

Submission in response to a call for submission by the OHCHR on how climate change can have an impact on the realization of the equal enjoyment of the right to education by every girl

Submitting Organisation

The [Africa Albinism Network \(AAN\)](#) exists to promote the rights, well-being, and inclusivity of people with albinism in Africa through advocacy, capacity development, and collaboration.

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Summary

In Africa, the impact of climate change poses significant challenges to the equal enjoyment of the right to education, particularly for girls, including those with albinism. The region is witnessing increasingly severe weather events, such as droughts, floods, and heatwaves. These climatic disruptions often lead to damaged school infrastructure, unsafe learning environments, and interruptions in the academic calendar which directly affect access to and participation in and quality of education received. Moreover, these climate-related changes can disrupt transportation systems, further hindering the accessibility of schools, especially in contexts where students must travel long distances to school. Climate change also indirectly impacts education by exacerbating socio-economic inequalities. Families, particularly those dependent on subsistence farming, face increased economic hardships due to climate-related disruptions in agriculture and other livelihood activities, leading to a higher likelihood of children being withdrawn from school.

The impact of climate change on the attendance and participation of girls with albinism in the education system is seldom considered. This is despite evidence that persons with albinism including girls with albinism are particularly affected by increased UV radiation levels closely linked with climate change and variations. The lack of or reduced melanin production in the eyes and skin of persons with albinism heightens their sensitivity to sunlight and UV rays. Increased UV exposure intensifies their susceptibility to health complications, most notably, the risk of developing skin cancer. The rate of UV exposure increases in regions on or near the equator. Africa is known to have a high UV index with most countries recording values above 8. Without intervention persons with albinism are five-times more likely to die prematurely from skin cancer and some estimates show that by age 40, most, - and up to 90% would have had a significant degree of sun-related damage,

have contracted, or have died from skin cancer.¹ For girls with albinism, who already face unique barriers to enjoying their right to education including stigma and discrimination; lack of reasonable accommodations; unavailability of appropriate assistive technology; exclusion from certain courses and activities at school; risk of ritual attacks and exposure to sun whilst commuting to school climate change exacerbates their vulnerabilities.²

Addressing the impact of climate change on education in Africa, especially for girls with albinism, requires a comprehensive approach. This involves reinforcing infrastructure resilience, implementing climate-smart school policies, and ensuring the inclusion of climate change education in the curriculum. Additionally, targeted support systems, awareness programs, and policies must be enacted to safeguard the right to education for all, acknowledging and addressing the unique challenges faced by girls with albinism in the changing climate landscape.

1. The most important barriers for girls with albinism to their equal enjoyment of the right to education

Exposure to Sun whilst Commuting to School

Girls with albinism in countries with high ultraviolet ray indexes who commute long distances to and from school without any sunscreen and protective clothing suffer from repeated sunburn, solar elastosis, skin photoageing increasing the risk of developing skin cancer. This exposure to excessive sunlight also exacerbates problems with their eye health as the eyes of persons with albinism are more sensitive to bright light and many individuals experience extreme discomfort from over exposure.³ With many schools situated at considerable distances from where students reside, particularly in rural areas, students with albinism, including girls, often have to walk long distances to access education.⁴ Many learners in Africa continue to walk for more than 2km to their educational institutions with no transport provided by the country's education department for children who need it. The *2022 National Household Travel Survey in South Africa report* for instance shows that about 10,1

¹ Human Rights Council (HRC), 'Preliminary study on the situation of human rights of persons with albinism' (2014) A/HRC/AC/13/CRP.1 para 22.

² Human Rights Council, The right to education for persons with albinism. Report of the Independent Expert on the enjoyment of human rights by persons with albinism, Muluka-Anne Miti-Drummond. A/HRC/55/45 (2024).

³ General Assembly, Climate change and persons with albinism, Report of the Independent Expert on the enjoyment of human rights by persons with albinism, Muluka-Anne Miti-Drummond. A/78/167 para 24.

