



**ACERWC**  
African Committee of Experts on  
the Rights and Welfare of the Child



## ADVOCACY FACTSHEET

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# 1.1°C TOO HIGH:

# CLIMATE CHANGE, EL NIÑO, AND AFRICA'S CHILDREN'S RIGHTS TO FOOD & WATER

ACERWC - WORKING GROUP ON CHILDREN'S  
RIGHTS AND CLIMATE CHANGE

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2026

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# 1.1°C TOO HIGH!



At 1.1°C of global warming, children's rights to food and water across Africa are already under severe threat. Climate change is systematically dismantling children's rights to food and water across Africa and a new El Niño event, confirmed by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) on 2 June 2026 with 80-90% probability, threatens to make things significantly worse. As the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC) affirms through its 1.1TooHigh! Child-Rights Based Approach to Climate Action in Africa campaign, Africa's children bear the heaviest burden of the climate emergency despite contributing least to it. The rights guaranteed to them under the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) to food, water, health, life, and survival demand immediate and decisive action.

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*This factsheet has been developed in the context of the 2026 Day of the African Child, under the theme "Ensuring universal access to water, sanitation and hygiene for every child in Africa." It highlights the scale of the challenge and outlines the concrete actions needed to address it.*

## INTRODUCTION

This advocacy factsheet is issued by the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC)' Working Group on Children's Rights and Climate Change in connection with the Day of the African Child (DAC) 2026, commemorated annually on 16th June, under the theme "Ensuring universal access to water, sanitation and hygiene for every child in Africa." This theme aligns with the African Union Theme of the Year 2026: "Assuring sustainable water availability and safe sanitation systems to achieve the goals of Agenda 2063," adopted at the 38th and 39th Ordinary Sessions of the AU Assembly.

## KEY FACTS AT A GLANCE



307 million people in Africa experienced hunger in 2024 which is more than 1 in 5 of the continent's population while hunger globally was declining.



Nearly 59% of Africa's population faced moderate or severe food insecurity in 2024, which is more than double the global average.



739 million or one in three children globally live in high or very high-water scarcity



436 million children face extreme water vulnerability, high water scarcity combined with severely inadequate drinking water services.



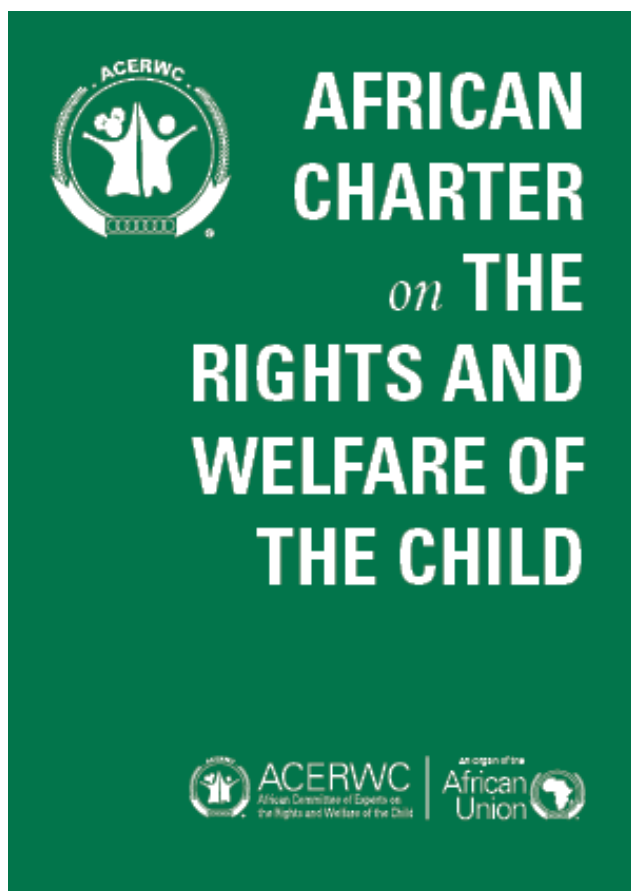
190 million children across 10 African countries face the highest risk from a convergence of inadequate WASH, water-related diseases, and climate hazards.



