



# ON THE EDGE

## Why bold action is needed now to protect Asian children's future from the climate and inequality crisis

### Summary

Asia has a vital role to play in global efforts to address the climate emergency. The region is projected to be responsible for almost half of the global emissions by 2030. Simultaneously, it is one of the regions that will be the hardest hit by the climate emergency, with children bearing the brunt. Their young bodies are more vulnerable to its impacts. They also have longer to live and cope with a worsening climate emergency than adults. Children affected by inequality and discrimination are, and will continue to be, the worst affected.

In 2022, Save the Children carried out extensive consultations with over **40,000 children** in eight countries in Asia, as part of a global listening project. Our aim was to understand their experiences of the climate emergency and inequality issues and listen to their ideas on the changes needed in the region and beyond to build a greener and more just planet. Children told us

that the climate emergency was eroding their rights across the region and increasing economic and gender inequalities.

This briefing presents new analysis showing that **349 million children** in Asia are both living in poverty and exposed to high climate risk. It draws on the rich insights and ideas that children shared with us, as well as findings and recommendations from Save the Children's global report, *Generation Hope: 2.4 billion reasons to end the global climate and inequality crisis*, to formulate five key entry points for governments to drive systemic change and tackle the dual climate and inequality crisis.

The time for incremental action has run out. Only through bold, urgent measures can the lives, hopes and futures of millions of children in Asia be preserved.



Save the Children

# I The climate and inequality crisis

66 Climate change isn't something people get to choose to believe or not: it's happening. 99

12-year-old boy, India

At the time of writing, the lives of 33 million people – including 16 million children – have been affected by unusually severe monsoon floods in Pakistan, described by its government and the United Nations as a “climate catastrophe”. Global heating is estimated to have increased the rainfall intensity by up to 50%.<sup>1</sup> Just three months before the floods submerged one third of Pakistan, a deadly heatwave scorched much of the country, with temperatures regularly exceeding 50°C.

Heatwaves are becoming more common across the region, with South Asia and China experiencing record-high heatwaves in 2022.<sup>2,3</sup> Warming seas have increased the intensity of typhoons that strike East and Southeast Asia by 12–15% and the frequency of the most powerful and destructive storms has at least doubled in the last four decades.<sup>4</sup> Economic and human losses from climate-induced disasters have been on the rise. Extreme weather events triggered by climate change have caused losses of at least USD 408 billion on an average every year in China, Japan, and India alone.<sup>5</sup> In September 2022, the United Nations estimated the economic damage from Pakistan’s unprecedented monsoon floods at approximately USD 30 billion.<sup>6</sup>

Climate-induced displacement and migration is also on the rise with the number of people forced to migrate within their countries in South Asia estimated to reach 40 million by 2050.<sup>7</sup> In Bangladesh, children displaced by extreme weather events are being pushed to drop out of schools to enter the workforce<sup>8</sup> while girls are being forced into early marriage as families struggle to cope with loss of livelihoods due to the climate crisis.<sup>9</sup>

The climate emergency and inequality are two sides of the same coin. The growth in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions over the past 25 years has been driven largely by the high carbon footprint lifestyles of the world’s wealthiest 10%.<sup>10</sup> The emissions of the wealthiest 1% in China and India, for instance, are estimated to be over 30 times more than the poorest 50% in 2030.<sup>11</sup> Simultaneously, lowest-income households living in climate-vulnerable landscapes are often least protected from the impacts of climate-induced

disasters. Communities most affected by inequality also have the least power to push for change and climate action because of their political and economic marginalisation. When they do, they often risk coming under attack from the powerful interests that benefit from maintaining the status quo. In these ways, the climate emergency is entrenching inequalities.

