

# Youth to Enhance Adaptation Action

## Visions, Ideas and Recommendations by Youth

Policy Brief | August 2020

### Key messages:

- Support **youth-centered/youth-led adaptation activities** through target implementation at local, regional and national levels, integrating them with international commitments.
- Increase **meaningful youth participation** in decision-making, policymaking and target implementation in plans for adaptation action at all scales and levels of governance.
- Adopt a **holistic, intersectional and systemic approach** to understanding the **vulnerability of youth** regarding the impacts of climate change and the need for adaptation.
- Foster adaptation action that is **intergenerational, inclusive and participatory**, with **policies and programmes** that are co-produced by all the relevant stakeholders, including youth.
- Prioritize the inclusion in adaptation plans of all **the 6 Action for Climate Empowerment (ACE) elements**, namely education, training, public awareness, public participation, public access to information, and international cooperation.
- Enable youth participation in a **just, green and resilient recovery post-COVID-19** to reduce all forms of inequality, and to support Parties/member countries to implement green budgetary packages that **consider not only climate mitigation but also adaptation**.

### Setting the Scene: Youth to Enhance Adaptation Action

Adaptation involves planning for ongoing and future climate impacts, building the capacity and resilience of communities to deal with expected and uncertain changes to their local climates and environments. Given the temporal implications of adaptation, young people have a big stake in it: youth are the next generation in charge of changing the world to make it a better place.

However, sensing the urgency of the situation and the perils of delayed action, young people have already taken the lead in pushing for more ambitious climate measures, evidenced by the mass demonstrations led by young activists across the world in the last couple of years.

Even beyond the streets, many young leaders around the world have taken action at a variety of levels and scales to help their communities and nations to be resilient against the devastating impacts of climate change, from on-the-ground adaptation projects to engagement in international climate negotiations.

Yet, as showcased in the *Adapt for our Future*<sup>1</sup> paper, young people face a variety of barriers to fully realise their potential as leaders in climate adaptation. Issues include a lack of recognition for their efforts, a lack of access to certain platforms, tokenism and limited meaningful engagement, poor institutional transparency, knowledge and capacity gaps, and a lack of financial resources (Amponsem et al., 2019)<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup>Amponsem, J., Doshi, D., Toledo, A.I.S., Schudel, L. and Delali-Kemeh, S. (2019). *Adapt for our Future: Youth and Climate Change Adaptation*. Rotterdam and Washington, DC:

Global Commission on Adaptation. Available at: <https://cdn.gca.org/assets/2019-12/AdaptForOurFuture.pdf>

On the back of these challenges, this policy brief lays out the importance and value of youth being fully, actively and meaningfully engaged in climate adaptation, including how their contributions can help to improve and enhance adaptation action.

The brief includes thematic considerations, examples and recommendations by youth for adaptation policy and programme design at all levels and scales, covering: youth vulnerability to climate change, youth involvement in decision-making and policy processes, COVID-19 and the post-pandemic recovery, (indigenous, local and/or traditional) knowledge and nature-based solutions, public participation and active citizenship, and youth education and innovation.

## 1. Understanding the Disproportionate Impacts of Climate Change on Youth

Young people between 10 and 24 years account for over 1.5 billion people<sup>2</sup> in the world, with 70% of them living in developing countries. Considering the specific vulnerability of developing regions to the impacts of climate change, such as being reliant on climate-vulnerable livelihoods like agriculture, this makes young people one of the most vulnerable groups

to climate change. Generally speaking, **climate change is a youth issue.**

The well-established reality that the negative impacts of climate change disproportionately affect specific social groups, such as women, children, indigenous communities, ethnic minorities, the elderly, and the disabled, calls for **adaptation action in line with basic principles of human rights and equity.** Additionally, the situation of vulnerable and marginalised groups like youth should not be overlooked during decision-making processes, and youth issues and concerns should be incorporated in plans for adaptation action.