25 of the 33 countries ranked by UNICEF as "extremely high risk" for children in the context of climate change are in Africa




## CHILDREN'S RIGHTS TO FOOD AND WATER



Children's rights to food and water are grounded in the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) and reinforced by multiple national, regional and international instruments. Article 14 on Health and Health Services of the ACRWC obligates States Parties to ensure the highest attainable standard of health, including through the provision of adequate safe drinking water, environmental sanitation, adequate nutrition, and the combating of disease and malnutrition. Articles 14(2)(c) and (d) specifically require States to ensure adequate nutrition and combat malnutrition. Article 5 guarantees every child's right to life, survival, and development, while Article 20 imposes obligations on States to provide material assistance including food, clothing, and housing for children in need.<sup>1</sup>

Article 4 of the ACRWC that focuses on the principle of the best interests of the child must serve as the primary consideration in all climate-related decisions affecting children. This principle is inseparable from the broader architecture of children's rights. The ACERWC's General Comment No. 5 on Article 1 of State Party Obligations affirms that the rights guaranteed under the African Children's Charter are indivisible, interdependent, and mutually reinforcing and States may not invoke resource constraints to justify inaction or regression in their fulfilment. The rights to food and water sit at the foundation of this architecture. When they are eroded by climate change, the consequences do not stop there. Violations cascade, undermining children's rights to health, education, protection from exploitation, and development in ways that compound with inaction.<sup>2</sup>

These obligations are reinforced by Aspiration 5 of Africa's Agenda for Children 2040 (universal access to clean water, adequate nutrition, and hygienic sanitation by 2040); the Africa Water Vision 2063 and Policy; the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (Articles 16 and 24, interpreted to include the right to water and a healthy environment); and SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) and SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation).<sup>3</sup>



### Aspiration. 5

Every child grows up well-nourished and with access to the basic necessities of life

## Agenda 2040

For an Africa Fit for Children

# CLIMATE CHANGE AND ITS IMPACT ON CHILDREN'S RIGHT TO FOOD

Africa faces its most severe hunger crisis in decades with many people facing acute food insecurity. The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (SOFI) 2025 Report confirms that over 307 million people in Africa experienced hunger in 2024, with the proportion surpassing 20 percent of the continent's population. According to the same report, nearly 59 percent of Africa's population experienced moderate or severe food insecurity in 2024. If current trends continue, 512 million people could face hunger by 2030, with nearly 60 percent of them in Africa.<sup>4</sup> The cost of a healthy diet continues to increase which puts nutritious food beyond the reach of a growing share of Africa's families and children.<sup>5</sup>

The ACERWC's Continental Study on Climate Change and Children's Rights in Africa (2024) identifies climate change as a primary structural driver of food insecurity which operates through the following key pathways:<sup>6</sup>

- ✓ Rising temperatures, shifting rainfall, prolonged droughts, and erratic floods are devastating crop yields and livestock across the continent. Countries such as Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi, and Namibia have seen up to 40% of their populations fall into acute food insecurity from climate shocks alone.<sup>7</sup>
- ✓ Ocean warming and marine ecosystem disruption are depleting fish stocks upon which millions of coastal and island families depend on. In Madagascar, artisanal fisheries support 1.5 million people and 7% of GDP; and in Mozambique, fisheries support 5 million people and 4% of GDP.<sup>8</sup> Both

countries are impacted by climate change.

- ✓ Climate change has intensified the prevalence of agricultural pests and crop diseases across Africa which further erodes food production and supply stability.<sup>9</sup>
- ✓ Today's children will inherit a climate far harsher than any previous generation has faced. Children born in 2020 may face nearly three times as many droughts and crop failures over their lifetime than any of their previous generations.<sup>10</sup>

**IN FOCUS: Lake Chad has shrunk dramatically since the 1960s, devastating the water, agriculture, fishing, and livestock security of millions of children and families in the Lake Chad Basin.<sup>11</sup>**

In all of this, children continue to pay the heaviest price. The SOFI 2025 Report records a global child stunting prevalence of 23.2 percent in 2024, with 150.2 million stunted children globally, a disproportionate of them in Africa.<sup>12</sup> In the worst-affected countries such as Somalia, Chad, Zambia, Uganda, Kenya, and Guinea-Bissau, one in three children is malnourished. Girls, children with disabilities, rural and displaced children bear the heaviest burden.<sup>13</sup> For children, this is not just a food systems crisis it is a survival crisis. Malnutrition weakens immune systems, increases susceptibility to disease, impairs cognitive development, and in severe cases, leads to preventable child deaths. Climate-driven food insecurity is therefore a direct violation of children's rights to life, health, and development.

