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Children & Climate

Mapping Intergenerational Justice in Brazil

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Without a liveable climate, there is no future, and without protecting our children today, there will be no one to build that tomorrow.

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CHILDREN & CLIMATE: MAPPING INTERGENERATIONAL JUSTICE IN BRAZIL

Abstract

Children are uniquely vulnerable to the climate crisis, yet their specific needs remain largely overlooked in national and global climate agendas. While a growing body of literature explores climate inequalities, the systematic intersection of early childhood development, children's rights, and intergenerational climate justice in Brazil remains significantly under-theorized. This study examines how the climate crisis contributes to violations of early childhood rights and how civil society is responding to these structural challenges. Employing a qualitative methodology, the research utilizes Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) to evaluate original data collected between 2025 and 2026. The study draws on 15 semi-structured interviews with representatives from 13 leading Brazilian NGOs, complemented by a comprehensive literature review. The findings reveal a pervasive "invisibility of childhood" within the climate agenda, in which state responses are chronically fragmented and reactive, hindered by a lack of disaggregated data. Furthermore, civil society efforts to combat entrenched adult-centrism are constantly constrained by budget deficits and political discontinuity. This study offers the first systematic mapping of climate governance gaps for children in Brazil, crossing the UNCRC, General Comment No. 26 (GC26), and the Brazilian Statute of the Child and Adolescent (ECA), and providing a novel "Green Child Rights" analytical framework. In practical terms, this research provides actionable policy pathways that advocate for intergenerational climate justice.

Keywords: Intergenerational Climate Justice; Children's Rights; Early Childhood Development; Climate Change; and Brazil.

Acknowledgements

This research journey was never solitary. It was built through encounters, shared struggles, and the quiet yet steadfast belief that a different future is possible.

First, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to everyone in socio-environmental organizations who has influenced my path in environmental activism over the years, both in academic settings and through volunteer work. You have taught me that defending human rights is inseparable from defending the Earth and that standing for humanity also means standing with nature. Thanks to you, I have learned to challenge anthropocentric perspectives and embrace a vision of justice rooted in connection, dignity, and care for all forms of life.

I am especially grateful to the individuals who generously contributed to this research. Your insights, experiences, and commitment transformed this fellowship into a space of hope. Each of you has helped lay another brick in the ongoing construction of socio-environmental rights and climate justice in Brazil. Special acknowledgment goes to Vital Didonet, whose lifelong dedication to children's rights continues to inspire generations. Your legacy echoes throughout this work and beyond.

To my mentor, Rodrigo Tadeu Guimarães Jales, thank you for being my fuel, for believing in me during moments of doubt, and for your constant support throughout this journey. I admire you deeply. Your strength, generosity, and commitment to human rights leave a lasting mark. I can only hope to carry forward a fraction of what you embody.

Finally, I would like to thank the Moving Minds Alliance for their unwavering support and for making this research possible. By believing in this project, you have amplified voices and perspectives that must be heard. *In times that often test our ability to envision a better world, let us continue to cling to hope and act.*

Introduction

Defining the problem

Children are uniquely affected by climate change. They are disproportionately affected by disasters, environmental degradation, and the climate crisis for several reasons (UNICEF, 2024). For this reason, *approximately 99% of the world's children experience climate and environmental hazards (UNICEF, 2021).*

In particular, young children (0-8 years) are more at risk of hunger and malnutrition because of climate change-induced insecurity (UNICEF, 2017). Their bodies and minds are still developing, making them particularly vulnerable to pollution, deadly diseases, and extreme weather, as illustrated below:

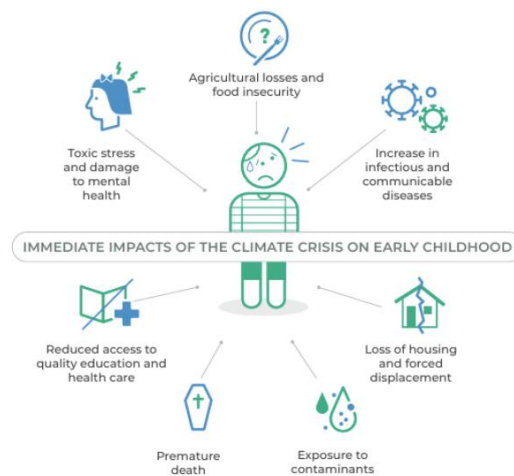


Figure 1 - Climate Change & Early Childhood. Source: NCPI Scientific Committee (2025).

For this reason, young children should be at the heart of climate responses, and few investments in the social sector offer returns as high as those from investing in Early Childhood Development (ECD)¹, because *“when we take care of childhood today, we create a fairer, safer tomorrow full of possibilities for everyone”*.²

However, only 34% of national climate policies are child-sensitive³, highlighting a significant gap in addressing the unique needs of children in climate action plans. Accordingly, this research arises from the urgent need to integrate children's rights and perspectives into climate policies

¹ ECD is a holistic approach to learning and development, incorporating the five interrelated components of nurturing care: health, nutrition, responsive care, early learning, and security and safety (UNICEF, 2017). Given its cross-cutting nature, ECD has the potential to be a building block for climate adaptation, resilience, and sustainable development, with the power to transform the lives of our youngest populations. For this reason, this Research Dialogue focuses on the field of Early Childhood Development in Emergencies (ECDiE).

² Childfund Brazil slogan.

³ UNICEF, (2021) ‘UNICEF analysis finds just 34 per cent of national climate policies are child-sensitive’. Retrieved from: [UNICEF analysis finds just 34 per cent of national climate policies are child-sensitive](#).

and actions, ensuring that younger and future generations are protected from the threats of climate change.

Conceptualizing Intergenerational Climate Justice

To ground the findings of this research, it is essential to examine the key concepts that underpin the analysis and their intersections, particularly intergenerational climate justice, which is a vital tool for ensuring that decisions regarding climate adaptation and mitigation are made fairly and equitably.

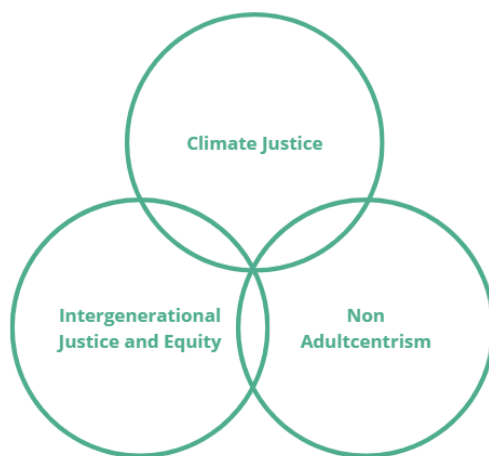


Figure 2 - Conceptualizing Intergenerational Climate Justice - Source: Author's elaboration.