It is therefore worrying that Asia has extremely high levels of inequality. In Japan, for example, the richest 10% of the population owns 59% of the wealth while the bottom 50% owns just 4.8%.<sup>12</sup> In Indonesia, the likelihood of children from the poorest households dying before their fifth birthday is more than twice that for children from the most affluent households.<sup>13</sup> There are also huge disparities between middle-income and low-income economies in the region. Nearly 56% of the population in Afghanistan are poor,<sup>14</sup> compared to 17.5% in Nepal.<sup>15</sup> Lower income countries in Asia have been found to be most at risk from the impacts of the climate emergency.<sup>16</sup> The risk of heatwaves for children born in 2020 in Afghanistan, for instance, is three times more than the average for South Asia.<sup>17</sup>

New research by Save the Children shows that 905 million children in the region are at high climate risk, experiencing at least one extreme weather event a year. 445.5 million children are living in poverty, severely deprived of good healthcare, nutrition, education, housing, water or sanitation.

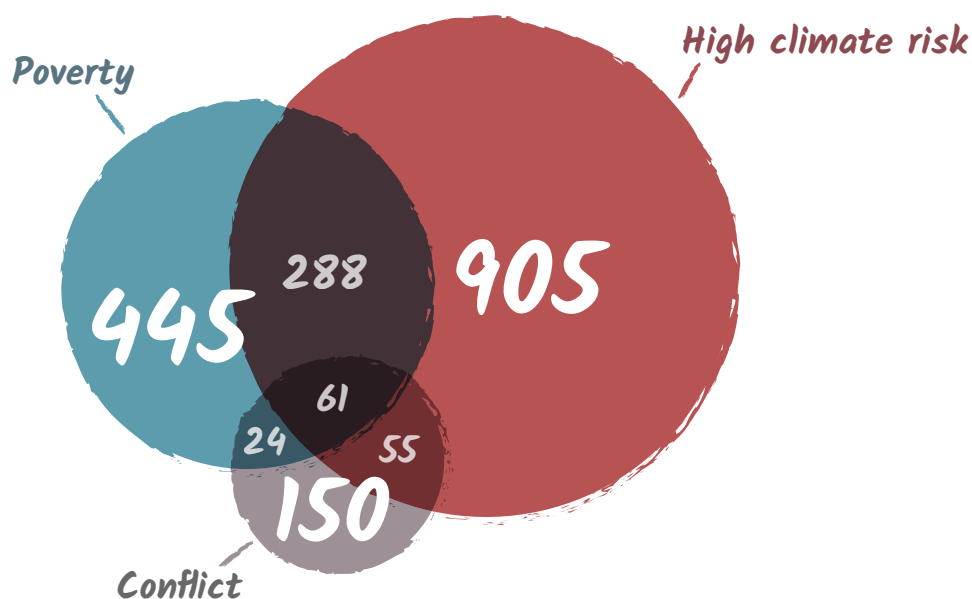
**Our analysis shows that as many as 348.6 million children in the Asia region face the double threat of high climate risk and poverty.**

The increasing frequency and severity of rapid and slow-onset disasters due to the climate emergency is likely to push these children further into poverty in the years ahead.

Children living in conflict zones,<sup>18</sup> estimated to number 149.6 million in the region, face even greater risks.

**We found that 60.6 million children in the region face the triple burden of high climate risk, poverty and conflict.**<sup>19</sup> India and Afghanistan are among the top five countries where the most children affected by this triple burden live.<sup>20</sup>

Figure 1: How poverty, the climate emergency and conflict risk intersect in Asia (millions of children affected)



## II Children’s experiences of the climate and inequality crisis

Between June and August 2022, Save the Children staff reached out to over 40,000 children in eight countries<sup>21</sup> in the region through a series of in-person and online consultations, interviews and surveys. This dialogue was part of a global listening exercise that Save the Children has undertaken with more than 54,500 children from 41 countries across the world to shape our new *Generation Hope* campaign, with a view to understanding what children have to say about climate and inequality, how they are taking action, and what support and action they want to see from adults.

Two overarching insights emerged from our dialogues with children in the Asia region, which also came across strongly in the global dialogue. First, **the climate emergency is having profound impacts on children’s lives**. The observations and stories children shared highlighted how the climate emergency is directly impacting their rights to education, health and child protection. Many have experienced the impacts of heatwaves, droughts, storms and floods, including crop failure and food insecurity from the loss of farmlands to floods, destruction of homes and other assets and difficulties with accessing basic services such as drinking water due to water shortages.

