



Cleaning up the Mess: Children's Rights and Environmental Protection

In support of the International Children's Peace Prize 2016, the KidsRights Foundation has prepared a KidsRights Report, in association with Leiden University, Department of Child Law. The report *Cleaning up the Mess: Children's Rights and Environmental Protection* focuses on the relationship between the environment and children's rights.

Facts and figures

- **Three million children** under the age of five die annually due to **environment-related diseases**;
- Acute respiratory infections annually kill an estimated **1.6 million children** under the age of five. As much as 60 percent of acute respiratory infections worldwide are related to environmental conditions;
- **Diarrheal diseases** claim the lives of nearly **1.5 million children** every year. 80 to 90 percent of these diarrhea cases are related to environmental conditions, in particular, contaminated water and inadequate sanitation;

A healthy environment is essential for the survival, wellbeing and development of children. Children are the most vulnerable to environmental degradation and their young, developing bodies are, for example, the most vulnerable to water and air pollution. The depletion of resources, pollution of air, water and soil, and extinction of whole species of flora and fauna – is killing millions of children in the developed and developing world.

Environmental degradation is worsening at an unprecedented rate. The same can be said for the rate of social, economic and political inequality, all of which are inextricably linked with the state of the environment. When the fields are flooded or the rain doesn't come, children have no food to eat. Children are affected disproportionately by these inequalities and are more vulnerable to the environmental health risks associated with hazardous child labor, housing, natural disasters and conflict.

Children's rights

Environmental issues are human rights issues. A healthy environment is vital to children's survival, well-being and development, and is therefore a precondition for the realization of the rights of the child. At the same time, the fulfillment of children's rights is a fundamental component of environmental protection. Children are in need of access to information, participation and justice, to be able to protect and advance the environment. A child with access to justice can take her or his government to court for not doing enough to protect the environment that is essential to her or his survival.

"Children are the future of the planet and we have the fundamental right to a life of dignity. Do not underestimate our potential. Give us respect and equal opportunities so that each of us can blossom."

Kehkashan Basu -

International Children's Peace Prize winner 2016

In the recently adopted Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the fulfillment of the rights of the child is both an end and a means to achieving sustainable development in developed and developing countries. Children are a vital but often overlooked part of the solution: vocal participants in environmental decision-making. Children's rights lie at the heart of the world's sustainable development agenda, and the success of the SDGs will depend in great measure on the fulfillment and protection of these rights. But in order for this to happen, children must be empowered, legally and environmentally.

Recommendations

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) does not explicitly recognize the environmental rights of the child, but it does acknowledge the role that the environment plays in fulfilling children's rights. Children's rights and environmental development are inextricably linked. To realise both, environmental rights for children should be further embedded in international policy. KidsRights therefore calls upon the UN to supplement the Convention on the Rights of the Child to specifically include these environmental rights.

With three million young children dying every year from environment-related diseases, and with the environment degrading at record levels, it is time to act now. We propose the following action points to integrate environmental protection with the rights of the child. Children have a major role to play in this and must be taken seriously.

The CRC

- The adoption of a General Comment on the Rights of the Child and the Environment interpreting the rights of the child from an environmental perspective and explicitly acknowledging the link between children's rights and environmental development;
- The adoption of a Fourth Optional Protocol to the CRC recognizing the environmental rights of the child, especially to a healthy environment and to energy;

Access

- Improved access for children to environmental information and participation opportunities in decision-making at all levels;
- Effective access to justice for all children on environmental matters, and the promotion of strategic litigation for the joint protection of children's rights and the environment;
- The development of child-responsive measures for accessing environmental resources and services;

Mainstreaming

- The mainstreaming of children's rights in all relevant environmental policy fields;
- Ensuring that climate change adaptation and mitigation takes children's rights perspectives into account;
- The integration of a child rights perspective into energy law, policy and activities;

Impact Measurement

- The development of a methodology for child rights impact assessment instruments concerning social, environmental and economic law, policy and activities;
- The development of child rights impact assessment instruments for environmental decision-making;
- Better collection of data and indicators to ensure that no child is left behind in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

From KidsRights Report 2016 'Cleaning up the Mess: Children's Rights and Environmental Protection'
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