School Safety in the Climate Crisis

A Call for Action in Central, Eastern, Southern, and Western Africa

Education is the foundation for a better future, empowering children and youth, strengthening communities' resilience in the face of crises, teaching them the lifesaving knowledge and skills they need when disaster strikes. Education also promotes peaceful societies and economic prosperity, giving children hope for a better life after crises subside.

Yet for every day that the climate crisis deepens, the promises of education become harder to realise. Desertification, increasing storms, drought, flooding, sea level rise – and more – mean disaster is an ever-present threat. In addition to the very real impact on children, these disasters have catastrophic economic impacts. Every year, disasters - whether climate-related or not - cost education systems $35.9 billion.[1]

But even while hazards are inevitable, the adverse impacts on children's learning are not. Investing and implementing school safety can help unlock a better, more resilient future for every child.

This policy brief aims to help guide these efforts, using the findings of the 2024 Comprehensive School Safety Policy Survey to set out key actions for building school safety as the climate crisis deepens in the region.

[1] United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (2025). Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction 2025: Resilience Pays: Financing and Investing for our Future.

Global Alliance for Disaster Risk Reduction & Resilience in the Education Sector

West and Central Africa Education in Emergencies Working Group

About the findings

In 2024, the Global Alliance for Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience in the Education Sector (GADRRRES) conducted a global policy survey to assess the status of comprehensive school safety around the world.

Built on the Comprehensive School Safety Framework, the policy survey was a collaborative, multi-stakeholder process that engaged ministries of education, national disaster management agencies, UN agencies, national, community, and international NGOs, and more.

In the **Central, Eastern, Southern & West Africa region**, 12 countries took part in the Policy Survey between August 2024 and February 2025. Together, this regional Africa dataset on school safety policy represents 139 million school-age children in the region.[2]

The all-hazards approach: evidence from Sudan

The situation in Sudan illustrates the urgency of an integrated, all-hazards approach to school safety. In 2023, the eruption of armed conflict forced schools across the country to close, while hundreds of facilities were damaged.[3] Just one year later, devastating floods again disrupted learning for over 23,000 children, many of whom had only just returned to classrooms. Such combined crises demonstrate that neither conflict-related attacks nor climate induced hazards can be addressed in isolation. Education systems must be prepared to withstand and respond to multiple hazards and risks.

The Comprehensive School Safety Framework

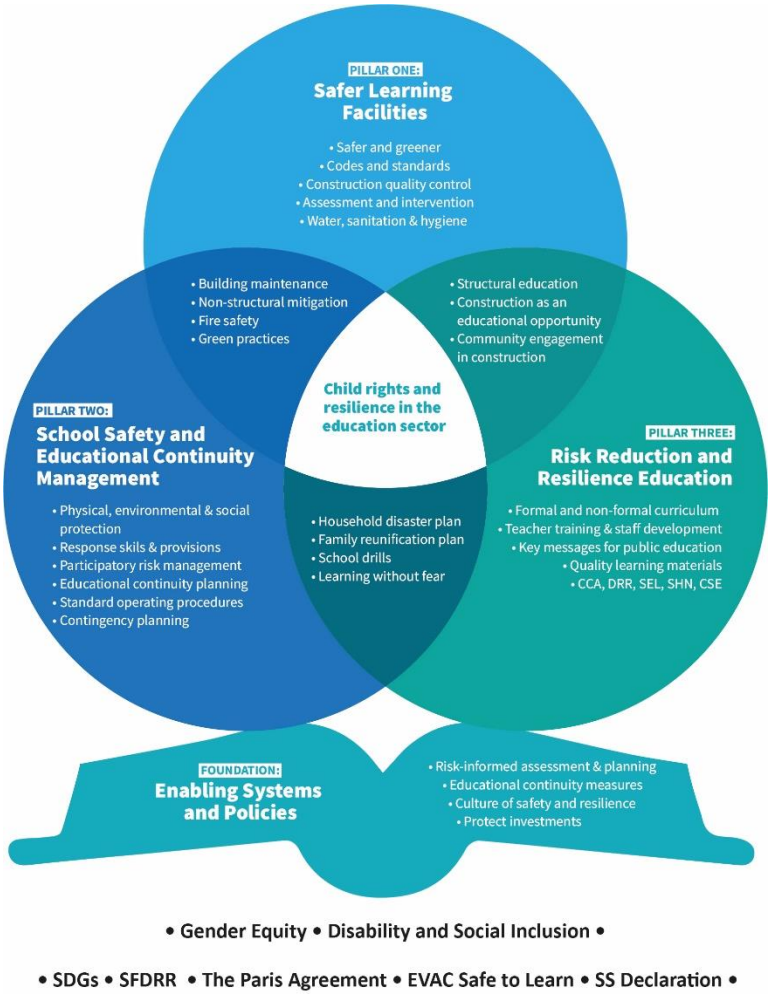
The Comprehensive School Safety Framework (Figure 1) is an evidence-based approach to protecting children and education systems from a range of crises and disasters. The Framework includes recommendations, roles, and responsibilities for all aspects of school safety, covering three pillars:

- **Pillar 1: Safer learning facilities**, to strengthen the resilience of education systems.
- **Pillar 2: School safety and education continuity management**, to keep schools open and children learning in times of crisis.
- **Pillar 3: Risk reduction and resilience education**, to provide children with the skills, knowledge and behaviours to prepare for and respond to shocks and stresses.

These pillars are connected to existing education and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) approaches through **enabling systems and policies**, also defined in the Framework.

Importantly, the Framework adopts an all-hazards, all-risks approach, reflecting the reality of many countries and making it relevant for a wide range of everyday risks, disasters and the compounding effect of multiple crises.

[2] See Appendix D of the Supplemental Materials for the Global and Regional Status of School Safety Technical Reports for method used to calculate school-aged children.
[3] United Nations (2023). *Sudan Humanitarian Update*. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).



EFFECTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON SCHOOL SAFETY

The impact of climate-induced disasters on education, including damage to educational facilities and disruption to educational services, is escalating. Education systems in Africa have not been spared. On the contrary, the climate crisis has become a full-fledged reality in the region, with floods of a scale or frequency that had never been experienced resulting in devastating impacts on education. In 2024 alone, over 20 million children in Central, Eastern, Southern & West Africa region Central, Eastern, Southern & West Africa region were affected by flood-related disruptions.[4]

In addition, climate-induced disasters strongly affect the viability of rural livelihoods, adding financial stress to vulnerable families who may not be able to afford basic expenses such as school-related costs for their children. Sadly, for many families this may force them to engage children in farm labour, pastoral activities or other forms of income-generating activities. Food and water insecurity resulting from disasters are other major threats to children's access to education, as household priorities shift, which may lead to school drop-out.

[4] UNICEF (2025). Learning Interrupted: Global snapshot of climate-related school disruptions in 2024.

Reflecting this reality, all governments in the **Central, Eastern, Southern & West Africa region** (100%) reported that climate change impacts and flooding impacted their schools.

Impacts included:

- **Damage to School Infrastructure**. Four in five governments (83%) reported that climate change damaged school infrastructure. Climate-exacerbated impacts were also highlighted, including damage from flooding (92%) and strong winds (83%).
- **School Closures**. Similarly, four in five governments (83%) reported that climate change led to school closures. All (100%) reported school closures from flooding, and three-quarters (75%) reported this impact from strong winds.
- **Injury and death**. Over half of governments (58%) reported that climate change caused injuries at school. Sadly, half of governments (50%) reported that climate change and flooding had been linked to death in school.

Foundations: Enabling Systems and Policies

Governments in the region show growing momentum to implement climate change adaptation within the education sector. According to the survey, over half (58%) of governments include climate change in their policies. The same percentage (58%) engage in limited or full climate change risk assessments.

Regionally, over half of governments (58%) also reported that their ministry of education had a designated or voluntary focal point in senior management for climate adaptation and mitigation.[5]

However, funding remains a significant gap. No government reported consistent and sufficient funding for risk reduction and climate change education programming, safe and green school construction, climate mitigation or climate change education. In fact, more than a third of governments (42%) reported no funding at all for response preparedness, education in emergencies, and risk reduction and climate change education programming.

