



CLIMATE JUSTICE FOR CHILDREN & YOUTH

A HANDBOOK



LAWYERS FOR
HUMAN RIGHTS
making rights real since 1979

 **TERRE DES HOMMES**
Empowered Children. A Just World.
Germany

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1 | ABOUT THIS BOOKLET



Overview

This handbook was developed in November 2025 as a guide to help children and youth understand climate justice and take action for a better future. It recognises that young people face unique challenges because of climate change—but also have the power to make a difference.



Inside, you will find important topics about the environment and how young people like you can stand up for climate justice. We explain big ideas in simple, clear ways so they are easy to understand. The handbook looks at how climate change affects younger generations the most and how today's choices can shape the world for future generations.

We also talk about human rights—especially the rights that protect your health, safety, and well-being in a changing climate. This handbook is here to support your voice and help you become a strong advocate for the planet.

This handbook is created for young people, especially children and youth who are passionate about protecting the environment and fighting for climate justice, and is driven by the goal of empowering a new generation of informed, confident, and active climate leaders who can inspire change in their communities and beyond.



CHILDREN AND YOUTH
HAVE THE **RIGHT TO
PARTICIPATE** AND BE
HEARD IN DECISIONS
THAT AFFECT THEM.





Acknowledgements

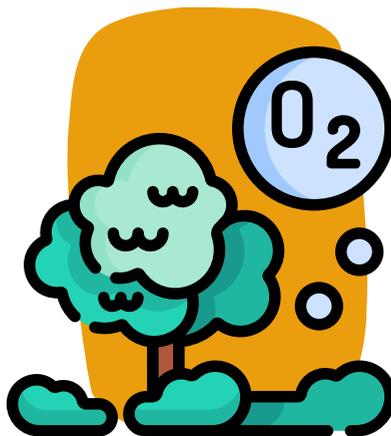
This handbook was developed by Lawyers for Human Rights (LHR), an independent, non-profit human rights organisation with over 45 years of experience in advancing social justice and public interest litigation in South Africa. Founded in 1979 by a group of activist lawyers, LHR uses the law as a tool for positive change and to deepen the democratisation of South African society.

Through its Environmental Rights Programme, LHR works to promote environmental justice for marginalised communities and individuals, seeking to uphold the constitutional right to a healthy environment and ensure a fair distribution of environmental benefits and burdens.

Our work combines strategic litigation, advocacy, law reform, community mobilisation, and human rights education to strengthen accountability and empower communities.

With offices across Johannesburg, Pretoria, and Durban, LHR remains rooted in the experiences of those most affected by inequality and environmental harm.

We extend our sincere gratitude to Terre des Hommes Germany (TDH) for their generous financial support, which made the development of this handbook possible. This collaboration reflects a shared commitment to protecting children's rights, advancing environmental justice, and empowering young people to become leaders in the fight for a more just and sustainable future.

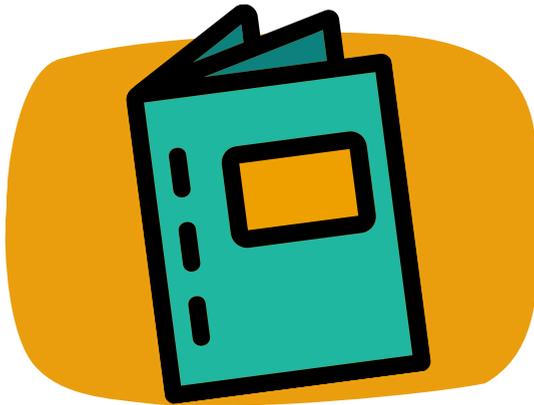




Report authors and contributors

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2 | WHAT IS CLIMATE CHANGE?



2.1 What is Climate Change?

Climate change means that the Earth's usual weather is changing over a long period of time.^[1] It's not just about one hot day or one big storm—those are examples of weather, which can change from day to day.^[2] Climate, on the other hand, is the average weather in a place over many years.

For example, a heatwave is weather. But if summers in one place are getting longer and hotter, with more frequent and intense heatwaves and potentially longer and more severe droughts over many years, that's a change in climate. When these long-term changes in temperature, rain, snow, or storms happen across many parts of the world, we call it climate change.

Scientists know that climate change is real. They use special tools—like NASA satellites and ice core samples—to study the Earth's past and present climate.^[3] Ice cores are pieces of ice drilled from deep in glaciers or polar ice sheets. These cores show how much carbon dioxide (CO₂) was in the air a long time ago.^[4] When scientists compare that to how much CO₂ is in the air today, they see a big increase.^[5]

More CO₂ in the atmosphere traps heat and causes the planet to warm up. That's one of the main signs of climate change. (We will explain more about carbon dioxide in the next section.)

^[1] United Nations (UN) Climate Action 'What is Climate Change' available at <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/what-is-climate-change>, accessed on 24 February 2025.

^[2] NASA 'What is Climate Change?' available at <https://science.nasa.gov/kids/earth/what-is-climate-change/>, accessed on 24 February 2025.

^[3] Same as above.

^[4] NASA 'Evidence' available at https://science.nasa.gov/climate-change/evidence/#footnote_1, accessed 25 February 2025.

^[5] Same as above.



2.2. Causes of Climate Change: Human Activities and Natural Factors

What Causes Climate Change?

The Earth's climate has always changed over time.^[6] In the past, natural events like volcanic eruptions, changes in the Earth's orbit, and shifts in the sun's energy caused the planet to warm or cool slowly.^[7]

But over the last 200 years, something different has been happening. The Earth is now warming much faster^[8]—and this time, it's mostly because of human activity.^[9]

This change began during the Industrial Revolution in the mid-1800s, when people started using coal-powered machines in factories, building cities, and burning more fossil fuels like coal, oil, and gas for energy.^[10] These actions released huge amounts of greenhouse gases into the air.^[11] Because coal is one of the most carbon-intensive energy sources, it is recommended that we move away from coal mining and coal-fired power stations. South Africa's Just Energy Transition plan includes steps to phase out coal in a way that supports workers and communities, while shifting to cleaner, more sustainable energy sources.^[12]

^[6] NASA 'What is Climate Change' available at <https://science.nasa.gov/kids/earth/what-is-climate-change/>, accessed on 24 February 2025.

^[7] Same source as above and NASA 'What is Climate Change?' available at <https://science.nasa.gov/climate-change/what-is-climate-change/>, accessed on 28 February 2025.

^[8] UN Climate Action 'What is Climate Change' available at <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/what-is-climate-change>, accessed on 24 February 2025 and NASA 'What is Climate Change?' available at <https://climatekids.nasa.gov/climate-change-meaning/>, accessed on 24 February 2025.

^[9] South African National Climate Change Information System (NCCIS) 'Climate Information' available at <https://nccis.environment.gov.za/climate-information/what-is-climate-change>, accessed on 25 February 2025.

^[10] Same as above.

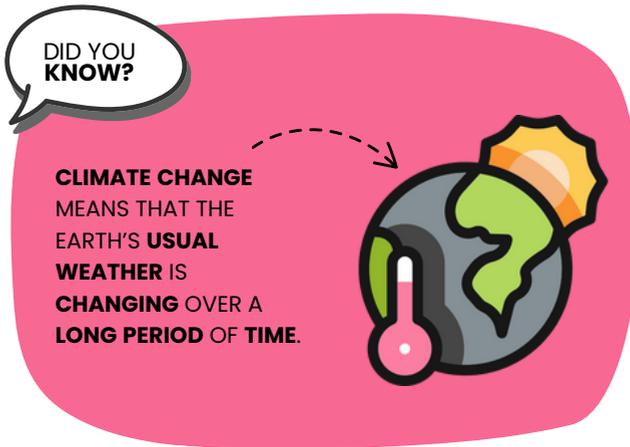
^[11] UN Climate Action 'What is Climate Change' available at <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/what-is-climate-change>, accessed 25 February 2025.

^[12] The Just Energy Transition Implementation Plan 2023 – 2027, in particular p 82 – 86 available at <https://justenergytransition.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/JET-Implementation-Plan-2023-2027-1.pdf>. See also the official website for South Africa's Just Energy Transition [https://justenergytransition.co.za/#:~:text=South%20Africa's%20just%20Energy%20Transition,-South%20Africa%20faces&text=The%20JET%20supports%20South%20Africa's,Nationally%20Determined%20Contribution%20\(NDC\).](https://justenergytransition.co.za/#:~:text=South%20Africa's%20just%20Energy%20Transition,-South%20Africa%20faces&text=The%20JET%20supports%20South%20Africa's,Nationally%20Determined%20Contribution%20(NDC).)



What are greenhouse gases?

Greenhouse gases trap heat in the Earth's atmosphere.^[13] Think of them like a blanket around the planet, or the glass walls of a greenhouse—they keep the Earth warm by holding in heat from the sun.^[14] Some of this is good and helps life exist, but now there's too much of it.^[15] The most common greenhouse gases are Carbon dioxide (CO₂) and Methane (CH₄).^[16] Since 1750, carbon dioxide has gone up by 47% and methane has gone up by 156%.^[17] This extra heat is causing the Earth's temperature to rise at about 10 times the normal speed compared to natural warming periods after an ice age.^[18] This is what we call global warming.



^[13] NCCIS 'Climate Information' available at <https://nccis.environment.gov.za/climate-information/what-is-climate-change>, accessed on 24 February 2025

^[14] NASA 'A Guide to Climate Change' available at <https://climatekids.nasa.gov/kids-guide-to-climate-change/>, accessed on 24 February 2025.

^[15] NRDC 'Greenhouse Effect 101' (2023) available at <https://www.nrdc.org/stories/greenhouse-effect-101#gases>, accessed on 25 February 2025.

^[16] UN Climate Action 'What is Climate Change?' available at <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/what-is-climate-change>, accessed on 25 February 2025.

^[17] NRDC 'Greenhouse Effect 101' (2023) available at <https://www.nrdc.org/stories/greenhouse-effect-101#gases>, 25 February 2025.

^[18] NASA 'Evidence' available at https://science.nasa.gov/climate-change/evidence/#footnote_1, accessed on 25 February 2025.



What are increasing greenhouse gases?

The biggest sources of greenhouse gases include burning fossil fuels for electricity, heat, and transportation; deforestation, or cutting down large forests; factory farming (raising lots of animals in crowded conditions) and making goods in large factories.

All these actions release harmful gases into the air. As more greenhouse gases fill our atmosphere, the planet keeps getting warmer—and the effects are being felt all over the world.

