IFRC

WE NEED TO DO BETTER

CLIMATE RELATED DISASTERS, CHILD PROTECTION AND LOCALIZING ACTION IN THE CARIBBEAN

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The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) is the world's largest volunteer-based humanitarian network. With our 192-member National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies worldwide, we are in every community reaching 160.7 million people annually through long-term services and development programmes, as well as 110 million people through disaster response and early recovery programmes. We act before, during and after disasters and health emergencies to meet the needs and improve the lives of vulnerable people. We do so with impartiality as to nationality, ethnicity, gender, religious beliefs, class and political opinions.

Guided by *Strategy 2030*—our collective plan of action to tackle the major humanitarian and development challenges of this decade—we are committed to saving lives and changing minds.

Our strength lies in our volunteer network, our community-based expertise and our independence and neutrality. We work to improve humanitarian standards, as partners in development, and in response to disasters. We persuade decision-makers to act at all times in the interests of vulnerable people. The result: we enable healthy and safe communities, reduce vulnerabilities, strengthen resilience and foster a culture of peace around the world.

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Terminology

Access to education are actions that enhance children's ability to attain education, such as the (re) construction or renovation of education facilities or of water and sanitation facilities; the distribution of education supplies or of meals and food in education facilities; education-related cash programming; the provision of psychosocial support; the provision of safe transportation services from, to or around education facilities; and the tracing of education-related documents.[1]

Adolescent is a child who is between the ages of 12-17 years.[2]

Anticipatory action is a set of actions taken to prevent or mitigate potential disaster impacts before a shock or before acute impacts are felt. The actions are carried out in anticipation of a hazard impact and based on a prediction of how the event will unfold. Anticipatory actions should not be a substitute for longer-term investment in risk reduction and should aim to strengthen people's capacity to manage risks.[3]

Best Interests of the Child is a foundational principle to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. It means that in all actions concerning children, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration. This principle should guide the design, monitoring and adjustment of all humanitarian programmes and interventions.[4]

Child is a human being below the age of 18 years.[5]

Child abuse refers to a deliberate act with actual or potential negative impacts upon the child's safety, well-being, dignity, and development. It is an intentional act that takes place in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust, or power.[6]
- Emotional or psychological abuse is when a caregiver acts or behaves in ways that have an adverse effect on the emotional health and development of a child. Such acts include restricting a child's movements, denigration, ridicule, threats and intimidation, discrimination, rejection, and other nonphysical forms of hostile treatment that deny the child an appropriate and supportive environment in which to thrive. They are acts that may result in psychological and social deficits in the growth of a child;
- Physical abuse is a caregiver's use of physical force to cause actual or possible physical injury or suffering; and
- Sexual abuse is when a caregiver involves a child in sexual activity that he or she does not fully comprehend, is unable to give informed consent to, or for which the child is not developmentally prepared, or else that violates the laws or social taboos of society.[6]

Child exploitation refers to when an individual in a position of power and / or trust takes or attempts to take advantage of a child for their own personal benefit, advantage, gratification, or profit. This personal benefit may take different forms: physical, sexual, financial, material, social, military, or political. Exploitation may involve remuneration in cash or in kind (such as social status, political power, documentation, freedom of movement, or access to opportunities, goods, or services) to the child or to a third person/s.[7]

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1 IFRC. (2019). *Strategic Framework on Education.*

2 IFRC. (2013). *Youth Engagement Strategy.* **IFRC-YES_Adopted-by-the-GA-2013_EN.pdf (volunteeringredcross.org)**

3 IFRC Anticipation Hub. (2020). *Anticipation Hub.* **ANTICIPATION HUB – Forecast-based Financing (forecast-based-financing.org**

4 Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action. (2019). *Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action* (2019 edition). **https://alliancecpha.org/en/cpms**

5 IFRC. (2021). *Child Safeguarding Policy.* **Child safeguarding - International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (ifrc.org)**

6 Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action. (2018). *Discussion Paper on the Review of Existing Definitions and Explanations of Abuse, Neglect, Exploitation, and Violence against Children.* **https://www.alliancecpha.org/en/child-protection-online-library/discussion-paper-review-existing-definitions-and-explanations-abuse**

7 Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action. (2018). *Discussion Paper on the Review of Existing Definitions and Explanations of Abuse, Neglect, Exploitation, and Violence against Children.* **https://www.alliancecpha.org/en/child-protection-online-library/discussion-paper-review-existing-definitions-and-explanations-abuse**

Child exploitation may be divided into three categories, namely:
- Economic exploitation – slavery and slave-like practices, servitude, bonded or indentured labour.
- Harmful or hazardous labour – work that, by virtue of the child's age or the nature of the work, is prejudicial to any aspects of the child's welfare, among other things the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral, or social development. This includes the use of children in the illicit production and trafficking of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances and children's association with armed forces and armed groups.
- Sexual exploitation – child prostitution, the trafficking or sale of children for sexual purposes (including forced marriage), child pornography and grooming for sexual purposes – including online.[8]

Child participation refers to the manifestation of the right of every child to express their view, to have that view given all due consideration, to influence decision-making and to achieve change. It is the informed and willing involvement of all children, including the most marginalised and those of different ages, genders, and disabilities, in any matter concerning them.[9]

Child protection is the prevention of and response to abuse, neglect, exploitation, and violence against children.[10]

Climate change means a change of climate which is attributed directly or indirectly to human activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere and which is in addition to natural climate variability observed over comparable time periods.[11]

Disaster refers to a serious disruption of the functioning of a community that exceeds its capacity to cope using its own resources. There are many potential causes of such disruption, including natural and technological hazards, industrial accidents, mass movements of populations and infectious and contagious diseases, as well as various factors that influence the exposure and vulnerability of communities.[12]

Disaster management refers to the organization, planning and application of measures preparing for, responding to and recovering from disasters.[13]

Disaster preparedness refers to the knowledge and capacities developed by governments, response and recovery organizations, communities, and individuals to effectively anticipate, respond to, and recover from the impacts of likely, imminent or current disasters.[14]

Disaster preparedness and response activities is an umbrella term for any facilities, services, processes, distributions, resources, training, education, or information that are conducted or provided for the purpose of preparing for and/or responding to disaster.[15]

Violence against children encompasses all acts that involve the intentional use of power or verbal or physical force, threatened or actual, against a child or against a group of children that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in actual or potential harm to the child or children's health, survival, development, or dignity. Possible forms of harm include injury; death; disability; decreased psychological, psychosocial, or mental health; or maldevelopment.[16]

8   Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action. (2018). *Discussion Paper on the Review of Existing Definitions and Explanations of Abuse, Neglect, Exploitation, and Violence against Children*. **https://www.alliancecpha.org/en/child-protection-online-library/discussion-paper-review-existing-definitions-and-explanations-abuse**

9   Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action. (2019). *Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action* (2019 edition). **https://alliancecpha.org/en/cpms**

10 Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action. (2019). *Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action* (2019 edition). **https://alliancecpha.org/en/cpms**

11 UN. (1992). *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change*. **https://unfccc.int/files/essential_background/background_publications_htmlpdf/application/pdf/conveng.pdf**

12 IFRC. (2019). *Disaster Risk Management Policy: From Prevention to Response and Recovery.*

13 IFRC. (2019). *Disaster Risk Management Policy: From Prevention to Response and Recovery.*

14 United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction. (2017). Terminology. **https://www.undrr.org/terminology**

15 United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction. (2017). Terminology. **https://www.undrr.org/terminology**

16 Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action. (2019). *Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action* (2019 edition). **https://alliancecpha.org/en/cpms**

Foreword

Each year across the Caribbean, we witness the destructive effects of climate change; hurricanes intensifying and posing tremendous dangers; floods washing away homes and livelihoods; rising sea levels putting the small islands in jeopardy; and droughts exacerbating fragility. While these climate related disasters affect each person in the Caribbean, children are particularly at risk. In fact, children are most prone to encountering violence, abuse, and exploitation in disaster settings, including those disasters driven by climate change.