⁴ <https://learningenglish.voanews.com/a/children-in-south-africa-walk-a-long-way-to-school/7357696.html>

million learners walked to their educational institution in South Africa.⁵ The situation is worsened by the fact that it is compulsory for students to wear school uniforms in most schools in Africa with no exception. Most of these uniforms are short-sleeved and as a result do not offer adequate protection from sun exposure. The negative health impacts experienced by girls with albinism because of the sun exposure are disruptive to their education and learning and contributes to higher dropout rates and poorer educational participation and learning outcomes for these girls.

The high prevalence rate of skin damage and cancer among persons with albinism of which girls with albinism are no exception impedes the enjoyment of both the right to health and education for these girls. For instance, in Togo, a 2019 survey among persons with albinism indicated that 95.2% of the participants presented with various skin lesions in sun-exposed areas such as head and neck regions.⁶ Similar studies conducted among persons with albinism in Tanzania, Nigeria and South Africa showed 25%, 20.98% and 23% prevalence rate of skin cancer respectively.⁷ Sunburns and other skin damages linked to climate change increase the vulnerability of girls with albinism to stigma, bullying, and discrimination, which serve as catalysts for school dropouts, denying them their rights to education.⁸

Temporary measures to mitigate climate related disasters not inclusive

When schools and other educational infrastructure are directly disrupted by climate-related impacts, such as extreme weather events, girls with albinism face specific barriers to their educational participation and to mitigate learning loss. ⁹Structures, such as temporary classrooms and tents, used in the aftermath of disaster events may not be sufficient to protect the skin of girls with albinism from sun exposure. In addition, remote learning methods used during and after disaster events are often not fully accessible to students with albinism, including girls with albinism with low vision meaning that these learners miss out on vital teaching and learning. In instances where families are displaced or migrate owing to climate related changes access to education in refugee camps and settlements is often compromised with many girls not attending school at all for several reasons.¹⁰

⁵ EMIS-Education Management Information Systems (2022) 2022 School Realities Report.

⁶ B Saka and others, 'Skin cancers in people with albinism in Togo in 2019: results of two rounds of national mobile skin care clinics' (2021) 21 BMC Cancer 26 <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12885-020-07747-8>

⁷ AK Daklo 'Access to healthcare for persons with albinism in Ghana: A human rights approach (2022). P20-21

⁸ Human Rights Council, (n1 above) para 18

⁹ General Assembly, Climate change and persons with albinism, Report of the Independent Expert on the enjoyment of human rights by persons with albinism, Muluka-Anne Miti-Drummond. A/78/167 para 29.

¹⁰ General Assembly, People with albinism on the move, Report of the Independent Expert on the enjoyment of human rights by persons with albinism, Muluka-Anne Miti-Drummond A/77/199 par 50.

Risks of violence increases with climate change impact

The pervasive threat of ritual killings and the brutal mutilation of body parts of persons with albinism in Africa for ritualistic purposes creates a formidable barrier for girls with albinism to access education.¹¹ In countries where attacks have been reported, research has shown that children with albinism including girls are vulnerable to attacks particularly during their commute to and from school. This has led to parents of children with albinism being reluctant to send their children with albinism to school, especially when schools are located at a considerable distance from their homes due to the legitimate concern for their safety.¹²

It has been increasingly noted that the adverse effects of climate change exacerbate these ritual attacks. For instance, attacks targeting people with albinism in Madagascar are believed to have increased due to prolonged drought and crop failure increasing the level of poverty in the affected areas.¹³ Reports from Malawi indicated an increased risk and vulnerability to attacks of persons with albinism housed in temporary structures during the aftermath of cyclone Freddy.¹⁴ Perpetrators of attacks targeting persons with albinism during climate disasters harbour the harmful belief that sacrificing the body parts of persons with albinism in ritual will bring favourable weather.¹⁵ Others also believe that such ritual sacrifices of body parts of persons with albinism will bring bumper harvest,¹⁶ while others adversely believe that the presence of persons with albinism rather causes famine by disrupting rainfall patterns.¹⁷ Conditions after disasters generally decrease security in affected areas increasing the risk of persons with albinism being attacked.

