



## Summary

This paper outlines the links between climate change and education, and sets out Link Education's current and future responses to the climate crisis. We firstly explore the impacts that climate change has on children's ability to access the education to which they have a right, and then outline the crucial role that education has to play in combatting climate change. Link has a strong track record of building resilience and strengthening systems to promote adaptation, and firmly believes that a strong and holistic education system can significantly support children, communities and nations as we face the challenges of our changing climate.

## About Link

Link Education is Scotland's leading international education charity, working to improve education for children and communities in some of the poorest rural areas of Ethiopia, Malawi and Uganda, and helping thousands of people escape the cycle of poverty. We focus on enhancing teaching and learning in schools, as well as building life-skills and promoting inclusion for the most marginalised. Our vision is one where all children have access to good quality education, giving them hope and a strong foundation for a brighter future. We take both a top-down and bottom-up approach to transform education, supporting broad system and school-wide improvements while recognising the need for more tailored, localised support to overcome specific challenges.

## Education and Climate Change

Climate change may not appear to directly impact education, yet there are manifold ways climate events prevent a quality education from being delivered. Research has shown an overall reduction in educational attainment, lower academic performance, and higher rates of absenteeism among children who experience climate shocks.<sup>1</sup>

### The impacts of climate change include:

- **Academic** - as a result of climate change children walk further to collect water (girls)<sup>2</sup> or graze animals (boys), reducing the time they can spend studying. Migration or displacement as villages are damaged or destroyed forces many children to drop out of school completely.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/education-plus-development/2018/01/23/how-natural-disasters-undermine-schooling/>

<sup>2</sup> In 2016, UNESCO said women and girls spend 200 million hours every day collecting water now exacerbated due to climate change <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/unicef-collecting-water-often-colossal-waste-time-women-and-girls>

- **Economic** - lower and destabilised earnings from traditional livelihoods and subsistence farming means less money to cover school costs.
- **Infrastructure** - school buildings damaged or used as shelters/ health centres due to adverse weather events, and roads and bridges washed away, prevent safe access.
- **Health** - climate shocks and their after effects can mean school is missed due to sickness such as malnutrition during drought, or increased rates of diarrhoeal disease after floods.
- **Gender Inequality** - girls more often miss out on education as they leave to support household incomes or are forced to marry to alleviate family pressures, and these risks are magnified in a changing climate, especially for households that rely on natural resources. Girls' attention, cognitive ability to learn and performance are all impacted due to their heightened risk of malnutrition and their unpaid work and girls are more likely not to return to school after a disaster.<sup>3</sup>

These issues disproportionately impact the most marginalised in society who have the fewest resources to cope. But as much as climate change is a problem for education, education is in fact a **solution** for combating climate change.

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the 2015 Paris Agreement underscore education's role in climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Education is crucial in building knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours needed for adaptive capacity,<sup>4</sup> engaging in and developing climate policies, supporting the green economy and encouraging individual environmental and social responsibility.

Education is one of the most effective and cost-effective contributions to adapting to climate change and can support mitigation through improved life-skills, green skills and more environmentally responsible decision-making. Research of 187 countries shows that education influences the number of deaths from disasters more than economic growth.<sup>5</sup>

Girls' education in particular has shown an extraordinary and multifaceted return on investment. Research by Brookings Institute shows for every additional year of girls' schooling on average, a country's level of climate resilience is improved. Research shows that closing gender gaps in education can help countries better adapt to the effects of climate change,<sup>6</sup> and ensuring girls' access to quality education is a sustainable and cost effective tool for building societies' resilience to climate change.<sup>7</sup>

- **Farming & resources** - Educated women have more productive small holdings, are better able to feed their families and communities, and are better stewards making the most of the world's natural resources.
- **Life Chances & Economic Potential** - Educated women have better life chances and more economic potential making their communities stronger and more stable in the face of emergencies and disasters.

<sup>3</sup> Plan International position paper – climate change, focus on girls and young women, 2019

<sup>4</sup> International Panel on Climate Change, 2018

<sup>5</sup> Plan International, 2019

<sup>6</sup> E.g. Malala Foundation 2021, Brookings Institute, UNESCO, Population Council, Echidna Giving

<sup>7</sup> Plan International, 2019

- **Healthier families** - Smaller, healthier and more educated families can lead to increased resilience with reduced footprints.
- **Decision making** - Investment in girls' STEM education can encourage girls and women to participate in and lead innovations in climate resilient and green technologies, bringing a gendered perspective that supports more effective and inclusive solutions.<sup>8</sup>

