

Assessing the Nexus Between Climate Change and Child Sexual Abuse: Analysis of SDG 2030 Commitments Towards Eliminating Child Sexual Abuse

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Abstract

Climate change is increasingly recognized as a catalyst for various social issues disproportionately affecting children through displacement, poverty, scarcity of resources and breakdown of protective structures. Poverty and social fragmentation erode familial and community safeguards, thereby increasing the risk of children to sexual assault, abuse and exploitation. This research paper investigates the climate induced disruptions and child sexual abuse (CSA), with a particular focus on how environmental crisis intensifies gendered risk and undermines child protective mechanisms. Using a multidisciplinary approach, the paper analyses conventions, policies, existing legal framework, Reports and case studies. The study examines the Sustainable Development Goals 2030 with special emphasis on SDG 5 (Gender equality), SDG 13 (Climate action), and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions), to assess how these global commitments address child sexual abuse in climate induced vulnerabilities. The findings reveal how climate crisis exacerbate existing gender-inequalities and creates new vulnerabilities towards children where violence against children increases in climate affected regions. Despite a decade since the adoption of 2030 SDG Agenda, its commitments towards equity and resilience, remains insufficiently integrated into climate adaptation and disaster response strategies with regard to protection of children from sexual abuses. The study highlights the linkage between CSA and climate crisis and how SDG 5,13 and 16 can together refocus global efforts on eliminating all forms of violence against children.

Key Words: Environmental crisis, Climate change, Gendered Impact, Child Sexual Abuse, SDG 5, SDG 13, SDG 16.

I. INTRODUCTION

The intersection of climate change and child sexual abuse (CSA) represents an emerging yet underexplored dimension of global child protection discourse. As environmental disruptions intensify, manifesting through displacement, resource scarcity and breakdown of social institutions, children particularly those in vulnerable geographies, face increased risk of exploitation and abuses.¹ Vulnerability however, has many different connotations. It includes a variety of concepts and elements including susceptible to harm and lack of capacity to cope and adapt.² Climate induced vulnerability means the state of being susceptible to harm or damage caused by the impact of climate change, such as extreme weather events, rising temperature etc.³

It is a known fact that climate change is not a one-day phenomenon, it is a long-term pattern which involves systematic degradation of the environment caused by human intervention, which will have a direct and indirect impact on climate related activities and the social system. With the depletion of the ozone layer the harmful UV rays causes numerous diseases to the human beings. With the increase in deforestation, pollution in land, water and sea caused by humans in the name of development and industrialization have repeatedly degraded the environment which has forced the ecosystem to make certain changes at the cost of human life.

Global warming is a world-wide problem which requires global intervention and creation of new green technologies that can be useful for our and future generation. The depletion of our ecosystem has led to growth of new forms of crime and sickness amongst people. Poverty, inequality, gender disparity, increase in crime rate is directly related to the entire climatic system. The climate crisis is not only changing the

¹ World Vision International & Overseas Development Institute, Ending Violence Against Children While Addressing the Global Climate Crisis (2020), <https://www.wvi.org/newsroom/environmental-sustainability-and-climate-action/report-finds-devastating-links-between>.

² Agnes Cherono & Charles W. Recha, *Vulnerability to Climate Change from the Kenyan Perspective*, 11:8 OPEN ACCESS LIBRARY JOURNAL 1-18, 1 (2024)

³ Id.

planet, but children too. A child development be it physical, mental and emotional is regulated by the environment he or she is born into.

While study related to climate crisis and its impact on violence against children are rare, especially taken up by the UNICEF, study on the climate induced vulnerabilities on children, especially sexual abuse and exploitation of children is even rarer, as little research and investigation has been carried out on this topic. Following the Vietnam war many children were born disabled due to the after effect of 'operation agent' which has taken numerous lives by impacting the generation of Vietnamese people. The chemical release in the environment had a lasting impact for which a few generations suffered from congenital disability. Climate change therefore results from different causes which affects the lives of the people in many different ways.

Climate crisis is a child right crisis.⁴ Children are mostly deprived of their rights in acute climate crisis leading to displacement, poverty and loss of education. Apart from all the rights children are more vulnerable towards illegal trafficking and sexual exploitation. The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) reported warmest period in a straight eight months row with the rise in sea surface temperature in 2024 which affected 160 million children due to drought and 503 million children of high risk of floods.⁵

UNICEF has reported increase in violence against children of which sexual violence against children are on the rise on a day-to-day basis.⁶ In one of the major findings of UNICEF, 120 million girls under the age of 20 have experiences sexual abuse and exploitation.⁷ In the Democratic Republic of Congo and Equatorial Guinea, Violence against girls of the age group of 15 to 19 years is 70% or more.⁸ The same violence however exceeds more than 50% in Uganda, The United Republic of Tanzania and Zimbabwe.⁹ Switzerland in its 2009 survey of boys and girls in the age group of 15 to 17 years, have found that 22% of girls and 8% of boys have experienced sexual violence.¹⁰ However, the most common form of sexual violence was cyber victimization.

