

# Youth Engagement in Climate Change Adaptation

## Empowering Youth to Enhance Climate Action

Policy Brief | August 2020

### Key messages:

- On a global level, **the majority of youth live in developing countries**. They are highly **vulnerable to the impacts of climate change** while at the same time being **future decision-makers and key stakeholders** when it comes to adaptation.
- Youth engagement in climate change adaptation happens by involving youth in **local, national, and international processes and projects**, and by building capacities, awareness, and sustainable lifestyles on an **individual level**.
- There are several **focus areas for youth engagement**: Awareness and training, capacity-building and empowerment, decision-making and advocacy, and adaptation action.
- Youth face **a number of obstacles** to engage in climate change adaptation such as **lack of access, knowledge, capacities, resources, and resilience**, especially in developing countries.
- **Youth engagement can be facilitated and strengthened in multiple ways**, including through education and skill-building, institutions, policies, finance, projects, advocacy, and resilience-building.
- **Youth are key stakeholders and actors** in this process, but they need the support and cooperation of other stakeholders on different levels, including community-based organizations, CBOs and NGOs, local and national government, and the United Nations.

Globally, 1.2 billion people or roughly 16% of the world's population are between 15 and 25 years.<sup>1</sup> Around 87% of youth live in developing countries<sup>2</sup> which tend to rely on agriculture as a major source of employment and livelihoods, disadvantaging rural young people in terms of exposure, sensitivity, and lack of adaptive and coping capacities.<sup>3</sup> Climate change is one of the most important issues affecting children and youth, especially in developing countries with low incomes, large rural populations, reliance on natural resources, and less robust risk management and safety nets.

When it comes to decisions on climate action, adaptation, environmental protection, and sustainable development, youth are key stakeholders and have to live with the consequences of today's actions or inactions. Intergenerational equity, solidarity, and the needs of future generations, as outlined in the Rio Declaration and the Rio+20 outcome document, should be a pillar for the processes on sustainable development as well as climate change adaptation.<sup>4</sup>

As future decision-makers, it is vital for youth to gain access and awareness to the processes around climate change adaptation and to build

<sup>1</sup> Hwang S., Kim J. 2017. *UN and SDGs. A Handbook for Youth*. Incheon: UNESCAP.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations. 2020. *World Youth Report: Youth Social Entrepreneurship and the 2030 Agenda*. New York: United Nations.

<sup>3</sup> Arslan A., Brooks K. 2019. *Climate change is a youth issue*.

Available at

<https://www.ifad.org/en/web/latest/blog/asset/41328025>

<sup>4</sup> UN General Assembly. 2013. *Intergenerational solidarity, and the needs of future generations*. Report of the Secretary-General.

## Box #1

### Sri Lanka's Youth Parliament: A National Mechanism for Youth Engagement

Sri Lanka is a tropical island developing country with around 23% of its total population aged between 15 and 29 years. To better integrate youth into decision-making and strengthen youth participation, Sri Lanka has developed a strong capacity-building infrastructure under the Ministry of Youth Affairs and the National Youth Services Council that includes youth clubs, over 12,000 youth centres across the island, and a range of capacity-building programmes. In addition, Sri Lanka has instituted a National Youth Parliament consisting of members from all ethnic communities between the age of 15 to 26 years. As a youth-led and youth-run initiative, it commenced its first session in May 2010 and added a senate or upper house in 2013. The Youth Parliament allows young people to build political capacities and participate in decision-making through a ground-up democratic process that provides comprehensive political training for its participants.

Source(s): Damayanthi M. K. N., Samarasinghe G. G. de L. W., Bandara M. A. C. S. et al. 2013. *Youth in Development: Sri Lanka*. Colombo: Hector Kobbekaduwa Agrarian Research and Training Institute.  
National Youth Services Council. 2020. *Youth Parliament*. Available at [https://www.nysc.lk/aboutParliament\\_e.php](https://www.nysc.lk/aboutParliament_e.php)

their capacities and establish networks. As young people in the present, they are among the most vulnerable and exposed groups in society and depend on successful adaptation to shield them from climate-related losses and damages, including economic and non-economic impacts such as those on nutrition, education, physical and mental health, livelihoods, social cohesion, and natural ecosystems.<sup>5</sup>

### Focus Areas for Youth Engagement in Climate Change Adaptation

Youth should be key stakeholders in the decision-making processes that impact their future. They offer invaluable contributions through their unique skills, energy, vision, and ideas to help shape climate change adaptation measures and policies.