This risk is set in a context where children make up a large portion of the population of the Caribbean region. While children potentially have great leadership and innovation capabilities, unfortunately, their voices are rarely being sought out or heard. Furthermore, there is a huge deficit in meaningful opportunities for children to be engaged in decisions that affect them. This is especially prominent in the stages of preparing for and responding to disasters.

This report, "We Need to Do Better" places the voices, perspectives, and ideas of children in the Caribbean at the forefront. It seeks to understand the generally unexplored relationships between climate related disasters and children's concerns around violence, abuse, and exploitation, and mental health challenges. Importantly, the report draws on children's perspectives to construct and define practical solutions moving forward.

In the Caribbean, like other regions across the world, it is evident that available approaches and investment to child protection in disasters are severely inadequate. We are failing to put in place the necessary systems to protect children in climate related disasters. We need to do better to get child protection in disasters right.

If we are to move forward, it is critical that governments enhance domestic laws, invest in child protection systems, improve local coordination, train local responders, include protection and climate change in school curriculum, and collect sex-, age- and disability-disaggregated data in disaster responses. Within the humanitarian sector, there are also practical actions we can execute in preparing for climate related disasters. These include designing child-friendly communications, implementing community feedback mechanisms, including child protection in anticipatory action, developing scenario-based preparedness approaches, integrating child protection across assessments and planning, and creating spaces for children and adults to engage, support one another and find viable solutions to protection risks.

The IFRC Network, through our local volunteers across the Caribbean, stand ready to support governments to continue striving to meet the best interests of each child affected by climate related disasters. Together, we will do better.

Ariel Kestens
Head of Delegation for the Dutch- and English-speaking Caribbean
International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

Key takeaways

This study "We Need To Do Better: Climate Related Disasters, Child Protection and Localizing Action in the Caribbean" is part of a campaign, "We Need to Do Better", by the IFRC to enhance protection of children in climate related disasters. Whereas the first study in this campaign specifically examined disaster laws and policies globally, this study aims to understand the climate related disaster risks facing children, the perspectives from children about the risks, and practical ways to enhance localized child protection approaches in preparing for climate related disasters in the Caribbean.

198 adolescents **+** **30** stakeholders

This study is centered around focus group discussions and an online survey with 198 adolescents ages 14-17 years in the Bahamas, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago. Thirty adult stakeholders from Red Cross National Societies, governments, and local and international NGOs were also interviewed. Complementing these consultations, the study also draws on existing climate change, disaster preparedness, and child protection research from across the Caribbean region.

The Caribbean is a region highly vulnerable to climate related disasters, it has a large population of children, children are already at risk of violence, the systems to protect children are under strain, and laws are not in place to protect children from violence, abuse, and exploitation during disasters.

Past disasters in the region, in addition to anecdotal and personal experiences from adolescents involved in the study suggest climate related disasters are a threat multiplier elevating the potential risk of violence, abuse, and exploitation against children. These disasters are also pose risks to children's mental health, and often lead to challenges in accessing education. Girls are burdened with disproportionate risks.

Adolescents overwhelmingly feel that they do not have the information needed to be safe from child protection risks in climate related disasters, they do not have meaningful opportunities to participate in decisions that affect them, they believe if they do participate their opinions would not be taken seriously by adults, and many children stated there would be 'nowhere to go' for help if they did experience violence, abuse, or exploitation.

This study proposes a series of practical recommendations to improve actions to protect children in climate related disasters. In particular, scaling up child participation in disaster preparedness systems, improving preparedness capacity, raising awareness on climate related disasters and child protection, strengthening local coordination, including child protection within anticipatory actions related to disasters, and enhancing child protection aspects within local disaster laws, policies, and regulations.

Climate related disaster risks

The Caribbean and Climate Related Disaster Risks

The IFRC World Disaster Report 2020 lists the incidence, fatalities from, affected people, and risks to climate related disasters. It shows that in the past decade the Caribbean is a region at high risk to climate related disasters.[17]

In recent years, the small island countries of the Caribbean have become among the most vulnerable in the world to the effects of drought, storms and flooding – events that are increasing in intensity and occurrence because of climate change.[18] Increasingly extreme weather events, shifting rainfall patterns, increasing temperatures and drought, to list a few, pose an unprecedented threat to the region's Small Island Developing States, whose vulnerability is shaped by their small size and exposure to natural hazards, combined with socio-economic factors including their reliance on climate-sensitive economic.[19]

Over the years 2014-2018, the number of people internally displaced by storms and flooding increased six-fold in the Caribbean including 761,000 children. The primary cause of this dramatic increase in forced displacement was a series of catastrophic tropical cyclones or hurricanes that hit the region between 2016 and 2018 – including four Category 5 and two Category 4 storms.[20] Under various climate projection scenarios, it is likely that level-5 hurricanes will become more common, while the effects of slow-onset events such as rising sea levels will become increasingly felt.[21]

Globally, the Caribbean region is highly represented in the countries most at risk of extreme weather events that are being caused by climate change. For instance, in 2019, the Bahamas was the third most affected country in the world by extreme weather events.[22] Moreover, between 2010-2019, Puerto Rico was the most affected and Haiti the third most affected country by extreme weather events; Bahamas was also in the top ten in sixth place.[23]

The risk of climate related disasters in the region is exemplified through the experiences of the nearly 200 adolescents who participated in this study. A vast majority of these adolescents have lived through climate change related disasters.

Adolescents were aware of the damages from climate change related disasters. They shared recent experiences around damage to homes, lives, and livelihoods from recent storms and floods.

> ❝ *Storms can cause a lot of damage and you can lose your home and even lives can be lost."*

Adolescents were also keenly aware of the various disasters that are influenced by climate change, in particular noting: hurricanes are a priority threat and also highlighted were risks to extreme heat and flooding. In addition, some adolescents expressed concerns about the longer-term risk of sea level rise.

The awareness of the threat from climate related disasters was reflected by a majority of adolescents who had significant concerns about the risk of climate events today and into the future.

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17 IFRC. (2020). *World Disasters Report. Come Heat or High Water: Tackling the Humanitarian Impacts of the Climate Crisis Together*. **World disasters report 2020 – International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (ifrc.org)**

18 UNICEF. (2019). *Children Uprooted in the Caribbean.* **Children uprooted in the Caribbean | UNICEF**

19 UNICEF. (2019). *Caribbean Children Facing the Climate Crisis.* **Caribbean children facing climate crisis | UNICEF Eastern Caribbean**

20 UNICEF. (2019). *Children Uprooted in the Caribbean.* **Children uprooted in the Caribbean | UNICEF**

21 UNICEF. (2019). *Caribbean Children Facing the Climate Crisis.* **Caribbean children facing climate crisis | UNICEF Eastern Caribbean**

22 UNICEF. (2019). *Caribbean Children Facing the Climate Crisis.* **Caribbean children facing climate crisis | UNICEF Eastern Caribbean**

23 Germanwatch. (2021). *Global Climate Risk Index 2021.* **Germanwatch**

"Water takes over land and things are washed away. People's homes will get water. It makes the appliances go out of order and leaves the homes very disturbed"

"Persons may not be able to get out of their area as roads may be blocked by fallen trees, mudslides or may be flooded."

"Health is affected in a negative way due to loss of food from water shortages. And people won't be able to have proper drinking water and to clean their homes. It could cause a lot of illnesses to spread."

"Heat exhaustion and dehydration can lead to illnesses such as heat strokes which affects health."

Comments in *blue italics* are from adolescents who participated in this study. Their names and locations have not been identified.

