

INTRODUCTION

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Why “youth and climate change” now?

Climate change is one of the defining challenges of the twenty-first century. It is a challenge that is global in both its impact and its solutions but one that is not shared equally, as developing countries are likely to be among the most seriously affected by and the least able to address the consequences of climate change. Climate change touches every aspect of life and impinges on development efforts, with consequences ranging from immediate to long term. Major adjustments are required to promote more sustainable patterns of production and consumption at both the collective and individual levels. Solid evidence exists that climate change will have a more serious impact than initially anticipated and that adaptation and mitigation will entail significantly higher costs if action is deferred than if the problem is addressed now.

Addressing and adjusting to the challenge of climate change is certain to be a defining feature of the future of today's youth. It is therefore critical that young people educate themselves and become more actively involved in combating this threat. The present *Report* is designed to assist youth and youth organizations in such an endeavour. It is also meant to affirm the status of young people as key stakeholders in the fight against climate change. The publication comes at a time when efforts to address climate change are receiving unparalleled attention in the international arena, offering youth a unique opportunity for their voice to be heard in the debate.

Youth have long been involved in environmental protection activities at the school and community levels, but the time has come for them to participate more actively in shaping global decisions relating to climate change. Young people must contribute to the process of addressing this critical challenge, as they will feel its impact most acutely throughout their lives.

Young advocates for the environment are becoming more insistent that their voices be heard. In recent years, youth have been recognized as a constituency, albeit with probationary status, at the annual sessions of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the world's most important inter-governmental forum dealing with international efforts and commitments to combat climate change. Young people must continue to move forward, strengthening their position until they occupy a secure place in the decision-making process. To that end, the current *World Youth Report* provides an assessment of youth participation today and identifies steps that can be taken at the local and international levels to facilitate wider and more effective participation among youth in addressing climate change.

Overview of the Report

Chapter I provides basic information on climate change as well as an overview of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and its Kyoto Protocol, the relevant international legal and policy framework recognized by most countries. The chapter concludes with a brief outline of the aims of the upcoming United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, Rio +20.

Chapter II focuses on the consequences of climate change, exploring how the threat it poses to health and safety, food security, and livelihood sustainability may directly affect youth development in developing countries. The chapter also addresses the possibility of ensuing tensions and conflicts over the control of basic natural resources and livelihood opportunities—and their potential outcomes, including migration.

In chapters III and IV, the focus shifts from how young people are likely to be affected by climate change to how they can contribute to remedying the situation. Chapter III identifies trends in young people's consumption behaviours and lifestyles. Youth, especially those in developed countries, constitute a critical mass of present and future consumers, and their consumption decisions could become a key factor in reducing or aggravating climate change and its consequences.

An overwhelming majority of youth indicate that world leaders should do all they can to stop climate change, but do young people take their own responsibilities in this context just as seriously? Education has been identified as a crucial tool in raising environmental awareness and promoting behaviour change among youth. Chapter III highlights education for sustainable development and the role of education in preparing young people to take advantage of "green" job opportunities. It also includes brief mention of additional measures that might be taken to promote green employment options for youth.

Chapter IV showcases existing youth mobilization efforts and initiatives to combat climate change. Youth-led environmental organizations constitute a highly successful model of self-mobilization among young people, and such bodies are likely to play a critical role in tackling climate change challenges. The chapter concludes with an assessment of where youth currently stand in terms of involvement, celebrating recent political developments acknowledging young people as legitimate stakeholders in intergovernmental negotiations on climate change but also identifying barriers to effective youth participation.

The first three chapters end with a short annotated list of references for readers interested in more in-depth information on climate change.

Ultimately, the present *World Youth Report* is intended to highlight the important role played by youth in addressing climate change and to offer suggestions on how young people might be more effectively integrated as individual and collective agents of change within the realm of climate change adaptation and mitigation.

