



**Findings from the Second Phase
of Consultations with
Children and Young People
for General Comment No.26**

June 2023






Summary Report

The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (the Committee) is listening to the calls of children and taking a significant step to hold State parties accountable for ensuring children can grow up and live in a clean, green, healthy, and sustainable world by creating a General Comment on Children's Rights and the Environment with a Special Focus on Climate Change (General Comment No. 26).

To ensure General Comment No. 26 is representative of the diverse experiences and best interests of children globally, a collaborative and intergenerational approach has been taken to its development.



An essential part of the development of General Comment No. 26 has been the involvement of children themselves. Children have the right to freely express their views on all matters and decisions that affect them and to have their views taken into account at all levels of society. This right is described in detail in General Comment No. 12 on the right of the child to be heard, available at [CRC/C/GC/12](#). The Committee recognises the importance of working with children on matters of such importance and relevance to their lives. With support from terre des hommes, the Committee established its first global Children's Advisory Team - a group of 13 children, between 10 and 17 years of age, from different regions, backgrounds and with diverse lived experiences - to support the development of General Comment No. 26 and ensure other children have meaningful opportunities to contribute their views, experiences, and ideas in global consultations.

The global consultations with children for the development of General Comment No.26 took place across two phases. In the first phase, which took place between 31 March and 30 June 2022, children were invited to share their views about children's rights, the environment and climate change with the Committee via a questionnaire. The contributions from the 7416 children who participated were of great benefit to the development of the draft General Comment No.26, as highlighted by the Committee in the draft's introduction. The findings from the first phase of consultations can be read [here](#).

In November 2022, the Committee asked children and young people¹ to share their views and ideas in response to the draft General Comment No.26. The Committee was specifically interested in understanding how children make sense of their right to a healthy environment, their right to information and education, and their right to participation. A total of **8915 children** participated in this consultation from **76 countries** of the world: 4146 children answered an online questionnaire with open-ended questions; 4769 children participated in **165 group workshops** led by children, young people, schools and organizations using a participation toolkit co-designed with the Children’s Advisory Team.

¹According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), a child means every human being below the age of 18 years. For promoting the consultations for General Comment No. 26, the phrase “children and young people” was used, recognising that older children often refer to themselves as young people. In this report, however, ‘child’ and ‘children’ are used for brevity.

Drawing by a child participating in a workshop, India





This report is a snapshot of key findings from the second phase of global consultations with children that took place between 15 November 2022 and 15 February 2023. The findings informed the Committee in their work to finalise the General Comment No. 26 which will be launched in September 2023, along with child-friendly versions created together with the Children’s Advisory Team.

As this report is a summary of key findings and a sample of illustrative quotations,² it is important to highlight that the detailed findings from the consultations with children will be featured in the creation of a children’s Global Charter - a tool that reflects the demands and messages of children from around the globe on their rights, the environment and climate change. The development of the Children’s Global Charter will involve the Children’s Advisory Team and will be launched alongside General Comment No. 26 as a compelling tool for implementing children’s views, ideas and calls to action.

²The quotes which were submitted in languages other than English were translated by the authors of this report. Also, in some cases, minor changes (for example, punctuation) were made to the sentences to ensure clarity.

Right to a healthy environment



“First of all [the governments] should think about the effects and damages it [environmental degradation] can cause to young people in order for them to enjoy a healthy environment.” (Child, 17 years old, Zambia)

Children participating in the consultation strongly expressed their desire to exercise their right to live in a healthy environment. They extensively discussed various forms of environmental degradation including the effects of climate change that they experience in their lives. They expressed particular concerns about deforestation, waste management and the pollution of air and water. Children expressed worry about the impacts that climate change and other forms of environmental degradation have on their physical and mental health.



Many children shared disillusion and frustration over the insufficient actions of governments and harmful practices of businesses that are destroying the environment. They asked governments for (i) stronger interventions to regulate business activities and harmful lifestyle practices (also by individuals); (ii) impactful interventions to tackle climate change, including implementation of provisions to reduce greenhouse gases emissions; and (iii) larger investments in innovation and technology for the promotion of renewable resources and sustainable materials (to ban plastic and other pollutants).