Children placed particular emphasis on the health implications of the climate emergency, with complaints including respiratory issues, malnutrition, dehydration, eye infections and communicable diseases from high temperatures, air and

**66** I live in an area that is often flooded during the rainy season. Because of changes in weather, floods are occurring more often. Before it usually occurred once every three years, now it’s becoming once every year. For me, people who live in that area are experiencing very negative impacts, starting from infectious diseases and (disrupted) logistical supplies when the flood occurred. **99**

13 year old boy, Indonesia

**66** Due to flood, mostly fertile paddy farms/ lands are full of sand, which is changing (fertile land) to non-farming land. **99**

Child in Nepal

**66** As climate continues to change rapidly, the poor people are more at risk of dying and being affected because of lack of money and increase in migration. **99**

Child in India

water pollution and poor sanitation infrastructure. They also highlighted how education is being disrupted as floods and storms cut off access to schools and destroy school materials. Several girls stressed that scarcity of water during climate hazards is causing serious menstrual and vaginal health issues.

One of the recurrent themes in our discussion with children in all nine countries was the linkages between child labour, child marriage, migration and extreme weather events. As families are pushed into poverty by climate disasters and slow-onset changes in weather patterns and water availability, many resort to coping mechanisms such as gaining extra income through child labour and child marriage. When families are displaced from their homes, children are at heightened risk of trafficking, abuse and exploitation – especially girls.

**Second, children care deeply about inequality and see the damage it is causing.** The children we spoke with established connections between economic inequality and access to health, education, and basic amenities. They also highlighted how poverty and inequality were drivers behind child marriage and labour, with many seeing it as driving some groups of children to become victims of abuse, exploitation, violence and criminal activities.

A number of the children we engaged with expressed an understanding of some of the linkages between economic inequality and the climate emergency. They told us that extreme weather events are impacting lower-income households the hardest, with many losing their houses and livelihoods and being forced to live in temporary shelters. They further identified certain groups of children, such as homeless children, those with disabilities, those living in coastal areas and near riversides as being disproportionately impacted by such events. Children also emphasised that inequality and discrimination experienced by marginalised girls and young women are amplified by the climate emergency.

Most of the children participating in our dialogues believe that the climate emergency will worsen in the future and impact their rights the hardest. This is motivating many to take action, sharing stories with us of the campaign actions they are taking and describing how they want to work with adults, communities and organisations to find solutions collectively. Some children requested more information on the issues to be able to campaign.

**66 Adults are doing few things like creating awareness and teaching people about climate change, but it is not enough. Most people are still ignorant about climate change. 99**

*Child in Nepal*

**66 The people of marginal areas are suffering more due to climate change. Farmers are not able to produce enough crops. Due to which the economic crisis is increasing in the country and the income of foreign currencies is decreasing. 99**

*13 year old boy, Bangladesh*

**66 I feel that in recent years the summer is getting hotter and hotter, which upsets me. Recently I also found that more than half of the saplings my family and I planted in the mountains died. I am worried that the future income of my family is reduced. 99**

*13 year old boy, China*

**66 Economic inequality affects education as well. There are parents who cannot even afford to fulfil their children's education, they do not hesitate to marry off their children even though they are at an early age. They say, 'Let her husband take care of her.' 99**

*15 year old girl, Indonesia*

**66 Due to economic inequality, children from poor families can't (seek) cure in well facilitated (equipped) hospitals. 99**

*Child in Nepal*

**66 Economic equality is when there is equal access for every community to take benefit from the development from the government. 99**

*16-year-old girl, Indonesia*

**66 It's not children's job to clean the mess spread by their elders. 99**

*13 year old boy, India*

Most of the children who spoke with us felt that adults are not doing enough to stop the climate and inequality crisis. While many believe that everyone has a role to play, they are also very clear that adults, particularly those in positions of power in government and in the community, needed to take greater responsibility and action.

