



## **Submission to the Ministry for the Environment**

**on**

## **Setting New Zealand's Post-2020 Climate Change Target**

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### **About Us**

UNICEF is the world's leading organisation for children, promoting the rights and wellbeing of every child, in everything we do. Together with our partners, we work in 190 countries and territories to translate that commitment into practical action, focusing special effort on reaching the most vulnerable and excluded children, to the benefit of all children, everywhere.

UNICEF is mandated by the United Nations General Assembly to advocate for the protection of children's rights, to help meet their basic needs and to expand their opportunities to reach their full potential, with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC) as its platform for advocacy. UNCROC is the most widely ratified human rights treaty in history. New Zealand ratified UNCROC in 1993 and in so doing committed itself to upholding children's rights in policy, practice and, where feasible, in law.

**UNICEF is committed to ensuring the protection of children and young people in a changing climate and to supporting their participation in decision-making processes that will ultimately impact their future. UNICEF is stepping up efforts to strengthen programming that reduces children's risk to climate change and natural hazards. UNICEF has also invested resources to help develop the knowledge base on children's vulnerabilities to climate change as well as the role they can take in shaping a more sustainable and climate-resilient future.**

## Introduction

UNICEF NZ welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the consultation on setting New Zealand's Post-2020 climate change target. We fully support the commitment NZ is making to table a target that is fair and ambitious and acknowledges our role as a constructive and responsible global citizen.

Overall we agree with the objectives for the contribution as outlined in the discussion document - particularly number one; that NZ's contribution is fair and ambitious (Q1).

Other individuals and organisations may advocate for specific targets for reducing CO<sup>2</sup> and greenhouse gas emissions and share their views on what a reasonable level of cost is appropriate for doing so (Qs 2,3). This submission will instead call upon the NZ Government to consider the cost of *inaction* and in particular the negative impacts on children brought about by climate change. **We wish to make the case that inaction towards climate change is a violation of child rights.**

## Climate change and children

Children, especially the most disadvantaged, are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Whether through increasing numbers and severity of natural disasters or slow-onset impacts such as rising sea levels and changing rain fall patterns, climate change threatens to wipe out decades of hard-earned progress in building healthy societies and economies achieved by communities, governments and development partners. Many of the countries that are most vulnerable to climate change are also those that have the most children as a share of their overall population, and shifts in child demographics over coming decades will further exacerbate this.

Climate change poses a severe threat to children's most basic rights, including those related to survival and wellbeing, health, food security and nutrition, water, and access to education. Some of the leading killers of children worldwide are highly sensitive to climate change. Higher temperatures have been linked to increased rates of malnutrition, cholera, diarrhoeal disease and vector-borne diseases like dengue and malaria. Children's underdeveloped immune systems put them at far greater risk of contracting these diseases and succumbing to their complications. Additionally, the loss of a parent or home due to a climate change-induced natural disaster certainly changes a child's world but it also can jeopardise their development.<sup>i</sup>

Furthermore, the role of climate change in exacerbating and compounding drivers of insecurity is likely to lead to more children being at risk of violence, exploitation and abuse, in both conflict and non-conflict settings.

**Climate change is, at its core, an equity issue.** Despite being least responsible for climate change, it is today's children and future generations that will bear the heaviest burden of our inaction.

## The Pacific context

**UN agencies in the Pacific have determined climate change to be the biggest threat to children and their families.** Communities in our South Pacific region are already experiencing the impacts of more extreme weather events, temperature changes and disease outbreaks.

### *A case study: The impacts of climate change on children in Kiribati and Vanuatu<sup>ii</sup>*

*The range of risks unfolding as a result of global warming in Small Island Developing states in the Pacific region include increased health issues, decreased potable water availability, food security challenges, cyclone risks and considerable coastal erosion.*

*The climate change-related issues confronting countries like Kiribati, are dominated by the projections of sea level rise because of the expected life-changing impacts. Even low-end projections will require infrastructure solutions (such as sea walls and water storage facilities) as well as non-engineering-based responses (psychosocial support). The high-end sea level rise projections challenge the very existence of Kiribati. Under a best-case scenario, it is more than likely that both Kiribati and Vanuatu will need to relocate some communities to less exposed areas, including international relocation.*

*Without drastic global cuts in greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, it is likely that sea level rise will have direct (such as loss of land) and indirect (psychological issues associated with forced relocation) consequences for Kiribati due to the nation's low-lying nature. Although sea level rise does not threaten to completely submerge Vanuatu (as it does in Kiribati), it still presents multiple challenges. These include forced relocations of low-lying communities and increasing risks from storm surge (when combined with cyclones).*

*The most pressing challenges for children from sea level rise in Kiribati and Vanuatu are likely to include:*

- psychological issues associated with loss of familiar surroundings and adjustment into new settlements*
- dwindling potable water supplies as freshwater lenses decrease*
- increased risk of diarrhoea and its consequences from the spread of faecal matter due to inadequate sanitation in overcrowded settlements (especially in Kiribati urbanised areas)*
- diminished access to education and health facilities during increasing king tide events or other extreme weather events (such as cyclones).<sup>1</sup>*

As a member of the Pacific Islands Forum and a supporting voice for Small Island Developing States at the UN, New Zealand has a role to play in both reducing our own emissions which are contributing to the impact of climate change on children in NZ and in the South Pacific region. We urge the NZ Government to acknowledge this in its dialogue on this issue and in defining international commitments.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.unicef.org/eapro/pacific\\_climate\\_change\\_report.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/eapro/pacific_climate_change_report.pdf)

## Key messages

Governments must sign up to a strong and legally-binding global climate agreement that protects children at this year's UN Climate Conference in Paris. Reaching this agreement will require NZ and other developed world economies to take strong action to curb accelerating temperatures, and to honour the promises they have made to support vulnerable countries to respond to a changing climate, and to develop their economies using clean technologies.