Climate Justice: The concept of climate justice⁴ emerges from the fact that those who contribute the least to climate change are often the ones who suffer its worst consequences (Robinson, 2018), among them children. Thus, climate justice recognizes that climate change involves environmental, economic, political, and ethical issues and proposes an approach that prioritizes people and protects the most vulnerable groups.

Moreover, climate justice focuses on local impacts and experience, highlighting the importance of community voices (Schlosberg & Collins, 2014). Given that climate change exacerbates social injustices and that its consequences are directly related to safeguarding the most basic human rights and interests of present and future generations, it is necessary to consider intergenerational justice within climate justice.

Intergenerational justice and equity: The concepts of intergenerational justice and equity were established and reiterated by international milestones such as the Stockholm Declaration (1972), the Brundtland Report (1987), the Rio Declaration (1992), Article 225 of the 1988 Federal Constitution,

⁴ Resolution No. 511/2025 of the Brazilian National Environment Council (CONAMA) defines climate justice as “the approach to combating socio-environmental inequalities and promoting human rights in the fight against climate change, in all its policies, with particular consideration of vulnerable groups in particular, as well as the pursuit of a fair distribution of investments and the addressing of historical responsibilities for climate change and the protection of guarantees and fundamental rights” (Article I, 1).

and, more recently, OC 32/2025. These milestones recognized the intensifying effects of climate change on future generations and established new standards for human rights and binding state obligations.

Also, climate change policy involves trade-offs between the rights and welfare of current and future generations, so a theory of justice should guide how these trade-offs are made appropriately and fairly (Wolf, 2009). This emphasizes that intergenerational equity must guide the interpretation and fulfillment of climate obligations. Inaction or delaying climate action imposes an unfair burden on future generations and constitutes a violation of international human rights law, giving rise to state liability.

Non-Adultcentrism: UNCRC Article 12 recognizes children as equal individuals with the right to participate in society. However, their enjoyment of this right depends on adults who may not support it, be reluctant to comply, doubt children's ability to contribute, or worry that granting them more control will undermine authority or require too much effort (Lundy, 2007). The concept of “adultcentrism” emerges from this relationship. It refers to a thought paradigm that leads adults to respond inadequately or in a distorted way to children's needs (Furioso, 2000). In this sense, adultcentrism causes intergenerational distortions and injustices and must be combatted.

Brazilian General Scenario

In Brazil, existing social and economic inequalities amplify the impacts of climate-related events, disproportionately harming vulnerable populations, particularly low-income communities, traditional peoples, black people, women, people living in vulnerable regions, and children. In addition, the report *“Children, Adolescents, and Climate Change in Brazil”* indicates that more than 40 million Brazilian children and adolescents are exposed to climate and environmental shocks (UNICEF Brazil, 2024).

Nevertheless, the country is progressing on the participatory construction of laws and public policies, based on constitutional principles that support socio-environmental protection.⁵ The guiding framework is Article 225 of the Constitution, which reflects the concept of sustainable development outlined in the “Our Common Future”⁶ report, assuring the protection of the environment for present and future generations:

⁵ One example is CONAMA Resolution No. 511 of 2025, which sets out the principles and guidelines for integrating climate justice and tackling environmental racism into environmental policies and actions. Adopted after COP 30, it cannot be fully understood without considering the historical advocacy of organisations such as Geledés – Institute for Black Women.

⁶ UNITED NATIONS, World Commission on Environment and Development, Our Common Future, Brundtland Report. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

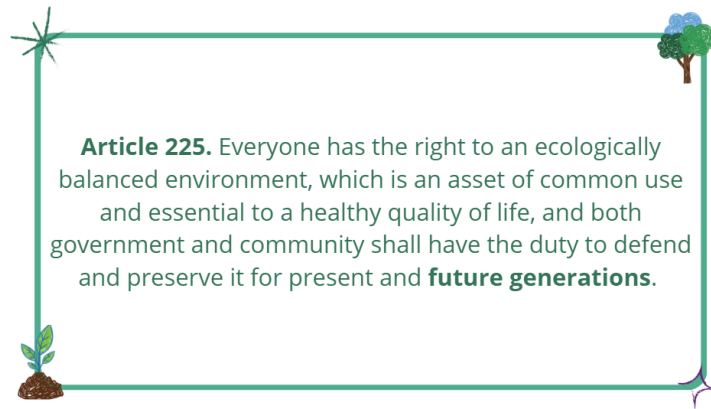


Figure 3 - Article 225 of the Brazilian Constitution

However, there is still a discrepancy and, like many developing countries, Brazil faces an “implementation gap”, where robust legal frameworks historically coexist with weak enforcement (McAllister, 2004). Sadly, Brazil has also seen a string of climate disasters over the past five years, highlighting the country’s vulnerabilities in adapting and developing disaster responses. As explained above, children suffer the most during such events.

Finally, regarding children’s rights, it is essential to cite Article 227. With this article, the 1988 Brazilian Constitution marked a decisive milestone in the affirmation of children’s rights (Didonet, 1986):

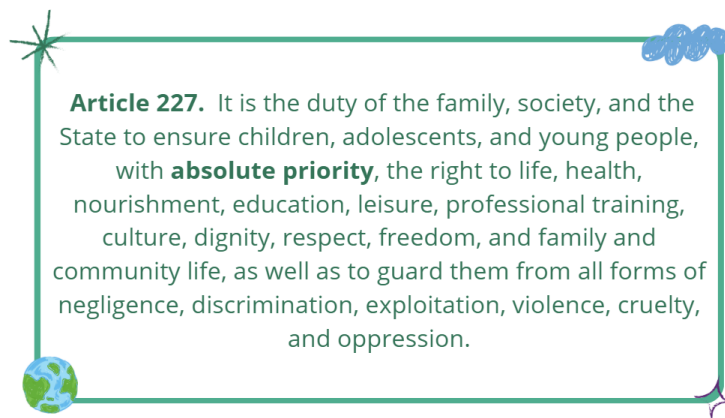


Figure 4 - Article 227 of the Brazilian Constitution

Article 227 is particularly significant because it recognizes the unique status of children as developing individuals, engaging with the doctrine of comprehensive protection, bringing about a revolution in how the law views and addresses this population. Moreover, *children's rights are the only rights highlighted in the Constitution as an absolute priority of the Brazilian nation.*

Furthermore, Article 227 can also be considered a synthesis of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)⁷ (García Méndez, 1998). Brazil signed the CRC in 1990 and ratified it on 24 September of the same year, becoming one of the first States Parties to commit to its principles. Since then, the CRC has had a significant impact on the country's legal framework.

