**Children at climate risk**

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The 60th session of the Subsidiary Bodies on Implementation of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCC) is taking place from 3-13 June 2024 at the World Conference Centre Bonn in Bonn Germany. Preceding COP29, the mid-year climate conference (SB 60) in Bonn serves as a crucial occasion to build momentum among international stakeholders and negotiators.

During the forthcoming UNFCCC COP29 in Baku, Azerbaijan, delegates from nearly 200 nations will seek to fulfil ambitious climate financing goals and accelerate national action on climate change to achieve the goals of the Paris Agreement.

In this context, subsequent to the completion of the first global stocktake (GST) at COP28, parties have called upon the Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI) to conduct an expert dialogue on children and climate change during its 60th session. The purpose of this dialogue is to examine the disproportionate effects of climate change on children and explore appropriate policy measures. This initiative seeks to involve pertinent United Nations entities, international organizations and non-governmental organizations in addressing this matter.

During COP28 in the UAE, the parties to the Paris Agreement collectively agreed on the importance of acknowledging, advocating for and considering the rights, distinct needs and perspectives of children, along with intergenerational equity. Despite this, children, who constitute one-third of the global population, continue to face the dual challenges of high climate risk and poverty and are frequently marginalized in national responses to climate change and in the discussions and recommendations emerging from the intergovernmental UNFCCC process.

Fundamentally, the climate crisis can be comprehended as a crisis concerning the rights of children. Children are significantly and differentially affected by climate change because of their distinct physiological and developmental attributes. For instance, a staggering 88 per cent of the worldwide disease burden linked to climate change impacts children under the age of five. The most vulnerable groups include children living in poverty, the youngest age category (under five years old), displaced children, girls, children experiencing discrimination based on their sexual orientations, gender identities, and expression (SOGIE), indigenous children, and children with disabilities, who encounter the most severe climate-related impacts.

The Expert Dialogue proposed to be held on 4th June during SB68 on children and climate change represents a significant milestone and a unique opportunity, being the first occurrence in the 30-year history of the UNFCCC, where the distinct and severe vulnerabilities of children are to be brought within a specific framework. Parties need to utilize this opportunity to propose specific and actionable recommendations on how climate policies and actions can be shaped by and mitigate the disproportionate effects of climate change on children.

This should be done at both the national level and within the framework of international processes, such as nationally determined contributions (NDCs) and national adaptation plans (NAPs). According to indicators used to assess child-centric aspects in Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), less than half of them adhere to this standard, with only 2.4 per cent of major global climate funds recognized for backing initiatives that are explicitly tailored to children.

Similarly, the New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG) is designed to prioritize the human rights of individuals and communities most impacted by climate change. It emphasizes the rights of children and indigenous peoples, gender equality and intergenerational equity as fundamental guiding principles. It also incorporates a qualitative objective focused on delivering climate finance that is responsive to children and gender issues on a significant scale. There is a pressing requirement for the development of comprehensive and child-centred NCQG targets that include designated funding windows dedicated to delivering child and gender-responsive outcomes at the scale required.

This is because, for the last many years, climate and development experts have been voicing the necessity of establishing a mechanism for the betterment of the world’s children and the well-being of forthcoming generations. It is imperative now for the parties to drive, exchange successful methodologies and enhance the capabilities of involved parties in integrating the unique requirements and viewpoints of children, as well as their fundamental rights, into climate policies, initiatives and financial strategies.

Some funding organizations, such as the Green Climate Fund (GCF), have acknowledged the existence of this crucial gap and are making commendable efforts to address it. Ensuring equitable solutions for children in all their diversity is crucial for achieving climate justice and upholding children’s rights in accordance with General Comment 26.

The expert dialogue and negotiations on adaptation during SB60 are likely to recommend the development of child-sensitive metrics under the UAE Framework for Global Climate Resilience, particularly in relation to its thematic targets for climate-resilient social sectors, as well as children’s participation. Consideration of the education sector, human mobility and mental health are also critical for addressing impacts on children.

Likewise, the establishment of the Loss and Damage Fund has been a great milestone in the direction of climate justice. However, the repercussions of loss and damage experienced by children, especially those at the forefront of the climate crisis, and permanent climate-induced effects on their cognitive growth and health, education and vulnerability to violence, exploitation and abuse, among other factors, need to be made a top priority of the Loss and Damage Fund. Likewise, the will be an enhanced focus on the unequal effects of economic and non-economic loss and damage on children in the upcoming review of the Warsaw International Mechanism (WIM), encompassing the activities of its specialized expert panels and the Santiago Network.

The allocation of fresh financial resources must be put in place for loss and damage, offered in the form of grants rather than loans, specifically aimed at and easily accessible to children and their communities, as outlined in Decision 5/CMA.5, Annex II, paragraph 18, and customized to mitigate the increased climate vulnerabilities that children face in their respective contexts. The active involvement of children representing diverse backgrounds in the planning, execution and evaluation of initiatives addressing loss and damage is also necessary.

A substantial portion of funding should be allocated to impacted countries such as Pakistan, and the funds need to be allocated to the reconstruction and revitalization of essential social services meant for children, encompassing education, healthcare, nutrition, water and sanitation, child protection, adaptive and shock-responsive social protection.

The coordination of funding and strategies to tackle loss and damage should be coupled with intensified endeavours to prevent and reduce loss and damage. This can be achieved by prioritizing investments in early warning systems tailored to children, anticipatory measures, adaptive and shock-responsive social safety nets, efficient humanitarian interventions, disaster risk management, comprehensive adaptation and mitigation strategies and funding mechanisms.

Pakistan being represented by the co-chair must take this opportunity and reiterate the importance of integrating children’s rights, needs, challenges, voices and equity in the NCQG by keeping the discussion focused and structured and endeavouring for an ambitious NCQG outcome at SB60 and then at COP29 in Baku.

It is sine qua non for the current government to jack up the agenda of climate justice and human rights, including children’s rights at its core, and push the developed countries to deliver adequate climate finance for its most vulnerable children and communities in an affordable, accessible, inclusive and predictable manner.

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