

# Summary of outcome of consultations with adolescents and young people in Latin America and the Caribbean for climate action

*Draft working document - October 2019*

This document summarizes and consolidates the outcomes of three consultation processes<sup>1</sup> on climate action in Latin America and the Caribbean in which 348 adolescents and young people from the region between the ages of 14 and 25 participated. It also links the views expressed by the adolescents with the Sustainable Development Goals, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Conference of the Parties on Climate Change.

## 1. MOTHER EARTH'S RIGHTS AND RECOGNITION OF ANCESTRAL KNOWLEDGE

Living well is knowing how to live in harmony with Mother Earth; it is knowing that what harms nature harms us all. Mother Earth is sacred. She provides us with food, water and life.

We believe it is essential to develop the concept of the "Rights of Nature" and to clarify ambiguities. States must protect forests, rivers, moorlands and jungles, understanding Mother Earth as a subject of rights.

We demand that our ancestral ideas, knowledge and practices be the basis for creating a new healthy environment in harmony with Mother Earth. There is no need to seek new alternative models for sustainable living; we should instead promote, restore and strengthen the traditional practices of our rural communities and the systems of our ancestors, which are kind to the environment of the indigenous community, while also taking into account their worldviews.

Young people are committed to respecting Mother Earth through their life goals, practices and actions that are in harmony with the environment. We invite governments, institutions and society in general to do the same.



**SDG 10:** *Economic growth is not sufficient to reduce poverty if it is not inclusive and if it does not involve the three dimensions of sustainable development – economic, social and environmental, including respect for planet earth.*

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- <sup>1</sup> *Global initiative: Accelerating progress in relation to children's right to a healthy environment.* Bogotá, Colombia, May 2019.
  - *Regional Meeting of Estudiantes Adolescentes por la Acción Climática (Adolescents Students for Climate Action).* Iquitos, Peru, June 2019.
  - *First Youth Summit on Water and Climate Change: Together with Mother Earth.* La Paz, Bolivia, November 2018.

**SDG 15:** *An estimated 20 per cent of land was degraded between 2000 and 2015. Seventy-five per cent of poor people, including children and adolescents, are directly affected by this degradation. We must sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation, and halt biodiversity loss.*



## 2. FORESTS AND ECOSYSTEMS

For our indigenous brothers and sisters, the forest is their territory, where they live their lives in harmony with animals, plants, rivers and their culture. For them, the forests provide not only their livelihoods, but also knowledge about their origins and identity. In the forests they find their traditional remedies and their main connection to their community. Forests are not just ecosystems, they are life systems. That is why protecting forests is protecting life.

We are concerned about deforestation caused by logging, mining and the burning of forests for other crops and livestock. We are losing unique endemic ecosystems like the Amazon.

It is essential to reforest with plants that are adapted to the ecosystem and that encourage its conservation. The designation of more protected natural areas and harsher penalties for illegal logging are necessary. Reforestation should also be required of companies that cause excessive deforestation.



**SDG 15:** *30.7 per cent of the Earth's surface is covered by forests that provide food security and shelter, and protect biodiversity and the homes of the indigenous population. By protecting forests, we can also strengthen natural resource management and increase land productivity.*

## 3. WATER

Rivers are being used like rubbish bins and filled with waste from sewers, industry, slaughterhouses and tanneries. The irresponsible use of water causes droughts. As a result of deforestation, it rains less, and lagoons and springs dry up. This affects a whole set of ecosystems. The countryside has no water for farming and cities have no water to drink.

Mining is a problem not only due to its use of water for the extraction of minerals, but also due to the pollution caused by waste from dams and heavy metals. Water can no longer be recovered and it flows through different areas, polluting other water sources and farmland. We are concerned about pollution from oil and waste spills that cause the loss of marine life. Such pollution also results in fish and aquaculture products for consumption that are causing disease.

In most rural areas, our families invest a lot of resources in buying water, because we don't all have drinking water in our homes. The lack of drinking water causes many diseases that put the lives of our younger siblings at risk.

We young people demand that water be safeguarded as part of the fundamental right to life for communities in Latin America. The authorities must ensure that water is distributed equitably, prioritizing rural areas that suffer from droughts and floods.

It is imperative that water and mining laws are enacted and updated at the national level. Protected areas for water sources must be created and investment must be made in natural reservoirs. Well drilling and groundwater use must be regulated and sewage treatment plants must be built so that pollution does not reach rivers, streams and lakes, thus reducing disease in communities.

There is a need for more regulation aimed at conservation and sustainable practices for fisheries and aquaculture. Public and private oil companies must be monitored and demanded to act in the event of oil spills.



