



Youth Voice Now, Indonesia.

Learning report

Supporting children and youth in the face of a changing climate: The Situation. The Problem. The Solution.

Prepared by the ChildFund Alliance Programme Committee Climate and Environment Working Group to share findings from the online workshop, ***The Participation of Children and Youth as Transformation Champions: A Practitioner Workshop***,
19 October 2023

Introduction

Climate change has emerged as one of the most pressing challenges facing our planet today. It has affected economies, disrupted critical sectors such as education, health, and agriculture, and destabilized the livelihoods of millions worldwide. Its indiscriminate nature has spared no one, but among the most vulnerable are children and youth, who often lack the capacity to handle the large problems it brings.

Despite the growing recognition of climate change as a global priority and the increasing support from governments and non-state actors, the voices and agency of children and youth remain inadequately represented in the discourse.

At ChildFund Alliance, we are committed to amplifying the voices of children and youth, creating platforms for them to engage meaningfully and share their perspectives. To this end, we sought to understand the specific support that children and young people require from civil society to help them achieve their goals in tackling climate change.

This report summarizes key findings from the ChildFund Alliance Program Committee's Climate and Environment Working Group's online workshop, *The Participation of Children and Youth as Transformation Champions: A Youth Practitioner Workshop*, held 19 October 2023. It aimed to shed light on the challenges faced by youth and children in the

context of mental health, resource access, capacity building, and policy influencing, particularly within the changing climate landscape. It provided insights into the nuanced issues affecting their well-being and ability to participate effectively in climate action initiatives. Furthermore, it is the first step towards learning more about implementing the strategic priorities of the *ChildFund Alliance Climate and Environmental Action Brief 2023*.

*“The UN Special Representative of the Secretary General on Violence against Children, Najat Maalla M’jid, refers to the climate crisis as a **threat multiplier** for violence against children. More children than ever are facing extreme poverty, discrimination, and social inequalities. They are being forcibly displaced, are fleeing conflicts and widespread violence, and are suffering from food insecurity.” Meg Gardinier, Secretary General, ChildFund Alliance*

Over 150 people from 36 countries registered for the webinar, which focused on seven issues identified by youth falling under three themes: Overcoming Challenges: Building Resilience and Breaking Age Barriers; Empowering Youth Champions; Nurturing Growth through Capital, Capacity and Collaboration; and Empowering Futures: Catalysts for Youth-Focused Policy Change and Practical Action Opportunities.

Youth and ChildFund Alliance country offices representatives from Kenya, Ethiopia, Bangladesh, India, Indonesia and Sri Lanka, as well as technical experts from ChildFund Alliance members, shared statements in person or via recordings, describing the issues they encounter regarding meaningful youth participation in the context of climate and environmental action. They raised concerns on issues such as how young people's mental health is being affected by engagement in climate change advocacy or through trauma; the importance of building youth leadership to develop climate resilience; barriers to environmental management; and frustrations with access to assets and to being involved and heard. Practitioners working with children and youth shared successful work practices, while also raising their own concerns and limitations. The floor was then opened to participants to directly provide feedback, ask questions, or in some cases, discuss their work in response to the needs of young people raised through the pre-recordings.

Youth interviews revealed the following challenges in meaningfully participating in climate and environmental spaces:

- Support with resources and financial recompense.
- Resilience strategies to cope with negativity and fear.

- Recognition of the barriers of age.
- Support to become informed, technologically savvy and safe.
- Supporting opportunities for youth champions to thrive and work with others.
- Advocating for policy change in support of young people.
- Developing practical action opportunities.

This *summary of findings* document has identified key recommendations aimed at enhancing development practitioners' engagement with children and young people in climate and environmental spaces, ensuring that their voices are not only heard but also acted upon in shaping a more sustainable and equitable future. We have supplemented some of the workshop findings with subsequent research, in order for this document to be as relevant and useful as possible to all ChildFund Alliance members, country offices and local partners. We hope that this report allows anyone working with young people on climate and environmental action to draw on the experience of others to grow and improve their work.

