



ACERWC

African Committee of Experts on
the Rights and Welfare of the Child



**WORKING GROUP
ON CHILDREN'S RIGHTS
& CLIMATE CHANGE**

FACTSHEET ON THE IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON SEAS AND OCEANS IN CONNECTION WITH CHILDREN'S RIGHTS IN AFRICA

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1. Oceans and seas: Africa's Frontier for Development Under Threat from Climate Change

Africa is surrounded by the Mediterranean Sea, the Red Sea, the Indian Ocean, and the Atlantic Ocean. Of the 55 African states, 39 are coastal states having access to the continent's 30,500KM long coastline.ⁱ Africa is also a continent that is blessed with several major rivers and lakes.

The far-reaching significance of oceans and seas to human life and planet earth is undisputed. Ocean generates about 50% of the oxygen we need, absorbs 30% carbon dioxide emissions and 90% of the excess heat generated by these emissions.ⁱⁱ For

Africa, its oceans and seas are critical for coastal livelihoods and economic activities. About 90% of Africa's imports and exports are conducted by sea.ⁱⁱⁱ The opportunities offered by the blue economy, be it fisheries, petroleum, tourism, maritime transport are huge.

Despite the benefits and opportunities, climate change (through sea level rise, storm surges, flooding) and human activity (through illegal overfishing, piracy, human and drug trafficking, rapid coastal population growth) pose considerable threats to Africa's Ocean ecosystems, coastal and marine tourism, maritime security and above all to the safety, survival, and protection of its children.^{iv}

2. Impact of climate change on oceans and seas: What it means to Africa's children and their rights.

Oceans and seas are under increasing threat by the effects of climate change. As the ocean warms up from excess heat and energy due to climate change, the impact manifests itself through ocean acidification, rising sea levels, flooding, storm surges, coastal erosion, and landslides as well as loss of marine diversity among others.^v In these circumstances, it is the low-lying coastal regions and their communities, especially children, who are the most affected. Sea level rise, for example, is feared to affect the survival of large coastal cities situated at sea level such as Lagos, Luanda, Dar es Salaam, Alexandria, Abidjan, Cape Town, and Casablanca where children are amongst those bearing the impact the most.^{vi} The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC) Sixth Assessment Report suggests that, by 2030, up to 116 million Africans could live in big and densely populated coastal cities that are exposed to sea level rise.^{vii} Besides, the impacts of climate change affect the livelihoods of coastal communities, especially vulnerable women and children. Because of ocean warming, weak governance and illegal fishing, for example, the livelihoods of millions of people who work on fisheries and its related processing sectors, in countries such as Madagascar^{viii} and Mozambique,^{ix} will be significantly affected.

Africa Day of Seas and Oceans

Acknowledging the significant opportunities and challenges of the marine and coastal ecosystem, in 2015, the African Union declared Africa Day of Seas and Oceans to be commemorated on July 25th every year. The decade 2015-2025 was also retained as the "Decade of African Seas and Oceans" with the aim to raise awareness of Africa's maritime opportunities as well as challenges and initiate the required actions. Every year on the 25th of July, Africa commemorates African Day of Seas and oceans.

The impacts of climate change are felt mostly in the coastal areas where there has been a rapid population growth over the last decades. By 2035, it is estimated that approximately 143 million more people will be living on or near African coasts.^x Africa's small island developing states (SIDS)^{xi}, which rely on oceanic and fisheries resources for economic development, food security and livelihoods, are especially one of the most vulnerable areas to climate change and extreme weather events. Most small island developing states (SIDS) also have higher exposure to the risk of sea level rise and coastal flooding which have disproportionate impact on children.^{xii}

Climate shocks undermine children's rights to access to clean air, food and safe water; to education, housing, freedom from exploitation, and even their right to survive.^{xiii} These impacts are even more pronounced on children living near oceans and seas, such as in coastal areas and island states where the frequency and severity of climate shocks are much higher. With the increase in ocean temperature, the intensity of storms, hurricanes and other tropical cyclones in these areas have increased affecting millions of people, especially children who often bear the brunt of the worst impacts of climate change and extreme weather events.

With the rising sea levels as well as storm surges and cyclones, the risk of coastal flooding along Africa's coasts is also increasing. Globally, approximately 240 million children are highly exposed to coastal flooding.^{xiv} Given Africa's vast marine and coastal areas, the number of children affected in these areas in the continent is likely to be significant. Approximately 10 million children live around Lake Victoria, which is prone to flooding.^{xv} Coastal flooding puts homes and infrastructure, especially those in low-lying and densely populated coastal zone at increased exposure to damage, destruction and submersion. Across large African river basins, the frequency of 100-year flood events is projected to increase to 1 in 40 years at 1.5°C and 2°C global warming.^{xvi}

These impacts of climate change on oceans and seas threaten the enjoyment by children of their rights to health, life, food, water and

sanitation, education, housing, culture, and development, among others.

3. State Party Obligations to the Protection of Children's Rights in the Context of Climate Change and its Impact on Seas and Oceans

African States have obligations to put the rights of children at the centre of their policies and decision makings on the protection of marine environment.

- **Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want** recognizes the huge potential of the Blue Economy as a catalyst of the continent's socio-economic transformation. It emphasizes the growth of an Africa-wide shipping industry, the development of sea, river and lake transport and fishing, and exploitation and benefits from deep sea mineral and other resources.
- **The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR)**, which is also applicable to children, recognises and imposes obligations regarding people's right to "a general satisfactory environment favourable to their development."
- **The Preamble of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC)** explicitly acknowledges the negative effect of "natural disasters" on children in Africa.
- **The 2050 Africa's Integrated Maritime Strategy (AIMS2050)** which was adopted

by AU in 2015 provides an important framework and roadmap for the protection and sustainable use of Africa's maritime resources. One of the key identified actions in the Strategy is the tackling of trafficking of persons especially children and women.