**RECOMMENDATION 1: *Adopt a holistic and systemic approach to understanding and framing the vulnerability of youth, and the public at large, to the impacts of climate change, and the need for adaptation.***

A suggested model of analysis to understand and frame vulnerability would be the Pressure and Release Model (PAR)<sup>3</sup>, also known as the 'Crunch Model'. Usually used for assessing vulnerability in the context of disaster risk reduction, the PAR model takes into account the root causes of vulnerability, including power relations, social

### Ideas Box 1

#### Supporting Young Girls for Enhanced Resilience to Climate Impacts

It is essential that extra effort is put to empower women and girls facing the impacts of climate change. UN figures indicate that 80% of people displaced by climate change are women, and in times of extreme weather conditions such as drought, young girls are vulnerable to being pulled from school to help their families make ends meet, either temporarily or permanently. At the same time, a 2017 Brookings Institute study suggests that "for every additional year of schooling a girl receives on average, her country's resilience to climate disasters can be expected to improve by 3.2 points (as measured by the ND-GAIN Index, which calculates a country's vulnerability to climate change in relation to its resilience)".

Source: Kwauk, C., and Braga, A. (2017). *3 ways to link girls' education actors to climate action.* Available at: <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/education-plus-development/2017/09/27/3-ways-to-link-girls-education-actors-to-climate-action/>

<sup>2</sup> Caparrós, M., Laski, L. and Bernhardt, V. (2009). *At the frontier: young people and climate change.* UNFPA.

<sup>3</sup> Brink, E. (2018). *Adapting Cities: Ecosystem-based approaches and citizen engagement in municipal climate adaptation in Scania, Sweden.* Lund University.

structures and political-economic systems, which create and/or contribute to pressures and conditions that make youth and other demographics especially vulnerable to extreme weather conditions, natural disasters, and changes to natural ecosystems<sup>3</sup>.

In essence, a **systemic and holistic approach** entails understanding that the vulnerability of youth to the impacts of climate change is not just about environmental and/or climatic hazards, but is also deeply affected by wider social, political, economic, institutional and cultural factors which are context-dependent and shaped by policy and programmes beyond climate ministries, departments and institutions.

## 2. Unlocking the Potential of Youth as Agents for Adaptation Policy

### Ideas Box 2

#### Youth Successes in Mobilising for Regional Climate Policy: The Case of Nariño

Youth and children were key actors in the formulation and approval of the Climate Change Territorial Plan of Nariño (Colombia) “Nariño acts for Climate 2019-2035”, adopted through the Ordinance 042 of 2019. With non-violent mobilizations, such as gatherings and strikes in 2018 and 2019, and important contributions from children and youth engaged in climate action, the Plan was adopted as the second subnational climate change public policy in Colombia. The climate change march in 2019 gathered more than 8.000 people in Pasto, the capital city of Nariño.

With the severity of the global climate crisis increasing due to further inaction, young people have felt motivated to take ambitious unprecedented action that transcends national boundaries and calls into question **the antiquated systems that perpetuate the climate crisis**. It is high time for governments to recognize that youth engagement and participation in climate decision-making and policy design should not be treated in a tokenistic manner, reduced to a mere goodwill gesture as it often is.

It has now become necessary to **create a governance landscape where young leaders can claim their seats in decision-making spaces** along with policymakers. Youth representatives,

especially from the developing world, need to move beyond street activism to help implement adaptation plans at different levels and scales.

The active participation in policymaking of young people is not only important to address youth-specific issues and gaps, but also beneficial to promote the implementation of adaptation, and larger climate action, in general.

**RECOMMENDATION 2: Consider and incorporate the voices and ideas of youth when designing climate policies and agreements at all scales and levels, from international climate negotiations to local territorial plans.**

A starting point to better involve youth in policymaking could be looking at the [Global Youth Climate Action Declaration \(GYCAD\)](#),

which was drafted by hundreds of young climate activists following the UN Youth Climate Summit in 2019.

The GYCAD is a set of 77 key climate policy recommendations collectively demanded by global youth for implementation in local contexts across the world. It serves as a salient reference point and policy toolkit that anyone can employ to directly demand the targeted climate actions from policymakers at all levels of governance. It can be signed and read at [gycad.org](http://gycad.org).

