

Youth Declaration by the She Leads Climate Cohort



Introduction

We are the **She Leads' Climate Cohort for Climate ACTION**, a group of passionate girls and young women from East Africa (Uganda, Ethiopia, Kenya), West Africa (Ghana, Mali, Sierra Leone, Liberia) and the Middle East (Lebanon, Jordan), committed to addressing the urgent challenges posed to girls and young women by climate change. **With this Youth Declaration**, we are representing the voices of thousands of girls and young women from our countries.

It is time to act now! Because we witness DAILY that **climate change is disproportionately affecting us, girls and young women** and marginalized communities, **exacerbating existing inequalities**. Despite contributing the least to climate change, girls and young women bear the brunt of its impacts facing increased risks of displacement, health, loss of education, early marriage and gender based violence. As we approach the COP30 climate negotiations, it is **our mission to advocate for inclusive and gender- and age- responsive climate finance, processes and policies** that empower, resource and acknowledge us, girls and young women, as **key stakeholders in climate action, climate finance, and in all climate policies**.

"Whenever you cut trees, whenever you leak wastes, whenever you do constructions, whenever you burn fossils, whenever you spoil the lakes, remember us girls and children. We will keep on facing higher rates of violence, starvation, dropouts, displacement, miss on opportunities and in the worst case be left to die.", said Ilham from Ethiopia, age 20.

Together with our sisters from the She Leads countries we have formulated **three Key recommendations for COP30 on Climate Finance, Gender & Inclusion and Climate Adaptation**. We **urgently call** on parties, negotiators and leaders:

1. To **ensure equal access to Climate finance for girls and young women** from vulnerable regions and **ensure that all** Climate Finance processes, including the Loss and Damage and Adaptation funds **integrate the specific needs, perspectives and solutions of girls and young women**.
2. To **translate Gender Equality, and Inclusion into action in all Climate Processes, to ensure girls' and young women's participate and co-lead in all Climate processes** and **the needs, solutions and perspectives of girls and young women in all their diversity** in should be centralized in the five year Gender Action Plan.
3. To **scale up and operationalize climate education, SRHR, green skills/ jobs for girls and youth and resources for gender and age-responsive climate adaptation** to address the harsh realities of climate change in our communities. This must be a key focus of the Global Goal on Adaptation, especially for those already facing inequality, such as girls and women. Decisions on climate adaptation investments must be driven by age and gender-disaggregated data. Equip our communities with the necessary skills, knowledge, jobs, SRHR and resources to be more resilient and achieve a more equal future.

¹ She Leads is a program of Plan International, Defense for Children-ECPAT, African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET) and Terre des Hommes, in partnership with the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, over 2021-2025. She Leads advances girls' and young women's rights, leadership and meaningful engagement in decision-making. Additionally, Plan International Netherlands and the ACT Group are financing the Climate Cohort.

Ad 1) Equal access to Gender and Age-Responsive Climate Finance

Currently, only 2.4% of ALL climate finance is allocated to children and less than 4% **of these Multilateral Climate Finance funded projects address the needs and engagement of girls**². Urgent attention to climate finance is essential to ensuring that gender- and age- responsive solutions are implemented to mitigate the adverse effects on vulnerable populations, and empower girls and young women as key stakeholders in climate finance.

"Finance without accessibility is an empty promise. We need direct, transparent funding that empowers our communities to act now, not just survive. We need finances to be prepared for future climate shocks, and we need finances to respond to loss and damage. Because this crisis is huge and happens now," says Faith from Sierra Leone, age 21

Our Key recommendation is therefore: To **ensure equal access to Climate finance for girls and young women** in vulnerable regions and **ensure that all** Climate Finance processes and actions **integrate the needs, perspectives and solutions of girls and young women**.

Our specific demands on **Climate finance** are:

- 1. Increase Gender- and Age Responsive Climate Finance Allocation:** Ensure that a significant percentage of climate finance is directed toward gender- and age responsive projects. This includes investments in education, healthcare, and social protection systems that benefit girls and young women, particularly in climate-vulnerable areas.

"If we want to solve this climate crisis, it is important to listen to the needs of young people and communities and especially girls and young women. To give young people the opportunity to implement concrete actions addressing the needs in their communities. Make funding flexible so that we can adapt it to the realities of our communities," says Korotoumou from Mali, age 24

- 2. Allocate funds to support capacity-building programs that empower girls and young women with the skills, knowledge, and leadership** to participate in climate policy development and green economies. This will help shift the narrative from girls and women as victims of climate change to agents of change.

