

Commonwealth Youth Statement on Climate Change 2022

"Young People as Key Partners in solutions to tackle Climate Change."

COMMONWEALTH YOUTH

There are more than 700 million youth aged 15-29 years old in the Commonwealth and more than 1.5 billion under the age of 30. Together the Commonwealth Youth make this clarion call to all parties and Governments in the lead up to COP27 and beyond, to act upon the ambitions and commitments made, with a sense of urgency and in partnership with us. Collectively, youth leaders and youth-led organisations from across the Commonwealth and the 13 Commonwealth Youth Networks, led by the Commonwealth Youth Climate Change Network (CYCN) and the Commonwealth Youth for Sustainable Urbanisation (CYSU) network, pledge our readiness as partners and solution providers as we contribute passionately to combat the global climate crisis.

COMMONWEALTH YOUTH ON CLIMATE CHANGE

Inaction on climate change threatens the future of all youth. The lack of global climate action, especially by nations who account for most of the world's carbon emissions, has evoked significant hardship, disproportionately affecting the most vulnerable and marginalised. The existing challenges faced by youth will be exacerbated by the climate crisis, introducing additional risks and disruptions to livelihoods and well-being. Notable climate-induced or exacerbated challenges include:

- A. **Loss and Damage of lives, homes & livelihood:** in addition to losses due to extreme weather and rising temperatures, 49 Commonwealth countries have marine coastlines, including two-thirds of the world's small island developing states that contribute the least to the problem but yet are most vulnerable to the changes of the ocean and climate. Prioritising aid and support to the most vulnerable, will prevent the crippling of nations' economy, infrastructure and the hope of their residents.
- B. **Rapid Urbanisation:** by 2050, an additional 2.5 billion people will be living in the world's towns and cities. Cities are faced with the burden of rapid urbanisation (the large-scale and fast transition of land to become part of the urban area) and natural disasters in addition to inadequate existing infrastructure to respond to these challenges. Rapid urbanisation is projected to be higher in developing countries, such as those in the Asian and African regions, which currently have more complex economic, governance and social constraints. These constraints make it harder for them to respond to the intense challenges of the climate crisis. Immediate action is therefore required to effectively plan for and implement urbanisation in a sustainable way, whilst meeting the needs of all groups, particularly young people.

The spatial planning process is the most important tool for deciding how the land, sea and environment we live in is used and designed. It is the one tool that provides, designs and ultimately decides the vision for each geographical area to meet the needs of its residents (including but not limited to housing, public spaces, jobs and

local services). It has the potential to support the birth, development and flourishing of a strong local community, in every neighbourhood. Yet young people are not supported and invited to the opportunities to gain the capacity, tools and rights to decide and shape how the very neighbourhoods and communities they live in and depend on, function and look like. We call for a more transparent and consultative planning process, including the youth and residents who are most directly affected, in and through every neighbourhood to national level of planning.

- C. **Water Crisis:** Water can give and take lives. Water affects national security. Climate change is inextricably linked to water. Around 74 per cent of natural disasters between 2001 and 2018 were water-related, including droughts and floods. Meanwhile, extreme weather events are exacerbating water scarcity, water quality issues and the unpredictability of water security. Increasing demand for water also increases pressure on the water-energy-carbon nexus. We must immediately recognise the strength that sustainable water management has in building resilience and reducing emissions and take action at all levels of society.
- D. **Food Insecurity:** Since the COVID-19 pandemic began in 2020, the percentage of the global population experiencing extreme hunger has increased. Extreme weather events and changing temperatures are already impacting food producers, consumers, and indigenous cultural practices, such as traditional medicines and foods. It is critical to tackle food insecurity (with the foundation and grounding of equitable and just action) through adaptation planning, policy, and investment into climate-positive and innovative but sustainable food production research and technology.
- E. **Global Public Health:** Health and climate change are intimately connected. The changing climate has increased death and disease, particularly in some of the world's most vulnerable communities. Key impacts include increasingly frequent and more severe extreme weather events and rising temperatures, widening socio-economic disparities, and increased rates of zoonoses and food-, water- and vector-borne diseases, antimicrobial resistance and mental health issues.

Climate change and extreme weather patterns continue to threaten the provision of essential health services, for many in low- and middle-income countries and especially among marginalised populations in high-income countries. Currently, many health systems and by extension, its health professionals are unprepared and ill-equipped to face climate emergencies such as heatwaves, droughts and floods. It is also important to note that current health systems practices are often carbon-intensive in terms of delivering care, with the global health sector reportedly accounting for 4.4 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions. Much of this comes from fossil fuel combustion and the healthcare activities of high income countries.

ACTION TO SECURE THE FUTURE WE ALL NEED

Young people of the Commonwealth unite to end climate inaction, and youth tokenism. Our generation will have to deal with more frequent and severe climate impacts than ever, making us one of the groups most vulnerable to its impacts. For many in the Global South, the effects of climate change are already existential. Future generations will face disasters at a scale never seen before. In an effort to secure a better future with less losses, damages and violations, we call upon member states to:

