

RISING TIDES

Mapping Youth Movements for Climate Resilience in Ethiopia, Fiji, Indonesia, Laos, Mozambique, Myanmar, Solomon Islands, Uganda and Zimbabwe.



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**Australian
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CONTENTS

4

Acknowledgements

5

Research Note

6

A Worsening
Climate Crisis,
as Youth Rise
and Organise

12

Youth Leadership
as Methodology

16

Core Findings

20

Recommendations
to Donors and
Partners

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RESEARCH NOTE

This summary report condenses the findings of a research process conducted by young researchers with youth groups and activists in nine countries.

Gender in this paper is understood as a multidimensional concept which influences people's identities and expressions in many ways. This report does not assume gender identity to fit into a binary field of male versus female. In highlighting the exclusionary impact of patriarchal systems, we are referring to the exclusions faced by young girls, women, trans girls, gender nonconforming and non-binary youth. We understand patriarchal systems as social, economic, political and cultural structures that prevent gender equality.

Plan International understands gender transformation as a journey that guides programming and influencing for which the final destination is gender equality. An approach aimed to tackle the root causes of inequality and reshape unbalanced power relationships.



A WORSENING CLIMATE CRISIS, AS YOUTH RISE AND ORGANISE

The unravelling climate emergency is the most pressing injustice of our time, for it worsens all the existing inequalities, vulnerabilities and poverties in our societies. Girls and young women - affected by patriarchal systems - are particularly and disproportionately affected.

The impacts of climate change are already being felt globally as weather extremes threaten ecosystems and the human communities they nourish. Agricultural, public health, sanitation, social welfare, and educational systems are particularly vulnerable to the far-reaching effects of climate breakdown. This vulnerability urges countries and societies to swiftly enact measures that bring greater climate resilience, pulling down emissions to zero and adapting to a warming world.

The magnitude and complexity of the crisis makes the climate emergency arguably the most significant global and intergenerational justice issue of our time.



Climate action in the face of limitations

Despite their lack of responsibility for this crisis, and their lack of representation in formal political processes, young people in all their diversity are at the forefront of climate action. From Fiji to Zimbabwe, youth-led and youth-supported groups are boldly advocating for renewable energy, reforestation, ecosystem protection, better waste management, resilient infrastructure and social systems that are more responsive to the needs of everyone. Youth groups are also highlighting the intersections of climate resilience with inclusive education, safe housing, sanitation, the right to water, and essential services for all.

Whether it be local agroforestry activities organised by Solomon Islands' NYC (National Youth Congress), or advocacy initiatives by Ethiopian youth-led groups to lobby for equity and climate justice at the international level, youth groups are working across multiple scales and intersections.