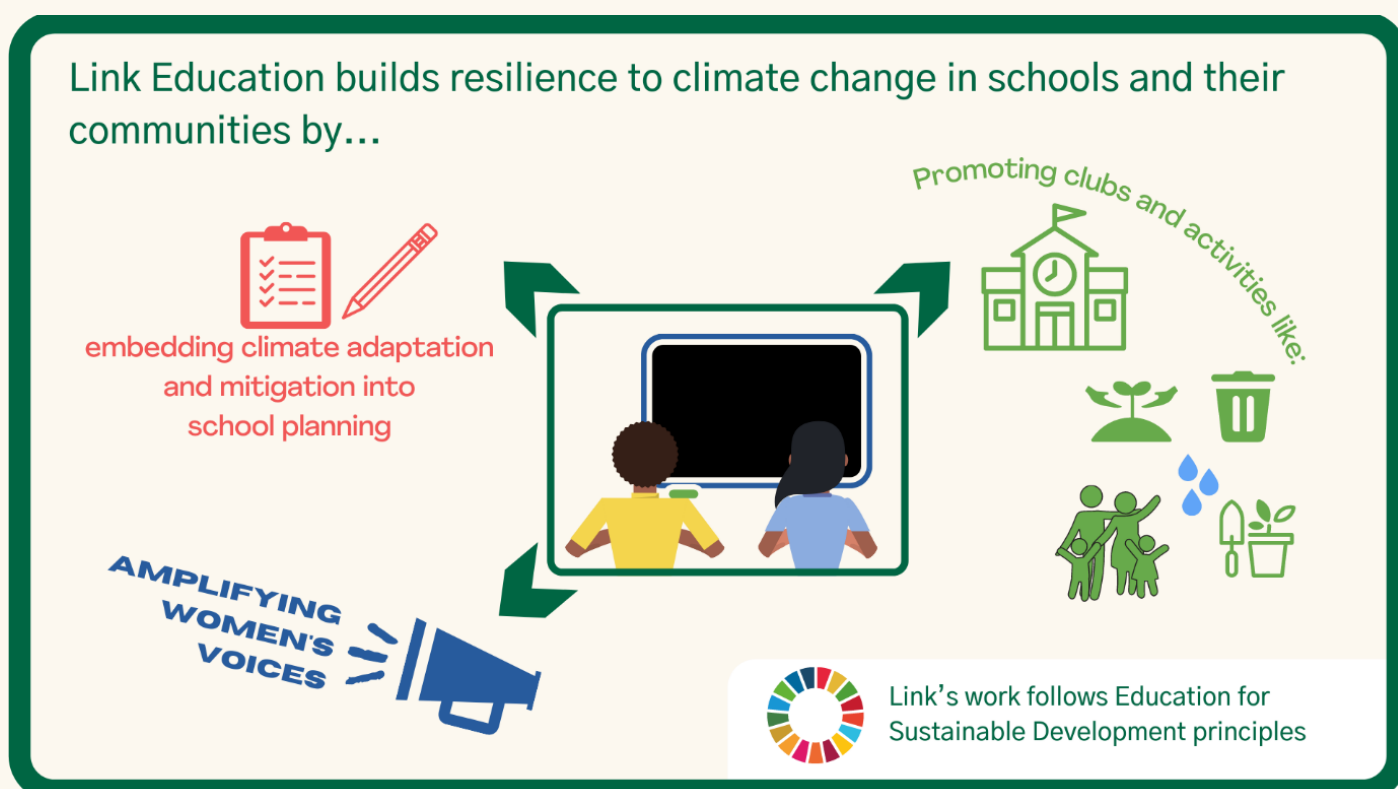
A quality education is essential to learn how to build resilience and equality within a fair society. A solid foundation in literacy, numeracy and life-skills enables the accurate and timely dissemination of scientific and logistical information, sharing of knowledge and the development of innovation.

Listening to local and indigenous knowledge that meets climate challenges will be key, and respectful school and community partnerships will ensure locally-led adaptations can be shared.<sup>9</sup>

An education system that acknowledges these areas will see this generation able to successfully contribute to their country's needs using **transferable 21st century skills**, be it participating in improving crop production for higher food security in Ethiopia; protecting biodiversity and promoting eco-tourism in Malawi; or developing renewable energy in Uganda.

## Link Education's Programmatic Approach

In order to build adaptation and resilience to climate change, Link will support a whole school approach<sup>10</sup> embedding climate resilience across every aspect of school life.



<sup>8</sup> Kheolamai, T. (2020) "Girls' Next Gen: An innovative learning to instil girls' leadership in disaster and climate resilience" in Prevention Web. <https://www.preventionweb.net/news/view/7482280>.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.wri.org/initiatives/locally-led-adaptation/principles-locally-led-adaptation>

<sup>10</sup> Educational content up close, UNESCO, 2019

Link will ensure the principles of Education for Sustainable Development (SDG 4.7 and SDG 13) are embedded within all our training, community awareness raising, system strengthening and advocacy activities.

We will support the delivery of quality education to:

- Empower and promote equality in fair societies
- Promote care for the environment
- Develop relevant livelihood skills

This will enable children and young people to make **informed and responsible choices** to protect themselves, their communities and the planet.

