

Emirates Youth Leading Climate Action and Policy

Building A Youth Movement on The Momentum to COP28



Context

The Emirates (UAE) is a largely oil-based economy; oil exports account for roughly 30% of GDP, with renewable energy making up less than 2% of the energy mix.

The nation has taken significant measures to become less oil-dependent such as becoming the first country in the MENA region with a net-zero by 2050 commitment.

In October 2022, young advocates organized the first ever in person Local Conference of Youth (LCOY) to discuss pressing issues, challenges, and discrepancies that exist on climate change in the country.

Program Approach

The Youth-leadership on Climate Change initiative supports young climate change advocates to influence national climate change related policies. In each country, UNICEF hires a coordinator, specifically a young person, who is then responsible for creating a coordination unit.

This coordination unit ensures collaboration among youth organizations and individuals who actively advocate for climate change action and implement plans to influence policies. Plans are developed along four pillars: awareness, advocacy, policy negotiation, and strengthening of youth-led movements. This case study describes the results achieved by UNICEF in the United Arab Emirates.

Awareness

Prior to the 2022 LCOY, the UNICEF young coordinator for UAE trained the LCOY core organizing team on UNICEF modules on awareness raising and advocacy. This allowed the team to identify the key challenges UAE is facing in addressing climate change, the gaps in advocacy and awareness, as well as the social norms that are preventing people from taking a stance on climate change. This prepared young organizers to facilitate awareness and advocacy spaces through panels and round table discussions that focused on multisectoral and intergenerational dialogues. Stakeholders from major industries (i.e., agriculture, construction, fashion, healthcare, education, energy, transport, and technology) helped open a conversation on the role they play in tackling climate change and discussed how they can work towards mitigating impact. Youth panels then discussed how youth can get involved to promote sustainable practices in each industry.



LCOY in 2022, to me, represented the start of our involvement within UN processes. The event introduced a massive opportunity to provide input into local and global climate-based decisions in the short-term leading to COP27, but also acted as a launchpad for several other movements, ideas, and further inputs, which will be key in development of COP28 in the UAE.

— Rushil, LCOY UAE
Core Organizer



For me LCOY UAE was an incredible opportunity to see the youth of the UAE working collaboratively to ensure that our voices are heard in climate negotiation spaces. Working on this event was a truly gratifying and inspiring experience”

— Rushil, LCOY UAE
Core Organizer

Advocacy

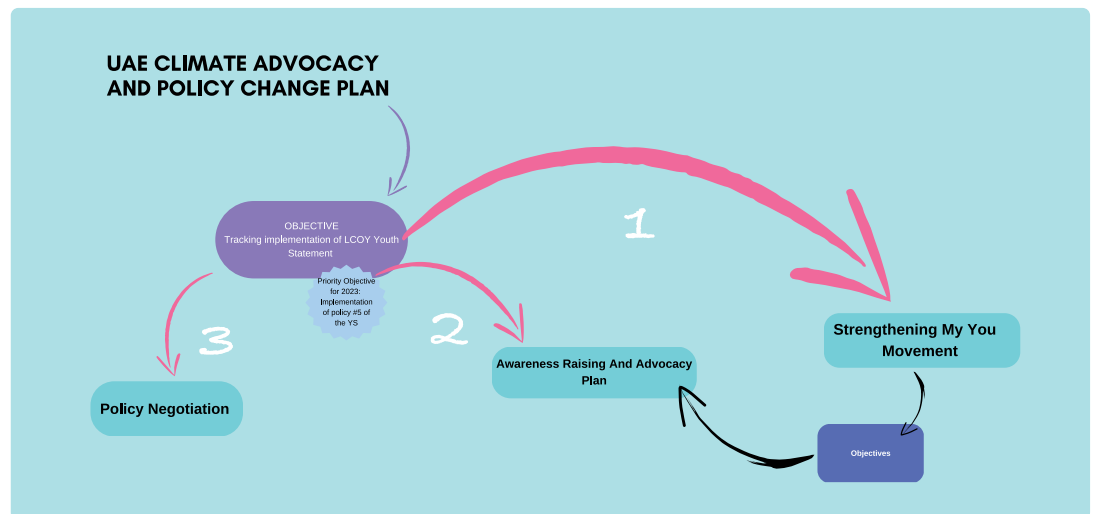
UNICEF training inspired the young LCOY organizing team to map key stakeholders, analyze policies, and identify areas of policy change. This included analysis with a focus on the gender lens and intergenerational equity. During the LCOY, young organizers conducted consultations, both online and offline, to discuss policy changes as well as to identify and prioritize channels for advocating.

As a result, the LCOY produced 19 recommendations outlined in the [Youth Statement](#) which was presented to the UAE Youth Minister, to the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change, Ministry of Education, as well as to the High-level Climate Champion with the UNFCCC.

Creating and Strengthening a Youth Led Movement

After LCOY, young advocates created the first youth led climate movement in the UAE, Reclaim our Future or [استعادة مستقبلنا](#) in Arabic. Reclaim our Future intends to implement solutions put forward in the LCOY UAE Youth Statement while introducing an intergenerational equity and child rights lens to the issues.

The first steps of the movement will focus on executing the strategic plan developed for policy negotiation, advocacy and awareness raising, and strengthening of a youth movement.



Key Lessons

- ▶ **Building transferable skills:** The LCOY organizing team worked on a tight timeline in preparing for the event. Through this experience they learned time management and prioritization, recognizing that it is crucial to start planning very early, so that there is adequate time to perfect the conference. They also learned about task sharing and delegation: inefficient distribution of work among the working group brought undue burden on a select few. In the future organizers will have a larger working group, so that the burden can be decreased and work can be managed more efficiently.
- ▶ **Supporting networking:** With UNICEF support, young leaders invested a considerable amount of time and effort towards outreach to key stakeholders, potential players and influencers, and especially young advocates. This allowed the creation of meaningful and long-term collaboration to amplify their work and to leverage upon as they set up the youth led movement.