

Keyword: global-warming

Headline: The case for climate change education

Byline: Hendrik Garcia

Published Date: 04:03 AM September 15, 2021

Section: opinion

Word Count: 721

Content:

I was talking to my kids the other day about climate change. They didn't ask who pollutes the most, how much the damage would cost, or when we should act. They just said, "It's scary, Dad. We need to stop it, now." Sofia is eight and Sean is six.

Then it dawned on me. Maybe the best way to promote action on climate change is through education.

Children see more clearly than us. They aren't weighed down by politics, ideologies, or limited budgets. They are creative, flexible, and honest. They need to be empowered to develop good habits, like recycling to reduce carbon footprints. And we must listen to them more.

Because the truth is, we are failing them. Governments and corporations continue to pollute the environment and emit greenhouse gas emissions at alarming rates. Despite raising ambitions and hopes ahead of the COP26 Conference in Glasgow this year, the world is far from achieving the Paris Agreement target of keeping global warming under 2 degrees Celsius.

Current pledges and determined contributions by nations fall short in helping transition economies to greener pathways. In the meantime, super typhoons and sea-level rise are battering low-lying island states and developing countries like the Philippines.

The latest report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change reaffirms the scientific evidence. Seven of the 10 warmest years in recorded history have occurred since 2014. Climate change is triggering severe health problems, droughts, forest fires, famines, large-scale conflicts, and migration.

Is this the world we want to bequeath to our children?

No wonder they went on strike. In 2019, protests by over 1.6 million children in 150 countries, inspired by the example of Greta Thunberg, made a resounding impact. One of their most memorable banners said simply: "There is no Planet B."

A recent study suggests that if only 16 percent of high school students in high- and middle-income countries receive climate change education, there could be a nearly 19-gigaton reduction in carbon dioxide emissions by 2050. Climate change education can solidify a youth-led global movement and become a catalyst for concerted action.

Many countries, including the Philippines, have enacted climate change education policies and projects. The Department of Education provides "Climate Action Training" online, and teenage students can submit proposals for seed funding. Such initiatives go a long way toward teaching Filipino youth foresight and resilience as they confront extreme weather events and natural disasters aggravated by climate change.

There are other good practice models throughout the world. But Unesco has also observed major gaps in curricula across countries, and heavy bias for cognitive over socio-emotional and behavioral learning. Clearly, more studies are required, as well as enhanced international dialogue and cooperation, to make climate education more purposeful and targeted, especially through teacher training.

Focusing on education has another upside: The likelihood of cross-sectoral partnerships and funding from global actors increases substantially.

Of course, it can also be argued that climate change education will take too much time and not have any significant impact on mitigation or adaptation. Real progress can only be made in high-level political arenas, business forums, and COP sessions. But imagine if each school in the world started teaching our children not only about the dangers of climate change but also ways and everyday actions to help solve the crisis. Imagine the powerful multiplier and transformative effect that could bring. Eventually, some of these students will become the leaders and policymakers of their communities and countries. At scale, according to the study mentioned above, education can be as effective as solar technology or electric vehicles in reducing carbon emissions.

As a parent, I believe in Sean and Sofia, and in the goodness and agency of all children. With the right education, they will make the choices we are still not making, and save our world from catastrophe.

* * *

Subscribe to our daily newsletter

By providing an email address. I agree to the Terms of Use and acknowledge that I have read the Privacy Policy.

Hendrik Garcia is a Philippine career diplomat. He has served at the Department of Foreign Affairs in various capacities since 2002. He was recently director for human rights and international humanitarian law. He is now on scholarship at the Harvard Kennedy School as an Edward S. Mason fellow, pursuing a mid-career Master in Public Administration degree.