As Meg Gardinier, Secretary-General of ChildFund Alliance, aptly stated, "*Children and young people know the world is in crisis, and they have an important role to play in making the world a better place for themselves. They are the future.*"

With thanks to the following presenters, whose contributions formed the basis for the findings in this document:

Youth presenters (speaking via video): Naufal, Indonesia; Sudeep, India; Sereti, Kenya; Zeyituna, Ethiopia; Dinar, Indonesia; Kibet, Kenya; Ruvatsan, Sri Lanka; Susalini, Sri Lanka; Elizabeth, Kenya; Mulugeta, Ethiopia; Vinitha, India.

ChildFund Alliance Practitioners: Reny Haning, ChildFund Indonesia; Lavanya Kesavaraj, Children Believe India; Shona Jennings, Barnfonden; Annarita Spagnuolo, WeWorld Kenya; Nancy Anabel, Children Believe India; Michael Boampong, ChildFund International; Faith Nimineh, ChildFund Alliance; Honelegn Berhanu, Children Believe Ethiopia; Keeva Duffey, ChildFund International; Kazi Abdul Kadir, EDUCO, Bangladesh; Ryan DeSouza, ChildFund Alliance.

Findings from the webinar were summarized by Velma Oseko, Barnfonden.

Climate change and mental health

According to a report published by the American Psychological Association, the acute impacts of climate change, including weather disasters, can induce trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder in the short term, with potential longer-term mental health challenges persisting in the absence of adequate interventions.

Children, in particular, are susceptible to mental health effects from extreme weather events due to their dependency on caregivers and their limited coping mechanisms compared to adults. The enduring effects of climate change, such as heatwaves, droughts, and deteriorating air quality, heighten the risk of anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder, cognitive impairment, interpersonal aggression, and other mental health issues¹.

Despite the severity of these consequences, research conducted by Barnfonden (2022²) reveals a significant gap in understanding the mental health implications of

climate change, especially among children and youth in the Global South.

Moreover, the absence of psychologists or mental health services compounds the challenge, leaving vulnerable populations without essential support mechanisms.

Given that the Global South faces disproportionate vulnerability to climate change impacts, the lack of adequate research and psychological support further jeopardizes the physical and mental well-being of the most vulnerable individuals, exacerbating the consequences of climate change.

To address this pressing challenge, ChildFund Alliance members recommend a multifaceted approach:

- Provide training for teachers and trainers of youth leaders to equip them with the skills to manage climate-related stressors affecting young people's mental health effectively.
- Establish a peer network of climate educators to offer mutual support and knowledge exchange. Encourage South-South and North-South learning, including indigenous ways of knowing and seeing the world.
- Develop positive climate messaging to instill hope and optimism among children and youth about the future.
- Incorporate mental health support into risk matrices and project plans to ensure comprehensive care.
- Create safe, age-appropriate forums and groups where young climate champions can gather, share experiences, discuss feelings, and plan constructive actions.
- Employ social and emotional learning techniques within these forums to teach self-care, stress management, and resilience-building strategies.
- Facilitate connections between youth and broader networks to foster dialogue and support beyond local communities.

¹ [Mental Health and Our Changing Climate Children and Youth Report 2023 \(apa.org\)](https://www.apa.org/2023/04/11/mental-health-climate-change)

² [Climate-change-violence-against-children-and-emerging-online-concerns.pdf \(barnfonden.se\)](https://www.barnfonden.se/2022/04/11/climate-change-violence-against-children-and-emerging-online-concerns.pdf)

- Provide online and offline platforms for young people to engage in actions with affinity groups, leveraging their shared interests and passions.
- Implement regular check-ins and assessments with young people, trainers, and leaders to monitor coping mechanisms and well-being.
- Incorporate feedback from youth into programming to foster positivity, hope, and tangible results.
- Prioritize climate change education – from both scientific and social angles – to increase awareness of and engagement with the issues, and to reduce fear and confusion.
- Encourage engagement in creative arts as a means for youth to express their emotions and experiences.
- Recognize and celebrate the achievements of youth initiatives, to help bolster their confidence and overall resilience in the face of climate challenges.