It is vital for youth to be able to engage in adaptation processes on a local, national, international, intergovernmental, and individual level. Cross-cutting across these levels of

engagement are the following four focus areas for youth engagement in adaptation:

**Awareness and training:** To engage in adaptation, youth need to be aware of the science and impacts of climate change, the different institutions and mechanisms addressing these impacts, and the ways they can participate in them. Research suggests that in developing countries, youth tend to be aware of anthropogenic climate change and its effects on their community but have much lesser knowledge when it comes to national and international institutions and processes such as the UNFCCC, the IPCC, or the Kyoto Protocol.<sup>6</sup> However, youth in developing countries seem to place a higher importance on climate action and are very willing to engage in training to raise their awareness and allow them to engage.<sup>7</sup>

**Capacity-building and empowerment:** Awareness is the first step, but it needs to be followed by building capacities among youth for adaptation action, skill development, and

<sup>5</sup> UNFPA. 2009. *At the Frontier: Young People and Climate Change*. Youth Supplement to the State of the World Population.

<sup>6</sup> Pandve H. T., Deshmukh P. R., Pandve R. T., Patil N. R. 2009. Role of youth in combating climate change. *Indian Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*

13(2):105. Available at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2847326/>

<sup>7</sup> Lee, K., Gjersoe, N., O'Neill, S., Barnett, J. 2020. Youth perceptions of climate change: A narrative synthesis. *WIREs Climate Change* Vol. 11, Issue 3. Available at <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/wcc.641>

## Box #2

### Youth Engagement and the NAP Process in Niger

Niger is a landlocked country mostly covered by desert and highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. It is one of the least developed countries in the world and currently in the process of formulating a National Adaptation Plan to address the impacts of climate change. Young Volunteers for the Environment (YVE) or Jeunes Volontaires pour L'Environnement (JVE) is a youth-led organization which works through mobilization via topic networks, a National Youth Council, community-based organizations for implementation and awareness, advocacy campaigns and petitions, training workshops, seminars, and consultations, networking and partnerships, alliances with parliamentarians and research institutions, use of social media, and coordination with other (volunteer) organizations. There are also a number of gaps that have been identified regarding access to and localization of climate information, scaling of good practices, youth capacities, stability of funding, and lack of recognition of the role of young people in the NAP readiness proposal. YVE/JVE is collaborating with SLYCAN Trust and Southern Voices on Adaptation to engage in the NAP process and identify entry points for civil society and youth.

*Source(s):* Ayoub, S. 2020. *Youth Engagement and Climate Change Adaptation in Niger*. Presentation during Webinar on Youth Engagement and Climate Change Adaptation organized by SLYCAN Trust on May 6<sup>th</sup>, 2020

participation in local, national, and intergovernmental climate change processes. The capacities and skills needed encompass a wide range, from navigating institutional structures to writing funding proposals and monitoring and evaluation processes. It is also crucial to engage youth in the formulation of Nationally Determined Contributions and National Adaptation Plans and integrate youth engagement into their commitments and actions, as well as into the national communications processes and the related M&E actions for climate change adaptation.

**Decision-making and advocacy:** There are different avenues of youth engagement to influence policy-making, allow youth to raise their voices, and enable them to participate in political and social processes. Collective action and organizing in youth groups and organizations can help to amplify the message, for example by participating in national processes and intergovernmental climate change negotiations, being vocal on media, highlighting youth experiences and youth champions, and problematizing climate inaction, inertia, and issues of intergenerational justice and equity. However, it is important to acknowledge the

need for support, finance, and training to ensure that youth participation in decision-making and advocacy is effective and not a token presence.

**Adaptation action:** Young people could become agents of change and directly develop and implement youth-led projects on the ground. They can offer examples of sustainable lifestyles, mindfulness, sustainable consumption, and participate in local, national, and international initiatives and campaigns.

### Obstacles for Global Youth Engagement

Youth are faced with a number of obstacles when it comes to engagement in climate change adaptation. They often face challenges due to lack of awareness of and access to institutions and processes, lack of knowledge and capacities, limited resources at their disposal, and adverse impacts of climate change and limited adaptive and coping capacities.

Some of the key gaps and needs for youth engagement in adaptation include limited youth participation in government decision-making and other national processes, lack of awareness and capacities among youth, high vulnerability to climate change impacts in particular for rural

youth and youth in least developed countries, unreliability of funding, lack of youth inclusion in policies and plans (in particular NDCs and NAP process), unavailability of climate information, gaps in dissemination of knowledge, lack of government transparency, and unavailability of knowledge products in local language and with local context.

## Empowering Youth and Strengthening Youth Engagement

To facilitate youth engagement especially in the global south, young people need avenues to connect with the four focus areas identified above and receive opportunities to learn, participate, and make a difference. The following measures can be implemented across different sectors to facilitate and strengthen youth engagement and in particular address the needs and realities of underprivileged youth in vulnerable developing countries and rural communities.

