

**BUILD BACK**

**BACK**

**FORWARD**

**BETTER**

**HOW THE GLOBAL COMMUNITY CAN PROTECT  
EDUCATION FROM THE CLIMATE CRISIS**

***“After the Cyclone, the school was closed. I stayed home for more than a week. When I came back to school, we had to walk over mud - even inside the school was muddy.”- Miranda, 11 years old, Mozambique, lost her classroom when Cyclone Idai hit.***

## **THE CLIMATE CRISIS IS A CHILD RIGHT’S CRISIS**

Our planet is amid a rapid and intensifying climate crisis, that threatens children’s right to education, a safe home, healthy environment, food, and healthcare. Nearly half of all children globally – one billion in total – live in countries at extremely high risk of the impacts of climate change.<sup>1</sup> **Data published by Save the Children highlights the intergenerational injustices posed by the climate emergency.**<sup>2</sup> It finds that a child born in 2020 will on average face seven times more scorching heat waves during their lives than their grandparents under the original Paris Agreement emission reduction pledges.<sup>3</sup> New-borns will also live through 2.6 times more droughts, 2.8 times as many river floods, and twice the number of wildfires.

Children’s increasing exposure to extreme weather events has serious implications for children’s access to quality education. 75 million children have their education disrupted each year – of which around half are due to environmental threats such as floods and drought.<sup>4</sup> Even before the COVID-19 global education emergency, 258 million school-aged children - one in six - were already denied their right to education.<sup>5</sup> The pandemic has further compounded education inequalities, particularly in low-income and conflict-affected countries which are also at greatest risk of the impacts of climate change.<sup>6</sup> Save the Children’s Risks to Education Index found eight countries to have school systems at “extreme risk” of an unprecedented intensity of threats including the climate crisis and COVID-19, with the Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, and Somalia most vulnerable.<sup>7</sup> As the pandemic has shown, building resilient education systems is critical, especially in crisis-prone and low-income countries.

**As governments prepare to review their commitments to the new five-year cycle of the Paris Agreement at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP 26), they must not overlook the devastating impacts of the climate crisis on education. World leaders must act to protect children’s learning and equip the next generation with the tools to respond to the challenges posed by the climate crisis, by taking the following actions:**

- Support preparedness and anticipatory action in education systems
- Protect education from the impacts of the climate emergency
- Rapidly scale up finance for mitigation, adaptation, and anticipatory action
- Support child participation in education and climate policy decision making

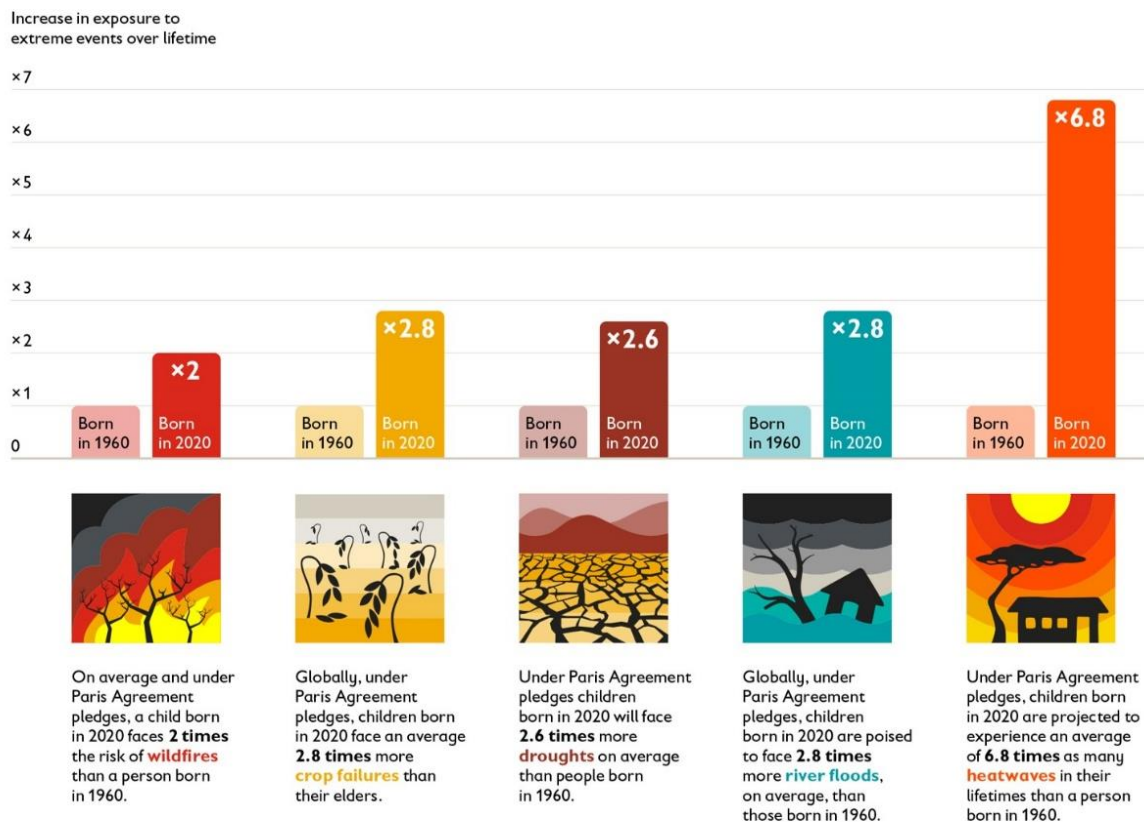
### **The climate crisis is threatening children’s right to learn**