Impact on children

The Caribbean region is home to a very high percentage of children.[24] Among these children the most disadvantaged face the greatest risks, as climate-related impacts threaten to overwhelm their limited coping capacity and further compound inequity.[25] As children will live longer, they will also bear the brunt of escalating harm and instability linked to rising temperatures in the years to come. The Lancet highlights that if the world continues to produce the same amount of carbon emissions, a child born today could be living in a world with an average temperature that is 4 degrees Celsius warmer by their 71st birthday.[26]

According to a UNICEF poll of children conducted in more than 60 countries, 77 per cent of children think that climate change is one of the most pressing issues for young people, and 98 per cent think that governments need to take urgent action to tackle this issue.[27]

Child participation

Children are increasingly recognized as agents of change to be cultivated and mobilized for disaster preparedness, response, and recovery.[28] Studies suggest that children's vulnerability is reduced and their resilience to disaster is enhanced when they: have access to resources and information, are encouraged to participate in disaster preparedness and response activities and can access personal and communal support.[29]

Such participation is not only empowering for children themselves, children are active agents of change and can, and do, make significant contributions to reducing disaster risk.[30] Children's practical and creative ideas and their unique knowledge and experiences of their local environment have provided important input to disaster risk reduction efforts in several contexts.[31] Reviews of child-centered disaster risk reduction programmes reveal positive outcomes for both the children and their communities.[32]

The basis for child participation is grounded in article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child that outlines that Children have the right to give their opinions freely on issues that affect them; adults should listen and take children seriously.[33] In addition, the 2010 Declaration of Paramaribo on the Future of Youth in the Caribbean Community affirms the rights of Caribbean youth to participate in decision-making on matters in which they have an interest and that affect them.[34] The CARICOM Commission on Youth Development (CCYD) in 2010 calls on Governments to address the "lack of awareness and education with regard to environmental issues, in particular the effects of climate change."[35]

24 Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. (2020). *Interactive Demographic Indicators*. **cepal.org**

25 UNICEF (2015). *Unless We Act Now: The Impact of Climate Change on Children*. **Unless we act now: The impact of climate change on children | UNICEF**

26 N. Watts et. al., (2019). *The Lancet Countdown on Health and Climate Change: Ensuring that the Health of a Child Born Today is not Defined by a Changing Climate, The Lancet*, 394 (10211).

27 UNICEF. (2020). *Are Climate Change Policies Child-Sensitive? A Guide for Action.* **Are-climate-change-policies-child-sensitive-2020_0.pdf (unicef.org)**

28 Pfefferbaum, B., Pfefferbaum, R.L., & Van Horn, R.L. (2018). Involving Children in Disaster Risk Reduction: The Importance of Participation. *European Journal of Psychotraumatology, 9*(sup2). **https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5804784/**

29 Peek, L. (2008). Children and disasters: Understanding vulnerability, developing capacities, and promoting resilience—an introduction. *Children, Youth and Environments, 18*, 1–29. As cited in Lopez, Y., Hayden, J., Cologon, K., & Hadley, F. (2012). Child participation and disaster risk reduction. *International Journal of Early Years Education.* **https://www.researchgate.net/publication/263538621_Child_participation_and_disaster_risk_reduction**

30 Mitchell, T., Haynes, K., Hall, N., Wei, C., & Oven, K. (2008). The role of children and youth in communicating risk. *Children, Youth and Environments, 18*: 254–79. As cited in Lopez, Y., Hayden, J., Cologon, K., & Hadley, F. (2012). Child participation and disaster risk reduction. *International Journal of Early Years Education.* **https://www.researchgate.net/publication/263538621_Child_participation_and_disaster_risk_reduction**

31 Back, E., Cameron, C., & Tanner, T. (2009). *Children and disaster risk reduction: Taking stock and moving forward*.

32 Lopez, Y., Hayden, J., Cologon, K., & Hadley, F. (2012). Child participation and disaster risk reduction. *International Journal of Early Years Education.* **https://www.researchgate.net/publication/263538621_Child_participation_and_disaster_risk_reduction**

33 UNICEF. (2020). *The Convention on the Rights of the Child: The Children's Version*. **The Convention on the Rights of the Child: The children's version | UNICEF**

34 UNICEF. (2019). *Caribbean Children Facing the Climate Crisis.* **Caribbean children facing climate crisis | UNICEF Eastern Caribbean**

35 UNICEF. (2019). *Caribbean Children Facing the Climate Crisis.* **Caribbean children facing climate crisis | UNICEF Eastern Caribbean**

In a statement in advance of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change's Conference of the Parties 21, the Caribbean Youth Environment Network, based on contributions from over 800 members across 18 countries in the region, called on Caribbean governments to create an enabling governance structure that would facilitate the involvement and engagement of young people and youth organizations in climate-related dialogue and action.[36]

With high rates of sexual violence in the region, children's participation around identifying risks and solutions to this problem has been found as needing more attention in the region.[37]

Children as Partners in Child Protection in COVID-19

During COVID-19 child-focused and humanitarian agencies found it harder than ever to communicate with children, needing to adapt their methods of hearing children's voices and ensuring children's participation to virtual and physically distanced realities.

In response, the IFRC in partnership with CPC Learning Network, the Area of Responsibility for Child Protection, UNICEF, and IICRD developed a guide to enhance child participation: **Children as Partners in Child Protection in COVID-19 Guide: From Participation to Partnership**.

The guide can also be a tool to reach out to children, especially those in hard to access locations, as part of climate related disaster planning.

These issues were echoed by adolescents who participated in this study. Specifically, they shared a number of insights around their participation in disaster planning. In terms of opportunities to participate, adolescents answered using a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 representing high agreement, regarding their opportunities to participate. In the Bahamas and Trinidad, the rates were generally middle to high mostly ranging from 5-9. In Jamaica, the rates were mainly under 5 indicating low participation. In general, where adolescents did feel they had chances to participate it was mainly with peers but rarely with decision-makers.

> *Most decisions are taken by the Office for Disaster Preparedness and Management, but if they would have more forums involving children, we would have opportunities. For now, I don't think we have opportunities."*

Most adolescents expressed their interest in opportunities to engage with representatives or child-friendly organisations who would take their perspectives forward to decision makers.

> *Improve reach of our opinions or thoughts on it - have a person assigned from any type of organisation to talk in a group like this to see the broad aspect of opinions from each person and see where it lies. And see what each person says. They take the data to those responsible for planning and bring these ideas."*

In terms of improving listening among adults and acting upon children's opinions, it was suggested that support should be given to parents.

> *For mental health and safety, we can also be talking to parents. Not every parent is a good parent. Having talks for them on how to behave. This can alleviate the stress of a child from physical or emotional or whatever aspects."*

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36 UNICEF. (2019). *Caribbean Children Facing the Climate Crisis.* **Caribbean children facing climate crisis | UNICEF Eastern Caribbean**

37 UNICEF. (2012). *Sexual Violence against Children in the Caribbean*. **ECAO_Sexual_Violence_againstChildren_in_the_Caribbean.pdf (unicef.org)**

When asked if their opinions on mental health and emotional and physical safety would be listened to and acted upon by adults, the overall response by adolescents was quite low.

> *I don't have set ideas. I think if you were to talk to adults, they wouldn't think you were serious. Adults think our response is not valid as we don't have knowledge. We could change that by showing them we are responsible. We could have a plan to show them.”*

Although it did not reflect the experience of most of the adolescents, there were also a few examples where adolescents noted that they did feel listened too and supported.

> *Some people will listen, some people won't. I am involved in having a voice in my community, because my grandparents will go to committees.”*

In line with this, and across the workshops, adolescents wanted to improve their meaningful participation by targeting family members to listen to them, through building trust and showing responsibility.

> *We find activities so there is a relationship between parents and children to listen to them and act upon it. And not really disregard them.”*

Violence, abuse, exploitation, and neglect in disasters

Available data show that girls and boys in the Caribbean are not being adequately protected from violence, exploitation, and abuse. It is a serious and growing problem.[38] This includes the risk of sexual violence which is a particular concern.[39]

Globally, children are at higher risk than other age groups of encountering violence, abuse, and exploitation in disaster settings, including those disasters driven by climate change.[40] A particular threat is SGBV which is among the greatest protection challenges in disasters.[41]

These threats are also reflected in the Caribbean, for instance, during the 2017 hurricane season thousands of children endured life-threatening experiences during the storms.[42] This was compounded by extreme hardship in the aftermath of the storms, such as relocation, loss of homes and possessions, and in some cases, living for months without power.[43] Meeting the physical and psychosocial protection needs of large numbers of children simultaneously initially overwhelmed social support systems across the islands.[44] Against this backdrop, and given the high prevalence of sexual violence and domestic abuse in the region, thousands of children — especially girls — and young women were at heightened risk of these forms of child rights violations.[45] In Puerto Rico, domestic violence and child abuse organizations reported a surge in requests for services following Hurricane Maria, and reported heightened levels of aggression towards children.[46] An increase in sexual violence and pregnancies was also reported in Dominica.[47]

38 Editors Henry-Lee A, Meeks-Gardner J.(2006). *Proceedings of the Caribbean Child Research Conference*. Promoting child rights through research.