### 3. The Place of Youth and Adaptation in Post-COVID-19 Recovery Plans

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic will likely have **disproportionate impacts on youth, particularly those from low/middle-income countries.**

However, it also presents opportunities for a just, green and resilient recovery for which youth will be integral. The question is, how can young people's passion be best harnessed and amplified through participatory decision-making and policy-making processes, as well as through the provision of education, training and job opportunities?

Led by YOUNGO's Adaptation Working Group, one of the 2020 Technical Expert Meetings on Adaptation included an intergenerational dialogue for a just, green and resilient recovery post-COVID-19. Young people know that these conversations must be had now, while the pandemic is ongoing and recovery plans are being drafted, to ensure youth are not left out from decision-making and policy processes.

**RECOMMENDATION 3: *Implement youth-centred measures to enable youth to be resilient and adapt to the impacts of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and its planned recovery, particularly in climate-vulnerable regions and communities.***

Transparency on the people affected by the virus is not enough to adapt under the current conditions, especially for youth. Since it is

particularly affecting the economy, actions like **giving a stimulus check for newly-graduate and unemployed youth, or ensuring subsidised access to the internet for all,** can be great adaptive measures for youth to be resilient in the face of business closures and lower job opportunities.

Attention must be paid as well to regional differences within countries: young students in rural areas, vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, rural poverty and ongoing trends of urban migration, often find themselves struggling more than the ones in capital cities to keep up with the current situation, particularly when comes to access to the internet, education and employment opportunities.

More generally, COVID-19 has provided us with many examples across the world of humans using their existing resources and capacity to swiftly adapt to a life-threatening challenge. This experience represents the core of what climate adaptation action is about, yet, at present, the **discussions linking COVID-19 with climate change,** including the need for a green recovery, tend to **focus on climate mitigation and not on adaptation.**

There is a need to capitalise on everything learnt from this difficult moment, both failures and successes, unaddressed gaps and found solutions, to highlight and embed the importance of being resilient and adaptive in the face of uncertain and extreme circumstances within climate plans in

#### Ideas Box 3

#### Addressing the Compounded Impacts of COVID-19 and Climate Change in SIDS

Climate change has threatened the socio-economic and livelihood of indigenous communities while COVID-19 multiplies living costs in uncertain times. It is understood that the pandemic was unexpected, remains uncertain, and it will be likely impossible to come back to a previous healthy life just like before. However, indigenous youth living in Small Island Developing States (SIDS) seek their active involvement and participation in adaptation plans and green recovery plans to reduce all forms of inequality. International climate actors and policymakers could work with YOUNGO, as the official children and youth constituency to UNFCCC, to actively support indigenous youth from SIDS by conducting Focus Group Discussions on relevant topics, building cooperation and communication among other observer constituencies and inter-UN agencies.

the context of a just, green and resilient post-COVID-19 recovery. **Adaptation cannot wait**, various marginalized and vulnerable populations and regions across the world are already experiencing the impacts of climate change, on top of being affected by the ongoing pandemic and by other sustainable development challenges.

Indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic has shown that many developed and developing countries lack the proper socio-economic safety nets expected by governments. The public health crisis has laid bare **systemic vulnerabilities and failings that have disproportionately impacted communities** mired by systemic racism, poverty, environmental challenges, and inequality.

In response, many have sought to create a social economy: a mixed-capitalist system distinct from the private and public sector that includes the creation of more localized cooperatives, non-profits, social enterprises and NGOs, to solve and address socio-economic and environmental vulnerabilities.

**RECOMMENDATION 4: *Support youth with the creation and development of their own organisations and enterprises with the potential to aid sustainable development, climate adaptation and post-COVID-19 recovery efforts.***

Encouraging the formation and support of youth-directed enterprises can create avenues for youth engagement in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), climate change adaptation, and resilience-building within their local communities, cities, and societies. Furthermore, support for these enterprises through economic stimulus or platform creation, could assist COVID-19 recovery and address systemic vulnerabilities heightened by climate change impacts and other externalities. Introducing governmental policies that support the formation of a social economy can provide economic opportunities for youth, as well as create localized and intergenerational

climate resilience to natural disasters and climate-induced shocks.

