



## Youth-led Innovations for climate justice: connecting local and global solutions

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This policy paper presents insights and recommendations collected through consultations with the Better Learning Better Innovation (BIBO) Network, led by youth innovators and supported by UNESCO IESALC, to contribute to the 2024 United Nations Summit of the Future. Held on June 3, June 17, and July 15, these consultations gathered youth from all five UNESCO regions –Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Arab States, Europe and North America, and Latin America and the Caribbean- ensuring a diverse and inclusive process.

The paper highlights the role of youth in achieving SDG 13 (Climate Action) by harnessing their energy, innovation, and leadership for transformative action. Empowering young people to drive efforts toward a sustainable and resilient future aligns with the Summit's goal of shaping a more inclusive and forward-looking global agenda.

As part of a broader initiative by the BIBO Young Innovators Network, this paper also connects with reviews of SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions), and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals). Together, these papers present a comprehensive youth-led vision to inform and support the outcomes of the 2024 Summit of the Future, advancing progress across the Sustainable Development Goals.

### Introduction

Science is unequivocal: our climate is heating alarmingly, and we are running out of time. Since 1880, average global temperatures have surged by 1.2 degrees Celsius, significantly accelerating in the late 20th century. The concentration of atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub>, the greenhouse gas responsible for over two-thirds of

global warming, has reached unprecedented levels<sup>1</sup>. The [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change \(IPCC\)](#) consistently affirms that human activities have significantly warmed the atmosphere, ocean, and land, triggering rapid and widespread changes across the biosphere. These climate shifts have led to a fivefold increase in weather, climate, and water-related disasters over the past 50 years, resulting in over 2 million deaths and \$3.64 trillion in losses<sup>2</sup>.

To tackle the climate crisis effectively, we must implement targeted actions that yield tangible benefits while minimising trade-offs across various fronts. These actions include investing in renewable energy, promoting sustainable agriculture, and enhancing urban resilience<sup>3</sup>. The 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), our global blueprint for sustainability and resilience, are deeply intertwined with climate action<sup>4</sup>. By harnessing the synergies between the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement, we can advance both agendas and secure a livable future for future generations. Progress in limiting the rise in global temperature will significantly facilitate the achievement of numerous SDGs, including those related to poverty, hunger, water access, and the health of terrestrial and marine ecosystems. Moreover, many SDGs, such as those focusing on infrastructure and urban resilience (SDGs 9 and 11), can be achieved in ways that bolster adaptive responses to climate change, highlighting the interconnectedness of our global goals<sup>5</sup>.

### **Youth perspectives on the challenges to advancing climate justice**

Despite decades of awareness and efforts, global initiatives to tackle climate change face significant obstacles. This section explores the urgent and multifaceted challenges shared by the young leaders of the Better Learning Better Innovation (BIBO) Network that impede the effective implementation of SDG 13. It focuses on issues of governance, political dynamics and innovation.

#### **Governance challenges: coordination and voluntarism**

Coordination challenges, power imbalances, and knowledge disparities have long hindered climate governance under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The Paris Agreement 2015, which underpins SDG 13, relies heavily on voluntary commitments from countries to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. This voluntarism reflects a shift from binding regulations to a facilitative model that fosters collective action through collaboration and flexibility. However, this approach raises significant concerns about its sufficiency in addressing the urgency of climate change. The credibility gap between national pledges and actual climate trends underscores the limitations of relying on non-binding commitments. Voluntary commitments may fall short of preventing dangerous global temperature increases without stringent, enforceable targets. Therefore, there is a critical need to establish mechanisms to enforce accountability and ensure that national pledges translate into tangible and practical climate actions.

#### **Responsibility challenges: balancing climate action and development**

The responsibility for climate action is a contentious issue, particularly between developed and developing countries. Historically, industrialised nations like the United States and those in the European Union have

contributed the most to global warming. Conversely, developing countries, now significant GHG emitters, face the dual challenge of addressing climate change while pursuing socio-economic development. This dichotomy complicates efforts to implement SDG 13, as developing nations often condition their climate commitments on financial and technological support from the Global North. The persistent failure of developed countries to fulfil these promises exacerbates the difficulty of balancing climate action with development needs. As a result, less ambitious climate targets and slower progress ensue. Developed nations must deliver on their commitments to provide adequate financial resources and technological support, enabling developing countries to pursue sustainable development without compromising climate action.

### **Political challenges: polarization and activism**

The political landscape around climate change is highly polarised, with significant opposition from climate change deniers and vested interests in fossil fuel industries. Climate deniers are supported by powerful lobbies and conservative think tanks, which have successfully slowed policy reforms and obstructed ambitious climate action. On the other hand, climate activism, led by movements like [Fridays for Future](#) and [Extinction Rebellion](#), has intensified, pushing for more radical and immediate actions. These movements highlight the need for systemic changes to address climate change effectively. The entrenched influence of vested interests presents a formidable barrier to implementing comprehensive climate policies. It is essential to counteract this influence through sustained public engagement, promoting science-based policymaking, and fostering a political environment conducive to bold climate actions. The increasing urgency of the climate crisis necessitates a decisive and unified global response, free from the hindrance of political polarisation and vested interests.