39 UNICEF. (2012). *Sexual Violence against Children in the Caribbean*. **ECAO_Sexual_Violence_againstChildren_in_the_Caribbean.pdf (unicef.org)**

40 IFRC. (2020). *We Need to Do Better: Policy Brief for Enhancing Laws and Regulations to Protect Children in Disasters*. **We-Need-To-Do-Better-Final-En.pdf (ifrc.org)**

41 IASC. (2016). *Guidelines for Integrating Gender-based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action: Reducing Risk, Promoting Resilience and Aiding Recovery*. **https://gbvguidelines.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/2015_IASC_Gender-based_Violence_Guidelines_full-res.pdf**

42 UNICEF. (2019). *UNICEF's Response to Hurricanes Irma and Maria – Recovery, Rebuilding and Resilience.*

43 UNICEF. (2019). *Caribbean Children Facing the Climate Crisis*. **Caribbean children facing climate crisis | UNICEF Eastern Caribbean**

44 UNICEF. (2019). *Caribbean Children Facing the Climate Crisis*. **Caribbean children facing climate crisis | UNICEF Eastern Caribbean**

45 UNICEF. (2017). Overview of Situation: Hurricanes Irma and Maria. **UNICEF Eastern Caribbean Humanitarian Situation Report, 11 October 2017 - Antigua and Barbuda | ReliefWeb**

46 Gonzalez-Ramirez, A. (2018). *After Hurricane Maria, A Hidden Crisis Of Violence Against Women In Puerto Rico*. **https://www.refinery29.com/en-us/2018/09/210051/domestic-violence-puerto-rico-hurricane-maria-effects-anniversary**

47 Dominica News Online. (2018). *Incest Shoots up after Hurricane Maria.* **https://dominicanewsonline.com/news/homepage/news/general/incest-shoots-up-after-hurricane-maria/comment-page-1/**

In Grenada, sexual abuse against children became more visible following Hurricane Ivan in 2004, and a gender impact assessment conducted following the event described gender-based violence as endemic with predominantly male perpetrators and women and girls as the vast majority of the survivors.[48] There were also reports of an increase in 'transactional sex' and the sexual exploitation of girls and young women, including by aid workers.[49]

The risk of violence, abuse and exploitation in climate related disasters was not a surprise to many of the adolescents interviewed for this study. In fact, most of the adolescents were able to articulate to varying degrees a linkage between climate change related disasters and emotional or physical or sexual abuse by others. Discussions with adolescents identified that increased stress and frustration of adults due to climate related disasters can lead to violence against children. This was often linked by adolescents to disaster impacts on livelihoods and income, as well as not knowing what to do in the situation. People hurting children in disaster contexts were typically identified as persons with direct responsibility for children's care, such as parents, teachers, or guardians of homes and known to the child.

Climate related disasters do put a lot of stress on parents or guardians of the home whether it be extreme cold, extreme heat, or something else. This leads to an increase in irritability which could then be taken out on the young person. Same goes for teachers, the abuse in schools may not be physical but verbal jibes could be directed at students as a result of the irritability that results from climate related disasters."

Climate related disasters can cause stress to families in many ways, whether it is the destruction of a home or extra medical bill. This stress may be taken out on young people who are more vulnerable."

Parents have to spend more money, experiencing natural disaster could cause parents to be frustrated and they'll abuse the child. The children have to stay at relatives who can abuse them physically or verbally."

Climate related disasters puts a lot more stress on people. The preparation and aftermath create many burdens including financial burdens. The loss of homes and lives is difficult. It all leads to an increase of mistreating others and even abuse."

The parents are stressed and don't know what do to so they use anger."

If parents feel frustrated and they don't know what to do they may lash out at their children."

Stress levels of adults may have increased not being able to provide an essential commodity. They may take this out on their family members."

The father may be only source of income and he has to go back and provide all over again. She (his wife) would say he does nothing and he wouldn't tell her it but he would say it in an aggressive way and the way he treats her physically and abuse."

Friends and relatives may be more frustrated and may take out their anger. To add not only children would be abused but also husbands may take out their frustration on their wife's making it mental and physical abuse. That child will tend to feel an uncertainty and may look at her father in a different way and that they may take it out on the child."

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48 UNICEF. (2019). *Caribbean Children Facing the Climate Crisis*. **Caribbean children facing climate crisis | UNICEF Eastern Caribbean**

49 Kempadoo, K. (2009), 'Prostitution, sex work, and transactional sex in the English, Dutch, and French speaking Caribbean'.

Adolescents emphasized that part of the risk to violence was being trapped in their own houses due to the disasters, which made worse by elevated stress among adults, could lead to violence. Of particular importance was the concern that disaster management protocols to stay at home could contribute to exacerbating child protection risks.

> *They trap the vulnerable young people and put them at risk of emotional, sexual, and physical abuse."*

> *Climate related disasters can keep youth with abusive family to be trapped with no escape because of protocols."*

> *Especially with parents they would lash out on children. I was thinking of something else but I just can't remember what I was thinking. Sometimes children don't feel safe at home and then when these events happen, and they can't go to school they may get more domestic violence because they can't go to school where they feel safer perhaps."*

> *When children are forced to be at home since they can't attend school, this sometimes are a burden to some parents. Hence, maybe because of the economic problems caused by a hurricane, may exert their frustration onto their children."*

In addition to restrictions, adolescent also noted that any informal or formal protection systems would not be easily accessible in the disaster context as other people would be preoccupied with their own responses. This would put children more at risk with people who want to harm children taking advantage of the situation. Adolescents recognised that this is projected to get worse over time with climate change accelerating extreme weather events.

> *I do think children are at more risk during a storm of abuse as everyone is doing their own thing. And these days the storm will be harder and harder from before."*

While most of the discussion centered on violence against children by others, self-harm was also raised as a potential threat that could result from mental health challenges during a climate related disaster.

> *It messes with their mental health and can give persons suicidal thoughts and others."*

> *In my community, things broke apart. Houses, and we aren't financially strong. It was a real thing and stress. And sometimes people get to the point where they can't take any more and it's suicide."*

Gender aspects

In the Caribbean, girls face greater disadvantages because of their gender. The historical inequalities that females have faced in this regard continue to have intergenerational impacts that reach today's children.[50] Furthermore, in the region, gender inequality permeates all levels: it is present in personal, family, and social relationships, but also in institutions and in public policies, and affects not only women and girls, but also men and boys.[51]

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50 UNICEF. (2020). *Gender Equality*. **Gender equality | UNICEF Latin America and Caribbean**

51 UNICEF. (2020). *Gender Equality*. **Gender equality | UNICEF Latin America and Caribbean**

Around the world, there is clear and growing evidence that women and girls suffer disproportionately from gender discrimination and gender blindness in disaster preparedness and response activities.[52] This is shaped and enhanced by an intersectionality between their gender, age, ethnicity, sexuality, and ability that can combine to increase discrimination against them.[53] Specifically, climate change related vulnerabilities and their consequences not only reflect existing gender inequality; they also reinforce and exacerbate socially constructed relations of power, norms, and practices that constrain progress toward gender equality. This includes gender roles and responsibilities that confine women's activities and mobility to the home; traditions and laws that limit women's access to natural, financial, and social capital, and thus their ability to cope with climate shocks and to adapt to climate change; and norms that inhibit women's ability to access information, knowledge, skills, and capacity building that could be life-saving during and after a weather-related disaster.[54] These same trends are present in the Caribbean. In particular, climate change is seen as a factor contributing to gender inequalities.[55]

In terms of disaster preparedness, a climate change and disaster preparedness project by Belize, Suriname, and St. Vincent and Grenadines Red Cross Societies found that social vulnerabilities are defined differently by women and men.[56] There is a tendency for men to be more aware or sympathetic to physical disabilities and age-related vulnerabilities experienced by elders or young people exposed to exploitation or violence. Women related less to visible vulnerabilities and more strongly to childrearing and caregiving, lack of financial means for coping and cited social problems related to gambling and substance abuse issues in some communities. Overall, participants across genders did not communicate the differentiated specific needs of diverse people and how disasters affect people differently.[57]

A deeply rooted problem across the Caribbean is high levels of violence, often of a sexual nature, that disproportionately affect girls and young women.[58] For example, reports of sexual violence against children indicate that in Trinidad and Tobago, 25 per cent of young women aged 18-29 years had experienced sexual violence by the age of 18.[59] This risk increases in the wake of extreme climate-related events.[60] In addition, rates of child marriage and early unions in the region are among the highest in the world.[61]

Although participation in workshops and the survey for this study were made equally available to girls and boys, nearly 90% of all the adolescents who participated were girls. As such, in future consultations, it will be important to determine ways to better engage with and show relevance for boys.