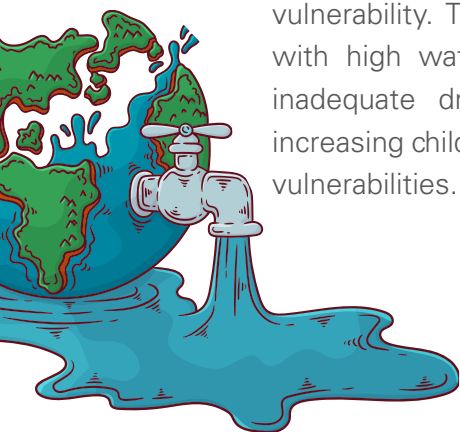
# CLIMATE CHANGE AND ITS IMPACT ON CHILDREN'S RIGHT TO WATER

The WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP) 2025 Report confirms that, despite progress, billions of people worldwide still lack access to safe WASH services, with the deepest disparities concentrated in Africa. Disaggregated data reveal access gaps of up to 35 percentage between rural and urban areas across the continent. Women and girls in many communities spend more than 30 minutes daily collecting water, which directly undermines girls' education and health outcomes.<sup>14</sup>

In Africa, 190 million children across ten countries (Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, and Somalia) face the highest risk from a convergence of inadequate WASH, water-related diseases, and climate hazards, with approximately 2 in 5 deaths in these countries attributable to unsafe WASH services.<sup>15</sup>

The scale of children's water insecurity globally and particularly in Africa is alarming. Evidence<sup>16</sup> shows that:

- ✔ 739 million children or 1 in 3 worldwide already live in areas of high or very high-water scarcity, with climate change threatening to worsen this further;
- ✔ 436 million children face extreme water vulnerability. They live simultaneously with high water scarcity and severe inadequate drinking water services, increasing children's health and survival vulnerabilities.



Climate change drives water insecurity for children in different ways:

- ✔ *Altered rainfall and increased drought:* Climate change is intensifying water scarcity by disrupting rainfall patterns, raising drought frequency and severity. By 2040, roughly 1 in 4 children worldwide will be living in areas of extremely high-water stress.<sup>17</sup>
- ✔ *Flooding and waterborne disease:* Climate-driven floods contaminate water sources and trigger surges in cholera and diarrhoea which are the leading killers of children in Africa. In the 10 most water-vulnerable African countries, approximately 2 in 5 deaths are attributable to unsafe WASH services.<sup>18</sup>
- ✔ *WASH and Displacement:* Climate-induced displacement forces children into settings where WASH infrastructure is absent or destroyed. The ACERWC Continental Study documents the climate-conflict-displacement nexus and its devastating effects on children's access to water.<sup>19</sup>
- ✔ *Gender inequality:* The burden of water collection falls disproportionately on women and girls, consuming more than 30 minutes daily in many communities and directly impeding girls' access to education.<sup>20</sup>
- ✔ *The food-water-nutrition nexus:* Water scarcity destroys crops, depletes livestock, and forces children to drink contaminated water. When water wells dry up, children miss school. When floods hit, waterborne disease surges. Water insecurity is food insecurity, and food insecurity is water insecurity.<sup>21</sup>

# EL NIÑO 2026 AND ITS IMPACT ON CHILDREN'S RIGHTS TO FOOD AND WATER

On 2nd June 2026, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) confirmed that El Niño conditions are developing, with an 80% probability of an El Niño event during June-August 2026 and probabilities of continuation through at least November 2026 at or above 90%. Forecasts indicate the event will be at least moderate and possibly strong.

