



EDUCATION AND CLIMATE ACTION SEMINAR

Speech by Dr Tajudeen Oyewale, UNICEF Representative

Arrupe Jesuit University , Harare,

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Key Messages:

1. Share key thoughts on the importance of innovative solutions on education and climate change.
2. Highlight importance of action to reduce effects of climate change on education.
3. Highlight UNICEF's continued commitment to support innovation around education and climate change.

Thank you, Master of Ceremonies!

The Acting Vice Chancellor of Arrupe Jesuit University, Dr. Evaristus Ekwueme

Distinguished representatives of different academic institutions.

Ladies and gentlemen.

I am very pleased to join you this morning at this seminar on education and climate change, as a key issue for human survival. Allow me to commend the organizers, especially the faculty and leadership at Arupe Jesuit University for this important session, which I hope will stimulate both academic research and policy action. I also acknowledge the leadership of the Government of Zimbabwe on Climate Change issues, including commitment from the partners and the private sector.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to start our conversation on the status of our climate as released by the Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), a group jointly established by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the United National Environment Programme (UNEP) to assess climate change based on latest science. In 2023, the IPCC reported that *“Human activities, principally through emissions of greenhouse gases, have unequivocally caused global warming, with global surface temperature reaching 1.1°C above 1850-*

1900 in 2011-2020. Global greenhouse gas emissions have continued to increase, with unequal historical and ongoing contributions arising from unsustainable energy use, land use and land-use change, lifestyles and patterns of consumption and production across regions, between and within countries, and among individuals.”

They noted that as consequence of this warming, *“Widespread and rapid changes in the atmosphere, ocean, cryosphere and biosphere have occurred. Human-caused climate change is already affecting many weather and climate extremes in every region across the globe. This has led to widespread adverse impacts and related losses and damages to nature and people. Vulnerable communities who have historically contributed the least to current climate change are disproportionately affected.”*

To sum up the impact, IPCC established 4 categories of impact that include:

1. Water availability and food production – i.e. physical water access, cropping, livestock and fisheries

2. Health and wellbeing – infectious disease, heat waves, malnutrition, human-wild life conflict, mental health & displacement
3. Cities, settlements, and infrastructure – flood, storms, infrastructure destruction & damage to livelihood
4. Biodiversity and ecosystem – impact of biodiversity, biodiversity loss
etc

Ladies and Gentlemen, for children, the impact of Climate change is dare.

An analysis by UNICEF indicated that up to two-thirds of preventable illness and death from environmental hazards is experienced by children, and the burden is predominantly in those aged under five years. Children are particularly vulnerable during gestation and early childhood, as critical biological systems such as the immune and central nervous system are developing. Maternal under-nutrition, infection and illness at these critical times can cause life-long damage, including physical stunting, neurological

impairments, and immune dysfunction. Examples of the effects of climate change and impacts on children include:

- Children tend to spend more time outdoors, where they can be exposed to high temperatures and where disease vectors are found, such as rodents, mosquitos, and ticks.
- Children require more water (by weight) than adults, so their exposure to water-borne pathogens is much higher.
- Diarrheal diseases cause dehydration in children much faster than in adults. Children are more likely to develop severe infections and experience complications during recovery due to their small body size and their developing immune systems, which provide little natural immunity or resistance.

Here in Zimbabwe, we are already experiencing the impact of El-nino driven poor rainfall patterns with implications for farming, drought and live stocks.

It is crucial to recognise that children and women are the most vulnerable and worst affected during any disaster. Every child in Zimbabwe (7.1 million

children under 18, 47% of the population) is exposed to at least one climate/environmental hazard and at risk of climate change impacts such as flooding, drought, heatwaves, cyclones, and air pollution

Ladies and gentlemen.

It is, however, not only about problems.

Through the United Nations Sustainable Development Agenda, we have a clear path forward to comprehensively address climate change and sustainable development. SDG 13 speaks to the importance of climate education, awareness and participation. We must engage children in and outside the education system and prepare them for their future which will be shaped by climate change in ways we haven't seen before.

Several Government, including Zimbabwe have made national commitment towards achieving a reduction in emissions by 2023 through the National Determined Contribution (NDCs). In Zimbabwe, the NDC is also child-

sensitive bring focus on children. In Zimbabwe, this also include innovation such as Education 5.0, Climate Smart Agriculture and the Clean-Green Initiative.

The United Nations has deployed all it's agencies to address the impact of Climate change, i.e., promoting a multi-sectoral approach.

In 2023, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child issued "General Comment No. 26 on children's rights and the environment with a special focus on climate change", explicitly addresses the climate emergency, the collapse of biodiversity and pervasive pollution, outlining countermeasures to protect the lives and life perspectives of children. This is significant has it offers a global child's right framework on climate change and children.

For UNICEF, we are also mainstreaming Climate Action across all our programme areas in 4 priority actions:

Key Actions include:

1. Climate-informed risk reduction, humanitarian action and resilient recovery from disasters, *including early warning, resilient infrastructure and disaster risk reduction / management etc.*
2. Sustainable energy for health-care facilities, schools and WASH e.g. *solarization of school and solar for health projects*
3. Sustainable WASH services in areas most vulnerable to climate change *including solar powered WASH infrastructure.*
4. Pathways for young people to be more effective champions for sustainability.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I call upon you to come up with innovative ideas and approaches to enhance learning opportunities and reduce the adverse impacts of climate change.

Seeks new fields in green economy and climate resilience services and infrastructure. Open up new studies and research on climate action and

encourage early learning on climate change through partnership and support to primary and secondary schools.

Together, let us work towards creating a better future for the children of Zimbabwe by tackling the intersection of climate change and education through collaborative and innovative efforts.

I hope you have been inspired to invest more in Climate Action for children and contribute towards the movement to keep our dear planet safe. Wishing you a wonderful Symposium.

Thank you.