






RECAP AND REFLECTIONS

Climate Justice Roundtable:

An online discussion with activists and experts
February 2022

Contents

	Introduction	
	Background	3
	Why this roundtable?	4
	Roundtable agenda	5
	Key takeaways	
	What do we mean by climate justice?	6
	What do young people want?	7
	What do young people need?	8
	What can UNICEF and others do?	9
	Conclusion	
	What next?	11

Background

By the time many of the teenage climate activists of today are in their late 20s, climate change could force an additional 100 million people into extreme poverty.

Young people have historically led the charge against environmental, social and racial injustice. However, in the last several years, they have mobilized like never before on the issue of climate justice. Spurred on by the speeches and marches of Greta Thunberg, millions of children and young people globally voiced their concerns and demanded that their governments take action on climate change. Their voices have demonstrated the urgency they are feeling that time is running out and that they, as the younger generation, will suffer the consequences of climate change more greatly than their parents and grandparents.

For children born in the 21st Century, the effects of climate change are already being felt. They are more vulnerable to the effects of climate disasters, including floods and high winds, as well as the day-to-day effects of climate change on air quality, airborne disease, and unclean water. The consequences of droughts and floods have contributed to 149 million children around the world being stunted. According to the World Bank, by the time many of the teenage climate activists of today are in their late 20s, climate change could force an additional 100 million people into extreme poverty. In addition, by 2050, the International Food Policy Research institute estimates a 20% increase in malnourished children compared to what we would see without climate change.

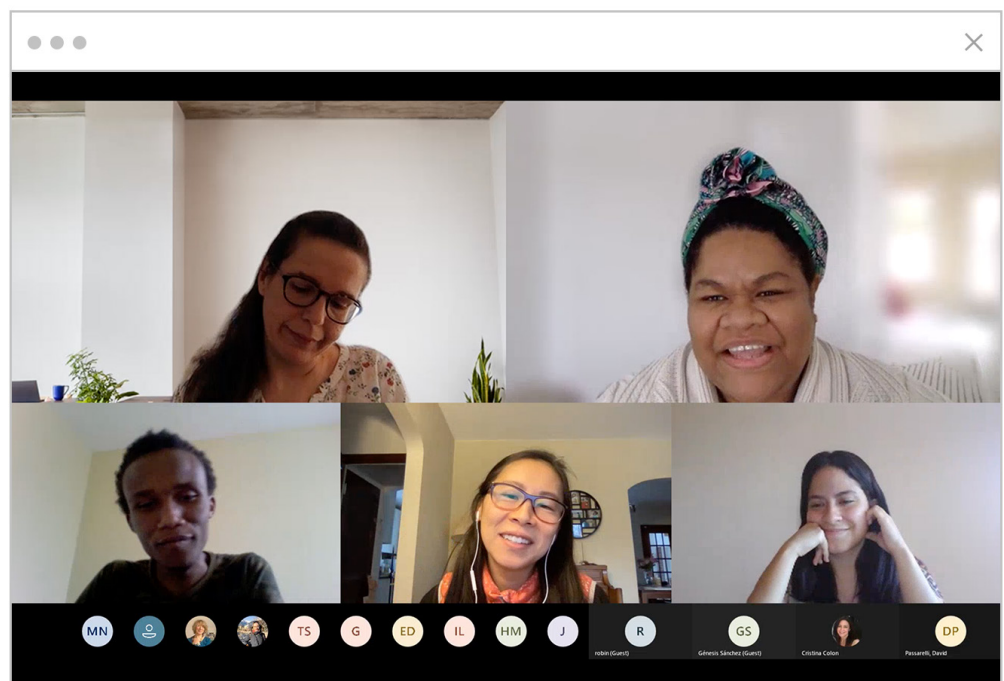
Taking these issues into account and disappointed with the pace and ambition of the climate negotiations to-date, 330 youth delegates from over 140 countries (72% from the global south), met at MOCK COP26 in 2020 and produced a global conference declaration centered around 6 main themes with climate justice being one of them. In addition, at the most recent COP26, tens of thousands of youth and others took to the streets of Glasgow demanding climate justice.

Why this roundtable?

In order to better understand what young people mean by and want from climate justice, as well as how they can be supported to achieve climate justice, this roundtable, comprised of a small group of experts and activists, discussed the following questions:

01. What do we know about climate justice? What does it mean to children and young people? What are they asking for?
02. What are the elements needed and what are the gaps and barriers to achieving climate justice for and with children and young people? How does it relate to racial and social justice?
03. How can UNICEF and others support and help bridge these gaps, including knowledge gaps and translate it to effective policy?

