

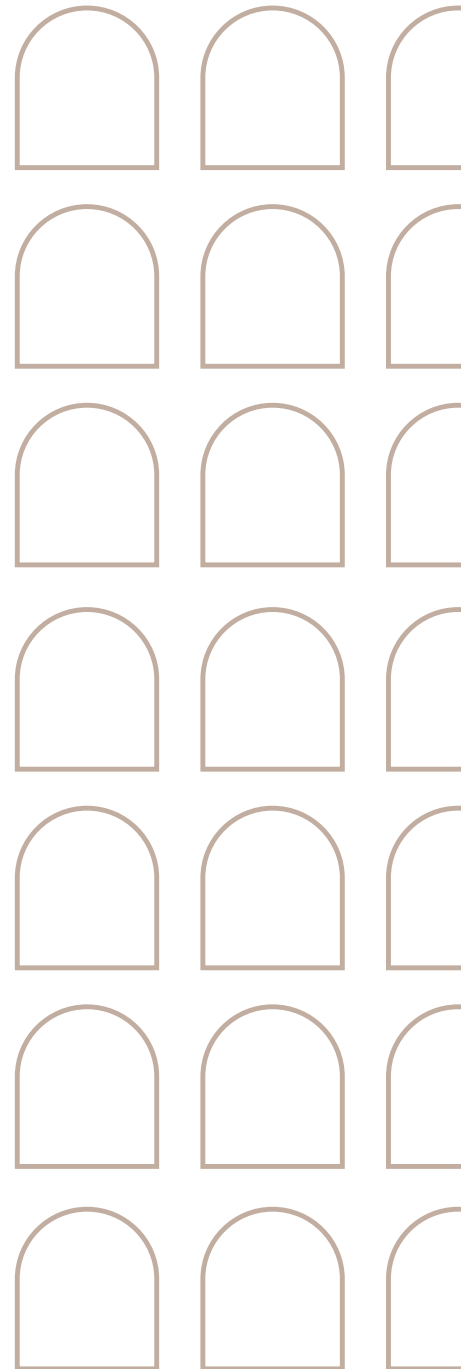
STG Policy Papers

POLICY BRIEF

WHO'S MISSING FROM CLIMATE GOVERNANCE? GLOBAL SOUTH YOUTH PARTICIPATION AND MOBILISATION

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since the Fridays for Future movement, media coverage of Youth environmental leaders has been on the rise. However, the work of young environmentalists beyond the EU often does not receive the same attention despite its significant impact in tackling issues like the climate crisis. The brief covers two broad areas, namely: (1) common barriers to Transnational Youth Participation and Mobilisation; and (2) potential solutions to overcome these barriers. This policy brief consolidates the insights and recommendations collated in a high-level policy dialogue with Young Environmental leaders from the Global South, which took place in April 2021 at the European University Institute, Florence (co-organised by the EUI's School of Transnational Governance and Department of Law). Recommendations focus on the need to elevate the voices of groups that are most affected by climate change, and in particular to address structural inequalities that prevent the participation of young environmental leaders from the Global South in decision making.

Authors and acknowledgements:

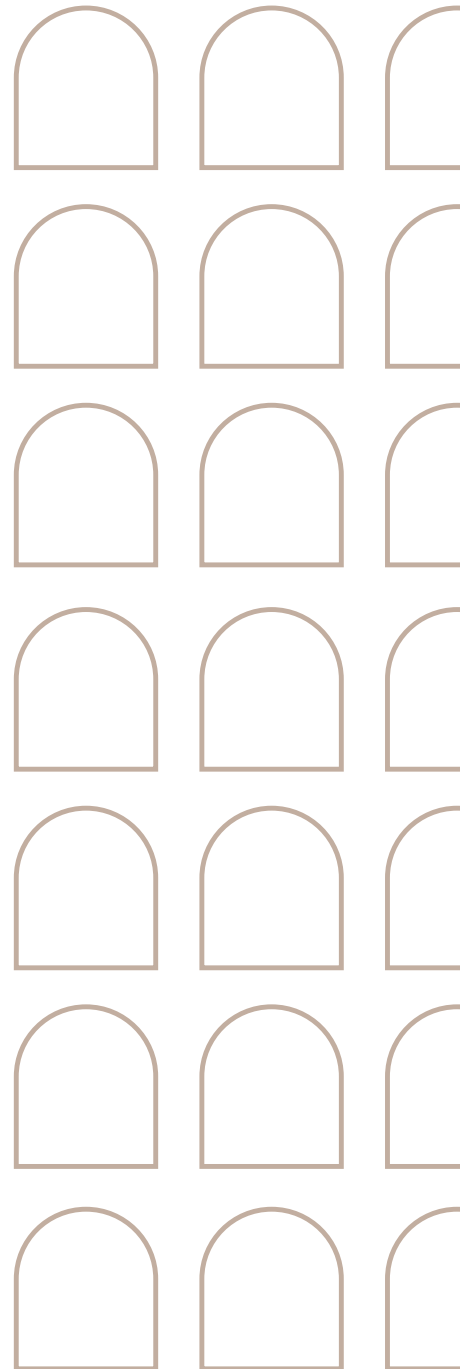
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¹ In hope of setting a precedent and as an acknowledgement of the need to forefront the voices of young people in policy debates on the role of Youth in climate decision making, all authors and contributors to this policy brief were under the age of 35 at the time of publication.



