Children & Youth Call for Action

Introduction

Disasters pose a substantial and growing threat to children and youth's well-being, and climate change is a rising threat to the environment and livelihood, including the survival and well-being of future generations. However, children and youth continue to be on the frontlines in combating climate change and building resilience in their communities. There has been consultative and robust research on child-centered risk reduction and school safety developed globally and in Asia-Pacific. Reports such as Words into Action Guidelines for Children and Youth and Guardians of The Planet have shown evidence of children and youth's crucial role and aspiration in Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and climate action and how we should work with and for children and youth through dialogue, skills building, and advocacy. Meanwhile, within April to August this year, child and youth-led research and consultations among young people in Asia Pacific were conducted in preparation for the 10th Asia- Pacific Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (APMCDRR). The report, "Advocates of Change: Asia Pacific Children and Youth's Voices and Perspectives on Climate Action and Disaster Risk Reduction" consolidates findings from the said activities and re-echoes the emphasis of previous research on the need to increase children and youth's meaningful participation in climate and disaster mitigation efforts.

The Asia-Pacific Children and Youth Call for Action, which is co-led by the Children & Youth Stakeholders Group composed of Sendai Stakeholders Children and Youth Group (SSCY), UNICEF, IFRC, Plan International, World Vision, and the Asia Pacific Coalition for School Safety (APCSS), draws mainly from the abovementioned report, specifically to highlight young people's voices and perspectives in urging governments, DRR partners, and practitioners to undertake the following actions in line with the underlying goals of the 10th APMCDRR:

1 Promote school safety by integrating disaster education and community awareness

Children and youth continue to face the compounding effects of multiple hazards, including natural and technological threats, climate change, violence, conflicts, and everyday risks in and around schools that can cause adverse impacts on their rights to education and development. Disaster risk reduction (DRR) and emergency preparedness should therefore be integrated into school and college curricula to foster a culture of safety among children and youth.

Inclusive, age-appropriate, gender-responsive educational programs and awareness campaigns must be developed to involve students, families, and communities. Efforts to raise awareness and strengthen technical capacity on disaster risk reduction and resilience-building in the education sector (i.e., development of standardized training, resources and tools development, learning exchanges, and knowledge and information management), particularly for the students, teachers, school staff, and the education authorities, must also be continued. Empowerment and building leadership capacities among children and youth must also be prioritized to ensure young people's meaningful participation in school safety planning, decision-making, and implementation.

The focus should be on common hazards such as floods, followed by heatwaves, and landslides to ensure that everyone is informed about disaster risks and preventive measures. Thus, we call on Asia-Pacific Governments and partners to sustainably address the barriers to children and youth's equitable access to safe, continuous, and quality education by committing to the Comprehensive School Safety Framework 2022-2030 and adopting its all-risk-and-all-hazards approach to protecting children and education.

Finally, we strongly urge governments and partners across the Asia-Pacific region to actively support the establishment of inclusive, multi-stakeholder mechanisms for school safety at all levels—sub-national, national, and regional. By fostering coordination and collaboration, we can collectively achieve our shared goals and outcomes for safe and resilient schools.

2 Utilize technology and social media to communicate information regarding climate change, disaster risk reduction, preparedness and early warning systems

Leveraging the power of technology, particularly social media, digital platforms, and cutting- edge tools and innovations, is essential to improving early warning and disaster preparedness. These technologies can be extremely important when swiftly and effectively disseminating vital early warning information to large audiences. The child and youth-led research shows that digital social media are the top sources of information and preferred platforms for learning about climate change and disaster impacts and incorporated with education and campaign. In this case, children and communities can be better educated and prepared for catastrophes by utilizing easily available channels like social media, mobile apps, and community-based alert systems. Ensuring that children receive timely alerts is very important, especially for those who live in distant or neglected communities.

The creation and broad application of age-appropriate and child/youth-friendly alarm systems that offer precise guidance on how to handle dangers will help achieve this. Child/youth-friendly preparedness strategies that are easy for parents, schools, and community leaders to understand and implement should also be promoted. By incorporating technology into disaster preparedness and response plans, we may contribute to the creation of a more resilient society where vulnerable groups, including children, are better shielded from the effects of disasters.

3 Build resilient and inclusive communities

Creating inclusive and resilient communities is essential in light of the growing environmental and socioeconomic issues amidst the climate crisis. Child and youth researchers and participants call for the implementation of disaster preparedness projects, improvement of waste management and policies, and provision of shelters and adequate support for children & youth during disaster emergencies as well as support to farmers and other populations heavily affected by climate change so they could recover from their losses. Prioritizing and assisting community-based, child-led and youth-led projects that aim to strengthen resilience is necessary to do this. It is crucial to implement initiatives like Climate-Smart Agriculture, which aids in community adaptation to shifting climatic conditions. Support for mental health is equally crucial in enabling young people to manage the psychological effects of disasters and build emotional, mental and social resilience.

