



Save the Children

# THE ASEAN DECLARATION ON ENVIRONMENTAL RIGHTS: CHILDREN'S FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION IN THE PHILIPPINES





The Philippines experiences around 20 cyclones annually due to its geographical location making heavy rains, widespread flooding, and strong winds common occurrences. In 2023, the country ranked first in the World Risk Report as the most disaster-prone. Children are among those vulnerable in any emergency and the Philippines' population includes 39.75 million children, with 10.46 million from poor households, making them the sector with the second highest poverty incidence. The climate crisis exacerbates the inequality children are already facing in different situations hence they are calling for urgent climate action.

The draft ASEAN Declaration on Environmental Rights is being developed by the ASEAN Environmental Rights Working Group in line with the international norms and standards on the rights to a safe, clean, healthy, and sustainable environment. Stakeholders have been invited to submit inputs for this declaration. With this, a children's focus group discussion was held last 16 March 2024, in Quezon City, Philippines.

The participants were fourteen adolescent boys and girls aged 14 to 17 and came from various regions in the country, as well as geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas (GIDA) and included representatives from indigenous communities, children with disabilities, and those representing diverse Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Expression (SOGIE). The participants were organized into four groups to engage in discussions facilitated through a World Café and each group's outcomes were presented creatively in the form of spoken poetry.

The activity was organized by Save the Children Philippines with support from its Asia Regional Office, and participation from Child Rights Coalition Asia, Gitib Inc., and Terre des hommes.

# 1. BEST WAYS FOR CHILDREN TO ACCESS ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION

## **Preferred sources of environmental information**

Broadcast and social media are popular forms of entertainment in the Philippines and is also cited as one of the top sources of environmental information preferred by children. Given that children and youth are already active in these platforms for leisure activities, it is recommended that environmental information be made available on these channels to expand reach and increase awareness. In addition, incorporating environmental information in the school curriculum especially in relevant subjects is also one way that children can receive credible information. Moreover, children have high regard for knowledge passed on to them by adults, including their parents and caregivers, which is why they highly encourage for trainings and corresponding materials containing environmental information be also provided to adults.

## **Preferred formats for receiving environmental information**

Aside from the credibility of information, children highlighted the importance of creating engaging and entertaining formats to encourage and excite young people to learn. This could come through the form of online and offline games, mobile applications, websites, and even recommended play-based activities that can be done daily from their own homes with their parents or caregivers.





### **Suggestions for improving accessibility of environmental information for children**

One of the immediate steps in improving the accessibility of environmental information for children is ensuring these are available in public spaces like neighborhood libraries. Child-friendly materials should also be created to ensure that information and format are age-appropriate. Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) materials and social media posts must be inclusive and disability-friendly through multi-sensory approaches and utilizing technology such as alternative text and text-to-speech. Community gatherings with interactive sessions must also be conducted to foster common understanding and increase awareness of children and adults alike. Furthermore, child and youth-centered organizations such as the Youth for Environment in Schools Organization (YES-O) and their efforts must also be supported to increase their reach and improve effectiveness.



# PARTICIPANT RESPONSES

A summary of responses from participants regarding their ideas and recommendations on preferred sources and formats for accessing environmental information, and challenges they experienced.

## 1. Digital Accessibility for Children:

- a. Develop child and disability-friendly social media posts.
- b. Create child-friendly applications and games focused on environmental education.
- c. Develop child-friendly websites with informative content on environmental issues.

## 2. Community Engagement and Awareness:

- a. Organize community gatherings and interactive sessions to raise awareness about children's ecological rights.
- b. Strengthen support and implementation of the Youth for Environment in Schools Organization (YES-O) of the Department of Education.
- c. Foster YES-O habits among students to promote environmental stewardship.

## 3. Accessible Education Materials:

- a. Ensure that Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) materials are accessible to children with disabilities through multi-sensory experiences.
- b. Enhance environmental information and education activities within school curricula.
- c. Contextualize and integrate climate change lessons into school subjects.

## 4. Media and Information Dissemination:

- a. Incorporate environmental education into broadcast media programs.
- b. Educate adults, parents, and caregivers about the importance of environmental awareness.