Extreme weather events damage education infrastructure, force children to flee their homes and classrooms, and impact learning.

- **Climate-induced displacement is expected to rise dramatically over the next few years, increasing the risk of school drop-out.**<sup>8</sup> More than 50 million children have already been displaced due to climate-related events.<sup>9</sup>
- Girls are at increased risk of child marriage as families struggle to cope with the economic impact of climate shocks, which may lead them to drop out of school permanently. **On current trends by 2025, the climate emergency will contribute to preventing 12.5 million girls from completing their education every year.**<sup>10</sup>

- Heat can have a significant impact on educational attainment, with students showing lower learning outcomes during hot school years compared to cooler school years.<sup>11</sup>
- Research also suggests that maintaining lower outdoor air pollution in and around schools could improve a child's ability to learn by enhancing working memory.<sup>12</sup>

The climate crisis is also likely to cause an increase in the incidence and prevalence of many disabling impairments including disease, injury, malnutrition, and physical and psychological disability. Children living with disabilities are often invisible and overlooked in emergency relief operations. Inaccessible healthcare and education facilities and severe communication barriers, which are exacerbated during and after climate-induced disasters, prevent children with disabilities from accessing the services they require.



**Figure 1:** Lifetime exposure to extreme events under Paris Agreement pledges for children born in 2020 compared to that of a person born in 1960.

### Quality education for climate action

At the same time, quality gender-transformative education can equip children with the tools to respond to the challenges posed by the climate crisis. It can help children protect themselves and their communities against the worst impacts. Environmental education on issues including climate change is central to the UN Human Rights Council on realising the rights of the child through a healthy environment.<sup>13</sup> **Children should have access to age-, language- and gender-appropriate education on topics such as the environment, climate crisis and biodiversity as part of the curriculum to help them gain the necessary knowledge and capabilities to build resilience and adapt to a changing climate.** Teaching skills for green jobs can enable young people to work in the green sector and support a transition to a low-carbon economy.<sup>14</sup> Quality education can also promote sustainable values that children need to challenge social and economic inequalities fuelling the climate crisis, and bring about greener, more inclusive, and just societies.



Evidence, 14, leads school drills as part of the Disaster Risk Reduction programme at his school in Zimbabwe which educates children about disasters and how to protect themselves.