**Education and Skill-Building:** Embedding climate change adaptation into education curricula is crucial to close gaps in awareness and knowledge and give young people a head start when it comes to engaging in climate change adaptation. On the other hand, mainstreaming education about climate change into national policies, strategies, and development plans allows a stronger connection between these processes and the needs of young people, especially when it comes to rural and underprivileged areas. Besides formal education, awareness and capacities can also be increased through digital modules that are tailored to local contexts and available in local languages, removing access barriers to knowledge, and establishing mentorship programmes and opportunities.

**Institutions:** Allowing young people to engage with existing institutions on different levels lets them gain vital experiences and build capacities for engagement. This includes mechanisms such as youth organizations, youth forums, Sri Lanka's National Youth Parliament, or the Youth for SDGs Action Network. For example, YOUNGO is the official constituency of youth NGOs under the UNFCCC process presents the opportunity to be part of the negotiation process as well as other areas of work under the UNFCCC process. Youth are provided a space to make official statements, provide technical and policy input to negotiation groups, engage with decision-makers, and raise awareness through advocacy activities. The UN Major Group for Children and Youth is the official constituency of those under 30 and has taken efforts to further integrate young people into its processes, for example through the UN Youth Envoys since 2013, the United Nations Joint Framework Initiative on Children, Youth and Climate Change since 2008, and the UN Youth Delegate Programme established under the World Programme of Action for Youth in 1995.<sup>8</sup>

**Policies:** Making policies and programmes responsive to the needs of young people and recognizing youth-specific challenges in sectors such as education and health, but also regarding agriculture, human settlements, migration, and rural development supports youth engagement and overall development and wellbeing. Giving youth a voice in the policy-making process lets them bring in new perspectives and increase the responsiveness and participatory nature of the process. For National Adaptation Plans, the NAP Technical Guidelines, which provide guidance to countries regarding the NAP process, highlight the need for inclusion of youth as a key stakeholder in the NAP process and contain a paragraph on integrating youth into the NAP process by "collaborating, promoting, facilitating,

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<sup>8</sup> United Nations Joint Framework Initiative on Children, Youth and Climate Change. 2013. *Youth in action on climate*

*change: inspirations from around the world.* Bonn: UNFCCC Secretariat.

### Box #3

#### Governance, Youth Inclusion, and Adaptation in Ghana

Ghana is in the process of formulating a National Adaptation Plan and reviewing its Nationally Determined Contributions at the same time. In the National Adaptation Plan Framework published in 2018, the government records a limited engagement and awareness of youth on climate change so far. To address this gap, youth NGOs including the Strategic Youth Network for Development (SYND) organized an online meeting with the government and created an organized platform for youth working on environmental actions, the Youth in Natural Resources & Environmental Governance (Youth-NREG) platform. This mobilization of youth NGOs led to a pooling of relevant skills and experiences, a higher level of organization, and a proactive engagement with the government on the NAP process in Ghana..

Source(s): Ezekiel, C. 2020. *Youth Engagement in the National Adaptation Process: The Case of Ghana*. Presentation during Webinar on Youth Engagement and Climate Change Adaptation organized by SLYCAN Trust on May 6<sup>th</sup>, 2020

developing, and implementing formal and non-formal education and training programmes focused on climate change at all levels, targeting women and youth in particular.”<sup>9</sup>

**Finance:** One major way that allows youth to participate in climate change adaptation regardless of their background is to provide funding opportunities and small grants that specifically target them. For example, the Adaptation Fund has launched a USD 10 million innovation small grants programme at COP25 in 2019 that includes young innovators as a special group of focus.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, the Global Environment Facility Small Grants Programme “privileges the participation of children and young people” and funds projects that include environmental education and awareness raising.<sup>11</sup> Dedicated funding opportunities such as the UN-Habitat Urban Youth Fund allow young people to gain experience in developing proposals, implementing projects, and handling finances, while learning about opportunities and processes that will benefit their future action and activities.

**Projects:** Apart from negotiations and political processes, youth can directly engage in the development and implementation of adaptation actions on the community level or even in a wider context. Tree planting, ecosystem conservation and restoration, establishing home gardens, environmental stewardship, climate-smart agriculture initiatives, conducting workshops and consultations, and research are just a few of the possibilities that allow youth to make a difference, establish best practices for future upscaling, and learn to manage projects in a real-life setting.

**Advocacy:** National and international competitions as well as media coverage are ways to amplify the voices of young people and engage them in the global climate change conversation. Some examples would be Fridays4Future, or the global competitions organized by the Youth4Climate initiative.<sup>12</sup> The Green Climate Fund has launched its Green Champions Awards in 2019, including a “Climate Youth Champion” award for people 25 years or less who are making

<sup>9</sup> LDC Expert Group. 2012. *National Adaptation Plans. Technical guidelines for the national adaptation plan process*. Bonn: UNFCCC.