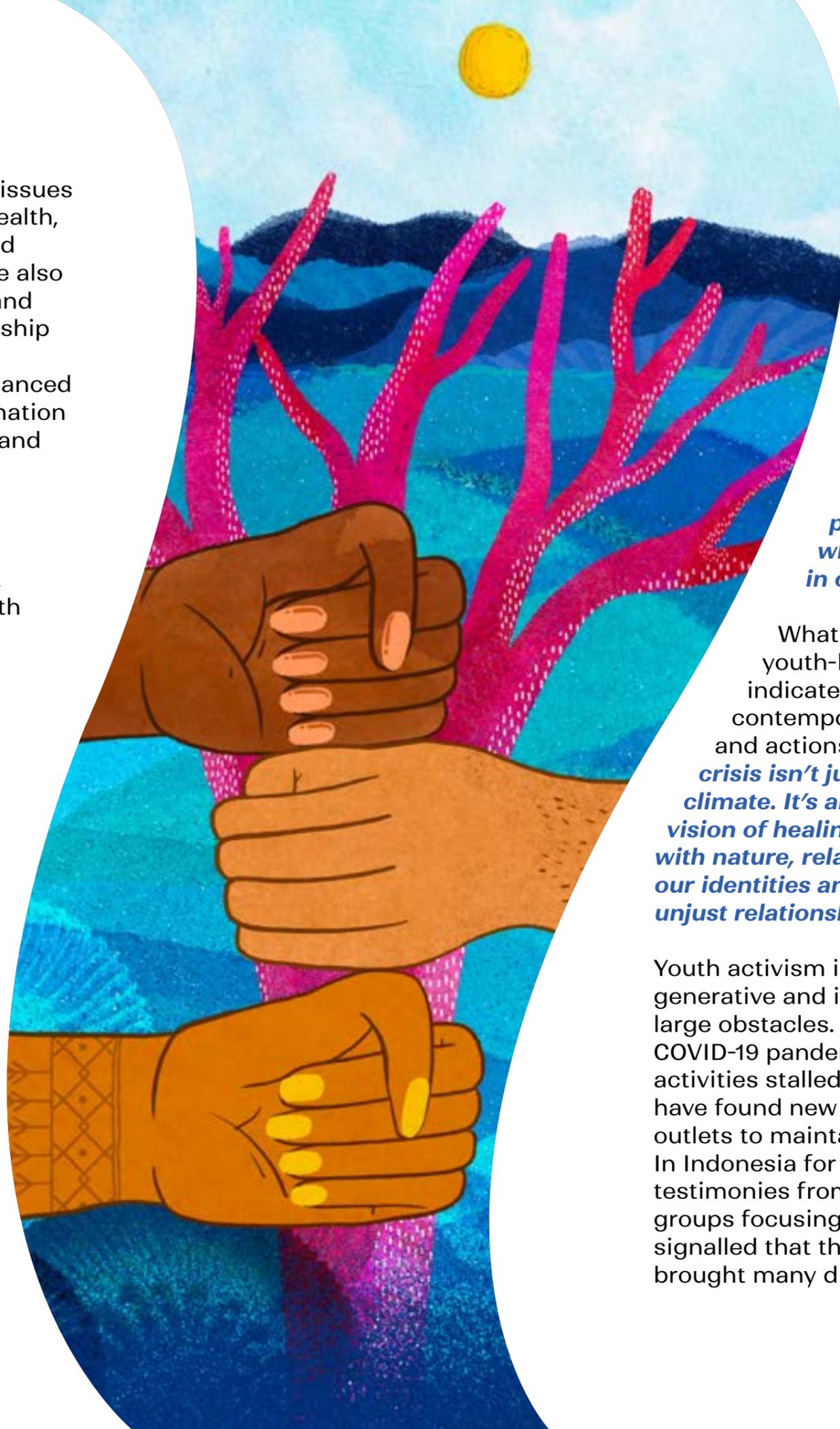
The scale and intensity of youth-led climate initiatives has increased dramatically in recent years.

School strikes, climate litigation, cross-regional partnerships across youth networks, and coordinated days of action, are some of the emboldened tactics activists are using.

This escalation of action comes hand in hand with a reshaping of how young people understand and practice transformative action.

Youth groups are increasingly understanding environmental issues as interlinked with issues of health, wellbeing, equality, poverty, and development. Youth groups are also taking the lead on inclusivity and accessibility – ensuring leadership from vulnerable and excluded groups, and tackling the unbalanced power dynamics and discrimination which excludes women, trans and gender non-conforming youth from positions of leadership.

For many youth groups, the **collective leadership** - not just inclusion - of young people with different and marginalised backgrounds on the basis of their gender, sexuality, ethnicity, ability, and other identity markers, is fundamental. As research in Fiji suggests, 'For most of the Youth civil society institutions (CSOs), their strategic focus now is not solely on climate change as it may have been before; however it also includes other key priority areas such as gender equality, social inclusion and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) programmes. Most of the Youth CSOs in Fiji have incorporated gender equality and social inclusion into their strategy, membership and programmes.'