PHOTO: SACHA MYERS / SAVE THE CHILDREN 2020

Research shows that a higher a person's level of education, the more likely they are to express concern over the environment. A person who has completed secondary education is 10 percentage points more likely to be concerned and engaged in political actions than an individual with only primary education.<sup>15</sup> Educating girls also contributes to gender equality in the economy and society – and women's participation in politics leads to more pro-environmental policies and higher levels of environmental wellbeing.<sup>16</sup> **Yet despite growing evidence, countries are failing to prioritise education on sustainability, climate change and diversity.** Just half of education documents studied by UNESCO referred to environmental themes.<sup>17</sup>

## HOW TO PROTECT EDUCATION FROM THE CLIMATE CRISIS

### Create resilient education systems

Unless governments take action to build more resilient “climate-proof” education systems, children's increasing exposure to extreme weather events will continue to threaten their right to safe, quality education. **To address these risks, every country needs a crisis-sensitive education plan.** Institutionalising risk management and anticipatory action in the education sector is crucial to building resilient education systems,<sup>18</sup> reducing the risks to education that children face before, during and after a crisis, and promoting education policies and programmes that will help prevent future crises.<sup>19</sup> Acting before a disaster can safeguard lives and livelihoods, build resilience to future shocks, and ease pressure on strained humanitarian resources.<sup>20</sup>

Despite the evidence for the impact of anticipatory action, 55% of humanitarian funding is spent on *responding* to predictable crises and only 1% is spent on preparedness and early action.<sup>21</sup> Whilst there is growing support for anticipatory action from donors, not enough focus has been paid to its role in mitigating the effects of disasters on education.<sup>22</sup> With investment in predictive analysis and early warning systems, the education sector can be better placed to respond once a crisis occurs and take early action. Anticipatory action requires flexible and forecast based financing to allow for action at scale based on risk, and to protect communities from predictable climate change risks.

### Child-sensitive climate financing

With children’s futures under threat, substantial funding increases – particularly from those most responsible for the climate crisis – are needed to reduce risks to education, support resilience, and help children, teachers and their schools adapt to a rapidly changing climate. For low- and middle-income countries, the human and financial costs of adapting to a changing climate are rising. Estimated annual adaptation costs currently total USD\$70 billion and are expected to reach USD\$140–300 billion by 2030.<sup>23</sup> **Yet current public funding falls far short at around USD\$30 billion annually.**<sup>24</sup>

Increases in climate finance should consider the impacts of the crisis on children most impacted by inequality and discrimination and use criteria to ensure child-sensitive investment. These criteria should prioritise investments that ensure children’s voices are listened to and considered, and that set out specific measures to protect the rights of children, such as climate-sensitive investments in education. Funding adaptation measures that protect schools such as climate-resilient school infrastructure and early warning mechanisms can help prevent loss and damages and therefore limit disruptions to education.

### Shock responsive or adaptive social protection

In countries affected by climate-induced disasters, cash transfers, particularly when provided alongside basic services, can help to break the cycle of poverty, protect families against the economic impacts of climate shocks and ensure children’s rights are fulfilled. Cash assistance can help children from low-income households return to school and prevent dropout by reducing economic pressures that may force children into work.<sup>25</sup> It can also help prevent girls from dropping out of school, which is both a cause and consequence of child marriage.

### “It is very hard to learn when the sun is hot” - Mohamed, 14-year-old boy and Shukri, 14-year-old girl, Somalia



“Climate changes causes many negative impacts to us and the entire community. For example, when the sun is too hot because of cutting down trees and clearing bushes. Furthermore, our house is made of make-shift or semi-permanent buildings that don’t protect us from the hot sun.

During the cold and rainy seasons, we face lots of obstacles. Many towns in Somalia have impassable roads making it very hard for us to attend schools, visit health centres and the price of food goes up making it hard for our families to buy food. Also, our houses can’t withstand the heavy rains and anytime might be flooded. Our temporary learning space releases rainwater and during the hot and dry season it is very hot and hard to stay in it which might cause our learning to stop.”

Artwork by Mohamed and Shukri



Universal coverage of social protection for certain groups, such as universal child benefits, offers a powerful means for governments to respond to climate-related shocks. Ensuring universal child benefits are in place before a crisis hit ensures that critical financial support can rapidly reach those in need in the event of shocks, such as climate disasters.<sup>26</sup> Shock responsive social protection systems should therefore be viewed as a central component for resilience, climate adaptation, and justice.