The Sustainable Development Goal in its Goal 13, has urged all the member states to take immediate action on climatic conditions which is prevailing today¹¹. Climate crisis is real and with it all living beings in this planet are at stake. Unless an immediate climate action is not taken, all the SDG will be in vain. SDG Goal 5, focuses on gender equality, empowering women and girls by eliminating all sorts of violence against them including child sexual abuse and exploitation in public and private sphere.¹² However, both girl and boy child faces sexual abuses and exploitation worldwide and though SDG 5 does not explicitly discusses about other gender, but some organizations and institutions are working to make SDG 5 gender inclusive to cater to the needs of LGBTQ and other gender.¹³

Within this context, the SDGs, especially SDG Target 16.2, which aims to "end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence and torture against children" by 2030, offer a normative framework for addressing CSA through integrated and right based approach.¹⁴ It is only through the creation of peaceful and inclusive society, and easy access to justice, one can building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.¹⁵ If required one has to associate with other member nations building

⁴ United Nations Children's Fund, *Climate Crisis is a Child Rights Crisis: Introducing the Children's Climate Risk Index*, UNICEF, (Aug., 2021, 10:20 PM), <https://www.unicef.org/reports/climate-crisis-child-rights-crisis>. Dec 2024, at 107093.

⁵ Simone Datzberger et al., *How do extreme weather events contribute to violence against children*, 158. Child Abuse & Neglect

⁶ United Nations Children's Fund, *New Global Data Expose Acute Prevalence of Violence Against Children*-UNICEF, (2014) <https://www.unicef.org/mena/press-releases/new-global-data-on-violence-against-children>

⁷ *id*

⁸ *id*

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ UNICEF for Every Child, *UNICEF and the Sustainable Development Goals*, <https://www.unicef.org/sustainable-development-goals>

¹² *Id.*

¹³ UNICEF for every girl child, *Goal 5: Gender Equality*, <https://data.unicef.org/sdgs/goal-5-gender-equality/>

¹⁴ *United Nations Global Compact*, *SDG Target 16.2: End Abuse, Exploitation, Trafficking and All Forms of Violence Against and Torture of Children*, <https://sdg16.unglobalcompact.org/target-16-2/>.

¹⁵ *Id.*

relationship and strengthening the global partnership for sustainable development (SDG 17).¹⁶ However, the extent to which SDG aligned policies and monitoring mechanisms have internalized the nexus between climate change and CSA remains insufficiently explored.¹⁷

The progress assessment of SDG was taken by collecting data from around the globe during 2015 which continued till 2024 and after analyzing the data it has found that SDG 13 and SDG 16 is not on track to achieve the target till 2030 rather the SDG 13 is going towards regression as provided by the SDG Report 2024.¹⁸ The data mentioned above, speaks about the present condition of the climatic condition and it's on the other areas of sustainability including the impact it can have on the child sexual abuse.

In this study the researcher with the help of review method being able to find out the linkage between climate crisis and child sexual abuse and how climate induced vulnerabilities affecting children in its growth and development and thereby forcing them to be a victim of physical, sexual and mental abuse. The study also incorporated the data from the SDG report 2016 to 2024 as well as data from the study undertaken by the UNICEF and UN in its various report from time to time. Since the passing of a decade of SDG Agenda 2030, the study also analyzed the SDG targets with regard to achieving the objective of providing a violence free environment to children along with climate resilience.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a doctrinal method, by analyzing the reports of the UN, UNICEF and SDG 2016-2025. The researcher has also undertaken a scoping review method by reviewing literature in the emerging field of study. However, the research has not adopted a systematic review keeping in mind the diversity of the research topic and varied nature of research methods used for the study. The researcher has also used secondary sources of data provided by the UNICEF and Sustainable Development Goals 2016-2025 with that of other sources to have a clarity with regard the impact of climate change to that of child sexual abuses and understand the challenges of SDG. Through this review method, the researcher has provided the findings with regard to the research questions.

III. Understanding the Interlinkages: Climate Change and Child Sexual Abuse

The linkage between climate change and child sexual abuse is not a one-dimensional phenomenon but have to be looked through multi-dimensional approach. Environmental degradation and climate change along with change in social structure, institutions and norms increases the risk of abuse amongst children.¹⁹ Such vulnerabilities can be seen mostly in Lower middle class society in comparison to upper class society.²⁰ The effect of climate change also leads to gender-based violence depriving the girl child to get easy access to education, two meals a day and engaging in physical labour.

The international policy makers though have acknowledged that children are more vulnerable in climate affected areas leading to various forms of violence, statistics with regard to direct relation of climate change and specific forms of violence against children are yet to delved deeper.²¹ Climate change can disrupt social structures, economic systems, and environmental conditions, leading to displacement, resource scarcity, and breakdown of social norms. These factors can create a fertile ground for child sexual abuse. Girls, in particular, are disproportionately affected due to existing gender inequalities, cultural norms, and limited access to resources and decision-making power.

