

**REIMAGINING
CLIMATE EDUCATION
AND YOUTH LEADERSHIP:
ADVOCACY BRIEF**

July 2021

A young girl is living in a temporary shelter (Guatemala).

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This advocacy brief presents the key findings and recommendations from a recent online survey undertaken by Plan International to hear young people's experiences of and recommendations for improving climate education and participation in climate processes. Over 1,800 adolescents and youth between the ages of 15 to 24, from 37 countries, responded to the survey and two advocacy workshops were held to share ideas for recommendations. More details on the methodology and survey findings are reported in the full report: [Reimagining Climate Education and Youth Leadership: Survey Report](#)



REIMAGINING CLIMATE EDUCATION AND YOUTH LEADERSHIP

The world is at a critical cross-roads. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed gross inequalities in and between countries and revealed just how fragile the societies we live in are: laying bare the vulnerability of the natural world and the delicate balance between human activity and the environment we depend upon. The climate crisis, sidelined during the pandemic, will continue to exacerbate these vulnerabilities far into the future, unless urgent, bold action is taken now.

For girls, the pandemic, particularly lockdown and school closures, has hit particularly hard. Over 20 million secondary school aged girls may never return to school,ⁱ and estimates also suggest that, in 2021 alone, climate-related events will prevent at least four million girls in low and lower-middle-income countries from completing their education.ⁱⁱ If current trends continue, by 2025, climate change will be a contributing factor in preventing at least 12.5 million girls each year from completing their education.ⁱⁱⁱ This will further entrench gender gaps in education and undermine girls' ability to adapt to climate impacts: preventing them from gaining the necessary knowledge and skills for climate activism and future secure livelihoods.



A youth advocate demands politicians include girls and young women in climate action (Spain).

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The climate crisis, biodiversity loss and overexploitation of natural resources has the potential to not only trigger further zoonotic disease transfer, but also to cause future large-scale disruption to education across every country. It poses the greatest threat to the achievement of the sustainable development goals (SDGs) and gender equality. And, as with COVID-19, it is the world's most marginalised, many of whom are girls and young women, who will suffer the most.

Quality of learning is fundamental to girls' ability to navigate and respond to the climate crisis. In most schools today, students are taught from an outdated curriculum that is the product of a patriarchal and imperialist system. This mode of thinking perpetuates a culture of oppression and dominance over people and planet, undermining climate action and the care and regeneration needed to live in harmony with nature. It also tends to reinforce gender stereotypes and dictate future career paths for girls and boys. Girls are often discouraged from pursuing STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering and mathematics), economics and politics. This limits their potential for civic engagement and leadership in a greener economy and climate diplomacy roles: in the renewable energy industry women make up just 20-25 per cent of the workforce^{iv} and in climate diplomacy, in the year the Paris Agreement was finalised, only 35 per cent of national delegates were women.^v

Gender transformative education is key to advancing climate and gender justice. It can equip girls with the skills and knowledge needed to tackle the climate crisis, claim and exercise their rights, and empower them to be leaders and decision-makers: challenging the systems and norms which reinforce gender and climate injustice around the world. Research shows that every additional year of schooling for girls leads to significant improvements in a country's resilience to climate-related disasters.^{vi}