### **The urgent need for fulfilled financial pledges in climate action**

Climate change wreaks havoc globally, disproportionately impacting people with low incomes in developing countries who contribute the least to its causes. Developed nations, historically the largest emitters, still need to meet their commitments to reduce emissions and support developing countries through finance, technology, and capacity building. The Paris Agreement requires climate action via nationally determined contributions (NDCs), with developed nations obligated to assist developing countries, yet these commitments often need to be met.

The [Green Climate Fund \(GCF\)](#), established to finance climate action, is vital for supporting developing nations. Despite initial pledges, contributions fall short; for instance, the USA pledged \$3 billion but provided only \$1 billion. Developing countries' emission reduction and adaptation costs could exceed \$1 trillion annually by 2050. Despite a collective pledge of \$100 billion annually by 2020 from developed nations, actual financial flows lag significantly. Currency fluctuations and unfulfilled pledges have eroded the GCF's initial funding of \$10.2 billion. A replenishment process is critical, as developing nations stress the need for predictable and adequate financing to combat climate change effectively.

## Recommendations and calls-to-action

1. ***Establishing binding commitments by enhancing the legal framework:*** Transform the voluntary commitments under the Paris Agreement into binding obligations to ensure accountability and compliance. Accountability measures include investments in a robust civil society presence and international treaties that mandate specific emission reduction targets and penalise non-compliance. Political and societal pressure from young people can also enhance states' accountability through advocacy and awareness raising. Raising awareness among young people is critical in raising awareness about climate change and its impacts through social media campaigns. Organising platforms like Fridays for Future have shown the power of youth voices in mobilising global climate action.
2. ***Enhancing political will and public engagement***
  - 2.1. Combating misinformation: Implement comprehensive public awareness campaigns to counteract misinformation and promote science-based understanding of climate change. Collaborate with social media platforms and educational institutions to disseminate accurate information.
  - 2.2. Fostering youth leadership: Engage and empower youth through leadership programs and include them in decision-making. Support youth-led climate initiatives and movements to ensure their perspectives and innovations are incorporated into climate policies.
3. ***Addressing equity and justice:***
  - 1.1 Equitable climate policies: Develop climate policies that prioritise the needs of the most vulnerable populations, including younger generations, ensuring fair distribution of resources and benefits. Integrate social equity considerations into all climate actions to address the disproportionate impact on marginalised communities.
  - 1.2 Global climate justice framework: Advocate for a global climate justice framework that holds historically high-emitting countries accountable and ensures they contribute their fair share to international climate efforts.
4. ***Strengthening climate action financing***

Fulfilment of financial pledges: Developed countries must fulfil their financial commitments, including the \$100 billion annual pledge, and reaffirm their international obligations to take action on climate change. Innovative financing mechanisms must also explore new financial instruments such as climate bonds, carbon pricing, and private sector engagement to mobilise additional funds for climate action in developing countries. Through global networking and collaboration, young people can create international alliances such as Fridays for Future to call for more political momentum and commitment towards climate financing.

## 5. **Promoting technological transfer and capacity building**

- 5.1. Technology transfer initiatives: Enhance international cooperation to transfer green technologies to developing countries by creating dedicated technology transfer funds and partnerships between developed and developing nations. Developing countries must also invest in capacity-building programs to empower them with the skills and knowledge to effectively implement climate adaptation and mitigation strategies.
- 5.2. Innovation and entrepreneurship: Countries must invest in developing green technologies to empower young entrepreneurs and innovators to contribute to developing sustainable technologies and solutions. This includes creating startups focused on renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, and waste management. Young people must also advocate for sustainable business practices to ensure the implementation of sustainable practices in businesses, promoting eco-friendly products, reducing carbon footprints, and encouraging corporate responsibility.

## Conclusion

The urgency of the climate crisis necessitates immediate and comprehensive action, with young people positioned as pivotal actors in achieving global climate justice. Effective climate governance demands binding commitments to ensure accountability and compliance, addressing the limitations of the current voluntary framework under the Paris Agreement. Developed countries must fulfil their financial pledges, enabling developing nations to pursue sustainable development without compromising climate action. Strengthening technological transfer and capacity-building initiatives will empower these nations to implement effective climate adaptation and mitigation strategies. Fostering political will and public engagement, particularly among youth, is crucial for countering misinformation and promoting science-based policies. We can ensure fair and inclusive climate action by integrating equity and justice into climate policies and advocating for a global climate justice framework. This multifaceted approach, grounded in collaboration and innovation, is essential for securing a sustainable and resilient future for all.

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