## 5. Resource Accessibility:

- a. Establish libraries with resources on environmental topics accessible to children.

## 6. Physical Accessibility and Awareness:

- a. Install disability-friendly signages in public spaces to promote environmental awareness.
- b. Organize daily, fun, and play-based activities related to climate change.

# 2. IMPACTS OF BIODIVERSITY LOSS ON PARTICIPANTS' LIVES



## Identified Impacts of Biodiversity Loss on Children and Young People

Biodiversity loss threatens the balance of nature and has implications on the lives of people, especially children. This worsens the climate crisis and causes heatwaves resulting to health issues and depletion of resources leading to reduced food supplies. Prices of food and other basic commodities have also increased, adding to the challenges that children and their families already face. In addition, the education of young people is also being affected as schools are being forced to suspend classes and multiple adjustments to the school calendar have been made due to extreme heat.



## **Perceived consequences of biodiversity loss on communities and ecosystems.**

The livelihood of communities is one of the most impacted by biodiversity loss, leading to food scarcity and an increase in prices. It also contributes to emerging diseases of children and youth today, and even of future generations and disrupts the medicinal development of potential cures for these illnesses. The environmental degradation and loss of biodiversity hinders cultural preservation and limits the knowledge and understanding of future generations about the different species and organisms.

## **Concerns and suggestions for addressing biodiversity loss**

Collective action is needed to address the biodiversity loss and to preserve nature for children and young people as well as for future generations. Progress must be made equally and should not compromise other aspects of life such as the protection of natural resources and animals that live in the ecosystem.

# **PARTICIPANT RESPONSES**

A summary of responses from participants regarding the impacts of biodiversity loss on their lives and communities, related challenges, and their recommendations.

1. Damage to wildlife habitats and loss of natural resources threatens the balance of nature.
2. Destruction of the environment affects the livelihoods of communities and leads to an increase in commodity prices.
3. Loss of biodiversity impacts the development of emerging diseases of children and youth today and future generations and creation of potential cures.
4. Destruction of natural habitats and species undermines cultural preservation and future generations' knowledge.
5. Children will lack familiarity with species lost before their birth, impacting their understanding of biodiversity.
6. Destruction of landmarks and loss of life and homes result from environmental damage.
7. Decreased production of supplies and materials due to resource depletion contributes to food scarcity.
8. Disruption of the food chain exacerbates health problems.
9. Biodiversity loss worsens climate change, causing heatwaves and health issues. It also affects education, as seen in the recent government decision to alter school calendars due to extreme heat.
10. Environmental degradation undermines efforts to uphold children's rights.



# 3. EFFECTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON RIGHTS TO FOOD AND CLEAN WATER

## Insights into how climate change affects participants' access to food and clean water

Due to the decrease in food and water supply coupled with the increase in prices, children and their families are often forced to purchase and consume less nutritious but more affordable options such as instant noodles and canned food. Aside from access to clean water for drinking, children especially girls require this for health and sanitation reasons. All these affect the health of children through malnutrition, diarrhea, and even their mental health.

As a result of the pressure to earn more to afford basic necessities such as food and water, children could be subjected to child labor or online sexual abuse and exploitation. The education of children is also affected not only through disruption of classes but also low participation due to hunger and sickness.





## Challenges faced in ensuring food security and access to clean water due to climate change

Climate change contributes to extreme heat and even drought which results to the lack of water and food. Food scarcity is being experienced as there is not enough crops to harvest and pollution puts additional challenges in some areas because access to clean water is affected by mining. Agriculture is already heavily impacted by climate change, and this further contaminates the water supply as it makes both water and food unsafe for consumption.

## Suggestions for mitigating the impacts of climate change on food and water rights

Climate change is becoming too extreme that people must recognize that the way to address it is if everybody changes their ways. Everybody has a role to play and by addressing climate change, this will also lead to better supply and accessibility to clean and nutritious food and water for children.



# PARTICIPANT RESPONSES

A summary of responses from participants regarding the effects of climate change on their rights to food and clean water.

## 1. Limited Access to Food and Water:

- a. Lack of water because of drought.
- b. Climate change limits access to water and food supplies.
- c. Due to the limited availability of fresh, organic food, people turn to instant food options.
- d. This scarcity significantly affects people's daily lives.