Sexual violence often increases in case of climate disaster areas who are prone to physical, economical, sexual and emotional abuses.²² Vulnerable are those who are left behind and often becomes victims of abuses, including sexual abuses and exploitation. In New Orleans, after the Hurricane Katrina, media

¹⁶ *Id.*

¹⁷ *PwC India Foundation & Save the Children India, Protect a Generation: Climate Security for India's Children* (2020), <https://www.pwc.in/assets/pdfs/research-insights/2020/protect-a-generation-climate-security-for-indias-children.pdf>

¹⁸ United Nations, *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2024*, <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2024/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2024.pdf>.

¹⁹ United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), *In Focus: Children, Climate Change and Environmental Degradation* (Nov. 2024), <https://www.unicef.org/eca/reports/focus-children-climate-change-and-environmental-degradation>.

²⁰ Simone, *supra* note 5, at 107095

²¹ *Id.* at 107097

²² Suan Sullivan, *Why Sexual Violence Increase in Disaster*, NATIONAL SEXUAL VIOLENCE RESOURCE CENTER, (2017) <https://www.nsvrc.org/blogs/five-reasons-sexual-violence-increases-disasters>

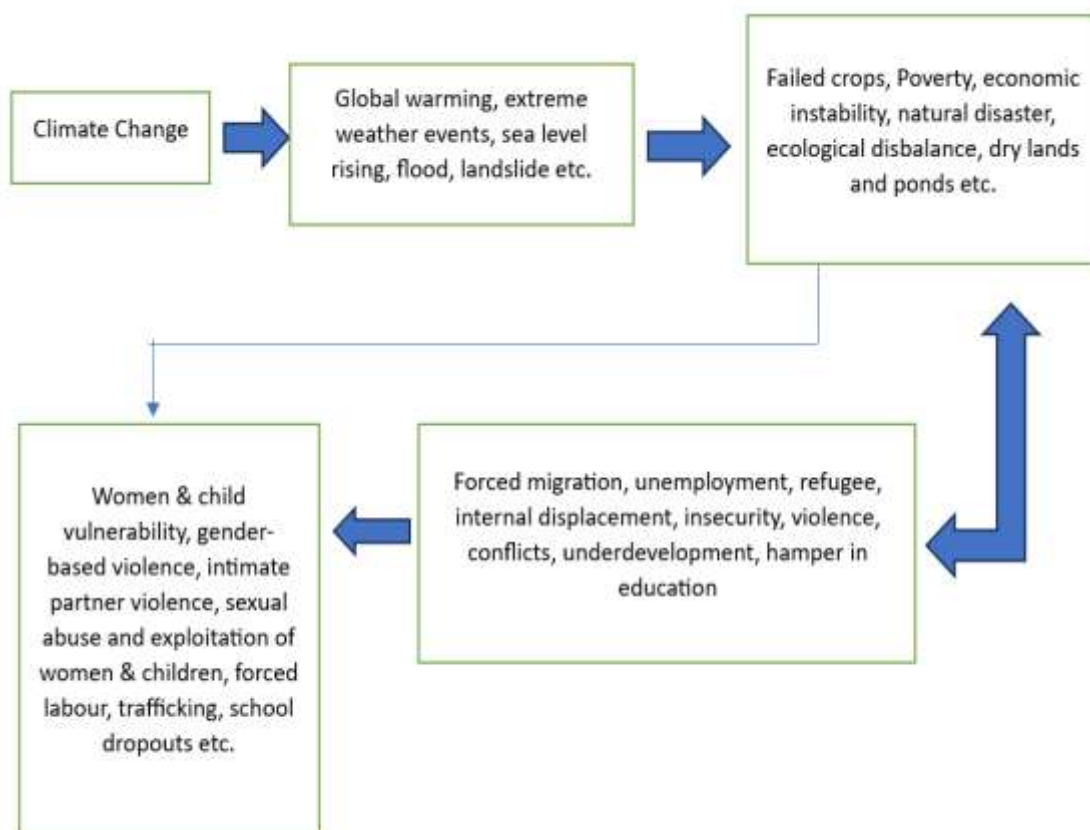
reported cases of sexual assaults in the evacuation location and shelter places.²³ Women and children often becomes the victims of sexual abuses in evacuation shelter homes where both families and registered sex offenders are placed in the same building.²⁴

Study conducted on floods affected people, has come to the light that 70% of mothers and 40% of fathers in flood affected region of Bangladesh and Pakistan have abused their children, where cases of molestation and sexual abuse of children were reported in post-cyclone period in due to cramped living conditions in shelter houses.²⁵

In 2017, drought in Turkana, Kenya, reported increase in sexual violence cases amongst women and girls who have to walk long distance to fetch water.²⁶ There were cases where it has been reported that most of the girls have to succumb to sexual favours in exchange of water.²⁷ In Somaliland, cases of forced child marriage were highest as a result of drought.²⁸ In India too, drought is a common occurrence where children were found left behind while their parents migrated to different states and cities in search of work and income, (UNICEF 2016).²⁹

Majority of cases related to child trafficking and child labour was registered in drought prone locations. A study conducted in Sub-Saharan African countries, nearly 3.36 million children (mostly girls) are responsible in collecting water for their households which takes minimum of 30 minutes a day to communicate.³⁰ During outbreak of Covid-19, lack of water and food has contributed to gender-based violence in Yemen.