"We want equitable actions, robust financing and effective mechanisms that promote sustainability and climate justice, and increased climate finance for vulnerable girls and young women to build their skills and capabilities". Jenneh, Liberia, age 18

2 Children's Environmental Rights Initiative (2023), Falling short: Addressing the climate finance gap for children.

"I have witnessed how communities bear the brunt of floods, droughts, and crop failures without the resources to recover. Climate finance often stops at high levels and never reaches the girls, women, and young people who need it most. Rights-based, accessible, and equitable climate finance is not an option—it is justice. It must flow directly to local communities and youth-led initiatives, because we are not asking for charity; we are demanding fairness in a crisis we did not create," says **Hamdiatu from Ghana, age 24**

3. Increase the Climate finance from the Private Sector for girls and young women, especially from the Global North as they are the biggest polluters, but also in the Global South. Enhance private sector funding not only to support girls through programs but also to provide them with direct access to finance for their own initiatives.

"We urge the public and private sector to maintain accountability and transparency when allocating funds as well as to empower girls and young women through climate smart education, green skills and jobs, both in the rural and urban areas, and establishing funds for projects led by girls and young women which in turn can help to develop gender inclusive climate policies". **Reem, Ethiopia, age 18**

Loss and Damage Fund

"Our Call for Justice on Loss and Damage: We did not create this climate crisis, yet we are bearing the brunt of its devastating impacts. The recent floods have destroyed our livelihoods, leaving us in dire need. We urgently demand loss and damage finances to support our communities, especially our sisters from the Karamoja region and Kassese, who already were suffering from the irreversible impacts of climate change without adequate support to adapt". **Brenda, Uganda, age 22**

While Africa has contributed only 3.8 per cent to global greenhouse gas emissions, it is the most vulnerable continent to the impacts of climate change³. So far **Loss and Damage commitments have not been met. Scarce climate finance for adaptation and loss and damage significantly increases the likelihood of child labour, loss of education, forced marriage and gender based violence⁴. **Therefore, we urge parties at COP30:****

1. Operationalize and significantly **scale up the Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage**.
2. **Increased contributions and accountability of the polluters to the Loss and Damage fund.** *"The climate crisis happens now, the polluters should work hand in hand with children and youth, especially girls and young women in all their diversity, who are hardest hit, **to meaningfully engage them in the design, implementation and monitoring of loss and damage responses**. Girls and young women*

³ chrome-extension://efaidnbmninnbpcajpcgclclefindmkaj/https://unfccc.int/files/press/backgrounders/application/pdf/factsheet_africa.pdf

⁴ Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Violence Against Children (2022). The Climate Crisis and Violence Against Children.

must be at the center of designing and implementing national and global loss and damage processes”, says Brenda from Uganda, age 22.

3. Make **the funds for Loss and Damage accessible to girls and their communities** who are facing the brunt impact of the climate crisis. A human rights based approach should be integrated into the fund’s governance and implementation.
4. **All funds provided should be grants-based and debt-free** for countries in the Global South. To ensure that climate action is equitable, inclusive, and driven from the ground up, without adding to financial burdens.

Ad 2) Gender equality and inclusion should be translated into concrete action in all climate processes, including the new Gender Action Plan (GAP)

Climate change is not gender-neutral; it disproportionately impacts girls and young women. As a result of worsening conditions such as water & fuel scarcity and food insecurity, girls and young women face heightened risks of displacement, early and forced marriage, disrupted education, period poverty, and sexual and gender-based violence. Additionally, girls and women often lack access to climate finance and leadership opportunities. Alarming, only 2.4% of all climate-related funding integrated gender equality as a principal objective⁵.

Damaris, Kenya, age 24: “Many young women in the area I am from, reported rising cases of gender-based violence, including child marriages and transactional sex due to the displacement, collapse of incomes and loss of housing caused by climate change”.

Our key recommendation to governments and parties is **to move Gender Equality and Inclusion in the Gender Action Plan beyond rhetoric to concrete action.** We urge states to prioritize the needs, solutions, and perspectives of girls and young women in all their diversity through resources for capacity strengthening, gender-responsive climate policy mainstreaming, enhanced gender data collection and monitoring, and supporting women’s meaningful participation in climate negotiations to ensure their voices are integrated into climate action and leadership.

“Data shows that including girls in climate action leads to more innovative and effective solutions. For example, a recent study reveals that regions with strong female participation in climate planning achieve 25% more successful adaptation outcomes. Investing in leadership programs and education for young women and girls not only harnesses their potential but also ensures that our adaptation strategies are more inclusive and impactful,” says Damaris from Kenya, Age 24

We specifically call on parties to:

1. **Ensure that all climate policies, actions, and climate finance address the impacts of climate change through the perspectives of gender and age:** These efforts

⁵ UNEP (2023). *Adaptation Gap report 2023: Underfinanced, Under prepared-Inadequate investment and planning on climate adaptation leaves world exposed.*

should contribute to gender transformation and be tailored to the needs and solutions of different age groups. This includes incorporating girls and young women in the formulation and negotiation of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), National Adaptation Plans (NAPs), and related reports. It is essential that these processes include formal consultations specifically with girls and young women, along with follow-up actions to ensure their voices are integral to climate policy development.