**CLIMATE JUSTICE
ROUNDTABLE**
24 February 2022,
Top: Lucy Szaboova,
Salote Soqo; bottom:
Eric Njuguna, Christina
Kwauk, Sara Cognuck



Roundtable agenda

- 8:30 – 8:35** **Welcoming remarks**
Jasmina Byrne, Chief, Policy Unit, OGIP
- 8:35 – 8:45** **Introductions**
Tour de table
- 8:45 – 8:55** **Setting the scene**
Cristina Colón, Policy Specialist, Environment, OGIP
- 8:55 – 9:00** **Introduction of the panel**
- 9:00 – 9:30** **Panel discussion**
Eric Njuguna, Youth Climate Justice Organizer
Sara Cognuck, Climate Activist and Natural Resource Manager
Christina Kwauk, Education Consultant
Salote Soqo, Director of Advocacy, Global Displacement, Unitarian Universalist Service Committee
- 9:30 – 10:10** **Guided plenary discussion**
- 10:10 – 10:25** **Next steps**
- 10:25 – 10:30** **Closing remarks**

Confirmed participants

- Oladosu Adenike**, Climate Justice Youth Activist
Robin Bronen, Executive Director, Alaska Institute for Justice
Beth Doherty, UNICEF Youth Climate Advocate
Jonathan Ensor, Senior Researcher, Stockholm Environment Institute
Ineza Umuhoza Grace, Co-Director, Loss and Damage Youth Coalition
Heather McGray, Director, Climate Justice Resilience Fund
Nkosilathi Nyathi, UNICEF Youth Climate Advocate
David Passarelli, Executive Director, United Nations University, Center for Policy Research
Genesis Sanchez, Climate Justice Grants Program Manager at The Climate Reality Project
Gaya Sriskanthan, Climate Justice Specialist

What do we mean by climate justice?

- **Climate justice means linking human rights with development and climate action.** Development cannot be delinked from climate action and vice versa. Throughout, a human rights base approach is necessary. For example, with the rapid pace of urbanization, a rights-based approach is crucial for addressing water, sanitation and health, challenges which are exacerbated by climate change in the formalizing of informal settlements.
- **Climate justice means having a people-centered approach to climate action.** This entails ensuring representation, inclusion, and protection of the rights of those most vulnerable to the effects of climate change. Solutions must promote equity, assure access to basic resources, and ensure that young people can live, learn, play and work in healthy and clean environments.
- **Achieving climate justice means understanding that not everyone has contributed to climate change in the same way.** While everyone must do their part to address climate change, the burden should not be borne by those that have contributed the least. The world's richest 10% are responsible for 50% of GHG emissions and the poorest 50% are only responsible for 10% despite population and energy consumption increasing.
- **Pursuing climate justice means combatting social injustice, gender injustice, economic injustice, intergenerational injustice and environmental injustice.** The intersectionality of these challenges must be acknowledged in order to address them holistically. For example, some climate projects inadvertently create climate injustices when local communities are displaced for a conservation or renewable energy initiative.
- **Climate justice requires a systems transformation.** The climate crisis is the result of a system which prioritizes profit over sustainability. As such, solutions will require a transformative systems lens and approach. Approaches that address the unequal burdens in certain communities and which realigns the economy with natural systems. The [new green learning agenda](#) proposes such an approach for an education system that develops and nurtures sustainable mindsets, as well as green skills in order to achieve this transformation.

"All climate justice work is climate work, but not all climate work is climate justice work."

KUMI NAIDOO
Former Secretary
General of Amnesty
International

What do young people want?

In order to achieve climate justice, young people are looking for the following:

- **Participation – a seat at the table:** Representation is crucial for getting concerns heard and addressed. Youth and civil society need to be given a seat at the decision-making table so that those asking for climate justice can influence decisions around climate policies and programming, including climate finance flows. Unfortunately, decision making processes are currently dominated by northern and corporate interests. Youth representation, when included, is perceived by young people to be tokenistic and used as a public relations exercise, and young people’s voices are not considered and taken into account when decisions are made.

While representation at official conferences is important, climate talks are not the only forums to influence decisions and processes related to climate (in)action. Other avenues for participation may be even more powerful, for example, influencing international trade agreements. The World Trade Organization (WTO) has far more legally binding power over countries than the United Nations Framework Climate Change Convention (UNFCCC), as they affect and potentially often prevent the right of countries to pursue low carbon development, through their trade agreements.

- **Decent jobs and sustainable livelihoods:** Marginalized and poor communities are disproportionately exposed to and affected by climate change impacts, but often face structural barriers to participating in the fight for climate justice. When people are unable to meet their basic needs for income, food and other necessities, it is difficult to get involved in climate action. Therefore, it is important to focus on education, livelihood and employment opportunities while working with marginalized and poor communities and these need to be tackled at the policy level.

"It is well acknowledged that across the globe, people who have the least role in causing the climate crisis are bearing the brunt of it, and unfortunately, climate justice is not talked about enough."

ERIC NJUGUNA,
Youth Climate Justice
Organizer

What do young people need?

"If we are not ensuring that there is a dedicated space for youth to work and engage in various climate justice movements/projects, we will continue to detract from our ability to make systems change."

CHRISTINA KWAUK,
Education Consultant

- **Capacity and skills building:** Supporting skills development and addressing structural constraints are key to empowering children and youth to claim their seat at the table.

