic work, or married early.

Climate crises can also increase risks of gender-based violence, exploitation and psychosocial distress. Girls who are displaced or living in temporary shelter arrangements may face additional protection risks. **For girls with disabilities, these challenges are often compounded** by discrimination and limited access to information, services and assistive devices during emergencies.

Evidence from Kenya shows that climate change can undermine girls' health, increase school dropout rates and worsen financial pressures that contribute to child marriage^{9 10}.

Yet despite being disproportionately affected, **girls remain underrepresented in many climate resilience and adaptation initiatives**. This represents a missed opportunity. Educated girls are not only better equipped to protect themselves and their communities, but they also

contribute to healthier families, stronger economies and more sustainable development outcomes.

Ensuring girls can learn about climate change is therefore essential. Failure to do so not only perpetuate inequality but also weakens our collective response to the climate crisis.

WHAT IS THE SOLUTION?

There is no single solution. Governments, schools, communities and families must work together to ensure all children, including girls, can access climate education and build resilience to climate-related risks.

At School Level

Schools have a vital role to play in both protecting children from climate risks and equipping them with the knowledge and skills needed to respond.

This means creating safe, climate-resilient learning environments while ensuring that climate education is integrated into teaching and learning. **Girls should not be viewed as passive victims of climate change, but as leaders, innovators and agents of change capable of contributing to solutions within their communities.**

Key actions include:

- Integrating climate change and climate literacy into school curricula and teacher training i.e in Mozambique.
- Promoting girls' participation in STEM subjects and climate-related leadership opportunities.
- Supporting reading for learning through child-friendly climate resources and digital materials.
- Establishing inclusive climate and environmental clubs that actively engage girls and children with disabilities¹¹.
- Supporting practical activities such as environmental clean-ups, tree planting and local conservation initiatives.
- Strengthening menstrual health and hygiene support so girls can continue learning during climate-related disruptions.
- Investing in locally led and indigenous environmental solutions.

Projects such as the Sierra Leone Coastal Resilience Project¹² demonstrate how inclusive climate clubs can help girls, boys and children with disabilities participate meaningfully in climate awareness and environmental action.

Schools should also be supported to develop climate action and emergency preparedness plans that take gender into account and help ensure learning continuity during crises.

At Community Level

Communities play an equally important role in supporting girls' climate education:

- Parents, school management committees, community leaders and local organisations should be equipped to understand climate risks and their responsibilities in creating safe and inclusive learning environments.
- Particular attention should be given to ensuring that girls, children with disabilities and other vulnerable groups can participate fully in climate-related activities and decision-making.

At Government Level

Governments have a responsibility to ensure that education systems can withstand climate-related shocks and continue providing safe, inclusive learning opportunities for all children.

Key priorities include:

- Investing in climate-resilient schools and infrastructure.
- Strengthening and financing education systems that can anticipate, withstand and recover from climate-related risks.
- Integrating gender-responsive climate planning and budgeting into education sector plans.
- Ensuring climate financing supports education continuity during emergencies.
- Linking climate resilience efforts with health, nutrition, protection and social care services so that children's broader needs are met.

Encouragingly, some progress is already being made. In South Sudan, new climate-resilient schools are expected to support more than 200,000 children affected by climate disasters, half of whom are girls¹³.

Governments can also draw on frameworks such as the Comprehensive School Safety Framework to strengthen resilience across education systems.

CONCLUSION

Climate change is one of the defining challenges of our time, and **its impacts on children are growing**. Yet millions of girls around the world still lack access to the education and information they need to understand climate risks and respond effectively.

If we fail to act, girls risk becoming further marginalised from climate decision-making and adaptation efforts. But by investing in safe, resilient and inclusive education today, **we can help build stronger communities, accelerate climate action and ensure that no girl is left behind in the transition to a more sustainable and resilient future.**

Inputs from Anja Nielsen, Rebecca Huddleston, Daljeet Kaur, Ayse Kocak, Sarah Knight, Sophie Lashford and Chrystal Holt.

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