**66** Unity is the greatest strength of all, so we need to stand together in this fight. When we stand together there is a higher chance of change. 99

*Child in India*

**66** The community and the government must monitor each other and collaborate, because if they don't, nothing will change. 99  
*17 year old girl, Indonesia*


### III Driving systemic change: five key entry points

Drawing on the rich insights and ideas that children shared with us through our global dialogues, as well as broader research and programming experience, Save the Children has identified five key entry points that have particular potential for driving systemic change globally to build a greener and more just planet. We discuss below how these should be addressed in Asia.

#### 1 Synergised reductions in emissions and poverty

Asia's biggest economies – Japan, South Korea, China, India and Indonesia – rank among the top twelve GHG emitters globally<sup>22</sup> but they haven't been historically so. Their cumulative historic emissions per population is lower than that of several high-income countries.<sup>23</sup> Historical emitters bear the greatest responsibility globally for achieving rapid and deep cuts in their emissions and supporting other countries through climate finance. However, all countries have considerable potential to do more than they are currently, and averting climate catastrophe will not be possible without stronger action by all of Asia's five biggest economies.

It is welcome that all five countries are already undertaking emissions reduction measures. Japan and South Korea had been recording a decline in their GHG emissions in the two years preceding the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>24</sup> The largest international financiers of coal – Japan, South Korea and China – have pledged to stop financing for overseas coal power plants. China and India have been rapidly adding renewables to their energy mix. China's investment in renewable energy in 2021 at USD 380 billion was the highest in the world.<sup>25</sup> India ranked third globally, overtaking Germany in solar installations in 2021 for the first time<sup>26</sup> and is producing the world's cheapest solar power.<sup>27</sup> In Indonesia where land-use change and peat



The cumulative historical emissions per population of Asia's top five economies is lower than that of several high-income countries.

**66** At the community level adults can engage more on aspects of pollution and clean surroundings, reforestation and other such smaller things that are possible. At the advocacy level, they must also look at ways to generate evidence to bring policy makers on our side and create environment friendly policies for large development projects and factories. We must transition into clean energy otherwise we will all be in trouble soon. 99

*From a discussion with children in India*

and forest fires are responsible for over 60% of the country's GHG emissions,<sup>28</sup> national efforts have succeeded in reducing deforestation for four years in a row, reaching the lowest level in a decade in 2020.<sup>29</sup>

In their updated Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) submitted to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), these countries have committed to more ambitious targets for reducing emissions and increasing the share of renewables in their energy mix.<sup>30</sup> However, their climate policies and enhanced ambitions have been described as 'highly insufficient' and inconsistent with the 1.5°C goal of the Paris Agreement.<sup>31</sup> Greater ambition is needed from these economies with their emission reduction targets and actions.

All five of the region's largest economies are heavily dependent on fossil fuels for their energy supply – the primary driver of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and the climate emergency. The production and consumption of fossil fuels are heavily subsidised in these countries. From 2017 to 2019, Asia's top five economies spent USD 229.6 billion annually on fossil fuel subsidies,<sup>32</sup> which is nearly eight times India's health and nutrition budget for 2021–2022.<sup>33</sup> Subsidising fossil fuels directly incentivises their production and use. Fossil fuel consumption subsidies,<sup>34</sup> which amounted to USD 55.8 billion in 2020 in the five countries, are also regressive, with the share of subsidies reaching lower income households smaller than their share in aggregate income or population.<sup>35</sup> Asia's biggest economies should transition urgently from fossil fuel subsidies that are exacerbating the climate and inequality crisis, and prioritise investment and incentives for activities and solutions that will help address it, whilst also protecting the interests of low-income households.

Scaling up renewable energy is critical, not only for reducing emissions but also for creating millions of jobs, saving money and reducing inequalities. Estimates suggest that switching from fossil fuels to renewables could save the global economy as much as USD 12 trillion by 2050.<sup>36</sup> Investments in clean energy and low-carbon technologies have been estimated to have the potential to create up to 15.4 million jobs in Indonesia by 2045.<sup>37</sup> In India, solar photovoltaic investments create more jobs per unit of energy produced than any other energy source.<sup>38</sup>

Responsibility for delivering on emissions reduction in Asia's biggest economies also needs to be borne by high-income countries who are major exporters of fossil fuels. For example, Australia is the fifth largest producer and the second largest exporter of coal. Australia's largest individual export markets for coal in 2019–20 were Japan, China, India, South Korea and Taiwan.<sup>39</sup> However, the level of aspiration in exporting and marketing coal to Asia by Australia has not been met by a similar level of ambition when it comes to climate finance.

