

CHILD-RESPONSIVE LOCALLY LED ADAPTATION

Action Brief

October 2025



Save the Children



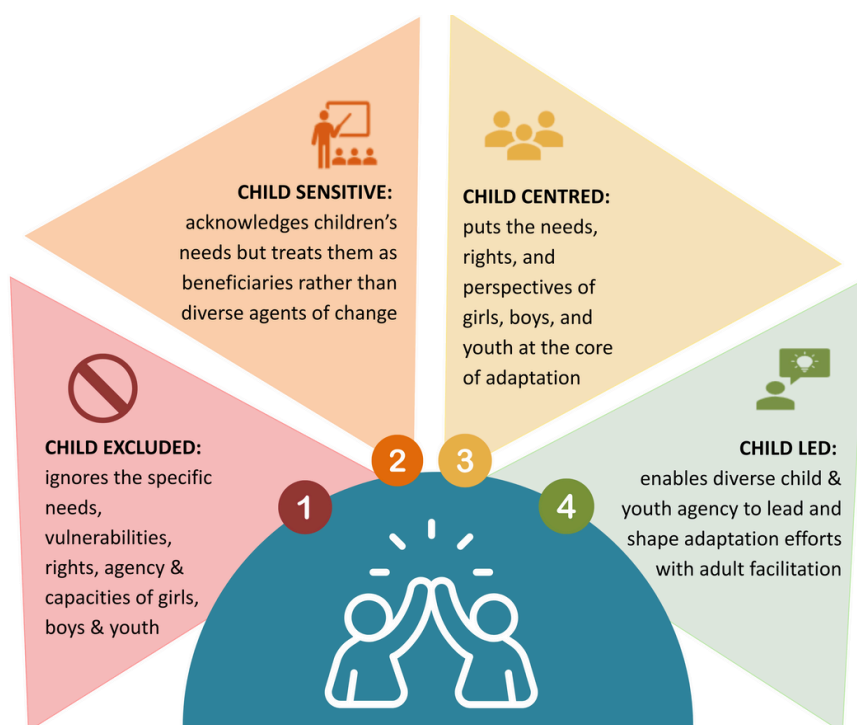
the sharetrust™

Rationale

Climate change is amplifying risks for children and youth worldwide with an estimated 1.2 billion children living in areas acutely exposed to climate-related hazards. Within these contexts, structural inequalities exacerbate vulnerabilities: women and girls bear the brunt of climate impacts due to entrenched gender norms and barriers to resources, while children and youth in conflict-affected settings face heightened risk of exclusion, exploitation, and insecurity.

Despite growing commitment, climate adaptation funding gaps remain considerable, including at the local level. As the global aid system undergoes significant restructuring, the imperative to advance locally led approaches has never been greater.

Research commissioned by Save the Children and led by The Share Trust examined emerging practices, enablers, and challenges for child-responsive Locally Led Adaptation (LLA) globally and with deep dives in Mali and Uganda. The study defined child responsiveness on a spectrum to enable more granular and operational understanding whilst reviewing good practices for applying the LLA Principles and shifting power, funding, policies, and processes to diverse local actors including children, youth, and women.



Child-Responsive LLA Spectrum

Good Practices Across the Spectrum

LLA Category

Emerging Good Practices



Child Led

AGENCY: children and youth, including girls and young women, lead decision making across programming processes and are recognised as agents of change

RESPONSIVENESS: adaptation is driven and led by children and youth with adults facilitating

- **School and community-based initiatives** e.g., eco-clubs in Mali and Uganda Red Cross school programmes, which strengthen children's knowledge and agency whilst influencing families and communities
- **Youth climate champions and child-led risk mapping**, enabling children and youth to analyse hazards, disseminate information, and mobilise local preparedness (e.g., Anticipatory and ENCORE initiatives, South Sudan and Philippines, Save the Children; DARAJA project, Uganda; Mon Ecole, Ma Responsabilité, Mali)



Child Centred

AGENCY: children and youth meaningfully participate; they are not just passive recipients, and are engaged across programming processes

RESPONSIVENESS: adaptation puts the needs, rights, and perspectives of children and youth at the core of climate adaptation initiatives, which address gendered needs, vulnerabilities, and capacities

