

# Enabling the Right to Participate

Children and Young People's Participation in Climate Action



**SAUTI-Youth**



**“Young people’s voice on climate change has to move from the streets to the halls, where decisions are made, and change happens.”**

– Mildred Nzau, AU-EU Youth Cooperation Hub

## YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN CLIMATE POLICY

Increasing meaningful youth participation in policy and decision-making processes is crucial to ensuring more ambitious climate action and implementation. Children and young people need to be seen as more than simply beneficiaries. Rather, they need to be seen as key stakeholders and active participants in policy development and implementation processes.

Not only is it their right to be involved, but it is young people who will suffer the greatest consequences if ambitious measures to mitigate climate change are not immediately taken, and thus, they have the most to gain from climate action. Those between the ages of 10 and 24<sup>1</sup> currently make up 23.6 percent (nearly 1.9 billion persons) of the world’s population, accounting for the largest age segment in many countries.

Nearly 90 percent of young people live in low- and middle-income countries and are among those experiencing the most significant effects of the climate crisis. Youth, which can include those up to age 35, often includes a number of transitory life phases. From completing education to establishing economic security and even starting a family, most of these major life milestones occur during the youth time frame. However, climate change is capable of disrupting said milestones, causing life-long repercussions<sup>2</sup>.

**The Need for Voice:** This Brief is based on learning from a programme that seeks to improve participation and address the governance and climate nexus. The programme’s aim is reflected in its title, Sustainable Accountability Uniting Tanzanian and Irish Youth or **‘SAUTI-Youth’**. **SAUTI** is the Swahili word for ‘voice’ and it is the empowerment of youth to be strong voices in and for their communities and to monitor government commitments on climate action that will bring about the programme’s results.

1 <https://www.unfpa.org/data/world-population-dashboards>

2 <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/documents/3285/Young-people-and-climate-change.pdf>

**Cover photo:** SAUTI-Youth group members from Handeni and Korogwe Districts celebrate national Tree Planting day in Tanzania.

SAUTI-Youth is based on the Citizens Voice and Action (CVA) model. CVA provides a methodology for youth to engage with local government structures, allowing for a common approach uniting youth in two different contexts in Africa and Europe. The project is a youth-led monitoring of local government commitments on climate action. SAUTI-Youth bridges and supports 1000+ youth in both countries to engage in governance and accountability. The young people have been empowered with skills to monitor their local government’s climate action commitments and spending and engage in dialogue with local authorities so that they take innovative actions to locally tackle this global challenge. The project is implemented in Tanga, Tanzania by World Vision Tanzania (WVT) and in Galway, Ireland by Youth Work Ireland Galway (YWIG).



The CVA community scorecard process provides a crucial method for ensuring that service delivery responds to the needs of the most vulnerable.



“SAUTI-Youth Project interventions are targeting to create young leaders who will not only spearhead proper utilisation of resources for conservation of the environment, but also who will raise their voices to empower more youth inclusion in governance processes”.

## CHALLENGES IN YOUTH ENGAGEMENT WITH LOCAL GOVERNMENT

In Tanzania, citizen participation and in particular youth participation in governance structures is an ongoing challenge. Good governance processes are limited by centralised power structures, reduced civic space and a still-emerging civil society, reducing government capacity and barriers to accessing information. Quality of public services and institutional capacity is low. Limited government accountability exists alongside a lack of public demand for improvement. Civil servants and elected officials are not held to account by citizens<sup>3</sup>. While public budgets have become more transparent and open, citizens’ active engagement in these issues continues to be modest, and even less for young people, especially girls. Corruption is a serious challenge for Tanzania and is of considerable concern. To address this, both political commitment and increased engagement from citizens, civil society, the media and parliament is essential. Continued strengthening of the public system for openness, accountability and transparency is key.

3 <https://www.usaid.gov/tanzania/democracy-human-rights-and-governance>

Participation in governance processes is low as per the World Bank's Good Governance Index, Tanzania achieved a score of 36 percent in 2017 for Voice and Accountability. Meanwhile, poor institutional coordination on climate change and environmental issues is a growing issue with a lack of oversight being a key challenge.

In Ireland, public participation and youth involvement is considered high with Ireland ranked 15th out of 183 countries in youth civic participation<sup>4</sup>. However, differences such as race, class, gender, culture, language, immigration status and sexuality can affect how young people experience empowerment. Youth input, captured as part of this programme's design process, revealed that whilst youth feel that they have increasing access to decision makers, they are keen to see improvements in how their voices are received, i.e. that they are taken seriously and see actions taking place as a result of any meetings.

Concerted commitments and delivery on climate action are a key challenge, with Ireland listed as one of the worst performers in the EU in reducing greenhouse gas emissions<sup>5</sup>. Youth involvement in calling for action on climate change has been growing.

## BEST PRACTICES AND LESSONS LEARNT

**Increased Youth and Community Awareness:** In both Tanzania and Ireland, young people working through World Vision Tanzania and Youth Work Ireland Galway respectively noted an increased awareness of their local and national climate-related public policies. This follows significant orientation and education shared with them as part of the 'Enabling Citizen Engagement' phase of the CVA process. As a consequence, young people have gone further to also increase awareness to other people within their communities.