Investing in more climate and disaster resilient infrastructures is also important in building resilient communities. Rebuilding of damaged public facilities such as schools and hospitals, and increasing the capacity of homes, roads, bridges and settlements to deal with extreme weather conditions can be greatly increased in communities. Long-term adaptation plans should also be created in addition to short-term fixes to assist communities in anticipating and lessening the consequences of natural hazards.

Finally, empowering children and youth and boosting their confidence to assume leadership positions is essential to creating inclusive and resilient communities, especially for those who belong to vulnerable groups. Furthermore, their active involvement guarantees that a diversity of voices is heard and that the needs and viewpoints of the community as a whole are reflected in the solutions.

Overall, children and youth are dynamic leaders and catalysts for fostering inclusivity and resilience. Through education, skill-building, and mentorship, they drive positive change and uplift their communities. By empowering their leadership abilities and investing in their development, we prepare them to navigate challenges and contribute to a more equitable and sustainable future. Their contributions are essential in building stronger communities that can overcome adversity and thrive together.

4 Prioritize investment in child-led and youth-led initiatives, establish systemic mechanisms in shaping disaster risk reduction, disaster preparedness, and climate resilience infrastructures

Promoting disaster risk reduction (DRR) activities is critical, especially for marginalized populations of affected youths and vulnerable children. Protecting children in times of emergency requires the establishment of multi-stakeholder systems centered around school safety. Funding for specific efforts led by children and youth and programs such as Child School Safety should be prioritized.

Investments in the modernization of community centers, green buildings, and shelters must be undertaken to make them child and youth-friendly, secure, and accessible during emergencies. They not only safeguard children and youth but also contribute to the development of stronger, safer communities that are better equipped to protect their most vulnerable members in the event of a crisis.

Finally, strengthening regional cooperation, particularly in addressing climate change mitigation, is crucial for sustainable progress. Climate finance mechanisms must be used in order to promote resilience and support adaptable infrastructure initiatives that benefit both people and the environment. Involving young people in these cooperative initiatives across geographic boundaries might stimulate creative responses to common climate problems, improving nations' ability to adjust to and endure the effects of climate change. Engaging youth in these collaborative efforts across regions can drive innovative solutions to shared climate challenges, enhancing the capacity of countries to adapt to and withstand climate impacts.

5 Leave no child and youth behind in disaster risk reduction and climate action

Children and youth still feel that people are affected differently by disasters, especially children and youth who live in remote communities, economically disadvantaged families, within fragile and conflict areas, who live with disabilities and health issues, who are orphans, separated from their families, indigenous people, young girls and young LGBTQIA+, and children under five. The disproportionate impacts of risks and disasters make them feel discriminated against, left out and neglected.

Overall, children and youth from all diversities have significant roles to play in emergency disaster preparedness, advocating gender equality and social inclusion, helping build resilient communities, and be involved in all levels of decision-making. Advocating for the inclusion of children and youth voices in local, national, and regional policy discussions related to DRR and climate action is crucial. Governments and stakeholders need to establish systematic mechanisms that facilitate meaningful participation of young people in all processes, including in generating evidence-based information through research and in policy-making, decision-making, implementation, monitoring and evaluation processes. It also includes their involvement in the implementation of the Comprehensive School Safety Framework and the development of child-centered, inclusive school safety management systems. Leave No One Behind needs to be taken seriously by promoting a family-based approach to ensure that the children and youth are considered in household preparedness plans. Accountability mechanisms should also be in place.

> **We, children and youth, are very prone to all kinds of hazards, so we need to be engaged in all kinds of advocacy and policy formulation in our community.**

Acknowledgement

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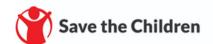
Annex 1. Summary of Key Findings & Recommendations from the Child/Youth-Led Research & Consultations

Introduction

Approximately 42% of the four billion people living in Asia Pacific are children and youth under 24 years who continue to face overlapping environmental, health and socioeconomic risks due to the worsening impacts of climate change and disasters. Their participation in climate adaptation and disaster risk reduction is therefore important to ensure that initiatives effectively protect them from the multiple threats posed by the climate crisis. A significant platform that provides young people with the opportunity to contribute to climate and disaster mitigation efforts is the Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (APMCDRR), which brings together key actors to track and accelerate the region's progress in reducing disaster risks.

In line with the underlying goals of the 10th APMCDRR which focuses on the theme, "Surge to 2030: Enhancing ambition in Asia Pacific to accelerate disaster risk reduction", World Vision and other members of the Asia Pacific Coalition for School Safety (APCSS) and United Nations Major Group of Children and Youth (UNMGCY) worked together to amplify the voices and perspectives of 2,735 children and youth aged 12-34 years across Asia and the Pacific on interrelated climate and disaster- related issues. The partners supported 28 children in six countries (Cambodia, Laos, Mongolia, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam) and five researchers in Indonesia to lead their own research projects and data collection activities within July to August 2024. Meanwhile, partners from 15 countries (Bangladesh, Indonesia, Nepal, Pacific countries including Solomon Islands, Fiji, Tuvalu, Palau, Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Vanuatu, Samoa and Kiribati, The Philippines, Sri Lanka, Timor Leste) had national consultations with selected children and youth to provide them a platform to articulate their views. Three online regional consultations with children and youth from 21 countries were also conducted to validate the outcomes from the child/youth-led research and national consultations.

