

MODEL UNITED NATIONS VI

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UNFCCC COP

EMPOWERING YOUTH INNOVATION AND
ENSURING INTERGENERATIONAL
EQUITY IN CLIMATE ACTION

TSINGHUA INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

UN FRAMEWORK CONVENTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE (UNFCCC)

Topic: Empowering Youth Innovation and Ensuring Intergenerational Equity in Climate Action

Difficulty: Intermediate

Statement of Problem

Climate change is the defining global crisis of the 21st century, with impacts that will disproportionately affect younger and future generations. Rising global temperatures, extreme weather events, sea-level rise, and ecosystem collapse threaten not only present livelihoods but also the long-term stability of human societies. Despite these stakes, young people, defined by the United Nations as individuals aged 15-24, have historically been excluded from formal climate decision-making processes, even though they will bear the longest-lasting consequences of today's policy choices.

Youth constitute approximately 16% of the global population and are among the most invested stakeholders in climate outcomes. Yet, their participation in climate governance has often been limited to symbolic roles, such as delivering speeches or participating in side events, without meaningful influence over negotiations, funding decisions, or implementation mechanisms.

In recent years, this dynamic has begun to shift. Youth-led movements such as Fridays for Future, Youth4Climate, and the Sunrise Movement, alongside prominent activists like Greta Thunberg, have propelled youth voices into the global spotlight. Beyond activism, young people are emerging as innovators, entrepreneurs, scientists, and community leaders, developing scalable solutions in renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, climate adaptation, and green technology.

However, existing international frameworks under the UNFCCC remain insufficient in translating youth engagement into tangible power. There is a lack of formal mechanisms to integrate youth perspectives into policy-making, limited access to climate finance for youth-led initiatives, and weak legal protections for the principle of intergenerational equity. The central question before this committee is: How can the international community move beyond symbolic inclusion to genuinely empower youth as partners in climate governance, ensure their innovations are funded and implemented, and safeguard the rights of future generations through enforceable international mechanisms?

History of the Problem & Past Actions

The international community has increasingly acknowledged the importance of youth engagement and intergenerational equity in climate action, though progress has been uneven.

UNFCCC Frameworks and COP Decisions:

- *UNFCCC (1992)*: Established the foundational framework for international climate cooperation but did not include explicit mechanisms for youth participation.
- *Paris Agreement (2015)*: Its preamble explicitly recognizes the principle of intergenerational equity, marking a significant normative step, though without binding legal force.
- *YOUNGO*: The official Children and Youth Constituency of the UNFCCC, serving as the primary channel for youth engagement. While YOUNGO enables access to negotiations, its influence over final outcomes remains limited.
- *COP26 (Glasgow, 2021)*: Marked a turning point in youth visibility and resulted in the Glasgow Work Programme on Action for Climate Empowerment (ACE), which emphasizes education, public participation, and youth engagement.
- *COP27 (Sharm el-Sheikh, 2022)*: Established the first UNFCCC Youth Climate Champion, aimed at facilitating youth participation across COP processes.
- *COP28 (Dubai, 2023)*: Featured a dedicated Youth Hub and increased attention to children and youth as critical stakeholders in climate action.

Broader UN Initiatives:

- *UN Youth Strategy - "Youth 2030"*: A system-wide strategy to strengthen youth participation, protect youth rights, and enhance youth engagement across UN bodies.
- *Secretary-General's Youth Advisory Group on Climate Change*: Provides direct policy recommendations to UN leadership.
- *UNICEF and UNEP Programs*: Support climate education, youth-led environmental initiatives, and community-based adaptation efforts worldwide.

Despite these initiatives, several structural barriers remain:

- *Tokenism*: Youth participation is often consultative rather than decision-making.
- *Funding Gaps*: Youth-led organizations and startups struggle to access large-scale climate finance.
- *Education Deficits*: Many national education systems lack comprehensive climate literacy and green skills training.
- *Political Marginalization*: Youth under 18 lack voting rights in most countries, limiting formal political leverage.

