

Newar (Indigenous) children are conscious, competent and collaborative individuals in the time of climate crisis: A case study of Nepal

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In a time of **climate crisis**, Indigenous children are engaging in climate action in different ways around the globe.

Despite their climate action, the voices of many children, including Indigenous children and those from developing countries are unheard.

At the **Youth Climate Justice (YCJ)** project, led by Prof Aoife Daly at University College Cork, Dr Nabin Maharjan led YCJ research on the environmental action of children in the Nepali Newar (Indigenous) community.

We found that these children are environmentally conscious beings, who are working as competent and valuable collaborators in the time of climate crisis.



Key research questions:

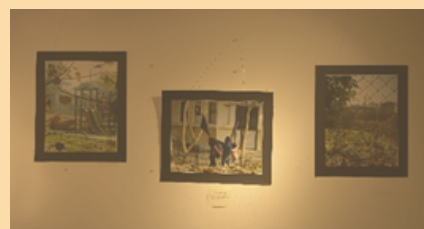
- Are Newar Indigenous children taking environmental action?
- What are their views and experiences on children's rights?



What did we do in our research?

With the help of Jyapu Samaj Yala, in 2025 Dr Nabin Maharjan led participatory, artistic workshops including a field visit to a heritage site. 34 Newar children (aged 8-17) took part.

The work ended with a final art exhibition. We examined Newar children's views and experiences on their environmental work.



What is postpaternalism and why this idea is a useful tool

The YCJ project is about explaining postpaternalism (Daly et al., 2024). This is the idea that climate action involves children organizing globally and creating their own understandings of what human rights are rather than being given their rights by adults. Children's rights such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child will have to be understood differently because of this exciting development.





UNCRC and General Comment 11:

The **UN Convention on the Rights of the Child** (UNCRC) and General Comment 11 (on the rights of Indigenous Children) are like big rule books that countries agree to follow. They contain rules and suggestions, and countries agree to make children's rights real.

General Comment 11 outlines the specific rights of Indigenous children (such as their rights to their culture) and assists countries to act locally.

Initial findings from art works:

1) Newar children: conscious beings

- CRC Article 12 creates the obligation to hear children's views regardless of their age as conscious (aware) beings.
- Indigenous children are aware of environmental harms and the problems they pose for the local community.

"I clicked this picture to capture (how) little children (are) playing on the banks of the Bagmati River. This photo shows the harm a polluted environment can cause to children like us." (Sichu, female, aged 15, Lalitpur, researcher)



2) Newar children: competent leaders

- Postpaternalism implies that children are now important leaders on environmental action.
- Newar children are not passive takers or followers of adult agendas but are capable of taking their own environmental action.
- They are sometimes leading environmental action locally either at home or in their community, e.g. collecting rainwater for household use to reduce energy for pumping water from underground.

"I drew this to show how I reuse water at home. I want to show others how we can reuse water at household (level)." (Babu, male, 11 years, Lalitpur, educator)



3) Newar children: valuable collaborators

- CRC Article 24 states that children have the right to a healthy environment. Article 30 says they have a right to their culture.
- Newar children have a right to enjoy a heritage site such as Patan Darbar Square to connect with their ancient history, culture, skills and indigenous identity.
- Different age groups have been working together in organizing many social and cultural events for a long time in the Newar community. Our research found that some adults were also involved in most child club-led community clean-up programs.

“I have drawn (this art to show) people from the community including child club members (coming together) to clean the polluted area.... Our Child club organized a cleaning program, and adults joins regularly, and I took it as an inspiration (to our clean-up work)”. (Sanu,14, male, Lalitpur, researcher and coordinator)



- The final workshop and art exhibition hosted around 300 guests including Hon. Minister Ain Bahadur Shahi (Minister for Forests and Environment), Hon. Prem Maharjan (Member of Parliament- Lalitpur – 2) and Mr. Chiri Babu Maharjan (Mayor, Lalitpur Metropolitan City). It has opened further possibilities for Newar children to work with other adults as partners on the environment (e.g. in a clean up campaign).



“The Nepal government cannot combat climate change alone....we all (including children) need to work together ... I am very happy to hear that [children/youth] would like to start a clean-up campaign with a new approach. I am ready to work on your proposal or support you from ministry level if you bring any campaign or event related to my office ... [thank you] for bringing attention to the concurrent issues related to its impact on us.” (Hon. Minister Ain Bahadur Shahi, Minister for Forests and Environment)

Conclusion:

By working with Newar children and youth on participatory workshops in Nepal, the study:

- Shows how Newar Indigenous children are environmentally conscious beings, capable leaders and valuable partners in environmental action.
- Demonstrates how Newar children are important partners in making the right to a healthy environment real for everyone in the community. This includes the enjoyment of their heritage site by engaging in child club-led local heritage clean-up programs.
- Shows the importance of supporting Indigenous children to use their rights under the UNCRC.
- Shows postpaternalism (children taking their own action on their rights) at work in the Newar community, though in a subtle way.



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