- **The Africa Blue Economy Strategy of 2018** is yet another key instrument that seeks to provide guidance to continental organs, RECs, RMs and Member States on the development and the utilization of Africa's blue economy in a sustainable way. The strategy prioritises to the importance of strengthening resilience and reducing vulnerability of communities (such as children) to climate change and stresses the importance of empowering women and youth in fisheries and aquaculture to benefit from the resources.

- **African Charter on Maritime Security and Safety and Development in Africa (Lomé Charter)** is another continental effort to encourage and coordinate efforts by African states to attend to maritime security, safety, and development. AU Member States have agreed to develop and implement sound migration policies aimed at eliminating trafficking in human beings, especially women and children, as well as smuggling of migrants by sea.

- **Advisory Opinion of the International Tribunal on the Law of the Seas (ITLOS)**

on climate change and international law recognized that greenhouse gas emissions are a form of marine pollution and noted that states have an obligation to protect the marine environment from climate change impacts and ocean acidification. The advisory opinion is key in the implementation of the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, in the context of oceans and seas.

States, therefore, must protect children's rights from the negative impacts of climate change in the context of oceans and seas.

Disappearing cities of Africa

Various studies warn of the risk for partial or total submersion of low laying coastal African cities due to rising sea level and inadequate adaptive capacity.

At the current pace of global warming, it is projected that, among others, Lagos, Nigeria (population estimate 15.3 million) could be either partially or totally submerged or experience severe flooding by 2050, Alexandria, Egypt (5.2 million) by 2030, Mombasa, Kenya (1.2 million) by 2040, Dakar, Senegal (1.1 million) by 2040, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire (4.7 million) by 2050, Port Harcourt, Nigeria (1.1 million) by 2040, Banjul, The Gambia (31,000) by 2030, Lomé, Togo (1.1 million) by 2040, and Conakry, Guinea (1.6 million) by 2040. Find out more [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).

Endnotes

ⁱGate, N. 2023. Ocean governance in Africa and Europe – an introduction. Africa Europe Foundation. February 6, 2023. Available at: <https://www.africaeuropefoundation.org/stories/ocean-governance-in-africa-and-europe-an-introduction>

ⁱⁱUnited Nations. The ocean – the world’s greatest ally against climate change. Available at: <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/science/climate-issues/ocean>

ⁱⁱⁱAU. 2012. 2050 Africa’s Integrated Maritime Strategy. Accessed at: http://cggrps.org/wp-content/uploads/2050-AIM-Strategy_EN.pdf

^{iv}United Nations. Economic Commission for Africa; African Union Commission (2022). African Union climate change and resilient development strategy and action plan (2022-2032). Addis Ababa. UNECA. Available at: <https://hdl.handle.net/10855/47738>

^vUnited Nations. How is climate change impacting the world’s ocean. Climate Action. Available at: <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/science/climate-issues/ocean-impacts>

^{vi} Africa Centre for Strategic Studies. 2022. “Rising Sea Levels Besieging Africa’s Booming Coastal Cities.” Infographic, November 8, 2022. Available at: <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/rising-sea-levels-besieging-africas-booming-coastal-cities-lagos-dakar-alexandria-maputo-nile/>

^{vii}IPCC. 2022: Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [H.-O. Pörtner, D.C. Roberts, M. Tignor, E.S. Poloczanska, K. Mintenbeck, A. Alegría, M. Craig, S. Langsdorf, S. Lösschke, V. Möller, A. Okem, B. Rama (eds.)]. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK and New York, NY, USA, 3056 pp., doi:[10.1017/9781009325844](https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009325844).

^{viii}In Madagascar, artisanal (small scale) fisheries contributed about 7% of the gross domestic product (GDP) and directly supported the livelihoods of 1.5 million people.

^{ix}In Mozambique, the fisheries sector account for 4% of the GDP, supporting 5 million people.

^xAli, M., Elham. 2022. “Taking charge of Africa’s oceans and blue resources.” Op-Ed. Africa Renewal. 23 June 2022. Available at: <https://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/june-2022/taking-charge-africa%E2%80%99s-oceans-and-blue-resources>

^{xi}Cape Verde, Comoros, Guinea-Bissau, Mauritius, Sao Tome and Principe, and Seychelles (Source: UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs. About Small Island Developing States (SIDS), accessed at: <https://sdgs.un.org/smallislands/about-small-island-developing-states>

^{xii}UNICEF. 2021. The Climate Crisis is a Child Rights Crisis: Introducing the Children’s Climate Risk Index. New York: United Nations Children’s Fund. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/media/105376/file/UNICEF-climate-crisis-child-rights-crisis.pdf>

^{xiii}Ibid

^{xiv}UNICEF. 2021. The Climate Crisis is a Child Rights Crisis: Introducing the Children’s Climate Risk Index. New York: United Nations Children’s Fund. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/media/105376/file/UNICEF-climate-crisis-child-rights-crisis.pdf>.

^{xv}Godfrey, S. and Tunhuma, F.A. 2020. The Climate Crisis: Climate Change Impacts, Trends and Vulnerabilities of Children in Sub Sahara Africa, United Nations Children’s Fund Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office, Nairobi. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/climate-change-impacts-trends-and-vulnerabilities-children-sub-saharan-africa>

^{xvi}Africa Centre for Strategic Studies. 2022. Rising Sea Levels Besieging Africa’s Booming Coastal Cities. Available at: <https://africacenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Rising-Sea-Levels-ENG.pdf>