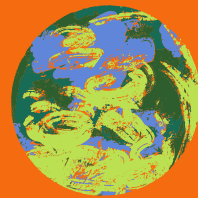


Sub-Saharan Consultation on Children's Right to a Healthy Environment





Final Report of the Sub-Saharan Consultation on the Right to a
Healthy Environment.

Sub-Saharan Africa, February 2023.

With the support of CERI - Children's Environmental Rights
Initiative and terre des hommes Germany.

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Chapter 1: Background

Introduction

This report represents key findings from this unique and rich exchange provided by different national representatives/partners in line with the guidance from the toolkit as well as findings of the online engagement with children. The findings were analyzed qualitatively and thematically responding to the questions that were drawn from the main discussion points.

Discussion of findings therefore, provides a holistic view of emerging issues and analysis, combining both online and direct engagement and feedback from children and young people. At the end, the report provides recommendations from children and young people on how their participation in environmental protection programs/initiatives can be improved, for a sustainable environment.

Below were the discussion points that underpinned the consultations. From these discussion points, 6 questions were drawn to probe views and contributions from children and young people. The consultations therefore sought to answer corresponding questions from the discussion points.

Children's right to a healthy and clean environment:

What are environmental problems you are facing in your community/country?

Environmental issues that put children and their rights at risk:

In what ways are children affected by the problems you have identified?

What is the impact of these problems on children and young people's wellbeing?

Actors in environmental degradation and pollution:

Why do you think these problems happen in your community or country?

Who is causing and contributing to these problems?

The role of children in environmental protection:

Do you know of any activities organized by your local or national government to protect the environment and involve and educate children about the environment in the school or the community?

Is there anything that you, other children/young people and community members are doing to overcome environmental problems?

Can you think of an example where this has been successful? Are decision makers listening to your voices?

Do you have any ideas about how climate change or environmental breakdown can be resolved in a positive way?

Are there any solutions that you would like to see happen?



Consultation Structure and Methodology

The consultations were conducted both through face to face and virtually. Participatory, youth-centered engagement and leadership methods were utilized to enable dialogue and maximum participation by all during the consultation. These included the use of arts-based, storytelling, relational and local methods, ensuring that the dialogue was grounded in the lived experience and culturally sensitive. Central to this approach was the design of activities to support the core principles of gender equality and social inclusion. The toolkit which was developed as part of these consultations was used to guide and ensure a safe, inclusive and participatory approach to the consultative process.

CERI & Regional Consultations

Since its formation in 2018, the Children’s Environmental Rights Initiative (CERI) by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and Environment to secure the realization of the right to a healthy environment by children. As part of its mission, CERI has been working on launching a Global Charter on Children’s Rights and the Environment, which is a set of key guiding principles on children’s rights and the environment that provides a strong foundation for States and other stakeholders to adopt global standards that catalyze radical and comprehensive change for children worldwide. The Charter is being informed by children, young people and other stakeholders through a series of regional and digital consultations.

Starting in 2019, a number of regional consultations have taken place in East Asia and Pacific, Latin America and North America. They have served as important platforms to build new networks and partnerships (e.g. between the children’s rights and the environmental community,) identify challenges, solutions and action plans, and produce a Regional Outcome Report, all serving as frameworks and furthering regional advocacy on children’s environmental rights.

Relevant stakeholders at local, national, regional and global levels are benefiting enormously from the initiative with more systematic efforts to facilitate knowledge sharing and mutual learning on the action required to promote children’s rights in relation to the environment.

CERI consultations seek to empower children and young people through specialized capacity-building by utilizing online platforms as well as physical workshops.

Intergenerational dialogue forms the basis for solidarity at national, regional and global levels, and demonstrates a model for child-friendly consultation mechanisms more broadly. Local partners assist in identifying and engaging children from marginalized communities in particular.

The Consultations also provide a basis for facilitating future collaboration and follow-up activities. CERI supports a powerful and consolidated network of experts and organisations across regions advocating on issues related to children’s rights to clean and healthy environment. The consultations therefore, facilitate the Identification of good practice laws, policies and action, to be collated in a compendium.