On the whole, there were few gender specific aspects raised by the adolescents regarding climate related disasters and child protection. However, one specific issue that was raised during an all-girl workshop was around difficulties for menstruating adolescent girls if there are water shortages caused by climate related disasters.

❝ *Sanitation for menstruating teens becomes difficult with a water shortage."*

❝ *Shortage of water can cause young people to not have proper hygiene and that can put a strain on their mental health by causing them to stress."*

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52 IFRC. (2017). *Effective Law and Policy on Gender Equality and Protection from Sexual and Gender-based Violence in Disasters*. **https://media.ifrc.org/ifrc/document/effective-law-policy-gender-equality-protection-sexual-gender-based-violence-disasters-global-case-study/**

53 IFRC. (2020). *We Need to Do Better: Policy Brief for Enhancing Laws and Regulations to Protect Children in Disasters*. **We-Need-To-Do-Better-Final-En.pdf (ifrc.org)**

54 As cited in PLAN International, UNICEF, and Global Economy and Development at Brookings Institute. (2019). *Girls' Education in Climate Strategies: Opportunities for Improved Policy and Enhanced Action in Nationally Determined Contributions*. **girls-ed-in-climate-strategies-working-paper-final.pdf**

55 UN ECLAC. (2019). Mainstreaming Gender in Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction in the Caribbean. **PowerPoint Presentation (cepal.org)**

56 IFRC, Canadian Red Cross, and Government of Canada. (2019). *Community Resilience Building in the Caribbean: Baseline Report.*

57 IFRC, Canadian Red Cross, and Government of Canada. (2019). *Community Resilience Building in the Caribbean: Baseline Report.*

58 UNICEF. (2010). *Child Sexual Abuse in the Eastern Caribbean.*

59 Based on UNICEF Eastern Caribbean analysis of *National Women's Health Survey for Trinidad and Tobago* (2018).

60 Based on UNICEF Eastern Caribbean analysis of *National Women's Health Survey for Trinidad and Tobago* (2018).

61 UNICEF. (2019). *A Profile of Child Marriage and Early Unions: In Latin America and the Caribbean.* **Profile of Child Marriage in LAC.pdf (unicef.org)**

Although boys participated at a low rate, those that did reflected on their own perceived strength compared to girls in disasters.

> " *With a potential disastrous event occurring, well, I feel like boys are more able to handle certain situations at home. And I feel girls are more susceptible to this than boys."*

Mental Health and Psychosocial Support

Disasters erode family and community structures and support for children's mental health and psychosocial well-being and safety.[62] It is estimated that 5 to 43 per cent of children in disasters experience severe stress and many suffer from depression, anxiety or other mental health disturbances.[63] Although most will not require professional care, the need for responsive systems and effective local capacity to support children is high.[64] Even ten years after a disaster, the incidence of depression and post-traumatic stress disorder in a disaster-affected population can be four to five times higher than in non-affected populations.[65]

With climate change, the mental health burden on children in disasters can be expected to rise.[66] Specifically, new psychological conditions can emerge and existing mental illnesses among children can worsen.[67] Yet gaps in the current data affect the capacity to act effectively.[68]

A key mental health concern among children when considering climate change is often described as "climate anxiety," "climate change anxiety," "eco-anxiety," or "climate distress." These feelings and concerns were expressed by adolescents in this study as well. In particular feelings of fear, hopelessness, and depression when considering climate change in general and climate related disasters in particular.

> " *I feel like it causes emotional damage and mental damage as to what are they going to do when it's over and they don't know."*

> " *I feel scared because it terrifying to think that one day I may not be able to live in my country because of sea levels rising."*

> " *It makes me sad to know that people in developing countries have to suffer drought and they did so little to contribute to its cause. Some children go weeks without eating."*

> " *I feel sad. The world is ending due to improper human activities. Mental health is decreasing".*

> " *I'm unsure how much time the earth has, by polluting it."*

> " *Hopelessness because really, we don't know how things will end up in the future. How we see things, everything is getting worse and environmental and then you see the sea level rising. And you don't really know how to stop it. We can always try. But I don't know. I'm part of the environmental club at school and we try to do things at school. But we need the entire community to help so we can make a change and help the world."*

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62 UNICEF. (2018). *Field Test Version of Operational Guidelines: Community-based Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Humanitarian Settings: Three-tiered Support for Children and Families.* **https://www.unicef.org/media/52171/file/Mental%20health%20and%20psychosocial%20support%20guidelines%202019%20.pdf**

63 Kar, N. (2009, February). Psychological Impact of Disasters on Children: Review of Assessment and Interventions. *World Journal of Pediatrics*, 5(1), 5–11. Epub 2009 Jan 27.

64 Ibid.

65 Operationalising Psychosocial Support in Crisis Project. (2016). *The Comprehensive Guideline on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) in Disaster Settings.* **https://www.uibk.ac.at/psychologie/fachbereiche/psychotraumatology/resources/opsic-mhpss-comprehensive-guideline-june-2016.pdf**

66 Dyregrov, A., Yule, W., & Olff, W. (2018, August). *Children and Natural Disasters. European Journal of Psychotraumatology, 9*(Suppl 2). **https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6095022/**

67 Wu, J., Snell, G., and Samji, H. (2020). *Climate Anxiety in Young People: A Call to Action. The Lancet.* Elsiver. **https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanplh/article/PIIS2542-5196(20)30223-0/fulltext#articleInformation**

68 Wu, J., Snell, G., and Samji, H. (2020). *Climate Anxiety in Young People: A Call to Action. The Lancet.* Elsiver. **https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanplh/article/PIIS2542-5196(20)30223-0/fulltext#articleInformation**

The feelings of anxiety were also present when adolescents reflected on preparedness for climate related disasters.

I would say that mentally yes it affects us, in the sense that not everyone is prepared for a catastrophe. After the fact of going through one, the sense of security is no longer with you. Prone to being alert and whether something is going to go right or wrong."

I'm afraid of this because hurricanes are powerful and can take lives and no amount of preparation can protect you fully."

It could impact your whole character or how your life was built. And seeing what happens after."

A loss of homes can cause children to lose their family …. making them feel abandoned and they can grow up with abandonment issues."

Disasters like hurricanes and floods they can cause people to feel anxious. And they may develop PTSD and they will be living in a state of anxiety."

A specific worry for adolescents was the trauma associated with losing loved ones in climate related disasters.

Young people can also experience the death of a family member or friend which can be traumatic."

The loss of loved ones could leave persons devastated, especially if they shared a close relationship."

Also emphasized by adolescents were the mental health risks associated with displacement due to destruction of homes.

Additionally, they may have to relocate to another settlement which can cause them to be socially retracted due to it being a new environment."

Impacts can lead to migration. Migrating to another country being exposed to other cultures etc."

Communication was highlighted as a key element to protect children. For example, when communication infrastructure, like internet and phone, is damaged it is a barrier to accessing help.

Isolation because of a lack of communication as electricity poles may be disrupted and this may encourage panic and anxiety due to no access to telecommunication services or an electronic device."