Children also expressed worry about the lack of biodiversity, although they rarely mentioned it directly. They called on governments to put effort into tree planting; preserve the existing natural environment, protect animal's ecosystems to avoid extinction, avoid overfishing and all other activities which are detrimental to biodiversity.

"We need the government to work twice as hard to repair past mistakes, to repair the natural habitat, and to protect the remaining resources and native animals that we have." (Child, 12 years old, Lebanon)

"I believe that the first thing to consider is the question - 'If this decision is made, what will be its impact on the surroundings in the next 5 years?' Children have become much more conscious about the environment than their prior generation. Governments need to keep in mind: emissions (air, water or in other forms), practicality (whether or not it will affect the ecosystem) and most importantly, the site of execution (the place should not in any way be endangering any areas of biodiversity)." (Child participating in a workshop in India).

Children are particularly worried about the implementation and monitoring of existing policies and regulations and would like governments and businesses to undertake due diligence and child rights impact assessments prior to making new plans. Children highlighted that governments should provide access to information and policies in child-friendly and local languages, so that children are able to understand them and provide feedback. This is in line with their overarching request to be involved in decision-making processes about the environment, including climate change, and to be taken seriously by adults.





Children collectively agreed that non-complying actors deserve punishment. Governments and businesses that are destroying the environment should (i) be judged in front of the law; (ii) pay large fines to compensate for pollution and environmental degradation; (iii) repair the damaged environment; and (iv) fund organizations that protect the environment, including child-led organizations.

Some children mentioned the need for coordinated actions of governments and global responses to address climate change. Children expressed worry that individual efforts of countries may not be enough especially if leaders of larger economies are not willing to reduce emissions and pollution nor take the data and warnings published by scientists seriously. Stronger and more-polluting economies should support low-income countries in their efforts towards sustainable growth.

Children explicitly asked the Committee to ensure that General Comment 26 will serve the purpose of monitoring and evaluating the actions of governments to ensure children’s right to a healthy environment is protected.

“They should have a consequence. Businesses should not be allowed to operate. They should have their licences taken away or pay really big fines that reflect how serious it is to not respect their responsibility to people and the planet. Governments should have to pay compensation to future generations and should have legal consequences like individuals do if they break the law.” (Child, 14 years old, Australia)



Drawing by a child participating in a workshop, Cambodia





"I am pretty sure my government isn't doing anything to help climate change. They try to put up some laws, but it is all just makeup for a problem much bigger than just using the right bag for the right trash. I believe the focus should be on making our main energy supplies renewable and working together as a community to solve the problem. I think it will also become easier when stubborn adults stop making decisions for the future they won't experience. Young people are definitely the key means to solving climate change or at least repairing the damage that is already done as it is their lives at stake."

(Girl, 17 years old, Croatia)

Right to information and education

"The sooner a child learns about his rights, the better he will own them."

(Girl, 16 years old, Uzbekistan)

Children placed a strong emphasis on the role that schools have in providing access to information about climate change, the environment and children's rights. Schools should not only provide information, but also guide and support children to take concrete actions to respect the environment, including how to hold States and businesses accountable when they fail to uphold their responsibilities.



Nonetheless, children highlighted that schools often fall short in these tasks: teachers are sometimes not trained enough; some vulnerable groups (for example, girls and children in rural areas) have scarce access to education; there is not enough teaching and learning material available; information is often not up to date; and the topic is not given the same weight as other subjects. Consequently, children suggested that education on climate change and the environment should be locally relevant, science-based and available in children's mother tongue. Teaching should have a caring, hopeful and compassionate approach to address eco-anxiety.