Despite having some of the most advanced legislation in the world, Brazil's situation is marked by historic advances offset by profound inequalities. For instance, there has been a significant reduction in school exclusion over the past few decades. However, the country still faces critical contemporary challenges, such as millions of students being severely behind in their studies. These rights violations disproportionately affect the most vulnerable children, primarily Black, Indigenous, and Quilombola children, as well as those living in peripheral areas.

Literature Review

Climate Crisis as a Children's Rights Crisis

"The Climate Crisis is a Child Rights Crisis" is a 2021 report by UNICEF that introduces the Children's Climate Risk Index (CCRI) and offers the first comprehensive overview of children's exposure to and vulnerability to the impacts of climate change. Regarding Brazil, the CCRI reveals alarming numbers:

Table 1 - UNICEF Brazil, 2022 (Brazilian Children's Climate Risk Index)

Brazilian CCRI		Millions of children and adolescents
Children and adolescents exposed to the...	Risk of water shortage	8.6
	Risk of river flooding	7.3
	Risk of coastal flooding	1.8
	Risk of heat waves	13.6
	Risk of ambient air pollution	24.8
	Risk of exposure to pesticide pollution	27.8

⁷ The CRC is a universal instrument establishing the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of children, which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1989.

In this sense, the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment highlighted the profound impact of environmental issues on children, violating their rights to life, development, health, an adequate standard of living, leisure and recreation, education, and equality.⁸

Hence, the climate crisis is a children’s rights crisis, making it essential to understand this relation.

“The UNCRC With a Green Lense” responds to this need. In this document, *How to Child Rights*, a platform that promotes co-creation and peer learning on children’s rights in practice, explores the intersections between children’s rights and the impacts of climate change by “greening” the CRC:



Figure 4 - CRC “Green Articles” – Source: *How to Child Rights*.

Learn more at: <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/Annex-3-The-UNCRC-With-a-Green-Lense.pdf/>.

This material takes place within the context of the guidance document related to General Comment No. 26 (GC26). The GC26 is a UN statement on children’s rights and the environment, with a special focus on climate change, developed through a unique, participatory process involving States, experts, civil society organizations, and, notably, children and adolescents from different regions of the world.

“Early Childhood at the Heart of Tackling the Climate Crisis” is a Brazilian working paper that compiles national and international evidence on the impacts of extreme events on child development, recognizing that a collaborative and equity-centered approach is the way to address

⁸ UNITED NATIONS. HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL, Report of the Special Rapporteur on human rights obligations related to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy, and sustainable environment. 37th session, Jan. 24, 2018.

the climate emergency while protecting children's development. In particular, the document examines the intersectional effects of climate change on early childhood and the systemic repercussions of these effects.

Building on this literature, this study focuses on advancing the intersection of early childhood development, children's rights, and intergenerational climate justice in Brazil.

Research Objectives

While a growing body of literature examines climate justice from the perspectives of race, gender, and indigenous peoples, the systematic intersection of intergenerational equity with early childhood rights frameworks remains significantly under-theorized.

In this way, the research will help clarify how legal frameworks can be better aligned with children's needs in the face of climate change, offering perspectives on advancing climate justice for young children through legal action and public policy.

To achieve this, the study is based on the following questions:

1. How is the climate crisis contributing to violations of early childhood rights in Brazil? What concrete examples illustrate these impacts, and which actors are responding to them?;
2. In what ways have civil society organizations contributed to advancing child-centered climate justice in Brazil, and how can their efforts be supported and scaled
3. What legal and policy reforms are necessary to ensure that the rights of young children are adequately protected in the context of climate change?

Moreover, by analyzing the contributions of civil society organizations, this research underscores the importance of participatory, community-based approaches to developing legal and policy responses to climate injustices. These actors often play a key role in amplifying children's voices, promoting accountability, and proposing innovative legal strategies for protection.

Finally, the research considers which legal and policy reforms are necessary to ensure that the rights of young children are adequately protected in the context of the climate emergency, and aims to raise awareness of the effects of the climate crisis on children's rights.

It also aims to contribute to the broader field of climate justice by highlighting the importance of integrating intersectionality and intergenerational equity into legal and institutional frameworks. In doing so, it seeks to support the development of more inclusive and effective responses to the climate crisis.

Methodology

Intergenerational Climate Justice in Practice

This study uses Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) (Braun & Clarke, 2019) as its main analytical method. RTA is appropriate because it recognizes that qualitative data analysis involves telling stories, interpretation, and creation rather than the discovery of a single objective "truth". By reflexively engaging with the interview data, this method enables a nuanced exploration of the perceptions, interpretations, and internal processes that guide the actions of the NGOs interviewed.

To achieve this engagement, a comprehensive literature review was conducted, including international reports, legal documents, academic studies, and publications from relevant civil society organizations addressing climate change and childhood. Among them is the Alana Institute, an NGO recognized for its decades-long advocacy for children's rights and for its "Children and Nature" program, which champions every child's right to live in a healthy environment while strengthening their connection with nature.

The reality is that not all NGOs have the capacity to produce publications and resources that address the issue in greater depth and document their projects' objectives and results. Furthermore, some NGOs have a broader scope of work and focus on the intersection of children and climate change in emergencies and specific situations, without documenting these incidents in detail. Due to the lack of documentation and information on NGOs' activities in these contexts, another gap is that NGOs usually lack permanent projects dedicated to children and climate issues.

Because of that, the primary data source was interviews with NGO representatives to understand what they have already done in this area, what they would like to do, and why the impact of the climate crisis on children is not a priority for these NGOs. The choice of this method is primarily justified by the need to access and understand dimensions that are not formally documented (NOGUEIRA, 1968), such as perceptions, interpretations, and internal processes that have influenced the construction and consolidation of projects and actions on the climate and children area, and their articulation with contemporary challenges.

The Interviews

The interviews were crucial for gathering diverse perspectives, understanding practical challenges and innovative solutions, and exploring how these actors contribute to advancing child-centered climate justice in Brazil. Initial participants were identified during the literature review

phase based on the relevance of their organizations to child-centered climate justice. Subsequent participants were identified through the referrals of earlier interviewees (snowball sampling).⁹

Data collection continued until theoretical saturation was achieved (Guest et al., 2006), resulting in 15 interviews with representatives from 13 organizations: **Empoderaclima, Engajamundo, FAS, ChildFund Brazil, IBDCRIA, NECA, NEPSID, Plataforma DHESCA, RESAMA, and UNICEF Brazil**. The activities of each NGO and their outstanding projects are detailed in **Appendix 1**, along with their main contributions to the research.¹⁰

The entire data collection process followed strict ethical guidelines, including informed consent, confidentiality safeguards, and the right to withdraw at any time. A decolonial and intersectional ethical approach was adopted, utilizing context-sensitive methods, such as flexible interview formats, to promote respectful engagement.