In another sense, interpersonal communication was underlined by some adolescents as essential to reducing the risk of mental health challenges relating to climate related disasters. Although barriers to having open communication was also noted, such as fears of embarrassment in seeking help.

Their mental health may be affected due to constantly overthinking as they be unsure about whether other persons in the home may react to it according to the levels of stressed experience and they may have to conceal their emotions instead of speaking up the members of their house."

It may make them feel a sense of panic and they can't share their feelings and it's all inside them and there's no way to communicate with a cell phone."

> *Children can feel embarrassed or ashamed to ask for or accept relief items from persons."*

> *Come to think of it now, in hurricanes and storms you can lose homes or family members and it can leave children mentally disturbed and depressed. If they have to go to live with someone else, they won't be comfortable. They could be treated improperly. Things fall out of place and cause the other people to get irritable because of their behaviour. The rebellion might cause miscommunication between the guardian and the child. They don't know how to communicate because the child is suffering."*

Access to education

Addressing education-related needs helps protect children.[69] Yet, climate change affects a child's ability to learn[70] and thus stay safe. Studies indicate that an overall reduction in educational attainment, lower academic performance, and higher rates of absenteeism among children who have experiences climate shocks.[71] After these events, children may also miss school due to sickness (e.g., malnutrition during drought, or increased rates of diarrheal disease after floods), injury, or displacement. In the long run, this may reduce lifetime earnings when these children reach adulthood.[72] As gender, climate change, and education intersect, girls are particularly at risk of being negatively affected.[73]

Across the workshops, adolescents frequently referenced the impact of climate related disasters on education. This was mainly around losing access to education, having schools supplies destroyed or lost, and not being able to focus while at school resulting in lower performance.

> *Flood damage can destroy students' books and other educational material that are crucial for their development."*

> *When it floods children losses things like school supplies, and it will affect their education."*

> *Extreme heat it can cause dizziness or even a heat stroke and if that happens to a student, they would be unable to go to school and heat can also be a big impact on the persons who have underlying sickness."*

> *If persons live in abusive households, whereas school would've been a safe place for them to escape to, now due to a natural disaster they may be forced to stay in their house subjecting them to being abused."*

Among adolescents there were pronounced concerns about mental health being put at risk due to losing out on school in climate related disasters.

> *Makes me feel depressed because it destroys our houses. And after Dorian had hit and the storm was clear some of the students in my school and the books were destroyed so it was a little harder for them to get back school."*

> *Lack of education if the school was destroyed. Students would grow up and they may not be as equipped as others so they may have to."*

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69 The INEE Minimum Standards for Education, the leading standard-setting document, says "in emergency situations through to recovery, quality education provides physical, psychosocial and cognitive protection that can sustain and protect lives."

70 UNICEF. (2019). *Are Climate Change Policies Child-sensitive? A Guide for Action: Summary*. **Are climate change policies child-sensitive (unicef.org)**

71 Brookings Institute. (2018). *How Natural Disasters Undermine Schooling*. **How natural disasters undermine schooling (brookings.edu)**

72 Brookings Institute. (2018). *How Natural Disasters Undermine Schooling*. **How natural disasters undermine schooling (brookings.edu)**

73 Brookings Institute. (2017). *3 Platforms for Girls' Education in Climate Strategies*. **3 platforms for girls' education in climate strategies (brookings.edu)**

> *Lots of times persons affected by floods - may not be able to go to school and may lose educational materials. Make persons feel distraught so they might feel frustrated and feeling hopeless.”*

> *One of my best friends. Her house got flooded and she couldn't come to school as her books were destroyed and all of her furniture. I felt a bit sad as her friend, as everything was destroyed. I can't really remember how she felt as it was a bit long ago, but I felt sad, so much.”*

Children with particular risks

Across the Caribbean region, there are some groups of children that have particular risks to violence, abuse, and exploitation in general and these risks are likely to be amplified during climate related disasters.

Persons with disabilities, including children, are at heightened risk of physical, psychological and sexual abuse during disasters.[74] However, the diverse needs, experiences, perspectives and potential roles of children with disabilities in disaster risk reduction have been largely overlooked or ignored by researchers and policymakers.[75] This is echoed in the Caribbean where there is a low level of information available regarding the situation of children with disabilities, including a lack of accurate data and underreporting due to stigma.[76] Reported challenges include difficulties in accessing the external support, education, care, or rehabilitation services that children with disabilities need.[77] This is particularly problematic for low-income families and especially single parents.[78] These factors are part of the reasons why children with disabilities are more likely to have lower adaptive capacity and higher exposure to climate- and environment-related harm.[79]

Among adolescents in this study, children with disabilities were specifically raised as a group at risk of violence, abuse, and exploitation during disasters.

> *I knew of someone who had autism and when the flood happened, they didn't know how to react as their parents were missing and siblings were missing. They were quire scared. She acted weirdly for around a week and wasn't behaving.”*

Children who are alone, such as unaccompanied child migrants are at elevated risk of death,[80] SGBV,[81, 82] being put in state custody or detention solely based on their migration status,[83] lacking access to basic health care,[84] experiencing severe psychosocial distress,[85] missing out on school,[86] and lacking a role and voice in decisions that affect them.[87]

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74 As cited in IFRC. (2019). *Law and Disaster Preparedness and Response: Multi-Country Synthesis Report.*

75 Ronoh, S., Gaillard, J.C., and Marlowe, J. (November 23, 2015). Children with Disabilities and Disaster Preparedness: A Case Study of Christchurch. *Koituitui: New Zealand Journal of Social Sciences,* 2015 10(2). **https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1177083X.2015.1068185**

76 **ECA_Caribbean climate change report.pdf (unicef.org)**

77 ECLAC (2018). *Disability, Human Rights and Public Policy in the Caribbean: A Situation Analysis.*

78 UNICEF. (2019). *Caribbean Children Facing the Climate Crisis.* **Caribbean children facing climate crisis | UNICEF Eastern Caribbean**

79 UNICEF. (2017). UNICEF *Written Submission to the Study of the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on Climate Change and the Full and Effective Enjoyment of the Rights of the Child.* **http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/ClimateChange/RightsChild/UNICEF.docx**

80 IOM. (2017, September 11). *Missing Migrants Project.* **https://missingmigrants.iom.int/**

81 Bhabha, J., Bohne, C., Digidiki, V., Donger, E., Frounfelker, R., Glenn, J., & Seervai, S. (2016). *Children on the Move: An Urgent Human Rights and Child Protection Priority.* Harvard FXB Center for Health and Human Rights.

82 IFRC. (2018)*. Alone and Unsafe: Children, Migration, and Sexual and Gender-based Violence.* **https://media.ifrc.org/ifrc/press-release/ifrc-world-failing-child-migrants-risk-violence-exploitation-sexual-abuse/**

83 Save the Children. (2011). *Leaving Home: Voice of Children on the Move.* **https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/library/leaving-home-voices-children-move**

84 IFRC and Terres des Hommes. (2017). *Identifying Causes and Defining Strategies to Address Youth Violence and Legal Protection, with Regards to Migration in the Northern Triangle of Central America.*

85 Laban, C.J., Gernaat, H.B., Komproe, I.H., Schreuders, B.A., & De Jong, J.T. (2004, December). Impact of a long asylum procedure on the prevalence of psychiatric disorders in Iraqi asylum seekers in the Netherlands. *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease, 192*(12), 843–51. **https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/15583506**

86 UNDP. (2009). *Human Development Report: Overcoming Barriers – Human Mobility and Development.* **http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/reports/269/hdr_2009_en_complete.pdf**

87 British Red Cross. (2016). *No Place for Children.* **https://www.redcross.org.uk/~/media/BritishRedCross/Documents/What%20we%20do/Refugee%20support/No%20place%20for%20children.pdf**

These risks to unaccompanied children, and children who are homeless, were also recognized by a few of the adolescents in the study.

> **It can open the window for children to be abused if they are separated from their parents by people that don't want to do good things."**

Child labour and humanitarian crises are intimately connected. Fragile situations characterised by instability, income shocks, school closures, lack of decent work opportunities and disruption of social safety nets and services create the conditions for child labour.[88] The problem of child labour was a risk noted by adolescents and reflects a concern in the region.