2.3 The Impacts of Climate Change on the Planet

The Earth is like a big, connected system—so when one-part changes, it affects many others. As the planet gets hotter, there's a domino effect that touches the environment, animals, and people.

Climate change has caused more hot days and intense heat waves around the world.^[19] In South Africa, this warming is happening even faster than in most other places.^[20] In fact, some areas in the center of the country are heating up at twice the global average, which makes South Africa especially vulnerable to the effects of climate change.^[21]

This warming also causes more extreme weather.^[22] Powerful storms, like hurricanes and cyclones, are becoming stronger.^[23]

^[19] UN Climate Action 'Causes and Effects of Climate Change' available at <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/science/causes-effects-climate-change>, accessed 24 February 2025 and Greenpeace 'Climate Change in South Africa: 21 Stunning Facts about South Africa's Climate Breakdown' available at <https://www.greenpeace.org/africa/en/blogs/54171/climate-change-in-south-africa-21-stunning-facts-about-south-africas-climate-breakdown/>, accessed on 28 February 2025.

^[20] R Scholes and F Engelbrecht 'Climate Impacts in Southern Africa during the 21st Century' (2021) available at https://cer.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Climate-impacts-in-South-Africa_Final_September_2021.FINAL_.pdf and Greenpeace 'Climate Change in South Africa: 21 Stunning Facts about South Africa's Climate Breakdown' available at <https://www.greenpeace.org/africa/en/blogs/54171/climate-change-in-south-africa-21-stunning-facts-about-south-africas-climate-breakdown/>, accessed on 28 February 2025.

^[21] Same as above

^[22] UN Climate Action 'Causes and Effects of Climate Change' available at <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/science/causes-effects-climate-change> accessed 24 February 2025).

^[23] Same as above



In some regions, it rains too little, leading to long droughts, while in others, it rains too much, causing floods that damage homes, schools, and crops.^[24] We've seen this in South Africa, with floods in provinces like KwaZulu-Natal, the Eastern Cape, Gauteng, and the Western Cape. Cyclones have also affected areas south of Vilanculos and Inhambane Province in Mozambique. Wildfires are becoming more common in hot and dry places, burning forests and threatening communities.^[25]

At the same time, satellites have shown that higher temperatures are melting ice in places like Antarctica and Greenland.^[26] As this ice melts, it adds more water to the oceans, causing sea levels to rise.^[27] This rise in water can slowly flood land, especially in areas near the ocean, forcing people to move and damaging ecosystems.^[28]

Climate change also affects people's health and safety. Extreme weather events can destroy crops, harm animals, and reduce fish supplies, which makes it harder for families to get enough food.^[29] This can lead to hunger and poor nutrition, especially in communities that rely directly on farming and fishing.^[30] Warmer temperatures also make it easier for some diseases to spread—especially those that come from mosquitoes or dirty water.^[31] Scientists have even found that there are more heat-related illnesses, like heart problems and heatstroke, during very hot months, and many of these health problems are linked to climate change.^[32]

These impacts are serious—and they are already happening. Young people today are especially affected, because they will live with these changes for the rest of their lives. But knowing the facts is the first step toward action.

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^[24] Same as above

^[25] Same as above

^[26] NASA 'Evidence' available at <https://climatekids.nasa.gov/climate-change-evidence/>, accessed on 24 February 2025.

^[27] Same as above.

^[28] Same as above.

^[29] UN Climate Action 'Causes and Effects of Climate Change' available at <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/science/causes-effects-climate-change>, accessed on 24 February 2025.

^[30] Same as above.

^[31] UN Climate Action 'Causes and Effects of Climate Change' available at <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/science/causes-effects-climate-change>, accessed on 25 February 2025.

^[32] J. Jaime King, Joanna Manning, and Alistair Woodward 'In this Together: International Collaborations for Environmental and Human Health' (2023) JLME 51

3 | WHO IS MOST AFFECTED BY CLIMATE CHANGE?



3.1 Vulnerable communities and Climate Inequality

Climate change affects everyone, but not everyone is affected in the same way. Some people face more risks than others. Young people, in particular, are more vulnerable to the effects of climate change than adults.^[33] This is because their bodies and minds are still developing, which can make it harder to cope with heatwaves, pollution, and other challenges caused by a changing climate.^[34]

People who live in mining communities, like those in parts of South Africa, are also at greater risk.^[35] Mining often leads to air and water pollution, which can harm the environment and make it harder to breathe clean air or drink safe water.^[36] These communities are directly exposed to the negative effects of both climate change and the pollution caused by mining activities.^[37]

Women, especially pregnant women, can also experience more serious impacts.^[38]

^[33] O Ruppel, C Roschmann, and K Ruppel-Schlichting 'Climate Change: International Law and Global Governance' (2013) 349, 378. It is important to note that the term "young people" can sometimes refer to youth above the age of 18; however, in this handbook, it primarily includes children and youth, recognising their distinct experiences and vulnerabilities in the face of climate change.

^[34] Same as above

^[35] Victor Munnik 'The Social and Environmental Consequences of Coal Mining in South Africa' (2010), Environmental Monitoring Group, Cape Town, South Africa and Both ENDS, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

^[36] Mike Scott 'ESG Watch: Why Climate Change is Leaving Mining Firms Between a Rock and a Hard Place' Reuters 23 April 2025 available at <https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/climate-energy/esg-watch-why-climate-change-is-leaving-mining-firms-between-rock-hard-place-2024-04-23/>, accessed on 1 February 2025.

^[37] Victor Munnik 'The Social and Environmental Consequences of Coal Mining in South Africa' (2010), Environmental Monitoring Group, Cape Town, South Africa and Both ENDS, Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

^[38] UN Foundation '5 Facts about Gender Equality and Climate Change' available at https://unfoundation.org/blog/post/five-facts-about-gender-equality-and-climate-change/?gad_source=1&gclid=Cj0KCQjw8MG1BhCoARIsAHxSiQl-FI72oe_QEz7hmSeuoFsk_iP_WQ_Aes5UsO6D0wV-AsouoG4lowVUaAp1VEALw_wcB, accessed on 1 February 2025.



When temperatures rise due to climate change, it becomes easier for diseases like malaria, Zika virus, and dengue fever to spread.^[39] These illnesses can be very dangerous—especially for pregnant women and their babies.^[40]

Understanding who is most affected by climate change helps us work for climate justice. That means making sure that solutions are fair and that vulnerable communities get the support and protection they need.

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3.2 Climate-Induced Displacement: The growing Crisis of Climate Refugees

Climate change does not just hurt the environment—it can also force people to leave their homes. When disasters like droughts, floods, and extreme heat become too dangerous, some families have no choice but to move. These people are sometimes called climate refugees.^[41]

Climate refugees may lose their homes, their farms, and even their way of life. Some cross borders to find safety, while others move to different parts of their country. Many end up in informal settlements—places with makeshift housing, little or no clean water, electricity, or healthcare.^[42] These areas are often built in unsafe locations, which means the people who live there are still exposed to climate hazards, like flooding and water shortages.^[43]

^[39] Same as above

^[40] UN Foundation '5 Facts about Gender Equality and Climate Change' available at https://unfoundation.org/blog/post/five-facts-about-gender-equality-and-climate-change/?gad_source=1&gclid=Cj0KCQjw8MG1BhCoARIsAHxSiQl-FI72oe_OEz7hmSeuoFsk_iP_WQAes5UsO6D0wV-AsouG4lowVUaAp1VEALw_wcB, accessed on 1 February 2025.

^[41] UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) 'The climate crisis is amplifying displacement and making life harder for those already forced to flee' available at <https://www.unhcr.org/what-we-do/build-better-futures/climate-change-and-displacement>, accessed on 2 February 2025.

^[42] Same as above.

^[43] Same as above.



This cycle can make life especially hard for children and families. They don't just lose their homes—they also lose access to schools, healthcare, and basic needs.^[44] As climate change continues, more and more people may be forced to move, which makes it one of the biggest human rights challenges of our time.

3.3 How climate change affects Children and Youth

Climate change impacts both the world we live in now and the future we're building. Young people today have a special role to play in protecting the environment—not only for themselves, but for the generations who will come after them. By speaking up and taking action, youth can help create a cleaner, safer world where all children can grow and thrive.

Children are often more sensitive than adults to the effects of climate change. Extreme heat, strong sunlight, and air pollution can affect their health and limit their ability to spend time outdoors, learn, or play.^[45] But outdoor play is more than just fun—it's also important for a child's growth and development. The United Nations, in its General Comment on Children's Rights and the Environment, explains that for children to fully enjoy their rights—including the right to play, to be healthy, and to learn—they must have access to a clean and healthy environment.^[46] Beyond these physical effects, climate change can also impact children's emotional well-being, leading to feelings of fear, sadness, or anxiety about the planet's future—a topic explored further in our section on eco-anxiety under chapter 5 of this handbook.

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^[44] Same as above.

^[45] M Karaba Bäckström, E Lundgreen, and B Slaug 'Mitigating the effects of climate change in children's outdoor play environments' (2024) Scandinavian Journal of occupational therapy p 1..

^[46] UN Committee on the Rights of the Child 'General Comment No. 26: Children's rights and the environment with special focus on climate change' CRC/C/GC/26: General comment No. 26 (2023) available at https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/crc/gcomments/gc26/2023/GC26-Child-Friendly-Version_English.pdf, p 2 - 4, accessed on 5 February 2025..

4 | WHAT IS CLIMATE JUSTICE?



Climate justice means making sure that everyone is treated fairly as we deal with climate change. While climate change affects the whole planet, not everyone is affected in the same way—and not everyone has the same ability to protect themselves or take action.^[47]

Some communities, especially in the Global South, face more serious harm from floods, droughts, pollution, and rising temperatures, even though they did the least to cause the problem.^[48] These are often places where poor communities, Indigenous peoples, and children live—people who usually do not have as much power to make decisions or change laws.^[49]

Climate justice asks important questions like:

- Who is most affected by climate change?
- Who caused the most pollution?
- Who has the power to fix things?
- How can we make sure everyone has a voice in the solutions?

At its heart, climate justice is about more than just protecting the planet—it's about protecting people, especially the ones who are most at risk. It's also about fighting for human rights, equality, and a better future for all, not just a few.



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^[47] UN Climate Action 'What is climate change?' available at <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/what-is-climate-change>, accessed on 5 February 2025.

^[48] Generation Climate Europe 'Global North and Global South: how climate change uncovers global inequalities' available at <https://gceurope.org/global-north-and-global-south-how-climate-change-uncovers-global-inequalities/>, accessed on 5 February 2025.

^[49] Same as above.

5 | WHAT IS MY RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT?