## 2. Drought and Inflation:

- a. Aside from humans, both crops and livestock are adversely affected by the lack of water.
- b. Drought has caused high inflation

## 3. Health Impacts:

- a. Instances of malnutrition are already rising.
- b. Hunger adversely affects mental health.
- c. Severe malnutrition can result in fatalities.
- d. Children are at risk of contracting waterborne diseases like diarrhea and dengue due to the lack of clean water.
- e. Hygiene and sanitation, especially for girls, are compromised.
- f. Problems associated with limited water, food, and access to essential services may lead to child protection issues such as child labor and Online Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children (OSAEC).

## 4. Educational Impacts:

- a. School attendance rates are declining due to hunger.
- b. There is an increase in school dropout rates.
- c. Hunger, which leads to ill health and access to education, also affects children's rights to participate.

## 5. Environmental Challenges:

- a. Floodwaters are steadily rising, exacerbating the situation.
- b. In some areas, access to clean water is affected by mining, which contaminates water supply and makes both water and food unsafe for consumption.
- c. Biodiversity is negatively impacted by the lack of food and water.

## 6. Displacement and Vulnerability:

- a. People are displaced due to the lack of access to food and water, making children vulnerable to protection issues in evacuation centers.

## 7. Rights and Leisure Activities:

- a. The right to enjoy development and leisure, such as swimming in rivers and seas, is compromised.

# 4. PROTECTION OF CHILD ENVIRONMENTAL RIGHTS DEFENDERS



## Identified risks and challenges faced by child environmental rights defenders

Child human and environmental rights defenders face risks and challenges both online and offline. When advocating for issues that are relevant to them, children have shared their concern on potentially being red-tagged similar to what other human rights defenders have experienced. In social media platform, online bullying and hateful messages and comments can be received by simply expressing their thoughts and opinions. They have also shared that seeing news about the unsafe situation of journalists creates fear and hesitation to pursue their campaigns and advocacies. In some instances, children are dissuaded by adults to speak up instead of providing them the support they need. The lack of information on where and how to get support also deters children to demand action for their rights to be upheld.



## **Suggestions for enhancing the protection and support of child environmental rights defenders**

Access to information must be ensured so that children can be more knowledgeable in defending their rights. This includes information on specific issues but also about policies that protect their rights and where they can seek legal and protection support like psychosocial first aid. Children are also calling for red-tagging to be rejected and for the safety of journalists to be ensured to prevent the spread of fear and misinformation. When it comes to the protection of children online, a social media page dedicated to receiving reports from children has been suggested given that children are already active on these platforms. The anonymity of children regarding sensitive issues should also be ensured to encourage them to speak truthfully but at the same time remain safe and protected. Furthermore, children recognize the value of acting together and highly encourage conducting collective campaigns at the national, regional, and global levels.

## **Recommendations for stakeholders and authorities to safeguard child environmental rights defenders**

In order to truly protect and ensure the safety of child environmental rights defenders, children believe that a legislation on this must be enacted. The Ecological Children's Rights Bill must also be approved as well as other related policies. The participants of this consultation are aware of referral pathways however they believe that promotion of these must be improved, especially those that are available offline, to reach more children. Finally, the establishment of a party-list and the appointment of a representative is recommended to create a consistent platform for children to be able to express their concerns and be consulted on issues related to them. Children believe that this is a safer alternative and will open up spaces for dialogues with authorities and decision-makers.



# PARTICIPANT RESPONSES

A summary of responses from participants regarding the protection of child environmental rights defenders.

## 1. Legal Protection and Advocacy:

- a. Make laws and adopt national and local policies to ensure the safety of child environmentalists.
- b. Approve the Ecological Children's Rights Bill.
- c. Reject red-tagging.
- d. Establish a party-list representative for child environmental defenders.

## 2. Access to Information and Support:

- a. Ensure access to information so that children can defend their rights (legal, mental, policies).
- b. Children should have adequate information to advocate for their rights.
- c. Schools should provide support.
- d. Raise awareness of referral pathways offline.
- e. Ensure the anonymity of children on sensitive issues.
- f. Provide psychological first aid.