Children indicated that education on climate change and the environment should become a compulsory, stand-alone topic, structurally integrated in the school curriculum from early years. Children should be involved in the development of curriculum and pedagogy. Active, hands-on, play-based, participatory and peer-learning teaching practices are key to ensuring children learn to embed environmentally friendly practices in their everyday life, which will in turn help further sensitise adults towards the issue. The learning materials should recognise children's specific interests and communication preferences, favouring the use of images, videos, and audio and platforms (such as social media). Schools should also help children experience and connect with nature and engage the entire community, while also fostering traditional practices, sports or activities which promote respect for the environment.

In addition, schools should also teach children the root causes of climate change, focusing on the role that colonialism and capitalism have played, and help children reflect on the unequal ways in which groups and countries are causing climate change and are impacted by it.





“ Children should be **involved in the development of the curriculum**, providing advice and guidance on **teaching methods** and ways of **disseminating information** effectively and accessibly. ” Child participating in a workshop in Scotland)

While schools are one of the key spaces for children to obtain information, others also stressed the importance of the Internet, TV and radio in raising awareness about climate change and the environment. At the same time, children feel overwhelmed by the large amount of information, especially online, and the negative tones used tend to generate eco-anxiety. Furthermore, information in mother tongue languages is often unavailable.

Family members, trusted adults and elders also play a central role in helping children access information, especially younger children. At the same time, children recognise that adults are sometimes less aware of, or care less about, environmental issues compared to them. Children therefore indicated that training and awareness-raising activities for adults are also necessary.

Finally, children stressed that national and local governments, as well as police forces, should be a source of information for children especially when they are seeking information about how to get help if their rights are being violated.



Right to participation

"Anything for us without us is against us." (Boy, 17 years old Malawi)

Children often referred to the concept of intergenerational equity (using their own words): they insisted that matters related to environmental degradation and climate change does, and will continue to, impact children more than adults, as children will inhabit the planet for longer. Many of them underlined the myopia of adults both in official and non-official roles when not taking measures to counteract the current situation and to take the health of the environment seriously.

"We must create a space to have a conversation between the young people and the government. This space does not currently exist." (Girl, 12 years old, Lebanon)

Consequently, children overwhelmingly emphasized the need for children to be at the forefront in decision-making processes on the environment and climate change. Children want to learn and be informed, be listened to, and have opportunities to contribute their ideas and solutions for promoting and protecting the health of the environment.











To gather children's views, children suggest that governments (i) work closely with schools, communities and local organizations; (ii) create official spaces for children to be part of decision-making processes (for example, child assemblies, child representatives, child parliaments, etc.); (iii) provide meetings and support, including financial support, to child environmental human rights defenders and activists and child organizations. They want to be asked their views about plans, policies and regulations, and about the activities of businesses in their communities.

Children are already participating and expressing their views at school and in their communities, by using social media and the Internet, attending protests and demonstrations, establishing organizations or actively participating in existing ones. Social media and the Internet are powerful tools for child participation but must be accessible to all: children must know how to use them and feel comfortable in expressing their views regardless of their capacities and capabilities. To strengthen child participation, children call on governments to invest resources in these spaces, and in improving digital literacy and child-friendly information.

"By translating decision documents from obscure language to easy-to-digest actual main points." (Child, 11 years old, Finland)

Children highlight that governments should always keep children safe from repercussions and violence when expressing their views by:

-  Creating safe spaces for child participation;
-  Protecting children's identity and anonymity in large consultations online;
-  Holding trainings and raising awareness activities on children's rights with police forces and all key stakeholders in communities;
-  Strengthening child protection systems and avoiding violence against child activists and children participating in protests and demonstrations;
-  Engaging with activists and organizations, and respecting their peaceful plans of actions, to ensure nobody gets harmed;
-  Providing child-friendly information on how to access justice and remedies for rights violations.



"Governments should prioritize our opinions and give us safe spaces to express our opinions, such as meetings in public spaces, and ensure that we are not violated by misunderstandings or aggression." (Boy, Peru)

Children overall appreciated having the opportunity to participate in this consultation and asked the Committee to continue to involve children in their work. The Committee should also monitor how governments around the world, as well as the international community, listen to children and give them decision-making roles in areas that concern the environment and climate change, avoiding tokenistic exercises.