Everyone deserves to live in a clean and safe environment. This is called the right to a healthy environment, and it's one of the most important rights we have. It helps protect our air, water, food, and the places we live. But today, climate change is one of the biggest threats to that right. It harms the quality of our air and water, increases the risk of floods and droughts, and makes it harder for people to grow food or find safe shelter.^[50] When the environment is harmed, it also affects other important rights—like our right to health, education, food, and even a safe home.

This chapter will explore how climate change and human rights are connected—especially for children and youth. It will look at the laws that protect these rights in South Africa and in international agreements, and explain what governments are supposed to do to protect the environment. Most importantly, it will show how young people like **you** can stand up for your rights and demand climate justice.

In South Africa, the Constitution says that:

Environment

24. Everyone has the right—
- (a) to an environment that is not harmful to their health or wellbeing; and
 - (b) to have the environment protected, for the benefit of present and future generations, through reasonable legislative and other measures that—
 - (i) prevent pollution and ecological degradation;
 - (ii) promote conservation; and
 - (iii) secure ecologically sustainable development and use of natural resources while promoting justifiable economic and social development.

This means that the government must work to prevent pollution, protect nature, and make sure that development is fair and sustainable. It also means that young people have the right to speak out and help hold leaders accountable when this right is not respected.

^[50] United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) (2021) The human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment (A/76/L.75), United Nations available at <https://undocs.org/en/A/76/L.75>, accessed on 9 February 2025.



5.1 Climate Change as Human Rights Issue

Climate change is not just an environmental problem—the effects of climate change such as rising global temperatures, extreme weather events, sea-level rise, and air pollution directly affects people’s ability to exercise their basic human rights.^[51] Its effects make it harder for people to enjoy their most basic rights, like the rights to life, health, water, food, housing, and a clean environment.^[52]

The Right to Life



As temperatures rise and extreme weather events become more frequent, millions of people—especially those in poor or rural communities—are put at greater risk.^[53] The right to life is the most basic of all rights. But climate change threatens this right in many ways. Extreme weather—like hurricanes, floods, droughts, and heatwaves—puts lives at risk.^[54] The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that climate change could cause about 250,000 deaths per year between 2030 and 2050 from heat-related illness, malaria, diarrhea, and other health problems.^[55]

The Right to Health

In South Africa, everyone has the right to access healthcare, and no one can be denied emergency medical treatment.^[56] But climate change makes this harder. Air pollution from burning fossil fuels can cause serious illnesses like asthma and lung infections, especially in children.^[57] Warmer temperatures also help diseases like cholera and dengue fever spread faster putting more pressure on healthcare systems and making it harder for young people to stay healthy.^[58]



^[51] UNHCR ‘Climate change and human rights’ (2021) available at <https://www.ohchr.org/en/climate-change>, accessed on 9 February 2025.

^[52] United Nations Human Rights Council (HCR) ‘Climate change and human rights’ (2019) available at <https://www.ohchr.org/en/climate-change>, accessed on 9 February 2025.

^[53] World Health Organization (WHO) ‘Climate change and health’ (2014) available at <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/climate-change-and-health>, accessed on 9 February 2025.

^[54] Same as above.

^[55] Same as above.

^[56] Section 27(1)(b) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 (the Constitution).

^[57] WHO ‘Air pollution and child health: Prescribing clean air’ (2018) available at <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/air-pollution-and-child-health>, accessed on 21 February 2025.

^[58] Same source as above.



The Right to Water and Sanitation

The South African Constitution says that everyone has the right to enough food and water.^[59] The Water Services Act also guarantees the right to basic water and sanitation. But climate change makes this harder to achieve. Droughts reduce the amount of clean drinking water, and floods can pollute water supplies and cause waterborne diseases.^[60] This especially affects children in rural and low-income areas, who are more likely to suffer from unsafe water and poor sanitation.^[61]

The Right to Food

The right to food means that everyone should have access to enough safe, healthy, and culturally appropriate food—either by growing it or buying it.^[62] But climate change is making food scarcer and more expensive. Unpredictable weather and long droughts make it harder for farmers and people to grow crops, which leads to hunger and malnutrition, especially among children and families living in poverty.^[63]



The Right to Education



Education is a right guaranteed to every child in South Africa.^[64] But when climate disasters destroy schools or force families to move, many children—especially girls^[65]—are forced to drop out. Some have to work to support their families, while others lose access to schools altogether.^[66] These disruptions can have lifelong effects on children's futures.^[67]

^[59] Section 27(1)(b) of the Constitution.

^[60] United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) 'Water, sanitation and hygiene: The silent emergency' (2015) available at <https://www.unicef.org/water-sanitation-and-hygiene-wash>, accessed on 21 February 2025.

^[61] Same as above.

^[62] United Nations General Assembly 'The right to food' A/67/268 (2012) available at [https://www.wfp.org/support-us/stories/united-nations-world-food-programme?utm_source=google&utm_medium=cpc&utm_campaign=22194234415&utm_content=174025229429&gclid=aw.ds&gad_source=1&gad_campaignid=22194234415&gbraid=0AAAAACOf4HroehYqyDRHbxfDfNuZ05RK&gclid=CjwKCAiAt8bIbHbPpEiwAzH1w6Z\)sQFlz1WuRkp_d1XeZuGMAuPW5FdP0swQwa5R3UJba_w5M3MumjxxoCoVUQAvD_BwE](https://www.wfp.org/support-us/stories/united-nations-world-food-programme?utm_source=google&utm_medium=cpc&utm_campaign=22194234415&utm_content=174025229429&gclid=aw.ds&gad_source=1&gad_campaignid=22194234415&gbraid=0AAAAACOf4HroehYqyDRHbxfDfNuZ05RK&gclid=CjwKCAiAt8bIbHbPpEiwAzH1w6Z)sQFlz1WuRkp_d1XeZuGMAuPW5FdP0swQwa5R3UJba_w5M3MumjxxoCoVUQAvD_BwE), accessed on 21 February 2025.

^[63] Same as above.

^[64] Section 29(1)(a) of the Constitution.

^[65] United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) 'Climate change and education: The impacts on children's education in a changing climate' (2020) available at <https://www.unicef.org/media/147931/file/Theclimate-changedchild-ReportinEnglish.pdf>, accessed on 2 March 2025.

^[66] Same as above.

^[67] Same as above.



The Right to a Clean and Safe Environment

As mentioned above, the South African Constitution also protects the right to live in an environment that is not harmful to health or well-being.^[68] But pollution from factories, plastic waste, and deforestation harms nature and people. When natural places are destroyed, animals and plants disappear, and people—especially those who live close to the land—can lose their homes and even parts of their cultural identity.^[69]

5.2. International Agreements on Climate Justice

South Africa and many other countries are part of international treaties and agreements that aim to stop climate change and protect people's rights. These agreements help countries work together to protect the planet and make sure that everyone—especially children and young people—has a voice in decisions about the environment.

5.2.1 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)^[70]

This global treaty encourages countries to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. South Africa is a member, which means it has agreed to take steps to help stop global warming and protect the environment.

^[68] Section 24 of the Constitution.

^[69] United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) 'The environment and health: Pollution, climate change, and the health impacts of environmental degradation' (2020) available at <https://www.unep.org/resources/report/environment-and-health>.

^[70] United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) 'United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change' (1992) available at <https://unfccc.int/resource/docs/convkp/conveng.pdf>.



5.2.2 The Paris Agreement (2015)^[71]

This is a legally binding agreement between many countries around the world. Its goal is to keep global temperature rise below 1.5°C, which helps reduce the worst effects of climate change. Countries like South Africa must create and share plans to cut emissions and adapt to climate change.

5.2.3 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)^[72]

This treaty recognises that children have the right to grow up in a healthy environment. It asks governments to protect children from environmental harm and take steps to make sure the planet is safe for future generations.

5.2.4 General Comment No. 26 (2023) on Children’s Rights and the Environment^[73]

The United Nations has shared something very important called General Comment No. 26. It gives detailed advice to governments about how to protect children from the harmful effects of climate change and pollution. It explains that children’s rights—like the right to be healthy, to grow up safely, to have clean air and water, and to live in a safe environment—are all connected to what happens to the Earth. Almost every country in the world (196 of them!) has promised to protect these rights. This means governments and businesses must take real action to fight climate change, stop pollution, and protect nature. They can no longer ignore how their choices affect the planet and children’s futures. And just as importantly, this new document says that children have the right to take part in decisions about the environment. Your voice matters—and it should be heard.^[74]



^[74] Same as above.



5.2.5 The World's Highest Court Speaks Up for the Planet

On 23 July 2025, something historic happened. The International Court of Justice (ICJ) — the world's highest court — announced that every country in the world has a legal duty to protect the climate and prevent harm to our planet.^[75]

The president of the Court, Judge Yūji Iwasawa, described climate change as an “existential problem of planetary proportions”— a threat so serious that it endangers all life on Earth.

This moment began years earlier, in 2019, when a group of 27 law students from the Pacific Islands launched a campaign asking the ICJ to explain what international law requires countries to do to protect people and the environment. Their courage and persistence led to this ground-breaking decision, which reminds governments that protecting the planet is not just a moral responsibility, but also a legal one.

Although the ICJ's ruling, known as an advisory opinion, is not legally binding like a court order, it makes it clear that when countries fail to take action against climate change, they are breaking international law. The Court explained that countries have legal duties under international treaties to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, to act with care and prevent serious harm to the environment, and to work together in good faith to protect the planet.

It also confirmed that climate change directly affects human rights, including the right to life, health, and safety, and that states must protect these rights by taking care of the environment and climate system.

The Court further noted that when countries do not meet these obligations, they can be held responsible under international law. This could mean repairing the harm they have caused, stopping the damaging actions, and ensuring that these mistakes are not repeated.

Most importantly, the Court reminded the world that laws alone cannot solve the climate crisis. Real and lasting change depends on people's will and wisdom — in the choices we make, the way we live, and the decisions of our leaders.

^[75] Obligations of States in respect of Climate Change, Advisory Opinion, International Court of Justice (ICJ), ICJ Rep., 23 July 2025 available at <https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/187/187-20250723-adv-01-00-en.pdf> on 30 October 2025.



This ruling marks a powerful moment in history. It confirms that climate action is both a moral and a legal duty, and it gives young people everywhere a stronger foundation to demand accountability, justice, and protection for the planet — now and for generations to come.

5.3. Children's Rights and Climate Action

Children and young people are not just affected by climate change—they are also powerful leaders in the fight against it. All over the world, youth activists have organised climate marches, spoken out in the media, taken governments to court, and demanded a healthier, more sustainable future.^[76] Young people are showing that age doesn't limit your ability to make a difference.

