

Global Campaign for Education

Briefing paper on key priority areas informed by the Strategic Plan 2023-2027

Quality Climate Change Education

1. Background

Disasters caused by climate change continue to increase. During 2018 alone, disasters affected 68.5 million people worldwide, with an estimated mortality of more than 11,000 people, and generated losses of US\$ 132 billion¹. The economic cost associated with disasters has increased 14 times since the 1950s².

Droughts are becoming longer and more extreme around the world. Tropical storms are becoming more severe due to warmer ocean water temperatures, and emergencies are becoming more frequent, such as cyclones Idai and Freddy in Africa, cyclone Amphan in India, deadly heat waves in India, Pakistan, and Europe, flooding in south-east Asia, North and Central America, and heavy storms in Vietnam. Wildfires destroyed more than 2 million hectares of Amazon rainforest, and millions of people have already lost their homes, livelihoods, and loved ones because of more dangerous and frequent extreme weather events.

The evidence is overwhelming, and the results are devastating:

- The number of climate-related disasters has tripled in the last 30 years.
- Between 2006 and 2016, the rate of global sea-level rise was 2.5 times faster than it was for almost all the 20th century.
- Climate change drives more than 20 million people a year from their homes.
- The United Nations Environment Programme estimates that adapting to climate change and coping with damages will cost developing countries \$140-300 billion per year by 2030.³
- Where data is available, 93% of the countries most vulnerable to the climate crisis are in debt distress, or at significant risk of debt distress⁴.

Climate change is a complex global problem because it is intertwined with many other issues, such as economic development and poverty reduction⁵. Climate change affects all people and all

¹ <https://www.redalyc.org/journal/3579/357965431002/html/>

² <http://portal.amelica.org/ameli/journal/18/184002/html/>

³ <https://www.oxfam.org/en/5-natural-disasters-beg-climate-action>

⁴ ActionAid. The vicious cycle. Connections between the debt crisis and climate crises. Johannesburg, 2023.

⁵ UNESCO Climate Change Initiative. Climate Change Education for Sustainable Development. Paris, 2010.

environments, but disproportionately affects countries that have done the least to contribute to the climate crisis and those who are socially, economically and politically furthest⁶.

Climate change has a direct impact on education. The primary impacts of climate change on education arise from the effects of extreme weather events, such as heavy rains accompanied by flash floods, strong winds and hail storms with short and long-term consequences. Drought and increasing temperatures lead to poor harvests and food scarcity which have negative impacts upon educational attainment. Extreme weather events reduce the availability of safe drinking water, compromise sanitation and increase the incidence of weather related diseases such as malaria and diarrheal diseases, leading to absenteeism and possible withdrawal of children from school.

Beside the primary impacts, climate change also has secondary impacts on education, arising from the ways in which households respond to, or choose to cope with and adapt to climate change as evidenced by income supplementing activities of household members, migration and child marriages⁷. It has increased the vulnerability of communities and particularly of education systems, on which it has imposed exorbitant costs. Due to the increase in global temperature and the damage caused by wind and sea level rise, climate change has also endangered school and community infrastructure, including archives and libraries, great repositories of knowledge, culture, and history⁸.

Clearly, education plays a determining role in climate change mitigation and adaptation as well as in recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction after disasters⁹. Climate Change education is key for people to understand and address the impacts of the climate crisis, empowering them with the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes needed to act as agents of change¹⁰, and this role is increasingly present in global fora, thanks in large part to the implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. However, it is also true that some education models, especially but not only the Western ones could be rather counterproductive when they support a type of curriculum in which individualistic and excessive forms of consumption are validated and stimulated, thus aggravating climate change causes¹¹.

⁶ It specially “inflicts disproportionate damage on people of African descent because many members of this community are already impacted by social, political, and economic oppression, due to the legacies of slavery and colonialism”. UNFPA. <https://www.unfpa.org/publications/our-words-voices-women-african-descent-reproductive-and-climate-justice>

⁷ https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/zw/UNDP_ZW_2017ZHDR_Briefs---Climate-Change-and-Education.pdf

⁸ Vicente Aylwin, Stefani Betroni and Karlos Castilla. Impactos del cambio climático en los derechos humanos. Institut de Drets Humans de Catalunya. Barcelona, 2023, p. 65

⁹ UNICEF. UNICEF. It is Getting Hot. Call for education systems to respond to the climate crisis. Perspectives from East Asia and the Pacific. 2019. East Asia and Pacific Regional Office-Bangkok, pp.6-7.

¹⁰ <https://www.unesco.org/en/climate-change/education>

¹¹ According to UNICEF, climate change in schools is usually marginal in syllabus. It is getting hot, op cit, p.vii.

International human rights law recognises the need to address education in emergency situations, including disasters brought on by climate change.

Some of the key instruments establishing state obligations regarding education in emergencies are: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (art. 26), International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (art. 18), International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (art. 13 and 14), Convention on the Rights of the Child (art. 22, 28, 29, 38, 39), Convention No. 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries (art. 26 to 31), Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (art. 24), United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Paris Agreement on Climate Change and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030.

This legal framework, which is not exhaustive but very relevant, is complemented by the technical-political guidelines issued by the Interagency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) and by the Incheon Framework for Action, which directly calls to ensure equity and inclusion in and through education and to overcome all forms of exclusion and marginalisation, including emergency situations (paras. 13 and 26).

The 2015 Paris Agreement is widely considered to be the most important multilateral treaty addressing climate change. Nearly 200 countries have ratified this historic document, making it legally binding. Its goal is to limit global temperature by 2 degrees and pursue efforts to limit by 1.5 degrees.