The Sub-Saharan Regional Consultation is part of this global process. The consultations seek to explore avenues for promoting tangible action at national, regional and international levels to promote recognition and implementation of children’s right to a healthy environment. The regional consultations are part of the global efforts and are also aligned to the African Union’s Agenda 2063 aspiration to have an Africa whose development is people-driven, relying on the potential of African people, especially its women and youth, and caring for children¹.

Objectives and Structure of the Sub-Saharan Consultations

The Sub-Saharan Consultations is a ground breaking participatory process, that had the following structure:



Objectives

- Represent the voices of African children and young people, including the most marginalized, in the Global Charter on Children’s Rights and the Environment.
- Produce an Africa Regional Summary Report synthesizing children and youth-led findings on concerns, solutions and recommendations on children’s right to a healthy environment in Sub-Saharan Africa, serving as a framework for regional advocacy initiatives.
- Strengthen African network of advocates championing children’s environmental rights and using the Africa Regional Summary Report and Global Charter on Children’s Rights and the Environment as tools for regional and global advocacy.
- Develop a child and youth-led action plan to further children’s environmental rights in Africa, including publicly launching the Africa Regional Outcome Report at the United Nations Environment Assembly and presenting at a briefing session with African Union Permanent Missions

Target Population:

2,527 children and young people took part at overall at Sub-Saharan Africa consultation activities: 1184 males and 1343 females; 2326 consultations were with children and 201 with adults and stakeholder; 538 consultations were online and 1989 were done through workshops and face to face engagements with children.

Participating Countries:

Burundi, Kenya, Lesotho, Mozambique, South Africa, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe

Sampling:

The consultation was conducted from November 2022 to January 2023 virtually and through face-to-face workshops in some of the countries. Virtual consultations allowed for views to be enlisted across a wide spectrum and to allow children to freely express themselves across the 6 key questions highlighted in the introduction, which the consultation was framed around.

Tools:

- A toolkit was developed to provide guidance and support to the consultation process with children and young people. It provided a variety of child-friendly and accessible methodologies, aiming at the engagement of children in the consultation activities directly and also providing recommendations and tips to organizations that wish to host consultation activities with children. The toolkit was available in English, French and Portuguese.
- **Questionnaire:** a questionnaire with six questions was the basis for both online and face-to-face activities, providing the scope and overall themes which the consultations sought to gather through children’s views and contributions.
- **Guide to Facilitation:** A guide provided step by step guidance to facilitators in directly engaging children. The tool suggested approaches and techniques which the facilitator could consider and adopt in ensuring active participation of children and young people during the consultation and engagement process.

- **Child Safeguarding guide:** The safeguarding of children during the consultations was of paramount importance. A guidance on ensuring adequate safeguard is in place to ensure participation of children is safe, voluntary and inclusive. The child safeguarding guide provided measures to be taken before and during consultations both face-to-face, as well as in online engagements.
- **Workshop Agenda:** A model workshop agenda was drafted for partners to adapt and adopt as necessary, based on the context and situation on the ground. The agenda had clear time slots to allow for adequate engagements with children.
- **Note on identification of participants:** A note on putting in place structure for a transparent and inclusive selection of participants was part of the toolkit and it guided the process of inclusive identification and engagement.
- **Reporting template:** created to assist support organizations in submitting the contributions across the countries and geographical locations



Figure 1: % of respondents from countries.



A total of **2048** children and **141** other stakeholders responded to the consultation online and through workshops.