“In our District, the youth groups took initiative to educate the community on specific government policies on water and environment. We conducted door to door campaigns to make people aware of the provisions of these policies, such as the prohibition of farming within a distance of 60 metres from rivers” – Youth Group Members, Tanga – Tanzania.

**Youth Investing in Sustainable Businesses:** In Tanzania, the youth are actively engaging with the local government by demanding accountability for climate actions whilst also investing in sustainable businesses. Due to a lack of local job opportunities, many young people migrate into the cities to seek work. To provide an alternative, environmentally friendly income-generating activities have been initiated.

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4 <https://www.youth.ie/articles/young-people-in-ireland-and-the-global-youth-development-index/>  
5 [https://germanwatch.org/sites/germanwatch.org/files/CCPI2019\\_Results.pdf](https://germanwatch.org/sites/germanwatch.org/files/CCPI2019_Results.pdf)

Through support from local government, several youth groups have been able to access financing to start sustainable businesses such as setting up tree nurseries and bee-keeping enterprises.

**Youth Inclusion in Decision-Making:** The close relationship that World Vision Tanzania has fostered with government authorities in Tanga District has supported substantial early accomplishments. For instance, noting that local-level environmental committees are legally required to include youth in their composition, youth involved in the project have successfully demanded for their inclusion within the Village Environment Committees. SAUTI-Youth group members also joined the Tanzania National Environmental Council in marking the National Tree Planting Day in Tanzania, leading to the planting of over 10,000 trees in Handeni and Korogwe Districts, Tanzania. In Galway, young people have been involved in consultations on the Galway City Development Plan 2023-2029 providing their views and opinions towards the management of their city.



“We now feel more confident of ourselves. Communities and authorities have now recognized the value of including the youth in decision-making”  
- Youth Group Member, Tanga – Tanzania.



SAUTI-Youth group members participating in a workshop in Galway, Ireland.

### **Invest in Building Trust with Local Government:**

Building trust with local government, administrators and front-line service providers is absolutely crucial in aiding meaningful youth participation in local climate governance. A relationship built on trust can aid access to information, transparency and promote youth



SAUTI-Youth group members in Galway, Ireland.

agency and participation in invited policy circles. In Tanzania, the longstanding relationship between World Vision Tanzania and the Tanga District administrators has made it possible for young people to engage across multiple pathways such as access to financing for investment in sustainable businesses, invitation to on-going public policy development processes spearheaded by the National Environmental Management Council, and inclusion on various village, environment and development committees. In Galway, the Local Government has been less responsive, often seeing the project as an add-on to its already existing range of relationships and engagements. In this instance, more initiative should be directed towards explaining what youth-led CVA is – especially to government officials who may not be familiar with the approach.

**Limits of Virtual Engagement:** The SAUTI-Youth project commenced at the height of the COVID-19 restrictions to face-to-face gathering in both Ireland and Tanzania. Whilst some of these restrictions were lifted in Tanzania and project activities were able to proceed, the restrictions in Ireland (which are more stringent) have continued throughout the first year-and well into the second year of the project. Although various interventions such as the web-based self-paced CVA training were adapted and were undertaken virtually, subsequent activities witnessed decreased youth enthusiasm.

**Exploit the Use of Creative Art:** Art provides a powerful and provocative tool to communicate at scale. In Ireland, YWIG reached greater audiences by organizing art and climate activism tours. In Tanzania, members of various youth groups exploit various opportunities and use art to send messages to the wider public. These groups have been invited to various platforms to perform drama or music, which they use to advocate for various climate actions.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

**Provide Greater Opportunities for Youth Engagement:** Young people should continuously be empowered with the skills, tools, and platforms to engage in broad governance processes. Including them in the decision-making process communicates that their opinions and voices are valued at all levels of governance and decision-making. Local and national governments should therefore provide greater opportunities for meaningful youth engagement through their inclusion in relevant committees, invitations to relevant workshops, and opportunities to provide input into relevant policies and legislations.

**Integrated Approach to Youth Empowerment:** Whilst increasing youth civic competencies and participation in local climate governance is in itself a noble goal, several young people from Tanga District, Tanzania observed that a more intentionally integrated approach that merges civic and economic empowerment would have been more contextually appropriate in Tanzania – where economic challenges such as high unemployment rates often push young people to turn to unsustainable practices such as charcoal burning. It is in this spirit, that World Vision Tanzania and the local administrators have linked youth groups to access loans provided by the Local Government Authorities (LGAs) of which 10 percent targets women, youth and people with disabilities. This complementarity increased youth motivation to pursue climate actions in a manner that builds on civic responsibility and economic empowerment.



“Kwa Pamoja Tunaweza Youth group is the best union of change-makers. They have been planting trees and selling them to add to their income, and the money they have been receiving has been used to help their members in solving various issues”.

**Influence National-level Policy Processes:** In addition to the promising local level youth engagements in influencing climate actions in Galway, Handeni and Korogwe, significant attention should be given to providing opportunities for youth to influence national level policy making and implementation processes. Youth can deploy evidence of systemic policy gaps and failures gathered through local CVA processes to influence national policy and decision-making processes. Such engagement platforms can also contribute to the development of context-specific and evidence-based policies.

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