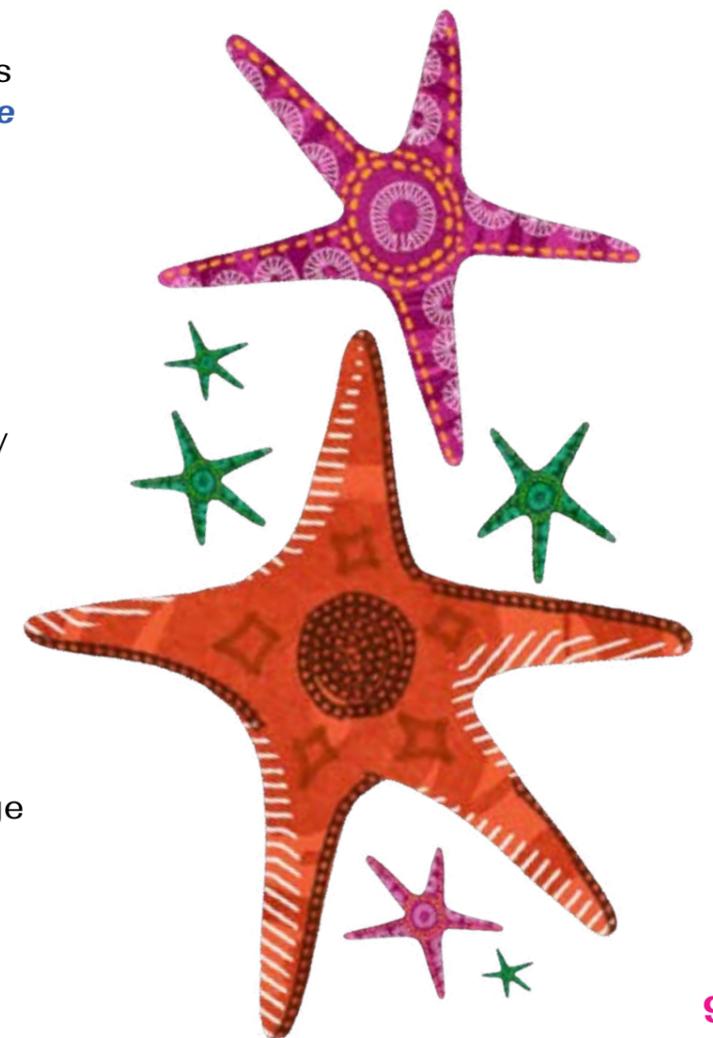
As future leaders, the position of youth groups makes them more willing to lead difficult and uncomfortable conversations, challenge generational taboos, and refresh perspectives on what is possible in our societies.

What Plan International's youth-led research indicates is that contemporary youth visions and actions show the **climate crisis isn't just about the climate. It's about a broader vision of healing relationships with nature, relationships with our identities and bodies, and unjust relationships in society.**

Youth activism is also consistently generative and innovative despite large obstacles. During the COVID-19 pandemic, while many activities stalled, youth groups have found new and creative outlets to maintain their work. In Indonesia for example, testimonies from diverse youth groups focusing on climate change signalled that the pandemic brought many different groups

together in online events and forums, and many developed closer relationships as a result.

Yet there is a sharp contrast. While young people are leading the way from below, government policies only scarcely recognise their contribution, power, or vulnerability. In civil society landscapes, youth groups are often seen as a 'target group' or a 'source of consultation' rather than an equal partner. If seen as a partner, the informality and structure of youth groups make sustained or formal collaboration difficult.



Report Purpose

How can donor organisations best respond to and nourish a reality of youth leadership on climate resilience? How can donor organisations challenge the systemic exclusion of youth organisations?

Emerging from these questions, this report brings together and summarises the findings of young researchers with the aim of improving connections between climate resilience and gender-transformative work, and better informing future actions and approaches.

The analysis aims to continue informing climate change and resilience strategies and actions within the projects under the My Body, My Future (MBMF) programme, as well as

other projects across the Plan International Federation. The Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs funds six Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) themed projects within the MBMF programme. Hence, researchers also explored possible linkages between SRHR and climate change impact in national climate policies. The findings will aim to empower Plan International and peers in the donor community to better recognise the agency and capacity of young people - particularly girls and young women - in their work.



YOUTH LEADERSHIP AS METHODOLOGY

Research on youth engagement should aim to not replicate the dynamics of exclusion that prevent youth engagement in the first place. It is crucial for work about young people to be **CONDUCTED AND DESIGNED BY YOUNG PEOPLE THEMSELVES**. This research project aimed to offer a platform for youth researchers to map youth-led climate action across Africa, Asia and the Pacific.



MAY 2021

12

YOUNG RESEARCHERS

JUNE 2021



Between May and June of 2021, eleven young researchers from Myanmar, Laos, Solomon Islands, Fiji, Indonesia, Ethiopia, Uganda, Mozambique and Zimbabwe conducted a **JOINT DESK REVIEW OF CLIMATE CHANGE POLICY**. They were tasked with identifying youth-led or youth-oriented organisations, groups, and movements for climate change adaptation.

They also reviewed selected **NATIONAL CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION POLICIES** to understand how children, adolescents and youth are portrayed in policies and actions. This process was followed by a **SENSEMAKING WORKSHOP** where researchers had the opportunity to further evaluate and refine the results.



Three questions guided the research process:



How are children, adolescents and youth portrayed in national climate change adaptation strategies?