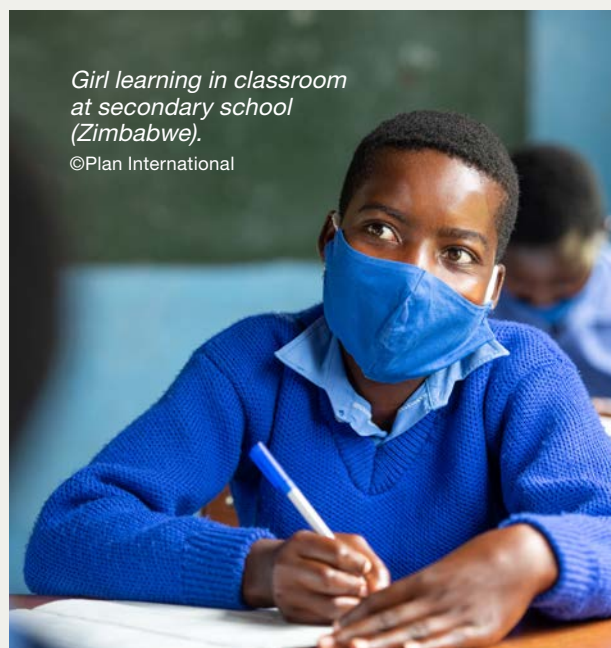
With so much at stake for people and planet, we must take steps to realise the transformative power of education – creating a force that has the power to advance gender, racial, intergenerational and climate justice for a more equal, peaceful, and sustainable world, built on care and regeneration not profit. This will be the key tool in dismantling systems of oppression and domination: ensuring that humanity can co-exist with nature and limiting the damage increasingly and unsustainably being inflicted on the natural environment.

The time is now. COVID-19 has highlighted the need to question outdated, traditional modes of thinking in order to adapt to an increasingly uncertain world – one which desperately requires concrete commitments to gender and climate justice. Education policy makers must recognise the importance of climate education and resilience, and the central role of girls' leadership prioritised alongside the basic skills of literacy and numeracy. We must all work harder to challenge the way that climate change is taught in schools.

The high-level international policy processes throughout 2021 provide an opportunity to set an ambitious, transformative climate and education agenda that galvanises the international community to prioritise and invest in our children's future. Governments and donors must take action to fund gender transformative education that places climate justice, sustainable development, human rights and gender equality at its centre, in line with SDG 4.7.

The UK government is playing a particularly influential role as the host of the 2021 G7 Summit, the Global Education Summit: Financing Global Partnership for Education (GPE) 2021-2025, and COP26 climate conference, all of which are key moments to advance and deliver on gender transformative climate education. It is vital that girls are supported to engage throughout these processes in order to share their recommendations on policy commitments directly affecting them.

The outcomes from these three processes should create the enhanced political and financial environment for gender transformative climate education, through a fully funded Global



Girl learning in classroom at secondary school (Zimbabwe).

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Partnership for Education that includes targeted policy commitments, and effective implementation of the G7 Girls' Education Declaration. COP26 provides a further opportunity through the review and enhancement of the Doha Work Programme on Action for Climate Empowerment (ACE), which must be more progressive, and responsive to the rallying cries from young people demanding climate education and meaningful inclusion in climate decision making. Commitments must be supported by concrete action, scaled up over the next five years and include clear accountability mechanisms. Unless governments step up this year to recognise the transformative power of education, a key opportunity to dismantle oppressive systems and chart the world on course to the 1.5 degree Celsius target will be missed.

The recent online survey^{vii} undertaken by Plan International, to hear young people's experiences of and recommendations for improving climate education and participation in climate processes, highlights significant gaps and challenges. Over 1,800 adolescents and youth between the ages of 15 to 24, from 37 countries, responded to the survey and two advocacy workshops were held to share ideas for recommendations. More details on the methodology and survey findings are reported in the full report.^{viii} The findings come at a key moment to influence milestone events and contribute to decisions about current and additional climate and education financing.

This advocacy brief presents the key survey findings and proposes policy recommendations, with clear practical steps, based on the insights and ideas from adolescents and youth participating in the survey and developed with young people's input.

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE GLOBAL SURVEY

All young people deserve the opportunity to learn about a global crisis impacting their lives and futures, yet current education systems are failing them: for reasons ranging from a lack of contextualised information, to teachers not believing in climate change, to receiving no information on the key global climate framework and target.

ONE IN FIVE YOUNG PEOPLE SURVEYED RATED THEIR CLIMATE EDUCATION AS POOR OR VERY POOR.

OF THE SURVEY PARTICIPANTS, 81 PER CENT DID NOT KNOW WHERE TO FIND INFORMATION ON THE PARIS AGREEMENT.

