

# Lesson 3: Youth dimensions of climate adaptation and programming



# Welcome



## About

The [LUCCC Network](#) and the [LDC Group on Climate Change](#) present a series of learning modules focused on gender and youth dimensions of climate adaptation action, with support from [START](#) and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization ([UNIDO](#)). These learning modules are part of ongoing work with the [GEF](#)-funded project 'Strengthening Engagement and Action by the Least Developed Countries Group on Climate Change'. These training modules will serve to expand learning on gender and youth dimensions across the LUCCC network, LDC group and beyond. Each online lesson is paired with a virtual live session with course facilitators allowing for interactive discussions between facilitators and participants. The value you find in this series will largely depend on how much energy, openness, and intention you bring to the exercises and discussions found within, so we urge you to think of this learning series as a chance for both professional and personal growth.

Lesson 3 builds on the concepts learned in lessons one and two on gender and climate change and provides a deeper exploration of youth dimensions of climate adaptation and programming. We explore barriers and opportunities for youth involvement in adaptation programming, unique ways in which youth are impacted by climate change, and we highlight examples of how youth are spearheading climate action in innovative and unconventional ways, and how you can foster youth engagement and empowerment.

## What to Expect

- Have a clearer understanding of terminology used when discussing youth and climate change adaptation.
- Better understand barriers for youth participation and decision making with regard to climate change adaptation and programming.
- Better grasp how youth actors can serve as change agents within diverse spaces with regard to climate change adaptation and programming.
- Learn about hands on, practical tools for integrating youth considerations into your work

## What will be covered:

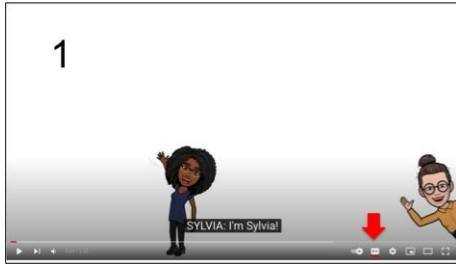
- We begin our exploration of youth and climate change by focusing on what is meant by youth, in the context of the global climate & sustainability discourse, why youth are vulnerable, and especially why youth in LDCs are uniquely vulnerable. An important focus of our vulnerability exploration will be on the mental health aspects and impacts of climate change.
- We then move from vulnerability to empowerment, with a focus on why youth are critical for developing sustainable and equitable responses to the climate crisis, and the current state of visibility and agency of youth within climate negotiations.
- The lesson then builds on the issue of empowerment by examining the persistent structural barriers that undermine youth agency and visibility, and how youth can strengthen their adaptive capacities by reducing or overcoming barriers to their being more innovative change agents.
- Lesson 3 concludes with an examination of how a broader, more collaborative societal response can help to empower youth and, in doing so, increase their adaptive capacities to climate risks.
- Throughout the lesson, entry points and approaches for youth engagement and empowerment will be presented along with practical hands-on tools to enhance intergenerational equity and youth empowerment in Climate Change Adaptation and Programming.

# To adjust language settings on YouTube video captions, follow these steps:

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**We would also like to acknowledge and thank our  
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### ***Why are we concerned with youth and climate change?***

Youth are uniquely vulnerable to the negative impacts of climate change. As a generational cohort, youth have contributed the least to the problem of climate change, but they are in many ways the most exposed to its impacts because of their age relative to older generations, and their lack of resources, societal stature, and political influence. Youth in LDCs are particularly impacted by climate change. They face increased risks of food and water insecurity, internal displacement, disruptions to education, and high disease burdens due to climate-induced risks and disasters. Important health risks that youth face, particularly in LDCs, include increased exposure to vector-borne and infectious diseases, malnutrition, and mental health issues such as anxiety and depression.