**66** I hope the factories will reduce carbon pollution and sewage, so the air and water will be cleaner. **99**

*Child in China*



**The climate policies and commitments of Asia's biggest economies have been described as 'highly insufficient' to meet the 1.5°C goal of the Paris Agreement.**

**66** Private sector such as companies (should) make more effective innovations to be environmentally friendly. **99**

*Child in Bangladesh*



**From 2017 to 2019, Asia's top five economies spent USD 229.6 billion annually on fossil fuel subsidies.**

Australia's cash commitments have fallen short of its rhetoric,<sup>40</sup> and in addition to disengaging from the Green Climate Fund (GCF) after its initial round of investment, it is currently near the bottom of global rankings for financing commitments<sup>41</sup> and broader climate action. It is critical that fossil fuel exporters to countries in Asia phase down their support for the fossil fuel sector and provide substantive commitments on delivering climate finance to lower income countries.

Investing in nature-based solutions can further play a crucial role in reducing emissions by removing CO<sub>2</sub> from the atmosphere and keeping it locked in. This was an area that children we spoke to put particular emphasis on, especially in relation to planting trees and caring for nature. Restoration or protection of nature and ecosystems can also help communities to adapt to climatic changes, for example through protecting against soil erosion or sea level rises, as well as helping to reduce biodiversity loss and build local livelihoods. Nature-based solutions, including restoration of degraded landscapes and peatlands, afforestation and reforestation, feature heavily in the NDCs of China, India and Indonesia. These solutions should be community-designed and led, with Indigenous Peoples and local communities granted secure tenure and empowered to manage them.

**66** Tree plantation should be increased to prevent climate change. **99**

*Child in Bangladesh*



*Preventing Climate Change* by K Siyak Theekshana Dias, 12

## 2 Investing in children

Despite Asia's economic progress, child poverty in several countries remains high, for example with more than 50% of children in Pakistan and Lao PDR and over 60% of children in Cambodia experiencing poverty.<sup>42</sup> Evidence shows that investment in public services and systems towards education, universal quality health, nutrition, social protection, and child protection services yields considerable economic benefit, builds human capital, and reduces inequalities. For example, an investment of 1% GDP in social protection in India and Bangladesh was found to reduce poverty by 3% and increase tax revenues by 2.3% and 1.9% respectively.<sup>43</sup>

In Nepal, Save the Children initiated the Child Endowment Fund (CEF) in 2011 to support the development of some of the most vulnerable groups of children. The fund is enabling children to continue going to school and not drop out, thereby reducing the risks of children's exposure to violence, abuse, trafficking and early marriage. The fund has also contributed to heightened awareness about child vulnerability and the role of community in addressing it.<sup>44</sup>

Governments across the Asia region must prioritise investment in children within their national and local budgets and spending, setting children up for success in life, fulfilling their rights, and building human capital for healthy and prosperous economies. Ensuring adequate social protection to protect children in times of crisis and hardship is critical, with a focus on systems that focus explicitly on children's needs and rights, and which can be scaled up when shocks and emergencies strike.

## 3 Protecting children at the frontlines of the climate and inequality crisis

Children are on average more at risk than adults from the impacts of extreme weather events because they are at a unique stage of physical and emotional development, and because they have longer to live with the climate emergency. They are calling upon leaders to help them adapt to climate change impacts, as well as for support when disasters strike. More action is required to adapt and increase the resilience of essential children's services to climate impacts, including schools and healthcare, as well as food production and access.