Key Findings

The research and consultation activities highlighted the unpredictable weather patterns and intense disasters experienced in recent years by children and youth from across all participating countries, including water-related disasters such as heavy rainfalls/typhoons/cyclones, flooding, landslides, extreme heat and drought. Participants also underscored the adverse impacts of climate change and disasters on different aspects of their lives. Most of them reported experiencing increased vulnerability to illnesses/injuries and anxiety and depression, as climate change and disasters cause food shortage and water scarcity and put a strain on their families' income and communities' livelihoods. They also had notable concerns about how climate change and disasters damage their schools, disrupt their education, and reduce their ability to learn and perform well in school. Most participants also expressed frustration and sadness over the loss of playgrounds and inability to freely go outside or pray at their places of worship. Overall, participants expressed fear for their survival and anxieties about their future owing to the impacts of the climate crisis and associated disasters.

The research and consultation activities also revealed that young people have a low to moderate level of awareness/knowledge on climate change and disaster impacts, and low to moderate level of preparedness for disasters. Most participants obtain information from social media sites and classes in school, and some responses also point to the indispensability of traditional print and broadcast media, informal conversations with friends and family, school and community clubs and government and NGO campaigns as channels for information dissemination. Finally, the research and consultation activities showed that most participants are highly motivated to contribute to climate action and disaster risk reduction efforts, but a significant number feel unsure about how to take action due to lack of knowledge and financial and mentorship support.

Key Recommendations

1. **The low to moderate knowledge on the climate crisis and associated disasters and low level of disaster preparedness among a significant number of young people call for the need to increase climate education efforts and disaster preparedness within schools and communities.** While the research and consultation activities showed that there are children and youth who are highly aware of the impacts of the climate crisis and the importance of disaster preparedness, there is still a significant portion of young people who have limited knowledge or have yet to undergo disaster preparedness training. Child and youth researchers and participants specifically call for governments and educational institutions to integrate climate action and disaster risk reduction in school curricula, to ensure that students at all levels are well-informed and equipped for when disasters hit their communities. They also call on governments and partners to fund and support education/awareness-raising and disaster preparedness training programs and activities, especially those which are child/youth-led. Lastly, participants urge governments and partners to invest in the development of innovative child and youth-friendly learning tools to creatively engage and effectively reach young people of all ages in both formal and informal spaces of learning such as schools, homes, community clubs and peer groups.

2. **Young people's inclination to digital technology calls for the optimization of technology & social media for more effective information dissemination and early warning systems.** The findings revealed that social media sites are young people's top source of information and preferred platform for learning about climate change and disasters. Child and youth researchers and participants call for governments and partners to invest in technological enhancements and maximize social media channels to provide child and youth-friendly climate and early warning information, especially for vulnerable groups such as those with disabilities. They also suggest optimizing digital applications and social media sites to create and update community hazard maps and emergency response plans, and to alert people about current disaster risks and predictions.

3. **Participants call for governments to build more resilient and inclusive communities through economic empowerment, investment in climate and disaster resilient infrastructures, and enhancement of disaster preparedness and response efforts and long-term climate adaptation actions.** Child and youth participants call for governments and partners to economically empower marginalized populations such as children and youth and their families, women and the elderly, and persons with disabilities, so they could better prepare and protect themselves from the impacts of extreme weather events and also have stronger recovery capabilities. Similarly, they urge governments to provide eco-friendly and sustainable livelihoods to populations in disaster-prone areas. They also demand financial support for populations most affected by the climate crisis, such as farmers, to help them recover from their losses. They also call for governments to establish local child/youth-friendly shelters, increase the disaster resilience of schools and public infrastructures, and promote climate smart agriculture, the use of renewable energy, and the establishment of green businesses and initiatives.

4. **Young people's eagerness to lead projects and significantly contribute to climate action and disaster risk reduction must be complemented with sufficient financial and mentorship support from adults.** The findings highlight children and youth's willingness and high level of interest to contribute to climate-related and disaster risk reduction efforts. However, the lack of financial resources and knowledge hinder their active participation and ability to lead or implement their own projects. They therefore call for governments to provide funding and increase support for child and youth-led organizations in communities and schools. Furthermore, they also desire for their perspectives to be integrated into community and national climate action and disaster risk reduction plans. Finally, the participants also demand for more opportunities to directly influence the development of local policies, and to participate in national and international consultations and in disaster management committees within their communities.