Climate change is a justice issue: those who have contributed the least to the problem (children in lower income countries) are bearing the brunt of the impacts, while the richest people in countries historically responsible for the crisis are less exposed to impacts, and/or have the resources to cope with them. Yet young people reported that their climate education did not focus on local solutions relevant to their local contexts and cultures but perpetuated western values, ideas and solutions not applicable or replicable in their environments: missing the opportunity to improve their adaptive capacity and identify youth-led solutions.

How can today's children and youth be expected to shoulder the burden of the climate crisis and find future solutions to extreme impacts, when they are not being provided with the knowledge and skills required to do this through formal education? It is their future that is being stolen from them and their rights most at risk, yet the vast majority of young people surveyed testified that it was too difficult for them to participate in climate decision making processes.

EIGHT OUT OF TEN YOUNG PEOPLE WANTED TO PARTICIPATE IN CLIMATE POLICY PROCESSES BUT **LESS THAN ONE OUT OF TEN** HAD DONE SO.

There were numerous barriers identified restricting their participation.

THE MAJORITY, 91 PER CENT, OF ADOLESCENTS AND YOUTH SAID THAT IT WAS DIFFICULT FOR THEM TO PARTICIPATE IN CLIMATE CHANGE POLICY DECISION MAKING PROCESSES. NOT HAVING BEEN INVITED TO PARTICIPATE OR NOT KNOWING WHERE TO FIND INFORMATION ON HOW TO PARTICIPATE WERE KEY BARRIERS.

ONLY 5 PER CENT KNEW HOW TO ENGAGE IN THE NEGOTIATIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PARIS AGREEMENT.

These barriers and challenges are particularly acute for girls and young women due to discriminatory gender and social norms. The issue of climate injustice is even more apparent where gender and age intersect resulting in increased vulnerabilities with few resources to cope, despite minimal contribution to the climate crisis.

“ False information coming from the teacher. ”

NON-BINARY YOUTH, 17-18, BRAZIL

“ Most of my school teachers don't even believe in climate change. ”

GIRL, 15-16, AUSTRALIA

“ Not enough focus on action, just science. ”

YOUNG WOMAN, 23-24, UK

“ There is no attempt on making it important, the curriculum doesn't trigger the student to take action. I received more information by following NGOs online by website or social media accounts. ”

YOUNG WOMAN, 19-20, INDONESIA

“ Also, [a barrier to my participation in formal climate policy processes is] that I am pregnant and I have a little girl. ”

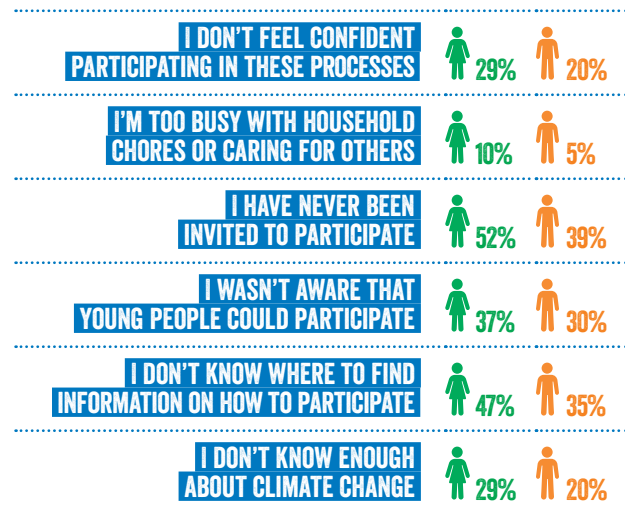
YOUNG WOMAN, 19-20, ECUADOR

ONLY **16 PER CENT** OF RESPONDENTS HAD LEARNED ABOUT THE GENDERED IMPACTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE.

GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN (**83 PER CENT**) WERE MORE LIKELY TO SAY THAT THEY KNEW NOTHING, VERY LITTLE OR ONLY A BIT ABOUT CLIMATE POLICY PROCESSES THAN BOYS AND YOUNG MEN (**78 PER CENT**).

More girls and young women (92 per cent) than boys and young men (87 per cent) said that barriers made it difficult for them to participate in climate policy processes.