- 1. Commit to increase climate finance to support the most vulnerable.** This includes increasing finance and investment into multidisciplinary, multisectoral and collective youth-led and youth-mainstreamed structures, climate solutions and action. Vulnerable and marginalised people (such as women, elderly, disabled, indigenous and youth) should be offered an organisational framework to deliver programmes and services, with the aid of additional allocated funding from governments which contribute most to climate change. We encourage the mobilisation of US\$500 billion in public finance to drive and support climate mitigation and adaptation initiatives in developing countries, especially in small island developing states and in indigenous communities and the implementation of the Santiago Network, adhering to the Principles for Locally-Led Adaptation. We call for the establishment of youth constituencies in the global climate finance implementation framework to ensure the engagement and contribution of young people.
- 2. Commit to a low-carbon, climate-resilient and just energy transition, by meaningfully engaging and partnering with youth and other marginalised people.** This includes mainstreaming, championing and involving young people and youth-led bodies as partners in meaningful dialogue, decision making and in the development of multi-scale sustainable development policies and agreements. We call for the Commonwealth's work in co-designing climate policies for an energy transition that is equitable and inclusive, and for programmes with youth to be scaled up, with increased and more consistent financing for youth-led action and solutions, to ensure that Nationally Determined Commitments (NDCs) are inclusively designed and delivered. Additionally, we urge governments to accelerate the research, investment, trial and implementation of renewable and clean energy, and carbon-reducing solutions, and divestment from non-renewable energy entities and projects, recognising the principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities.
- 3. Commit to investing into and building the capacity of youth** to plan, design and build the sustainable cities of the future, invest in schools and universities, from national to grassroots levels, to encourage the development of innovative and climate-smart glocal solutions to the challenges of the climate emergency. Further commitments must be made to implement the six elements of Action in Climate Empowerment so as to enhance youth-led green and blue enterprises, promote energy literacy as a viable tool for catalysing change and cement young people as key partners in climate mitigation, adaptation and recovery efforts in line with Article 11 of the Paris Agreement.

In line with Article 10 of the Paris Agreement, we also urge that all technologies for global challenges (including climate adaptation and mitigation, and pandemic preparedness and response) are made open-source, with robust anonymised open data sharing systems, complemented with lowered barriers for greater technology transfer and patent sharing to address the intersectional planetary crisis, democratically and equitably. We call upon all governments and countries to increase investment into the research, development, trial, implementation and protection of youth-created and youth-led technologies and solutions.

4. Commit to ocean protection through the inclusion of youth, local and indigenous communities in developing sustainable blue economies. Sustainable tourism, decarbonisation of sea freight and vessels, better regulated fisheries, and expanded ocean protection can create valuable economic opportunities for local communities, and young people. To realise the full potential of the blue economy, inclusive decision-making is necessary. Therefore, we call on countries to increase support and investment into ocean conservation initiatives, public education, and skills development (through training and mentorship), to create suitable and sustainable ocean employment opportunities for the present and future generations.

5. Commit to enabling Sustainable Urbanisation - developing smart and sustainable cities and urban areas, inclusively and collectively. As the member states have done at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in 2022, this means providing the resources needed to plan for, and to enable sustainable urbanisation. Recognising that the majority of the world will live in urban areas by 2030, we need to ensure that urban areas are developed in a sustainable and inclusive way. This can only be achieved by meaningfully involving marginalised people and youth as partners in the design and implementation of all policies and decisions that will impact the environment that they live in. We call on governments to recognise youth, youth-led organisations and networks as key partners, by increasing your investment and collaboration with us, in co-creating inclusive solutions for a more sustainable and habitable environment for all. We welcome the adoption of the [Declaration on Sustainable Urbanisation](#) by heads of state at CHOGM2022 and further urge the declaration's and the [New Urban Agenda's](#) implementation into national, regional and local policies. Sustainable urbanisation is a key factor in achieving climate change goals, and managing the impacts of climate change, especially upon young people.

6. Commit to developing climate-resilient health systems that protect the most vulnerable. It is necessary for countries to build the capacity and resilience of health workers, services and systems to ensure that they can effectively prepare and respond to climate change. Countries must develop climate-resilient healthcare systems, leveraging both adaptation and mitigation measures, while integrating a multisectoral and 'one health' approach. Health systems must also recognise the role they play in climate change, and therefore efforts must be made to decarbonise health systems and transition to clean energy even as countries and health systems progress technologically. Governments must support the initiatives of young people, including young health professionals, who seek to communicate the relationship between climate and health,

facilitate research on the extent of impact on climate-related health events among young people and provide professional support to young people with climate anxiety stemming from loss of lives and livelihood.

7. Commit to increasing the integration of residents and young people in spatial planning to effectively tackle complex challenges from the national to the neighbourhood level. In order to achieve equitable and inclusive outcomes that take into consideration the plight of the poor, vulnerable, and the people who are affected by their immediate environment the most, these interventions need to reflect the local environmental, social and economic contexts in which they sit. These integrated spatial plans will allow young people and residents, most affected, to be directly involved in tackling any issue and challenge, in the best possible way for them and their neighbourhoods, it facilitates the implementation of visions into reality more effectively and cost efficiently. Governments must adopt the spatial planning approach that involves the active and inclusive participation of all groups, particularly young people, and allow the voices and needs of young people to drive the solutions to the climate crisis and the increasing burden of rapid urbanisation.

We call on governments to implement 3 actions. Firstly, the drafting of legislation that mandates the involvement and consultation of youth and youth residents in spatial planning. Secondly, to recognise and promote the rights of youth and residents in the design, enhancement and preservation of their neighbourhood. Thirdly, to establish and refine the implementation, enforcement and compliance process of spatial planning, towards a ‘cities for citizens, cities by citizens’ approach.

Given the above, we call for greater inclusion of young people as part of the solution and a new, more inclusive and collective way of working. Youth are key stakeholders and partners in driving local, national and global climate action, in line with the goals of the Paris Agreement, Land Degradation Neutrality targets, post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework and Sustainable Development Agenda. We acknowledge the Commonwealth's commitment towards a common future and call for further enabling the meaningful participation of youth in the design and implementation of climate and sustainable development policies. We also call for the inclusion of marginalised groups at the policymaking and solutions-design table, and a more equitable distribution of resources and investment to enable these goals to be planned for and implemented in an integrated manner.

We request governments, institutions and companies to act now, to invite young people as partners and establish the foundations for a sustainable future for all.