"Climate interventions must recognize that women, girls, and young people experience climate impacts differently due to social, economic, and cultural factors. Policies and financing should be gender- and age-responsive, ensuring inclusive, equitable, and locally grounded solutions. Embedding their perspectives in all stages of climate policy ensures that adaptation and resilience efforts are transformative." **Margret, Uganda, 25**

2. Promote Gender Parity in Governance: Advocate for equal representation of women and girls in decision-making bodies related to climate finance. Relevant governments must include grassroot movements and girls & young women as stakeholders in climate programs, policies and projects, from the design till the evaluation.

"Climate action should be led by girls and for girls, especially young women at the grassroots level should be on the front line of climate action. Young people should be given the chance to be included in decision-making spaces," asserts **Damaris from Kenya, age 24.**

"Growing up, I saw how women in my community were always the first to respond when climate disasters struck, caring for children, finding food, and keeping families safe. But when it came to decision-making, their voices were the last to be heard. True climate justice means recognizing that women and girls are not just caregivers, but leaders: their inclusion in every climate process is non-negotiable. Excluding women and girls from climate decisions is like fighting with one hand tied; we are half the population, and half the solutions." **Bilkisu from Sierra Leone, 20**

"Promoting gender parity is not just about fairness, it is about harnessing the full range of knowledge, innovation, and purpose-driven leadership needed to build resilient and just communities." **Margret from Uganda, 25**

3. Establishment of a Gender and Age Accountability Marker: To mainstream, monitor, and enhance accountability on gender and age in climate actions, finance, and policies

"We urge this instrument to be developed and implemented with the main support of girls and young women, ensuring that governments are held accountable for their commitments and actions in line with it," says **Faith from Sierra Leone, age 20**

4. Empower Girls in Climate Leadership: Create leadership opportunities and training programs for girls and young women in climate policy, advocacy, and sustainable practices.

"Everyone should be included in climate action and policy processes, despite their background, age, gender, or status." insists Massa from Liberia, age 18

"89% of people in Liberia are living in extreme poverty with climate change being one of the contributing factors that affect girls and young women mostly as they experience increased gender-based violence issues. Youths, specifically girls and young women, should prominently be represented at the decision-making spaces where they will contribute meaningfully despite where they come from and the conditions they are found in," highlights Jenneh from Liberia, age 19.

"I speak not just for myself, but for the girls who plant seeds in the sun, yet never see their voices in climate decisions. Inclusion is the sunlight that helps solutions grow," states Hamdiatu from Ghana, age 24.

Ad 3) To scale up and operationalize climate education, SRHR, green skills/ jobs for girls and youth and resources for gender and age-responsive climate adaptation Climate Adaptation

Climate adaptation is crucial in mitigating the adverse effects of climate change, particularly for vulnerable populations. Girls and young women are disproportionately affected by climate change, facing heightened risks such as early and forced marriage, disrupted education and displacement, and gender-based violence due to food and water scarcity and threats to health and safety. Despite these challenges, they often lack access to climate finance, and leadership opportunities. To address these issues, it is **essential to prioritize climate education, green skills and jobs, SRHR and resources** for gender and age-responsive climate adaptation. This approach ensures that we are equipped with the necessary green skills, knowledge, jobs, health and protection services and resources to be more resilient and achieve a more equal future. Therefore we urge parties to:

1. Commit funds to Community-Led Gender and Age-Responsive Adaptation and Resilience Building.

1. Support Gender- and Age-Responsive Grassroots Initiatives: Girls want to see investment in local, community-driven projects that address specific environmental challenges affecting them, such as sustainable farming or water conservation.



"Women and girls must be involved in all climate change planning policies and initiatives because disasters impact men and women differently. In times of disasters, women are often accompanied by their children. If we don't take the needs of different age and gender groups into account, we won't solve the problem." **Yaye Mali, age 24**

2. Provide **Climate resilient sexual reproductive health and rights**, and **protection** services, including mental health support.

"Water scarcity is not just an environmental issue; it is a human rights crisis, especially for women and girls. Lack of access to water directly impacts personal hygiene, especially during menstruation, increasing health risks, mental stress, and the psychological pressure of thinking about water scarcity. At COP30, the impact of climate change on gender and age must be addressed in all frameworks, ensuring that women and girls have access to basic hygiene resources and live in dignity," says **Sarah from Jordan, age 23**

"Climate changes leads to food- and health insecurity and it leads to climate displacement which impacts girls and young women the most. Therefore climate adaptation should invest in SRHR, protection against GBV, and education to prepare the next generation." **Yaye from Mali, 24**

3. Provide **Climate smart education, green skills, resources and green job opportunities to young women** to equip them with knowledge and technology to protect, adapt and monitor their communities from climate impacts and to build climate-resilient livelihoods and give girls and young women autonomy to engage in long-term climate solutions.