Fig.1 The following diagram denotes the chain of effects of climate change



²³ *Id.*

²⁴ *Id.*

²⁵ Simone, *supra* note 5 at 5.

²⁶ Barnfonden: Member of Child Fund Alliance, *Exploring the link between climate change and violence against children*, (2021) <https://childfundalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Exploring-the-link-between-climate-change-and-violence-against-children-1.pdf>

²⁷ *Id.*

²⁸ Save the Children, Annual Review 2018, SAVE THE CHILDREN INTERNATIONAL, (2018) https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/stc_annual_review_digital_aw.pdf

²⁹ Barnfonden, *supra* note 26

³⁰ *Id.*

IV. Climate Induced Vulnerabilities and Child Sexual Abuse

a) Displacement and Forced Migration: Climate-induced displacement can disrupt traditional social support systems, leaving children vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. Girls may be particularly at risk due to cultural norms that restrict their movement and access to education. It has estimated that almost 300,000 child migrants unaccompanied and separated from their parents were in transit in 2017.³¹ Children in move are an easy target for abusers, exploiters and traffickers which puts them in high risk of sexual abuse and exploitation.

Uganda faces extreme weather condition such as flood, droughts and landslides, for which around 334,000 people got displaced between 2018 to 2020 as per the report provided by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre.³²

Each year flood impacts nearly 50,000 people, costing around \$62 million. According to the Uganda's Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MGLSD), within the age group of 13 to 17 years, 25% of girls and 11% of boys faces sexual violence every year.³³ Many Countries with risk of climatic breakdown is facing acute violence including child sexual abuse and exploitation.

b) Scarcity of Resources: Shortages of food, water, and other essential resources can increase economic hardship and strain family structures, making children more susceptible to abuse. Girls may be denied access to education and healthcare in favour of boys, further exacerbating their vulnerability. It has been predicted that by 2041, children in one out of four will face extreme high-water stress apart from poverty, discrimination and social inequalities.³⁴

Climate crisis has aggravated the vulnerabilities of children pushing them deeper into in many different sorts of violence including sexual abuse and exploitation. Scarcity of resources been one of the factors of climate crisis, has led many families to negotiate in compelling circumstances which also results children leaving homes for labour and to earn money, which is against the very right children has been bestowed through the Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989.³⁵

c) Breakdown of Social Structures: Climate-related disasters can weaken social institutions, such as schools and law enforcement, making it difficult to protect children from abuse. Traditional social norms may also break down, leading to a loss of protective mechanisms. Though child marriage has no direct relation with climate change, since it differs from region to region and culture to culture, but research points out that child marriage can be one of the reasons of climate crisis.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), points out that there has been increase of 1.5° C of global warming which could lead to extreme poverty, especially seen in Sub-Saharan African and Soth-Asian regions, which is also the two highest regions in child marriage.³⁶ A review done by the researcher has found that there is a high chances of child marriage in lower classes of society due to environmental crisis, pushing parents to marry their daughters early.³⁷

Another study has identified the reasons of child marriage due to environmental crisis, which are: 1) loss of economy and opportunities to generate income; 2) displacement and forced migration from their homes and villages; 3) lack of educational support; 4) fear of hostile environment with regard to sexual abuses.³⁸ Though the study is not limited to it and it has multiple facets, but the risk of child marriage increases due to climatic factor.³⁹

³¹ *Alone & Unsafe: Children, Migration, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence*, 5 (2017) Alone and Unsafe: Children, migration, and sexual and gender-based violence | Save the Children's Resource Centre.

³² Othering & Belonging Institute at UC Berkeley, *Climate Crisis, Displacement, and the Right to Stay*, <https://belonging.berkeley.edu/climatedisplacement/case-studies/uganda>

³³ *Safeguarding Childhood: An Assessment of National Transparency to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse*, Uganda, <https://safeguardingchildhood.com/safe-guarding-childhood/uganda/#:~:text=According%20to%20Uganda's%20Ministry%20of,percent%2C%20respectively%2C%20as%20of%202020.>

³⁴ Arianna Bagra, *Climate Crisis is a children's Rights Crisis*, HUMANIUM, (Dec 6, 2022), Climate crisis is a children's rights crisis - Humanium.

³⁵ UNICEF, *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, <https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention/convention-text>.

³⁶ Daniel H. Pope, et.al, *What is the current evidence for the relationship between the climate and environmental crisis and child marriage? A scoping review*, 18:1 2095655 Global Public Health, 2095657 (2023).

³⁷ *Id.*

³⁸ Simone, *supra* note 5 at 107097

³⁹ *Id.*

d) **Gender-Based Violence:** Notion of 'gender' is a socially constructed term which is different from the 'biological' term.⁴⁰ Though victims of sexual abuse can be of any gender, it is mostly the girls who are the most vulnerable in terms of sexual abuse. The gender-based violence with regard to women and girl child can mostly be seen in all aspects of society. However, the Climate change can increase the prevalence of gender-based violence, including sexual assault. Girls and women may be more likely to experience violence in times of crisis, particularly when their economic security is threatened.