How Youth Can Take Action

One of the most important first steps in fighting for climate justice is to educate yourself and others. Understanding what climate change is and how it affects people and the planet helps you figure out where you can make a difference. You can share what you learn through awareness campaigns in your school, neighbourhood, or community—because when more people care, more people take action.

A great way to get started is by joining or starting a climate action group or environmental club at your school. These groups can plan activities like Earth Day events, climate-focused film screenings, tree-planting, clean-up days, and even sustainability audits—where students check how their school is doing with waste, energy, and water use. These audits can help schools become more eco-friendly by cutting down on plastic, saving energy, and using water wisely.

You can also get creative and hands-on by starting edible gardens or carbon sequestration projects at your school. These projects help capture carbon, promote food security, and show how nature-based solutions can make a real difference. Plus, they're a fun way to connect learning with real-world action.

Climate advocacy doesn't stop at the school gates. Young people can take action by writing to leaders, joining community meetings, or campaigning for stronger climate laws. In South Africa, the #CancelCoal campaign,^[77] led by the African Climate Alliance, Vukani Environmental Movement, and groundwork, shows how youth activism can drive real change.

^[76] United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) 'Children's rights and climate action: Youth activism for a sustainable future' (2021) available at <https://www.unicef.org/climate-crisis>, accessed on 3 March 2025.

^[77] The #CancelCoal Initiative available at <https://www.africanclimatealliance.org/cancel-coal>.



The campaign called for an end to new coal projects and supported a court case challenging the government’s plan to build 1,500 MW of new coal power. In December 2024, the Pretoria High Court ruled in favour of the campaign, marking a major victory for young people and the planet.

Social media is another powerful tool for young climate activists. Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube allow you to share your message through videos, art, stories, and campaigns. You can connect with other youth around the world and build powerful movements for change.

And if you’re ready to take it further, you can help hold governments and companies accountable. This could mean speaking out against pollution, joining legal campaigns, or supporting efforts to stop environmental damage. Some young people have even taken legal action to demand stronger climate protection from leaders.

No matter where you start, remember this: children and youth have the right to a clean, safe, and healthy environment. By learning, speaking up, and working together, young people can be powerful changemakers—shaping a better future for themselves and for generations to come.

DID YOU KNOW?

SOUTH AFRICA AND MANY OTHER COUNTRIES ARE PART OF **INTERNATIONAL TREATIES AND AGREEMENTS** THAT **AIM TO STOP CLIMATE CHANGE AND PROTECT PEOPLE’S RIGHTS.**

The infographic features a teal background with a white speech bubble containing the text 'DID YOU KNOW?'. A dashed white arrow points from the speech bubble to a stylized globe with green and grey sections. A white warning sign with a red exclamation mark is overlaid on the right side of the globe.

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6 | WHAT ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE AND MENTAL HEALTH?



Climate change is not just an environmental issue; it is also a mental health issue. The fear, anxiety, and stress caused by witnessing the effects of climate change or anticipating future environmental disasters can deeply affect children, youth, and adults alike. This section explores how climate change impacts mental health, particularly for young people, and provides strategies for managing climate-related stress and building resilience in the face of climate challenges.^[78]

6.1 What is Eco-Anxiety? Understanding Climate-Related Stress

Eco-anxiety, also known as climate anxiety, is the feeling of worry, fear, or sadness that people experience when thinking about climate change. Many children and young people feel this way when they hear about or live through events like floods, droughts, or wildfires. Learning about the damage being done to the planet can be overwhelming, especially when it feels like no one is doing enough to stop it.^[79]

Eco-anxiety is not just about being scared for yourself—it's also about caring deeply for the planet, animals, and future generations. It shows that you're paying attention, and that you care. But if these feelings become too strong or constant, they can start to affect your mental health and make you feel powerless or hopeless.^[80]

^[78] American Psychological Association (APA) 'The psychological impacts of climate change: Stress, anxiety, and mental health' (2017) available at <https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2017/03/mental-health-climate.pdf>, accessed on 12 May 2025.

^[79] American Psychological Association 'Eco-anxiety and the mental health effects of climate change' (2020) available at <https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2017/03/mental-health-climate.pdf>, accessed on 12 May 2025.

^[80] Same as above.



6.1.1 What Causes Eco-Anxiety ?

Living through climate disasters can be scary. Children who experience things like hurricanes, wildfires, or floods may feel unsafe or uncertain. These events can leave a lasting impact and sometimes cause fear or stress that doesn't go away easily.

Worrying about the future is another cause of eco-anxiety. Many young people wonder what the world will look like when they grow up. Will they be able to live safely? Will their communities survive rising seas, drought, or food shortages? These big questions can create anxiety.

News and social media can also make things feel worse. Seeing constant headlines or videos about melting glaciers, burning forests, or endangered animals can increase stress. While it's important to stay informed, too much exposure—especially to frightening images—can make problems feel too big to solve.

Feeling powerless is another common part of eco-anxiety. Many children and youth care deeply about the planet but don't always know how to help. When the problem feels so big, it's easy to feel like your voice doesn't matter—but it does.

Eco-anxiety is a normal response to a real and serious crisis. But when these feelings become overwhelming, they can affect your well-being. Some young people may experience symptoms like depression, panic attacks, or even post-traumatic stress.

If you ever feel this way, know that you are not alone—and there are ways to cope, speak out, and take action. You are not powerless, and your concern is a sign of strength, not weakness.





6.2 How Climate Change Affects Mental Health in Children and Youth

Climate change doesn't just harm the environment—it also affects how people feel, especially children and young people. Because young people are still growing and often rely on adults for safety and support, they are more vulnerable to the emotional impacts of climate change. These feelings can show up in many different ways, both right away and over time.^[81]

6.2.1 What Causes Eco-Anxiety ?

Many young people experience increased anxiety and depression because of climate change. Studies show that children who live through extreme weather events—like floods, wildfires, or droughts—may feel scared, sad, or constantly worried. For some, the fear of what might happen in the future can feel overwhelming.^[82]

In more serious cases, children who have lived through natural disasters may experience post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This can include symptoms like nightmares, flashbacks, trouble concentrating, or feeling unsafe, even in everyday situations.^[83]

Some children also feel a deep sense of loss and grief when they see nature being destroyed. The disappearance of forests, animals, coral reefs, and other ecosystems can feel like losing something precious—even if they've never seen those places in person.^[84] This kind of grief is real and valid.

^[81] A Cunsolo and N Ellis 'Ecological grief as a mental health response to climate change-related loss' (2018) *Nature Climate Change*, p 275-281.

^[82] M Ojala 'Children's fear and sadness in response to climate change: A study of Finnish children's emotional reactions to environmental degradation and climate change' (2012) *Environmental Education Research*, p 365-382 available at <https://www.unicef.org/parenting/mental-health/climate-anxiety#:~:text=Climate%20change%20is%20impacting%20almost,of%20hope%20for%20the%20future,21%20May%202025>.

^[83] W Yule 'Post-traumatic stress disorder in children and adolescents: A review of the literature' (2006) *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, p 675-688.

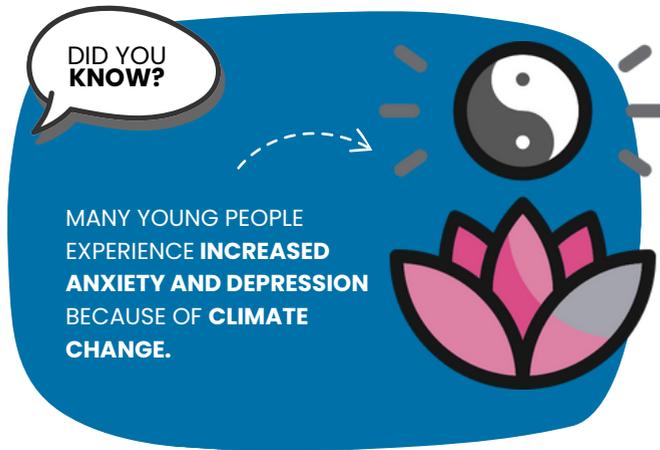
^[84] S Clayton 'Climate change and mental health: From impacts to adaptation' (2020) *Current Opinion in Psychology*, p 32, 28-34.



Other young people may struggle with helplessness or hopelessness. When the damage to the environment feels too big to fix, it's easy to feel like nothing you do matters.^[85] These feelings can make it hard to imagine a bright or safe future.

Children who are displaced by climate disasters—those who have to leave their homes because of floods, storms, or drought—may face even more serious mental health challenges.^[86] Leaving behind their home, school, and community can be traumatic, especially when they don't know what the future holds.

It's important to know that these feelings are normal responses to a very real crisis. If you ever feel overwhelmed, talking to someone you trust—like a teacher, parent, or counselor—can help. You are not alone, and there are ways to cope, connect, and find hope.



^[85] M Ballew, T Myers, S Uppalapati, S Rosenthal, and J Kotcher 'Is distress about climate change associated with climate action?' Yale Program on Climate Change Communication available at ^[86] [A Betts and L Bloom 'The impact of climate change on forced migration' Refugee Studies Centre, University of Oxford \(2014\) available at <https://www.unicef.org/innocenti/media/3741/file/UNICEF-Mental-Health-Displacement-2023.pdf>, accessed on 21 May 2025.](#)



6.3 Coping Strategies: How to Manage Climate Anxiety and Stay Hopeful

It is normal to feel anxious or overwhelmed when thinking about climate change. The climate crisis can feel scary, especially when the news makes it seem like things are getting worse. But there are many ways to cope with these feelings and stay hopeful. This section shares helpful strategies that focus on emotional well-being, building support, and taking action.^[87]

6.3.1 Grounding Techniques for Managing Anxiety

When anxiety becomes too strong, grounding techniques can help calm your mind and body. These are simple practices that bring your attention back to the present moment:

(1) Deep Breathing: Taking slow, deep breaths can help relax your body and ease feelings of panic. Try breathing in for four counts, holding for four, and breathing out for four counts. Repeat this a few times.

(2) Mindfulness and Meditation: Focusing on the here and now—through quiet breathing, guided meditation, or simply noticing your surroundings—can reduce fear about the future.

(3) Progressive Muscle Relaxation: This technique involves gently tensing and then relaxing different muscle groups. It helps release physical tension and brings a sense of calm.^[88]



^[86] A Betts and L Bloom 'The impact of climate change on forced migration' Refugee Studies Centre, University of Oxford (2014) available at <https://www.unicef.org/innocenti/media/3741/file/UNICEF-Mental-Health-Displacement-2023.pdf>, accessed on 21 May 2025.