Among others, girls and young women were more likely than boys and young men, to select the following barriers:



RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to galvanise international action towards gender transformative education for climate justice at milestone events in 2021, **governments** must:

1

Urgently scale up funding for gender transformative climate education, through:

- a fully funded GPE and targeted policy commitments from GPE donor governments and developing country partners
- a fully funded Green Climate Fund of \$100billion/year, with 50 per cent towards adaptation. Funding must be allocated to transforming the education system to support adaptive capacities and pro-environmental behaviours
- honouring the Generation Equality Forum commitments on financing of gender- just climate solutions, gender transformative education and building girls' and women's resilience.

2

Resource and fund the implementation of the G7 Girls' Education Declaration with effective accountability mechanisms and particular attention to political commitments to climate education.

3

Push for an enhanced Doha Work Programme on Action for Climate Empowerment that is gender transformative, through:

- recognising the disproportionate impact of climate change on girls' education with key actions to support girls' access to quality education
- recognising the power of gender transformative education as a key pathway to climate justice
- taking a holistic view of climate education that includes civic engagement, green skills, rights, life skills, policy processes and activism
- recognising the additional barriers to girls' engagement in climate policy processes, with key actions to support their engagement.

THEIR THOUGHTS, THEIR FUTURE

The section that follows has been developed directly from the ideas and opinions of the survey participants and the young people who contributed to the workshops set up to develop recommendations for this report. It reflects their experience of climate change education and participation and offers a step-by-step plan for the progressive reforms needed to:

01 DRIVE SUSTAINABLE AND PRO-ENVIRONMENTAL BEHAVIOURS

02 ADVANCE CLIMATE JUSTICE

03 ENABLE YOUNG PEOPLE TO ADAPT TO A CHANGING CLIMATE AND PARTICIPATE IN CLIMATE POLICY PROCESSES

01 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CLIMATE EDUCATION

Creating and supporting an enabling environment is key to climate education. This is primarily the responsibility of **national governments and the Ministries of Education, Environment and Finance**.

We ask them to work together to:

- Include transformative education in all national climate strategies (e.g. Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), National Adaptation Plans (NAPs), ACE enhancement and implementation).
- Sign the Declaration on Children, Youth and Climate Action.^{ix}
- Fully implement the Berlin Declaration on Education for Sustainable Development.^x
- Increase funding focused on resilience strengthening and girls' access to education in most climate exposed countries.
- Increase funding to transform curricula content, curricula delivery and teacher training to support climate justice and pro-environmental behaviours.
- Develop education sector plans that are gender responsive and prioritise resilience, climate change adaptation and mitigation and sustainable development in line with SDG target 4.7.

IT IS IMPERATIVE THAT A TRANSFORMATIVE CLIMATE CURRICULUM AND TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAMME IS CO-DEVELOPED WITH YOUNG PEOPLE, TEACHERS, SCHOOL STAFF AND CLIMATE EXPERTS, THROUGHOUT ALL STAGES OF THE PROCESS INCLUDING DESIGN, DELIVERY AND MONITORING.



A girl holds a 'Climate is changing, why aren't we?' sign at climate strike action in Melbourne, Australia.

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The detailed recommendations below set out incremental steps for policymakers and practitioners in Ministries of Education working with Ministries of Environment, climate specialists, young people, civil society, NGOs and UN agencies: including those directly involved in the planning and delivery of formal and non-formal education, from pre-primary through to higher education.



STEPS TOWARDS IMPROVING THE CURRICULUM

Ministries of Education together with Ministries of Environment, with inputs from climate specialists, young people, civil society, NGOs and UN agencies should:

Mandate, within current curricula, climate change education that is evidence-based, contextually relevant, gender responsive and inclusive, and includes indigenous knowledge and rights.

