**2024 NATIONAL CHILDREN’S SUMMIT ON**

**CLIMATE CHANGE AND CHILD RIGHTS**

***Theme: Empowering Children's Voices: Addressing the Climate Crisis and Child Rights***

1. **Background**

The National Children's Summit on Climate Justice took place at Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources (LUANAR) from September 11-12, 2024. Hosted by Save the Children and partner organizations, the event drew esteemed attendees, including Minister of Gender, Community Development and Social Welfare, Hon. Jean Sendeza, seating on behalf of the Principal Secretary for Natural Resource and Climate Change Madam Emma Mbalame; LUANAR Director of Research and Innovation Dr Kamoto, The University Registrar Philip Kaonda, Civil Society Network on Climate Change (CISONECC) National Coordinator, Mr Julius Ng’oma and the National Youth Network on Climate Change Executive Director, Mr Dominc Nyasulu.

Over 150 children from diverse backgrounds including those with disabilities and from refugee camps shared heartfelt testimonials on climate change's devastating impact on their education, health, and well-being, exemplified by Cyclone Freddy. They presented recommendations to the COP29 presidency, Malawi government, COP delegates, NGOs, and the public, emphasizing swift climate action, increased representation, climate education, and protection of child rights. Their passionate advocacy underscored the urgent need to address climate change's disproportionate impact on children, ahead of COP29.

To underscore the importance of environmental conservation, the children took a symbolic walk through the barren landscape of Bunda Mountain, a stark reminder of the devastating effects of unchecked deforestation

1. **Summit Objectives**

* Elevate children's voices on climate change and child rights
* Develop actionable solutions, recommendations and child-led statement for climate action and child rights

1. **Keynote addresses and presentations**

*The Minister of Gender, Community Development and Social Welfare, Jean Sendeza*

The Minister emphasized the urgency of addressing the climate crisis, particularly its devastating impacts on children. She underscored the importance of amplifying children’s voices in climate discussions, as children are at the frontline of the crisis, facing disruptions in education, health challenges and food insecurity due to extreme weather events. The Minister also assured that the government is committed to integrating children's perspectives into the national position for COP29 and other international forums. She called for collaborative action between government, civil society and international partners to ensure the protection of children's rights in the face of climate change.

*Director of Programme Operation, Partnerships and Awards, Dr. Chakufwa Munthali*

Representing Save the Children, Dr. Munthali, echoed the sentiment that the climate crisis is also a child rights crisis. He highlighted the role of children as change makers and their rightful place in decision making processes. He urged stakeholders to prioritize climate financing for children, especially in addressing loss and damage and emphasized the need for urgent global action to limit warming below 1.5°C.

*Director of Technical Services, Ministry of Natural Resources and Climate, Emma Mbalame*

The Director, representing the Ministry, highlighted the critical importance of engaging children in climate policy decisions. He underscored the government's commitment to revising national strategies to reflect children’s issues, ensuring their rights to a safe environment are protected. The Director praised the summit for empowering children to be active participants in shaping their futures.

Child testimonies

“*It was last year in February when it rained for three days non-stop because of Cyclone Freddy. Within a short period, the whole area flooded, my 3 siblings were taken away with water, and the rest of the family was displaced to school as a temporary shelter. My education was affected as I stopped going to school. With the support I received from JCED, the organization has helped me to continue with my studies at Providence Secondary School. Lastly, I am urging the government and non-governmental organizations to end the environmental degradation practices’’* *Chiradzulo.*

*“Due to Cyclone Freddy I lost both of my parents, I take care of my little siblings which has caused me to drop out of school. I lack food, clothes, and school funds. I failed to write end-of-term examinations due to lack of funds. I am looking for people with goodwill or organizations to help me together with my siblings, if my parents were alive, I would not have been in this situation’’.*  *Chiradzulo.*

*‘“Climate change has caused water scarcity problems in our area, and we children are heavily affected. Teachers refuse to stay in our area because of lack of water, as a result, our education has been affected since our school was opened no child from our area has been selected to a national secondary school. As young girls, we are failing to take care of ourselves due to lack of water, and lastly, we are failing to take care of planted trees due to lack of water’’. Blantyre*

1. **Child-led dialogues on issues**

Presentations made by children emphasized the severe impact of human activities such as deforestation, industrial processes, and emissions are some of the causes of climate change. This crisis affects their education, health, and nutrition, exposing them to risks like floods, climate-sensitive diseases, respiratory issues, and malnutrition.

Climate change and education

Impacts of the climate crisis include: drought, floods, extreme temperature fluctuations, and global warming.

