

Youth Leadership on climate change initiative - Lessons from UNICEF Malawi

By Brenda Mwale



Phalombe Adolescent Girls Training Workshop following Cyclone Freddy. Graced by the District Commissioner for Phalombe in the middle.

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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 results achieved by UNICEF and young people in four flood-prone districts in the southern region of Malawi on awareness and strengthening of youth-led movements. The program provides training on climate action planning, leadership, and community engagement integrated with community-led activities supported by UNICEF funding.

Activities

The programme, which scaled up from one young coordinator to more than 200 girls, is fully led by girls. Girls decided the focus (alternatives to plastic, afforestation, and waste management), the “how to” (developing their own plans), and implemented it themselves (global advocacy and implementation of local initiatives), relying on UNICEF for specific support such as capacity building, coaching them for strategic planning, and brokering with local authorities.

Context

The adverse impacts of climate change continue to burden the poorest and the most vulnerable, especially women and girls. Despite growing recognition of the different skills and viewpoints women bring to development and sustainability initiatives compared to men, there is still not enough support for women or amplification of their voices in this space. Women are change makers, innovators, and solution providers to their communities, as was proven by the Girls Leadership in Climate Action Disaster Emergencies project, and deserve to be part of leading our collective efforts in reducing climate change. In collaboration with the Green Girls Platform, UNICEF Malawi aims to improve adolescent girls and women’s knowledge and leadership on climate action.



As a person with a disability, I have been empowered to know that there is much I can do for my community and not be limited by what others say about me.

— Mphamvu Kalima, Nsanje Youth Network, Malawi



Cyclone Freddy left us girls hopeless, but this training has enabled me not to let these challenges stop me from creating the change I want to see in our community, especially for girls.

— Matrida, age 16, Malowe Youth Club, Phalombe

Focal points

Brenda Success Mwale - Youth leadership coordinator

Fabio Friscia, Adolescent and Youth Manager - UNICEF NYHQ

Mutsinzi Heinrich Rukundo, Education Specialist - UNICEF Malawi

Youth consultation, training, and planning

- ▶ Organization of LCOY and youth consultation (450 participants) on challenges that youth-led movements are facing in the policy advocacy journey. Outcomes fed into the Malawi COP27 position paper and in the Global Youth Statement;
- ▶ Training of trainers for 54 adolescent girls from the four target districts on climate change awareness, design of strategic plans, community interventions and engagement, leadership, and policy advocacy;
- ▶ Development of Climate Action Plans by the 54 trained adolescent girls, who are representing the interests of their districts.

Youth action

- ▶ Training of young leaders on disaster risk reduction, leadership, advocacy, awareness, and movement strengthening;
- ▶ Engagement of young advocates on implementation of the Climate Action Plans in their communities (community awareness sessions on alternatives to plastic, on afforestation, and on waste management);
- ▶ Creation of safe spaces for girls and young women to share experiences and challenges related to climate related disasters;
- ▶ Monitoring and mentorship by the Green Girls Platform team and District Youth Officers on the progress of the community-led activities.

Results

- ▶ Key outcomes of the local conference of youth were included in the Malawi COP27 position paper and the Global Youth Statement. Success stories of youth-led movements documented at the LCOY were showcased at the Malawi Pavilion during COP27;
- ▶ The community training of trainers reached 200 girls in the four target districts who have planned and are now implementing community-based activities such as campaigns on plastic, tree planting, and waste management;
- ▶ Green girl movement strengthened through the definition of a clear narrative, leadership designation, team structure, and a plan for growth;
- ▶ Girls-led organizations mobilized their constituency with training, strategic planning, and implementation of youth-led activities to respond to the impacts of climate change.

Key Lessons

- ▶ **A platform for interaction with authorities.** It is important to provide young people with a platform to interact with decision and policymakers to help them share key challenges they are facing and get a better understanding of the policy making context;
- ▶ **Local is key for action.** While global advocacy is important, it is at the local level that impactful action takes place. The ideal combination is when young leaders are engaged at both levels so that when they advocate at the global level they amplify the voice of their community, and when they work in their community they contribute to commitments made at the global level.;
- ▶ **Connections and partnerships.** It is crucial for UNICEF to support young people in networking and partnering with key stakeholders who are championing climate action. This support will lead to further success on commitments, goals, and visions that a country sets.