

## Child Rights and Environment

### Why in news?

For the first time, the United Nations has recognised and affirmed children's rights to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment in a new guidance on children's rights and the environment.

### What is UN guidance on children's rights and environment?

- The UN guidance, formally known as **General Comment No. 26**, was adopted in 2023.
- It provides a legal framework to address the adverse effects of environmental degradation and climate change on the enjoyment of children's rights.
- It is to ensure a clean, healthy, and sustainable world now and to preserve it for future generation
- It encompasses their rights to information and participation.
- It allows access to justice to protect and receive remedies for the harms caused by environmental degradation and climate change.
- It details member states' obligations under the **Child Rights Convention (UNCRC)** to address environmental harms and guarantee that children are able to exercise their rights.

### What about the UNCRC?

- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) was approved by the United Nation General Assembly (UNGA) in 1989.
- It outlined *children's rights*, which include the right to life, health, clean drinking water and survival and development.
- It has been ratified by 196 countries including India.

## UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

Right to Survival – to life, health, nutrition, name, nationality	<b>Fundamental Rights</b>	Non-discrimination	<b>Core Principles</b>
Right to Development – to education, care, leisure, recreation, cultural activities		Right to life, survival and development	
Right to Protection – from exploitation, abuse, neglect		Best interests of the child	
Right to Participation – to expression, information, thought, religion		Respect for the child's views	

### What are the impacts of climate change on children?

- Children, including adolescents under the age of 18, are often more vulnerable than the general population to the health impacts of climate change.
- **Displacement of children** - According to UNICEF report, extreme weather reports around the world lead to 12 million displacements of children in 2022.
- **Increases child mortality** - According to a study, Heat-related child mortality due to high emissions is projected to double in the continent by 2049, compared with 2005-2014.
- **Separation from family** - Climate change induced migration makes children highly vulnerable as they may get separated from their families or caregivers.
- **Increases child labour** - Climate change related industries like agriculture and mining contribute to child labour which can expose children to exploitation and violence.
- **Accelerates hidden hunger** - Infants will bear the increased burden of malnutrition as the temperature increases.
- **Increases disease Burden** - Children will suffer more from the rise of infectious diseases.
- **Less focus on human development** - Climate affected children are denied access to education and healthcare.

### What is the relationship between extreme weather events and child marriage?

- Extreme weather events intensifies elements of structural oppression such as *gender inequality and poverty*.
- Gender-based violence and inequities have adverse impacts on girls' resilience leading to higher incidences of child, early and forced marriages (CEFM) in low and middle-income countries.

- **Reasons for child marriages** - It is often seen as a coping strategy to reduce *economic vulnerability and food insecurity*.
  - In Bangladesh, daughters were married early after *Cyclone Aila* in 2009.
- Parents resorted to child marriages to *protect daughters from sexual violence and avoid family dishonour*.
  - Rates of sexual assault often escalate during times of crisis, particularly in evacuation camps or temporary shelters.
- **Linkage with bride price/dowry** - Girls in sub-Saharan Africa or Vietnam have a local custom of bride price which had increased probability of CEFM during extreme events.
- But, in regions where *dowry is common such as India, girls were less likely to get married* during a drought year, because the bride's family could not afford dowry payment.

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- **Other findings-** *Education and financial control* are key to empowering women and girls and allowing them to take their own decisions.
- *Educational attainment and CEFM were inversely associated* for girls in India and Malawi.
- Also, the incidence of *CEFM decreased as parental education increased* was observed in India and Vietnam.

### **Status of Child Marriages**

- **Global level** - Every year, *12 million girls get married* before adulthood.
- COVID-19 as well as poverty have spurred child marriages in India.
- The *Global Slavery Index 2023* has said that climate change, along with other environmental factors, has exacerbated modern slavery in Africa.
- More than 3.1 million Africans are in forced marriage and more than 3.8 million in forced labour.
- **India** - In the last five years, it declined to 23.3% in 2020-21, according to the latest National Family Health Survey-5 data.
- Among the bigger States, West Bengal and Bihar have the highest prevalence of girl child marriage.

### **International Conventions that address Child Marriage**

- The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women covers the rights to protection from child marriage in Article 16.
- The Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages

- The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
- The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa.

To know more about child marriages in India, click [here](#)

## References

1. [Down to Earth| UN guidance call on climate action](#)
2. [Down to Earth| Climate change and Child Marriage](#)
3. [PIB| Child Marriages in India](#)