1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the transnational mobilisation of activists fighting for climate justice¹ has gained significant ground. Those at the forefront of these movements are young people, who, as the group who will be most impacted by climate change, hold a unique claim on the future. However, despite [50% of the global population being under the age of 30](#), young environmental leaders continue to be marginalised from decision making processes. In particular, young people in the Global South, who are and will be disproportionately affected by the climate crisis,² are often structurally excluded from the global dialogue and policy making on climate action.

This policy brief consolidates insights and recommendations from young environmental leaders in the Global South following a high-level policy dialogue held in April 2021 at the European University Institute, Florence. The brief recounts key barriers to participation and mobilisation for climate action as identified by the young Global South environmental leaders, including: oppression or fear; lack of inclusivity and lack of climate education. The brief makes recommendations informed by the experience of these young leaders to address these impediments, including identifying and recognising barriers, institutionalising Youth participation through affirmative action and providing support to help network-building.

2. BARRIERS TO TRANSNATIONAL YOUTH PARTICIPATION AND MOBILISATION

A number of key barriers are encountered by Global South environmental leaders when trying to participate in climate action in their respective geographical regions.

2.1 Oppression or Fear

Oppression or fear was highlighted as a reason why Youth were not willing to mobilise and partake in climate action. Governments were seen to be: (1) limiting freedom of speech;

and (2) arresting protestors or resisters. As a result, young people feel unsafe or unable to partake in climate protests, such as those seen in [Fridays for Future](#), or raise their voice in opposition to their Government's actions (or lack thereof). Concerns were also raised that governments were not integrating young people's concerns fully into their projects and agendas. For example, the lack of Youth input into the trajectory and direction of so-called 'development projects' was highlighted as particularly concerning, as remaining participatory channels, such as protests, may put Youth a risk of police violence, harassment and targeting. This fear and oppression can also cause the knock-on effect of causing Youth disengagement with issues such as climate change, as they feel hopeless in the face of such issues where there is no safe or democratic way to engage in dialogue with policy makers.

2.2 Lack of Inclusivity

A lack of inclusivity was identified as a general barrier to Youth participation and mobilisation in climate action, particularly for Youth from the Global South or with marginalised identities. Where efforts to include young people in consultations and decision making processes for climate policy did exist, they were often reported to be 'tokenistic', failing to recognise young people's meaningful role or respect their voices.

A need for language inclusivity was highlighted as particularly essential in the case of indigenous communities. However, the inclusion (or lack thereof) of intersecting identities were also highlighted as a being barrier to Youth engagement and mobilisation in climate action. LGBTIQ+ representation, gender balance, religious diversity, spiritual and cultural differences, linguistics, indigenous communities and other socio-economic differences like health and education, economic inequality were highlighted as being barriers to participation if not properly accounted for by policymakers in climate decision making.

¹ Climate justice requires that climate action is consistent with existing human rights agreements, obligations, standards and principles. Those who have contributed the least to climate change unjustly and disproportionately suffer its harms. They must be meaningful participants in and primary beneficiaries of climate action, and they must have access to effective remedies. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 'Understanding Human Rights and Climate Change' (2015) <<https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/ClimateChange/COP21.pdf>> accessed 29 August 2021.

² David Eckstein and others, *Global Climate Risk Index 2021 Who Suffers Most Extreme Weather Events? Weather-Related Loss Events in 2019 and 2000-2019* (2021).

National narratives against these communities were emphasised as not being unique to environmental issues, and general lack of representation and consultation in society was again highlighted as a consistent barrier to Youth in many social matters.