It is also crucial that national governments in the region strengthen anticipatory action to forecast shocks and prevent them from developing into crises. Climate-vulnerable nations should introduce policy frameworks to ensure safety of children from hazards (see Box: Children's Emergency Relief and Protection Act in the Philippines). Inter-linking early warning systems with shock-responsive social protection programmes can prevent disaster survivors falling back on negative coping

**66** There should be special facilities to prevent child dropouts from schools. 99  
*Child in Bangladesh*

**66** Adults should support in stopping child marriage. 99  
*Child in Nepal*

**66** We don't need so many roads but need basic infrastructure like sewage systems, schools and hospitals. 99  
*Child in India*

**66** I ask the government to help or deal with parents who send young children to work. Because the child deserves a good education, proper medical assistance, etc. So, they can have a good future. 99  
*17 year old girl, Indonesia*

**66** Now it's not climate change any more, it's climate crisis, and countless people, including myself, feel their rights undermined or life threatened in the crisis. And I've been thinking about what I can do and what I want to do for a long time. 99  
*17 year old girl, South Korea*



## Children's Emergency Relief and Protection Act in the Philippines

In the aftermath of Typhoon Haiyan in 2013, Save the Children, together with UNICEF, World Vision and Plan International, conducted a study to assess impacts on the rights of affected children. The study found that over 10,000 affected children remained in precarious situations with unstable access to education and health resources and lack of protection from child abuse and trafficking. Based on the findings

of the study, Save the Children drafted a bill – The Children's Emergency Relief and Protection Bill – to protect and harness resources for children in emergencies and engaged extensively in bottom-up policy advocacy to get the bill passed. After several amendments, the bill was signed by the President and the Act came into force in 2016.<sup>45</sup>

strategies at the household level such as early marriage and child labour. Early warning systems can also provide data to assess the potential impacts of climate-induced disasters which can be used to inform and adjust shock-responsive social protection programmes, including cash transfers, to mitigate the effects of such disasters.

National climate-related commitments, policies, and frameworks should include a comprehensive focus on children and their rights. The specific needs and rights of girls, indigenous children, children with disabilities, refugee, migrant and displaced children, and other groups impacted by inequality and discrimination must be given due attention. Governments in Asia must ensure that climate adaptation interventions are child-centred and gender-transformative. International and national legislation, policies, strategies, and plans should holistically address climate change, mobility, humanitarian and development needs to protect children's rights.

Save the Children has been designing initiatives to support adaptation and resilience-building in Asia. In Pakistan, it is developing a Green Climate Fund (GCF) project to build adaptive capacities and strengthen climate resilience of vulnerable communities, including children, women, youth, indigenous peoples in coastal areas of Sindh against climate-related disasters. In Lao PDR and Indonesia too, the organisation is developing GCF projects with government and NGO partners to make health systems climate-resilient, including early warning of vector-borne disease risk for communities living in areas of high climate hazard and risk. In Bangladesh, it has been supporting children, youth and people with disabilities to engage with community and urban risk assessments. The programme also introduced child participation into school safety plan processes, supported pupils to manage funds for adaptation measures in schools and delivered a practical climate change education module.

**66** Children are the most affected by climate change. Due to climate change, there are storms and rains, our school and school playgrounds become waterlogged, we cannot play, we are lagging behind in education. The issue needs to be resolved through sound planning. 99

*16 year old boy, Bangladesh*

**66** (Adults should carry out) resource assessments, sustainable water management, efficient use of warning systems to save lives immediately. 99

*Child in India*

**66** The World Health Organization says it expects 250,000 people to die each year from climate change-related malaria, malnutrition, diarrhoea, and heat stress between 2030 and 2050. I don't think it's a problem I can solve on my own. We all want more people to be interested in it. 99

*17 year old girl, South Korea*

## 4 Ensuring children have a meaningful seat at decision-making table

Children are demanding that their voices be heard by adults. Countries in Asia are signatories to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) which recognises the intrinsic rights of children to participate and have their views accounted for in decision-making that affects their lives. Evidence suggests that interventions can be more effective and sustainable when children participate in decision-making.<sup>46</sup> Across the region, children are already making their voices heard through campaigning activities, and the children we spoke with in our dialogues highlighted the different ways that adults could support them in their efforts.