V. Sustainable Development Goals and its Challenges in Addressing Prevention of CSA/CSE Towards Target Achievement

The Sustainable development Goals Agenda 2030, adopted by all UN member Nations in 2015, aims to establish an integrated framework balancing socio, economic and environmental imperatives by creating a resilient system where present developmental needs can be meted out without compromising the needs and ability of the future generation.⁴¹ The SDG has a total of 17 goals which requires all member Nations be it developed or developing to take immediate action in order to achieve the goals by 2030.

Ending violence against children including physical, sexual, mental and emotional harm is one of the targets of the 2030 Agenda for SDG.⁴² Target 16.2, specifically deals with ending violence against children by building a peaceful, just and inclusive societies. The agenda prioritised the right of children to live a dignified life by ending all forms of violence, be it abuses, exploitation, trafficking, torture as well as all sorts of harmful practices that leads to sexual exploitation and abuses.⁴³

The adoption of SDG 16.2 ensures a global commitment towards ensuring elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against children, giving them a chance to live a peaceful life, free from neglect, fear, abuse and exploitation.⁴⁴ Target 5.2 and 5.3 of SDG 2030, further fortifies the child protection agenda across diverse fields ensuring gender equality by eliminating violence against women and girls including sexual abuses and exploitation.⁴⁵ Though every member states do sets the target to abide by the agenda, without proper institutional framework and policies in place, it will take centuries to achieve the target.

While analysing the SDG 5 and SDG 16 from 2016 to 2024, growing inconsistencies and disparities can be seen in climate affected regions.⁴⁶ Despite positive enrolment of women in education and moderate representation in parliament under SDG 5, it can be seen that there has been an increase in gender-based violence against children as cases of child sexual abuse and exploitation goes unreported.⁴⁷ This can be seen from the data provided after the COVID-19 Pandemic, where there has been an increase in the instances of domestic violence against women and child molestation and abuses. Many cases go unreported due to family pressure and lock down.

The instances of child marriage is a global problem, especially in developing nations like Bangladesh, India and many Asian nations, where girl child are married before they turn 18, either because of poverty, or as a custom, in fact there is no one reason for giving away the girl child in marriage.

On the basis of the report provided by SDG 2025, the low income and lower middle income countries assessment from 2016 to 2024 is shown in stagnant position. Whereas, upper middle income and high-

⁴⁰ *Id.*

⁴¹ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *the 17 Goals*, <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

⁴² United Nations, *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2024*

⁴³ United Nations, *World Day for the Prevention of and Healing from child Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Violence-18 November*, <https://www.un.org/en/observances/child-sexual-exploitation-prevention-and-healing-day#:~:text=In%20the%202030%20Agenda%20for,exploitation%2C%20abuse%2C%20trafficking%2C%20torture>

⁴⁴ United Nations, Sustainable Development Goals, *Violence Against Children*, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/topics/violenceagainstchildren>

⁴⁵ *id*

⁴⁶ Barnfonden, *supra* note 26 at 14.

⁴⁷ Laura Quinones, *Climate crisis driving surge in gender-based violence, UN study finds*, UN News, April 22, 2025, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/04/1162461>

income countries are progressing towards SDG 5 target achievement.⁴⁸ Data from 131 Nations has revealed substantial amount of challenges in Target 5 in 2024.⁴⁹

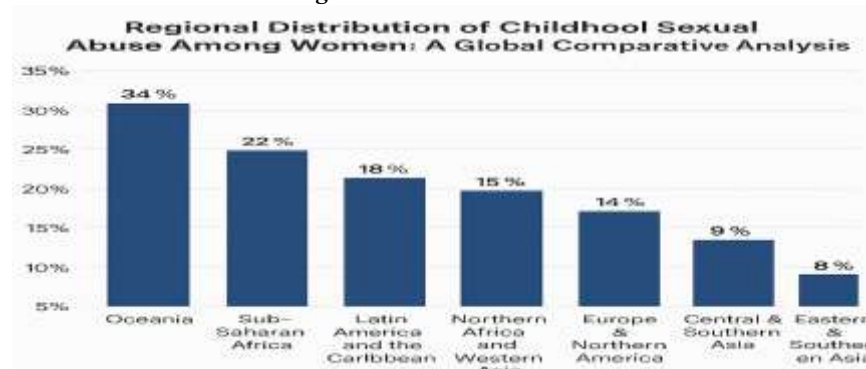
Though most of the nations are able to progress as they have increased the seats of women representation in parliament and other positions. Yet poverty and lack of education and job discrimination in climate affected countries is creating hurdle to achieve the SDG target and not to mention sexual offences against women and children being the highest amongst all the nations, the overall progress of the target 5 is still in the process with little to no chance to achieve the target by 2030.⁵⁰