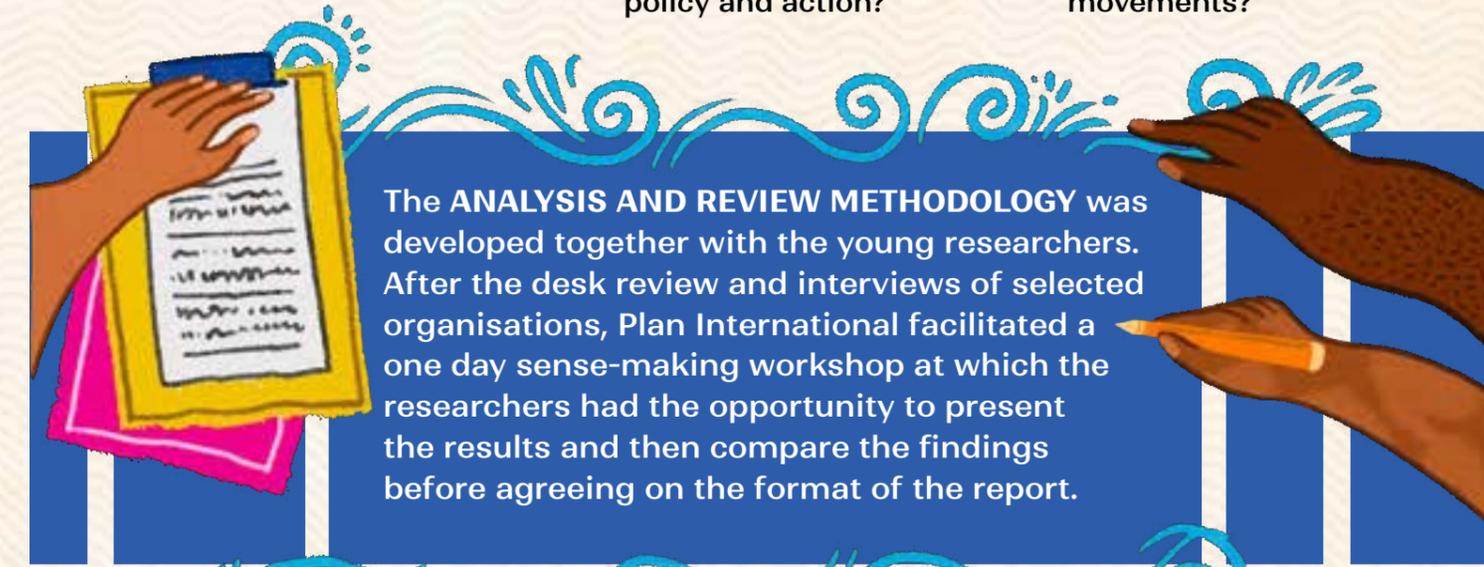


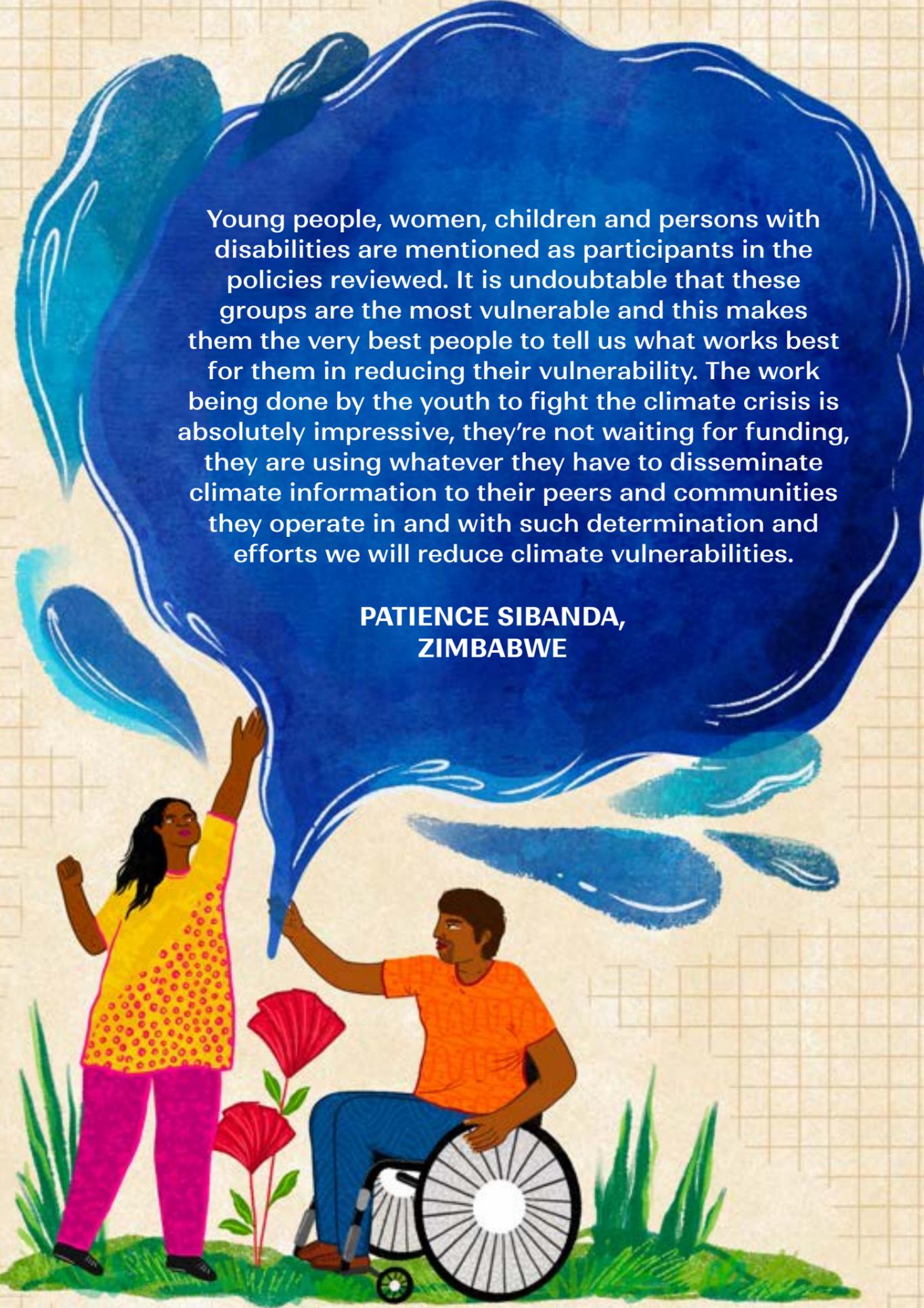
Which organisations, groups and movements are led by or involve children, adolescents and youth in climate change adaptation policy and action?



How could Plan International's programmes link to and benefit from working with these organisations, groups, movements?

