



# AFRICAN GIRL CHILD CHANGEMAKERS IN THE WAKE OF CLIMATE CHANGE

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# Introduction and Background

The international day of the girl child was first declared on December 19 2011, following the adoption of Resolution 66/170 by the United Nations General Assembly (UN, 2022). The Resolution declared October 11 as the day to recognize girls' rights and the unique challenges girls face around the world, and to focus attention on the need to address the challenges girls face and to promote girls' empowerment and the fulfilment of their human rights.

As a way to recognise and address the challenges that girls around the world face, this year's theme is *'Our time is now - our rights, our future'*. This paper will highlight the current challenge of climate change and how girls in Africa have been affected by it, as well as highlight the mitigation measures that girls themselves have taken up to help curb those challenges.



Image attributed from: CNN

## *What is climate change?*

Climate change is defined as **gradual changes in all the interconnected weather elements on our planet.**

There is a clear connection between climate change and children's rights in Africa. The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child clearly points out the different rights that children enjoy: the right to life, education, a clean environment, good health, and water, among many others. If the climate drastically changes, the enjoyment of these rights by children will be adversely affected.

The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child aims to protect the private life of the child and safeguard the child against all forms of economic exploitation and against work that is hazardous, interferes with the child's education or compromises his or her health or physical, social, mental, spiritual, and moral development (Article 16(2)).





# Challenges girls go through in relation to climate change

According to statistics from the African Development Bank Group (2022), despite its low contribution to greenhouse gas emissions, Africa remains the most vulnerable continent to climate change impacts under all climate scenarios above 1.5 degrees Celsius. This in turn comes with a lot of challenges, especially for the girl child. As a matter of fact, issues like female genital mutilation/cutting often arise due to climate change. Let's look at these challenges that girls face because of climate change:

## a) FGM/C (Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting)

Female genital mutilation/cutting is recognized internationally as an issue of global health concern and a violation of human rights. Changing climatic conditions have put a strain on people's livelihoods making women and girls more susceptible to harmful practices.

This explains the effect of climate change on changing social gender norms and FGM practices in Africa and the world at large. In Kenya, most of the pastoralist communities due to harsh weather conditions often sell off their daughters in exchange for livestock and before they are married off they have



to undergo the 'cut'. This is a painful experience that hurts the girl child mentally, physically, socially and emotionally. An estimated 200 million girls and women alive today are believed to have been subjected to FGM, according to the United Nations Population Fund (2022).

### **b) Early Marriage**

According to research conducted by the Global Partnership and Fund to End Violence Against Children (2022) every year, 12 million girls, that's one in five girls worldwide, get married before adulthood. While years of effort have led to a decline in the practice, it is now at great risk of rising. Child marriages are driven by a range of intersecting reasons, from gender inequality and societal norms to poverty, displacement, conflict and lack of education.



Image attributed from: [Petition Site](#)

In some pastoralist communities with low access to resources and low income particularly in rural areas where people depend on the local environment for their livelihoods when these resources are unavailable as a result of climate change which brings about drought and in turn the death of livestock, the family or the community sells off their daughters at an early age in exchange for dowry which acts as a source of income.

### **c) Dropping out of school**

According to research conducted by Plan International (2019) on girls' education is often the first thing families sacrifice when faced with the impacts of the climate crisis. Girls are pulled out of school to help their families find food and water or take care of siblings thus depriving them of the right to education. Article II of the Children's Charter states that every child has a right to education and prescribes measures that the African States undertake as part of their efforts to achieve their full realisation of this right.



Image attributed from: The Maravi Post



## **d) Violence against the girl child**

The impacts of climate change cause many people to migrate which puts girls' safety at risk. These risks are worse when girls are collecting natural resources and when staying in temporary shelters.

Women are key stakeholders when it comes to climate change and violence. Over half of Kenyan rural women experience some form of gender-based violence in their lifetime. Moreover, climate change unequally impacts girls due to their lower socioeconomic status and not being accorded the same basic human rights as their male counterparts. Girls need to be included at the decision-making table when developing interventions to combat climate change and increase protections for women.



Image attributed from: Shutterstock

The effects that climate change has had on children and girls are so massive and these are just a few of the challenges girls face when there is climate change. We can't forget all the great work many of the girls out there have been doing

to try and solve climate change. These are the great children and future leaders who are trying to make a difference when it comes to climate change.

## The Girl Change Makers in Africa Yola Mgogwana



According to Global Citizen Network, a girl by the name of Yola Mgogwana is not letting being just 11 years old stop her from taking on one of the biggest challenges of her generation.

Image attributed from: [Green Route ZA](#)

*'People are poisoning the Earth by littering. So, I'm teaching them to take care of the Earth by not polluting the water and air and throwing rubbish on the streets,' she said.*

Mgogwana was one of the hundreds of young people in South Africa who joined the March 2019 global climate action protest called #FridaysforFuture, a movement inspired by Swedish activist Greta Thunberg's call for school children to strike against the climate crisis.



## Ellyanne Wanjiku



Ellyanne Chlystun-Githae Wanjiku is an 11-year-old environmentalist and Africa's Youngest Climate Change Ambassador. The climate change ambassador planted her first tree in Karura Forest and then one tree

became ten, ten trees became twenty and now she has planted over 1.3 million trees. The youngest climate change ambassador hopes to plant a trillion more trees so as to help fight climate change. So far she has done several projects with different organisations including the Kenya Forest Research Institute and even the government of Kenya to help fight climate change.

These are just a few of the great climate change ambassadors in Africa, who are trying to make a difference and help save the girl child from the massive effects of climate change. This is why we celebrate the International Day of the Girl Child because girls do go through a lot of challenges especially when it comes to climate. Together let's all help to stop climate change. Our time is now - Our Rights, Our Future!

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