Voices from young people in our program work

“Some of the challenges we face are lack of resources to expand advocacy on ... environmental issues. My wish is to get more resources so I can create awareness and sensitisation...” *Kibet, Kenya*

“The advocacy process did not go smoothly. As a senior student, I had to prepare for my graduation alongside my regular schoolwork. Coordinating meeting schedules with fellow student council members and the school administration was difficult due to different priorities. Additionally, some friends and teachers disagreed with the advocacy idea.”
Naufal, Indonesia

We would like to ask organisations to amplify our voices to own land.
Mulugeta, Ethiopia

“...we can improve the activity level of engagement of the community by providing awareness, training and giving information on environmental protection and building the capacities of youth ... as a focal point for preserving the environment.” *Susalini, Sri Lanka*

The challenges we always face is sometimes the resource constraint. Like sometimes as young people it's so hard to get resources since we're not financially stable. Another challenge is political goodwill. Like sometimes we don't get support from people in authority like chiefs and like those political leaders, so sometimes it's really hard. [Another] great challenge in people is like lack of knowledge, like most people don't really know more on climate change... and one of the things organisations can do... to support youth... is maybe just support them financially, because I think that is the biggest challenge. Supporting them financially can really take the youth... take us... along.” *Sereti, Kenya*



WeWorld Climate of Change

“Our [information and awareness] activities can be improved more when the organisation provides us with training, awareness, information on environmental protection.”
Ruvatsan, Sri Lanka

“... we can improve the activity level of engagement of the community by providing awareness, training, and giving information on environmental protection and building the capacities of youth in communities as a focal point for preserving the environment.” *Susalini, Sri Lanka*

“One thing I could recommend is always ending sessions about climate change with a positive example... like a company doing a project that really supports climate change. That helps towards feeling less sad.” *Sonja, Sweden*



Youth for Nature Campaign, Children Believe, India

“The best way to acquire... skills for the future of work is through practical training and eco-friendly education.”
Elizabeth, Kenya

We planted trees and created micro-forests in our village. Government officials appreciated us after seeing our activity. *Vinitha, India*

“... my age sometimes acts as a barrier... it's hard to take a young person seriously in a community bound by old habits, [but] our unyielding efforts are making a difference. We are witnessing a notable shift in our village's mindset towards sustainability.”
Sudeep, India



Building Youth Leadership, Children Believe, India

“There should be the creation of financial sources for youth to engage them in climate action and disaster risk management through a linkage with different institutions.” *Zeyituna, Ethiopia*

During the [advocacy] project I faced rejection from some of my teachers and friends regarding my initiative. They were sceptical about this effort and considered it a waste of time. Despite facing this rejection, I did not give up. As a member of the Youth Voice Now, I was taught to actively collect information through Youth Journal activities [and] to identify issues along the way along with appropriate solutions.” *Dinar, Indonesia*

Climate change and youth access to finance, capacity enhancement and collaboration

Finance

Access to finance is a critical component of effective climate action, serving as the linchpin for implementing ambitious adaptation and mitigation strategies. However, the process of accessing climate finance is often convoluted and bureaucratic, particularly for those in developing countries who are most in need of support to bolster their resilience against climate impacts. Without adequate access to financial resources, individuals and communities are severely limited in their ability to undertake meaningful climate actions.

Financial support is not only essential for implementing climate adaptation and mitigation measures but also for facilitating youth engagement with duty bearers. Climate finance plays a pivotal role in enabling the participation of young people in climate action initiatives worldwide. Nevertheless, youth in the Global South encounter significant obstacles in accessing finance

compared to their counterparts in the Global North, presenting a substantial barrier to effective climate action.

In light of these challenges, it is incumbent upon civil society actors to contextualize their support for youth engagement with climate finance.

Understanding the unique circumstances and constraints faced by youth and youth-led organizations in accessing financial resources is crucial for devising targeted strategies to overcome these barriers and empower young people to contribute meaningfully to climate action efforts.

Capacity

Capacity building is paramount for effective climate action, starting with raising awareness about climate change and its far-reaching impacts. The lack of understanding and knowledge regarding climate change has resulted in significant losses for communities, including the depletion of resources and livelihoods. Regrettably, many young people are deprived of access to

comprehensive climate education, which hampers their ability to actively participate in climate initiatives.