Children in Malawi are affected in the following ways:

* Rise in Orphanhood: Over 2000 people were killed and half a million displaced during the 2023 Cyclone Freddy resulting in increased numbers of orphaned children in the country.
* Decreased Concentration: A study conducted by Save the Children reveals that children that were affected by Cyclone Freddy struggled to associate with peers, participate and concentrate in school activities
* Inadequate and unsafe school infrastructure: Floods damage or destroy educational facilities and materials hindering access to quality education. Many children lost their school materials
* Classrooms being used as evacuation centers during disasters hereby infringing children’s right to education

Climate change and child labour

Climate change exacerbates child labour, forcing:

* Children to cultivate in large farms for survival especially when in camps
* Children to scavenge for and selling charcoal
* Children to scavenge for domestic work in exchange for food and shelter
* Girls to work extra and fetch water for the men and boys in camps
* Fall victims of child trafficking and exploitation

Climate change and food security & nutrition

Children defined food security as the availability of sufficient food which has all nutrients.

Impact on Children

* According to research on ‘Impacts of Cyclone Freddy on Children’ by Save the Children many children in Malawi lack food. Food insecurity (as a result of droughts, crops being destroyed by floods) leads to malnutrition and death, violating the right to health and life of children.
* Lack of food forces children to drop out of school to search for food, hindering the right to education.
* Hunger affects concentration in class, resulting in poor performance in class.

Climate change and mental health

Effects on Children

* Climate Change and Trauma: Lifelong Impacts on Children's Mental Health
* Witnessing traumatic events (e.g., losing loved ones during climate disasters like cyclones) can have lasting psychological effects.
* Disruption of the ozone layer causes physical health issues, such as headaches, especially in summer.
* Climate crises disrupt family unity, depriving children of their right to play and socialize.

Emotional and Social Consequences

* Loneliness and isolation due to displacement and separation from friends and loved ones.
* Loss of childhood experiences and memories due to trauma and disruption.
* Difficulty focusing, impacting educational and personal development.
* Long-term Impacts on Well-being and Future
* Deprived childhood experiences affect upbringing and future prospects.
* Increased vulnerability to mental health issues, such as anxiety and depression.
* Inter generational trauma and emotional scars.

Climate change and water

Children in Malawi have identified several water-related issues that affect their daily lives. Key Challenges include:

* Inadequate Access to Safe Water: Insufficient access to clean drinking water, leading to water-borne diseases
* Water Extremes: Too much water causes floods, leading to famine, death, and displacement, while droughts cause crop failure and famine
* Limited Water Infrastructure: Inadequate boreholes at school and home, long distances to get water, and poor sanitation in schools
* Health Consequences: Water-related illnesses like diarrhea, sneezing, and coughing

These challenges have severe consequences, including:

* Death and injury
* Inadequate quality education
* Increased absenteeism in schools
* Poor performance of children

To address these issues, children are demanding:

* Government led enhanced afforestation and reforestation initiatives to reduce floods and reduce mudslide impacts
* Government should construct more water Infrastructure
* Construction of more safe water treatment systems
* Everyone should invest and embrace technology and innovations like water harvesting
* Flood Response: Government should enforce settlement policy and punish offenders and move people from flood prone areas
* Government should invest in technology during response to enhance timely response
* Conservation Farming: Promoting crop rotation and other sustainable farming practices

Climate change and child protection

The following are the challenges associated with child protection and climate change:

* Child labour: When there is a natural disaster such as floods children are employed to support their families or themselves.
* Displacement: During natural disasters, families relocate to find shelter, affecting children's education.
* Sexual Harassment and Exploitation: In camps, children are sexually harassed and exploited to receive food items.
* Forced marriages: Natural disasters force children to get married to be able to support themselves and their parents.

Effects

* School dropout: during natural disasters, schools are washed away with water, and used as camps, leading to dropout.
* Malnutrition: Due to displacement caused by natural disasters, families find it hard to find proper food for their children and sometimes they eat once a day which has negative nutrition impact on children
* Mental health: Natural disasters cause panic, sleeping disorders, etc. amongst children later cause mental health diseases.
* Stress and anxiety: Natural disasters cause shocks in children which leads to stress and anxiety in children.