- **Child-friendly engagement methods and tools** including games, music, dance, drama, sports, quizzes, and skills exhibitions; creating space for children's voices in policy and planning; leveraging traditional practices for mobilising communities (e.g., "Why Adapt" games-based curriculum, Uganda Red Cross)
- **Creating dedicated spaces for child and youth voices** to elevate their agency in decision making, planning and policy (e.g., Save the Children's "Generation Hope Campaign") and leveraging traditional practices and existing community systems to support the role of youth in climate action
- **Women-led groups and networks**, including Self Help Groups, youth groups, and elected women leaders, which strengthen accountability, disseminate early warnings, and support gender and child-responsive adaptation initiatives
- **Inclusive and participatory planning approaches** that engage children, women, and youth to ensure the relevance and timeliness of anticipatory actions (e.g., Save the Children's Anticipatory Action Initiative in South Sudan and LoCAL processes in Mali)
- **Anticipatory action approaches**, such as Uganda's DARAJA project, which mobilised and trained women and youth champions to disseminate actionable climate information, and Save the Children's support to inclusive flood preparedness committees in South Sudan connecting near-term early action with long-term resilience (including through microgrants for implementing priority anticipatory actions)



Child Sensitive

AGENCY: projects are informed by an understanding of the needs, rights, and perspectives of children and youth, but they are not necessarily consulted and have no (or limited) agency in programming processes

RESPONSIVENESS: adaptation initiatives recognise children and youth as a particularly vulnerable group and take steps to ensure their needs and rights are considered but gender differences are not always addressed

- **Decentralised climate finance mechanisms**, such as UNCDF's LoCAL in Mali and Kenya's County Climate Change Fund, which devolve resources and decision-making closer to communities, supporting child and conflict sensitive investment planning
- **Integrating conflict and gender analysis** into adaptation planning to address inequalities and insecurities

Enablers of Child-Responsive LLA

LLA Principle	Enablers
Shifting Power	
 Devolve decision making	Institutionalise the sustained and meaningful participation of children/youth to place their perspectives, priorities, needs, rights, and capacities at the heart of LLA programming Recognise and plan for the unique role of diverse local actors across all programming processes (framing, design, delivery, learning)
 Address structural inequalities	Understand age and gender/specific risks to develop adapted and accessible early warning systems/forecasts Use participatory tools (e.g., visioning, mapping, games, drama) to elevate children and youth voices and unpack underlying root causes including girls only spaces and girls clubs Underpin programming with integrated conflict, gender, and inclusion assessments and analysis Create dedicated spaces to facilitate the meaningful involvement of women and girls in policy and initiative framing and design to identify and address inequalities
 Build a robust understanding of climate risk & uncertainty	Align risk assessments and programme design with cultural practices and local knowledge to build ownership, relevance, and local solutions Strengthen climate learning to ensure children understand climate risks and combine generational, Indigenous, traditional, and scientific knowledge in risk assessments for early warning systems
 Invest in local capabilities	Mobilise peer-to-peer learning structures (e.g., youth clubs, teacher networks, youth champions, volunteers, women's groups) to drive local awareness raising, peer-to-peer learning structures, and invest in school-based programmes positioning children as advocates Support local government capacity strengthening for gender and child-responsive climate action by including children's needs and priorities in national and local adaptation plans informed by child-focused climate assessments
Shifting Funding	
 Provide patient & predictable funding	Increase investment in informal community structures (e.g., Self Help Groups) particularly in conflict contexts Increase accessible flexible and multi-year funding for youth and women-led organisations and other local actors, and leverage climate financing for child-led or child-centered initiatives Channel funding directly to local actors or intermediaries including local pooled funds governed by local bodies to enable grassroots access (e.g., microgrants for anticipatory action) Support coalitions of local actors to co-lead multisectoral adaptation interventions grounded in local priorities and solutions identified by women and children
Shifting Policies, Processes, Practices	
 Ensure transparency & accountability	Engage with national and local government to embed child and gender-responsive adaptation into national and sub-national frameworks ensuring youth involvement in policy framing Support the agency of children, youth, and women in monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) alongside tailored indicators to track and measure progress Promote collective accountability empowering children and youth to hold providers accountable
 Flexible programming & learning	Develop participatory toolkits that uses child-friendly and inclusive methods e.g., gender and age-responsive assessments (e.g., mapping, visioning, drama) to identify distinct risks Support flexible programming and learning for adaptive management through the integration of inclusive feedback mechanisms to adjust to changing priorities and address uncertainty Scale and institutionalise proven models (e.g., school clubs) through sector systems including curricula
 Collaborative action & investment	Facilitate collaboration across sectors, initiatives, funding sources including integrating conflict-sensitive approaches Harness the power of community collectives by supporting community-collective action and community structures (e.g., Self Help Groups, flood/drought committees) Establish strategic partnerships including with regional and local hydrometeorological entities