While El Niño is a naturally occurring climate phenomenon driven by the periodic warming of ocean surface temperatures in the central and eastern equatorial Pacific, because the climate system is globally interconnected, these oceanic warming triggers cascading changes in temperature and rainfall patterns across continents.<sup>22</sup>

According to the WMO the June 2026 global alert on El Niño Potential Implications for Africa,<sup>23</sup> and similar other state of the climate briefings the continent faces indicates a deeply differentiated but a universally alarming risk picture:

- ✔ *Drought and agricultural failure in Southern Africa:* El Niño conditions are strongly associated with below-average rainfall, prolonged drought, agricultural production losses, water stress, and reduced pasture availability across Southern Africa during the 2026/27 rainy season. The most recent El Niño (2023-24) triggered one of the worst droughts in more than 100 years in Southern Africa, leaving more than 30 million people in need of humanitarian assistance. Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi, and Namibia saw up to 40%

of their populations fall into acute food insecurity.<sup>24</sup> For children in Southern Africa, the developing 2026 El Niño event therefore constitutes a direct, foreseeable, and imminent threat to their right to adequate food and to safe drinking water and sanitation, falling hardest on children under five who are already nutritionally and physiologically most vulnerable.





✓ *Drought followed by Floods, contaminated water and waterborne disease surges in East Africa:* East Africa typically experiences drought followed by flooding rain during El Niño events. The consequences for children's water rights are severe and well-documented. During the 2023-24 El Niño event, heavy rains and flooding devastated infrastructure across Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda destroying homes, hospitals, schools, and roads, displacing people, and critically compromising access to clean water and sanitation facilities. Eastern and Southern Africa simultaneously experienced one of the worst cholera

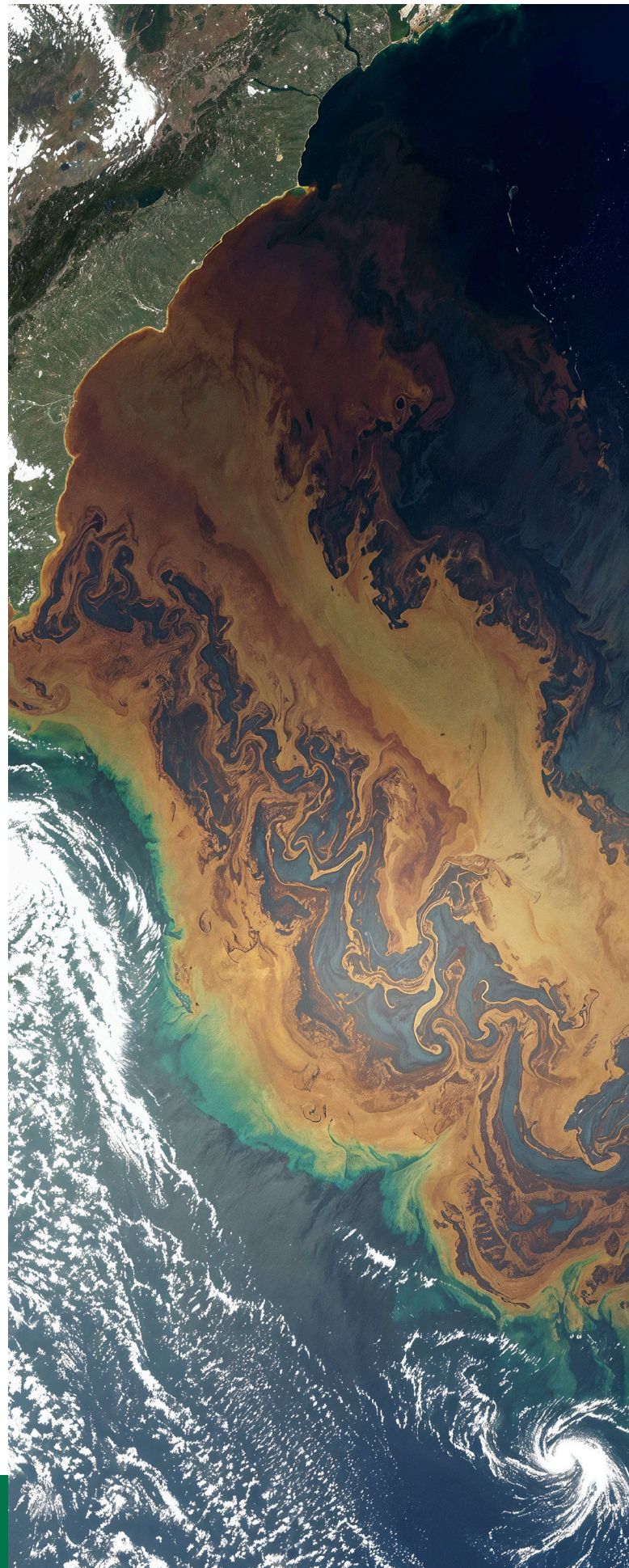
outbreaks in decades, with children and adolescents disproportionately affected. In Kenya alone, during a previous El Niño event, an estimated 2.5 million children were affected by floods, landslides, and related diseases.<sup>25</sup> El Niño-driven flooding contaminates drinking water sources and disrupts sanitation infrastructure, while drought conditions force communities to use contaminated water and abandon proper hygiene practices which increases the risk of cholera transmission. This year's prediction for the months of June-September indicate below normal rainfall that may result in drought in parts of Ethiopia, Uganda and Sudan, followed by flooding rains from Oct – January.