"Girls and women want to be trained on green skills, get access to climate-smart technologies and digital tools, and work in future green industries like renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, and climate science to improve their ability to participate in climate-smart solutions and foster economic inclusion and stability," says Faith from **Sierra Leone, age 20**.

"We need to increase green skills and jobs for girls and young women so that people increasingly understand the link between gender, security, and climate change. Young people need to know how to face this irreversible trend to increase their resilience. We need to see climate change not as a challenge but as an opportunity", **Yaye from Mali, age 24**.

"Promote and scale up indigenous women-led agripreneurship and renewable energy practices, as they are affordable. For example, the use of fireless basket cookers, eco-briquettes, and eco-stoves made from locally sourced and

renewable materials provide cleaner, safer cooking options, improve health and air quality, and create opportunities for income generation and entrepreneurship while conserving natural resources.” Margret from Uganda, 25

2. Prioritize Anticipatory Action, Nature-Based Solutions, and Social Resilience.

“Adaptation must go beyond survival. It must protect dignity, livelihoods, and hope. The Global Goal on Adaptation must prioritize anticipatory action, nature-based solutions, and social resilience so that communities on the frontlines, especially in Africa, can thrive, not just endure,” emphasizes Hamdiatu from Ghana, age 24.

“Indigenous agripreneurship, such as using traditional knowledge in seed preservation, organic composting, intercropping, and climate-resilient farming techniques, not only enhances food security and conserves biodiversity but also strengthens community resilience and creates sustainable livelihoods for youth and women in rural areas. By integrating these community-driven innovations into vocational training and empowerment programs, young women and girls can gain access to meaningful green employment, champion climate-smart solutions, and play key leadership roles in fostering inclusive, climate-resilient communities.” Margret, Uganda, 25

3. Integrate Climate Education in Curricula.

“We cannot keep patching the wounds of climate disasters without changing how we prepare for them. Adaptation is our shield of hope. We need climate education in our curricula and resources for children and girls and young women to be prepared for climate disasters,” says Faith from Sierra Leone, age 20.

4. Empower Young People in Climate Leadership and Adaptation.

“As young people living on the frontlines of the climate crisis, we carry the weight of disrupted futures, but also the determination to shape solutions that are just, inclusive, and lasting,” states Faith from Sierra Leone, age 21.

“Empowering us, girls and young women, in tackling climate and environmental problems is hitting two birds with one stone. One is to address climate change, and the other is to address gender inequality,” says Ilham from Ethiopia, age 20.

“Women and girls in our communities need direct and fair resources to adapt to this crisis and be prepared for future climate shocks”, Brenda, Uganda, age 22.

"I urge for the inclusion of youth in decision-making. I want to see a structural representation of girls and young women, in the climate negotiation and decision-making process, ensuring their views and solutions are taken seriously and accounted for", Deli, Ghana, age 20.

Conclusion

COP30 must mark the end of discussions about the inclusion of girls and young women in climate actions. This COP should be the turning point where we commit to action and bring previous discussions to fruition. We urge parties to incorporate our demands into budgets, decision-making bodies, policy implementation, and monitoring and accountability mechanisms.

To save our planet, and achieve sustainable solutions, girls and young women must be at the center and engaged from the design phase till the implementation, monitoring and evaluation in all climate policies, climate actions and climate finance.

"We are tired of waiting. From community to policy, girls and young women are marginalized. It's not just about empowerment; we demand the authority to effect real change." Ilham, Ethiopia, 20

The She Leads Climate Cohort advocates:

Jenneh, 18	Esther, 24
Whitney, 23	Emma, 22
Bezawit, 21	Farah, 25
Bilkisu, 19	Fatoumata, 21
Sandra, 23	Yaye, 24
Ruth, 19	Regina, 18
Ilham, 20	Shamim, 21
Deli, 20	Kassier, 21
Sarah, 23	Reem, 18
Margret, 24	Habibatou, 22
Damaris, 24	Ghiwa, 19
Rukaya, 24	Gloria, 24
Faith, 20	Linda, 23
Ayat, 23	Maggie, 18
Korotoumou, 23	Jumah, 19
Hadizatu, 24	Mayamah, 22

*She whispers softly, aching with fear,
The ground we walk on sheds a tear.
Her forests thinning, her waters rise,
A future dimming before our eyes.
But in our hands, the power grows,
To mend her wounds, to heal her woes.
Each act of care, each tree we tend,
Brings life back where the damage ends.
So listen closely, feel her plea,
And let your heart help set her free.*

Poem by: Deli, Ghana, 20