**UNICEF NZ recommends that the NZ Government should:**

### 1) Champion the rights of children in the climate negotiations

Children's futures are at stake – their rights and role as key agents for change should be recognised in the global agreement on climate change. Children's lives will be indelibly shaped by decisions made this year, yet recognition of children's rights has been largely absent in the global conversation on climate change. As a small but important player at the UN (in Post 2015 Agenda and Financing for Development negotiations, and as a temporary member of the Security Council), we call upon NZ to be an advocate for the rights of children at the international level.

**New Zealand should continue to champion all children's rights by placing them at the heart of a new global climate change agreement that makes our planet safe for future generations.**

### 2) Call for a significant reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 and a net zero emissions goal by 2050

The science is clear. Carbon emissions must fall to zero by the latter half of this century in order to stay within the maximum temperature increase of 2°C above pre-industrial levels agreed by world leaders. **Safeguarding development gains means taking ambitious action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.** We agree that the current target to reduce emissions 5 per cent below 1990 levels by 2020 is not fair or ambitious enough. Our colleagues at UNICEF UK are calling for the EU to go beyond its current target of 40% greenhouse gas emissions reductions by 2030. As well as setting a bold and ambitious target, we think NZ should support a mechanism at the international level for regular reviews of global carbon cutting targets, and a long term goal for carbon neutrality by 2050, with a view to focusing attention onto the pathway and timetables required to deliver substantial emissions reductions.

### 3) Recognise the importance of adaptation in terms of managing climate risk and building resilience

Limiting climate change isn't enough – children are in danger right now. Equipping children and communities with the capacity and tools to adapt to the effects of climate change that are already occurring, and to reduce and manage disaster risk, is essential. Despite its critical role in strengthening resilience and managing climate risk, adaptation has historically been undervalued in climate talks, and many countries are woefully unprepared to manage the impacts expected to take place even under a temperature increase of 2°C, let alone the current trajectories for global warming of 4°C. For this reason, adaptation must be prioritised in parallel to targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions within the global climate deal. The Pacific Consultation of the World Humanitarian Summit at the end of this month provides an excellent opportunity for NZ to take a lead role in being an advocate for the importance of adaptation and building resilience.

#### 4) Mobilise its fair share of global climate finance commitments and help deliver an ambitious Post-2020 finance package

Developed countries are nowhere near providing the support required to keep the most vulnerable children safe from climate change. A quarter of a billion children live in the 10 countries most vulnerable to climate change, and they – together with many more children around the world – are at high risk.<sup>iii</sup> Credible means of implementation (financial, capacity building and technology) are required to help developing countries to adopt low carbon development pathways, and to adapt to the impacts of climate change that cannot be avoided. New Zealand should make a bold commitment to climate finance, and call on others to provide their fair share of global commitments. In addition, New Zealand should play an active role in shaping an international framework for an ambitious post-2020 package for climate finance.

#### 5) Support investments in mitigation and adaptation to address the vulnerabilities and rights of children

There is no smarter investment for sustainable development than investment in our children. Investing in children is a moral and legal obligation enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. But it is also the smartest investment we can make in the sustainability of our planet, social cohesion, and economic growth and development. Targeting children in climate change adaptation and mitigation investments will deliver win-win benefits for child rights and climate goals. For example, innovative sustainable energy solutions can reduce air pollution and contribute to reduced child mortality, it can provide electricity in the home, contributing to better education, and it can reduce the time spent by girls on fuel collection and lower risks of gender based violence.

Strengthening the climate resilience of schools will lead to better education for children, and strengthening the climate resilience of water services will improve child health. Finally, investment in the awareness, training and education of today's children will be essential in enabling them to adopt the low carbon lifestyle required to bring about a rapid transition to low carbon climate-resilient societies.

***A NZ Aid Programme funded UNICEF 'Solar Power in Schools' project in the Solomon Islands shows the multiplier effects of investing in both children and renewable energy. As well as improving educational outcomes for children, power at the school has made it a community hub for everyone and has even been used to power small micro businesses.***

The NZ Government should pursue adaptation policies at scale in countries that are vulnerable to climate change, to help communities – particularly the hardest to reach and least resilient – to cope with its effects. This work should recognise the specific risks faced by children in the context of climate change, and seek to adequately address these risks.

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<sup>i</sup> [http://www.unicef.org/pacificislands/Children\\_and\\_Climate\\_Change\\_.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/pacificislands/Children_and_Climate_Change_.pdf)

<sup>ii</sup> [http://www.unicef.org/pacificislands/Children\\_and\\_Climate\\_Change\\_.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/pacificislands/Children_and_Climate_Change_.pdf)

<sup>iii</sup> Climate Change Vulnerability Index (CCVI) 2015 (Maplecroft); UNICEF: State of the World's Children 2015