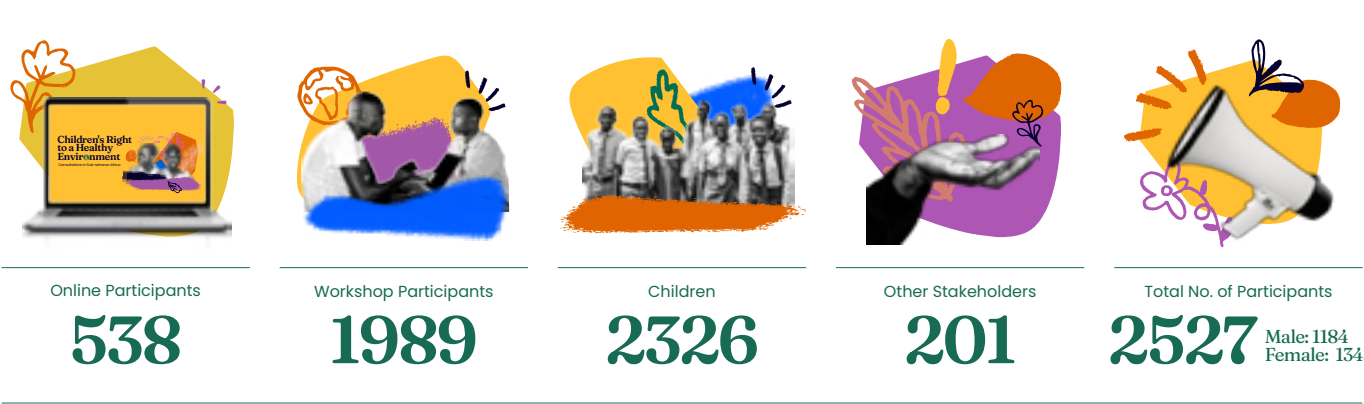
36 %	16 %	12 %
Zambia	Lesotho	Zimbabwe
12 %	07 %	06 %
Kenya	South Africa	Burundi
06 %	05 %	
Uganda	Mozambique	



Table 1: No. of Participants per Country

Country	Online Participants	Workshop Participants	Children	Other Stakeholders	Total No. of Participants
 Burundi	–	122	73	49	122
 Kenya	–	230	200	30	230
 Lesotho	9	304	309	4	313
 Mozambique	99	–	99	–	99
 South Africa	–	134	134	–	134
 Uganda	–	125	102	23	125
 Zambia	337	368	705	–	705
 Zimbabwe	93	368	412	35	447

Total No. of Participants



Lead Organisation Involved



Children’s environmental rights and children’s key concerns

Key concerns on children’s environmental rights in Sub-Saharan Africa

Children are the least responsible for climate change, yet they bear the ripple effects of its impact.

Nearly 160 million children live in high drought-severity zones and 500 million (almost a quarter of the world’s child population) live in extremely high flood occurrence zones². It is projected that by 2040, almost 600 million children will be living in areas of extremely high-water supply stress conditions³.

Sub-Saharan Africa hosts several climate change hotspots, where strong physical and ecological effects of climate change intersect with large populations of poor and vulnerable communities.

Recent years have seen serious climate-related crises including the severe crisis in the Sahel region of West Africa that started in 2012 in which a drought, food and refugee crisis continues to affect people in Niger, Burkina Faso, Mali, Chad, Mauritania, Senegal and the Gambia; the Horn of Africa drought; Tropical Cyclone Idai and Tropical Cyclone Kenneth (the strongest storm to ever hit Africa) in 2019; and in 2020, the worst outbreak for decades of swarms of desert locusts across East Africa, with a huge threat to food security and livelihoods.

Currently, Somalia is reeling under the unimaginable effects of climate induced drought with acute hunger and starvation threatening to wipe out the whole country⁴.

Due to the concentration of children in urban areas, and their level of vulnerability, children will bear the heaviest impacts. UN Habitat estimates that 55% of world population lives in urban centers and this number is expected to rise to 70% by 2050⁵; with the majority being children and young people. Some of the examples of child rights deprivations resulting from climate change include:

Some of the examples of child rights deprivations resulting from climate change include:

- Droughts, hunger, starvation and malnutrition,
- Preventable illness and death from environmental hazards, such as air pollution and water pollution
- As temperatures increase and water becomes scarcer, it is children who will feel the deadliest impact of water-borne and sanitation related diseases
- Developmental gains in education are offset due to damage or destruction of school facilities, extended disruption of education, and limited access to schooling,

2. www.unicef.org/esa/media/7061/file/UNICEF-The-Climate-Crisis-2020.pdf
3. www.unicef.org/esa/media/7061/file/UNICEF-The-Climate-Crisis-2020.pdf
4. African Union. 2014. African Strategy on Climate Change. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: African Union.
5. United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). 2016. The Adaptation Finance Gap Report 2016. Nairobi, Kenya: United Nations Environment Programme.

