

EVIDENCE
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LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS ON YOUNG PEOPLE'S ENGAGEMENT IN CLIMATE CHANGE AND HEALTH IN SIX

KEY MESSAGES

- **The climate crisis represents a child rights crisis.** Today's children will bear the greatest burden of the climate crisis, especially young women, girls, the urban poor and marginalised young people.
- **Decision-makers at all levels have an obligation to uphold the rights of children,** including their right to be heard, and right to a healthy environment. As such, they should formally establish and support opportunities for children and youth to have a clear say in decisions affecting their future by being a part of decision-making processes. They should ensure administrative procedures and communication of policies are inclusive for all ages, abilities and backgrounds.
- **Young people are enthusiastic, active, important, and influential as agents of change in addressing the climate crisis and health impacts.** Despite their proven capabilities, their engagement is challenged by structural, organisational, and financial barriers, as well as unequal access to opportunities to exercise their power and agency.
- **Civil society actors play important roles in connecting the government with young people.** They must continue to increase efforts to work with young people to uphold civil society, public and private sectors accountable to climate action. They need to empower future generations to address climate and health issues.
- **National and international donors are key in ensuring young people are meaningfully engaged** in climate and health action in bringing their voice to policy and funding decision-making. Donors have the ability to enhance their level of engagement.



Save the Children

ABOUT THE STUDY

The climate crisis directly affects children and youth around the world and is the greatest threat to their survival, learning and protection. Young people are also active agents of change and have demonstrated the capacities and agency to advocate for and contribute to climate action and resilience-building. Yet, despite their proven capabilities, structural barriers and normative beliefs too often fail to recognise their rights and agency to participate beyond a tokenistic level.

The Climate Crisis

Our children warned us

But we didn't listen.

This study identifies, maps, and analyses actors, stakeholders and initiatives relevant to young people's engagement in climate action in six countries facing climate risks and public health challenges – Ethiopia, Kenya, Senegal, Bangladesh, Indonesia, and Vietnam. In each country context, the research investigates:

- How young people are currently engaging in climate change and health action.
- What factors enable or challenge key actors and stakeholders effectively engaging with young people
- The strengths and limitations of policy and governance mechanisms related to climate change, health and young people's engagement.

The research comprised a literature review, policy analysis, online survey, focus group discussions with young people aged 10-25 years, and key informant interviews with government agencies, academia, non-governmental and civil society organisations, private sector actors, and youth leaders in each country.

FINDINGS

- Young people are **active, important, and influential** in climate change and health. They bring **enthusiasm, fresh perspectives, and unique skills** such as the ability to adopt new technologies. Young people are also strong in **scaling-up awareness and advocacy** through extensive social networks, including reaching experts, local governments and traditionally excluded groups.
- Young people often engage in climate change, environmental protection, or health activities separately. There is limited engagement in the intersection between climate change and health.
- Young people's engagement in climate change and health takes three complementary forms:
 - **Led directly by young people**, such as activities, organisations/clubs, social enterprises, start-ups, businesses, event-based activism to hold governments and private sector accountable.
 - **Facilitated by non-state actors**, such as the UN, INGOs, NGOs, CSOs and private sector.
 - **Facilitated by the state** is less common, but includes policy consultation, governmental projects and state-sponsored youth groups.
- Young people's engagement in climate change and health focusses on:
 - **Awareness and advocacy** – they are teaching other young people and adults about environmental, climate and health issues through school-based activities, campaigns and trainings.
 - **Policy and decision making** – Young people are communicating their opinions to decision makers and participating in consultation and lobbying to inform policy processes.

Climate and health action – Young people are changing their behaviours and directly taking part in adaptation and mitigation efforts at personal, community, and higher levels.

- **Young people may not have equal access to opportunities and the space to practice their power and agency.** Factors influencing young people's inequitable access and opportunities for engagement include their language, school-going status, gender, economic background, age, ability, and geography.