^[87] A Cunsolo and N Ellis 'Climate change and mental health: An overview of the impacts and coping strategies' (2018) International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, p 527.

^[88] J Kabat-Zinn 'Full catastrophe living: Using the wisdom of your body and mind to face stress, pain, and illness' (1990) Delta.



6.3.2 Emotional Expression and Support

It is important to talk about your feelings instead of keeping them bottled up. Sharing your worries with a trusted adult, friend, or sibling can bring relief. You can also express your emotions through creative activities like writing, art, or music—these can help turn your feelings into something meaningful.

Connecting with others who care about the environment can also help. Joining youth-led climate groups gives you a safe space to talk, learn, and take action together. Being part of a group reminds you that you're not alone—and that many young people around the world are working for change too.

If your emotions feel too heavy, it is okay to ask for help from a counselor or therapist.^[89] Mental health professionals can help you better understand your feelings and teach you ways to manage anxiety.



^[89] American Psychological Association 'The psychological impacts of climate change: Preparing for the future' (2017) APA.



5.3.2 Emotional Expression and Support

One of the most powerful ways to deal with eco-anxiety is to take action. Doing something positive—even something small—can help turn feelings of fear into feelings of purpose and power.

(1) Advocacy and Activism: You can join climate marches, start petitions, or speak to local leaders about making greener choices. Standing up for the planet gives your voice power.

(2) Volunteering for Environmental Causes: Helping out with tree planting, beach clean-ups, recycling drives, or school garden projects is a great way to take action and make new friends.

(3) Living Sustainably: Simple changes—like using less plastic, saving energy, and choosing eco-friendly products—can make a difference. These small steps, done regularly, help protect the planet and give you a sense of control.^[90]

(4) Art: Through drawing, painting, poetry, music, or storytelling, young people can share their hopes, fears, and ideas about the environment. Art can be a powerful way to express feelings about climate change and cope with eco-anxiety, helping young people turn their worries into creativity, connection, awareness raising, and hope for a better future.

6.4 Building Resilience & Collective Well-Being in Climate Activism

Standing up for the planet can be inspiring—but it can also be emotionally exhausting. That's why building resilience, both as individuals and as a community, is so important for young climate activists. Resilience means being able to cope with challenges, bounce back from hard times, and keep moving forward with hope.

When young people work together in solidarity, they create strong, supportive communities where no one feels alone.^[91] This sense of togetherness helps protect mental health and promotes collective well-being—the feeling that we are stronger, healthier, and more hopeful when we take care of one another.^[92]

^[90] L Steg and C Vlek 'Encouraging pro-environmental behavior: An integrative review and research agenda' (2009) *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, p 309-317.

^[91] UNICEF 'The climate crisis is a child rights crisis' (2021) available at <https://www.unicef.org> accessed on 21 May 2025.

^[92] Same as above.



6.4.1 The Power of Collective Action

Joining a climate justice movement can remind children and youth that they are not alone in their worries or their efforts. Working with others creates a shared sense of purpose. It turns fear into action and isolation into connection.^[93] Knowing that others care just as much as you do can make activism more powerful—and more joyful.

Caring for the planet is important—but so is caring for yourself. If you want to stay involved in climate action for the long term, you need to take care of your mental and emotional well-being too.^[94]

Some helpful self-care practices include:

(1)Balancing action with rest. It's okay to take breaks. You don't have to fix everything at once.

(2)Spending time with friends, family, or fellow activists. Talking and laughing with others can recharge your energy.

(3)Connecting with nature. Walking in a park, listening to birds, or just sitting outside can remind you why your work matters—and bring peace to your mind and body.^[95]

6.4.2 Promoting Mental Health Awareness in the Climate Movement

Youth-led climate movements should make mental health a priority. That means creating safe spaces where young people can share how they feel, offering emotional support, and reminding each other that it's okay to rest. A healthy movement is one that values both the planet and the people fighting to protect it.^[96]

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^[93] Same as above.

^[94] S Clayton and B Karazsia 'Psychological research on climate change and mental health: Understanding the link and the potential for action' (2020) APA, p 289-303.

^[95] Same as above.

^[96] WHO 'Mental health and climate change: Addressing the impacts of climate change on mental health' (2022) available at <https://www.who.int>, accessed on 21 May 2025.

7 | WHAT ACTION CAN I TAKE?



7.1 How Young People Can Make a Difference

All around the world, young people are stepping up to take action for climate justice. They are showing that you don't need to be an adult to make a big difference. Whether through activism, education, art, or helping their communities, young people are leading the way toward a more sustainable and fair future. They are creating projects, organising protests, and speaking to leaders—all with one goal: to protect the planet and the people who live on it.



One powerful example is María from Mexico, who speaks out about how climate change is harming water systems. She reminds people that protecting forests is key to protecting clean water.

In the Philippines, Mitzi connects climate change with social justice, making sure that the voices of the most affected communities are heard and included in climate decisions.



These young activists do not just talk—they take action. By joining global movements like Fridays for Future, organizing school strikes, and pushing governments to create stronger climate policies, they are helping to shape the laws and systems that affect us all.

Storytelling is another powerful way youth are making a difference:



Russell from Dominica uses photography to show the real-life damage hurricanes cause in his community.



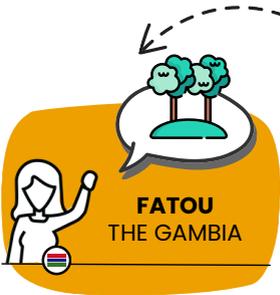
In Zimbabwe, Nkosi shares his personal experiences of how the environment around him has changed.

These stories help people understand the impacts of climate change and inspire them to care—and to act.

Youth are also leading solutions in their communities. Some help with disaster relief after extreme weather, while others work on renewable energy projects or teach others how to live more sustainably. Their actions prove that we don't have to wait for change—we can create it together. Their work proves that by using their voices, creativity, and determination, young people can drive meaningful change and inspire hope for a cleaner, more just world.

7.2 Inspiring Stories by Climate Activists

Across Africa, young people are proving that climate action starts with them. They are not just talking about the climate crisis—they're doing something about it. From tree planting and recycling to advocacy, education, and innovation, these youth leaders are showing how powerful young voices can be in protecting our planet.



Fatou Jeng from The Gambia is a passionate youth climate activist and the founder of Clean Earth Gambia,^[97] an organisation that focuses on climate education and conservation. Through her work, she promotes tree planting and environmental awareness while also leading as the policy advocate for gender and climate change within the UNFCCC Youth Constituency (YOUNGO). Recognised on the Forbes 30 Under 30 Africa list, Fatou is showing how education and activism can go hand in hand in building a more sustainable future.

In Kenya, Lesein Mutunkei turned his love for football into a movement for the planet. Through his project "Trees for Goals",^[98] he plants eleven trees for every goal he scores and encourages others to do the same. His idea has inspired schools and football clubs across Kenya—and even caught the attention of FIFA—as a way to use sport to grow a greener world.



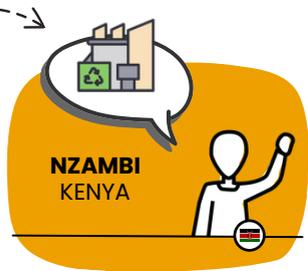
^[97] Clean Earth Gambia available at https://www.instagram.com/cleanearth_gambia/.

^[98] Trees4Goals available at <https://www.instagram.com/trees4goals/?hl=en>.



Mmabatho Mtsamai from Botswana is the co-founder of The Afrolutionist,^[99] a platform that mobilises African youth for social and environmental justice. Her activism explores the links between climate change, feminism, racial justice, and youth empowerment. Through her work, she reminds us that climate justice is about people, equality, and building inclusive movements that leave no one behind.

In Kenya, Nzambi Matee, a young materials engineer, founded Gjenge Makers,^[100] a company that transforms plastic waste into durable, affordable paving blocks. Named one of the United Nations Environment Programme's Young Champions of the Earth, Nzambi's innovation is helping to tackle Nairobi's plastic pollution crisis while creating jobs and promoting sustainable housing.



From Uganda, Hilda Flavia Nakabuye, the founder of Fridays for Future Uganda,^[101] has become a powerful voice for inclusion and justice in the climate movement. Speaking at the UN Climate Conference (COP25) in Madrid, she highlighted how communities in Africa, especially women and the poor, are among those most affected by the climate crisis. Her message is clear: the climate movement must reflect the voices of those living its realities every day.



^[99] The Afrolutionist available at <https://youthcollective.restlessdevelopment.org/organisation/the-afrolutionist/>.

^[100] Nzambi Matee founder of Gjenge Makers available at https://www.instagram.com/nzambimatee_ke/?hl=en.

^[101] Fridays for Future Uganda available at <https://www.instagram.com/fridays4futureug/?hl=en>.



In Zimbabwe, Elizabeth Gulugulu leads as a project manager for the African Youth Initiative on Climate Change.^[102] She works to strengthen food security and promote climate-smart agriculture, while advocating for more youth leadership and gender equality in environmental spaces.



And in Tanzania, Liberatha Kawamala, founder of Libe Green Innovation,^[103] is tackling plastic pollution through recycling and education. Her organisation upcycles plastic waste and teaches communities, especially young people, about conservation and the importance of a circular economy.

These young African leaders are inspiring a generation to rise for climate justice. Their stories show that no one is too young to make a difference, and that when youth lead with creativity, courage, and compassion, real change is possible for both people and the planet.

^[102] African Youth Initiative on Climate Change available at <https://www.ayicczimababwe.org.zw/about>.

^[103] Libe Green Innovation available at <https://www.instagram.com/liberathakawamala/>.



7.3 How to Communicate Climate Justice Effectively

Talking about climate justice in a clear and meaningful way is just as important as taking action. To do this well, we need to recognise that climate change, health, and social injustice are all connected. Climate change isn't only about the environment—it also affects how people live, work, and stay healthy, especially in communities that have been historically marginalised.

At the heart of climate justice communication is the need to center the voices of the Most Affected People and Areas (MAPA). We have said that certain communities suffer the most from climate change—often Indigenous peoples, low-income families, or people in the Global South—yet they are the ones whose voices are least heard in climate conversations. To be fair and effective, climate messaging must lift up their experiences and show the real-life impacts of climate change on their lives.

To truly understand and explain climate justice, we also need to look at the bigger picture. Many of the inequalities we see today are the result of colonialism, racism, and other systems of oppression. These systems have shaped who is most at risk from climate change, and why. That's why it's important to use anti-colonial and anti-racist ways of thinking when we talk about climate issues.