Climate change and housing & shelter

CHALLENGES

* Loss of life- children’s lives are lost when they lose their houses to floods, earthquakes, and other disasters caused by climate change.
* Displacement- disasters can cause families to relocate temporarily to evacuation camps, in some cases homes are permanently destroyed causing permanent displacement. For children, displacement can disrupt their education, social networks, and sense of security.
* Loss of property: most homes are destroyed during natural disasters leading to loss of life and property

Effects

* School dropout: Children drop out of school when they are displaced into camps and most schools are used as evacuation camps
* Mental health: Surviving a disaster can leave children with psychological trauma, as the loss and disruption create a sense of insecurity. This often leads to increased fear, anxiety, and long-term emotional distress
* Lack of care: families become overwhelmingly focused on rebuilding their homes which may result in reduced attention and care for children
* Orphanhood: disasters can result in loss of life leaving children orphaned without caregivers. This increases their vulnerability; they may face instability.
* Injuries: Injuries: during disasters, children experience various degrees of injuries, some leaving them permanently disabled

Climate change and energy

Challenges

* Unwillingness to stop the use of charcoal and firewood: the government is paying little attention to banning the use of charcoal and firewood which is leading to mass deforestation.
* Expensive renewable energy: the government is paying little attention to subsidizing renewable energy such as solar power electricity should be available in every school.

Effects

* Respiratory Diseases: Due to excessive cutting down of trees children are suffering from respiratory diseases due to lack of fresh air.
* Loss of trees: cutting down trees excessively is causing loss of forests and skin diseases amongst children due to sun waves.

**5. Issues highlighted under each right:**

* Right to Education: Children are increasingly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, which disrupts their education, health, and overall well-being. As climate-related disasters and economic pressures intensify, children are experiencing heightened stress and anxiety, contributing to school dropouts and poor mental health. During recent discussions, it was highlighted that children are not only deprived of their right to education but are also exposed to significant risks, including contracting STIs, HIV, and AIDS. Additionally, there is a growing concern over the violation of children's rights to education and freedom of choice, as many are coerced into early marriages due to financial hardships and societal pressures exacerbated by climate change. These challenges call for urgent multi-sectoral interventions to protect children’s rights and ensure they receive the support they need to thrive despite the growing climate crisis.
* The right to life: right to life is fundamentally threatened by climate change, with children bearing a disproportionate burden due to their vulnerability. Extreme weather events like cyclones have tragically resulted in the loss of many young lives, highlighting the urgent need to protect children from these climate impacts. Droughts also pose severe risks, depriving children of access to clean and safe drinking water, leading to waterborne diseases that further endanger their health and survival. As one of the most vulnerable groups, children face compounded risks that threaten not only their immediate safety but also their long-term development and well-being. Addressing these challenges requires urgent action, including strengthening early warning systems, investing in resilient infrastructure, and ensuring access to essential resources like clean water to safeguard the lives and futures of children in the face of climate change.
* The right to play: this has been highlighted that children's physical, emotional, and social development are crucial, yet it is often overlooked in the context of climate change. Children should be given ample opportunities to play and thrive in safe, supportive environments. Positive parenting methods that encourage play and emotional expression are essential, especially in times of crisis. Parents/guardians must provide equal treatment to all children, ensuring that each child feels valued and supported.

**6. Actions currently being done by stakeholders**

The Human Rights Council sitting in 2021 under the resolution number ([A/HRC/RES/48/13](https://undocs.org/A/HRC/RES/48/13)) and the General Assembly sitting in 2022 under the resolution number ([A/RES/76/300](https://undocs.org/A/RES/76/300)) recognized the the right to a safe and clean environment as a fundamental human right that is internationally recognized. The declaration imposed obligations to the state to take necessary measures in ensuring that this right is safeguarded at all times by the actions of all players within their spaces. As such, the state becomes a primary duty bearer with other stakeholders playing complementary roles.

The state therefore, through the Ministry of forestry and Natural resources, Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban development, Ministry of Agriculture, the Department of Meteorological services, Ministry of Natural Resource and climate change, Ministry of energy and Mining, the Malawi environmental Protection Authority and others play a critical role in development of legislation, policies, strategies and programmes to mitigate the negative impacts of climate change. For example, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Climate Change is currently reviewing the current Strategic Plan to develop a successor plan that aligns national priorities to the 2063 Sustainable Development Goals.

Apart from government efforts through its ministries and development, the civil society plays a complementary role to government through various programmatic actions that include interventions, monitoring, and advocacy on legislative and policy reform and enforcement of existing laws. The climate change and environmental civic space include Civil society Network on Climate Change, National Youth Network on Climate Change, SOS Children’s Village, Jesuit Centre for Ecology and Development, and the Malawi Human Rights Commission among others.

