

INTERACTION CHILDREN & YOUTH WORKING GROUP RESPONSE TO USAID'S 2022-2030 DRAFT CLIMATE STRATEGY

JANUARY 2022

InterAction's Children & Youth Working Group—comprised of over 30 InterAction Member NGOs working with and for children and youth globally—commends the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) for its commitment to developing a new climate strategy. We are grateful to have had the opportunity to be engaged in consultation and discussions ahead of the draft's release.

It is undeniable that climate change will disproportionately impact the lives and futures of children and youth more than any other age group. Despite being leaders in the fight against climate change, younger generations are likely to face a two- to sevenfold increase in extreme weather events compared with those born in 1960. Currently, 1 billion children live in countries classified as “extremely high-risk” to the impacts of the climate crisis. These young people are exposed to severe, compounding environmental shocks that increase vulnerabilities in the different sectors that contribute to their overall health and well-being, including inadequate access to proper nutrition, water, sanitation, healthcare, housing, and education. While we strongly support USAID's acknowledgment of young people as leaders and actors of change in the climate movement and intention to create opportunities for youth-led groups, we encourage USAID to also be inclusive of children in the strategy. The Working Group has compiled comments on the strategy from the lens of children and youth, because the climate crisis is a child's rights crisis.

OPPORTUNITIES TO STRENGTHEN THE CLIMATE STRATEGY

THE STRATEGY MUST ADDRESS THE CROSS-SECTORAL NATURE OF CLIMATE.

The effects of climate change permeate into every other sector of children and young people's lives, including their physical health, mental health, access to clean water and sanitation, nutrition, education, and living arrangements. USAID's approach to climate must provide considerations for each of the sectors impacted by the effects of climate change.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- We urge USAID to ensure that its climate-related programs take children into consideration and ensure that child protection experts, and children and youth themselves, are included in climate-related decision-making. There is no mention of the impacts of climate-related migration on children. While we are glad to see USAID acknowledge the impact of climate change on migration, we stress that policies related to climate-related migration must acknowledge children's particular need for protection when facing climate displacement. Children are a third of the global population—up to half of the population in many low- and middle-income countries—and climate change impacts them uniquely. Children's exposure to destructive natural disasters and other harms of climate change often results in the loss of education, family separation, homelessness, and statelessness, which in turn expose children to trafficking, persecution, and other forms of exploitation that force them to leave their homes.

According to UNHCR, children already make up half of the forcibly displaced population, and thus will likely make up a significant number of those forced to flee their homes because of climate change.

- According to the American Psychological Association, climate change has been detrimental to the mental health of children and young people. We ask that when looking at climate-affected countries, USAID identifies the climate-related stress and how that affects the mental health and general health of children and youth, and create tailored approaches based on the specific country contexts.

THE STRATEGY MUST RECOGNIZE THE CLIMATE CRISIS AS A CHILD'S RIGHTS CRISIS.

As mentioned in the introduction, the climate crisis will disproportionately affect the lives and futures of children and youth. Although the strategy includes numerous mentions of youth, it references children only twice (on pages 1 referencing child malnutrition and 12 in reference to marginalized and underserved populations) and does not sufficiently address children in its current iteration.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- In general, the Working Group would like to see children's voices and needs fully integrated into all aspects of this strategy. The introduction should acknowledge that climate change is a child rights crisis. While children have contributed the least to global emissions, they will face the greatest impacts of climate change. It is essential that USAID's strategy call out the needs of children under 18, including children under 10. In fact, climate-related deprivations that affect the youngest children, from birth to age three, can have irreversible negative impacts on their development.
- Children drink more water, eat more food, and breathe more air than adults relative to their body weight, meaning that the environmental health implications of climate change will have a greater impact on their minds and bodies. Therefore, we believe the USAID Climate Strategy should include a separate section on the impacts on children, specifically, under Intermediate Result (I.R.) 1.5.
- In the current iteration of the strategy, there is no mention of children in the climate risk screenings. We ask that USAID conduct a detailed analysis on children to further inform this strategy. In doing this, USAID will
- To maximize child impact statements' effectiveness, USAID should designate clear children and youth coordinators within the agency, provide training and support for government personnel to consider the impacts of policies on children and youth, create child well-being benchmarks to assess policy impact, and ensure transparency to the public and stakeholders about the conclusions of the agency's analysis.
- Additionally, I.R. 1.5 on pages 12-13 should include girls either as a stand-alone marginalized population that is separate from women and young people in some of its unique needs or include specific actions that will work to include girls under youth, including girls with disabilities and girls from marginalized ethnic or religious groups. These intersecting identities have enormous consequences on girls' ability to participate in the actions listed, and strategies to mitigate their marginalization and encourage their participation should be listed.