Other Key Findings

Children participating in this consultation also talked extensively about non-discrimination, injustice and the rights of future generations. Depending on the country, region and location, there are differences in how children experience natural disasters and their conse-



"Not everyone is affected equally. It is due to colonialism, natural disasters, and drought. There are 10 earthquakes in Chile, nothing happens. However, there are 7 earthquakes in Turkey and everything collapses. In Somalia, people struggle to find water." (Child participating in a workshop in Turkey)

"People living in rural areas are suffering from shortage of rainfall and dry land which leads to drought and food shortage." (Girl, 13 years old, Ethiopia)

Some of the participants mentioned that access to information and participation opportunities (including this consultation) tends to exclude young children as well as specific groups of children (orphans, indigenous children, disabled children, girls). They believe governments should adopt the approach of intersectionality to recognize the overlapping circumstances children may face - for example, being a young girl from an indigenous group or a displaced boy with a disability.





Some children are worried about the indirect and long-term effects of environmental degradation and climate change. By making some populations less food-secure and poorer, climate change creates additional risk factors for girls, such as early marriage and early pregnancy. The negative consequences of climate change also cause migration and displacement with the associated protection risks for children and young people.

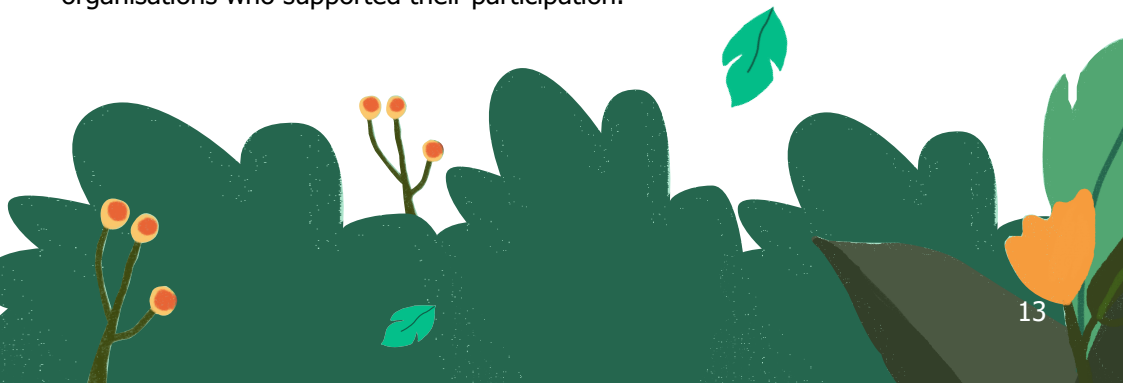
"As a Syrian girl living in a tent, climate change affects me a lot. When it rains, water enters the tent through the fabric. This fills our pillow and mattress with water, and the tent gets flooded. We have to go to our neighbour's house to sleep." (Girl between 6 to 13 in a refugee camp in Lebanon).

"The country should keep stopping deforestation and invest in afforestation. Let the government put climate change as its priority because, as of recent days, the northern parts of Nigeria have experienced flooding which makes a lot of families homeless. Children are forced to live in camps, schools were also closed because of the flooding. The health of children and the general community is affected so we need to act on this global problem." (Boy, Nigeria)

Children want to make sure that General Comment No.26 is used as a strategy to force State and non-State parties in resolving climate injustice and to make sure all children are safe and able to enjoy a safe future, regardless of their age, gender, ethnicity, religion, disability status, and where they live.

"Thank you very much for creating this Committee for the development of General Comment No.26. Children and young people should stand up for their rights. Not stay silent and suffer with their problem in silence. And not only for children and young people, but also for adults. The world is changing and we need to save it before it's too late." (Girl, 13 years old, Albania)

This summary report was compiled by [Articolo12](#) and [terre des hommes](#). We wish to thank all the children who contributed to the consultations, and to the organisations who supported their participation.



General Comment

Child rights, environment and climate change



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