Educators, health workers, and activists can use ideas from important thinkers like Paulo Freire and Bell Hooks, who believed in learning through conversation and building strong, caring communities. This kind of education helps people ask questions, think critically, and work together to understand the root causes of climate injustice—and to take action together.

Effective climate communication should also be adaptable. Messages should be tailored to fit the unique culture, language, and needs of each community. In places where people don't have internet or other resources, we must find creative ways—like community radio, posters, or local gatherings—to share information so that everyone can be part of the climate conversation.

In conclusion, climate justice communication should be inclusive, respectful, and grounded in justice. By listening to and learning from the most affected communities, and by understanding the history behind today's challenges, we can build a stronger, more united global movement—one that leaves no one behind.

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8 | HOW CAN I GET INVOLVED IN PUBLIC PARTICIPATION?



8.1 Understanding Public Participation Processes for Children and Youth

Young people have the right to be heard—especially when it comes to decisions about climate change and the environment.^[104] Even though many decisions are made by adults, they affect your life now and in the future. That's why your voice matters.

In South Africa, the law says that people must be consulted before important environmental decisions are made. This is called public participation. It means that communities—and especially children and youth—have the right to speak up when the environment is at risk.

The Constitution of South Africa supports this right in a few important ways:

1. It says that everyone has the right to a clean and healthy environment.
2. It says the environment must be protected for both present and future generations.
3. It also says that the best interests of the child must always come first in any decision that affects them.

Because of these laws, children and youth have a legal right to take part in climate-related and environmental decisions. This includes things like environmental hearings, policy discussions, and local planning meetings. Your opinions are valuable, and your ideas about how to protect the planet should be taken seriously.

When young people are included in these conversations, the solutions become more fair, creative, and effective—because they reflect the needs and hopes of the next generation.

^[104] UNICEF 'Youth Advocacy Guide' available at <https://www.unicef.org/georgia/media/9256/file/Youth%20Advocacy%20Guide.pdf>, accessed on 2 July 2025.



8.2 Legal Policy Frameworks Supporting Youth Engagement

Aside from the constitution, the Children’s Act also supports youth participation. It says that when decisions are made about a child’s life, the child’s age, maturity, and development should be considered—and that children must be given a chance to share their views, which must be taken seriously.^[105]

This is also in addition to the General Comment No. 26 from the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Childs says that governments must think about how climate change and environmental decisions affect children.^[106] This guideline was discussed in section 4 of this handbook.

8.3 Pathways to Participate: Formal and Informal Avenues

Aside from the constitution, the Children’s Act also supports youth participation. It says that when decisions are made about a child’s life, the child’s age, maturity, and development should be considered—and that children must be given a chance to share their views, which must be taken seriously.^[105]

This is also in addition to the General Comment No. 26 from the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Childs says that governments must think about how climate change and environmental decisions affect children.^[106] This guideline was discussed in section 4 of this handbook.

Young people in South Africa have powerful rights when it comes to protecting the environment—and there are many ways to take action.

According to the Children’s Act, every child has the right to go to court if their rights are being violated.^[107] This means that a child—or a group of people acting on behalf of a child—can ask a court to step in when a right in the Bill of Rights is not being respected. This includes rights related to health, the environment, and safety.^[108]

^[105] Section 9 of the Children’s Act 38 of 2005.

^[106] UN CRC/C/GC/26: General comment No. 26 (2023) available at https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/crc/gcomments/gc26/2023/GC26-Child-Friendly-Version_English.pdf, accessed on 2 May 2025.

^[107] Section 14 of the Children’s Act 38 of 2005.

^[108] Section 15 of the Children’s Act 38 of 2005.



8.3 Pathways to Participate: Formal and Informal Avenues

When public participation processes happen in your community—like meetings, forums, or consultations—it’s important that young people come together, support one another, and take part actively and meaningfully. These decisions will shape the future, and young people must be part of shaping that future.

Young people in South Africa also have the right to make their voices heard by sending submissions to Parliament on important issues like climate change. A submission is a written message or proposal that shares your views, ideas, or concerns about a law, policy, or topic being discussed. You can write a submission as an individual or as part of a group, such as a school club or youth organisation. It can include your personal experiences, facts about climate change, and suggestions for what the government should do to protect the environment and support communities. Submissions can be emailed to the relevant parliamentary committee or delivered during public participation hearings. By doing this, young people can play an active role in shaping the country’s climate policies and showing leaders that the next generation is paying attention and taking action.

Outside of formal spaces, there are other powerful ways to get involved. You can use social media to raise awareness and start conversations about climate change. By creating posts, videos, or campaigns, you can inspire others and spread important messages quickly.

You can also take action in your own community. Organizing clean-up events, educating neighbors about climate issues, and encouraging people to stop littering are all great ways to make a difference locally. These small actions can create big change—and help more people understand how to protect the environment.

DID YOU KNOW?

USING HASHTAGS LIKE **#CLIMATEJUSTICE**, **#STOPLITTERING**, OR **#YOUTHFORTHEPLANET** HELPS YOUR CONTENT REACH MORE PEOPLE

An illustration featuring a hand with the index finger pointing up, positioned next to a document with a scale of justice symbol on it. A dashed arrow points from the text to the icon.

^[109] Section 32 of the Climate Change Act 22 of 2024.



YOUNG PEOPLE'S ROLE IN CLIMATE ACTION

What is a submission to Parliament?

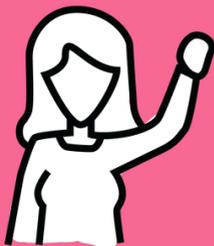
A written message sharing your views on a law, policy, or topic.

How can I make a submission?

Email the relevant committee or deliver it during public hearings.

What else can I do?

Use social media to raise awareness and take action in your community.





8.4 Engaging with Government and Decision

Young people in South Africa have the right to share their ideas and concerns about climate change directly with decision-makers at all levels of government. One important place to send your ideas is the Presidential Climate Commission.^[110] This national body advises the government on how to fight climate change and protect the environment.^[111] As a young person, you can write to the Commission and share your ideas about what the government should be doing.

Another way to take action is by commenting on proposed changes to climate laws or policies. When the government asks the public to give feedback on new rules or amendments, young people can submit written comments to share their views and ideas.

8.5 Using Digital Platform for Participation

Social media is a powerful tool that young people can use to raise awareness, mobilise others, and speak out about climate justice. Platforms like TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, and even podcasts allow youth to share information, express opinions, and call for action—whether it's encouraging others to care about the environment or holding leaders accountable for their decisions.

You can create social media campaigns to spread your message and inspire change. Using hashtags like #ClimateJustice, #StopLittering, or #YouthForThePlanet helps your content reach more people and builds a sense of community among young activists across the world.^[112] You can make videos, graphics, or posts that explain climate issues in simple, creative ways—and encourage your peers to take action with you.

By using your voice online, you can make a real difference offline, too.

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^[110] Section 7(2) of the Climate Change Act 22 of 204.

^[111] Section 7(2) of the Climate Change Act 22 of 204.

^[112] UNICEF 'Youth Advocacy Guide' available at <https://www.unicef.org/georgia/media/9256/file/Youth%20Advocacy%20Guide.pdf>, p 42-43, accessed on 6 June 2025.

9 | ARE THERE SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS FOR A JUST FUTURE?



9.1 Renewable Energy and a Just Transition

As the world starts using less fossil fuels and more clean energy, like solar panels and wind turbines, it's important to make sure this big change is fair for everyone. This is called a just transition. It means making sure no one is left behind, especially the workers, families, and communities whose lives might change because of new energy choices.

Some people work in jobs like coal mining or oil production. If those industries get smaller or close, people could lose their jobs. A just transition is about helping those workers and their communities. This includes creating new green jobs, teaching people new skills, and making sure everyone has clean energy and a safe, healthy place to live.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) says a just transition is a principle, a process, and a practice—which means it's an idea, a plan, and something we must actually do. It includes things like:

1. Investing in clean technology such as solar and wind power,
2. Supporting workers by giving them training and helping them find new jobs,
3. Including everyone's voices, especially women and groups who are often left out,
4. Helping local communities grow in new and sustainable ways, and
5. Thinking about future generations, so the choices we make today create a better world for tomorrow.

A just transition helps make sure the move to clean energy is good for both people and the planet.

To stop climate change from getting worse, countries around the world agreed to work together under something called the Paris Agreement. One big goal is to reach "net-zero," which means we cut down pollution so much that whatever we still release is balanced by what we remove from the air.



To do this, we need to make big changes in how we get energy, how we travel, how we grow food, and how we run factories.

Some countries have already started planning what's called a "just transition." This means changing to cleaner ways of living and working in a fair way, so no one is left behind. Most plans so far look at the energy sector, but farming and land use are also very important—especially in places where many people rely on agriculture to earn a living.

A just transition only works if everyone is included: governments, companies, communities, and young people like you. It also means understanding that climate change and job losses don't affect everyone in the same way. Men, women, and marginalized groups may feel the impacts differently, so fairness means listening to everyone.

A just transition also links to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are global goals like clean energy for all, healthier cities, using resources responsibly, and building strong communities. When done well, a fair transition helps protect people and the planet at the same time.

Right now, most climate money is spent on things like solar panels or cleaner transport. But there isn't enough funding to make sure the transition is fair for people. We need more money for things like training workers for new jobs, helping vulnerable communities, and collecting good information so governments can plan for the future.

Most importantly, everyone should have a say in what a just transition looks like. This means listening to the people who will be affected and making sure their ideas help shape the solutions.

9.2 Climate-Smart Agriculture and Food Justice

Farming and food are a big part of climate change. The way we grow food, move it around, and even throw it away can release gases that warm the planet. At the same time, climate change is making farming more difficult—there are more droughts, floods, and storms, and these make it harder for farmers to grow enough food for everyone.

That's why we need climate-smart agriculture (CSA). This is a way of farming that helps farmers grow more food, take care of the environment, and cope with climate change.



With climate-smart farming, farmers use clever techniques—like planting crops that can survive droughts or taking care of the soil so it stays healthy. This helps them get better harvests while also protecting the Earth. It also helps make sure people have enough healthy food to eat.

But for CSA to truly work, it has to be fair. Not all farmers have the same chances. Farmers who work on very small pieces of land often don't have enough money, training, or tools. Many women farmers also face extra challenges, like not owning land or not being able to get loans easily.

To make climate-smart farming fair for everyone, we need to support all farmers. This includes:

- 1. Giving small farmers financial help;
- 2. Investing in research that can help farmers in different parts of the world; and
- 3. Making sure women farmers have the same opportunities as men.

