

Youth leadership on Climate Change initiative

Lessons from UNICEF Maldives



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Context

The climate crisis is acutely felt in the Maldives as it poses an existential threat to the country. Maldives is an island as well as the lowest and flattest country in the world, leading to high levels of vulnerability to natural hazards and climate change. Like other countries in the world, it is grappling with the pressing challenges and the urgency to drive meaningful action. The country is at the forefront of efforts to respond to the climate crisis and along with other Small Island Developing States (SIDS), has long been a fierce advocate for stronger climate action.

Children and young people in the Maldives are the ones most affected by this crisis, as is the case in most countries.

Program Approach

The Youth Leadership initiative for Climate Change is supporting young advocates to influence national policies related to climate.

In order to do this, UNICEF hires one or two young coordinators responsible for creating a coordination unit among youth organizations and individuals who are active in advocacy on climate and implement plans to influence policies. Plans are developed along a journey made up of four steps: awareness, advocacy, policy negotiation, and strengthening of youth-led movements. This case study describes results achieved by UNICEF Maldives on youth leadership on climate change.

UNICEF Maldives (MCO) works with a cohort of smart, young, and committed climate guardians to contribute to the fight against climate change. Young people hold a unique and vital perspective on climate change as well as the potential for implementing solutions needed to address the climate crisis. In engaging, empowering, and leveraging the agency of young people, UNICEF MCO hired an intern (Zayan Ismail) for youth-led climate advocacy and action, to amplify the voices of young people, and to work alongside like-minded youth and policy makers in climate and environment related activities.



Unicef Maldives opened its doors to young people and I can see the changes happening. We don't stay silent and we raise our voices when the climate crisis is happening before our eyes. I am immensely grateful for this opportunity

— Zayan Ismail, 25 years old
Youth Led Advocacy and
Action on Climate Change

Key Activities

- ▶ In order to have young voices reach the highest possible stakeholders, UNICEF established the “Youth Reference Group” and brokered between it and key policy makers from the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Environment, Climate Change and Technology, and the President’s Special Envoy for Climate Change.
- ▶ Young leaders held design thinking bootcamps and climate workshops with over 60 youth in the North, central Malé, and Southern Laamu Atoll to bring community-based climate and environmental solutions to councils and relevant authorities.
- ▶ In partnership with the Special Envoy for Climate Change and Maldives National University, Young leaders organised the “Maldives Youth Track to COP28 Conference”. Over 50 youth participants attended panel discussions around amplifying youth voices and inspiring action, workshops on child friendly-climate resilient islands, climate justice and finance, and skills for climate resilience. Youth attending the conference developed the [Demands and Recommendations by Young People of Maldives to National Policymakers and World Leaders](#) to support their advocacy ramp up to COP.
- ▶ In partnership with the Special Envoy for Climate Change, young leaders launched a Podcast Series on climate advocacy and action titled “Seariously!” to amplify their voices, provide technical expertise and knowledge on environment and climate issues in the Maldives, and influence policymakers.

Key Lessons

- ▶ Youth led action on climate change may encounter conflict with institutional partners. UNICEF has an important role to play in opening doors for young people and prevent this from happening. Thanks to UNICEF brokering of partnerships and connections, in the Maldives, youth-led engagements are now amplified by government, CSO, and multisectoral partnerships.
- ▶ Platforms are crucial for young people to amplify their voice and network with each other, experts, and policy makers. UNICEF provided opportunities previously not available for young activists in the Maldives, facilitating access to conferences, podcasts, workshops, bootcamps, and panel discussions.
- ▶ Young people are change-makers: involving them in co-designing and giving them platforms strengthened their voices and asks to policy makers, shifting public discourse on climate change and youth.

Focal points

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