#### 4. Integrating The “Local” and the “Traditional” in Adaptation through Nature-based Solutions

It is crucial to consider indigenous, local and/or traditional knowledge (ILTK) when adapting to climate change, including ILTK-derived nature-based solutions. The COVID-19 crisis has highlighted how climate and biodiversity systems are intricately linked with human health. **To maintain ecosystem health is to maintain human health**, and one way to do this is through nature-based solutions and ecosystem management as often employed by indigenous and local communities, who have been harnessing their ILTK for years to adapt to climate change.

For young climate and environmental organisers across the world, particularly those from indigenous communities and ethnic minority groups, **the preservation, transformation and use of ILTK is a deeply political, cultural and social matter** linked to their sense of identity and place in a globalised world which is constantly changing and which is shaped by the marginalisation of certain forms of knowledges and ways of being.

The importance of ILTK is also highlighted in article 7 of the Paris Agreement: “*Article 7.5. Parties acknowledge that adaptation action should [...] be based on and guided by the best available science and, as appropriate, traditional knowledge, knowledge of indigenous peoples and local knowledge systems, with a view to integrating adaptation into relevant socioeconomic and environmental policies and actions, where appropriate.*” However, a key issue to consider is the need to open discussions regarding ILTK to

#### Ideas Box 4

### Local Institutions and Traditions as Adaptive Environmental Management

One of the most important opportunities for climate adaptation resides in local institutions and traditions. In Iran, special customs and traditional ceremonies exist which aim at conserving the environment and enabling family participation in farming or fishing. There are also some traditions which are adaptive, influenced by climate and environmental change, such as choosing the appropriate time for fishing in wetlands areas. Local people do not catch fish in the first days of some particular months due water scarcity, a situation worsened by climate change. Youth have the chance to invest in these local practices and define them. Moreover, investing in local institutions and traditional customs helps to encourage all members of the community to participate and contribute to adaptation action.

other vulnerable and marginalised populations beyond indigenous communities, as appropriate by national, regional and local context. For instance, in Latin America, the input and knowledge from Afro-Latin populations and farmers, as ethnic community groups, is also relevant for climate adaptation.

**RECOMMENDATION 5:** *Foster dialogue between policymakers, climate researchers and indigenous/local groups (understanding these categories might overlap) to share and exchange knowledge in a participatory and non-extractive way.*

**RECOMMENDATION 6:** *As regionally appropriate, include ILTK for climate adaptation and mitigation, as well as for the conservation and sustainable management of ecosystems, in natural and environmental science curricula from primary to tertiary education.*

An example of the importance of ILTK-derived nature-based solutions includes using natural indicators to alert communities to extreme weather events, as illustrated by Kasei, Kalanda-Joshua and Benefor's (2019)<sup>4</sup> study in Ghana on indigenous adaptive knowledge derived from links between rainfall patterns and ant behaviour, appearances by certain birds, the flowering of

<sup>4</sup> Kasei, R.A., Kalanda-Joshua, M.D. and Benefor, D.T., (2019) Rapid urbanisation and implications for indigenous knowledge in early warning on flood risk in African cities. *Journal of the British Academy*, 7(52), pp.183-214.

baobab trees, and observations of heat intensity, and which is passed down between generations.

### 5. Improving Public Participation and Supporting the Co-Production through Active Citizenship

When discussing non-state actors in climate adaptation like "the public" or "youth", it must be understood that these **are not homogenous groups**. This entails acknowledging the existence of a variety of interests, concerns and positionalities among the public (and youth) which might intersect, and which shape and influence their level of engagement and participation in adaptation action.

In particular, when aiming to promote youth participation to enhance adaptation action, an **intersectional and inclusive approach** should be taken that simultaneously considers age with other social factors as appropriate by context, such as gender, religion, class, caste, disability, sexuality, migration/citizenship status, or ethnicity.

Attention must be paid to how different social factors interact with each other to shape the varied experiences, concerns and interests of members of the public and youth. Furthermore, when looking at the specific issue of social barriers, exclusion and/or marginalisation faced

Available at: <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/documents/930/JBA-752-o8-Kasei-Kalanda-Joshua-Tutu-Benefor.pdf>

by youth, remedial policies and plans ought to simultaneously **consider intergenerational injustice and ageism with other forms of discrimination and/or social vulnerability** which affect the participation of people in adaptation action, such as gender inequality, poverty, ableism, or racial inequality.