In Nepal, for example, Save the Children supported youth and children to campaign against the construction of the Nijgadh airport in a heavily forested area which would

**66** We need support from adults because sometimes adults are not listening to our voices. **99**

*14 year old boy, Indonesia*

**66** Adults could leverage their resources to organise meetings like this. At the community level we can also help them mobilise people. We cannot think to do this by ourselves so we must unite and fight this together. **99**

*From a discussion with children from India*

### Making children's voices heard: Niang Mary Aung's story

14-year-old Niang Mary Aung is a member of Shining Star Child Group in Myoma Ward, in Tedim, Chin State, Myanmar. With her enthusiasm and bubbly personality, she is actively participating in the child group working for the realization of children's rights in her community.

"I have heard a little bit about child rights from my friends before joining Shining Star. After becoming a member of Shining Star, I have learned about child rights, life skills, presentation skills, and communications skills which have made me gain more self-confidence, more understanding on children and have strong desire to help disabled people."

As the members of Shining Star, including Mary, have worked vigorously to identify and promote child rights in their community, they have seen some fruitful results. For example, after they had presented to Township Child Rights Committee (TCRC) about the repair and renovation of an old school building at the Middle School that was in very bad situation and too dangerous for the students, a new school building was built for the students. They were very happy to see the result of their efforts in making this happen.



Another issue they had raised to TCRC is permission of teaching Chin language at schools every day. Chin language is now being taught every day in grade 3 at every school in their community.

"As it is stated in the UNCRC's Article 30 that children have the right to learn and use their native language and customs, I believe it's important for our children to learn Chin language since they are in primary school and it is also a way of maintaining our language. If they go abroad or wherever they are, they can still use and speak our language."

have caused severe ecological damage and displaced 1476 households. Their activism helped to strengthen a broader campaign against the project, which resulted in the Supreme Court ordering the government to find an alternative site for the airport.

Governments, institutions and businesses should also support children to make their voices heard through establishing safe spaces for children's meaningful participation in policy making processes that concern their rights and wellbeing. In Pakistan, for example, Save the Children developed a project under the Prime Minister's Clean Green Pakistan Initiative to encourage children and youth to actively participate in climate change-related activities, support them with opportunities to contribute to the cause, and ensure their achievements are recognised at the national level.<sup>47</sup> Countries in Asia should draw from examples like this to facilitate children's participation in policy making, which not only helps fulfil their right to be heard but also leads to policies that are more effective and enjoy wider public support.

## 5 Financing a just and green future for children

The investment required to maintain Asia's growth, eradicate poverty, and respond to the climate emergency has been estimated to be USD 1.7 trillion annually.<sup>48</sup> This is a huge sum, but the cost of an unmitigated climate catastrophe will be far greater. Adaptation costs in lower-income countries will increase substantially in the absence of concrete climate action.

All countries in the region must prioritise investment in children and planet within current budgets, with participation from children in identifying needs and priorities, and seek to expand tax revenue by implementing environmental tax regimes, strengthening institutional and regulatory frameworks that progressively reduce environmental harm, and easing debt burden of countries most impacted by climate change.

However, economies in Asia are still recovering from the social and economic impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic and have been hit by the global energy and cost of living crisis spurred by the war in Ukraine. Public debt levels of several countries in the region rose during the pandemic, and the hike in interest rates by central banks of high-income countries are further increasing the cost of borrowing for Asian nations, making their debt financing and economic activity more expensive, and restricting fiscal space for investment in children.

In this context, high-income countries and those that are responsible for the historical bulk of global emissions have a responsibility not only to make rapid and deep cuts to their emissions, but also to support lower income countries in the region with their climate mitigation and adaptation goals. Overall climate finance, and particularly adaptation finance, flows to these countries have been highly inadequate.