**SDG 6:** *Many children and adolescents experience climate change through its impact on water quality and access to water. By 2040, approximately 1 in 4 children will live in areas with extremely limited water resources. It is essential to ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.*



**SDG 12:** *Countries are continuing to address challenges regarding air, water and soil pollution. Net gains from economic activities must be achieved by reducing resource use, degradation and pollution, while achieving a better quality of life for children.*



**SDG 14:** *The conservation and sustainable use of oceans, seas and marine resources is essential for sustainable development. Marine protected areas contribute to poverty reduction by increasing fish catches and incomes and by improving the health of families, especially the most vulnerable who live in rural areas.*

#### 4. EDUCATION

We believe that there is a lack of knowledge about the rights and duties that humanity has in relation to nature. Not all children and adolescents receive environmental education, nor do they have access to information on environmental issues.

It is essential to develop a curriculum with an integrated and cross-cutting focus on caring for the environment at all levels of formal and informal education. It is important that this curriculum be adapted for different ages, taking into account the urban and rural contexts in which children and adolescents live, and promoting the construction of a society that has a greater understanding of the ancestral knowledge of indigenous communities.



**SDG 4:** *Education is an essential element of the global response to climate change. Increasing knowledge about climate change among young people promotes attitude and behaviour change and helps them better adapt to the context in which they live.*

*Climate change can also affect the continuity of schooling for children and adolescents. Even temporary disruptions in education can be difficult to overcome and the effects are felt for several years. Furthermore, the effects of climate change can cause damage to both educational and transport infrastructure and interrupt school routines. Extreme heat can affect the ability of children and adolescents to learn.*

## **5. DIFFERENTIATED IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS**

States have an obligation to recognize the specific consequences of climate change on the health and lives of children and adolescents and the impact they have on our realities, especially those of us who live in rural areas. Children and adolescents are the group most affected by environmental issues. Adults must understand this and take it into consideration when making decisions that affect us.



***SDG 13:** Urgent action is needed to combat climate change and its effects on children. Women and children are 14 times more likely to die during a disaster (Peterson, 2007). Ninety per cent of the diseases attributable to climate change are suffered by children under the age of five. The World Health Organization (WHO) has said that climate change will cause approximately 250,000 additional deaths globally between 2030 and 2050, including those of 95,000 children, due to malnutrition linked to contaminated water and droughts.*

## **6. MIGRATION AND POVERTY AS A CONSEQUENCE OF CLIMATE CHANGE**

In rural areas, deforestation, water pollution and chemical use have affected soils, reducing our production capacities. For this reason, our parents have to migrate, splitting up the family, leaving us and our grandparents to work in the fields. Furthermore, the growth of cities and companies has left us with less land to farm and what we produce is not enough to sell and generate income, so some of us must leave in search of work in the city.

Whether they live in the city or the countryside, our families end up living in poverty. In the countryside, this is because there is a lack of water, the land is eroded and our produce is increasingly undervalued. In the city, it is because when parents do migrate, they don't find decent and safe work there either.

It is necessary to work with communities to find solutions and to support grass roots initiatives. It is not a question of imposing solutions from the top down, but of a joint process of development that takes into account the needs, perspectives, ideas and, above all, the knowledge of rural communities.

We believe it is essential to reform the countryside-city relationship and to learn through the exchange of knowledge about the impact of climate change in both rural and urban areas.



**SDG 1:** Climate change continues to threaten sustainable development in all regions. It increases the poverty and vulnerability of many families and this disproportionately affects children and adolescents. Strong policy frameworks for the most vulnerable must be created to support accelerated investment in poverty eradication measures.



**SDG 2:** Many rural smallholders can no longer earn a living on the land they work, forcing them to migrate to the cities in search of opportunities. Profound reform of the global farming and food system is needed if we are to end the stunted growth of 1 in 4 children and if we are to feed the 66 million primary school-age children who are currently going to school hungry.

## 7. CHANGING THE DEVELOPMENT MODEL

We are in a period of radicalizing political positions, with a model of territorial intervention that has led to a climate crisis. We need to create a new system that monitors and limits transnational corporations, the extractive mining-energy model and agro-industrial models in order to finally achieve climate justice.

We must analyze current development models and propose alternatives that balance our relationships with nature and with other people. Holistic plans must be developed. It is no longer possible to think about planning development for just a few. It is essential to promote new industries that allow us to take care of the environment.

On a personal level, we must return to responsible consumption and raise public awareness. It is unfair that rural communities are the ones who have to adapt to climate change, when they are the ones taking care of nature. In rural areas, we do not pollute and we do not exploit Mother Earth. We recognize the future as a right and commit to changing how we live and respecting Mother Earth. For us climate change is a sign that we need to change and transform our present to secure the future.



**SDG 7:** Ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all is imperative.



**SDG 9:** Resilient infrastructure must be built, inclusive and sustainable industrialization promoted and innovation encouraged.



**SDG 12:** Sustainable consumption and production consists of promoting the efficient use of resources and energy, building environmentally friendly infrastructure, improving access to basic services and creating green jobs.

## 8. INTERSECTION BETWEEN THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS AND CLIMATE CHANGE

The rights of nature and human rights, including those of children and adolescents, are interdependent. Although the Convention on the Rights of the Child does not mention the rights of nature, we believe it is important to discuss the link between climate change and how it affects compliance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The right to a healthy environment must include access to clean water, clean air, non-toxic environments, a safe climate and healthy ecosystems.