Build on existing climate education around climate science and impacts, and expand it, in line with Sustainable Development Goal target 4.7, to include social/justice dimensions, sustainable development and human rights framing. This includes:

- examining the broader social and political dimensions of the climate crisis and striking the right balance between promoting individual actions, which disproportionately burden individuals, and a whole society approach
- teaching about climate policy processes at all levels: including the different policies that exist, how to engage in decision making processes, developing relevant skills, and how to hold decision makers to account
- incorporating green skills and learning in a variety of subjects, beyond geography and science, such as history, politics, psychology, mathematics, languages, biology
- adapting and translating climate information to local contexts and languages and different population groups: involving real life stories and examples that are locally relevant and include indigenous knowledge.

Take a gender transformative approach to curriculum reform that can change norms and attitudes and build the skills necessary to shift the way we think about others and the world around us. This includes:

- knowledge and skills development to support confidence building, critical thinking, data analysis, negotiation/ debating, creativity, systems thinking, activism,^{xi} leadership and civic education and drive sustainable and pro-environmental behaviours, guided by the green learning agenda^{xii}
- a holistic systems approach to curriculum reform that tackles intersecting societal injustices and oppressive systems and encourage care and regeneration values and behaviours.



A young girl has to walk for three hours a day to collect water (Mozambique).
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“ I think it would be so important to include the justice side of things. And really have [climate education] in history and social sciences and all these other subjects where it's so relevant and also to make it a bit more interesting to students. ”

YOUTH WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT

“ It's important that within education systems we are developing young people to be researchers and solution finders. ”

YOUTH WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT



STEPS TOWARDS IMPROVING CURRICULA DELIVERY AND PEDAGOGY

Ministries of Education together with Ministries of Environment, and in consultation with climate specialists, young people, civil society, NGOs and UN agencies should:

Ensure all climate information being taught in schools is from **reliable, reputable sources**, based on the best available science.

Connect schools to local universities researching climate change and enable exchanges of knowledge, information, and skills including through placements and researchers giving talks in schools.

Encourage teachers and local departments of education to regularly check and update climate information and data.

Prioritise students' wellbeing through acting with empathy, creating safe spaces to talk about feelings and potential climate anxiety and connect young people to support services.

Support curiosity and critical thinking on climate change including through strengthening and empowering the teacher-student-parent relationship.

Provide information through different platforms and methods most accessible to young people in the local context: for example, social media, toolkits from NGOs, games, youth clubs.

Connect students to government-led initiatives that have active youth participation and capacity and knowledge building opportunities on climate action.

Provide financial support for youth-led organisations to work in and with schools on climate change and provide links to local youth groups working on climate change.

Support the development of climate change activism and organisation through extra-curricular activities.

Support schools in procuring resources needed to develop transformative green skills, such as internet access, laptops/ computers, school books.

Promote action-oriented learning in schools to support pro-environmental behaviours: for example, writing letters to government, growing a vegetable garden, holding debates.

“ We have been given some talks (few) at school, but they always say the same thing. ”

**YOUTH WORKSHOP
PARTICIPANT**

A young woman on her way to collect water in a region which has been hard hit by the El Nino-induced drought (Ethiopia).

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STEPS TOWARDS IMPROVING TEACHER TRAINING

Ministries of Education together with Ministries of Environment, in consultation with climate specialists, young people, civil society, NGOs and UN agencies should:

Mandate comprehensive climate change modules in all current teacher training courses.

Support teachers in accessing up to date, reliable climate data and facts, based on best available science, to support their teaching.

Provide stipends/funds for teachers to go to climate conferences.

Mainstream gender-responsive and learner-centred pedagogy in initial and ongoing professional development programmes for teachers, to support effective delivery of a transformative climate curriculum and improve young people's participation and engagement.

A young woman relies on a successful maize harvest to survive but drought, and delayed, erratic rainfall have caused harvests to fail for the last three years (Zambia).

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02 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN CLIMATE PROCESSES

The recommendations below, based on young people's feedback, are for Ministries of Environment, Finance and Education, working together with UN agencies, CSOs, young people, climate specialists and other relevant actors.