An example of the use of technology to create awareness on climate change is the You Can App. This is an innovative app that is strategically designed with video-based modules in the local vernacular language and offers a safe space for young minds to engage in climate action.

Youth-Led climate action in India ([youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com))

As well, the current education system often fails to equip youth with the necessary skills for adaptation and mitigation, exacerbating vulnerabilities in at-risk communities.

Another challenge to capacity enhancement among youth is limited access to technology, which restricts their ability to innovate and implement environmentally sustainable solutions. This need for digital skills goes hand in hand with the need for other transferable skills, including 'life skills' or 'socio-

emotional skills’.

Recognizing these obstacles, ChildFund members have undertaken training initiatives to empower youth with climate change knowledge and skills. However, the absence of adequate data in certain contexts where ChildFund operates complicates the customization of training programs to suit local needs.

The lack of a centralized data repository accessible to ChildFund Alliance partners hinders effective knowledge sharing and program design. To address these challenges, several recommendations are proposed:

- Prioritize digital data collection efforts and sharing via a shared online platform, integrating local knowledge and insights on climate change adaptation and mitigation.
- Foster partnerships with learning centers including in schools and technical institutes to enhance youth capacity building on climate change issues.

- Utilize social media platforms to disseminate climate messaging to a wide audience of young people, while also addressing misinformation through regular updates and fact-checking.
- Engage climate ambassadors to mentor and empower fellow youth, leveraging their expertise and experience to enhance climate awareness and action at the grassroots level.

Collaboration and sustainability

Collaboration and sustainability are essential pillars for achieving Sustainable Development Goal 13 on climate action, as emphasized in SDG 17, which underscores the importance of partnerships for sustainable development.

Beyond raising awareness about the impacts of climate change, it is important for youth to forge coalitions that can sustain their momentum in climate action. Governments

represent key partners who can provide support to youth initiatives through policy frameworks, financial assistance, and knowledge sharing. Likewise, engaging the private sector is appropriate, given its growing interest in climate action within the communities it operates in.

As well, involving youth in existing climate and environmental platforms is essential for maintaining momentum in climate action.

Additionally, by bringing youth together and providing mentorship opportunities, as well as offering seed funding and facilitating connections to institutions for financial and technical support, we can ensure the longevity and effectiveness of youth-led climate initiatives.

This collaborative approach harnesses the collective efforts of various stakeholders to address the challenges of climate change and work towards a sustainable future.

Influencing climate policies: The youth participation challenge

Despite the fundamental right of children and youth to participate in decision-making processes that affect them, numerous constraints hinder their engagement. One such constraint is the lack of appropriate legislation that would facilitate their participation, resulting in limited spaces for their voices to be heard and considered seriously.

Furthermore, youth agencies often face challenges in securing adequate financial and technical support, hindering their ability to actively participate in decision-making forums. Institutional barriers and a lack of coordination among government departments further exacerbate these challenges.

Cultural norms, such as those observed in Ethiopia where youth defer to their elders in decision-making

processes, also contribute to the marginalization of youth voices. Even in international climate spaces, youth voices are often marginalized and tokenized, undermining their role in shaping climate policies and actions.

However, there are positive examples, such as in Kenya, where young people are increasingly assuming political positions and confidently advocating for the concerns of their constituents.

Given these challenges, it is imperative for ChildFund Alliance members to reflect on how youth are perceived by duty bearers and take proactive measures to support meaningful youth participation in decision-making platforms.

Recommendations to address this include:

- Empowering youth to present themselves as capable agents of change
- Calling out tokenism in high-level climate forums and promoting meaningful participation by developing standards and procedures for youth participation
- Establishing feedback mechanisms between youth and duty bearers
- Equipping youth with knowledge of their rights and leadership tools
- Fostering collaboration with other stakeholders to amplify youth voices and
- Promoting intergenerational dialogues to facilitate collaboration between adults and young people.

By implementing these recommendations, we can create an enabling environment for meaningful youth engagement in climate action and decision-making processes.

Lessons on effective engagement of children and youth

Given the central theme of climate change awareness in this report, it is important to explore effective strategies for engaging children and youth in this critical issue. A key consideration in engaging them is ensuring that they perceive the experience as enjoyable, worthwhile, and meaningful.