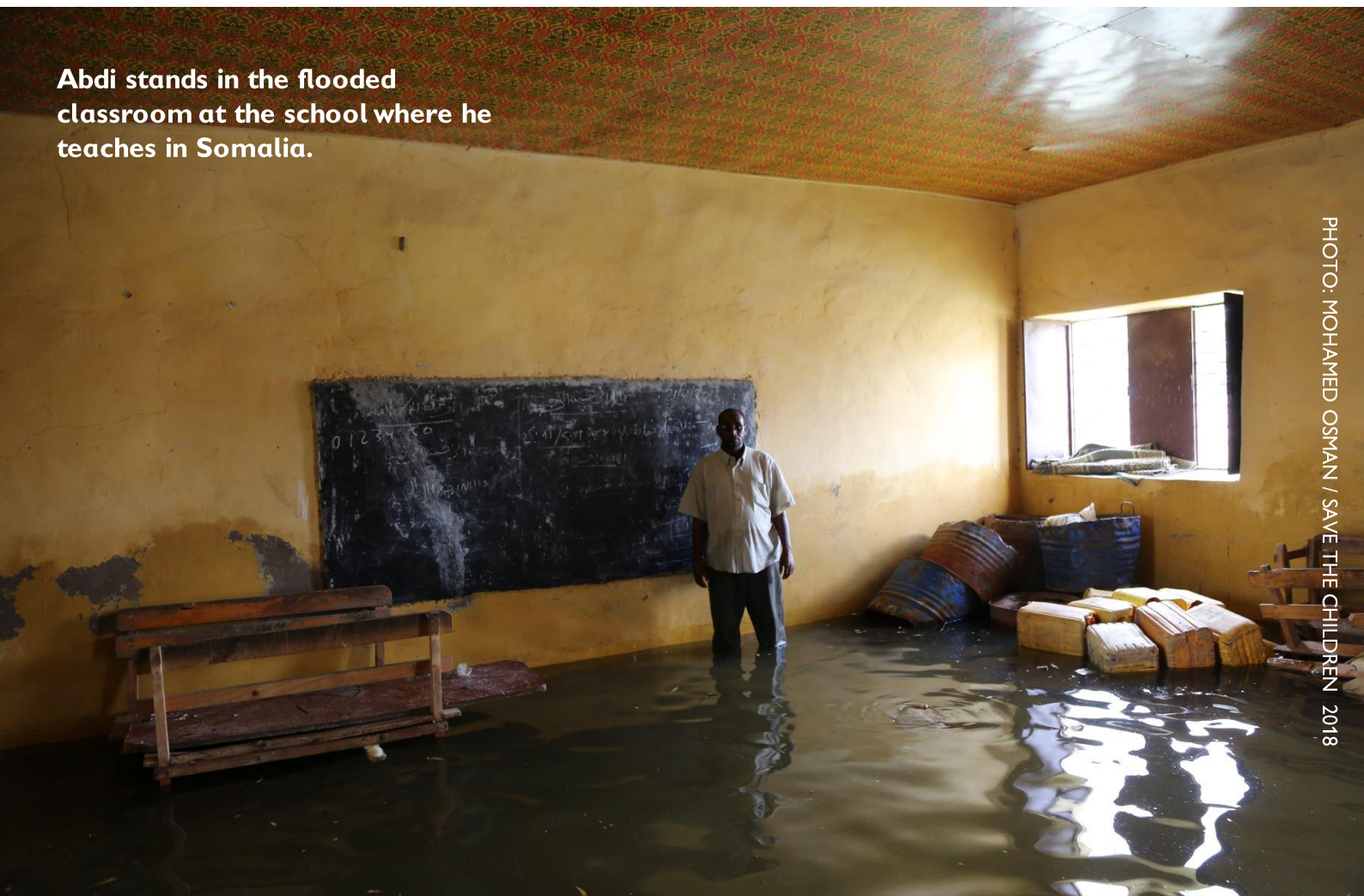
### **Act on children's demands**

Encouraging and facilitating an active role for children in defining their best interests fulfils their rights as enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and further defined in the Human Rights Council resolution on child rights and the environment. Despite the direct and disproportionate threat to their rights now and in the future, and their leadership in defending these rights in the face of crisis, such as through the Fridays for Future movement, children are routinely excluded from and overlooked in decision-making.