**Convention on the Rights of the Child:** *The impact of climate change threatens the exercise of the rights set out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, including the rights to life, survival and development (Art. 6), family reunification and not being separated from parents against their will (Art. 9-10), the best possible health (Art. 24), an adequate standard of living (Art. 27), education (Art. 28), freedom from all forms of violence or exploitation (Art. 19, 32, 34, 36), leisure and play (Art. 31) and the enjoyment of one's own culture (Art. 30).*

## 9. HEALTH, FOOD, FOOD SECURITY AND FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

Climate change has caused the spread and recurrence of disease. Extreme climates damage our territories and limit access to health care. Medical services are insufficient and underprepared for the adverse weather conditions caused by climate change.

The use of chemicals for fertilizer and food production harms our health and impacts the food security and sovereignty of farming families. Furthermore, the failure to control imported products and fast food imposes an unhealthy diet on us, causing us to miss out on the opportunity to include the diversity of home-grown produce in our diet. This problem also makes it difficult to achieve and maintain fair prices for our producers.

We propose developing a risk and disaster management plan to prevent the flooding that brings disease due to vector agents and hinders the access of rural communities to health centres.

It is necessary to monitor and promote organic farming so that we can all access healthy food, prioritizing Mother Earth and guaranteeing food security and sovereignty. We must create new ways of promoting, enhancing and exchanging our national products and making our families aware of the consequences of our choices.



**SDG 3:** *It is necessary to guarantee a healthy life and to promote the well-being of all at all ages. Children are the most affected by diseases at risk of spreading due to climate change, such as malaria and dengue fever. They also face the dangers of malnutrition and diarrhoea. Increasing the resilience of health, education and nutrition services is a key tool for safeguarding development opportunities of future generations.*

## 10. PARTICIPATION

What future awaits us children and adolescents in the world we are creating? What would our future be like in a zero-emissions world? We need to have a concrete vision of what will happen. Children and young people are actors, not just passive subjects of rights. The information available to us must be clear, understandable and truthful and enable children to make informed decisions.

Dialogue between adults and young people is an opportunity and a necessity to promote the environmental rights of children and adolescents. Today, there are few spaces for real and effective participation, where our voice is taken into account and turned into concrete actions. There is a lack of inclusive dialogue that considers the perspective of indigenous children and rural communities.

Children and adolescents must have a voice and a vote when policies and projects related to climate change are being developed, especially considering the disproportionate impact that today's environmental policies will have on future generations.

It is necessary to set up youth organizations at the national level and strengthen youth participation spaces by creating local and virtual platforms that enable the active participation of young people, exchange and cooperation.

Spaces should be created for the representation and participation of young people in government congresses and assemblies that are diverse in terms of age, gender and ethnicity. If we look at representation in government institutions in our region, it is clear that the vast majority of political representatives, senators and members of congress are all older men. This seems to us to be an unjust representation of the society in which we live.



*Convention on the Rights of the Child – Art. 12: Children and young people can play a key role in addressing the risks of climate change by expressing their ideas, opinions and concerns, identifying solutions and promoting sustainable lifestyles – setting an example for their communities. The participation of young people is a necessity and a fundamental right established in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.*

## 11. URGENCY AND NEED FOR ACTION

The time to act is now. Emphasis must be placed on the urgency of addressing the problem now.

We must demand that our countries sign and ratify the Escazú Agreement (on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean). But there is also a need to move past simply signing and ratifying treaties and on to enacting laws to action.

It is time to demand compliance with national and international agreements that seek to eradicate deforestation, conserve the environment and reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in our Latin



America. We adolescents and young people demand that national laws relating to water, environment, mining and agriculture be adopted and updated. The processes of developing and updating these regulations must be carried out in a participatory manner, in which we must have a leading role.

The private sector also has responsibilities and must act now, with direct and specific emphasis on the impact their activities have on the environment and on children.

We need to understand and recognize the historical responsibility of this development model in which we are immersed and commit, as young people, to mitigate and adapt to climate change by ceasing to be indifferent to this issue. We must analyse current development models and propose alternatives such as Living Well, which promotes balance in our relationships with nature and other people.

We need to create awareness programmes about life outside of the cities, so that everyone understands what is happening in the countryside and in rural areas and commits themselves to solving the problems of their territories and of their countries.

We suggest creating the hashtag #latinoaméricaenacción and sharing it on social networks.

***National laws and policies relating to climate change: Child-centred mitigation and adaptation plans and interventions are essential for complying with the Paris Agreement and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.***



*Through Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Actions (NAMAs), National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) and Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), countries established their policies and actions to reduce emissions and adapt to climate change in many sectors. By 2020, all Parties to the Paris Agreement are requested to submit the next round of NDCs (new or updated). In accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, it is an opportunity and duty for national plans to specifically address the impact of climate change on children and teens and to include them when defining policies and actions.*

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