- **Barriers to young people's engagement** in climate change and health include:
 - A lack of will, capacity and resources within organisations to engage young people, particularly in non-official languages and in a child-friendly, inclusive and accessible manner;
 - Social and cultural norms and perceptions among policy and decision-makers mean they may lack trust in young people or view young people as passive victims, therefore limiting their ability to listen and proactively or meaningfully engage;
 - A lack of recognition, investment in, and formal channels for young people to participate, combined with young people not having the legal status to fundraise and finance their climate change and health engagement activities.
- **Policies in all six countries give little attention to the links among health, climate change and young people's engagement.** Some policies factor in the health impacts of climate change on young people or mention the roles of young people in protecting the environment, but most still see young people as a vulnerable group in a changing climate. The policies provide little details as to how young people can act on climate and health issues.

“Young people are underestimated everywhere in policy making and in government budget. We are not being valued. Adults think that young people have no knowledge or experience of climate change.”

“So, socioeconomic status is a factor, living in a remote area is a factor, being woman is a factor, disability is a factor, indigenous is a factor.”

– Youth leader, YouthNet for Climate Justice, Bangladesh

WHAT DOES THIS RESEARCH MEAN FOR PRACTICE/POLICY?

Young people are undoubtedly shaping climate change and health action at different scales across the six countries, largely through advocacy by youth-led groups; action through social enterprises, start-ups, or business run by young people; event-based activism such as climate marches; and participating in policy processes as well as taking legal action on holding governments and private sectors accountable to climate action. The effective engagement of young people in grappling with the health impacts of climate change requires greater recognition and concerted efforts from public and private sector actors alike.

Recommendations for Civil Society Organisations

- **Advocate** for the links between climate change, health and sustainable development with young people to be reflected in regional and national policies.
- **Co-design** projects, **co-produce** knowledge, **invest** in and implement with youth-led organisations.
- Expand **working with young people** in raising awareness, changing behaviours and practices, and enabling transformative climate action.
- Lead on **capacity building** for young people's engagement in decision-making processes through identifying, nurturing & excelling talent for meaningful engagement.
- Research, **create networks, platforms and enabling environments** to share best practices on climate & health action and for young people's voices to be valued and translated into action.
- Build programmes with **tangible incentives and co-benefits** to attract attention and ensure **diversity and inclusion** (e.g. supporting sustainable social enterprises to build skills sharing and livelihoods).
- Prioritise the voice of **traditional knowledge holders, marginalised and discriminated** groups at all stages of climate and health action from policy to advocacy and project design and implementation.

Recommendations for Funders

- Support **connections between the climate change and public health sectors** to enhance young people's engagement.
- Identify and **scale-up** existing and emerging youth-led climate change & health initiatives, particularly those that are under-funded and do not already have state or other institutional support.
- Prioritise **support for marginalised and discriminated** groups and communities that face health- and climate-related challenges.
- Prioritise **innovative and inclusive approaches** to engaging young people (e.g. social media and emerging information and communication technologies), including investments in youth-led social ventures/enterprises.
- Support **long-term partnerships** between established organisations and emerging youth-led networks, to build new capacities and identify solutions rooted in local ownership.
- Create more **accessibility for youth-led groups** to thrive by removing barriers to entry (e.g. application processes, financial requirements, and limited capacities and networks).

Recommendations for Decision-makers

- **Ensure inclusive and accessible policy processes**, procedures and communication (e.g. simplifying administrative requirements to access resources or establish a youth-led entity).
- **Mainstream engagement with young people** (e.g. mandated consultations and institutionalised youth constituencies in government agencies).
- Invest in **capacity building** at all levels (e.g. to engage with young people and to use social media).
- Allocate **sufficient and sustained financial resources** for engagement with young people.
- **Integrate knowledge** on the health dimensions of climate change into formal education curricula.

MORE INFORMATION



This study was conducted by the Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI) and Save the Children International (SCI), with financial support from Wellcome.

This Evidence to Action Brief provides a summary of the [full report](#) for policy and practice professionals.

Boyland, M., Tran, M., Kwamboka, E., Njoroge G. K., Schymanski, R. A. R. (2021). Landscape analysis on young people's engagement in climate change and health in six LMICs in Africa and Asia.

Wellcome, Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI), and Save the Children International (SCI). London, UK.

Additional resources

Noor, H. and O'Connor, N. (29 July 2020), "Our children warned us but we didn't listen", Save the Children blog, <https://www.savethechildren.net/blog/our-children-warned-us-we-didnt-listen>.



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