Youth constitute more than 16% of the global population, and nearly 90% of the world's 1.8 billion young people live in developing countries. Thus, climate impacts on youth fall disproportionately on the global south. Younger generations are likely to suffer 6-10 times more than senior generations due to runaway climate change, which is becoming increasingly probable given the lack of a sustained global effort to constrain future warming. The long-term impacts of climate change will affect LDC youth more profoundly, making their involvement in climate action essential. (UNIDO Gender and Youth Strategy)

## ***Who are the youth?***

Various definitions of youth exist, with the UN stating youth as ranging from 15 and 24 years old ([UN.org](https://www.un.org/)). The [COP28 International Youth Climate Delegate Program](#) considers youth as being between 18 and 35 years old, and [YOUNGO](#), the official children and youth constituency of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change ([UNFCCC](https://unfccc.org/)), uses the designation of anyone under the age of 35.



### [Untold stories of climate change loss and damage in the LDCs: Rwanda](#)

By approaching the topic of youth and climate change through an **intersectional** lens, we can see that not all youth are impacted equally by climate change, and their adaptation options and strategies can vary greatly. Factors such as location (rural/urban), migration status, language, wealth level, disabilities, and gender can have tangible and serious influence on a young person's vulnerability to climate impacts and their options for action. On the next page, you will read about five ways that girls are disproportionately impacted by climate change.



# 5 ways climate change is disrupting girls' lives

These stories show how the inequalities experienced by marginalised girls and young women are amplified by the impacts of climate change.



## 1. Forced to drop out of school

Girls' education is often the first thing families sacrifice when faced with the impacts of the climate crisis. Girls are pulled out of school to help their families find food and water or take care of siblings.

Dawele, 14, from Ethiopia was forced to drop out of school due to a drought.

"There is no rain in our community. We walk for more than 8 hours every day to get water," she explains.

"Because of this, I couldn't attend class and was forced to drop out. I love mathematics and want to be a teacher but now I don't know what my future will be."

Girls' education is one of the most powerful strategies to combat climate change. For every additional year of schooling a girl receives, her country's resilience to climate disasters improves. Increased investment in quality education for girls must be one of the highest priorities in climate action.

## 2. Child marriage

Child marriage is used by families to cope with economic hardships caused by climate change. This puts millions of girls at risk of sexual and physical abuse, early pregnancy and maternal death.

Following a food crisis in South Sudan, Yari got married at 16.



"I wasn't ready to get married," says Yari, now 18. "My mother told me that if I married then I would save the whole family from hunger and give my brothers the opportunity to marry too."

### 3. Increased risk of violence

The impacts of climate change cause many people to migrate which puts girls' safety at risk. These risks are worst when girls are collecting natural resources and when staying in temporary shelters.

In Cambodia, many people have been forced to move to find work due to the impact of climate change on peoples' livelihoods.

Prey\*, 8, has been living on her own since her older brother and sister moved away to find work.

"I miss her," says Prey, talking about her sister. "Sometimes it's scary to be home alone."

Plan International Cambodia's Chann Sophon says, "We're very worried about Prey. She's in great danger of being sexually abused or becoming a victim of human trafficking."

### 4. Fewer opportunities to work

For millions of young women whose livelihoods are inextricably linked to natural resources, the consequences of climate change are felt daily.

Flora, 21, from Papua New Guinea, is a farmer. However, her home and income are increasingly being disrupted by climate change.

"We rely on growing coconut for money, but the trees are being washed away by sea level rise," she says.

"I have experience of the weather's impact on crops, but I don't understand what is happening here."

To meet global climate change targets, economies will have to become greener and sustainable. This provides an opportunity to advance climate justice and promote gender equality by challenging the stereotypes that limit opportunities for girls and women.

### 5. Health problems

During food shortages caused by climate change, girls are more likely to go hungry and will often eat least and last, leading to hunger and malnutrition.

Beauty, 13, is from a community in Zimbabwe that suffers from food shortages due to droughts. Despite the lack of food, she gets up at 4am to fetch water before walking 9km to school every day.

"I sometimes feel my bones aching. Some nights we go without food. After such nights, I cannot wake up to go to school, my body fails me," says Beauty.