2.3 Lack of Climate Education

A lack of appropriate climate education was also highlighted as a barrier for Youth participation in climate matters. A number of factors underlying this lack of education among young people were identified including: (1) Government control of national media; (2) apoliticality among Youth; and (3) a lack of resources, such as digital resources, to access accurate information among those most marginalised. Where the media is controlled by government powers, Youth are not able to access accurate information about their governments' actions or about the scale or type of environmental issues in their country. Moreover, accessing media beyond censorship, places Youth in a precarious situation – either leading to Youth disengagement or penalisation. Youth apoliticality can be a result of this aforementioned fear of prosecution, but also for more general reasons, such as disinterest (perhaps resulting in a lack of knowledge on the subject matter, either due to media censorship or inadequate education). Lastly, a lack of resources, and particularly digital resources, was highlighted as another driver of a lack of education on environmental and climate matters. When rural or marginalised communities are unable to access information on an issue, such as climate change, or are not digitally literate, they are unable to challenge or engage with the issue – thus leading to the exclusion of important voices from any consultative process.

3. POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS TO OVERCOME THESE BARRIERS

The Young environmental leaders in the high-level dialogue are all experienced in developing climate actions, whether it be through transnational networks, grassroots work, community organising, or high-level policy making at the national, regional or UN

level. From their experience, a number of key solutions can be delineated that may assist in overcoming these aforementioned barriers to Youth climate participation and mobilisation.

3.1. Identifying Structural Barriers

As a first step to improve Youth climate participation in climate decision making, young environmental leaders stressed the importance of identifying structural barriers that restrict or prevent their participation. Many of these structural barriers stem from oppression, lack of inclusivity or lack of climate literacy as discussed in section two. To tackle these structural barriers effectively and sustainably, young environmental leaders emphasised the need for policy makers to adopt an intersectional approach. That is, the need for policy makers and institutions to actively consider the complex nature of diversity, how issues and oppressions are often overlapping, and what this complexity and interconnectedness means in reality for different Youth communities. By building an understanding of how multiple oppressions intersect, structural barriers can be identified and informed mechanisms can be formulated for more inclusive, intergenerational, and sustainable decision making.

3.2 Network Building

The importance of building networks and creating large platforms to share experiences and exchange ideas was highlighted as particularly important for young people to participate and mobilise in climate action. Building these networks was seen to:

- help build skills;
- support and make connections between a diverse variety of young people;
- offer opportunities for educating and collaborating - even during a pandemic if online resources can be utilised;
- motivate and empower young people to care about environmental issues, through engaging and entertaining content, events and social media;

- create official platforms to use in intergenerational dialogues and policy making processes; and
- facilitate online or social media campaigns, as a solution for Youth not being able to participate in in-person protests or action due to fear of persecution.

Many of the leaders highlighted the confidence-building role their networks had in their climate activism and advocacy. Within these networks, the need for creating safe and inclusive spaces for marginalised identities was also highlighted as essential by the young environmental leaders. If this is achieved, transnational networks provide a prime opportunity for learning and representation that can be utilised by the Youth themselves, or by policy makers who seek to engage with Youth in consultative or deliberative dialogues.

3.3. Institutionalising Youth Participation in Law

While networking amongst Youth can provide tools to navigate these challenges, young environmental leaders particularly emphasised the beneficial role that enshrining Youth participation in law would have on fully integrating Youth interests in environmental decision making. Affirmative action measures were highlighted as a useful tool to ensure this participation is institutionalised, including:

- right to freedom of speech;
- rights for protestors and environmental defenders;
- voting rights for young people
- quotas for young people (and other marginalised identities, such as women or indigenous communities) in decision making;
- adequate impact assessment, consultation and dissemination strategies.
- funding for Youth environmental initiatives; and
- increasing the number of Young people in political arenas or positions.

Concerns were generally raised about the ‘tokenism’ of Youth in decision making, and a need for this to be avoided at all costs through meaningful affirmative action. Moreover, barriers to involvement with the aforementioned affirmative actions were also highlighted. For example, activists are concerned Youth may not want to enter potentially corrupt or uninterested government positions. Young people may find additional barriers to participation in political arenas due to other aspects of their identity, which are inseparable and intersecting. For example, a young woman’s capacity to amplify the voices of Youth in the political sphere may be restricted in the event of facing sexism and discrimination in the workplace. Moreover, financial resources are often required to become involved in politics. For example, running for a political position often requires a financial down payment, and young people may not have access to the financial resources of their older peers due to intergenerational financial inequality and issues like disproportionate youth unemployment. As a result, any affirmative action should take into consideration these concerns and be implemented after a full consultation process to ensure maximum recognition and accounting for potential barriers to their meaningful success.