Key actions

Governments should:

- Ensure climate change adaptation is part of education sector plans, policies, programmes, and risk assessments, including school improvement plans.
- Embed education and school safety in national, regional, and local climate change policies, processes, programmes, and funding.
- Ensure education and school safety are integrated comprehensively in National Adaptation Plans and Nationally Determined Contributions.

Donors should:

- Use all available avenues, including bilateral funding and climate funds, to increase the amount of climate finance that goes to education.

[5] See Figure 8 and Table 8 in Appendix A of the Regional Status of School Safety 2024: Central, Eastern, Southern & West Africa for details.

Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC 3.0)

In 2025, all governments were expected to submit their updated Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC 3.0), setting out their country's contribution to climate change mitigation, adaptation, and loss and damage. Education plays a key role in both reducing the impact of the climate crisis and ensuring governments respond accordingly, and as such should feature in all countries' NDCs.

Across the region and across the globe, governments have recognised and responded to the role of education in climate action. Commitments already made in NDCs include:

- **Kenya**: Strengthen infrastructure resilience across all sectors such as transport, energy, education, human settlement among others to withstand extreme weather and climate events, while ensuring their accessibility to all.
- **Liberia**: By 2035, at least 50% of schools have emergency preparedness plans in place.
- **Sao Tome and Principe**: Promote the adaptation of the infrastructure sector through the rehabilitation and construction of 'climate-proof' infrastructure.
- **Somalia**: Ensure access to health, education, and nutrition during climate shocks; strengthen climate-responsive social protection and safeguard services, including cash transfers, safe schools, and child-focused disaster preparedness.
- **Solomon Islands**: Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (MEHRD) has developed and worked with school to implement the School Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) Handbook for the Solomon Islands, which helps address school-level risks and preparedness.
- **Cambodia**: By 2035, the Education sector will strengthen climate resilience through the following key actions, 1,000 schools will implement the National Guidelines on Eco-schools and other 1,000 the Guidelines for Safe School Framework.
- **Nepal**: By 2030, 30% of new school and education infrastructure construction will adhere to the comprehensive school safety guidelines and use carbon-offset and energy-efficient systems, increasing to 70% by 2035.
- **Tonga**: Tonga's target is to ensure school facilities meet national standards for safety and resilience to climate change and disaster risks.

Pillar 1: Safer Learning Facilities

Climate impacts regularly damage school buildings if they are not disaster-proof, causing physical and financial damage and – in the worst cases – leading to deaths of children, teachers, and school staff. One of the most important strategies for reducing impacts from natural hazards is to have robust policies and monitoring around the siting, design and construction of school buildings, recognising climate-related impacts. When it came to selecting and preparing sites for school construction, almost all responding governments in the region (91%) indicated that flood risk was addressed in their policy to some extent.[6] Over half (58%) noted this regulation was robust.

[6] See Figure 13 and Table 13 in Appendix A of the Regional Status of School Safety 2024: Central, Eastern, Southern & West Africa for details.

Governments also addressed future sea-level rise in site selection, with many (89%) having regulations that addressed this hazard to some extent, though only half (56%) were identified as robust. Wildfire and bushfire were similarly addressed in regulations, with many (78%) having some manner of guidelines or regulation but only half (56%) having robust regulations.

However, regionally less than one in ten (8%) governments had done systematic assessment and prioritisation of school upgrades for climate change adaptation or environmental sustainability. Guidelines and policies for use of schools as evacuation centres and post-disaster collectives were similarly modest.[7] Less than a quarter of the governments in this region had systematic selection processes (17%) or policies to maintain educational continuity (25%) and student health (25%) while schools were used in these ways.

Key actions

Governments should:

- Identify, prioritise, and upgrade or replace unsafe or older school buildings at risk of climate impacts.
- Engage in annual assessments of education sector exposure to natural hazards and climate change, and estimate potential impacts.
- Update, disseminate, and implement policy to limit the placement of schools in unsafe areas, ensuring the use of climate change-related data.
- Use building code regulations and monitoring to ensure school buildings can withstand expected natural hazards with limited damage.

Donors should:

- Protect education investments by embedding climate-resilience and school safety in donor-funded programmes.