THE DEFINITIONS OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH MUST BE CONSISTENT AND CLEAR.

While we support the specific mentions of youth in the USAID Climate Strategy, we believe that “youth” is not a sufficient term to encompass children under the age of 18. USAID’s Youth in Development Strategy excludes younger children by defining youth as individuals ages 10 to 29. This distinction is important because children are not miniature adults. Because they are under 18, children are typically dependent on their parents or caregivers and have fewer mechanisms to make themselves heard; they do not have the right to vote and are not considered to have reached the age of majority. As such, around the world, children under 18 have unique rights globally under the Convention on the Rights of the Child. While the strategy states that 2.4 billion people in the world are under 30, UNICEF estimates that the vast majority of that number (**2.3 billion**) are children under the age of 18—children with unique needs and different legal rights.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- USAID should acknowledge and account for the legal and practical distinctions between children and youth in the climate strategy. The impacts of climate change on younger children are in fact more dire and should be directly addressed.
- Youth are not a monolith. We would urge you to drill down further on what you mean by “youth.” According to the recent Youth in Development Policy update, youth is defined both as a series of life stages and as ages ranging from 10 to 29 years or up to 35, depending on the country context. The participation of a 10-year-old will require different actions than the participation of a 29-year-old, and we encourage you to articulate in I.R. 1.5 that this is the case and that agencies should be cognizant to include all ages and stages so that younger youth and youth who identify as girls are given equal access to opportunities for funding, green jobs, and the other actions.

THE STRATEGY MUST STRENGTHEN ITS POSITION ON ENGAGING THE EDUCATION SECTOR.

The USAID Climate Strategy presents a great opportunity to better integrate science education across the Agency’s development and to emphasize investment opportunities in STEM-related education and workforce development programming. While we applaud USAID for taking positive steps toward developing a gender-inclusive and youth-inclusive approach to its climate strategy, there remains much room for the strategy to strengthen its position on engaging the education sector and education stakeholders as well as its positioning of educational activities as a means to achieving USAID’s strategic objectives.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Education is the entry point for so many of the stated objectives, which we propose should be more explicit in the strategy. It must elaborate on how USAID aims to help support education systems in partner countries to achieve this generation of climate-aware citizens.
- Article 12 (On Action for Climate Empowerment) of the Paris Agreement needs to be leveraged and referenced more throughout the strategy as an orienting principle—particularly when it comes to objectives and activities intended to build climate resilience, adaptive capacity, behavioral change, adaptation of technologies, skills required to participate in and innovate green transitions, civic engagement, and youth and women climate leadership.

- At the most ambitious level, the strategy should ensure these approaches are gender-transformative and aim to achieve climate justice alongside climate action and sustainability.
- In thinking of schools as important sites for the community—acting as shelters during and after disasters and as places of normalcy for children during times of disruption and shock—there is a case to be made that the education sector is a “key infrastructure sector” for community resilience and response.

LOOKING AHEAD TO THE CLIMATE STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION

MEANINGFUL CONSULTATIONS AND PARTNERSHIPS WITH YOUTH MUST BE CONTINUED AND PRIORITIZED THROUGHOUT IMPLEMENTATION.

We commend USAID’s commitments to consult and partner with the most vulnerable populations, including youth.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- We encourage USAID to include children as a vulnerable population and as people with valuable perspectives.


CLIMATE FINANCING MUST BE DIRECTED AT VULNERABLE POPULATIONS WITH THE HIGHEST NEED.

The commitment to mobilize \$150 billion on climate financing is a laudable goal. According to UNICEF’s Children’s Climate Risk Index, extremely high-risk countries received only a small fraction of global climate finance flows for all sectors. Increasing resilience is one part—but ensuring that developing economies prioritize climate-resilient technologies and solutions, like renewable energy and natural climate solutions, while building their economies—is also important.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- USAID should ensure that such climate financing flows to vulnerable countries and populations with the highest need and includes a priority focus on addressing impacts on children.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON NGO RECOMMENDATIONS, SEE THE [DETAILED RECOMMENDATIONS ANNEX FOR THE DRAFT USAID CLIMATE STRATEGY 2022–2030](#).



INTERACTION is the largest U.S.-based alliance of international NGOs and partners. We mobilize our Members to think and act collectively to serve the world's poor and vulnerable, with a shared belief that we can make the world a more peaceful, just and prosperous place—together.

INTERACTION'S CHILDREN & YOUTH WORKING GROUP works to better integrate and elevate children and youth issues in our coalition's advocacy. InterAction's diverse Membership includes many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working and advocating on behalf of children and youth around the globe. Within InterAction, children and youth issues span working groups, sectors, and teams. InterAction utilizes its platform to highlight children and youth issues and support advocacy by its Member NGOs.