Despite time constraints and scheduling difficulties in the second half of 2025 due to institutional commitments in preparation for COP30, the diversity of perspectives allowed for a robust, multidimensional understanding of the theme.

A common interview guide was developed, comprising a fixed block of core questions applicable to all participants. However, these were supplemented based on the specific area of work of the NGO being interviewed. The questions were divided into five sections:

Table 2 - Interview-based questionnaire

Climate Justice	How would [<i>NGO name</i>] define child-centered climate justice?
Government Action	How do you assess the performance of local, state, and federal governments in protecting children's rights in the face of the effects of the climate crisis? Are there any government policies, programs, or initiatives that you would highlight as exemplary in the integration of children's issues and climate action?
Third Sector Challenges	What are the main challenges faced by civil society in protecting children's rights in the face of the climate crisis? In your opinion, what types of support (financial, institutional, legal, community-based) would be most effective in strengthening and expanding these efforts?

⁹ Recognizing that in snowball sampling, an NGO's network of contacts tends to point to organizations with similar perspectives, an active search was conducted for organizations with divergent positions, distinct approaches, and geographic diversity, to ensure a variety of perspectives.

¹⁰ In addition, Vital Didonet was interviewed in his individual capacity, in recognition of his decades-long advocacy and strategic engagement in the promotion of children's rights and early childhood policies in Brazil. Furthermore, Instituto Alana, Conectas and LACLIMA were contacted and responded to a set of adapted questions designed to gather more legally oriented insights.

Future

Looking ahead, what legal or public policy changes do you consider most urgent to safeguard the rights of young children in the face of the climate emergency in Brazil?

Classifying the findings

To process this volume of data, the study applied the six phases of Braun and Clarke's TCA. For the first phase, familiarization with the data, the interviews were transcribed in full using transcription software and then manually reviewed. From there, immersion in the data occurred through complete readings of all transcripts, during which initial observations and ideas were noted, organizing the preliminary findings into a centralized analysis matrix, available at:

LINK: https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1TeUNaK7nNKl9fhWFI6LKSq83_BHq57JYG0rVoP2q_pM/edit?usp=sharing.

For the second stage, code generation, the questionnaire sections served as deductive anchors while allowing the emergence of inductive codes. The initial codes mapped perceptions regarding government action, climate justice, and challenges facing the third sector. Subsequently, to identify themes, the generated codes were grouped based on frequency of repetition and consensus among the interviewed NGOs.

For the fourth stage, theme review, the themes were refined and systematically verified against the raw data from the transcripts and against the "Green Child Rights" conceptual framework, which will be detailed below. In the fifth phase, definition and naming of themes, the final themes were identified and defined around four main analytical axes, each with a clear central argument emerging from the data.

Finally, for the sixth phase, the refined analytical themes were used to structure the results and recommendations section. Rather than presenting the data in the chronological order of the base questionnaire, the final narrative was designed thematically, flowing from the conceptualization of climate justice in practice to structural gaps.

Green Child Rights: Shaping a Framework for the Future

To translate the theoretical debate on intergenerational climate justice into a practical assessment tool for the Brazilian context, this chapter presents "Table 3 – Green Child Rights" as the primary analytical tool and the study's central framework.

By systematizing the relationship between “green rights”, the CRC, the GC26, and the articles of the ECA¹¹, which are presented in **Appendix 2**, the table establishes an innovative conceptual framework focused on the “greening” of national legislation.

This framework clearly illustrates how the climate crisis contributes to the violation of early childhood rights in Brazil. It provides a legal basis for identifying non-compliance and demanding the guarantee of these rights at the national level:

Table 3 - Green Child Rights - Source: Author's elaboration¹²

Green Child Right	CRC	GC26	ECA*
Non-discrimination	Article 2	Parag. 14-15	Articles 3 and 5
Best interests of the child	Article 3	Parag. 16-19	Article 4
Survival and development	Article 6	Parag. 20-25	Articles 3 and 7
Right to be heard	Article 12	Parag. 26-28	Article 16
Freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly	Articles 13 and 15	Parag. 29-31	Articles 16 and 53
Access to information	Articles 13 and 17	Parag. 32-24	Article 71
Freedom from all forms of violence	Article 19	Parag. 35-36	Articles 5 and 18
Highest attainable standard of health	Article 24	Parag. 37-44	Articles 7, 8, and 11
Social security and an adequate standard of living	Articles 26 and 27	Parag. 45-50	Article 4
Education	Articles 28 and 29	Parag. 51-57	Articles 53 and 54
Indigenous children and children belonging to minority groups	Article 30	Parag. 58	Article 28 (§ 6º)
Rest, play, leisure, and recreation	Article 31	Parag. 59-62	Article 16, IV, and 71
Clean, healthy, and sustainable environment	Articles 6 and 24 ¹³	Parag. 63-67	Article 7

¹¹ The ECA has been in effect for over 35 years, and it is based on foundational concepts, principles and guidelines that aim to integrate children and adolescents into society (Didonet, 2015). Three important themes contained in the Statute are highlighted: (i) establishing a system to guarantee children's and adolescents' rights, which has given rise to the System for Guaranteeing the Rights of Children and Adolescents; (ii) paying attention to their individuality and respecting diversity; and (iii) formulating public social policies to promote comprehensive protection. The following public policies stand out among those created as a result of the third provision: initiatives stemming from the National Social Assistance Policy (PNAS) and the Unified Health System (SUS), such as the National Policy for Comprehensive Child Health Care (PNAISC); educational policies, such as the National Common Core Curriculum (BNCC); the “Protected Listening Law”, which sets out the conditions for special testimony and hearings for child and adolescent victims or witnesses of violence; and finally, the recent National Integrated Policy for Early Childhood (PNIP), derived from the Legal Framework for Early Childhood (Law 13,257/2016).

¹² It is important to note that the correspondence between the articles of the CRC and the paragraphs of GC26 stems from the categorization of the green articles provided by How to Child Rights, as explained above. The novel aspect of this table lies in the correspondence between the aforementioned documents and the ECA.