CASE STUDY: South Sudan

In **South Sudan**, the Ministry of General Education and Instruction has worked with Save the Children, World Vision, Windle Trust International, Finn Church Aid, Peace Corps Organization, Help Education South Sudan, and Action for Children Development Foundation to construct and rehabilitate 22 schools across the country to improve their resilience. In the past, flooding had caused many children to drop out of school, with schools submerged and families forced to relocate. Now, the new flood-resilient schools and classrooms have led to improved access to education, increased enrolment, and enhanced sanitation in certain areas. In Tiap Tiap Primary School in Warrap State, enrolment has more than doubled since the project began.

South Sudan is also part of the Building the Climate Resilience of Children and Communities through the Education Sector (BRACE) initiative, the first major investment of climate finance in education. Co-financed by the Green Climate Fund and the Global Partnership for Education, BRACE is built on the Comprehensive School Safety Framework, utilising a climate lens.

[7] See Figure 18a and Table 18 in Appendix A of the Regional Status of School Safety 2024: Central, Eastern, Southern & West Africa for details.

Investments in climate-resilient schools by the Global Partnership for Education have saved countries $2.5 billion in potential damages. [8]

PILLAR 2: SCHOOL SAFETY AND EDUCATION CONTINUITY

Keeping children learning in emergencies is essential for ensuring they can continue to develop the knowledge and skills they need to thrive. Disruption to learning can lead to exponential impacts on education, setting back years of progress and in the worst cases meaning children drop out of school altogether. Key to keeping children safe in school and learning is education continuity planning.

Overall, more than half (53%) the governments had some form of plan for climate change adaptation and action,[9] though only a small fraction of these plans (9%) were considered robust. A quarter of the governments reported they had robust safety and security plans (25%) and educational continuity plans (25%) covering most risks. Less prevalent were robust plans for protecting education sector investments (17%), such as plans to strengthen or "disaster-proof" infrastructure.

Regionally, governments reported education authorities showing foundational leadership in providing guidance for school safety planning.[10] Many governments provided some level of guidance for risk assessment (92%), risk reduction (92%), response preparedness (91%), and climate change adaptation and action (67%).

Spotlight on West and Central Africa: National Adaptation Plans and Adaptation Communications

In 2024, UNICEF reviewed the 11 National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) and 6 Adaptation Communications submitted by West and Central African countries. The majority of these plans recognise the importance of education, including the NAP of Liberia, which presents education as '*an essential element of the global response to climate change. It helps people understand and address the impact of global warming, increases climate literacy among young people, encourages changes in their attitudes and behaviour, and helps them adapt to climate change-related trends*'.

However, the NAPs and Adaptation Communications say little about the education sector's vulnerability to climate impacts. Instead, proposed adaptation measures focus on curriculum reform and public awareness, with few measures only concerning school infrastructure and disaster preparedness.[11]

[8] Global Partnership for Education (2025). Key results 2021-2025.
[9] See Figure 20 and Table 20 in Appendix A of the Regional Status of School Safety 2024: Central, Eastern, Southern & West Africa for details.
[10] See Figure 22 and Table 22 in Appendix A of the Regional Status of School Safety 2024: Central, Eastern, Southern & West Africa for details.
[11] UNICEF (2024). CHILD-RESPONSIVE ADAPTATION IN WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA: Placing children at the centre of climate adaptation policies and strategies.

KEY ACTIONS

- Develop, disseminate, monitor, and regularly update national-level policies and plans for educational continuity management, including on climate change-related risks.
- Equip schools with comprehensive guidance to design, implement, and monitor localised plans for education continuity in climate-related emergencies.
- Ensure all educational continuity planning on climate resilience provides support for contextually-relevant curriculum adaptations and alternative methods of delivery (such as radio learning).

PILLAR 3: RISK REDUCTION AND RESILIENCE EDUCATION

Comprehensive school safety is, at its heart, about ensuring children are safe and learning at school. Supporting children to understand risk and the impacts of climate change is key to this.

