

Youth leadership on Climate Change in Paraguay



Members of the Paraguayan Youth Network for Climate Action during the National Youth Climate Summit at the national congress hall. © Defensores del Chaco Pyporé and UNICEF

Context

Paraguay is classified as at “extreme risk” according to CAF’s Vulnerability and Adaptation to Climate Change Index for the Latin America and Caribbean region, making it a highly vulnerable country. Deforestation, rising temperatures, air pollution, and drought directly impact not only people’s health but also the environment.

Paraguay is home to 2.5 million children and adolescents, the least responsible group and the one most affected by climate change. Young activists are organizing themselves, though they face several challenges, such as weak structures to influence national policy negotiations and unequal access to learning/training opportunities.

Program Approach

UNICEF’s Youth Leadership on Climate Change Initiative supports young advocates to influence policies related to climate change.

In countries where the programme is implemented, UNICEF hires a young coordinator responsible for coordinating youth organizations and individuals actively engaged in climate change advocacy and for implementing plans to influence policies. The plans are developed through four steps: strengthening the youth-led movement, raising awareness, advocacy, and policy negotiation.

This report and case study describe the results achieved by the initiative in Paraguay in terms of strengthening the youth led movement and advocacy.

Strengthening the Youth Movement

After mapping youth organizations and key individuals active in promoting climate change to understand their approaches and challenges, different youth initiatives were connected and a survey was conducted to identify capacity gaps among climate activists in Paraguay. Under the guidance of the young coordinator, the “Youth network for climate action” was born: regular meetings were held by the network to define mission, vision, strategies, campaigns, to develop its regulations, to elect coordinators, and define the action plan.

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The Youth Network for Climate Action is a safe and empowering space where my voice is heard and is enhanced along with the voices of all my colleagues in the Network, with whom we have been strengthening our capacities and knowledge in the area of Climate Action.

— Emily, age 19 youth advocate from Ciudad del Este.

Capacity Building

The coordinator received global-level training on youth movement strengthening, awareness, advocacy, and political negotiation, she then cascaded it to the network through the “Young Leadership School: Advocacy in Climate Policies”. This training consisted of six modules delivered in nine sessions (online meetings with a concluding in-person event), providing a space for exchanging experiences, ideas, and opinions with other young people who shared their interests through debates and practical activities. These activities addressed theoretical knowledge of climate change, as well as the development of soft skills such as communication, emotional intelligence, teamwork, critical thinking, and leadership.

The “Climate Academy” was another initiative supported by the coordinator, providing online training on climate change, adaptation, mitigation, financing, climate negotiations, and COP (Conference of the Parties), with specific sessions on youth, indigenous peoples, and climate change.

Advocacy

Members of the network co-led the organization of the Paraguay L-COY, which is the main youth-led advocacy on climate change event at a national level. L-COY aims to strengthen global advocacy and local organizations’ capacity for climate action, it typically produces the “National Declaration on Climate Change and Youth”, and prepares youth for the next COP.

Results

- ▶ Approximately **200 young people** representing different contexts and realities in Paraguay were trained on climate advocacy.
- ▶ Co-leadership by network members in **organizing 2023 LCOY** and development of the “2023 National Declaration on Climate Change and Youth”.
- ▶ **Creation of the “Youth network for climate action”** which mobilises about 130 climate activists engaged in activities such as advocacy in national events, environmental education activities with national partners, and tree planting.





I'm very excited to be part of this network, we are developing so many projects across the country and connecting to other youth, for us climate action is a long term decision.

— Javier, age 20, youth advocate from Caazapá.

Focal points

Global focal point:
Fabio Friscia
Adolescent & Youth Manager, NYHQ

Paraguay CO focal point:
Nathalia Delgado Vera
WASH Specialist

Initiative implemented by:
Joice Mendez

Lessons Learned

- ▶ **Involving young people in political negotiations** is key. Government institutions must encourage intergenerational dialogue, not merely as a checklist exercise, but by genuinely providing young people with a space to voice their opinions and have their perspectives taken into account.
- ▶ **Involving indigenous youth** in climate advocacy. Youth climate action requires a safe space for the inclusion of indigenous advocates and methods that consider historical and cultural contexts. Intercultural and non-violent communication (NVC) creates a strong foundation for any youth-led movement, allowing for representation and understanding among young people.
- ▶ **Developing green skills.** Governments are understanding that green jobs can address both unemployment and the climate crisis. They should prioritize the creation of professional development opportunities in green fields and also recognize that activism is key to leadership development for the green transition.

Way forward

- ▶ Advocating for the Paraguay's government signing of the "Declaration on Children, Youth, and Climate Action", an initiative promoted by YOUNGO, CERI, and UNICEF. The declaration represents a country commitment to fulfill the rights of children and youth in the face of the climate crisis.
- ▶ Ensuring youth inclusivity in Paraguay's NDC (Nationally Determined Contributions) consultation processes; updates are due in 2025. This is a unique opportunity to achieve a holistic, intergenerational approach to national climate action.
- ▶ Continuing this program, maintaining ongoing communication between UNICEF and various youth climate movements, progressively including more children in climate literacy and advocacy.