If we make climate-smart agriculture fair and inclusive, we can build a food system where everyone—no matter who they are or where they come from—has enough good food and a way to earn a living from the land.





9.3 Protecting Forests, Water and Biodiversity

We're living in a time when taking care of our planet's natural resources—like forests, water, and wildlife—is more important than ever. Climate change, pollution, and the loss of nature are big challenges, but if we work together, we can protect the environment and build a fairer, healthier world for everyone.

Forests are often called the “lungs of the Earth” because they help clean the air by absorbing carbon dioxide. They also give homes to millions of animals, plants, and insects, and help keep our air and water clean. But many forests are being cut down to make space for farming, building, or logging. This destroys habitats and makes climate change worse.

Water is essential for all life. We need it to drink, grow food, and stay healthy. But climate change, pollution, and wasting water are causing big problems in many parts of the world. Some places are running out of clean water. We need to save water, stop polluting it, and make sure everyone has enough—especially communities that already face shortages.

Biodiversity means all the different living things on Earth—animals, plants, insects, and more. When nature has lots of different species, it stays strong and can recover from things like droughts or floods. But biodiversity is disappearing quickly because we're destroying habitats, polluting the environment, and heating up the planet. When we lose biodiversity, we lose food sources, medicines, and the natural balance that keeps Earth healthy.

A just transition means making these changes in a fair way. As we move toward greener ways of living and working, we must make sure that everyone shares the benefits—and that no one is left behind. This includes helping communities that depend on old industries, listening to people's needs, and creating good, green jobs.

- Protecting nature is something everyone can help with.
- Governments can make laws that protect forests, water, and wildlife.
- Businesses can use cleaner and greener methods.
- Individuals—including you—can help by saving water, reducing waste, and supporting eco-friendly choices.

In the end, taking care of our forests, water, and biodiversity isn't just good for the environment—it's good for people too. When we choose a fair and sustainable path, we help create a brighter future for everyone.

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10 | WHAT ARE THE COURTS SAYING?



10.1 Climate Litigation: How Young People are Suing the Government and Companies

All around the world, young people are standing up for their rights—not just in protests or social media, but also in courtrooms. A growing number of youth-led court cases are being brought against governments for failing to protect the environment and violating the right to a clean and healthy future.

These climate court challenges are making headlines and setting legal precedents, showing that children and youth can hold leaders accountable when their rights are ignored.

THE “CANCEL COAL” CASE



AFRICAN CLIMATE ALLIANCE V MINISTER OF MINERAL RESOURCES AND ENERGY

In the case of *African Climate Alliance v. Minister of Mineral Resources and Energy* (also known as the “Cancel Coal” case), a group of young activists took the South African government to court.^[113] They argued that building a new coal-fired power station would harm the environment and children’s health.^[114]



The High Court agreed. It found that the government’s public participation process did not include or consider children’s views or how the coal plant would affect them.^[115] The court ruled that the decision to approve the power station was unconstitutional and unlawful because it violated children’s right to a clean and healthy environment and ignored their right to be heard in decisions that affect their future.^[116]

^[113] *African Climate Alliance and Others v Minister of Mineral Resources and Energy and Others* (56907/2021) [2024] ZAGPPHC 1271 par 21-23.

^[114] Same as above.

^[115] Same as above.

^[116] Same as above.



HELD V. THE STATE OF MONTANA



In *Held v. State of Montana*, a group of young people under the age of 18 sued their government because environmental laws in the state didn't allow the government to consider climate change when approving big projects.^[117] These youth argued that this failure harmed their health, their environment, and their future.



The court ruled in their favor. It said that the laws were unconstitutional because they violated the youths' right to a clean and healthy environment.^[118] The court also confirmed that the young people had the right to sue because they were personally affected by these harmful policies.^[119]

These court cases show that youth voices matter in the legal system—and that the law can be used to demand climate justice. When young people take action through the courts, they help change not only laws but also the way leaders think about the future.

10.2 Holding Companies Accountable for Climate Change

It is not just governments that have a duty to protect the environment—companies do too. In South Africa, everyone must respect the Constitution, and that includes businesses.

When a company pollutes the air, water, or land, or does anything that harms the environment, it can be taken to court. This is because it violates people's constitutional right to a clean and healthy environment.

For example, mining companies are required by law to carry out Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) before starting any new projects.^[120] These assessments help predict how a project might affect the environment and communities nearby.

If a company causes environmental damage or ignores these legal requirements, they can be held accountable in court for breaking the law. This means communities—and even young people—can challenge them for harming their health, environment, or future.

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^[117] *Held v State* (DA 23-0575) Mont available <https://climatecasechart.com/case/11091/>, accessed on 2 July 2025.

^[118] Same as above.

^[119] Same as above.

^[120] Section 24 of the National Environmental Management Act 107 of 1998.



11 | HOW CAN WE BUILD A CLIMATE-JUST WORLD, TOGETHER?



11.1 Collaboration Across Borders: How Countries Can Work Together

Climate change knows no borders, and every continent and country is affected by the rising temperature of the Earth's atmosphere. In order combat this global crisis, countries must work together. No country can stop climate change alone.

In recent years, many countries have tried to fight climate change by focusing on what they can do within their own borders.^[121] This means setting goals to lower pollution and checking how much damage is being done to the environment at home.^[122] Some of these efforts have worked well, and certain countries have made real progress.^[123] But climate change is a global problem, and one country alone cannot fix it. That is why countries need to work together and find solutions as a team.

First, nations must take responsibility for their part in global warming. While all countries and continents are affected by climate change, they are not all equal contributors.^[124] For example, Africa only contributes around 3.8% of global emissions, yet faces some of the most severe consequences.^[125] Countries like the United States and China, which contribute heavily to greenhouse gas emissions, must take responsibility for their high percentage of pollution so that they can actively change course.^[126]

[121] J King, J Manning, and A Woodward 'In this Together: International Collaborations for Environmental and Human Health' (2023) *The Journal of Law, Medicine & Ethics*, 51.

[122] Same as above.

[123] Same as above.

[124] K Anderson 'International Cooperation: Key to Combating the Climate Crisis' available at <https://greenly.earth/en-us/blog/ecology-news/international-cooperation-key-to-combating-the-climate-crisis>, accessed on 25 February 2025.

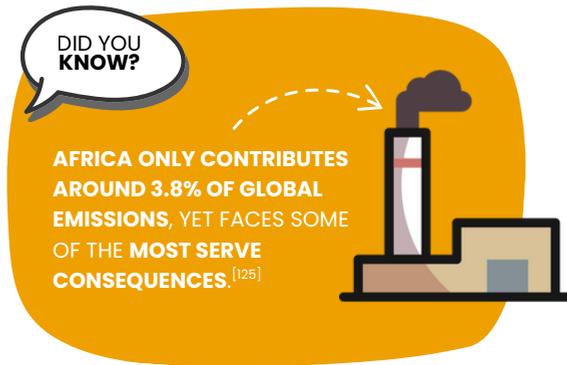
[125] Same as above.

[126] World Resources Institute 'This Interactive Chart Shows Changes in the World's Top 10 Emitters' available at <https://www.wri.org/insights/interactive-chart-shows-changes-worlds-top-10-emitters>, accessed on 29 February 2025.



With reality acknowledged, countries can work together by sharing information. No country or continent has all the answers to the climate crisis. By sharing research on sustainable technology and strategies, countries can better deal with rising temperatures and natural disasters, as well as, cut their greenhouse gas emissions.^[127] Governments and organizations can share best practices and model laws with other nations to ensure that everyone knows how to best implement sustainability into everyday life. When technology is shared across borders, solutions can drop in cost and be implemented faster.^[128]

Another way that countries can and do work together is through international agreements. Countries can agree to provide each other assistance in the event of a natural disaster, reducing the number of people affected by extreme weather events.^[129] Additionally, countries can and do put pressure on other nations to implement greener policies by putting taxes on their exports or entering into trade agreements that contain specific sustainability requirements.^[130]



^[127] J King, J Manning, and A Woodward 'In this Together: International Collaborations for Environmental and Human Health' (2023) *The Journal of Law, Medicine & Ethics*, 51 and K Anderson 'International Cooperation: Key to Combating the Climate Crisis' available at <https://greenly.earth/en-us/blog/ecology-news/international-cooperation-key-to-combating-the-climate-crisis>, accessed on 25 February 2025.

^[128] K Anderson 'International Cooperation: Key to Combating the Climate Crisis' available at <https://greenly.earth/en-us/blog/ecology-news/international-cooperation-key-to-combating-the-climate-crisis>, accessed on 25 February 2025.

^[129] J King, J Manning, and A Woodward 'In this Together: International Collaborations for Environmental and Human Health' (2023) *The Journal of Law, Medicine & Ethics*, 51.

^[130] Same as above.



Countries have previously come together to create global frameworks and agreements to work toward protecting the environment.^[131] These agreements and frameworks include the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, and the Paris Agreement.^[132] These international treaties and documents work to cut the global emissions of greenhouse gases, adapt to climate change, and finance sustainability and green projects.^[133] International cooperation has proven to be a powerful tool when countries are strongly committed to climate justice.^[134]



^[131] UN Climate Action 'What Is Climate Change?' available at <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/what-is-climate-change>, accessed 25 February 2025.

^[132] Same as above and UN Climate Change '17 Goals to Transform Our World' available at <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/17-goals-to-transform-our-world>; UN Climate Change UNFCCC available on <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/what-is-the-united-nations-framework-convention-on-climate-change>; and UN Climate Action 'The Paris Agreement' available on <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/paris-agreement>, accessed on 25 February 2025.

^[133] Same as above.

^[134] K Anderson 'International Cooperation: Key to Combating the Climate Crisis' available at <https://greenly.earth/en-us/blog/ecology-news/international-cooperation-key-to-combating-the-climate-crisis>, accessed on 25 February 2025.

^[135] Greenpeace 'Acting through Art, Poetry that Inspires Climate Action' available at <https://www.greenpeace.org/international/story/71765/acting-through-art-poetry-that-inspires-climate-action/#:~:text=Art%20and%20climate%20justice&text=Artivism%20pursues%20climate%20justice%20through,change%20and%20extreme%20weather%20events> and A New Era in Climate Communications 'Power of Climate Story Telling' available at <https://climatecommunications.earth/whitepaper-articles/the-power-of-climate-storytelling/#:~:text=According%20to%20Climate%20Outreach%2C%20reliable,scientific%20to%20a%20social%20reality.&text=Effective%20storytelling%20can%20induce%20%E2%80%9Ctransportation,and%20be%20moved%20by%20stories> accessed on 2 March 2025.

^[136] Same as above.