On the other hand, assessing SDG Targets from 2016 to 2024, it has been seen that only 17% of the targets are on track and there has been a stagnant in the growth rates due to war, conflict affecting women and children in every 12 minutes.⁵¹ In 2024, 123.2 million people were forcibly displaced and there has been an increase in the rate of homicide cases which has cost the progress of SDG 16.⁵² Though few improvements have been made, still there is a significant gap in providing an effective, accountable and inclusive institution.⁵³

On the basis of the assessment, it has come to the notice that countries across Middle East and North Africa as well in Sub-Saharan Africa, have shown significant deviation from achieving the SDG target 16, which focuses on peace, justice and strong institutions.⁵⁴ These countries have underperformed in areas such as law & order, institutional peace building and governance. While, the low-income countries continue to struggle consistently, the middle- and high-income nations have experienced stagnation, failing which will distance itself from reaching the goal till 2030.⁵⁵

SDG 16.2 aims to end abuses, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against children, but many nations are facing a challenge in combating violence in all forms against children.⁵⁶ Irrespective of international conventions and domestic laws, there is a sharp increase in violence against children, especially child sexual exploitation and abuses are on the rise. The SDG 16.2.3 provides a proportion of young women and men in the age group of 18-29 years, facing sexual abuse by the age of 18 years.⁵⁷ The data of 7 countries based on SDG indication have been analysed by the UNICEF and have come to the notice that in all the seven countries there is a growing rate of child sexual abuses.⁵⁸

Fig. 2 Represents region wise classification of percentage of women who have experienced contact sexual abuses before the age 18.



Source: UNICEF, When Numbers Demand Action: Confronting the global scale of sexual violence against children

⁴⁸ Sustainable Development Report 2025: Financing Sustainable Development to 2030 and Mid-Century, Sustainable Development Solution Network, 10th Edition, <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2025/>.

⁴⁹ United Nations, *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2025*, <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2025/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2025.pdf>.

⁵⁰ *Supra* note 47.

⁵¹ *Id.*

⁵² *Id.*

⁵³ *Id.*

⁵⁴ *Id.*

⁵⁵ *Supra* note 48

⁵⁶ *Supra* note 47

⁵⁷ SDG indicator metadata, <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/metadata/files/Metadata-16-02-03.pdf>

⁵⁸ UNICEF, When Numbers Demand Action: Confronting the global scale of sexual violence against children, (Oct. 9, 2024) <https://data.unicef.org/resources/when-numbers-demand-action/>.

Moreover, SDG 16 acts as a catalyst for achieving the entire 2030 Agenda for sustainable development, for which timely delivery of justice, accountability and maintaining peace and security becomes essential to create the foundation for sustainable development.⁵⁹ This reminds us that a protective society is backed by a strong institution without which no law & order can be prevailed. Children are in the most vulnerable position their protection depends on a peace building just society along with good governance, where timely justice can provide relief to the victims of crime and abuse of power. Protecting children against sexual offender is not only the responsibility of the executive, but also the society we live in. Thus, without achieving SDG 16, children shall not be free from fear of the victims of crime. With the help of Target 16, both gender equality and climate action can be achieved.

Been said that, 2025 is an important year for climate action under SDG 13 as it has completed 10 years of the Paris Agreement, though the agreement has been accepted and works are carried out however, the world is still facing the climate crisis.⁶⁰ According to the UN Environment Programme's Emissions Gap Report of 2024, the global greenhouse gas has hit a record of 57.1 gigatons of CO₂ which is far more than it has recorded in 2023.⁶¹ Keeping in view the current climate policies, the report spills a bitter truth, as there will be a rise of 3.1°C, which will have a sever impact on the climate, finances and the people, which indirectly shall affect the Agenda 2030.⁶²

According to the report 'Climate Change and India: A 4×4 Assessment', there may be a rise in temperature in the North-Eastern region of India, projected to range between 1.8°C and 2.1°C, leading to increased evapo-transpiration, something which was unheard of in the densely situated hilly areas of the north-eastern region.⁶³ There has been an increase in moderate drought-like conditions in Nagaland from 2021, which as per the study may continue till 2050s.⁶⁴ The drought weeks across the state are likely to increase by 25–50 percent in this period with respect to the current baseline scenario (Government of Nagaland (GoN), 2012).⁶⁵

As a result of these changes, women and men face serious challenges in undertaking their traditional gender roles and responsibilities. For women, an important set of roles and responsibilities revolves around collection and management of water for domestic use – primarily for drinking, cooking, washing, cleaning and personal hygiene of different household members.

While women are also associated with the agricultural and livelihood activities in an important way, it is the set of domestic water management roles which is most importantly affected on a day-to-day basis. While the women face gender- based discrimination, it is the children from 14-17 years who faces the biasness when it comes to collecting of woods, water or taking care of younger siblings. Many households in the village area does not allow girl child to enrol in education, they are forced to take household responsibility along with their mothers.