Climate change drives inequality as well as creates and prolongs poverty traps, with children and young people particularly exposed. Climate change and its impact not only affects the natural ecosystem, but has severe consequences and implications for child rights. It threatens to undo major gains made in recent years and impede realization of the rights of children as captured in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and affirmed in the Africa Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC).

The implications for the region are enormous. Young people make up 62.9% of the population in Sub-Saharan Africa. Between 2017 and 2050, the child and young people population in the region is expected to more than double to 945 million, with declines expected in other regions of the world⁶.

Children and adolescents are estimated to make up approximately half the residents of urban poor communities. More than 6 in 10 Africans who live in urban areas reside in slums⁷. Rapid urban population growth in Africa is happening more in coastal areas considered climate change hotspots; namely the West African coast, around Lake Victoria and Lake Tanganyika.

In addition to the inherent risks caused by the lack of adequate services in crowded slums, it is anticipated that urban areas around the world will be affected by rising sea levels, increased precipitation, inland floods, more frequent and stronger cyclones and storms, and periods of more extreme heat and cold⁸. The Sub-Saharan in not spared from the disasters. A case in point is the cyclone Idai and Kenneth which hit hard the Eastern parts of Zimbabwe and the Northern regions of Mozambique, causing thousands of deaths, environmental and infrastructure destruction, displacement of people and exacerbated poverty⁹.

The evidence is clear that climate change is having serious impacts on human lives. It threatens the basic elements all beings need for good health – clean air, safe drinking water, nutritious food supply and safe shelter and will undermine decades of progress in the context of global health. Close to 90% of diseases attributable to climate change occur in under-five children¹⁰.

In particular, every year exposure to air pollution causes 7 million deaths worldwide and is directly linked with pneumonia and other respiratory diseases that account for almost 1 in 10 under-five deaths¹¹.

Goal 3 of the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development (SDGs) seeks to ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages. Goals 6, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, and 15 emphasize on environmental protection and sustainable use of natural resources. It should be appreciated that sustainable development lies in the ability to utilize natural resources without jeopardizing future generations.

Children are an integral part of the future and sustainable development; every generation should have young people who are prepared to preserve the environment and actively participate in environmental protection in different ways.



6. www.unicef.org/esa/media/7061/file/UNICEF-The-Climate-Crisis-2020.pdf
 7. www.unicef.org/media/96161/file/SubSaharan%20Africa%20%E2%80%93%20Growing%20up%20in%20crisis%20in%20a%20world%20of%20opportunities%20.pdf
 8. www.liberianobserver.com/experts-warn-africas-children-are-under-threat-climate-crisis

9. World Bank. 2014. Financial Protection Against Natural Disasters: An Operational Framework for Disaster Risk Financing and Insurance. World Bank, Washington, DC.

10. www.scidev.net/sub-saharan-africa/news/climate-action-could-prevent-6000-child-deaths-a-year/
 11. *ibid*

Children's key concerns from the Sub-Saharan Consultations

The Sub-Saharan Consultations responses from children, young people and other stakeholders confirmed a lot of environment problems that are mentioned above. Children and young people listed a number of environment problems and concerns they face in their respective communities/countries.

However, there are some common challenges that are shared across all countries and these include:

- Air, water, noise and land pollution, Climate change, Deforestation
- Flooding, Soil erosion due to riverbank cultivation
- Scarcity of safe water
- Health effects due to pollution
- Farmers using herbicides and pesticides, polluting the soil and rivers
- High emission of greenhouse gas and littering of toxic materials.
- Food insecurity has been worsened by climate change affecting the livelihoods of already vulnerable communities.