Efforts to mitigate climate change and crisis are also supported by the international organizations and development partners that include, Save the Children International, Plan International, World Vision Malawi, UNICEF, USAID, Action Aid, and UNDP.

The academia through the Malawi University of Business and Applied Sciences (MUBAS), the University of Malawi (UNIMA) and the Lilongwe University for Agriculture and Natural Resources (LUANAR) plays a critical role in research into matters of climate change and climate crisis. Apart from the research and documentation, the academia has various courses focusing on agriculture and the environment.

All the mentioned stakeholders have a range of interventions that include response and prevention of natural disasters, building resilience of future climate events, adoption of climate-smart technologies, use of renewable energy, natural resource management, research and documentation on environmental changes and the impact on the welfare and development of children, promoting awareness and advocacy on climate justice, adoption of agroecology as opposed to dependance of industrial products.

**7. Recommendations**

* There is a need to create avenues that empower children to speak out boldly and courageously. In doing so, we are not merely nurturing the leaders of tomorrow; we are cultivating a generation of change-makers today. Their energy, creativity, and passion are vital ingredients for the solutions we so desperately need.
* There is a need to recognize that children are at the frontlines of the climate crisis. The increasing frequency of droughts, floods, and extreme weather events disrupt children’s education, threaten their access to food and water, and undermine their health and overall well-being.
* There is a need to make sure that the voices, ideas, and aspirations of children must inform our policies and actions.
* To make sure that the solutions that are being developed in dealing with climate change in the country protect both the planet and the rights of every child who calls it home
* There is a need to enforce laws in making sure that children’s rights are protected.
* Ensuring that infrastructure is climate resilient. This is crucial to safeguarding communities, especially vulnerable groups like children, from the adverse effects of climate change. People should not construct their houses near areas prone to disasters e.g. mountains and river banks
* There is a need of enforcing early warning system
* There is a need to make sure that children attend different platforms that can make their voices be heard.
* We must have children’s pavilions where suitable at COP and any other gathering; this will help them to voice out their own grievances during different meetings concerning climate change.
* Afforestation and reafforestation must be promoted. CSOs, Private sector, Government and non-governmental organizations should provide trees for afforestation in order to reduce floods
* New energy technologies should be affordable. New cooking technologies should be subsidized.
* The Ministry of Home Affairs and Public Security in collaboration with the Forestry Department should make sure that people are not cutting down trees aimlessly.
* Government and Organisations must ensure that displaced children should be supported. One way is to ensure that those children affected can be provided safer homes. This is to ensure that such children are adopted so that they have a family
* There is a need of promoting civic educating communities where child labour is high.
* Government through the Ministry of Education should reinstate woodlots and orchards in schools

**8. Call to action**

To protect children affected by climate-related disasters, it is both the responsibility of governments and NGOs to invest in their well-being. We call on these institutions to prioritize children’s welfare by establishing climate change and disaster-focused, child-centered funding. This financial commitment is essential for turning the cited above into action. Without it, we will continue discussing the same issues for years to come. Let’s act now to ensure tangible progress in safeguarding vulnerable children and providing them with the essential services and protections they deserve.

Recommendations:

* Government should construct more climate resilient educational infrastructures which can withstand climate -related disasters in cyclone and climate change related affected areas
* Government and NGOs should provide more scholarship opportunities to children affected by cyclone Freddy or any climate change related disaster to continue their education.

Recommendations:

* Community leaders and CSOs should invest in Civic and parental education, while also promoting awareness campaigns on child labour and children’s rights.
* Government should lead in enhancing collaboration among communities, organizations, and government agencies and departments
* Government, courts and Malawi police should enforce laws and punishment for offenders
* Government should lead in provision of free seedlings for reforestation

Children's Demands to Address Food Security and Nutrition

* Establish Sustainable Food Sources: Children should establish woodlots and orchards
* Government Support: Government should provide tree seedlings to people to plant
* Enforce Climate Laws: Ministry of Natural Resources and Climate Change should enforce laws against violators
* Climate Awareness: Government should increase awareness about climate change
* Implement Children's Voices: Government and duty bearers should implement children's suggestions, rather than just listening

Recommendations:

* Children recommend Governments and organizations provide safe homes for displaced children, such as through orphanages or adoption.
* Children are calling for positive parenting and equal treatment to help them cope up with traumas that come with climate change.
* Children who are affected would like to be receiving counseling and therapy to cope up with the trauma.
* Children recommend the global community to continue contributing to the donations like medical equipment to support their health
* Children recommend provision of recreational materials during emergencies for them to continue exercising their right to play