11.1 Collaboration Across Borders: How Countries Can Work Together

Art, music, and storytelling can express important messages about climate change, and in doing so, they humanize global warming and inspire empathy. Art is a great tool for engaging and engaging communities to mitigate climate change and push toward a sustainable future. It is a form of activism that allows us to envision a just future with alternative pathways for fighting climate change.^[135] Similarly, storytelling allows people to make sense of the crisis and understand climate change as a social reality versus a scientific fact.^[136]

Research and statistics can be confusing. They can feel emotionless and lack a sense of compassion. Poetry and storytelling, on the other hand, transport listeners and can be more personal and engaging. Sharing climate change related poetry, stories, and other art forms invites observers to engage with climate change and feel many emotions about the state of the environment.^[137] This immersion can lead to people caring more about climate issues and donating money or shifting their behavior.^[138]

Like storytelling, music is also very powerful. Music has the ability to inspire and influence generations of people, young and old.^[139] Music has long been used as way to express urgent and important messages, especially since music has the power to change the way people feel.^[140] Musicians have long used their lyrics to discuss important topics like greenhouse gas emissions, and they use their platforms to advocate for environmental activism.^[141]

^[135] Greenpeace 'Acting through Art, Poetry that Inspires Climate Action' available at <https://www.greenpeace.org/international/story/71765/acting-through-art-poetry-that-inspires-climate-action/#:~:text=Art%20and%20climate%20justice&text=Artivism%20pursues%20climate%20justice%20through,change%20and%20extreme%20weather%20events> and A New Era in Climate Communications 'Power of Climate Story Telling' available at <https://climatecommunications.earth/whitepaper-articles/the-power-of-climate-storytelling/#:~:text=According%20to%20Climate%20Outreach%2C%20reliable,scientific%20to%20a%20social%20reality.&text=Effective%20storytelling%20can%20induce%20%E2%80%9Ctransportation,and%20be%20moved%20by%20stories> accessed on 2 March 2025.

^[136] Same as above.

^[137] Same as above.

^[138] Same as above.

^[139] H Prior 'How Can Music Help Us to Address the Climate Crisis?' (2022) *Music & Science*, 5.

^[140] Same as above.

^[141] UN Environment Programme 'As climate crisis worsens, musicians push for change' available at <https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/climate-crisis-worsens-musicians-push-change> accessed on 5 March 2025) and same as above.



Non-profits and other organizations even understand the important role of art in the fight for climate justice. Recently, the international non-profit Greenpeace invited artists from around the globe to share their poetry about climate change and justice for a project titled the Just Poetry project.^[142] Through the collection of poetry, artists and activists were able to come together to discuss their hopes of a just future as well as their visions and plans.^[143] The project ended with a candlelight vigil where people came together, shared their experiences, and engaged in meaningful conversation about climate justice.^[144] No matter the scale, artists of all kinds can use their medium to inspire climate action and engage in collective activism.

Hopelessness often leads to inaction.^[145] Hope, on the other hand, gives people the space to imagine a better future and act on solutions.

Actions can and have been taken to reduce the effects of climate change. For example, humans were depleting the atmosphere's ozone layer by emitting certain gases into the environment.^[146] In 1987, countries around the world signed a global agreement to reduce the use of substances that deplete the ozone.^[147] Since then, global emissions of ozone-depleting substances have fallen by more than 99%.^[148]



^[142] Greenpeace 'Acting through Art, Poetry that Inspires Climate Action' available at <https://www.greenpeace.org/international/story/71765/acting-through-art-poetry-that-inspires-climate-action/#:~:text=Art%20and%20climate%20justice&text=Artivism%20pursues%20climate%20justice%20through,change%20and%20extreme%20weather%20events>, accessed on 25 February 2025.

^[143] Same as above.

^[144] Same as above.

^[145] BBC 'A leading data scientist's journey from doomism to climate hope' available at <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20240206-hannah-ritchie-sustainability-data-spreads-hope-not-doomism>, accessed on 7 March 2025.

^[146] Our World in Data 'Ozone Layer' available at <https://ourworldindata.org/ozone-layer#:~:text=During%2520the%25201980s%252C%2520the%2520world,fallen%2520by%2520more%2520than%252099%2525>, accessed on 7 March 2025

^[147] Same as above.

^[148] Same as above.



The same can be done today with global warming by reducing greenhouse gas emissions. One major way that countries and people can cut emissions is by changing their current energy systems.^[149] Switching energy sources from predominately fossil fuel to renewable sources like wind or solar majorly cuts greenhouse gas emissions.^[150] Solar energy is becoming very affordable, opening the door to an expansive energy transition.^[151] Countries can also promote energy-efficient technology and make electric vehicles more affordable.^[152]

On the individual level, as stated before, you can help mitigate climate change by educating your peers about the climate crisis. Sharing ideas and plans, standing up to local governments, and taking collective action are all important ways in which to fight climate change. You can engage in responsible waste disposal by trying to recycle and minimize your overall trash production. You can also practice conserving energy and water in your home.

Governments must also play a role in a just, climate efficient future where greenhouse emissions are low and the impacts of climate change are distributed fairly.^[153] By investing in renewable energy sources, governments can boost the economy while also creating quality jobs in the green sectors.^[154] Job creation is important because it provides a means of justice to those communities affected most harshly by the changes in climate. Governments must also hold corporations accountable for their emissions, while transitioning to renewable energy sources.



^[149] NRDC 'Greenhouse Effect 101' available on <https://www.nrdc.org/stories/greenhouse-effect-101#gases>, accessed on 25 February 2025.

^[150] UN Climate Action 'What is climate change?' available on <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/what-is-climate-change>, accessed on 25 February 2025.

^[151] NRDC 'Greenhouse Effect 101' available on <https://www.nrdc.org/stories/greenhouse-effect-101#gases>, accessed on 25 February 2025.

^[152] Same as above.

^[153] Earth.Org 'Climate Justice: A Crucial Pathway to Secure Human Rights' available at <https://earth.org/climate-justice-a-crucial-pathway-to-secure-human-rights/>, accessed on 7 March 2025.

^[154] Same as above.



Many countries are already trying to create a climate-resilient society and foster an inclusive economy.^[155] For example, in South Africa, the government hopes to create new jobs in areas like electric vehicle production and to increase energy security through sustainable energy sources.^[156] Moving toward sustainability should be done with equity in mind, and as both individuals and governments move toward a green future, justice must be of key importance.

DID YOU KNOW?

SWITCHING ENERGY SOURCES FROM **PREDOMINATELY FOSSIL FUEL TO RENEWABLE SOURCES** LIKE WIND OR SOLAR MAJORLY **CUTS GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS.**^[150]

The infographic features a large orange rounded rectangle. On the left, a white speech bubble with a black outline contains the text 'DID YOU KNOW?'. A dashed white arrow points from the speech bubble towards a globe on the right. The globe is a simple line drawing with a recycling symbol (three arrows forming a triangle) in the center. The text is in white and yellow, with key terms in bold.

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^[155] Same as above.

^[156] State of the Nation 2025 'Just Transition to a Low-Carbon Economy' available at <https://sona22-content.stage-v1.co.za/priorities/growing-the-economy-and-jobs/just-transition-to-a-low-carbon-economy#:~:text=Boosting%20economic%20growth%20through%20more,green%20economy%20of%20the%20future>, accessed on 7 March 2025.

12 | RESOURCES FOR YOUNG CLIMATE ACTIVISTS



12.1 Further resources by Lawyers for Human Rights



12.2 Learning Resources

(1) NASA Climate Kids – A fun and interactive website by NASA that explains climate science in a way that's easy to understand.

Link: climatekids.nasa.gov

(2) UNICEF's Youth Climate Portal – Offers youth-friendly information about how climate change affects children and what they can do.

Link: unicef.org/environment-and-climate-change

12.3 Activism and Advocacy Platforms

(1) Fridays for Future – A youth-led global movement started by Greta Thunberg, where students protest for climate justice every Friday. You can find local events or start your own!

Link: fridaysforfuture.org

(2) Climate Action Project – A global platform where schools from all over the world join forces to work on real climate solutions.

Link: <https://www.climateactionproject.org>

12.4 Creative Tools for Spreading Awareness

(1) Canva for Education – Free design tool where you can make posters, social media posts, and infographics to raise awareness about climate issues.

Link: canva.com/education

(2) TikTok & Instagram – Great platforms for creating short videos or posts to talk about climate issues and encourage your friends to take action. Just make sure to share respectful and truthful messages!



12.5 Ways to Connect and Organize

(1) Earth Uprising Youth Climate Movement – A youth-led organization that offers toolkits, leadership opportunities, and global partnerships.

Link: earthuprising.org

(2) Global Changemakers – Provides free activism guides, storytelling resources, and opportunities for youth leadership in sustainability.

Link: <https://www.global-changemakers.net>

12.6 Practical Action Tools

(1) Plastic Pollution Calculator (EarthDay.org) – Helps you calculate your plastic use and learn how to reduce it.

Link: earthday.org/plastic-calculator

(2) Carbon Footprint Calculator (WWF) – Find out how your daily activities affect the planet and get tips for reducing your impact.

Link: footprint.wwf.org.uk

12.7 Books for Young Activists

(1) Greta's Story by Valentina Camerini

The true story of Greta Thunberg's journey from a quiet student to a world-famous climate activist.

Ages 9+

(2) Old Enough to Save the Planet by Loll Kirby

Inspiring stories of 12 young environmental changemakers from around the world.

Ages 6–12

(3) How to Change Everything by Naomi Klein and Rebecca Stefoff

A guide to climate change, justice, and action, written specifically for teens.

Ages 12+

(4) No One is Too Small to Make a Difference by Greta Thunberg

A collection of Greta's most powerful speeches.

Ages 12+



12.8 Films and Documentaries

(1) 2040 (Documentary by Damon Gameau)

A hopeful look at climate solutions that already exist, told through the eyes of the filmmaker's daughter.

Ages 10+

(2) Youth Unstoppable (Documentary by Slater Jewell-Kemker)

Follows young climate activists from around the world over 10 years.

Ages 12+

(3) My Octopus Teacher (Documentary by Pippa Ehrlich and James Reed)

A moving story about a filmmaker and his friendship with an octopus, showing the beauty of ocean life.

Ages 10+

(4) The Lorax (Animated film based on Dr. Seuss's book)

A fun story about protecting trees and standing up to pollution.

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Lawyers for Human Rights remains committed to using the law to help build a more just and sustainable South Africa and world. We will continue to uplift the voices of children and youth, ensuring that you are heard and included in decisions that shape your future.

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