Young people in Kenya in a group discussion during the consultation

Children expressed that their open playground spaces even those closer to wetlands have been converted to housing stands or other commercial property. This literally means they no longer have recreational spaces and local councils are no longer constructing recreational facilities for young people to play and utilize their talents. As a result of the above mentioned and other problems, children and stakeholders in Lesotho reported that children's play is constantly disrupted by injuries they get from the bottles that are almost everywhere. It also even mentioned that children no longer have enough space to play because large part of the land is contaminated and has become hazardous to children's health in several ways. There are incidents of explosive devices found in dumping sites and some children have been hurt by dumped glasses and metals. Children highlighted that a combination of overpopulation and land pollution have limited the spaces for children to play and associate, most children were concerned that they are prone to injuries when playing in the environment with bottles and scrap metal.

Young people in Lesotho further highlighted that land is being eroded due to erratic soil erosion and the country is battling land degradation. Plastic and solid waste is polluting the environment. Animals are dying from eating plastic and nappies that are everywhere because refuse collection is not done consistently.

Lead poisoning is another serious concern. There are high levels of lead poisoning, water pollution, climate change, land pollution and air pollution especially in Kabwe. [United Nations Human Rights, Office of the Human Rights Commission](#)¹² observes that, more than 95% of children in Kabwe suffered elevated blood lead levels caused by lead mining and smelting, which can impair brain development and cause blindness, paralysis, and death.

[Human Rights Watch 2019](#)¹³ complements this observation in noting that Children in Kabwe are especially at risk because they are more likely to ingest lead dust when playing in the soil, their brains and bodies are still developing, and they absorb four to five times as much lead as adults. The consequences for children who are exposed to high levels of lead and are not treated include reading and learning barriers or disabilities; behavioral problems; impaired growth; anemia; brain, liver, kidney, nerve, and stomach damage; coma and convulsions; and death.

Poor waste management was mentioned as a major issue across the Sub-Saharan region especially in communities where there is water pollution. As a result, cholera outbreaks have hit a large number of Sub-Saharan Africa. In 2022, the WHO¹⁴ stated that 14 out of the 23 countries that reported cholera outbreaks were in Sub-Saharan Africa. Malawi in one of these countries.