Based on the insights shared by ChildFund Alliance partners, the following recommendations have been formulated:

- Recognize that children and young people are more likely to engage with information that is personally relevant and valuable to them. Thus, engagement efforts should be tailored to their interests and concerns.
- Create adolescent and youth groups that are not only informative but also enjoyable and interactive, incorporating elements of fun and creativity as well as a sense of urgency and hope to maintain their interest.
- Demonstrate to youth that their efforts and

contributions have tangible impacts, whether on their communities, local environments, or broader climate initiatives. This sense of efficacy can motivate continued engagement and action, and promote positivity about their role in determining their future.

- Introduce elements of competition or gamification to engagement activities, allowing youth to actively participate in and take ownership of small-scale environmental or advocacy projects. This approach fosters a sense of agency and responsibility among youth participants.
- Do not overburden young people or seek to make them 'grow up' too soon. They are children and deserve a childhood – their participation in the adult world often forces them to 'be adult' in order to relate to adults. Instead, adults should behave in a more child-friendly manner. Young people's time is also of value – so value it! This may involve developing a

policy on providing stipends to young people (an example was given from British Young Minds on rewarding participation, found [here](#)). We should also encourage intergenerational engagement, where older adults and younger generations can learn from each other and benefit from coming together.

- Recognise that there could be psychological reactions to discussions about climate change. Young people's mental and psychological safety should always be considered, and facilitators should be equipped to identify and address anxiety. Ending sessions with positive examples of climate action helps.

By implementing these recommendations, civil society organizations and other stakeholders can effectively engage children and youth in climate change initiatives, fostering a sense of empowerment and collective action toward a sustainable future.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this learning report has provided a comprehensive overview of the challenges faced by children and youth in the context of climate change, as well as actionable solutions to address these challenges. As climate change continues to exert its toll on communities worldwide, it is imperative that we prioritize the well-being and agency of our younger generations.

From the mental health implications of climate change to the barriers hindering youth access to finance, capacity enhancement, and policy influencing, this report has underscored the multifaceted nature of the challenges confronting children and youth in the face of a changing climate. However, amidst these challenges lie opportunities for meaningful engagement and collaboration.

Through collaborative efforts involving civil society organizations, governments, private sector actors, and youth themselves, we can forge pathways towards a more sustainable and equitable future. By prioritizing youth voices, providing them with the necessary resources and support, and fostering inclusive decision-making processes, we can empower them to become effective agents of change in the fight against climate change.

As we move forward, it is essential to heed the recommendations outlined in this report and take proactive steps to implement them. By doing so, we can create an enabling environment where children and youth are not only heard but also actively engaged in shaping climate policies and initiatives at local, national, and global levels.

The following projects, conducted by ChildFund Alliance members and their local partners, helped inform the findings presented in this document.

Building youth leadership to develop climate resilience to reduce carbon emission in 110 villages, through awareness and adaptation measures in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, India June 2021 – February 2023. Children Believe – implemented by local partners SPEECH, OPES and IRCDS Supported by Canada Fund for Local Initiative (CFLI)

Climate Action and Disaster Risk Reduction Arsi Negelle District, Ethiopia. Children Believe Fund with local partner Bole Bible Baptist Child Care and Community Development Program Supported by CBF, implemented by BBBC-Langano Program

Environmental Management, Jobs and Income Generation for Youth and Women in Kasarani (EMAJIC). ChildFund Kenya, funded by BMZ Ustadi Foundation Nairobi County Government

#ClimateOfChange in 23 EU countries, Kenya, Senegal, Cambodia, Guatemala Jan 2020 - July 2023. We World, co-funded by the European Commission (DEAR)

Youth for Nature Campaign Puttalam, Batticaloa, Nuwara Eliya, Tricomalee, Sri Lanka. ChildFund Sri Lanka with local partners ; Voice Area Federation, T-field, Action Unity Lanka, Child Development Federation) Supported by Central Environmental Authority in the district level.

Youth Voice Now, Sikka, Indonesia. ChildFund Indonesia with local partner Flores Childrens Development Organization (FREN) Supported by Barnfonden, Funded by the Swedish Institute