## 3. Engagement and Communication:

- a. Ensure access to information so that children can defend their rights (legal, mental, policies).
- b. Children should have adequate information to advocate for their rights.
- c. Schools should provide support.
- d. Raise awareness of referral pathways offline.
- e. Ensure the anonymity of children on sensitive issues.
- f. Provide psychological first aid.

## 4. Safety Measures:

- a. Ensure safety and security protection.
- b. Establish a social media reporting page.
- c. Ensure the safety of journalists to prevent the spread of fear and misinformation.

## 5. Policy Implementation and Collaboration:

- a. Collaborate on SDG 17 between children's groups, CSOs, and government.
- b. Conduct collective campaigns at the national, regional, and global levels.

# CONCLUSION

## **Empowering Children Through Tailored Environmental Education**

Children reiterated the importance of tailored and inclusive approaches to engage children in environmental education, emphasizing accessibility across digital, community, educational, media, resource, and physical spaces. These strategies aim to empower children to become informed and proactive environmental stewards from an early age.

## **Urgent Action Needed: Children's Vulnerability to Climate Change**

The multifaceted impacts of climate change on access to food and water rights and biodiversity loss, affecting health, education, culture, livelihoods, and overall well-being is a challenge that children continue to face. They emphasized the urgent need for comprehensive strategies and action to address climate change and its effects on vulnerable communities, particularly children and future generations.

## **Mainstreaming Child Participation in Political and Policy Processes**

Mainstreaming child participation in policy discussions is imperative, especially on issues that will affect generations to come. Children need to be consulted to capture their perspectives and address or prevent their apprehensions about the future. In addition to providing spaces for children to participate, it is essential that freedom of expression is ensured in all platforms that children use to share their thoughts and opinions.

## **Safeguarding Child Environmental Rights Defenders**

Lastly, children expressed the importance of legal frameworks, access to information and support, safety measures, and collaborative efforts in ensuring the protection of child environmental rights defenders. These strategies aim to empower children to continue advocating for environmental protection while safeguarding their safety and well-being.

# NEXT STEPS

This documentation compiled by Save the Children contains the inputs and suggestions of children on the thematic areas of the ASEAN Declaration on Environmental Rights and will be shared with members of the ASEAN Environmental Rights Working Group. Children, especially those who participated in the focus group discussion, will be provided with feedback about how their inputs have been considered and will be provided updates on the status and timeline of the declaration whenever possible.



# ANNEX: SPOKEN WORD POETRY

## CHILDREN'S ACCESS TO ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION

### Original (in Filipino)

Kabataan ang pag-asa ng bayan,  
nasusunod nga ba o napapabayaang?  
Paano nga ba mapapatunayan kung ang kaalaman  
ay limitado at access ay hindi mabibigyan?  
Kung sa social media active ang kabataan,  
bakit hindi ito gawin upang ma-access ang impormasyon  
patungkol sa kalikasan?  
Puwede rin ba ang information patungkol sa kalikasan  
gawin din accessible sa mga batang may kapansanan?  
Education at communication materials na para sa kanila  
bakit hindi natin maibigay at nang maging mulat din sila sa  
mga nangyayari sa ating klima?  
Para sa kabataan!

### English translation:

The children are the hope of the nation,  
are they being supported or neglected?  
How can you prove that awareness is limited  
and if access to information is not being provided?  
Children are already active on social media,  
why can't this be used to give them access to environmental  
information?  
Can information on the environment  
also be made available to children with disabilities?  
Education and communication materials that are for them,  
why is it not being provided so they can be aware of what's  
happening to the climate?  
For the children!

# BIODIVERSITY LOSS

## Original (in Filipino)

Kawalan kawalan kawalan.  
Nais na ba natin mahirapan sa lumalalang isyu ng kalikasan?  
Biodiversity, hindi napangalagaan,  
paano pa ba ang tahanan ng susunod na kabataan?  
Dumaloy dumaloy, hanging maaliwalas;  
umaksyon umaksyon ating karapatan ang alas.  
Likas na yaman, hayop, at tao  
tutulong sa ating maging malakas.  
Para sa kinabukasan ng bansa na kaunlaran dapat ay patas,  
'wag tayo maging ahas sa ating bansang Pilipinas.