"It's painful to be in school sometimes. I have sharp stomach pains."

Governments must step up to support girls

All governments must acknowledge and address the increased risks faced by girls on the frontlines of the climate crisis.

Despite the impact on their lives, girls and young women are not included in political decision-making. This is preventing progress in the development of climate solutions and achieving sustainable development.

The most marginalised must be able to participate so their specific needs are met in climate strategies.

\*Name changed to protect identity

Categories: [Emergencies](#)

Tags: [Climate change](#)

## Related pages



Source:

<https://plan-international.org/case-studies/5-ways-climate-change-is-disrupting-girls-lives/>



## Spotlight on Mental Health Impacts

"Climate change poses a particular threat to children and youth, starting before birth and potentially derailing the normal development of physiological systems, cognitive abilities and emotional skills in ways that are sometimes irreversible." -[The American Psychological Association](#)

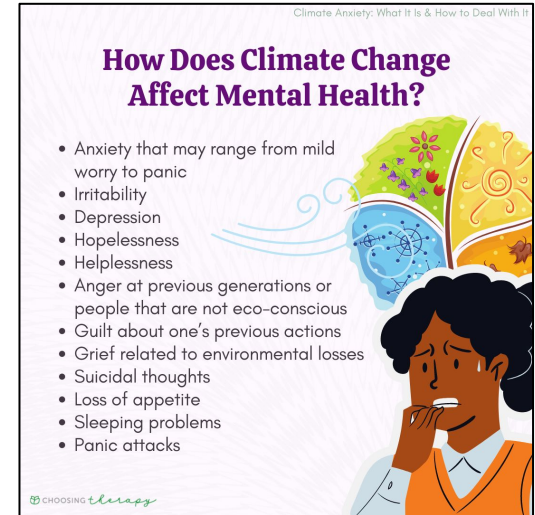
The mental health aspects and impacts of climate change are gaining recognition as critically important to managing risks and responding adaptatively to an increasingly unstable climate system. The existential and highly uncertain nature of extreme climate events pose a vexing challenge for all of society but especially for youth. For example, [in Nigeria, 76 percent of young people aged 16-25 believe that people have failed to care for the earth, which has led to anthropogenic climate change.](#)

Increases in extreme weather events and hydrometeorological disasters has contributed to climate-induced displacement, diminished food and livelihoods security of youth and their families, and loss of material resources and infrastructure, which can have serious mental health implications for youth including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), increased anxiety and depression, and suicide ([The American Psychological Association](#), 2023).

# Spotlight on Mental Health Impacts

In recent years, discussions around “**climate anxiety**” have surged. [Climate anxiety](#) is fundamentally distress about climate change and its impacts on the landscape and human existence. That can manifest as intrusive thoughts or feelings of distress about future disasters or the long-term future of human existence and the world, including one’s own descendants. As noted by [Mehita Igani](#) from Stellenbosch University, “The prospect of a future filled with wildfires, floods, droughts, heatstroke and pandemics is (understandably) causing unprecedented levels of anxiety among young people (Hörter, 2024; Panu, 2020; Wu et al., 2020), in turn raising the prospect of pandemics of depression and suicide (Majeed & Lee, 2017).”

Climate anxiety can be diminished by engaging in collective action and building social connectedness with people who share similar values and concerns. For example, the [Resilience Project](#) was created to enable other young people concerned about climate to find their peace, their power and their people.



Source: <https://www.choosingtherapy.com/climate-anxiety/>

# Why are youth critical for developing sustainable responses to the climate crisis?

Scientific evidence shows that the worst climate disasters will come in future decades, making youth an essential stakeholder in climate change policy-making processes. (COP28 Presidency Youth Champion) Young people, who make up about 35% of the population in the LDCs, have the potential to become more essential actors in climate change mitigation, adaptation, and loss and damage action. Young people are also more tech-savvy and adept at using social media to share and to learn. Often, these young actors view themselves as progressive global citizens, which contrasts with the sometimes more conservative outlook of older generations.