✓ *Drought compounding food and water insecurity in the Sahel:* El Niño raises the risk of drought in the Sahel, a region already facing extreme food insecurity, conflict, displacement and severely overstretched WASH systems. FEWS NET projects that food assistance needs in November 2026 will be highest in Sudan, DRC, Nigeria, and South Sudan, with needs expected to be higher than in November 2025 in Sudan, DRC, Nigeria, South Sudan, Somalia, Burundi, and Mali. In a region where water sources are already insufficient and sanitation coverage remains critically low, El Niño-induced drought will further deplete groundwater, dry boreholes, and force children, especially girls to walk longer distances to fetch water, compounding both their exposure to protection risks and their inability to attend school. This represents a foreseeable threat to children's rights to food, water, and education.<sup>26</sup>

✓ *Disruption of Fisheries:* El Niño disrupts marine ecosystems and fisheries through ocean warming and altered current patterns. For the millions of African children and families dependent on marine and freshwater fisheries for food and livelihoods particularly in coastal states and across the Great Lakes region, this represents a compounding threat to food security with potentially severe consequences for child nutrition in communities where fish is the primary source of food and income.<sup>27</sup>

The 2026 El Niño event has rightly generated significant coverage in meteorological, humanitarian, and food security circles. Governments, international and development organisations have issued calls for preparedness. However, El Niño is not merely a meteorological or humanitarian challenge. It is a children’s rights emergency in the making. It directly threatens the rights of millions of African children to food (Article 14(2)(c)(d) of ACRWC), water (Article 14 of ACRWC), health (Article 14 of ACRWC), life and survival (Article 5 of ACRWC), and education (Article 11 of ACRWC). The consequences are foreseeable and States have a legal obligation to take preventive and anticipatory action to prevent harm to children. Foreseeable harm demands foreseeable response.

The ACERWC notes with concern that the developing El Niño alert of 2026 constitutes a foreseeable and imminent threat to the rights of millions of children across Africa. The principles of preventive action, precaution and harm prevention under the ACRWC and international human rights and climate law require States to act without delay. Waiting for the crisis to arrive before responding is not a failure of capacity but a failure of the obligation to protect children from harm.



## CALLS TO ACTION

In the spirit of the 1.1TooHigh! Child-Rights Based Approach to Climate Action in Africa campaign, and in alignment with the DAC 2026 theme, the ACERWC calls upon the following actors to take immediate and concrete actions to protect children's rights to food, water, health, and survival.