We will strengthen our engagement on these issues and build on our existing relationships with communities and governments in current and future programming across three key areas:

- **Education for Sustainable Development**
- **School Improvement Planning**
- **Girls' Education**

### Education for Sustainable Development

Education for Sustainable Development empowers learners with the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes to take informed decisions and make responsible actions for environmental integrity, economic viability and a just society.

Education for Sustainable Development is an integral part of quality education by enhancing the cognitive as well as the social and emotional dimensions for inclusive learning. It is holistic and encompasses learning content and outcomes, pedagogy and the learning environment itself.

Education for Sustainable Development is recognised as a key enabler of all the Sustainable Development Goals and achieves its purpose by transforming society.<sup>11</sup>

Link currently delivers Education for Sustainable Development by:

- **Mainstreaming Gender and Inclusive Responsive Pedagogy** - Link mainstreams Gender and Inclusive Responsive Pedagogy that also supports social-emotional learning and life-skills for learners, school leaders and teachers, which in turn develops equitable school systems and fairer, more sustainable societies
- **Developing Curricula** - Link develops relevant curricula in non-formal education settings that focus on literacy, numeracy and livelihoods which ensures the hardest to reach students are given a fairer chance to actively engage with and contribute to their society
- **Engaging communities** – Link engages communities, such as mother and father groups, to promote behaviour change that supports education for all

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<sup>11</sup> <https://en.unesco.org/themes/education-sustainable-development/what-is-esd>

In future Link will build on these by embedding Education for Sustainable Development within:

- **Strengthening leadership and teacher training** - placing additional emphasis on gender responsiveness and social-emotional development
- **Further curricula development** - curricula review to contain viable environmentally friendly livelihood and life-skills such as preventing soil erosion, responsible water use, coping with stress, financial literacy, and power dynamics in relationships
- **Supporting school/ gender clubs** - the clubs will promote equality and challenge harmful social norms, as well as promoting and instilling climate resilience and environmental sustainability using indigenous knowledge from local experts. Club activities might include woodlots and tree planting, school gardens, advocating for a sustainable water source and waste management practices
- **Training Pathways** - focusing vocational training pathways on environmental-friendly options such as briquette-making to replace wood for fuel

### School Improvement Planning

Annual School Development Plans use national indicators to measure performance. Link supports Ministries of Education to ensure data collected against these indicators supports general school management, governance and learning as well as inclusion and child protection.

These indicators will be strengthened to fully consider and include:

- the local school environment in terms of sustainability
- building resilience to climate change and ensuring child safety
- empowering the community to ensure their school can adapt to climate challenges so that education can continue

Disaster Risk Reduction tools, guidance and training that responds to climate events and promotes school safety<sup>12</sup> will be integrated into the annual school planning process. Strengthening the School Development Plan indicators to build resilience and respond to climate shocks, and training school and community leaders how to monitor progress against these indicators is a cost effective way of engaging local communities and in turn building local resilience.

### Girls' Education

Supporting girls' education is a primary area of expertise for Link. As discussed above, the often reduced quality education of girls limits both their access to information and knowledge on climate and disaster risks, and their skills on how to prepare, anticipate, reduce, adapt and respond to those risks. Opportunities to gain important life skills may be missed.

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<sup>12</sup> Comprehensive School Safety: A Toolkit for Development and Humanitarian Actors in the Education Sector October, 2012, Save the Children

Link has extensive experience in strengthening delivery of:

- leadership and teacher training and planning that considers gender
- social and emotional learning activities for girls, and their teachers
- community awareness campaigns that promote and support education for all girls
- infrastructure developments that work for and protect girls
- policies that promote girls' education, and education for all more widely.

In the future, we will continue to work within all these areas, *and* ensure environmental resilience and sustainable development are built in. For example:

- school development plans will support protection and inclusion, focus on equality and consider climate adaptations
- social and emotional learning will be embedded across all teacher, leadership, community and government training so that every stakeholder is pulling together to build a just society
- curricula reviews and materials development will consider sustainability, environmentally sound livelihood options, and strong life-skills

## Link Education's Organisational Approach

In order to ensure what we support is relevant, impactful and progressive, Link will partner with global climate change thought leaders, youth movements, networks and civil society groups.

Link believes that the climate emergency is the most significant intergenerational equity issue of our time and that the urgency of climate action applies to everyone.

Link is changing the way we work to reduce our own carbon footprint. We are already achieving this by improving our global communication functions so that international travel is decreased.

This paper is one of a series, including one which outlines Link's approach to Education in Emergencies. Our knowledge, expertise and future plans in both of these areas mutually strengthen each other.

A strong education system that provides a holistic approach to support quality learning, relevant life-skills and embeds equality can play a significant role in combating climate challenges and associated emergencies.

Link is examining all our actions and ways of working so that our activities do everything possible to build a **brighter, healthier and safer future**.