According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), many observed impacts of the changing climate, such as sea-level rise, are happening more quickly than previously predicted, threatening coastal communities and critical infrastructure by increasing the frequency of disaster events, including flooding and storms.⁶⁶

According to the UN Secretary-General, the cost of disasters, mainly climate-related, has reached an average of \$250 billion to \$300 billion a year – during 2003–2013, disasters cost nearly \$1.5 trillion in worldwide economic damage.⁶⁷ The Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction (GAR) 2025,

⁵⁹ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Welfare, *SDG 16: A cornerstone for achieving all Global Goals*, <https://www.un.org/en/desa-en/sdg-16-cornerstone-achieving-all-global-goals>

⁶⁰ *Supra* note 48.

⁶¹ *Id.*

⁶² *Id.*

⁶³ Nandita Singh & Om Prakash Singh, *Climate Change, water and gender: Impact & adaptation in North Eastern Hills of India*, 58 ISW 375, 376 (2015).

⁶⁴ *id*

⁶⁵ *Id* at 378

⁶⁶ IPCC Sixth Assessment Report, *Chapter-11: Weather and Climate Extreme Events in a Changing Climate*, Chapter 11: Weather and Climate Extreme Events in a Changing Climate | Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis.

⁶⁷ UNDP, *Gender and Climate Change: Overview of linkages between gender and climate change*, *UNDP Linkages Gender and CC Policy Brief 1-WEB.pdf

highlights the true disaster cost crossed \$2.3 trillion, the burden of which disproportionately falls upon the developing Nations.⁶⁸

At the national level, countries such as Honduras and Peru have prioritized high levels of gender integration in their climate change policy and planning documents. The latest examples of progress come from the inclusion of gender dimensions in a selection of Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs), submitted under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Paris in 2015 (COP 21).⁶⁹

Climate change impacts men and women differently, largely due to their gender-differentiated roles and responsibilities at the household and community levels. Women tend to be overly burdened with household work and caring for children, the sick and the elderly.⁷⁰ Environmental degradation is a driving force for gender-based violence. Scarcity of resources, regional conflicts and displacement due to climate crisis deepens the existing inequalities.⁷¹ Environmental crisis can also weaken the legal institutions which enables the offender to commit more crimes. As provided by numerous reports on climate crisis, the number of offences increases due to drought, famine, flood and displacement/migration. Such offences range from sex trafficking to sexual abuse of women and children, child labour and many more.⁷²

Gender-based violence is not just a violation of human rights, but also violates the rights of the victims from exercising their economic, political and social rights which also limits their access to education and work. It is also a barrier for conservation and achieving the SDG Agenda 2030. As per the IUCN 2020 report, in a project conducted in Nepal, it has been found that women were sexually exploited in order to prevent them from taking part in restoration activities of the ecosystem.⁷³

With the increase in environmental degradation, the chances of increase in child marriage are also more, especially amongst the poorest region. Survey undertaken by Alston and colleagues (2014) in Bangladesh, found that about 91% of the participants given a positive respond as to direct relation between climate change and financial crisis.⁷⁴ Whereas, 45% of the participants claimed that girls below 18 years are forced to get married due to climate change and extreme poverty.⁷⁵ There is also larger possibility of child marriage due to extreme weather events, where migration and displacement contributes to early marriage of girl child.⁷⁶

Studies demonstrate that gender equality and women's empowerment are crucial for economic development and environmental sustainability. For example, "recent research from the McKinsey Global Institute (MGI) finds that if women were to participate in the economy "identically to men", they could add as much as \$28 trillion or 26 percent to annual global GDP (roughly the combined size of the current US and Chinese economies) by 2025."⁷⁷

It has been observed after going through the data provided by SDG report from 2016 to 2024 that none of the goals will be able to achieve its target by 2030. On the other-hand only 16.7% SDG targets are on track till 2024 to achieve the target, the rest of the countries are stagnating in most of the important targets such as SDG 2, 15 and 16.⁷⁸ There has been an increase by 25% of global trafficking of children, where child victims have risen to 31& since 2019.⁷⁹ 60% of trafficked girls are mostly used for sexual

⁶⁸ UNDRR, *From billions to trillions: Flagship UN report reveals true cost of disasters and how to reduce them*, May 27, 2025) UN report reveals true cost of disasters and how to reduce them | UNDRR

⁶⁹ *Supra* note 53

⁷⁰ *Id.*

⁷¹ International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), *Gender-Based Violence and Environment (Issues Brief, 2020)*, <https://iucn.org/resources/issues-brief/gender-based-violence-and-environment>

⁷² *Id.*

⁷³ *Id.*

⁷⁴ Margaret Alston, et.al, *Are climate challenges reinforcing child and forced marriage and dowry as adaptation strategies in the context of Bangladesh?* 47 *Women's Stud. Int'l F.* 137, 139 (2014)

⁷⁵ *Id.*

⁷⁶ Daniel H. Pope, et.al., *What is the current evidence for the relationship between the climate and environmental crisis and child marriage? A scoping review*, 18 (1) *GLOBAL PUBLIC HEALTH* 2095655, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17441692.2022.2095655>, (2022).

⁷⁷ *Supra* note 53.

⁷⁸ *Supra* note 47.