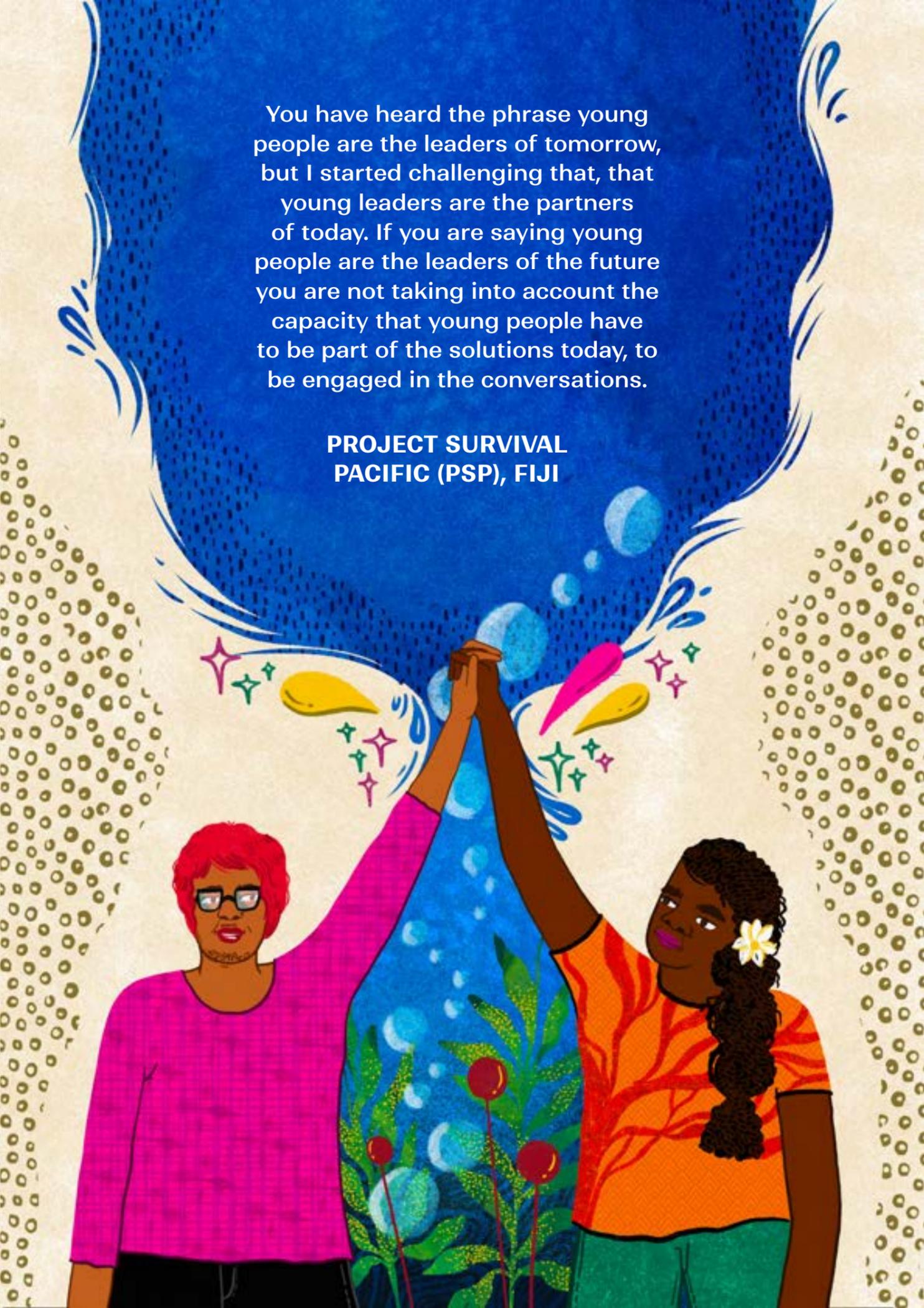
The **ANALYSIS AND REVIEW METHODOLOGY** was developed together with the young researchers. After the desk review and interviews of selected organisations, Plan International facilitated a one day sense-making workshop at which the researchers had the opportunity to present the results and then compare the findings before agreeing on the format of the report.





Young people, women, children and persons with disabilities are mentioned as participants in the policies reviewed. It is undoubtable that these groups are the most vulnerable and this makes them the very best people to tell us what works best for them in reducing their vulnerability. The work being done by the youth to fight the climate crisis is absolutely impressive, they're not waiting for funding, they are using whatever they have to disseminate climate information to their peers and communities they operate in and with such determination and efforts we will reduce climate vulnerabilities.

**PATIENCE SIBANDA,
ZIMBABWE**



You have heard the phrase young people are the leaders of tomorrow, but I started challenging that, that young leaders are the partners of today. If you are saying young people are the leaders of the future you are not taking into account the capacity that young people have to be part of the solutions today, to be engaged in the conversations.

**PROJECT SURVIVAL
PACIFIC (PSP), FIJI**

CORE FINDINGS

LOOKING ABOVE - MAPPING & EVALUATING GOVERNMENT POLICIES

Invisibility: Children and young people - with girls, young women and youth with disabilities in particular - are not sufficiently referenced as stakeholders or relevant groups in the policy process. Neither are other crucial groups such as Indigenous peoples, ethnic minorities, or marginalised communities. In Mozambique, words such as adolescents, youth, young people and girls are entirely absent from adaptation policies.

While the acknowledgement of vulnerabilities based on gender and the affirmation of gender equality as an objective appear regularly in national climate plans and policies, policies that actively promote gender equality and intersectional climate action are harder to find. Denial of SRHR can limit women and girls in all their diversity from fully engaging in climate action.

However, SRHR is not mentioned across national climate change policies, with the exception of Uganda. Furthermore, there is limited recognition in government policies of the underlying structural reasons for the vulnerability of young women. Only in Myanmar do national climate



change policies acknowledge that the uneven effects of climate change on women stem from their unequal responsibilities and access to resources.

Passive Recipients, not Active Citizens: When referenced, children, young people and women are depicted as vulnerable recipients, rather than powerful and indispensable partners in climate policy processes. More inclusive processes need to recognise these groups as political agents, active citizens and implementers of climate resilience. Firstly, there is a strong democratic case for this recognition, given that young people represent the majority of the population in many states: in Laos, 60% of the population falls within the category of youth, and in Zimbabwe, 62% of the population is under the age of 25.