<sup>10</sup> Adaptation Fund. 2019. *Press Release December 5, 2019*. Available at [https://www.adaptation-fund.org/adaptation-](https://www.adaptation-fund.org/adaptation-fund-launches-new-grant-programme-to-foster-innovation-of-adaptation-practices-in-vulnerable-countries/)

[fund-launches-new-grant-programme-to-foster-innovation-of-adaptation-practices-in-vulnerable-countries/](https://www.adaptation-fund.org/adaptation-fund-launches-new-grant-programme-to-foster-innovation-of-adaptation-practices-in-vulnerable-countries/)

<sup>11</sup> Global Environment Facility. 2020. *SGP Youth Participation*. Available at <https://sgp.undp.org/our-approach-153/youth.html>

<sup>12</sup> Connect4Climate. 2020. *Youth4Climate*. Available at <https://www.connect4climate.org/initiatives/youth4climate>

#### Box #4

### The Youth Forum on Climate Change in Sri Lanka

To build the capacity and empower youth at national, regional, and international level, the Global Youth Forum on Climate Change organized by SLYCAN Trust is held annually as part of Sri Lanka NEXT Conference under the auspices of the Ministry of Mahaweli Development & Environment of Sri Lanka. The Forum which has been a component of Sri Lanka NEXT Conference since its first session in 2016, brings together a group of selected participants who are working on, interested in working on climate change related sectors and addressing issues related to climate change. The sessions of the Forum are organised to create awareness, develop skills and capacity, and engage youth in climate action. It also aims to provide financial and technical support to youth participants who complete a project proposal focusing on a climate and environment related issue, and are committed to implement the activities of the project on a topic related to addressing impacts of climate change, and achieving sustainable development goals.

a difference in responding to climate change.<sup>13</sup> Calling attention to successful youth champions can serve to establish pathways, highlight best practices and experiences, and inspire youth, especially if champions come from their own countries and communities. Spaces for young voices could be created by featuring youth in (social) media, giving opportunities for youth reporting, making climate change and adaptation widely available and localized, highlighting adaptation-related writing, videos, podcasts, and artwork from youth, improving virtual participation, knowledge sharing, best practices and lessons learnt, and community-level engagement.

**Resilience:** Youth need to be recognized as key stakeholders in climate change adaptation processes, especially those which are in developing countries and most vulnerable to climate change. Strengthening their adaptive and coping capacities, shielding them and other vulnerable groups from climate change impacts, increasing coping and adaptive capacities, linking them up with sources of knowledge, and providing targeted support for youth in climate-vulnerable, poor, rural areas will not only increase resilience but allow them to better engage in the conversation on adaptation as well as the

implementation of concrete adaptation actions. Reducing vulnerabilities through better education, food security, nutrition, and health services reduces barriers for youth engagement and unlocks the potential of young people to engage in climate change adaptation.

### Conclusion

Youth are key actors in ensuring that climate adaptation actions are effective and create lasting change. It is important to ensure that their voices are heard and they are part of the decision-making processes related to climate change adaptation actions, as well as beneficiaries of adaptation processes at national and global level. Among the most vulnerable are those from developing and least developed countries. Rural areas in particular are among the hardest-hit by droughts, floods, heat waves, soil erosion, loss of livelihoods and other impacts of climate change that threaten the socio-economic fabric and social cohesion of communities.

To solve climate-related issues and adapt to the increasingly frequent and intense impacts of climate change, it is pivotal to strengthen youth engagement and empower youth to participate in processes on different levels. This includes creating an enabling environment and remove

<sup>13</sup> Green Climate Fund. 2019. *Press Release August 20, 2019*. Available at <https://www.greenclimate.fund/news/gcf->

[launches-green-champions-awards-recognise-outstanding-climate-change-efforts-developing](https://www.greenclimate.fund/news/gcf-launches-green-champions-awards-recognise-outstanding-climate-change-efforts-developing)



existing barriers for engagement, such as lack of access, awareness, knowledge, capacities, resources, and adaptive capacities. In addition, investment and mechanisms in different sectors, such as education, institutions, policies, finance, projects, advocacy, and resilience could contribute to youth empowerment and their contribution to climate change adaptation.

Youth are key stakeholders in climate action and future decision-makers. Engaging them in climate change adaptation is not only a matter of intergenerational justice and equity, but also brings great benefits stemming from their skills, perspectives, and innovations that will drive and shape adaptation action in the decades to come.

This policy brief is part of a series of briefs developed as part of the Technical Examination Process on Adaptation (TEP-A), which in 2020 is focusing on the topic of Education and training, public participation and youth to enhance adaptation action. The brief was developed by SLYCAN Trust (GTE) Ltd. in its capacity as a volunteer expert organization contributing to the TEP-A in 2020.

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)