¹³ The How to Child Rights classification considers the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment to be an implicit element of the CRC and does not link it to any specific article. However, considering that this right necessarily evokes the need for survival linked to a healthy environment, which is linked to sustainable development, this right has been linked to Article 6 of the CRC. Furthermore, the absence of a guarantee of a healthy environment poses health risks, endangering the fulfilment of Article 24 of the CRC, thus justifying this link as well.

Thus, this tool will inform subsequent analyses in this study, providing a foundation for classifying challenges reported by NGOs in practice and for the systematic formulation of final policy recommendations.

Results

NGOs Driving Child-Centered Climate Justice

Firstly, it is important to note that the interviews, in addition to the reviewed material from other NGOs, show that climate and environmental damage in Brazil is undermining all the green child rights identified by the systematization of the CRC, GC26, and ECA, especially for those already experiencing poverty, racial inequality, displacement, or social exclusion. For more details, see **Appendix 2**.

In response to the first research question, this systematic approach clearly illustrates how the climate crisis contributes to violations of early childhood rights in Brazil. These include discrimination, threats to survival and healthy development, and more besides. It also provides concrete examples of these impacts. For example, disasters further undermine the right to health, education, participation, protection, and a clean, sustainable environment by causing delays to social protection, disrupting schooling, reducing leisure and safe spaces, and causing psychological trauma.

In the interviews, NGOs' contributions were also highlighted across several areas of activity, thereby answering the second research question. Direct community interventions and environmental education influencing change were identified at:

- i. *FAS*, through operations with isolated communities in the Amazon and the implementation of the DICARA project, delivers environmental education workshops and educational materials adapted to the local context;
- ii. *ChildFund*, through interventions in schools in Maranhão, tackles extreme heat and food insecurity by building "green areas" to lower school temperatures and provide thermal comfort, alongside producing educational materials that teach children disaster risk prevention, such as how to map flood risks within their schools; and
- iii. *Empoderaclima*, by translating complex subjects like environmental racism, climate justice, and the importance of global COPs into accessible, visual formats for students through educational workshops.

In addition, the contribution of these organizations using legal frameworks and advocacy to protect children displaced or harmed by environmental degradation has also been demonstrated:

- i. *RESAMA* focused on human mobility driven by climate change, actively advocating for the proposed National Policy for Environmental and Climate Displaced Persons, which

- is still under consideration and open to lobbying for specific child-protection guarantees within the bill, such as ensuring immediate school enrollment for children whose families lost their homes to disasters and were relocated; and
- ii. *IBDCRIA* acted in response to the Braskem mining disaster in Alagoas, actively pressuring authorities to release disaggregated data on the number of children displaced from their homes and schools.

Finally, it was demonstrated that NGOs are fighting to ensure that children and youth are treated as active participants in climate policy rather than passive victims:

- i. *Engajamundo* provides marginalized youth, including Indigenous and Afro-descendant populations, with the tools to participate in high-level decision-making spaces, such as municipal councils and global COPs;
- ii. *NEPSID* promotes anthropological listening with children and trains educators to understand how children express climate anxiety; and
- iii. In preparation for COP 30 in Brazil, a large coalition of NGOs, including Instituto Alana and ChildFund, organized a campaign to collect letters and videos from children to present to global leaders. This campaign bypassed the prohibitive bureaucratic and financial costs that prevent marginalized children from attending the summits in person.

In this context, NGOs demonstrate that they are key actors in responding to these issues and advancing child-centered climate justice. They do this by amplifying children's voices, demanding government accountability, and designing innovative community strategies.

From Norm to Practice

Given their relevance to the subject, the NGOs were able to answer the research questions and contribute to the four areas outlined in the study's questionnaire; the results are summarized below. These contributions were highlighted by frequency to indicate consensus among the NGOs. Consequently, not all contributions were highlighted; however, they can be found in **Appendix 2**.

Child-centered climate justice: First, it is important to note that the questions in this section were not intended to yield a static definition of child-centered climate justice, but rather to clarify what it is not, based on the climate injustices participants mentioned. In this regard, the following are the elements of child-centered climate justice as outlined by the NGOs interviewed:

1. *Dynamic nature:* Climate justice is understood as an ongoing "flow" rather than a static definition, ensuring that no sphere of vulnerability or injustice is excluded, as UNICEF Brazil pointed out.
2. *Intersectionality and Diverse Childhoods:* There is no single universal childhood; children from marginalized backgrounds, such as low-resource, Afro-descendant, disabled, migrant, and Indigenous children, face vastly disproportionate climate impacts due to

existing socioeconomic vulnerabilities. In this sense, children are the most affected by the climate crisis, but some children are exposed to far greater harm.¹⁴

3. *Interdependence of Social and Climate Justice:* It is also essential to understand the importance of addressing inequalities, whether social, racial, or territorial, in parallel with climate injustices. There is no climate justice without social justice. UNICEF Brazil highlighted that climate justice is about ensuring that processes - including the transition processes we must undertake to address the climate crisis - are fair, meaning that “we will not reproduce the logic of exclusion and exploitation found in current systems.”¹⁵
4. *Child-Centered Public Policies and Budgets:* Governments must prioritize children in their public budgets to ensure access to adequate housing, healthcare, education, and food security, with a strong focus on preventing environmental damage. As the DHESCA Platform added, caring for children and adolescents cannot be a one-off measure.
5. *Overcoming Adult-Centrism:* Society must abandon the outdated view that children are merely subordinate to adults. Instead, children must be recognized as active, autonomous producers of culture whose unique creativity and logical reasoning are vital to climate decision-making.¹⁶
6. *The Three "I's Framework:* Effective climate action must be intersectional, intergenerational, and inclusive, guaranteeing children the "right to a future" while protecting their immediate right to play and be happy without the burden of climate disasters, as Empoderaclima highlighted.

Government Performance: In the ambit of government action, the interviewed NGOs have offered a critical perspective on the government's performance in addressing the intersections between climate change and children's issues: Although recent progress has been noted, the overarching concern highlighted is the general "invisibility of childhood" within the climate agenda. This assessment can be summarized in the six main points discussed below:

1. *Lack of coordination:* The fragmentation and lack of cross-sectoral coordination in policies targeting children and climate action were highlighted. As Engajamundo noted, the two

¹⁴ As Engajamundo noted, there is no single childhood; there are many different childhoods. “Every child has their own experience and faces very different issues (...) we need to talk about this and view it in different ways, because as long as we render these differences invisible, we will face many challenges ahead.”

¹⁵ Thus, IBDCRIA emphasized that “thinking about climate justice means ensuring that these children and adolescents - especially those who are more vulnerable to greater harm (...) - have access to a home and a space where they can live adequately. It means ensuring that we develop public policies to prevent environmental damage from having a greater impact than it already will. So, thinking about climate justice for children involves considering various aspects, especially prevention, to ensure that the damage does not reach these children.”