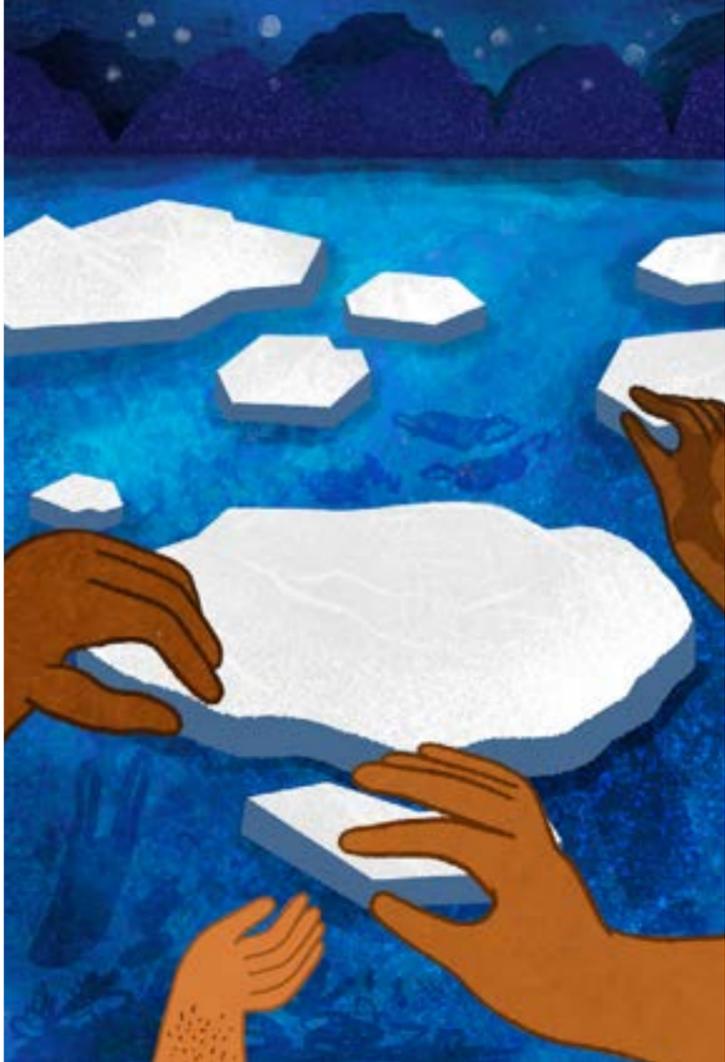
Secondly, there cannot be effective or sustainable climate resilience without youth leadership. Transformation for a resilient future requires involving them beyond the preliminary policy consultation in the co-creation, implementation and evaluation of policies, action plans, and infrastructure.

In Fiji for example, research suggests that there has been relatively successful engagement and consultation with youth groups in the formulation of climate and

development policies. This success is reflected in the policies' regular and attentive mention of the vulnerabilities and capabilities of marginalised populations, and the need for intersectional implementation. But Fijian youth CSOs have stressed that improvements could be made by up-skilling and capacity-building with young people to equip them to better participate in and navigate often exclusionary and jargon-heavy formal policy spaces. Similar views have been echoed by youth groups in Ethiopia, who have also pushed for better capacity-building for young people in areas such as fundraising, proposal writing and financial management.

The Impotence of Promises:

Many states have bold declarations or commitments to implement strategies both on climate change, but also on furthering the rights of women, children, and young people. Yet budgetary limitations, limited institutional capacity and a lack of political will prevent actions that meet these promises. Greater investments, sustained political commitments, and the active empowerment of diverse groups are required to build realities that meet the aspirations of national and international declarations. The major economic recovery required in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic offers an unmissable opportunity for states to implement



youth-responsive, gender-just and climate-resilient economic development programmes.

The Neglect of Adaptation in Climate Policies: While many countries have submitted NDC (Nationally Determined Contributions) plans that largely address mitigation, adaptation is rarely given the same importance in policies and plans. Existing adaptation plans are also not responsive or accountable to the needs of youth, women and marginalised groups; neither are these groups mentioned as core drivers of potential community-based approaches to adaptation.