Youth bring a great capacity and energy for socializing, networking, and activism. This is evident in their increasing impact on climate actions, including exerting pressure for better outcomes in climate negotiations. Their ability to mobilize and advocate for change is a powerful force in driving climate action. Furthermore, youth development and engagement are integral to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and are essential to forging a more sustainable future for humanity.



# How prominent are youth issues in international climate negotiations?



A key component of youth mobilization and inclusivity centers around visibility and agency in global discourses on climate change and sustainability. Youth are increasingly gaining prominence in the UNFCCC Conference of Parties negotiations. This increased visibility provides potential avenues for strengthening the youth voice in climate negotiations.

## **Examples of increased visibility of youth in international climate discourse include:**

- Article 12 of the Paris Agreement (COP 21) underscores the importance of youth engagement and empowerment. This article emphasizes education, training, public awareness, public participation, and access to information on climate change—all essential for enabling and empowering young people to take climate action.
- The announcement at COP28 in UAE regarding the institutionalization of the role of youth within the UNFCCC process introduces significant strategic actions and approaches.
- At COP 26 in Glasgow, the Glasgow Climate Pact (Articles 55 & 56) highlighted the critical role of youth and children in addressing and responding to climate change. These articles emphasize the need for inclusive and multilevel action, recognizing the contributions of youth in enhancing climate resilience and promoting sustainable development.
- At COP 27, Article 55 of the Sharm El-Sheikh Implementation Plan further reinforces underscored the role of youth in driving systemic change and ensuring effective climate action.
- The Youth's Negotiators Academy engages in 63 countries, including 18 in Sub-Saharan Africa, 19 in Asia and The Pacific, and 17 in Latin America.
- The Climate Leadership Initiative features 'The New Generation Program', which is designed "to empower young negotiators from the Global South to champion climate action and drive equitable solutions for their countries, communities, and households.
- The role of the Presidency Youth Climate Champion (Decision 16/CP.28) (PYCC) under the UAE Consensus in 2023, aims to enhance and encourage the inclusive engagement of children and young people in climate decision-making and policy processes by utilizing the unique position of each COP Presidency.



# How prominent are youth issues in international climate negotiations?

“YOUNGO is the official children and youth constituency of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). YOUNGO is a vibrant, global network of children and youth activists (up to 35 years) as well as youth NGOs, who contribute to shaping the intergovernmental climate change policies and strive to empower children and youth to formally bring their voices to the UNFCCC processes.” Learn more about YOUNGO [here](#).

**YOUNGO is not an organisation!  
It is a CONSTITUENCY!**

**We are a mechanism mandated to represent  
the voices of the children and youth in  
UNFCCC processes!**

Source: [Introduction to YOUNGO](#)

In spite of this progress, youth participation often remains symbolic with limited influence on final decisions. In the next section, you will learn more about the obstacles that young people face which limit equitable participation.



## Persistent structural barriers that undermine youth agency, visibility, and power to contribute to addressing climate solutions.



While official UN declarations are symbolically important and serve to illuminate a growing global consensus, they often lack the reach into national and local contexts that have significant bearing on how well youth can practice their own agency and thrive. In this part of the lesson, we will delve into some of the key structural barriers that leave youth vulnerable to climate and related impacts, and that, if not addressed, undermine their ability to adapt to a changing climate.

### **Persistent structural barriers that undermine youth's abilities to partake in climate actions include:**

- Resource Constraints: Many LDCs face significant resource constraints that impact various aspects of climate action and education that include limited funding for climate education and capacity development opportunities that affect the development and dissemination of educational materials, training programs, and the capacity to raise awareness about climate issues among youth.
- Inadequate Financial Support for Training and Travel: Financial constraints extend beyond the lack of materials and technology. There is often a lack of funding for training programs and travel expenses, which limits the ability of youth and women to participate in climate negotiations and international forums. This reduces their opportunities to gain knowledge, share experiences, and influence global climate policies.