¹⁶ As Engajamundo points out, we have a mystical view that young people do not know what they are talking about, lack experience and life wisdom, and are immature. By doing this, we are underestimating the importance of children's perspectives. We are missing out on their creativity, because “a child is transformed through their relationships with others and transforms those with whom they interact; it is a relationship of mutual transformation, so we must foster an environment that encourages dialogue and interaction, for this mutual shaping of a more inclusive and lighter society, because children can be creative and bring lightness, precisely through the potential for imagination and logical reasoning that differs from that of adults,” as NECA teaches. In this regard, Engajamundo points out that we need to ensure that the voices of children and adolescents are taken seriously. It's not just about listening, but about taking their contributions into account “in defining these fairer paths: adaptation, transition, everything we've been discussing so much right now and that will impact the future — which is our future (that of the youth).”

remain largely separate, and the climate agenda rarely prioritizes child protection, just as child-focused policies still do not consider the environmental risks these children face.

2. *Data scarcity:* The lack of data, which remains disaggregated and scattered across disparate systems, hinders research and limits the generation of evidence that can be translated into public policy, thereby constraining the planning of effective initiatives. NECA further notes that it is uncommon to find data on children in the information made available regarding climate-related disasters.
3. *Reactive state responses:* The state's responses to climate disasters are always fragmented, ad hoc, and reactive, noted the DHESCA Platform.¹⁷ As an example of this, they cited the tragedy in Recife in mid-2022, caused by heavy rains. The situation exposed the vulnerability of the hillsides, stilt houses, and flood-prone areas, where many families with children live, and the state's response at that time was very ad hoc. There was no contingency plan, no warning system that could provide guidance and enable immediate action in such situations.¹⁸ NECA added another example: the floods in Rio Grande do Sul, which left many children vulnerable in temporary shelters. "So this is a snapshot of a broader situation: in cases of public disasters or accidents, we still lack the policy framework for a rapid and appropriate response," concluded NECA.
4. *Educational gaps:* A problem was mentioned concerning the training of educators, which neglects the role of environmental education and children's contact with nature in a free and playful manner.¹⁹ In addition, there is a need to consider public policies that prioritize schools in climate adaptation, so that they can be climate-controlled and children do not have to stop attending school due to thermal discomfort and extreme heat, as mentioned by Empoderaclima.
5. *Local implementation challenges:* Translating national climate policies into effective actions at the regional and municipal levels remains a major difficulty that depends on local government. According to Empoderaclima, there are many interesting projects at the federal level, which sometimes receive support from local governments but depend heavily on effective management.²⁰ So, implementation ultimately depends on the priority that government administrations will give to the issue and the available budget.

¹⁷ We do not address climate change and its impact on children with social workers, even though some response protocols do exist, as NECA also points out. An important example is the National Protocol for the Comprehensive Protection of Children and Adolescents in Situations of Risk and Disasters. Unfortunately, despite this, "we haven't had an in-depth discussion on the subject, as if these were issues that only happen very rarely, and we're seeing that nature is showing us that's not the case — we have to prepare for changes that are both highly anticipated and imminent", said NECA.

¹⁸ One of the key strategies for combating the impacts of these climate-related tragedies lies in social protection — specifically, the support that social protection can provide to these families: humanitarian aid, cash transfers, and the establishment of shelters, as the DHESCA Platform also noted.

¹⁹ NEPSID adds that "there is a lack of understanding of the significance, the right, and the importance of play in the life and development of a human being (...) children are getting sick, adults are getting sick, due to a lack of nature, due to excessive screen time, due to a lack of connections— often, it is a combination of all these factors."

²⁰ "The government has its ways of trying to ensure compliance at the local level, but it will depend on whether it is a priority. So we need measures that fulfill this protective role—measures that are cross-sectoral, that are coordinated, that mobilize different areas of the state and civil society to ensure these children's rights," concludes Empoderaclima.

6. *Youth participation:* The social participation and inclusion of children and adolescents in the debate and decision-making regarding the climate crisis is more than urgent, since they are the ones who will spend the longest time growing up on a planet in disarray and facing multiple crises. In this regard, Empoderaclima highlighted that the Ministry of the Environment launched a pact titled Voices for Children and Public Policy, which addresses intergenerational climate democracy.²¹ Finally, UNICEF Brazil highlights another participatory initiative in the context of COP 30: the launch of the Global Ethical Balance, a collaborative initiative that aims to develop possible pathways from an ethical perspective, centered on contributions drawn from people's lived experiences.

Civil Society Challenges: An analysis of the accounts provided by the interviewed NGOs revealed three major structural challenges that are common to all these organizations: (i) a shortage of funding and budgetary resources; (ii) a lack of data and government transparency; and (iii) challenges in the implementation and sustainability of public policies.

1. *Budget:* Regarding the first point, the lack of resources was cited as a universal barrier to action on the climate adaptation agenda, particularly for grassroots initiatives. Furthermore, regarding the implementation of public policies, RESAMA cited the creation of obligations without the necessary budget to ensure their fulfillment. Thus, the government's provision of environmental education, for example, is carried out in the easiest, fastest, and cheapest way possible, disregarding the quality and objectives of the National Environmental Education Policy (Law No. 9795/1999). Moreover, the education budget not only affects children, who will be denied a quality environmental education, but also devastates universities, which will be unable to advance their research in this area.
2. *Data:* Second, the difficulty in accessing accurate information on children and climate issues was mentioned, and the consequence is that civil society is unable to act effectively; without publicly available data on the specific impact of climate-related disasters on this group, there is no way to contribute to evidence-based public policies. Moreover, the availability of cross-sectional data is also extremely relevant for addressing complex issues, such as climate-related human mobility, as RESAMA points out, and for ensuring that these impacts are included in public debates.²²

²¹ The agreement is an example of the growing commitment to ensuring that children are heard and involved in the formulation of environmental public policies, and is the result of discussions on the topic during COP 30, a subject that will also be detailed below. These efforts stem from the "importance of the Statute of the Child in prioritizing children when we are discussing climate adaptation at all levels and conferences," as Empoderaclima also highlights.

²² "These aspects are never brought up in the debates. If they are, it's in a very subtle way—to mention them when you're giving a speech to try to move people, and then you say, 'that community that suffered so much, those children who suffered,' but then I can't pinpoint exactly what harm the children suffered, how it impacted, well, school, education—we had children who were kept out of the classroom because of this, in this case—and we don't have that detailed, and that data isn't even made public. Maybe it's within the departments, I don't know, because they didn't come to us with all those details, even though we asked for them repeatedly, but they aren't made public, which is also a problem—civil society can't think about and contribute to the development of public policy based on assumptions, right? We also need access to these data" said IBDCRIA.