Pre-existing Discrimination, Stigma and Bullying magnified

¹¹ Human Rights Council, The right to education for persons with albinism. Report of the Independent Expert on the enjoyment of human rights by persons with albinism, Muluka-Anne Miti-Drummond. A/HRC/55/45 (2024) Para 50 See also <https://atasmalawi.com/kasungu-3-year-old-girl-with-albinism-killed-assailant-on-the-run/>

¹² As above. See also <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/05/1064482>

¹³ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/10/madagascar-combat-dangerous-myths-and-poverty-end-attacks-against-people>

¹⁴ General Assembly, Climate change and persons with albinism, Report of the Independent Expert on the enjoyment of human rights by persons with albinism, Muluka-Anne Miti-Drummond. A/78/167 para 16

¹⁵ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/10/climate-change-puts-people-albinism-grave-risk-un-expert>

¹⁶ Ero I and others, 'People with albinism worldwide. A human rights perspective' (United Nations 2021) www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Albinism/Albinism_Worldwide_Report2021_EN.pdf

¹⁷ Human Rights Council (n4 above) para 16

The intersectionality of gender, albinism, and climate change compounds the challenges faced by girls with albinism in accessing their right to education. The impact of climate change including extreme weather events magnifies the pre-existing stigma, discrimination and bullying experienced by girls with albinism in.

Name-calling and bullying are unfortunately prevalent forms of mistreatment that girls with albinism frequently encounter within educational settings. These hurtful actions which often target their physical appearance undermine their self-esteem and sense of belonging, creating a hostile learning environment. The physical consequences of prolonged sun exposure which include wrinkling, ageing, dark spots, and lesions¹⁸ fuels the social exclusion these girls already experience. Girls with albinism with visible manifestations of skin damage become targets for heightened discrimination and bullying and often enduring additional layers of prejudice.¹⁹ The body disfigurements caused by UV radiation, associated with climate change, leads to debilitating sense of low confidence and low self-esteem among persons with albinism, particularly girls with albinism which can result in them underperforming at school or dropping out. The negative self-image deters these girls from actively participating in educational activities.

The consequences of stigma and discrimination are far-reaching, with potential ramifications for the girls' educational aspirations and their broader contribution to societal issues like the climate change agenda. Exclusionary practices experienced by girls with albinism limit their engagement in classroom discussions, extracurricular activities, and leadership roles, hindering their overall development and potential contributions to important global issues. Moreover, the psychological toll of enduring stigma and discrimination can result in increased stress and anxiety for girls with albinism. This, in turn, negatively impacts their mental well-being, further exacerbating the challenges they face in pursuing education.

Families of girls with albinism whose livelihood has been disrupted and negatively impacted by climate change and are struggling to afford school costs are likely to choose to withdraw their girl child rather than their siblings because of preexisting misconceptions held about their child's learning ability. It is imperative to recognize the interconnected nature of these issues, acknowledging that the

¹⁸ PM Lund and JS Taylor, 'Lack of adequate sun protection for children with oculocutaneous albinism in South Africa' (2008) 8 BMC Public Health 225, 226 doi:10.1186/1471-2458-8-2252.

¹⁹ Human Rights Council (n1 above) para 16

convergence of gender, albinism, and climate change exacerbates the barriers these girls face in realising their right to education.

Lack of reasonable accommodation for visual impairment

The challenge of low vision among persons with albinism is significantly increased by the exposure to intense sunlight, rendering it difficult for them to see clearly. This is particularly evident in a classroom setting where persons with albinism may struggle to read from the board due to excessive lighting from the sun which causes glares and reflections, even if seated in the front rows.²⁰ The severity of the situation is exacerbated in remote areas and disaster-prone regions, where the lack of proper classroom infrastructure is more pronounced. The result is affected children have greater difficulty seeing classroom content and concentrating on their learning.²¹ In these settings, schoolchildren, including those with albinism, often find themselves compelled to learn under trees as a temporary measure.²² This not only highlights the challenges posed by inadequate educational facilities but also underscores the heightened vulnerability of girls with albinism in such marginalised and exposed environments.