**66** It would be much more touching than news or articles if children gather and shout out in their voices how different our future will be from the past of adults and that we will be struggling with these (natural) disasters on Earth. 99

*16 year old girl, South Korea*

**66** I feel that most of the economic disadvantages caused by climate change are in developing countries, so the developed countries need to look at the fact that people in faraway countries who are not doing anything wrong are suffering unreasonably and to urgently create measures to deal with the situation. 99

*17 year old girl, Japan*

**66** Rich countries should support poor countries economically to tackle climate change. 99

*Children in Bangladesh*



**The investment required to maintain Asia's growth, eradicate poverty, and respond to the climate emergency has been estimated to be USD 1.7 trillion annually.**

Our analysis shows that adaptation finance commitments from high-income countries to South Asia<sup>49</sup> averaged USD 2.6 billion annually from 2016 to 2020.<sup>50</sup> This pales in comparison to the estimated annual adaptation needs of USD 40 billion in the sub-region.<sup>51</sup>

Affected communities are paying out of their pockets to protect themselves from loss and damage caused by extreme weather events. In Bangladesh, for instance, poor female-headed rural households are spending on average 30% of their total expenditure on measures to reduce the risks of climate-related disasters.<sup>52</sup> Conservative estimates show that the climate emergency has already cost low and lower middle-income countries, including in Asia, more than half a trillion dollars.<sup>53</sup>

High-income countries must commit to significantly scale up climate finance, allocating at least 50% to adaptation, increasing consideration of children's rights in investments and making allocations needs-based and predictable. Locally-led approaches should be prioritised in adaptation finance allocations. High-income countries must also commit to establish a new and dedicated Loss & Damage financing mechanism under the UNFCCC by 2023.

Urgent reforms must also be made to the global financial architecture to ensure that global debt, tax and trade systems are fair and fit for purpose. International institutions must ensure that countries in the region can access the investment and funding they need, including through accelerated operationalisation of the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) Resilience and Sustainability Trust (RST).

Energy transition in Asia's top economies will also require massive financial resources. Indonesia's energy transition, for instance, is estimated to require USD 16 billion in investments every year.<sup>54</sup> Australia's June 2022 announcement of a A\$200 million climate and infrastructure partnership with Indonesia<sup>55</sup> is a step in the right direction, but much more needs to be done. Asia's top economies should explore the creation of country mobilisation platforms such as South Africa's USD 8.5 billion Just Energy Transition partnership, which offer potential to help unlock billions through improving coordination between public and private financiers. Ensuring that the rights of current and future generations are upheld should be a central component of such initiatives.



**In Bangladesh, poor female-headed rural households are spending on average 30% of their total expenditure on measures to reduce the risks of climate-related disasters.**



**Extreme weather events have caused losses of at least USD 408 billion on an average every year in China, Japan, and India alone.**

# Conclusion

Tackling the climate and inequality crisis in Asia will not necessarily be straightforward. Policymakers must make bold decisions. Asia's advanced economies need to accelerate action to curb emissions. Investments in children, especially those most impacted by inequality and discrimination, need to be scaled up across the region. Climate finance (domestic and international) should be increased substantially to support countries in Asia to transition away from fossil fuels, adapt to a rapidly changing climate, build resilience of vulnerable communities, and assist households affected by loss and damage caused by the climate crisis. Children's rights should be at the heart of these decisions and actions.

These decisions and actions are no longer a choice – they are a necessity. As duty-bearers, governments have particular obligations to act under international human and child rights frameworks while at the same time wider communities, including adults, have a role to play and must stand in solidarity with children. As a child from Japan put it: **“I would like to see this generation tackle the problem, instead of prioritizing the economy and development and putting the problem off to future generations. This may be the last generation that can tackle the problem. I want to see that it is not too late for the next generation.”** Governments, wider communities, and adults everywhere must respond to this call.

Monyrath, 7, at school in Kampong Cham, Cambodia



PHOTO: HANNAADCOCK/SAVE THE CHILDREN

# Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> World Weather Attribution, 'Climate change likely increased extreme monsoon rainfall, flooding highly vulnerable communities in Pakistan' (webpage) <https://www.worldweatherattribution.org/climate-change-likely-increased-extreme-monsoon-rainfall-flooding-highly-vulnerable-communities-in-pakistan/>
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Cover photo: Marium\*, 11, stands in her home  
in a camp for Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar  
(\* name changed to protect identity)  
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