- Mental health and burnout relating to being overworked and being asked to do unpaid work (causing youth to worry about how to pay for food and shelter; or take care of their children and family members); not everyone can afford unpaid internships or volunteering in climate action projects. See:
  - <https://www.mindline.sg/youth/article/why-burnout-is-hitting-young-people-hard?type=mood>
  - <https://www.youthforum.org/files/231114-DP-CostUnpaidInternships.pdf>
  - <https://www.standard.co.uk/business/business-news/younger-workers-more-likely-to-suffer-burnout-as-generation-gap-grows-survey-b1205376.html>
- Restricted Access to Funding for Community Development: Limited access to financial resources hampers the involvement of active youth and women in local community development projects. This includes challenges in securing funding for initiatives that address climate change at the grassroots level, which are crucial for building resilience and adaptive capacity in vulnerable communities.
- Challenges in Establishing and Operating NGOs and CSOs: Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations (CSOs) play a vital role in climate action. However, financial constraints in LDCs make it difficult to establish and sustain these organizations. This limits their ability to mobilize resources, implement projects, and advocate for climate justice for women, youth, and marginalized groups.
- Lack of Resources for Mitigation and Adaptation Technologies: Implementing climate change mitigation and adaptation technologies requires significant investment. Many LDCs struggle to access the necessary financial and technical resources to deploy these technologies effectively. This includes renewable energy systems, sustainable agricultural practices, and infrastructure improvements that are essential for reducing vulnerability to climate impacts, as well as data collection tools, and other technological innovations that can enhance climate resilience. Youth, who tend to have fewer financial resources than older generations, are particularly excluded from accessing these much-needed technologies.
- Language Barriers: In many Francophone LDCs (Least Developed Countries), young leaders and civil society organizations struggle to access international climate funding due to the requirement to submit in English. Furthermore, most platforms, training, consultations, or advocacy mechanisms are exclusively in English, hindering inclusive participation.

While it is important to understand barriers, it is equally important to realize that there are ways of lessening and overcoming these barriers in order to empower youth in the context of climate risks and adaptation. While youth face unique climate-related challenges, they also have unique attributes and strategic acumen that can enable them to come together and collectively flourish. Some of the most important steps that youth can take to be empowered relate to building community.

### Checklist for youth to engage in climate action:

- Check at your school or at local organizations if they have youth committees or programs specifically working on organizing and local and state level policy. (<https://climategen.org/blog/how-do-i-become-a-youth-activist/>) (<https://www.weforum.org/stories/2021/09/how-can-young-people-change-the-world-top-tips-from-an-expert/>)
- Explore larger youth-focused and youth-led climate action initiatives. In addition to local efforts,, there are a number of national and international climate and sustainability-related initiatives through which youth can engage. These youth-climate initiatives offer opportunities for building professional networks, being exposed to peer mentoring, and gaining a sense of agency in the face of climate vulnerabilities. Examples of such efforts include:
  - [The Global Youth Climate Action Fund](#)'s mission is to finance youth-led climate action around the world, and drive financial and technical support to communities vulnerable to the effects of climate change.
  - [The Youth Climate Justice Fund](#) aims to support climate justice young leaders with trust-based funding, resources, and youth-to-youth capacity development, enabling them to amplify their voices and to keep their vision and influence alive.
  - The United Nations advances youth engagement through initiatives such as the [Youth in Action](#) forum, the [YOUNGO](#) constituency and UNESCO's [Youth Climate Action Network](#).
  - [Fridays for Future](#) is a youth-led and -organized global climate strike movement that started in August 2018, when 15-year-old Greta Thunberg began a school strike for climate.
- Another important step towards greater empowerment is to engage in policy through *talking to your lawmakers*:
  - Find out who represents you in your district or region in government and talk to them about climate related impacts happening in your community. (<https://climategen.org/blog/how-do-i-become-a-youth-activist/>)

## Case Study: Philippines



Case Study: Mexico



Case Study: Madagascar

# How can others support youth to become change agents?

Accomplishing a more youth-driven and youth-inclusive response to the climate crisis will require comprehensive societal support. One of the key support factors relates to greater involvement of international, national, and sub-national policy makers, business owners, schools, universities, and other influential actors and institutions to enhance youth participation and representation in climate decision making and action.

