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CHANGE^{the} SUBJECT

HOW LEADERS CAN TAKE ACTION FOR
CLIMATE EDUCATION AT COP26



THE IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON GIRLS' EDUCATION

As leaders contend with the effects of global heating at the November 2021 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conference of Parties (COP26), they must not overlook one of its devastating impacts: Climate change is driving girls out of school.

The world is on the brink of a climate and ecological catastrophe. Human activity that produces greenhouse gases — particularly carbon dioxide — has caused a rapid heating of our planet with disastrous effects.¹ In 2021, extreme weather has led to unprecedented disasters, including flooding, temperature spikes, droughts and wildfires. Many of the effects are already irreversible — and unless governments take drastic action to restrict temperature rises to 1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels, heat extremes will have catastrophic consequences for humanity and our planet.^{2,3}

Climate-related events like flooding, droughts and increased exposure to zoonotic diseases (infectious diseases spread from animals to humans) amplify the inequalities girls face, threatening to reverse decades of progress for girls' education. Following climate shocks, stressed families often pull girls out of school to help with an increase in household responsibilities — such as fetching water and firewood — or to enter early marriage to ease the burden of scarce household resources.^{4,5} During prolonged school closures, girls have less access than boys to distance learning and/or temporary school facilities, causing them to fall behind in their education.⁶ Girls drop out of school at higher rates than boys during climate-related social disruption and forced migration.⁷



In 2021 alone, climate change impacts will prevent four million girls from completing their education.

If current trends continue, by 2025 climate change will be a contributing factor in preventing at least 12.5 million girls from completing their education each year.⁸



HOW EDUCATION CAN FIGHT CLIMATE CHANGE

Realising girls’ right to 12 years of quality education can help communities’ resilience and adaptation, and reduce the rate and impact of global warming.

Emerging evidence shows how education for all could be a powerful tool in tackling the crisis at its roots *if* teaching adapts to help girls and boys make personal connections to the issue, interrogate its causes and adopt new ways of thinking and being. It is critical that quality climate education responds to the needs and priorities of girls so that it is relevant and accessible for all students.

- Education equips girls with the **tools and competencies to respond to the challenges of climate change**. Girls and women with literacy, numeracy, critical thinking and problem-solving skills can act on weather reports or make sustainable choices around natural resource management.⁹
- Educating girls contributes to **gender equality in the economy and society**. Research shows that women’s political participation and leadership leads to more pro-environmental policies and higher levels of environmental well-being.^{10 11}

- Ensuring girls acquire 21st century skills like critical thinking and joint problem-solving — along with participation in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) subjects — means they can **lead innovation and bring a gendered perspective to solutions for the transition to a green economy**.
- When girls acquire this broad set of green skills, they are able to **access opportunities** that a low-carbon, climate-resilient economy offers on equal terms with boys.
- Bringing values-based climate learning into life-skills education leads to long-standing, **pro-environmental changes in attitudes and behaviours**.¹²
- A participatory, democratic approach to education encourages students to embrace **justice-based solutions to climate change**, imagine a different future and take action towards it.¹³



Countries’ resilience to climate disasters significantly improves with every additional year of education that girls acquire,

increasing by 1.6–3.2 points on the ND-GAIN index, which assesses a country’s vulnerability and ability to adapt to climate change.¹⁴



The Gender-Equal Green Learning Agenda



The Gender-Equal Green Learning Agenda is a new framework from Malala Fund to help leaders address the climate crisis through education, based on research by the Brookings Institution.¹⁵ By implementing each pillar in the agenda, leaders can help teach students the skills and values they need to thrive in climate-resilient economies and challenge the social and economic inequalities fuelling the climate crisis.¹⁶

Youth activists' demands for quality climate education

In too many countries, students are not learning the information and skills they need to adapt to and challenge the climate crisis. In a recent Plan International survey of students in 37 countries, 86% of respondents reported they did not receive enough information about climate change, nearly half said they did not know anything about the Paris Agreement and only 20% learned about climate activism in school.¹⁷

Recognising its importance in the fight against climate change, young people are calling on leaders to ensure students receive quality climate education. In November 2020 at the Mock COP26, over 330 youth delegates from over 140 countries signed a treaty of demands aimed at world leaders to address the climate crisis. Key among their demands was increased action on climate education.¹⁸

At the July 2021 Global Partnership for Education climate education event, youth climate and education activists shared their demands for a gender-transformative education for climate justice.

Youth activists from El Salvador, Ethiopia, India, Nigeria, Pakistan, South Africa, Uganda and more are joining Malala Fund's call for leaders to prioritise climate education at COP26 and helped shape the demands in this paper.



“Regrettably, all I ever learned about climate change was abstract concepts. I wish I was made aware about more than just a concept and learned practical ways to tackle the problem. It would have been of great help if my school would have emphasized more on the actions than theory of my environmental science book.”

— Kaushar, 18, India

Read more about what students wish they learned about climate change in school in Assembly, Malala Fund's digital publication and newsletter for girls.



ACTIONS LEADERS MUST TAKE FOR CLIMATE EDUCATION AT COP26

COP26 provides leaders with the opportunity to commit to urgent climate action. As governments review progress against commitments and redouble efforts to limit global warming, they must not overlook education's potential to reduce the rate and impact of climate change.