Children's participation in developing policies and programmes that address risks to education is vital to ensure governments design child-focussed responses and allocate resources effectively. For instance, in Burkina Faso, Save the Children supported the Ministry of Education to explore children's perceptions of barriers to education, their experiences of distance education during school closures, and their priorities for a safe return to school. The information was used as part of a joint needs' assessment led by the Education Cluster to generate updated data for emergency planning interventions, considering the COVID-19 pandemic and growing insecurity crisis.

***“We children are maybe not climate-scientists, but we know something important. We must act now!” – Emanuel, 14-year-old girl, Norway***

**Abdi stands in the flooded classroom at the school where he teaches in Somalia.**



## Calls to action

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are informed by the findings of Save the Children's *Build Forward Better* and *Born into a Climate Crisis* reports and include specific areas that must be prioritised as part of the *UN Framework Convention on Climate Change* (UNFCCC) process.

National governments – including ministries of education, social protection, health, and climate - donors, policymakers, development, and humanitarian actors must urgently take the following steps to act ahead of climate shocks to education systems and prevent disruptions to learning.

#### 1. Support preparedness and anticipatory action in education systems

- Develop and implement inter-sectoral preparedness plans, in consultation with children, parents, education authorities, teachers and education staff. The plans should consider the full breadth of school services to ensure a holistic response that fulfils children's needs, including water, sanitation and hygiene facilities, child protection reporting, referral and monitoring systems, school meals, mental health and psychosocial support, sexual and reproductive health, and rights programming, and gender-based violence training.
- Fully integrate global citizenship, climate change and environmental education and conflict-sensitive education into curricula and teacher training, as set out in the Paris Agreement, the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, to better prepare children to live in a rapidly changing climate.
- Develop national climate justice learning strategies that are gender-transformative and recognise the importance of youth leadership. Recognise and embed these climate learning strategies in climate financing, policies, and agreements, including National Action for Climate Empowerment (ACE) Strategies, and updated Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and National Adaptation Plans (NAPs).

#### 2. Protect education from the impacts of the climate emergency

- Take ambitious and urgent action now to limit warming to a maximum of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, including by rapidly phasing out the use and subsidy of fossil fuels, to curb emissions and reduce the scale, speed, and severity of future damage.
- Take an inclusive, all-hazards approach to keeping children safe in and around schools through strong policies and systems for school safety and protection, and through teachers and children having the knowledge, skills, and behaviours to keep themselves protected in and around school.
- Prioritise 'climate proofing' of educational infrastructure, conducting school infrastructure vulnerability assessments and supporting the adaptation and construction of safe schools, with consideration for the most vulnerable children.
- Ensure that Nationally Determined Contributions to climate action and National Adaptation Plans commit to making education systems gender-equal and resilient so that the most marginalised children, including girls, do not drop out of or miss school due to climate-related events.
- Identify mechanisms that enable governments to better coordinate agencies responsible for climate change adaptation and mitigation with the health and education sectors, and incentivise multisectoral approaches to localise, coordinate, and implement this agenda.

#### 3. Rapidly scale up finance for mitigation, adaptation, and anticipatory action

- Increase climate financing to fulfil the unmet pledge to mobilise at least \$100 billion annually by 2020, allocating at least 50% of investment to adaptation, resilience, and disaster risk reduction measures, including within the education sector, with a focus on reaching children most impacted by inequality and discrimination.
- Support new and additional climate finance to urgently address rapidly escalating loss and damage, as well as the creation of a new climate finance mechanisms for loss and damage by 2023.

- Scale up social protection systems to address the increasing impacts of climate shocks on children and their families, with the ambition to move to universal child benefits over time to improve child well-being and build resilience.
- Donors must ensure that the Global Partnership for Education’s US\$5 billion 2021-2025 replenishment is fully funded to ensure partner countries have the resources to support preparedness and anticipatory action in education systems.
- Donors must make significant pledges to help Education Cannot Wait raise \$400 million to its global fund and \$1 billion in-country to support multi-year resilience programs by the end of 2022.