## How to support youth to become change agents:

- Supporting youth-led solutions to climate change through grants, venture capital, debt financing, or in-kind support. (See: [Three ways to engage young people for effective climate action](#))
- Investing in climate-focused awareness, capacity-building, and education opportunities for youth.
- Practicing youth-responsive budgeting, including the active engagement of youth experts in project and budget planning, youth-inclusive training, budgeting for youth-specific needs in project formulation, and risk-mitigation for youth within activities and initiatives. Guiding questions for youth-responsive budgeting include:
  - Does the distribution of programme funds reflect the level of commitment to youth-related goals according to the project category?
  - Are there sufficient funds to achieve the expected results that support youth inclusion and empowerment?
  - Are there sufficient funds to integrate the differentiated needs of youth and adults and to remunerate them for any of their contributions, including in an advisory role?
  - Is there a contingency fund to address youth needs in case of an unexpected event?
- Promote multilingualism in international youth engagement tools, platforms, and processes in climate action. This would contribute to better representation of multilingual youth and a more equitable distribution of resources and opportunities.

# How can others support youth to become change agents?

- Build in processes and mechanisms for youth engagement and participation in research projects and community-focused initiatives.
- Media can raise awareness of youth-focused climate impacts and youth-driven climate action.
- Intergenerational mentoring programs can help pass valuable lessons along to youth who are spearheading climate action now.

## See Also:

- [Six ways governments can meaningfully engage youth in tackling climate change](#)
- [COP 28 Youth Climate Champion communication](#)
- [Engaging youth in climate action: Hope for the region's sustainable future](#)



# Exercise



***“What you do makes a difference, and you have to decide what kind of difference you want to make.”***

-Dr Jane Goodall, Scientist & Activist

## **Answer the following questions:**

1. What is a project or group you are involved in or are aware of that does or could engage youth on climate action?
2. Are youth involved now? If so, how?
3. List three ways that you can support greater youth participation or support existing youth activities relating to this project or group?
4. Make a list of people who could help you with this support or engagement.
5. Make an action list. What will you do first?



# Resources



1. [Youth in Africa use art to highlight the impact of climate change](#)
2. [YOUNGO](#)
3. [Ghana's youth voices on the climate crisis](#)
4. [The psychosocial impacts of slow onset climate change events among youth in LMICs: A rapid evidence review](#)
5. [Meaningfully engaging with youth Guidance and training for UN staff](#)
6. [Meaningful Youth Engagement in Policy and Decision-making Processes](#)
7. [UNIDO Guidebook for meaningful youth engagement](#)
8. [Climate change can have 'lifelong impacts' on young people's mental health, report says](#)
9. [Got Climate Anxiety? You're not alone.](#)
10. [Climate Anxiety: What to Do if You're Worried About Climate Change | AAP](#)
11. [Greta Thunberg on how to tackle climate anxiety](#)
12. [Why climate change is a code red for girls | Dr Faith Mwangi-Powell | TEDxLondonWomen](#)
13. [Report warns against the effects of climate anxiety in young people](#)
14. [Eco-anxiety on the rise in young people](#)
15. [A Gathering Storm | Plan International West and Central Africa](#)
16. [Why including youth in climate talks is 'non-negotiable'](#)
17. [TOWARDS A YOUTH ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY \(YES!\) CONSULTATION NOTE FOR A YOUTH ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY AT THE CLIMATE INVESTMENT FUNDS](#)
18. [Asia-Pacific Youth Advisory Group on Environmental and Climate Justice](#)
19. [UN- The Second Youth Advisory Group on Climate Change](#)
20. [Global Center of Adaptation - Youth Advisory Panel](#)
21. [Climate Centre launches Youth Advisory Group on Climate](#)

# Thank You!