Recommendations

International Actors



✓ INGOs, Multilaterals, Funders

- **Provide increased, flexible, and multi-year funding to youth- and women-led organisations**, as well as local intermediary coalitions that can channel smaller grants to community groups
- **Support decentralised climate finance mechanisms** e.g., the UNCDF Local Climate Adaptive Living (LoCAL) Facility, and the Kenya County Climate Change Fund (CCCCF) to devolve power and funding to local levels
- **Integrate child- and gender-responsive indicators and targets into adaptation finance frameworks, funds, and programming** with clear metrics ensuring to balance the focus on quantity with achieving quality climate finance
- **Scale proven models approaches** (e.g., school clubs, women's Self Help Groups, eco-clubs) and participatory approaches (e.g., mapping, drama, games) through education, health, and protection systems

Local Government



✓ National and Subnational

- **Collect sex, age, and disability disaggregated data** to strengthen gender- and child-responsive programming
- **Embed-child and gender-responsive adaptation into national adaptation plans, nationally determined contributions**, as well as broader national and subnational development plans, budgets, and key sector strategies (e.g., water, environment, infrastructure, education and health)
- **Prioritise social protection measures, gender-responsive services, and resources** (e.g., gender-based violence services, health services, childcare)
- **Establish and/or support inclusive community resilience or climate change committees and groups**, including girls-only spaces ensuring the meaningful inclusion and leadership of youth, women, and marginalised groups
- **Integrate climate education into school curricula and extracurricular clubs**

Other Local Actors



✓ CSOs and Community Groups

- **Work through Self Help Groups, informal community groups, youth and girls clubs as trusted channels** for adaptation and anticipatory action
- **Capture and elevate children and youth experiences through participatory methods** (e.g., storytelling, theatre, games, digital platforms) and provide girl-only spaces for strengthening skills and leadership,
- **Build coalitions of youth, women's groups, and CSOs to influence local climate policy agendas** (e.g., coalitions of local actors amplifying community voices through collective advocacy and collective action).
- **Strengthen accountability** by monitoring adaptation spending and supporting communities to track whether funds reach child and gender priorities



Photo credit: B Mahamane



Photo credit: M, Ethiraj, The Share Trust

Next Steps



Photo credit: Bintou Mahamane, young researcher, Mali Deep Dive

Key Actions

1) Create space for local agency

- Recognise children, youth, and women as leaders in adaptation, and not only “vulnerable” groups
- Facilitate their meaningful participation in decisions that affect their lives, ensuring adaptation is inclusive, sustainable, and rights-based

2) Adopt child and youth-responsive approaches

- Progressively move along the spectrum of responsiveness: from **child-sensitive** (prioritising children’s needs), to **child-centred** (shaping climate action with children’s perspectives and participation), and, where feasible, to **child-led**
- Support schools, eco-clubs, girls clubs, and youth climate champions as proven platforms for children and youth to contribute meaningfully and strengthen their knowledge and capabilities

3) Strengthen women and youth collective leadership

- Integrate women and youth networks into adaptation planning to improve access to climate information, enhance preparedness, and ensure gendered needs are addressed in early warning systems
- Harness their leadership to connect near-term anticipatory action with long-term adaptation strategies

4) Institutionalise systemic reforms

- Provide predictable, flexible, and accessible climate finance that reaches local actors
- Invest in local capacities, knowledge systems, and trusted networks
- Embed child- and gender-responsive approaches and indicators into national policies, climate funds, programmes, and monitoring frameworks
- Sustain and institutionalise support for schools, clubs, and youth networks as vehicles for lasting leadership



Save the Children