Key Issues and Possible Directions for Debate

Delegates should consider the following core areas and guiding questions:

1. Formalizing Youth Participation in Climate Governance
 - a. Should a permanent youth advisory body with a formal consultative or voting role be established within the UNFCCC?
 - b. How can Parties be encouraged or required to include youth delegates in official negotiating teams and National Adaptation Plans?
 - c. How can equitable representation of youth from the Global South, Indigenous communities, and marginalized groups be ensured?
2. Financing Youth-Led Climate Innovation
 - a. How can existing climate finance mechanisms, such as the Green Climate Fund, create accessible funding windows for youth-led initiatives?

- b. What roles should grants, micro-financing, and venture capital play in supporting youth entrepreneurship?
 - c. How can bureaucratic barriers that prevent youth organizations from accessing international funds be reduced?
- 3. Climate Education and Green Skills Development
 - a. How can comprehensive climate education be universally integrated into national curricula?
 - b. What mechanisms can support vocational training and higher education in green skills, such as renewable energy engineering and sustainable agriculture?
 - c. How can a "Just Transition" be ensured for youth in regions dependent on fossil fuel industries?
- 4. Legal and Ethical Dimensions: Intergenerational Equity
 - a. Should intergenerational equity be strengthened through legal instruments such as an optional protocol or an international court advisory opinion?
 - b. What role does youth-led climate litigation play in advancing climate accountability?
 - c. How can the UN-recognized right to a healthy environment be operationalized to protect future generations?

Possible direction

A comprehensive resolution may include:

- The establishment of a permanent, funded Youth Climate Council within the UNFCCC.
- A mandate requiring Parties to include at least one youth delegate under the age of 30 in official COP delegations.
- The creation of a Youth Climate Innovation Fund under an existing financial mechanism with simplified access requirements.

- Calls for developed nations to support global programs for climate education and green skills training.
- Language strengthening commitments to intergenerational equity, including exploration of its legal status.
- Reporting and monitoring mechanisms for youth engagement in NDCs and National Adaptation Plans.

Possible Stances

High-Ambition Bloc (e.g., SIDS, Nordic Countries): Likely to strongly support formal youth participation and robust intergenerational equity provisions, driven by existential climate risks.

Major Emitters & Developed Nations (e.g., USA, EU, UK): May support youth engagement rhetorically but remain cautious about binding obligations or redistributing climate finance toward youth-specific mechanisms.

Developing Nations (e.g., G77 + China): Will emphasize climate finance, technology transfer, and education as prerequisites for youth empowerment, while guarding national adaptation priorities.

Petrostates (e.g., Saudi Arabia, Russia): Likely to resist proposals that increase legal accountability or accelerate fossil fuel phase-outs, favoring non-binding youth engagement language.

Further Research

Delegates are strongly encouraged to:

- Review YOUNGO policy statements and past COP submissions.
- Examine youth movements such as Fridays for Future, Youth4Climate, and the Sunrise Movement.
- Read the Glasgow Work Programme on Action for Climate Empowerment (ACE).
- Analyze the latest IPCC Synthesis Report on intergenerational impacts.

- Research assigned country positions, youth policies, NDCs, and recent COP statements

Key Terms & Definition

Intergenerational Equity: The principle that present generations must meet their needs without compromising future generations' ability to meet theirs.

Climate Justice: A framework emphasizing the unequal distribution of climate impacts and responsibilities.

Youth Climate Activism: Youth-led efforts to demand climate action through advocacy, protest, and litigation.

Green Skills: Skills required to support a sustainable and resource-efficient economy.

Just Transition: Ensuring the shift to a green economy is fair and inclusive.

UNFCCC: The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs): National climate action plans under the Paris Agreement.

Climate Finance: Financial resources supporting climate mitigation and adaptation efforts.