3. *Continuity:* Finally, there is a major challenge: translating theory into practice and ensuring the continuous implementation of public policies that advance the climate agenda and the protection of children's rights. As mentioned in the section on government performance, there are already significant difficulties in implementing policies at the local level, and with the turnover of administrations and governments that have differing perceptions of the climate crisis, there is a fear of discontinuity and that climate projects and policies developed in collaboration with NGOs will be ignored or dismantled whenever there is a change in government leadership. In this vein, Empoderaclima raises a question: "How do we ensure that these projects, these policies, and the decisions made do not suffer a setback or damage when an administration changes and that administration decides to ignore them, right?"

The future: In conclusion, regarding the necessary changes and hopes for the future, several points of consensus could be identified. First, education is highlighted as a tool for raising awareness and transforming Society: environmental education must be strengthened and integrated into schools starting in early childhood, in a playful manner that prioritizes contact with nature. Furthermore, children and adolescents must be actively listened to and participate in the development, debate, and decision-making regarding public policies that affect them.

Next, the legal framework and public policies that have advanced in recent years must be implemented. Brazil has progressive laws and discourse, though they remain insufficient; what is lacking is their actual enforcement, along with the allocation of the necessary budget to carry out these plans. Finally, in all these spheres, local specificities and territorial diversities must be respected, requiring that prevention and protection plans be adapted to each child's situation.

Recommendations

Based on the findings from the interviews described above, particularly those regarding the future area, and on the materials collected, which were produced by other leading NGOs and social movements²³, this chapter addresses the third research question: *What legal and policy reforms are necessary to ensure that the rights of young children are adequately protected in the context of the climate emergency?*

²³ The recommendations developed by NGOs in international or national advocacy materials were summarized and systematized, based on the green child rights blocks. The materials used were: (i) Early Childhood at the Heart of Tackling the Climate Crisis (NCPI, 2025); (ii) Every child has the right to a healthy environment (UNICEF, 2022); (iii) How can CSOs support implementation of GC26? Guidance - Annex 3: "The UNCRC with a green lens" (How to Child Rights, 2025); (iv) . Children, adolescents and climate change in Brazil (UNICEF Brazil, 2022); and (v) Early childhood development and climate change: Advocacy brief (UNICEF Asia, 2022). These recommendations were used to provide more concrete guidance regarding the necessary changes and hopes for the future that emerged from the interviews. They were also supplemented by exploratory research to identify government initiatives with the greatest impact that were not mentioned, as well as initiatives that were recently launched or are currently being developed.

From Gaps to Action: Pathways for Reform

Before detailing the recommendations, it is important to note that they must all be guided by the imperative of absolute priority for childhood and the best interests of the child. In addition, it is necessary to use Child Rights Impact Assessments (CRIAs) in all environmental decisions (UNICEF Brazil, 2022; How to Child Rights, 2025).

To this end, Article 4 of the ECA states that this guarantee of priority comprises: (a) primacy of receiving protection and help in any circumstances; (b) precedence of service in public services or services of public relevance; (c) preference in the formulation and execution of public social policies; and (d) privileged allocation of public resources in areas related to the protection of children and youth.

One example of an initiative aimed at strengthening enforcement of this guiding principle is Bill 2225/2024, known as the “Environmental ECA”, which establishes the Legal Framework for Children and Nature to ensure, as a top priority, the right of children and adolescents to learn about, experience, and form a bond with nature, as well as to contribute to the protection, care, and regeneration of the environment, the adaptation of cities, and the protection of children in the event of extreme weather events (Instituto Alana, 2025). More than 80 NGOs drafted it, and it is currently pending approval, with only the Federal Senate’s review remaining.

Education: This section focuses on recommendations related to school infrastructure, climate literacy, and ensuring access to information. Regarding the first point, it is necessary to provide adequate climate control in schools (such as ventilation and shaded areas) and to build resilient infrastructure to prevent disruptions to classes during extreme weather events and disasters.²⁴ This is where the need arises to create a Climate Adaptation Protocol for Brazilian Schools, because “without a climate, there is no future. And without schools, there is no one to build that future” (UBES, 2026).²⁵

As for environmental literacy and access to information, environmental information must be made available through accessible, age-appropriate channels, which is crucial for children to understand how the environment affects their rights and to change their own behaviors. In this vein, the importance of changing children’s language and perspective on nature is highlighted, to

²⁴ Adaptation in schools is urgent, given that 43.5% of early childhood education schools in Brazil’s capital cities lack green spaces and approximately 370,000 students enrolled in early childhood education and elementary school attend schools located in high-risk areas, with 90% of these schools located within or within a 500-meter radius of favelas and urban communities, highlighting the connection between inequalities and climate factors (Instituto Alana, 2024).

²⁵ In this vein, the guide “Nature-Based Education: A Guide to Greener and More Resilient Schools” was published, produced by the National Fund for Educational Development (FNDE), an agency under the Ministry of Education (MEC), and the Alana Institute. The guide is aimed at helping schools and daycare centers adapt to the impacts of climate change and focuses on guiding public administrators, school staff, and infrastructure professionals in adopting simple, effective, and nature-based solutions.

enable them to compare their communities to natural ecosystems and foster a deeper connection with the environment (Instituto Alana, 2025).

One example of efforts to achieve this goal is the National Policy on Environmental Education (PNEA) – Law 9795/1999, a Brazilian legal instrument that promotes environmental education at all levels of education. However, as noted in the interviews, this policy requires improvements in its implementation and adaptation to regional contexts.

Social Participation: This area addresses ensuring that children, adolescents, and young people (as well as their communities) play a leading role in decisions that affect their future and that of future generations. The right to be heard must be ensured through safe, accessible, and age-appropriate mechanisms so that the opinions of children and young people are regularly heard and taken seriously in all stages of public policy formulation and environmental decision-making.

This area also encompasses freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly. This entails promoting a safe environment and legal framework that allows children to exercise their rights without intimidation. It also entails advocating for robust protection for activists and environmental defenders.

Children and youth must also have greater visibility in national and international climate governance processes through their demands and proposals. The “Mutirão das Juventudes” experience at COP30 shows how organized youth engagement can shape public debate, build networks, and present collective demands. Similar initiatives, including children’s assemblies and dedicated participation platforms, should be strengthened so that their perspectives are recognized as substantive contributions to environmental decision-making and intergenerational justice.