They are structured around increasingly progressive actions, to improve young people's participation in climate policy processes and centred on three key areas:

- access to information on climate policy processes
- opportunities and resources
- reducing the gender divide



STEPS TOWARDS IMPROVING ACCESS TO INFORMATION ON CLIMATE POLICY PROCESSES

Provide a database of and signpost to information and resources on climate policies and engagement opportunities.

Share key climate information and opportunities to engage in processes *on platforms most accessible to young people*, primarily social media. This information should be fun, engaging, locally relevant, and use gender and age responsive language. It should also be shared regularly to maintain interest, with old posts available in archived areas to maintain access.

Provide simplified information about key climate policies and frameworks, that can be easily translated and understood by different people. This information should be accessible in child and youth friendly language and formats. At a minimum the following should be available and translated to local languages:

- Paris Agreement and all articles
- Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) and other national climate strategies
- Escazú Agreement^{xiii}
- texts for negotiations
- Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reports

UNFCCC and host governments should **make the application processes for conferences much simpler**:

- Young people and youth organisations need a simplified application process and should not be required to submit complicated company registration details which limits them, especially those not affiliated to a company, from attending.
- The communication from UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and host government on the COP processes should be translated into different languages and use simpler age and gender responsive language.

“ I [want climate information] through the social networks that young people use, with Tik Tok videos, with influencers talking about the topic. ”

YOUTH WORKSHOP
PARTICIPANT

“ What could help is creating infographics in the language of the country we are talking about on how to get involved in different ways because even the nine constituencies of the UNFCCC process they are so tricky to understand and I find that a lot of people I know don't understand what that looks like and how they can get involved. ”

YOUTH WORKSHOP
PARTICIPANT



STEPS TOWARDS IMPROVING OPPORTUNITIES AND RESOURCES

Create safe spaces, in climate decision making at all levels, for meaningful child and youth engagement.

- Mandate all decision-making spaces on climate change to meaningfully engage young people.
- Develop and implement safeguarding principles for safe engagement.
- Compensate/pay young people for their expenses (travel, internet etc.) and time.
- Create an enabling environment for young people's engagement where their views and recommendations are respected, valued and they have a real opportunity to influence decision making.
- Support young people with issues related to passports, travel visas, and other travel restrictions.
- Encourage opportunities for engaging in climate processes through formal and informal channels such as schools, school clubs and social media.

All actors must work together to reduce the digital divide and improve electricity, internet access and access to computers to enable young people to join online climate spaces.

“ I know a lot of friends who know about the processes and they want to be involved but they can't afford a ticket to go to these conferences. ”

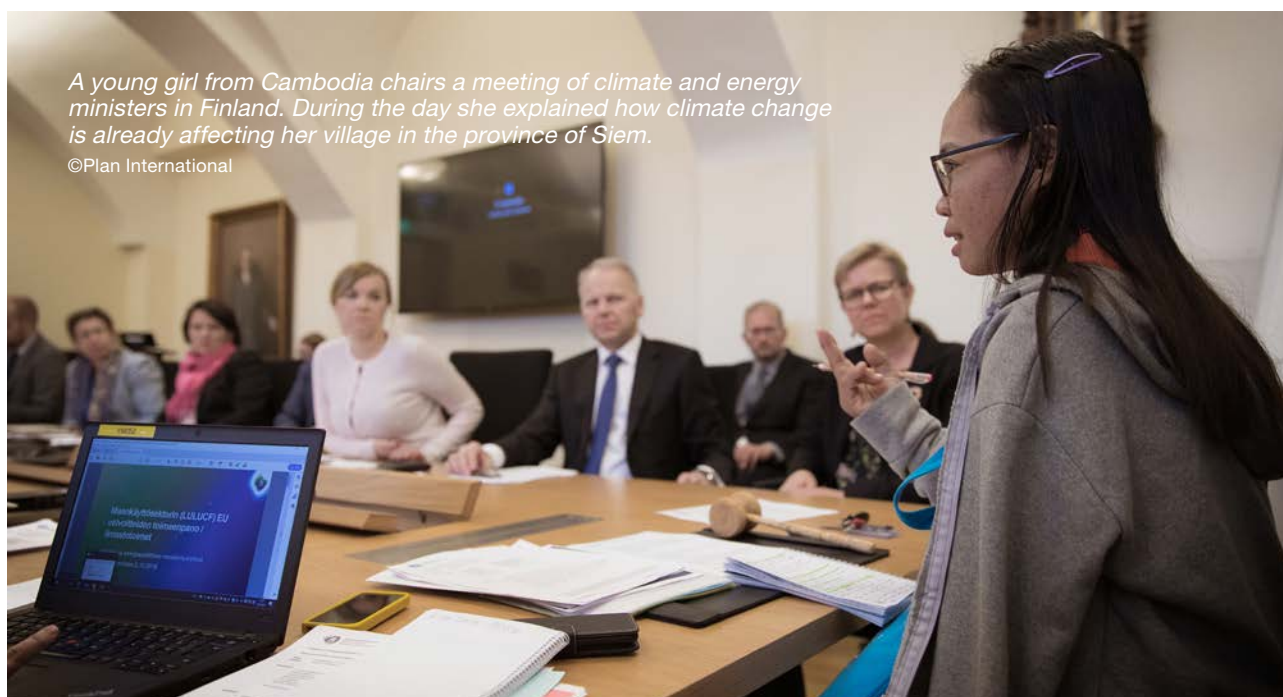
YOUTH WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT

“ There is not enough funding when it comes to bringing the right people and the right voices to the decision-making tables ... youth activists are not brought to the table and presents a very big information gap. ”

YOUTH WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT

A young girl from Cambodia chairs a meeting of climate and energy ministers in Finland. During the day she explained how climate change is already affecting her village in the province of Siem.

©Plan International



Youth Advisory Panel members at COP25 where they were able to discuss their climate change work with representatives from the private sector and institutions such as the EU's Directorate-General for Climate Action and the High Commissioner for the 2030 Agenda.

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STEPS TOWARDS REDUCING THE GENDER DIVIDE IN ENGAGING IN CLIMATE PROCESSES

Provide mentoring and training for girls, young women and girl-led groups on climate policy processes,^{xiv} both online and offline, including connecting to decision-makers virtually.

Specifically **engage community-based girl-led groups** in local and national climate policy processes.

Provide adolescent girls and young women with the **information, skills and access**, to monitor climate processes at local, national, and global levels.

Take measures to **address gender-based violence** in all settings and ensure that adolescent girls and young women activists are protected in public spaces, with clear reporting and feedback mechanisms.

Provide financial support to girl-led groups and networks and support them in accessing formal platforms and spaces on climate change.

“It’s very important that we are breaking down the power dynamics in the climate space, what are the power dynamics between different regions of the world, what is the power to end the climate crisis and how can we openly and meaningfully engage.”

YOUTH WORKSHOP
PARTICIPANT

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- xi. Highlighted by youth in the workshop
- xii. See Kwauk, C, Casey, O. (2021). A new green learning agenda: Approaches to quality education for climate action. <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Brookings-Green-Learning-FINAL.pdf>
- xiii. Latin American and Caribbean countries created a pioneering tool in the context of environmental protection and human rights that reflects the region's ambition, priorities and specific features: the Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean, better known as the Escazú Agreement.
- xiv. See WEDO's online training as an example - <https://wedo.org/women-delegates-online-negotiations-training/>



Two young girls are working as labourers during the pandemic (Kenya).
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No photographs were taken during the course of this research. Girls featured in images in the report are not the same as those that participated in the research.

About Plan International

We strive to advance children's rights and equality for girls all over the world. We recognise the power and potential of every single child. But this is often suppressed by poverty, violence, exclusion and discrimination. And it's girls who are most affected. As an independent development and humanitarian organisation, we work alongside children, young people, our supporters and partners to tackle the root causes of the challenges facing girls and all vulnerable children. We support children's rights from birth until they reach adulthood, and enable children to prepare for and respond to crises and adversity. We drive changes in practice and policy at local, national and global levels using our reach, experience and knowledge. For over 80 years we have been building powerful partnerships for children, and we are active in over 75 countries.

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