Article 12 of the Paris Agreement mandates parties to promote public awareness on climate change and climate action. In particular, it calls on nations to ‘enhance climate education, training, public awareness, public participation and public access to information’ as a way to augment actions being implemented under the accords.

Awareness, response, and climate change mitigation should be grounded in people's solidarity implicit in the idea of climate justice, which “links human rights and development to achieve a human-centred approach, safeguarding the rights of the most vulnerable and sharing the burdens and benefits of climate change and its resolution equitably and fair”¹².

2. The GCE Strategic Plan (2023-2027)

With the world on course to fail the commitments of the Paris agreement and keeping global warming below +1.5°C, urgent action aimed at slowing the progression and mitigating the impact of the climate crisis must be at the centre of GCE’s political efforts. The education sector holds a profound responsibility to utilise the transformational potential of education in the pursuit of learners to aid the development of more sustainable and inclusive societies. Advocacy for quality climate change education is therefore a cross-cutting priority in the GCE Strategic Plan. We believe that educators need to be provided with adequate training and resources to integrate

¹² Mary Robinson Foundation. The Geography of Climate Justice. 2011. Sheffield

climate and sustainability into teaching and learning, including a focus on lifelong learning and upskilling opportunities aimed at supporting the increasing number of learners undergoing the transition from unsustainable to greener jobs. Students should not only achieve climate literacy by the time they complete their education but also enjoy a supportive educational environment that encourages their transformative attitudes and actions for sustainable and healthy ecosystems.

Our asks for governments and decision-makers at all levels include:

- Ensure sufficient investments in and equitable access to Quality Climate Change Education (QCCE) for all learners, across all sectors and levels of education.
- Facilitate capacity building and training for educators to acquire the skills and knowledge to implement QCCE.
- Foster critical thinking, civic engagement and a multicultural approach that recognises indigenous knowledge within QCCE curricula.
- Cultivate an understanding of climate injustice that encompasses the unequal contribution of countries to causing climate change and the inequitable and unsustainable system of production and consumption that further fulfils it.
- Safeguard that the professional autonomy and academic freedom of teachers, further and higher education personnel are protected and guaranteed when teaching science based QCCE
- Secure that the impacts of climate change do not prevent children and young people from enjoying their right to quality education.
- Advocate for the largest polluting countries to contribute in proportion to their actions to the financing of investments in the education sector for Quality Climate Change Education.

3. Critical challenges

We know that climate change affects all people and all environments. It is evident that, among the negative causes of climate change, industrial development that is insensitive to its environmental effects is one of the most counterproductive. China, for example, generates around 30% of all global emissions, while the United States is responsible for almost 14%, India with 2,654 million tons of CO₂, Russia, with 1,711 million tons, Japan, 1,162 million tons and Germany, 759 million tons. These six top polluter countries won't be able to reach carbon neutrality only by reducing their domestic emissions. They will need to offset much of their carbon footprint on international carbon markets¹³.

Those primarily responsible for global pollution are obliged not only to reduce their carbon emissions, but also to offset their carbon footprint by supporting global environmental initiatives, to which all countries, communities and individuals should commit.

¹³ <https://climatetrade.com/which-countries-are-the-worlds-biggest-carbon-polluters/>

The global environmental initiatives should include financial aid for development, in accordance with the Incheon Framework for Action and the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness¹⁴. This aid is key to responding to crises in the global south and is a shared responsibility with the governments of industrialised countries, especially when they pledge to increase the effectiveness of aid to challenge complex situations associated with underdevelopment and to harmonise humanitarian assistance and aid to reduce poverty and inequality. The Lost and Damage Fund for Vulnerable Countries should be urgently operationalized as part of states commitment to catalyze economic and technical assistance to developing countries that are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change.

The humanitarian response to climate change-related disasters should not be delayed because many cases of emergency situations induced by climate change have a complex genesis that is not only attributable to the countries that suffer it, therefore the crises response should be holistic as it is essential to the maintenance of ecosystems and securing human rights.

A human rights-based education prepares societies to prevent and manage the risks associated with climate crises through pedagogies aimed at strengthening resilience and responding to climate change mitigation and adaptation. Consequently, the humanitarian response should not focus exclusively on providing people with food and shelter but also on building resilience capacities by understanding the local, national, and global contexts in which emergencies occur and thus contributing to building cultures of peace and the conditions to respond proactively to sustainable development. This educational approach is urgent to promote within the principal polluter countries, although it certainly should be a global priority as well, for which UNESCO promotes the Climate Change Education for Sustainable Development Program¹⁵.

This programme uses innovative educational approaches to help a broad audience (with particular focus on youth) understand, address, mitigate, and adapt to the impacts of climate change, encourage the changes in attitudes and behaviours needed to put our world on a more sustainable development path, and build a new generation of climate change-aware citizens.

4. Way forward

GCE is responsible for mobilising civil society towards the inclusion of climate education in national climate action plans, collating best practices on how to teach sciences and history, among other subjects. The goal is to model climate education within the whole school approach, as well as identify gaps in mainstream pedagogical models where indigenous knowledge and student-driven paradigms should be included¹⁶.

¹⁴ <https://www.oecd.org/dac/effectiveness/34580968.pdf>

¹⁵ Unesco Climate Change Initiative. Climate Change Education for Sustainable Development. Paris, 2010.

¹⁶ Torralba, Alanah, op cit, p.17

These actions should be accompanied by political demands to stop all forms of environmental pollution and associated industrial causes, especially those linked to the exploitation of natural resources, unsustainable trade, and environmental degradation.

The right to an environmentally responsible education must be claimed in the context of other actions leading to a shift in lifestyles while fostering patterns of development and sustainability based on care, community, and cooperation¹⁷.

¹⁷ Cf. COP27