Support can include sharing knowledge and [resources](#) including information that donors/programming entities develop, so that grantees can succeed in their own initiatives. Knowledge exchange and knowledge transfer are important and accessibility of information for everyone is key. In addition, it is important to highlight the work of climate justice organizations, especially young organizations, to support their fundraising efforts and track history.

In order for their seat at the table to be effective, children and youth need to be supported to develop skills, knowledge and competencies to have the ability to meaningfully advocate for and provide solutions on climate justice. Support can be provided through capacity and skills building (technical competencies, as well as soft skills) and by addressing structural barriers to participation (job creation, meeting of basic livelihood needs).

In addition, young people can be supported to use and challenge national laws in the countries where they live and work. There has been a marked increase in climate litigation over the last 10 years and this trend is set to increase over the next few years.

- **Financing:** Consistent and reliable financing for operational and programmatic expenses are instrumental for allowing young climate activists to achieve their vision.

Supporting youth is an investment that achieves more than short-term results. In the long run, it is investment in leadership and action on initiatives for climate equity and justice. Consistent and reliable funding is indispensable for supporting the climate justice movement, and for allowing young climate justice organizations to build their organizational and leadership capacities. To this end, longer-term operational funding which provides ongoing financial backing and security for climate justice activists, groups and their organizations needs to increase.

Young people also need support to gain knowledge on how to apply for funding and benefit from the available climate funding sources. Obtaining funding is a highly competitive process, and crucial to the ability to develop initiatives for climate justice activism. Young people often lack the know-how on developing successful grant application

- **Partnerships: Non-monetary forms of support are equally important for helping climate justice action to flourish.**

Donors and programming entities can do more than just provide or enable the transfer of money. They can facilitate connections, networking opportunities, provide spaces to meet, share lessons and experiences, and discuss ideas, so that youth and their organizations can accumulate expertise and establish partnerships to develop and successfully implement their projects and plans.

Programming entities should also respect the expertise and lived experiences of the youth grantees and see them as equal partners. Funders should support and trust the vision and ideas of the youth activists and their understanding of the policy landscape. This trust means allowing grantees to work in the way they judge best for developing their ideas and initiatives.

What can UNICEF and others do?

Participants and panellists put forward a number of suggestions for actions that UNICEF and others can take in supporting youth and children in their efforts towards climate justice.

- **Acknowledge children and young people's quest for climate justice, support their meaningful participation and facilitate partnership opportunities:** Utilizing a climate justice approach for UNICEF would include integrating children's perspective and rights into actions, recognizing children as the most vulnerable group in the face of climate change, and reducing their vulnerability to the climate crisis. It would mean supporting full participation of young people and children to seek equity across and contribute to decisions on climate policies. UNICEF and others' youth engagements strategies should include youth participants who represent marginalized and most vulnerable communities affected by the climate crisis.



UNICEF could support youth in developing effective, bankable proposals as well as including them in funding decision-making processes.

Additionally, facilitating networking opportunities and capacity building workshops to share knowledge and opportunities for collaboration.

- **Support and facilitate access to funding for youth-led climate justice action:** UNICEF as a programming entity could act as an intermediary between donors and grantees to minimize inequalities. They can lessen constraints to funding and absorb some of the burden that comes with managing funds. UNICEF could play an important role in lessening the burden of accountability for grantees to donors, by providing support in monitoring and evaluation. In addition, UNICEF could support youth in developing effective, bankable proposals as well as including them in funding decision-making processes.
- **Support children and youth as they confront climate change impacts and climate (in)justice:** Effort should be made to prevent children's health, well-being and rights from being impacted by climate (in)actions that create injustices. While there is consensus and acknowledgment on how not addressing climate change impacts on children's rights, there is less attention paid to how some activities meant to alleviate climate change, can create injustices. For example, particular issues of concern around unjust climate actions include renewable energy projects which impact on indigenous people's land rights, use of child labor in mining minerals (e.g. cobalt) for renewable batteries, etc.

A reflection of the toll that the climate change crisis is causing, eco-anxiety (a chronic fear that climate destruction is inevitable) is becoming more common among youth and is an issue worth focusing on. As part of its mental health work, UNICEF could explore ways to navigate this anxiety among children and youth.



What next?

The rich discussion demonstrated how important the topic of climate justice is to and for children and young people. The participants were welcoming of the idea to become a network to move this agenda forward together.

A follow-up meeting in Q3 2022 is planned to take forward some of the suggestions made during the roundtable and develop an action plan.

UNICEF works in the world's toughest places to reach the most disadvantaged children and adolescents — and to protect the rights of every child, everywhere. Across 190 countries and territories, we do whatever it takes to help children survive, thrive and fulfill their potential, from early childhood through adolescence. And we never give up.

The Office of Global Insight and Policy serves as UNICEF's internal think-tank, investigating issues with implications for children, equipping the organization to more effectively shape the global discourse, and preparing it for the future by scanning the horizon for frontier issues and ways of working. With dedicated expertise in seven policy areas — digital technology, human capital, governance, the environment, society, markets and finance — the Global Insight team assists the organization in interpreting, and engaging in, a rapidly changing world.

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