**RECOMMENDATION 7: *When it comes to enhancing and enabling public participation, including that of young citizens and residents, there is a need to ensure that participation is truly accessible for all.***

## 6. Education, Training and Capacity Building for Youth Expertise and Innovation

Not recognizing the need for youth participation itself is a huge barrier in adaptation action. For this, it is necessary to ensure meaningful youth engagement by enabling young people to emerge as community leaders and take adequate actions to combat the negative impacts of climate change. Training is a well-recognized way to help them improve their skillset and strengthen the adaptation process.

### Ideas Box 5

#### Promoting Active Citizenship through Public Participation in Research and Data Collection

To implement adaptation plans at a local level, scientific data and experts are not enough. Practices like citizen participation in research are important for local communities to feel ownership (and thus a level of protection and commitment) over adaptation plans. For example, if local authorities want to implement adaptation measures around habitat change of species of vector-borne mosquito, citizens could help with reporting of sightings of mosquitoes through citizen participation in research. Youth and children could also contribute to this, as part of their own educational upbringing. Both citizen participation and science are essential for successful adaptation plans, and that will also involve enhanced data accessibility and interdisciplinary interpretation of findings.

Often, “public” consultations are conducted at times inconvenient to groups like carers or students, or in places that may not be readily accessible to poorer or more vulnerable members of the community. Moreover, there are several layers (e.g. informing, consulting, involving, collaborating, empowering...) to public participation.

Participation is prone to be reduced to a tick-box exercise whereby one or two consultations with the public are conducted and the process is then deemed participatory. In actuality, for processes to be participatory, they need to involve those directly impacted by policies/decisions in **every element of the actual decision-making process.**

**Adding climate adaptation concepts and issues in curricula** at college and university level can open further avenues for young minds to devise innovative yet effective strategies to improve climate action. This will foster collaborative work and research, thus generating evidence-based data to be presented at the tables during the decision-making process to make the youth voices to be heard.

At a more practical level, capacity building is important to **enable youth to transform their education, knowledge and skills into implementable solutions and expertise.** For instance, young innovators have been playing a very important role in the development of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) around the world and there has been a rapid increase in the youth-led start-ups providing solutions to adapt the

impacts on agriculture, energy production, waste management etc.

The **ideas of young innovators should be upscaled in a sustainable way** to boost innovation and to solve a range of climate crises through the integration of technological solutions. [UNDP Accelerator Labs](#) are supporting the skills of young people and provide an example to follow.

**RECOMMENDATION 8: *International actors like The UN and UNFCCC should strive to create opportunities for youth while establishing its own digital capacities in this unprecedented time.***

The COVID-19 pandemic has transitioned the United Nations to online platforms, digital mediums, and e-diplomacy/conferences for the indefinite future. Consequently, COVID-19 has also pushed some academic institutions and schools onto similar online platforms and e-learning, globally and for the foreseeable future.

We should strive for **greater digital inclusivity, access, and training for the global youth** through UN and UNFCCC-administered youth-focused live-webinars, forums, training, and information sessions.

These initiatives could be facilitated by YOUNGO and other related UN Youth environment/climate change initiatives to connect peer-to-peer and devise talks on climate adaptation and awareness as well as the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. Such actions can also **include expert talks** on specialized climate topics **for youth NGOs, young leaders, and activists that may not have access to in-person COPs** or UN Climate Summits. These could align with the

TEP-A's goals by increasing the understanding and implementation of adaptation actions through bringing such access and awareness to youth.

## Contributors Acknowledgement

This policy brief was collaboratively produced through the inputs of volunteer members of YOUNGO, the official children and youth constituency to UNFCCC, including:

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The TEP-A was established under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) process in 2015 and seeks to identify concrete opportunities for strengthening resilience, reducing vulnerabilities, and increasing the understanding and implementation of adaptation actions. The process is organized by the SBSTA and SBI and conducted by the Adaptation Committee. For more information see [tep-a.org](http://tep-a.org)