Again, many of these barriers are present and crosscutting in contexts beyond the climate Youth movement. Improvements in inclusivity were emphasised as important across all socio-economic or environmental issues, whether it be for marginalised identities (such as indigenous communities) or for Youth who come from territories whose national sovereignty has not been recognised (such as Taiwan).

4. CONCLUSION

Young people are currently underrepresented in climate decision making, and when participation is ensured, it is often tokenistic. When talking about the participation of young people, it must be recognised that even the climate movement is ridden with inequalities, particularly to the detriment of Youth in the Global South. Unfortunately, climate decision making is often top-down, institutionalised

Figure 1: Recommendations from the Policy Brief



and led by adults, despite narratives that often label young people as ‘the future’ — like future policy makers or future leaders. This Policy Brief attempted to engage in a dialogue with young people to share the issues and solutions surrounding Youth participation and mobilisation in climate action from their perspectives. Oppression or fear, lack of inclusivity, and lack of climate education were highlighted as key barriers for Young people having their voices heard in decisions regarding climate and the environment. Potential solutions included identifying structural barriers to participation, building transnational networks among Youth, and institutionalising Youth participation in decision making through affirmative action measures.

Should policy making fail to address the barriers explored, young people’s capacity to take their rightful seat at the table will continue to be limited. Through some of the recommendations outlined in this Policy Brief, the meaningful participation of Global South Youth in climate decision making can inevitably bring us closer to more sustainable and inclusive futures.

The School of Transnational Governance (STG) delivers teaching and high-level training in the methods, knowledge, skills and practice of governance beyond the State. Based within the European University Institute (EUI) in Florence, the School brings the worlds of academia and policy-making together in an effort to navigate a context, both inside and outside Europe, where policy-making increasingly transcends national borders.

The School offers Executive Training Seminars for experienced professionals and a Policy Leaders Fellowship for early- and mid-career innovators. The School also hosts expert Policy Dialogues and distinguished lectures from transnational leaders (to include the STG's Leaders Beyond the State series which recorded the experiences of former European Institution presidents, and the Giorgio La Pira Lecture series which focuses on building bridges between Africa and Europe). In September 2020, the School launched its Master-of-Arts in Transnational Governance (MTnG), which will educate and train a new breed of policy leader able to navigate the unprecedented issues our world will face during the next decade and beyond.

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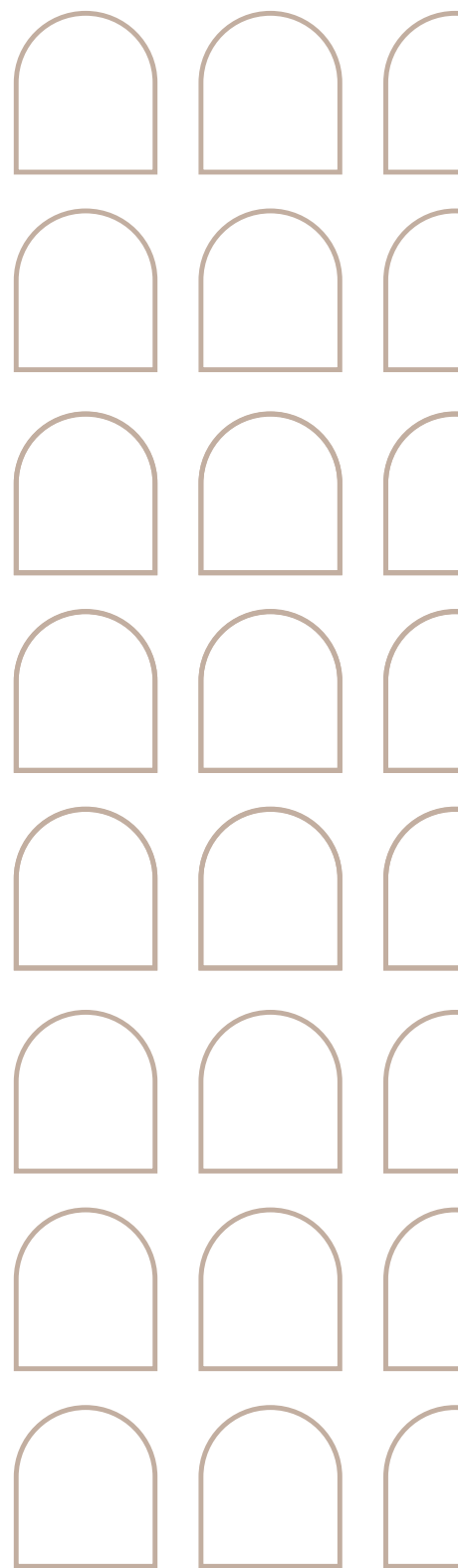
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