At COP26, Malala Fund urges leaders to include gender-responsive climate education as a key component of their climate adaptation, resilience and mitigation strategies. We set out below what actions leaders can take at COP26 to ensure every girl goes to school and learns the knowledge, skills, values and commitment to action she needs to fight for gender and climate justice.

Recommendations for COP26 co-hosts Italy and the United Kingdom

1. In their statements and commitments at COP26, **prioritise quality climate education for all girls and boys** as a key component of climate action and urge other countries to do the same.
2. At the ministerial summit on climate education, ensure **all outcomes are gender-responsive and agree on a common framework of action**.
3. Ensure that UNFCCC processes create a **supportive policy environment** for gender-equal education and climate learning (see "Proposals to modify UNFCCC processes" box below).
4. **Enable girls and young women to meaningfully participate in decision-making around climate education by:**
 - Providing accessible information on key climate policies and processes;
 - Simplifying application processes for in-person meetings; and
 - Facilitating visa applications, creating safe spaces in conference venues and compensating girls for their time and effort.

Proposals to modify UNFCCC processes

In order to ensure that UNFCCC processes create a supportive policy environment for gender-equal education and climate learning, governments should take the following steps:

- At the **COP26 Action for Climate Empowerment (ACE) Day**, incorporate a gender analysis into the new Doha Work Programme to strengthen implementation of ACE.
- During the **2022 review of the Lima work programme on gender and its gender action plan**, emphasise the role education — especially gender-equal, green learning — plays in achieving gender equality and ensuring girls can succeed in the future workforce.
- Through the **Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) Partnership**, recognise education as an at-risk sector affected by climate change and that girls face the greatest threat. Leverage the partnership's resources and expertise to provide increased technical support so that governments address barriers to girls' education in NDCs, including improving climate resilience in education.





“I wish my school had taught me the importance of climate change adaptation, not just what climate change is and what causes it. We need to learn what we can do to systematically fight it because there is more to climate change than just the basics we’ve learned. I also wish I had been taught about the issues that need to be addressed in the climate struggle, such as intersectionality, inclusivity and community-based climate education. To fight climate change, we must advocate for systemic change that urges climate justice.”

— Angela, 18, South Africa

Read more about what students wish they learned about climate change in school in Assembly, Malala Fund's digital publication and newsletter for girls.

Recommendations for all governments attending COP26

1. Make specific commitments to climate and girls' education in Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), National Climate Change Learning Strategies (NCCLs) and Action for Climate Empowerment (ACE) Strategies.

Governments' pledges could include:

- Investing in girls' access to 12 years of free, safe, quality education.
- Increasing girls' participation in STEM subjects and green skills development, for example by using mentoring schemes, initiating curriculum reforms or encouraging access to vocational and training programmes.
- Creating clean, green, healthy, care-centred and girl-friendly schools by making the building infrastructure low-carbon and resilient to climate impacts and ensuring that the surrounding environment is free from pollutants.

- Addressing inequalities in education by implementing specific initiatives to address the challenges Indigenous and Black girls, students with disabilities, transgender girls and non-binary students face.
- Mandating the integration of science-based climate education across the curriculum and ensuring it is gender-responsive.
- Training and supporting educators to use gender-responsive, participatory learning styles so that girls and boys learn equitable values, creativity, empathy and a collective approach to problem-solving.
- Improving the climate-resilience and gender-responsiveness of education systems so that climate events do not disproportionately impact girls' education.
- Promoting and funding climate action projects linked to community mobilisation in schools for all students.
- Making life-skills education a compulsory subject and including topics like dealing with eco anxiety, civic engagement and understanding and exercising rights.



Lower-income countries with the least historical responsibility for climate change are experiencing its worst effects *and* face the biggest girls' education challenges.¹⁹



2. After the COVID-19 crisis, commit to a gender-just and green recovery that centres girls' education, gender equality and climate justice, prioritising:

- Investing in quality education and training that prepares girls and women to access and thrive in green jobs.
- Investing in care (e.g., early childhood care, elderly care) as a green economic activity.
- Rejecting austerity-style economic policies, favouring investment in public services — such as access to quality education — and social protection for all.

3. End the expansion of fossil fuel energy, actively support the transition to clean energy and promote sustainable energy use, including in the education system itself.

Governments must pledge to remove fossil fuel subsidies, increase fossil fuel taxes without triggering significant consumer price increases and invest some of the revenue into gender-equitable green job creation and green skills development.



Recommendations for high-income countries at COP26

Announce more and better financing to lower-income countries affected by climate change so they can adapt to new realities and transition to low-carbon economies, including:

- Commit new and additional funding to reach the \$100 billion target for the Green Climate Fund (GCF), reserving 50% of the funds for climate adaptation.
- Target GCF funding to support the implementation of NDCs.
- Develop and use accountability markers to monitor how much climate finance goes to gender equality and girls' education.
- Reserve specific funds for women's rights organisations working at the front line of climate impacts.





“My school never taught me what climate change is, what are its root causes, why it’s important and how we can play a part in stopping it. Over the course of 12 years of education, I never learned that I could help address the climate crisis and make an impact in my community. I believe that educators need to teach 21st-century skills in the classrooms — such as digital literacy, personal development and social entrepreneurship to ensure that the next generation of future change-makers is ready to change the world. If students discover these skills, they could address the world’s most pressing problems like climate change.”

— Amna, 15, Pakistan

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