⁷⁹ *Supra* note 48.

exploitation whereas, boys are exploited for forced labour.⁸⁰ Places like, Central America, Sub-Sahara Africa, Caribbean, and Northern Africa has a highest number of child victims.⁸¹

VI. Findings of the Study

Based on the review of the reports and the objective undertaken by the researcher, it has been found that as of 2025, only 35% Targets are on track and making moderate progress, while it can be seen most of the targets are off the track, with 18% of them are regressing.⁸² Climate disruption, conflicts and war, economic instability due to environmental crisis continue to obstruct the progress of the SDG goals, especially in regions like Sub-Saharan Africa, Bangladesh, parts of Middle East and North Africa.

While Indonesia and other Asian countries are facing huge shift in climatic conditions, middle east nations are engaged in wars making it vulnerable to women and children and thereby creating a challenging environment for SDG targets to achieve its goals. The SDG Target 16.2, which aims to end all forms of discrimination and abuses against children, especially sexual abuse, exploitation and trafficking of children are basically off the track as of 2025.⁸³ Violence against children is on the rise, despite international and domestic laws to prevent all forms of discrimination against children.

Recent UN, NCRB, UNDP data speaks about the growing sexual offences against children, commercial sexual exploitation, cyber-crime, cyber stalking of children, rape, trafficking and prostitution of children are on the rise.⁸⁴ The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) has reported in 2022, that climate change has caused more displacement both within and beyond borders in comparison to displacement caused due to conflict.⁸⁵ The International Panel for Climate Change (IPCC) has found gender-based discrimination at the time of environmental crisis, where it has recorded that women are more likely to get displaced due to climate change than men, which accounts for 80% of women being displaced globally.⁸⁶

It is a known fact, that the global estimates indicate that 1 in 5 girls and 1 in 7 boys are the victims of sexual abuses before they turn 18 years of age.⁸⁷ A study on the case of Child Sexual Abuse by the Dhaka Metropolitan Police, has reported that poverty and lack of education are the key factors for the child sexual abuse.⁸⁸ In Pakistan, it has been reported that an average of 8 children are sexually abused in a day, where the total number of children being the victim of child sexual abuse has increased to 1489 in the year 2020.⁸⁹

For Afghanistan the situation is equally alarming, as 4,519 cases of violence against children were recorded for the year 2021 and 2022 as reported by UN Secretary- General's Report on children and armed conflict.⁹⁰ Similarly, in Bangladesh a total of 818 cases of penetrative sexual assault have been recorded in the year 2021, which is 31% more than record in the year 2020.⁹¹ About 90% of victims of child sexual exploitation comes for poor economic background where poverty plays a pivotal role.⁹² Many such children falls victim to sexual abuses because of poverty, especially during the time of flood, displacement and migration from one place to another.

⁸⁰ *Id.*

⁸¹ *Id.*

⁸² *Id.*

⁸³ SDG 16 Now, Target 16.2: End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children, Target 16.2 - SDG16NOW

⁸⁴ Ritwika Mitra, *In the Sundarban, Climate Change has an unlikely effect-on child sex trafficking*, THE FULLER PROJECT (Jan. 20, 2022), *In the Sundarban, climate change has an unlikely effect – on child sex-trafficking | The Fuller Project.*

⁸⁵ Rebecca Allen, *Women, Girls, and the Impact of Climate Change on Sex Trafficking*, EARTH REFUGE (Nov.15,2021) <https://earthrefuge.org/women-girls-and-the-impact-of-climate-change-on-sex-trafficking/>.

⁸⁶ *Id.*

⁸⁷ World Childhood Foundation, *Global Progress in the Fight Against Child Sexual Violence* (July 9, 2025), *Global progress in the Fight Against Child Sexual Violence - World Childhood Foundation - 25 Years*

⁸⁸ Md. Omar Faruk et. al., *Child Sexual Abuse: A Study on the Cases of Dhaka Metropolitan Police*, 7 Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP), 2021.

⁸⁹ *Id.*

⁹⁰ Fidel Rahmati, *Children in Afghanistan at risk of sexual violence: UN Report*, THE KHAAMA PRESS NEWS AGENCY, Dec. 24, 2023, *Children in Afghanistan at risk of sexual violence: UN Report - Khaama Press*

⁹¹ *Supra* note 81.

⁹² *Id.*

VII. CONCLUSION

Addressing the gaps and challenges of child sexual abuse requires a concerted effort from Governments, international organizations, civil society, and individuals. Child sexual abuse is not a one-day phenomenon nor it is solely related to climate crisis, but climate change is one of the reasons that children are falling a victim to exploiters and abusers. The SDGs are inter-related to each other. One cannot achieve the SDG targets without addressing all the targets simultaneously.

Violence against children, especially child sexual abuse and exploitation can be tackled only when climate change can be reduced and the institutions provide proper justice and develop peace mechanism for a healthy development of children, not just physically but mentally and emotionally. SDG 5, 13 and 16 if combinedly worked together can be a stepping stone for the redressal of crime against children. Sustainable Development Goals and its targets is helping to bring a balanced and peaceful society by trying to build more resilient and sustainable communities that are better able to cope with the impacts of climate change. A better environment fosters healthier minds, which is necessary for reducing crime and cultivating a better and compassionate society.

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