Compounding this issue is the prevalent lack of assistive devices such as binoculars, handheld magnifiers, and computers in most schools to help mitigate the situation. The absence of these devices creates an additional hurdle for the inclusive education of persons with albinism, including girls with albinism. In most cases, this leads to a high school dropout rate among persons with albinism, or they are unable to progress to higher levels of education due to poor academic performance caused by the lack of assistive technology in many mainstream schools in Africa.²³ The absence or insufficiency of assistive devices further marginalises the learning experience for persons with albinism including girls, inhibiting their ability to fully engage in classroom activities. Girls with albinism face heightened challenges as they contend with both visual impairments and gender.

2. Concrete measures taken to respond to the barriers faced by girls indicated above

²⁰ Human Rights Council (n1 above) para 45

²¹ Par 48

²²<https://www.ghanaiantimes.com.gh/akosombo-dam-spillage-schools-conduct-studies-under-trees-as-classrooms-into-holding-places/>. See also, <https://dailyguidenetwork.com/nwodua-r-c-school-block-turns-death-trap-pupils-sit-under-trees-to-study/#:~:text=Pupils%20of%20Nwodua%20R%2FC,death%20trap%20endangering%20their%20lives.>

²³ Human Rights Council (n1 above) para 39.

Wearing of Protective Clothing at School

In some schools in Africa, such as Tanzania, South Africa, and Namibia, increasingly exceptions have been made to the school uniform to allow students with albinism to wear long-sleeved protective clothing to prevent sunburn. Special schools for the visually impaired, attended by many persons with albinism in South Africa and Namibia, permit students with albinism to wear hats to school.²⁴ These measures provide some level of protection for persons with albinism against sun and UV exposure.

Provision of Sunscreens

Sunscreens are essential for protecting persons with albinism from sunburn and UV exposure, providing an extra layer of defence against excessive sun exposure and UV radiation. Governments across Africa are progressively adding sunscreens to the essential medicine list and distributing them to persons with albinism at no cost. For example, in Kenya, the government, through the National Council for Persons with Albinism, is distributing sunscreens to individuals with albinism, including girls, across the country through the National Albinism Sunscreen Support Program.²⁵ Similarly, countries such as South Africa, Namibia, Zambia, and Tanzania are also distributing sunscreens to persons with albinism, including female students with the condition.²⁶ It is important to stress however that these government initiatives are relatively few and where they exist and where they exist may not be easily accessible to all persons with albinism particularly those living in rural and remote areas.

To complement government efforts in sunscreen provision, Non-Governmental Organisations such as Beyond Suncare and Standing Voice in Malawi and Tanzania are engaged in the local production of sunscreens and freely distribute these products among persons with albinism in the countries where they operate.²⁷

Access to assistive devices

Assistive devices, including hand-held magnifiers, binoculars, video magnifiers, and laptops, play a pivotal role in enhancing the learning experiences of students with albinism, including girls, within the classroom setting. These tools facilitate better engagement and comprehension, addressing the

²⁴ PM Lund and JS Taylor, 'Lack of adequate sun protection for children with oculocutaneous albinism in South Africa' (2008) 8 BMC Public Health 225, 226 doi:10.1186/1471-2458-8-2252.

²⁵ National Council on Persons with Disabilities, 'Albinism (Support Program)' <<https://ncpwd.go.ke/albinism-support-program/>>

²⁶ AK Daklo 'Access to healthcare for persons with albinism in Ghana: A human rights approach (2022). P48-50.

²⁷ <https://beyondsuncare.org/en/how-we-work/>

unique needs of learners with albinism. Despite their importance, the availability of assistive devices is not uniform across educational settings in most African countries including Kenya, Lesotho, Mozambique, Rwanda, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.²⁸

In special schools, particularly those designed for the visually impaired, where a significant number of persons with albinism receive their education, assistive devices are provided to enhance the learning environment. For example, in Malawi, Standing Voice, a non-governmental organisation is partnering with the government to provide assistive devices such as reading lenses to persons with albinism including girls with albinism.²⁹ Similarly, in Ghana and Namibia, Engage Now Africa and SINASRA assist persons with albinism, especially students to acquire prescription lenses and other assistive devices including telescopic lenses respectively. Unfortunately, this is oftentimes not the case in mainstream schools, where these crucial assistive devices are often unavailable perpetuating inequality in access to resources and support. This disparity poses a significant challenge for students with albinism attending mainstream schools impeding the educational opportunities and achievements of learners with albinism.