As another legacy of the COP 30, the Ministry of the Environment launched the “Voices of Children in Public Policy” pact, which aims to ensure that these groups are heard in environmental policy and is currently open to public institutions and civil society organizations, reaffirming that climate democracy will only be fully realized if it is intergenerational, structured, and permanent.²⁶

Finally, it is essential to strengthen the integration of climate policies within a framework that prioritizes children’s rights. This can be achieved through meaningful social participation, interministerial coordination, and permanent public consultation mechanisms. Public consultations, such as those carried out for Brazil’s Climate Plan, illustrate how participatory

²⁶ Additionally, the initiative recognizes that it is urgent to (i) consolidate intergenerational dialogue as a permanent practice, adopting tools such as Mini COPs, Children’s and Youth Conferences for the Environment, the Global Ethical Balance (BEG), the Children’s COP, and their respective Educational Toolkits as ongoing methodologies for listening, ethical monitoring, and civic education; (ii) to recognize Environmental Education as a structural pillar of climate and socio-environmental solutions, integrating it into mitigation, adaptation, and resilience strategies, in line with the agenda for education, public participation, and capacity building; and (iii) to create and strengthen permanent institutional frameworks. Thus, it aligns with the findings of this research and needs to be put into practice.

governance can connect climate action with social priorities. Integrating children's rights into climate governance would align mitigation, adaptation, and resilience measures with the best interests of present and future generations.

Implementation of laws and public policies: The third area involves a more cross-cutting approach, encompassing recommendations that call for direct government action in the creation, financing, and implementation of health services, social protection, human rights and development, infrastructure, and environmental protection regulations. Only with this perspective will it be possible to address in full the green child rights violations mentioned in this study and ensure climate justice centered on children.

Cross-sectoral policies also involve integrating civil defense and social protection measures to respond to climate shocks; adopting strict environmental standards (air and water quality, and food safety); strengthening primary health care with a focus on vector-borne diseases; and ensuring safe housing and green, resilient public spaces for play.

An example of an effort to establish this cross-cutting approach is the National Integrated Early Childhood Policy (PNIEI), established by Decree No. 12,574 of August 5, 2025, and aimed at the comprehensive and integrated development of children aged 0 to 6 through coordination across the health, education, and social assistance sectors to strengthen the state's role with a focus on equity and the guarantee of rights, especially for children in situations of greater vulnerability. Participation is still voluntary, but the policy could represent a significant step toward greater integration among the agencies involved in child protection, providing a valuable platform for advocating the adoption of climate adaptation measures.

Moreover, the establishment of legal obligations, such as the National Environmental Education Policy, must be accompanied by adequate funding to ensure their fulfillment. In this regard, governments must allocate financial resources to ensure the high-quality implementation of these policies at the local level rather than opting for the cheapest and fastest alternatives.

Territorialization of initiatives and adaptation to regional diversity: Finally, it is important to recognize that climate change does not affect all children equally and that it requires solutions tailored to specific geographic, social, and cultural realities (such as the populations of the Semi-Arid Region and the Amazon).

To meet this requirement, it is first necessary to collect disaggregated data (by age, gender, race, ethnicity, and location) to identify the differential effects of environmental damage and adopt special measures and policies focused on groups with higher socioeconomic risks or vulnerabilities.

To achieve this goal, a shift is needed from reactive to proactive disaster management. State and municipal responses to climate disasters are often fragmented, ad hoc, and reactive. Local

governments must develop comprehensive contingency plans and effective early warning systems tailored to their specific territorial risks.

Finally, it is crucial to recognize the vital role of traditional peoples and communities (especially Indigenous peoples and Quilombolas) in environmental preservation by meaningfully engaging Indigenous children and integrating local traditional knowledge and culture into climate mitigation and adaptation measures.

Conclusions

Research overview

This study explored the critical intersection between early childhood development, children's rights, and intergenerational climate justice in Brazil. Using a qualitative methodology based on a literature review and in-depth interviews with NGO leaders, the study investigated how the climate crisis functions as a crisis of children's rights and how civil society and the state are responding to these challenges.

The study revealed that, although Brazil has a robust and pioneering legal and constitutional framework for child protection, notably Articles 225 and 227 of the Federal Constitution and the Statute of the Child and Adolescent (ECA), the country suffers from a severe implementation gap, given that there is a widespread "invisibility of childhood" in national climate agendas and policies.

As a result, green child rights are being systematically violated, exacerbating the vulnerabilities of marginalized children (such as low-income, Black, Indigenous, and traditional communities) in the face of extreme environmental disasters. The analysis showed that the government's response to climate-related disasters is often fragmented and reactive. It lacks cross-sectoral coordination and adequate contingency plans.

In contrast, NGOs have proven to be key players in promoting child-centered climate justice. They do so through direct community interventions, litigation, environmental education, and by encouraging youth participation in decision-making spaces, such as the COPs.

However, the findings indicate that the efforts of civil society and the advancement of effective policies face three universal structural challenges: First, the critical shortage of disaggregated and transparent government data hinders the creation of solid evidence. Second, the lack of dedicated resources and budget limits the expansion of local initiatives and compromises the quality of environmental education. Third, the risk of policy discontinuity threatens to dismantle long-term public policies due to high turnover in local governments.

To overcome these obstacles, the study concludes that society must move away from adult-centered thinking and recognize children and young people as autonomous political actors. The study proposes systemic reforms along four main lines of action: (i) providing infrastructure and

education for climate adaptation in schools, (ii) encouraging social participation and actively listening to young people in environmental decision-making, (iii) ensuring the effective implementation of intersectoral public policies with adequate budgetary commitments, and (iv) promoting localization of initiatives and adapting responses to Brazil's diverse local realities and traditional knowledge.

Future Pathways

The next steps in this research involve providing direct feedback to the participating NGOs on the findings, fostering an ongoing dialogue on joint strategies, and discussing possible next steps to drive the necessary systemic change.

Also, this research can be easily expanded, and its qualitative methodology can be replicated to reach an even greater number of organizations, especially community and grassroots initiatives across different regions.

Furthermore, this study serves as an urgent call to action for the third sector itself, urging NGOs working on child protection to consider climate issues and encouraging environmental organizations to adopt a child-centered approach to climate change.

Finally, the findings summarized in this document provide a valuable foundation for in-depth analyses of current public policies on climate and childhood. Understanding the serious implementation gap and lack of cross-sectoral integration in the analyzed policies is key to addressing these shortcomings. After all, climate justice will only be fully realized when protecting children becomes our absolute priority, not just a legal promise.

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