LOOKING BELOW - MAPPING GRASSROOTS MOVEMENTS

Structural Obstacles: In comparison to their counterparts in the high-income countries, youth-led organisations in the low and middle-income countries have less access to resources, media visibility, or possibilities to formalise their work. Organisations also face challenges related to a shrinking or hostile civic space, patriarchal and hierarchical cultural norms which undervalue the expertise and visions of young people (especially young women).

Structured Poverty and Precarity: Economic hardship severely constrains the political empowerment and possibilities of young people, particularly for girls. Political and civic participation require time and space, while poverty deprives young people of both of these.

Absent Funding: Lack of funding is a common issue for youth-led organisations across the spectrum. This funding gap is compounded by the lack of technical knowledge groups have on available funding streams and how to submit fund applications; as well as funding timelines and delays that are not sensitive to the daily precarity of young activists. Funding, when given, tends to be project-based or short-term. Youth groups

largely rely on self-organising and self-funding.

Knowledge and a Desire for Education: Various active youth groups are eager to learn more about their field of work, and have expressed a desire for both acquiring greater technical skills on various issues, including climate resilience, environmental science and SRHR. Young activists have also sought to access spaces of knowledge-sharing, both to share insights between peers and to also learn how to engage in more complicated, highly-technical conversations. Yet virtual knowledge exchanges are made difficult by limited bandwidth, unaffordable data plans, or unreliable internet connectivity.

Success through creativity and collaboration: Despite ample obstacles, youth-led groups are able to achieve significant success through their proactivity and innovation. Through their creative communications, they are able to skillfully connect with wider audiences. In Indonesia, the youth group Cerita Iklim crafts creative social media content that distills academic articles into accessible information pieces. Youth groups place particular importance on popular education and mass information-sharing, often acting as knowledge spreaders and translators.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO DONORS AND PARTNERS

CLOSE PARTNERSHIPS AND RELATIONSHIPS

Achieving greater climate resilience and challenging the oppressive systems that generate the climate crisis requires close and healthy relationships with youth organisations. Closer relationships depend on building trust and prioritising opportunities for regular meetings, co-creation and learning between groups. By adopting a relational perspective, donors and partners can ask: what can we do to be better partners? What can we change to become more responsive to the needs of youth groups? Building more just and equitable relationships also requires anti-racist and gender-responsive collaboration and awareness from partner organisations.

FACILITATING CONNECTIONS AND MENTORSHIPS

Donors and partners can support youth civil society groups by helping them establish connections across borders with other initiatives. Youth-led organisations are eager to benefit from peer-to-peer support and collaboration with other youth groups, and also through long-term learning partnerships with established climate change and gender equality organisations.

STABLE, SECURE, AND CREATIVE FUNDING

Through long-term financial grants and creative funding mechanisms, donors and partners can help sustain and scale up the capacities of youth-led organisations.

EXTENDING OPPORTUNITIES

Donors, through funding, logistical support, and invitations, could increase the opportunities of youth organisations from low-income countries to participate in global climate policy and knowledge-sharing spaces. Through advocacy work, donor organisations can also push policy forums to be more inclusive of youth organisations from low-income states, and amplify the voices of youth in those spaces.

CHALLENGING PATRIARCHAL EXCLUSION

The safe, active participation of girls, young women and trans youth in civil society groups is crucial for intersectional and just activism. Donors can advance this by specifically supporting youth groups that promote gender equality, advancing policies and actions that tackle patriarchal exclusion with governments, and sharing best practices through horizontal interactions with youth groups.

BREAK THE BOX

The climate crisis is here. It's too late to simply think outside the box, rather the box itself needs to be broken. An unprecedented global emergency needs unprecedented relationships, tactics, and redistributions to meet it. Donors should be willing to engage with youth groups through dialogues that nourish co-creation, creativity, and innovation.



Plan International strives to advance children's rights and equality for girls all over the world. We recognise the power and potential of every single child. But this is often suppressed by poverty, violence, exclusion and discrimination. And it's girls who are most affected. As an independent development and humanitarian organisation, we work alongside children, young people, our supporters and partners to tackle the root causes of the challenges facing girls and all vulnerable children. We support children's rights from birth until they reach adulthood, and enable children to prepare for and respond to crises and adversity. We drive changes in practice and policy at local, national and global levels using our reach, experience and knowledge. For over 75 years we have been building powerful partnerships for children, and we are active in over 70 countries.

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