In the region, three-quarters (75%) of governments included climate change action in the primary curriculum, and most (83%) included the topic in the secondary curriculum. Over half (60%) of governments also included climate change action as part of school assemblies and experiential learning.[12] In school clubs, afterschool activities, and other extracurriculars, four in five (80%) responding governments included climate change action. However, only 42% of governments said they had high quality education materials for climate change action.

Teachers are at the heart of quality education. In order to fulfil this role, teachers need effective training, capacity development, and assessment before and during their time in the classroom. However, in the region, only 25% of governments reported that teacher training on climate change action was mandatory, and only 8% reported that teachers' ability on this topic is assessed.

Collective Action for Climate-Resilient Education in Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone is leading efforts to protect its education sector from the impacts of climate change. Under the guidance of the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE) and with support from UNICEF, a multi-stakeholder partnership comprises government agencies, such as the National Disaster Management Agency and Environmental Protection Agency, development groups, including Save the Children, and youth participation. This partnership helped develop a National Disaster Risk Management (DRM) Strategy, school disaster guidelines, and a Climate Change and Environmental Education (CCEE) curriculum to prepare students for climate issues. The DRM and CCEE documents will undergo joint pilot testing in selected regions in early October 2025, allowing for iterative improvements based on feedback.

Existing Digital Learning Hubs will transform into Agriculture, Reforestation, and Climate (ARC) hubs within vulnerable communities. These centres, co-managed by youth leaders, focus on experiential learning, community initiatives for sustainability, and renewable energy. This initiative aims to establish a resilient educational framework, empower young people, and foster partnerships for Sierra Leone's sustainable future.

[12] See Table 33 in Appendix A of the Regional Status of School Safety 2024: Central, Eastern, Southern & West Africa for details.

Key actions

Governments should:

- Strengthen climate change education in the curriculum and provide adequate funding and training to ensure effective implementation.
- Embed disaster risk reduction and climate change content in mandatory pre- and in-service teacher training.
- Provide training and support to adapt teaching methodologies post-disaster, including for remote learning, multigrade methodologies and catch-up initiatives.
- Invest in teacher well-being, providing good working conditions, mental health support, stress management, peer collaboration, and specialised care when required.

Where do we go from here?

With every year, the likelihood of crises increases and their impacts deepen. Storms become stronger, heatwaves more intense, sea levels rise, and health risks spread.

But in this picture of increasing challenges to education, hope emerges. The Comprehensive School Safety Policy Survey revealed that governments in the **Central, Eastern, Southern & West Africa region** are taking concrete, comprehensive measures to ensure every child realises their right to learn. While there are clear areas for improvement, as this brief highlights, there is progress to build on. The Comprehensive School Safety Framework can help guide further action, ensuring no child is left behind and no hazard forgotten. In addition to the targeted strategies above, all governments should:

1. **Endorse the Comprehensive School Safety Framework**, committing to work towards implementing and institutionalising the 3 pillars and foundation of the CSSF.
2. **Implement the Framework**, using it to shape policy, programmes, resources, and ways of working.
3. **Monitor and report on progress implementing the CSSF**, sharing impact, updates, and lessons learned with national and global stakeholders.
4. **Champion comprehensive school safety**, helping to put safe, climate-resilient education on the regional and global agenda.

West and Central Africa Education in Emergencies Working Group

The West and Central Africa Education in Emergencies Working Group (R-EiE WG) was formed to bolster global efforts led by the Global Education Cluster at the regional level. It advocates for education continuity during emergencies, improves data collection, fosters coordination among regional education actors, and provides technical support to countries through education in emergency mechanisms. **Contacts: Arpana Pandey: apandey@unicef.org; Yoshie Kaga: y.kaga@unesco.org; Romain Monsieur: romain.monsieur@nrc.no.**

Global Alliance for Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience in the Education Sector (GADRRRES)

GADRRRES was established in 2013 to provide a comprehensive approach to school safety. It is a multi-stakeholder alliance composed of UN agencies, international non-governmental agencies, humanitarian and development organisations and networks, youth organisations, donors/multilateral funds, and private sector organisations that work together to advocate for and support child rights, resilience, and sustainability in the education sector across the humanitarian, development, peace nexus. GADRRRES has regional networks across the globe, including West and Central Africa. **Contact: gadrrres@gmail.com.**