## English translation:

Loss, loss, loss.  
Do we want to suffer  
because of worsening environmental issues?  
Biodiversity has been neglected;  
what will happen to the home of future generations?  
Flowing, flowing clear air;  
action, action, our rights are our ace.  
Natural resources, animals, and people  
can help us become stronger.  
For the future of our country  
where progress should be equal,  
let us not be snakes to our country, the Philippines.

# EFFECTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON RIGHTS TO FOOD AND CLEAN WATER

## Original (in Filipino)

Pagbabago, pagbabago, pagbabago.

Yan ang ating nararanasan lalo na ang pagbabago sa ating kilma sa mahabang panahon.

Habang tayo'y nakakaranas ng mga bagay na dulo't ng climate change, nagkakaroon tayo ng food scarcity, nagkakaroon tayo ng water contamination, at naapektuhan ang ating biodiversity.

Naapektuhan din ang ating karapatan bilang isang kabataan, naapektuhan din ang ating karapatang maproktesyunan, lalong-lalo na sa ating nutrisyon at sa ating kalusugan.

Nagbabago na ang panahon.

Panahon na para magbago.

## English translation:

Change, change, change.

This is what we have been experiencing, especially in our climate for a long time.

As we are experiencing the impacts of climate change, we also go through food scarcity, water contamination, and biodiversity loss.

Our rights as children are being affected, including our rights to be protected, to nutrition and health.

The climate is changing.

It is time for us to change.



# PROTECTION OF CHILD ENVIRONMENTAL RIGHTS DEFENDERS

## Original (in Filipino)

Boses ng kabataan ay boses ng kalayaan,  
kailangan ng makabatang sambayanan.  
Maging maalam sa child environmental rights,  
upang ligtas, seguridad, at proteksyon ay makamatan.  
Epekto ng kapaligiran hindi lang sa pisikal,  
ito rin ay epekto sa emosyonal.  
Huwag makielam kung hindi makialam.  
Saloobin sa kapaligiran, ipaglaban.

## English translation:

The voice of children is the voice of freedom.  
We need a nation that is for children.  
Be aware of children's environmental rights, so that safety,  
security, and protection can be attained.  
The environment's effect is not only physical  
but also emotional.  
Don't just interfere and take action instead.  
Fight for what you think is right for the environment.

## Original (in Filipino)

Kalikasan ang pag-asa ng bayan.  
Kagaya na lang ng mga kabataan,  
kaya huwag nating pabayaan.  
Ang mga bata na nais ito alagaan.  
Kaligtasan ng kabataan ay kaligtasan din ng kalikasan.  
Sila ang nagsisilbing tagapag-ligtas  
sa panahon na ikaw ay nahihirapan.

## English translation:

Nature is the hope of the nation.  
Just like the children,  
So let us not neglect them.  
The children that we wish to care for,  
Wants to take care of it.  
The safety of the nation is also the safety of nature.

# PROTECTION OF CHILD ENVIRONMENTAL RIGHTS DEFENDERS

## Original (in Filipino)

Pula ang kulay ng pag-ibig,  
may pagmamahal kaya may hilig.  
At sa bawat taong aking minahal,  
katumbas nito'y paglaban para sa bayan.  
Sa bawat pag-ibig na hinulma,  
nahulma rito ang pagmamahal sa masa.  
Sa bawat pinormang relasyon,  
Ang tungo nito ay rebolusyon.  
Layung wala ng batang magugutom,  
patas ang maghuhukom,  
at mga batas ay mula sa boses ng masang nilikom.  
At dahil ang pagmamahal ay pagpapalaya,  
Ang umibig ay pakikibaka.

## English translation:

Red is the color of love,  
there is love that's why there is passion.  
And for every person that I have loved,  
is reflected in my drive to fight for the nation.  
For every love that has been molded,  
molded my love for the masses.  
For every relationship formed,  
it all leads to revolution.  
It is my goal that no child will be left hungry,  
and that justice will be fair,  
and laws will come from consultation of the people.  
Ans because love means liberation,  
to love means revolution.