#### 4. Support child participation in education and climate policy decision making

- Ensure children are supported to participate in decisions taken by their schools, communities, and governments to ensure their safe, continued access to education during and after crises.
- Ensure that children have access to age-, language-, gender- and ability appropriate information and education on the climate and environmental crisis through formal and non-formal education to ensure that children have the necessary skills and knowledge to build resilience and adaptive capacity, and to empower children to influence, promote, and create a more sustainable future.
- Enable children and youth, particularly girls and young women to claim their seat at the table by including them on official national delegations and/or meaningfully engaging them in all aspects of COP26 including national briefings, meetings, panels, high-level processes, and can observe relevant negotiations. Refer to *A COP Fit for Children for more guidance*.<sup>27</sup>

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Cover photo: Miranda, 11, lost her classroom and her home when Cyclone Idai hit Mozambique. (Photo: Saman Saidi/Save the Children)

<sup>1</sup> UNICEF, 2021. [Press release: One billion children at ‘extremely high risk’ of the impacts of the climate crisis.](#)

<sup>2</sup> Thiery, W., Lange, S., Rogelj, J., Schleussner, C.-F., Gudmundsson, L., Seneviratne, S. I., Frieler, K., Emanuel, K., Geiger, T., Bresch, D. N., Zhao, F., Willner, S. N., Büchner, M., and Volkholz, J. and the ISMIP modelling team, 2021. [The kids aren’t alright.](#)

<sup>3</sup> Save the Children, 2021. [Born into a Climate Crisis.](#)

<sup>4</sup> Their World, 2018. [Safe Schools: The Hidden Crisis.](#)

<sup>5</sup> UNESCO, 2019. [Factsheet on out-of-school children.](#)

<sup>6</sup> UN Conference of the Parties, 2013. [Report of the Conference of the Parties on its eighteenth session.](#)

<sup>7</sup> Save the Children’s Risks to Education Index identified eight countries with the greatest risks to schooling: Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, Somalia, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Mali, and Libya. Closely followed by Syria, and Yemen.

See Save the Children, 2021. [Build Forward Better: How the global community must act now to secure children’s learning in crises.](#)

<sup>8</sup> KK Rigaud et al (2018) Groundswell: Preparing for internal climate migration World Bank

<sup>9</sup> UNICEF. [Web page: Climate Mobility and Children.](#)

<sup>10</sup> Malala Fund, 2021. [A greener, fairer future: Why leaders need to invest in climate and girls’ education.](#)

<sup>11</sup> Harvard Kennedy School, 2018. [When the heat is on, student learning suffers.](#)

<sup>12</sup> University of Manchester, 2020. [Reducing air pollution levels could improve children’s ability to learn.](#)

<sup>13</sup> Sunyer J, Esnaola M, Alvarez-Pedrerol M, Forns J, Rivas I, López-Vicente M, et al. (2015) [Association between Traffic-Related Air Pollution in Schools and Cognitive Development in Primary School Children: A Prospective Cohort Study.](#)

<sup>14</sup> Resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council on 7 October 2020. [Rights of the child: realizing the rights of the child through a healthy environment.](#)

<sup>15</sup> Brookings, 2021. [A new green learning agenda: Approaches to quality education for climate action.](#)

<sup>16</sup> UNESCO, 2016. [Education for people and planet: Creating sustainable futures for all.](#)

<sup>17</sup> Cordero EC, Centeno D, Todd AM, 2020. [The role of climate change education on individual lifetime carbon emissions.](#)

<sup>18</sup> UNESCO, 2021. [Learn for our planet: What you need to know.](#)

<sup>19</sup> Save the Children, 2021. [Build Forward Better.](#)

<sup>20</sup> UNESCO. [Crisis-sensitive educational planning.](#)

<sup>21</sup> ODI, 2019. [Anticipatory crisis financing and action: concepts, initiatives, and evidence.](#)

<sup>22</sup> ODI, Start Network, 2019. [Analysing the gaps in the humanitarian and disaster risk financing landscape.](#)

<sup>23</sup> The New Humanitarian, 2021. [The push to anticipate crises gains steam.](#)

<sup>24</sup> United Nations Environment Programme, 2020. [Adaptation Gap Report 2020.](#)

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> ODI, 2016. [Cash transfers: What does the evidence say?](#)

<sup>27</sup> Save the Children International, 2020. [Universal Child Benefits \(UCBs\): A foundation to end child poverty.](#)

<sup>28</sup> Save the Children, 2021. [A COP Fit for Children: How to support children’s participation.](#)