National Action Plans on Albinism

In 2021, the African Union took a significant step in addressing the pervasive issue of attacks and human rights violations against persons with albinism by adopting a comprehensive plan of action, The AU Plan of Action on Ending Attacks and Discrimination against Persons with Albinism (2021 to 2031).³⁰ This strategic initiative serves as a catalyst for change, aiming to eradicate such violations and promote the rights and well-being of individuals with albinism across the continent. To translate this continental commitment into actionable change, African countries are actively engaged in the development of national action plans aligned with the AU Plan of Action on Albinism.

These National Action Plans represent a crucial mechanism for addressing various human rights violations experienced by persons with albinism, with a particular emphasis on enhancing inclusive education for students with albinism. The plans outline concrete and comprehensive steps to improve the human rights situation of individuals with albinism, placing a strong focus on ensuring their

²⁸ Multi-Country Overview of Barriers and Opportunities for Children and Adolescents with Disabilities in The Eastern and Southern Africa Region.

²⁹ Human Rights Council (n1 above) para 65.

³⁰ <https://africaalbinismnetwork.org/homepage/about/strategy/>

equitable access to education. Several countries, including Angola,³¹ Uganda³², Malawi³³, and Mozambique, have not only adopted but also commenced the implementation of these plans.³⁴

Other nations, such as Tanzania, Kenya, and South Africa, have taken strides in drafting their respective action plans. These plans are awaiting government adoption and subsequent implementation. Simultaneously, countries like Ghana, Namibia, Zimbabwe, and Madagascar are actively in the process of developing their national action plans on albinism. These collective efforts underscore a commitment to fostering an environment that safeguards the rights of persons with albinism, promoting inclusivity, and ensuring access to education as a fundamental human right.

3. The most important existing gaps and challenges in education to empower all girls to contribute to the climate change agenda.

Public Education efforts

In Africa, concerted efforts are underway to raise awareness about albinism, particularly within the education sector. Organisations such as Standing Voice conduct school outreach programs in countries like Malawi and Tanzania, engaging both students and teachers in interactive sessions on strategies for inclusive education. In 2022, Standing Voice in collaboration with the Government of Malawi partnered with 15 schools across four regions of the country to provide specialist training for 167 teachers.³⁵ Similarly, in Ghana, Engage Now Africa conducts community workshops that include dedicated sessions on albinism awareness, involving educators, parents, and community members.³⁶

Educational materials, such as pamphlets and posters, are distributed to schools to enhance understanding of albinism. The Albinism Society of Kenya focuses on school visits and talks to educate both students and teachers, supplementing these efforts with support programs specifically designed for educators.³⁷ These public education programmes are integral to equipping educators,

³¹ <https://africaalbinismnetwork.org/blog/angola-adopts-national-action-plan-on-albinism-after-six-years-of-relentless-advocacy/>

³² <https://uganda.ohchr.org/news/uganda-action-plan-gives-hope-people-albinism#:~:text=The%20action%20plan%20will%20run,put%20their%20lives%20at%20risk.>

³³ <https://alanmsosa.files.wordpress.com/2018/09/malawi-national-action-plan-on-albinism.pdf>

³⁴ <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/meeting-multisectoral-group-albinism>

³⁵ Human Rights Council, (n1 above) para 61

³⁶ <https://engagenowafrika.org/tag/albinism/#:~:text=Creating%20Albinism%20Awareness%2C%20One%20Community%20at%20a%20Time&text=That%20is%20why%20Engage%20Now,about%20this%20inherited%20genetic%20condition.>

³⁷ <https://www.ndi.org/our-stories/dismantling-beliefs-and-attitudes-advance-inclusion-persons-albinism-idpd-partner>

learners and parents with the knowledge and resources needed to support students with albinism effectively and conscientizing them about sun protective behaviour.