### **A. STATE PARTIES TO THE AFRICAN CHARTER ON THE RIGHTS AND WELFARE OF THE CHILD SHOULD:**

- ✓ Activate child focused El Niño anticipatory action plans by Q3 2026. Given the high probability of a moderate-to-strong El Niño continuing through at least November 2026, States in Southern Africa, East Africa, and the Sahel should immediately;
- ✓ Activate child-specific anticipatory action plans including pre-positioning food and water supplies;
- ✓ Prioritise and scale up child sensitive social protection including ensuring continuity plans for school feeding and WASH services;
- ✓ Strengthening early warning systems including child specific risk indicators;
- ✓ Protecting agricultural livelihoods and ensuring the continuity of WASH services;
- ✓ Implement the recommendations of the ACERWC's Continental Study on Children's Rights and Climate Change. Develop concrete, time-bound plans for its implementation across food, water, health, and education sectors;
- ✓ Fulfil Article 14 ACRWC obligations: Adopt and adequately resource comprehensive legislative, administrative, budgetary, and institutional measures to ensure universal, equitable, and climate-resilient access to safe food and water for every child;
- ✓ Integrate children's rights into climate and WASH plans. Embed children's rights under the ACRWC explicitly into National Adaptation Plans (NAPs), Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), and Disaster Risk Reduction strategies, including El Niño preparedness plans for 2026-27;
- ✓ End disparities in WASH access. Close the gap in safe water access between rural and urban areas, with targeted investment in schools, health facilities, and the communities most exposed to El Niño related WASH failures;
- ✓ Protect girls and marginalised children. Develop gender-responsive, disability-inclusive, and age-appropriate food and water security programmes, addressing the disproportionate burden borne by girls, children with disabilities, rural children, and displaced children;
- ✓ Ensure children's meaningful participation. In line with Article 4 of ACRWC, create structured mechanisms for children to participate in El Niño preparedness planning and in the design and monitoring of food and water security policies;
- ✓ Include in the State Party periodic reports, specific, disaggregated data on progress in realising children's rights to food, water, and sanitation in the context of climate change, including El Niño.

## B. INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS AND DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS SHOULD:

- ✔ Mobilise child-specific El Niño preparedness funding for Africa, recognising that the 2026 event is foreseeable and that anticipatory action is both more cost-effective and more rights-compliant than emergency response after the fact;
- ✔ Increase financing for child-sensitive, climate-resilient WASH and food security systems in Africa, ensuring it reaches the most vulnerable children and communities and is disbursed with the speed the climate threat demands;
- ✔ Prioritise grant-based, child-focused climate finance for Africa, ensuring that funding for adaptation, WASH, and food security reaches frontline services (schools, health centres, communities) and is not delayed by complex disbursement processes;
- ✔ Integrate a child rights-based approach into all El Niño response frameworks, humanitarian appeals, and climate adaptation programming;
- ✔ Engage and work with the ACERWC for child-focused climate action in Africa in 2026 and beyond.

## C. CIVIL SOCIETY, NHRIs, AND COMMUNITIES SHOULD:

- ✔ Issue child rights-based alerts and analyses on the 2026 El Niño event at national level, urging governments to activate anticipatory action plans and protect children's rights to food and water;
- ✔ Amplify the 1.1TooHigh! campaign and the DAC 2026 theme by raising awareness, at community, national, and continental levels, of the concrete threat that El Niño, climate change, and the degradation of Africa's seas and oceans pose to children's rights to water, sanitation, and hygiene;
- ✔ Monitor and document violations of children's rights to food and water caused by El Niño and other climate disasters, and report to the relevant national accountability mechanisms, including the ACERWC;
- ✔ Support child environmental defenders and young climate advocates in food- and water-insecure communities to participate meaningfully in disaster preparedness planning and in continental and global climate policy processes.

# PROTECT AFRICA'S CHILDREN NOW



HUNGER IS DEEPENING. WATER SCARCITY IS INTENSIFYING. FISHERIES ARE COLLAPSING

Across Africa, the climate crisis is eroding children's rights to food and water which are the foundations without which no other right can be fully enjoyed. Hunger is deepening. Water scarcity is intensifying. Fisheries are collapsing. Currently, a new El Niño alert is developing and threatening to trigger droughts in Southern Africa and the Sahel regions, floods in East Africa, and cascading harm to the food, water, and health systems upon which Africa's children depend.

Since El Niño is a foreseeable event, it demands a foreseeable, rights-based response. The ACERWC, through its Working Group on Children's Rights and Climate Change, reiterates: 1.1°C is already too high for Africa's children. The time to act is now; before the rains fail, before the wells run dry, before the harvests collapse, and before the diarrhoea, cholera, malnutrition, and displacement of another El Niño season add their toll to an already unconscionable burden. Africa's children cannot wait.



## 1.1TooHigh!

# Endnotes

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