> **On this one I think yes as they might put the child to labours — I took you in and you have to do these things. Like working outside and probably have to get a job somewhere and for girls inside like cleaning and cooking."**

> **Natural disasters can cause disaster to homes, schools, and communities. Repairing these damages can be very expensive. Parents would have to cut back on their expenses to repair damages. Usually this can cause stress on the parents which may cause them to become abusive parents. Safety and security could become a concern, people out of desperation would probably start robbing homes and schools and young people may get caught in the middle of this."**

While not mentioned by any of the adolescents, protection from violence, abuse and exploitation remains a risk for children who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, or intersex (LGBTQI).[89]

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88 Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action. (2020). *Inter-agency Toolkit: Preventing and Responding to Child Labour in Humanitarian Action.*
    Inter-Agency Toolkit | Child Labour Tools | The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (alliancecpha.org)

89 Human Rights Watch. (2018). *'I Have to Leave to Be Me': Discriminatory Laws against LGBT People in the Eastern Caribbean.* **Eastern Caribbean: LGBT People Face Bias, Violence | Human Rights Watch (hrw.org)**

Accessing support

Child friendly approaches and tools, and interventions to educate parents and children around violence, including sexual violence, have been shown as a gap across countries in the region. This includes inadequate support services.[90] Given the risk of violence, abuse, exploitation, and mental health challenges, it is critical for children to know where and how to access local support.

A majority of children in this study conveyed that they either didn't have enough information and did not have reliable places to get help with regards to violence, abuse, or exploitation, and that they were sceptical that adults would listen, know what to do, and/or support children if they did reach out for help.

A majority of adolescents shared that there was no where to go for help, or that if there were that children would not know where to go for help if they required it.

> *[I could go] Nowhere. My community it's a mess so young children wouldn't want to talk to anyone. And there isn't any place or anywhere we can go. The community is back in time. It needs progress."*

In terms of people that could help, adolescents emphasized that they would mostly turn to people they trusted such as in church, family, or school, rather than service providers who they had no relationships with and were unknown to them. Although there was uncertainty of the reliability and access to people they know during disasters and suggestions that in those cases services would be more readily accessed.

> *I would go to the church first but not sure how much help in an extreme weather event. Our church is really close to the sea but if there isn't anybody there, I'd go to the school."*

> *Person we trust the most. Someone who has been with you through other circumstances."*

> *You can't trust anyone. And someone who has been with you from the jump. You have to make sure they have your back 24-7. You can't just go to any teacher. And if they come to a problem, not all teachers are the same. Build a bond with a few teachers at least. Could be another adult. It has to be someone you trust. Who you can really count on."*

> *CHILD A: Normal answer would be police. But how can I say this in the nicest way possible... A good way to go.*
> *CHILD B: What if you are being abused by the police in your own community?*
> *CHILD A: Then you go to the department of police?"*

Reporting to police was a common suggestion although one with mixed feelings and some concerns. Trust in local police was not high among many adolescents and their competence and care in dealing with adolescents was questioned.

> *I think the people that are being attacked physically may try to escape during climate related disasters to get away from their abuser and they might end up being more injured or even dead depending on how dangerous the disaster is."*

There was uncertainty among children on where to go during a disaster if they were being abused at home. To improve this, adolescents recommended using social media and going to trusted family and neighbours.

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90 UNICEF. (2012). *Sexual Violence against Children in the Caribbean*. **ECAO_Sexual_Violence_againstChildren_in_the_Caribbean.pdf (unicef.org)**

> *It is impossible in the Bahamas. Go to your most close relative who will listen. They may have connection and they can spread it that way. You can't just stay in your little corner and expect something to be done. You go to your neighbour and trusted friends and family. If it happens again, they know exactly.≈*

Additionally, adolescents reflected that while some of them had information in no-disaster settings, it would be more complex in a disaster to access information and get help.

> *To some extent we have enough info. We are taught the basic safety measures. When it comes to disaster you are left really on your own. You have to think. Do what you do and hope that it (abuse) never happens when you are trying to get to safe place."*

Action by children

Adolescents in this study suggested a range of actions they would like to see going forward for improved child protection within climate related disaster preparedness and response.

Child participation

Adolescent participants underlined the need for ongoing discussions, surveys, and communication with young people about climate change disasters and the risks to violence, abuse, exploitation, and mental health. This study should be a starting point rather than an end point.

> *Participate when we get the opportunity. Once they (adults) see what we are doing they may be more agreeable to what we say."*

> *Survey for young people. Use statistics and show adults to change minds."*

Have adolescent and youth led social sessions between children and parents to increase bonding, trust, and dialogue around problems of violence, abuse, exploitation, and mental health.

> *Pair the adults with the children so they can see what they know. Like the Jamaica Red Cross link. You have the senior members and the youth members. Mix the interaction between the adult members you have a youth member and an adult member."*

> *It lies within the adults. They are going to tell you that children don't know what they are talking about and that we see stuff that they don't see. And such we should take their opinions."*

In order to amplify their voices, adolescents suggested involving role models and celebrities, particularly in the music industry that young people both respect and would be engaged by.

Education in schools and communities

A priority for adolescents was to educate young people and adults through schools and communities. In particular, to have regular information sessions on issues such as climate change, disasters, violence, and mental health with school youth ambassadors. In addition, they called for a dedicated disaster awareness day in schools so that all students and teachers could explore the issues together. Moreover, the need for interactive sessions on violence prevention and mental health were highlighted as needed in schools and communities. Adolescents emphasized the need to ensure they are involved in these processes so they are not coming from adults, but it is a more collaborative effort.

> *For opportunities most tell you there is an age limit to participate in certain activities. We want to do it, but our birthday doesn't fall. We could have more opportunities in schools. That would boost more opportunities for children. It can spread the knowledge of what we're having and to know what we're knowing."*

> *Bring about more opportunity by putting in place programmes and hosting seminars."*

Preparedness

For preparedness, adolescents suggested that a key step is to enhance preparedness actions with vulnerable communities. By planning in advance and having in place protective systems, the risk to children in climate related disasters could be reduced.

Adolescents also recommended having "scenario based" preparedness activities so disaster planners and schools can have practical scenarios to consider and plan for.

Making support more accessible

The barriers around children being heard and their perspectives respected was an ongoing challenge noted by adolescents. In response, they recommended that support services should be made more child friendly. For instance, through easier and better information sharing such as through an app on violence, abuse, exploitation and mental health so that children can better understand the risks to these problems and where and how to access help.

Adolescents also suggested there is value in informal support networks for children to discuss issues and access help and these should be scaled up and made easily available. Given the risks to violence and mental health strains, adolescents advised the importance of making widely available counselling and therapy services.

> *Things like counselling and therapy could be put in place to give children an opportunity to open up and express their opinions safely around their parents. Camps that would train us and we could help spread whatever we know."*

> *Mental health isn't really considered. It isn't priority when it comes to Jamaican people. We are born with tough love so expressing their feelings and that, isn't something that they will go to their parents and talk about."*

Systems capacity

Local support systems

A UNICEF study in the Caribbean on sexual abuse against children[91] found that across countries there was a considerable list of local systems challenges for supporting children and families affected by sexual abuse. The challenges that require strengthening are indicated below; these are likely only to be strained further during climate related disasters.

- A general lack of specialized services (for example psychological and therapeutic care)
- A need for more and better accredited staff training
- Inadequate or absence of out-of hours full and responsive service coverage
- Confusion and fear surrounding disclosure
- Inadequate provision to deal with variations in reporting and referral pathways
- Slow and inadequate response of services
- Variations in waiting times to have initial assessment
- Variations in service accessibility and availability due to such factors as geographical location
- Insufficient focus on the gender dimensions of child sexual abuse for prevention and treatment purposes
- Lack of child friendly Police, Court and Medical procedures for abused children
- Insufficient prevention and awareness raising programmes
- Very few services targeted at parents, guardians, caregivers, and families
- Persistence of silence, shame, and stigma among sexually abuse children and their families
- Lack of specialized provisions for specific groups including children between birth and 5 years, children with disabilities, children with cultural and religious peculiarities, and children with language/translation issues
- Insufficient allocation of financial, human, and other resources
- Need for more school, family and community based resources and services
- Weak participation and involvement of children in decisions affecting them
- Inadequate data collection and use of data to inform service provision / no consistent approach to information sharing among agencies / not enough focus on the provision of service when it is most needed
- Weak or non-existent monitoring and evaluation mechanisms and processes.