Notably whilst these programs do highlight the effect of sun exposure on persons with albinism and the need for sun protective behaviours, they often do not link albinism with broader climate change issues despite the impact climate change has on persons with albinism nor do they specifically target girls with albinism. It is a few organisations like Black Albinism in Kenya who have taken an innovative approach to link albinism with climate change issues in their workshops, addressing unique vulnerabilities experienced by persons with albinism.³⁸ At the regional level, the Africa Albinism Network has started leading discussion on the intersection between education and albinism.

Inclusion of climate change in education curricula

Only a half of the worlds' national curricula contain lessons on climate crisis.³⁹ Not surprisingly albinism and how it interacts with climate change is oftentimes missing in national curriculums. Developing an inclusive curriculum that integrates content related to climate change and environmental sustainability is essential for fostering understanding of the climate change agenda.⁴⁰ It is important that such a curriculum incorporates perspectives and experiences of vulnerable groups like girls with albinism. The ecological dimensions of albinism, particularly its interaction with climate change, should be integral components of the curriculum.

In addition to curricular enhancements, providing assistive devices in mainstream schools is critical to enabling girls with albinism to actively participate in climate change discourses and contribute to fostering an inclusive environment that values and includes diverse perspectives. The absence of assistive devices in impedes the ability of girls with albinism to fully engage with educational content that could enhance their understanding of climate change issues. The lack of such tools creates a disparity in the learning experiences of girls with albinism, limiting their capacity to contribute meaningfully to discussions and initiatives related to climate change.

³⁸ Human Rights Council, Climate change and persons with albinism, Report of the Independent Expert on the enjoyment of human rights by persons with albinism, Muluka-Anne Miti-Drummond. A/78/167 2023) para 68

³⁹ <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/only-half-national-curricula-world-have-reference-climate-change-unesco-warns>

⁴⁰ <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/only-half-national-curricula-world-have-reference-climate-change-unesco-warns>

Teaching on climate change and albinism

Teaching that incorporates the impact of climate change on persons with albinism is an emerging and crucial area that seeks to bridge gaps in understanding and address the unique challenges faced by this community. Presently, teaching on albinism in the education sector is overall limited, primarily confined to biology. The prevailing focus on albinism within the framework of biology results in a narrow perspective, failing to encompass its broader implications, including its connection to climate change and the social challenges confronted by persons with the condition. The inadequate representation of albinism in the educational sphere reinforces a significant gap in the understanding of its multifaceted nature, particularly in relation to its interaction with the environment. This limitation hinders the development of a comprehensive understanding among students including girls with albinism of the climate change agenda.

4. Concrete measures taken to empower all girls through education to contribute to addressing climate change

Empowering children for climate action

A noteworthy example of such efforts is evident in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where UNICEF is championing an initiative that engages young children with albinism to serve as climate change ambassadors.⁴¹ This initiative not only enhances their understanding of environmental issues but also empowers them to actively contribute to discussions and actions aimed at mitigating and adapting to the impacts of climate change. Empowering girls with albinism to be active contributors to climate change discussions is a significant step toward building a more equitable and sustainable future.

Awareness Creation/Community Engagement

In Kenya, the organisation "Black Albinism" plays a vital role in engaging communities in discussions about climate change and its impacts on individuals with albinism.⁴² The initiative aims to enhance understanding and consciousness regarding the effects of climate change on persons with albinism among healthcare professionals and community advocates for disability and climate change. It also

⁴¹ <https://www.unicef.org/drcongo/en/node/3186>

⁴² <https://www.blackalbinism.org/ba-advocacy>

strives to enhance the caregiving abilities of parents and guardians responsible for children with albinism. Additionally, the project collaborates with persons with albinism and their communities to boost tree planting efforts, thereby increasing green coverage in their respective areas.⁴³

Simultaneously, the Africa Albinism Network operates on a regional and global level, raising awareness about albinism and its intricate relationship with climate change. The Network is actively involved in a project aimed at creating a digital storybook that delves into the nexus between climate change and albinism. These interventions serve as invaluable tools in generating much-needed awareness while concurrently empowering girls with albinism to contribute to the climate change discussions.

⁴³ <https://www.blackalbinism.org/ba-advocacy>