Local coordination

Effective and maintained communication in preparedness and response was high on agendas of both children and stakeholders.

There was wide agreement for stakeholders interviewed that during disaster responses child protection and disaster response actors are not well coordinated. In particular, there are challenges around joint planning and assigning responsibilities between actors. In addition, local communities, and especially representatives from groups with protection vulnerabilities, are not part of planning and sharing their perspectives.

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91 UNICEF. (2012). *Sexual Violence against Children in the Caribbean*. **ECAO_Sexual_Violence_againstChildren_in_the_Caribbean.pdf (unicef.org)**

Disaster laws, policies and regulations

Countries across the Caribbean have in place laws to protect children rights' including from some forms of violence, abuse, and exploitation; although their implementation varies.[92]

Similar to most countries around the world,[93] the countries of the Caribbean do not have in place specific laws, policies, or regulations to protect children in disasters.[94] This means that during disasters, including climate related disasters, children do not have clear, coordinated, formal safeguards to ensure that their needs are met and prioritized.

Climate policies and Nationally Determined Contributions

Despite climate change disproportionately impacting children, they are consistently overlooked in the design and content of climate policies and related processes.[95] In a review of 160 Nationally Determined Contributions for the Paris Agreement, 75 noted children or "future generations"; only three specifically mention girls.[96] In the Caribbean there were six countries which made reference to children in their Nationally Determined Contributions: Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Cuba, Dominican Republic, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Within these children were mainly framed as "vulnerable" or as "beneficiaries". Although for the plans in Cuba and the Dominican Republic, children were also framed as active agents of change.[97]

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92 Sawyers, K. (2015). *Child Rights in the Caribbean: An Annotated Bibliography*. University of the West Indies. **Child Rights in the Caribbean: (uwi.edu)**

93 IFRC. (2020). *We Need to Do Better: Policy Brief for Enhancing Laws and Regulations to Protect Children in Disasters*.
     We-Need-To-Do-Better-Final-En.pdf (ifrc.org)

94 Commonwealth Review.

95 UNICEF. (2019). *Are Climate Policies Child sensitive?* **https://www.unicef.org/media/62956/file/Are%20climate%20change%20policies%20child-sensitive?.pdf**

96 PLAN International, UNICEF, and Global Economy and Development at Brookings Institute. (2019). *Girls' Education in Climate Strategies: Opportunities for Improved Policy and Enhanced Action in Nationally Determined Contributions*. **girls-ed-in-climate-strategies-working-paper-final.pdf**

97 PLAN International, UNICEF, and Global Economy and Development at Brookings Institute. (2019). *Girls' Education in Climate Strategies: Opportunities for Improved Policy and Enhanced Action in Nationally Determined Contributions*. **girls-ed-in-climate-strategies-working-paper-final.pdf**

Recommendations

In order to meet the best interests of children during climate related disasters, specifically through enhancing protection of children from violence, abuse, and exploitation top-line recommendations relevant for the region are presented below. These are categorized by actions for governments and actions for humanitarian agencies.

Actions for governments

The following recommendations are specific to government agencies responsible for child protection, climate change, and disasters. Implementing the recommendations can be supported by the National Red Cross Societies, and other partners, where needed.

1) Enhance domestic laws, policies and regulations
Review national domestic laws, regulations, and policies, including those related to climate change adaptation, in order to strengthen child protection aspects in the most appropriate instruments. These reviews are best if they are inclusive of the perspectives all relevant ministries and agencies and levels of government, as well as relevant civil society actors, including National Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies. Actions should keep in mind the different needs of children, including girls and children with disabilities, and aim for meaningful participation of children throughout.

2) Invest in child protection systems
Ensure budget allocations for child protection services within disaster response and for awareness-raising, training, planning, and monitoring and evaluation of child protection measures as part of disaster preparedness including through private public partnerships.

3) Improve local coordination
Improve coordination by the government across relevant ministries and agencies, with relevant civil society actors, including National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, and as appropriate, international partners with regard to child protection in disaster preparedness and response. Increasing coordination can include government and humanitarian agencies developing joint planning around disaster preparedness and finding points of collaboration and complementarity.

4) Train local responders
Train local disaster responders, communities, and National Disaster Office personnel on legal requirements on child protection and making decisions based on the best interests of the child. In particular, children's rights to participation, rights from violence, abuse and exploitation, and mental health.

5) Include child protection in school curriculum
Working with the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency sub-committee on education, include child protection within the curriculum related to climate change and disaster preparedness. This should include elements on prevention and response to violence, abuse, and exploitation. In addition, time dedicated to developing skills for coping with disasters and enhancing mental health in crises.

6) Collect sex-, age- and disability-disaggregated data
Mandate the collection and analysis of age-, gender- and disability-disaggregated data as part of risk assessments, damage and needs assessments, environmental assessments, delivery of emergency assistance, and as part of allocation of recovery and reconstruction assistance.

Actions by the humanitarian sector

The actions by the humanitarian sector, including Red Cross National Societies, are designed to complement and reinforce the actions by governments. All actions should ensure children representing diverse genders, disabilities, and backgrounds meaningfully participate in the actions.

1) Design child-friendly communications
Design climate related disaster communications that are child-friendly. This includes having children help choose the appropriate format, co-lead the development of messages and tools, and lead the delivery of communications to other children. Child-friendly messages should include information on where, how and whom to access protection support from. Pilot using social media, including an app, to provide this information. Where possible, partner with local influencers that children respect and look up to.

2) Implement community feedback mechanisms
Working with children, schools, and local leaders develop community feedback mechanisms that can be implemented in disasters. The community feedback mechanisms can be developed in child-friendly ways that allow children to share questions, concerns, and ideas in safe and confidential ways.

3) Embed child protection within disaster preparedness and anticipatory action
Develop and pilot child protection indicators as part of anticipatory action on climate related disaster forecasts and planning.

4) Develop scenario-based preparedness
As part of disaster preparedness planning, develop and pilot scenario-based activities. These activities can place participants in simulated scenarios where they work-out solutions to specific child protection concerns related to climate related disasters.

5) Integrate child protection into assessments and planning
Integrate child protection elements into ongoing climate related disaster project assessments, such as vulnerability and capacity assessments, and planning processes. Prioritize seeking the perspectives of children who are often marginalized; this includes children who are alone, connected to the streets, in migration, living with disabilities, LBTQI, and those from racialized and indigenous communities. Throughout take steps to engage with children across genders.

6) Create spaces for discussion and support
Through youth clubs, school clubs, and outside of school forums, provide a safe space for children to discuss climate change concerns, child protection and mental health issues, and where, how and whom to access help from around protection concerns. Complement this with opportunities for parents and children to come together to discuss these issues and plan local actions they can take together to improve child protection and mental health risks.

THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES
OF THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT

Humanity

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours, in its international and national capacity, to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace amongst all peoples.

Impartiality

It makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress.

Neutrality

In order to enjoy the confidence of all, the Movement may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

Independence

The Movement is independent. The National Societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with the principles of the Movement.

Voluntary service

It is a voluntary relief movement not prompted in any manner by desire for gain.

Unity

There can be only one Red Cross or Red Crescent Society in any one country. It must be open to all. It must carry on its humanitarian work throughout its territory.

Universality

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, in which all societies have equal status and share equal responsibilities and duties in helping each other, is worldwide.

The vision of the IFRC is to inspire, encourage, facilitate and promote at all times all forms of humanitarian activities by National Societies, with a view to preventing and alleviating human suffering, and thereby contributing to the maintenance and promotion of human dignity and peace in the world.