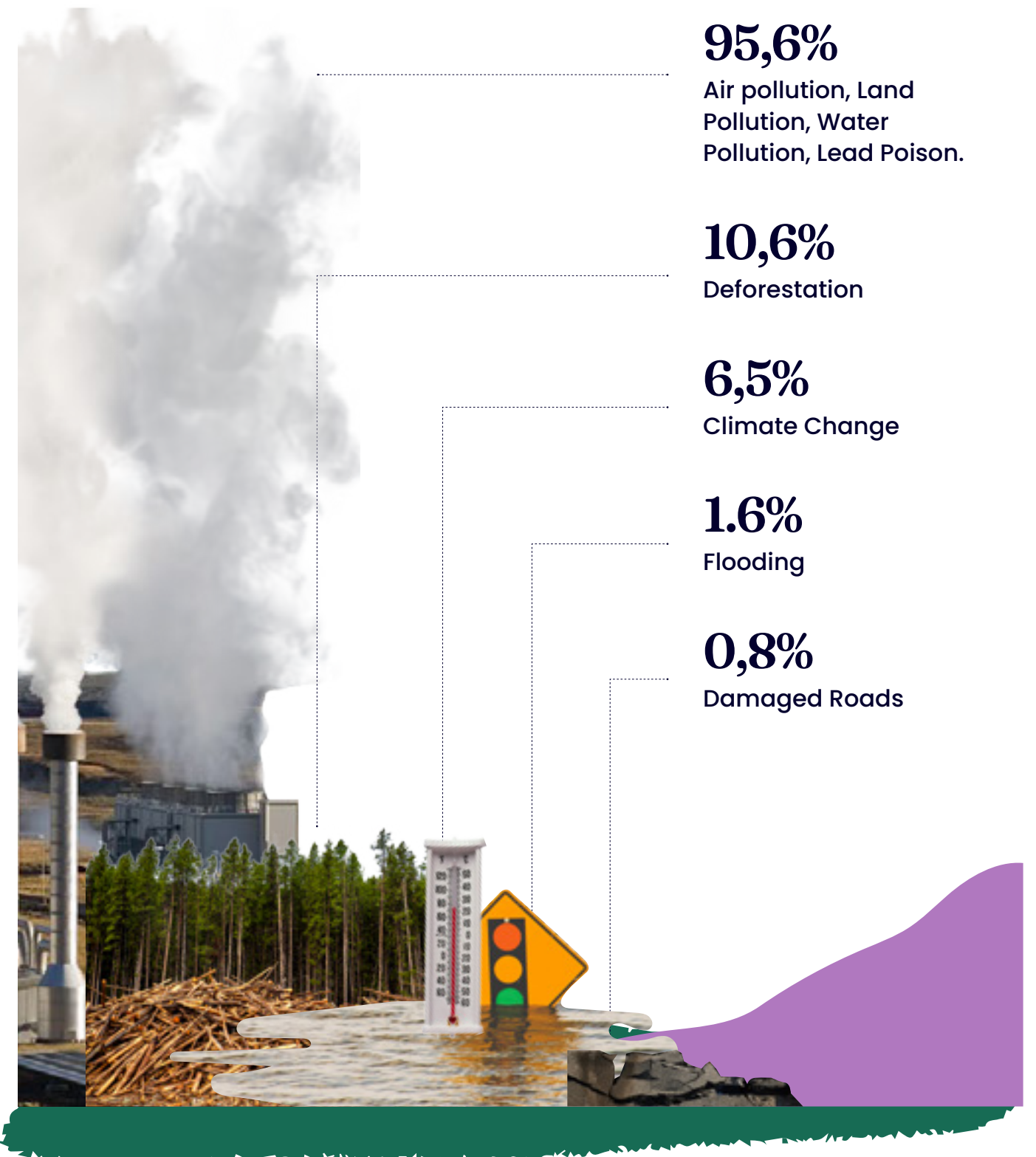
Major flooding, above-normal cyclone seasons increase outbreak severity and the propensity for regional spread, affecting societies and the wellbeing of young people and children.

Children and young people from Zambia complained that unregulated and disorderly and illegal mining was a major source of water, land, and air pollution including severe soil erosion and public health concerns as a result of environmental degradation. Other environmental challenges highlighted by children and young people in Zambia include: insufficient drainages and poor sewer system, water problems (people walk long distance to find clean water), and lack of proper dumping sites around markets places. Children and young people in Zimbabwe also complained about poor drainage and sewer system especially in Rujeko a township in Marondera suburb, a small town in Zimbabwe.

12. Zambia must treat children suffering from lead poisoning, clean up former mine area – UN experts | OHCHR, access on 20.02.2023 <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2021/07/zambia-must-treat-children-suffering-lead-poisoning-clean-former-mine-area>

13. "We Have to Be Worried": The Impact of Lead Contamination on Children's Rights in Kabwe, Zambia. Access on 20.02.2023. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2019/08/23/we-have-be-worried/impact-lead-contamination-childrens-rights-kabwe-zambia>

Figure 2: Key Environmental problems identified through the consultations.



14. Cholera: Global Situation. Access on 20.02.2023 <https://www.who.int/emergencies/disease-outbreak-news/item/2022-DON426#:~:text=In%202021%2C%2023%20countries%20reported,have%20been%20reporting%20protracted%20outbreaks.>

The graph above illustrates environment problems as they were mentioned by children who responded online. From the face-to-face workshops that were convened across the Sub-Saharan countries, the same issues also emerged as real problems to the ecosystem. Children and young people highlighted environment pollution as a major problem in their respective communities with 95.92% (516 children/young people) of the online participants agreed that pollution is a major environmental challenge. Children and young people especially in Zambia were concerned by Lead poison pollution that is known for causing neurological problems in children. Majority of children mentioned air pollution, land pollution and water pollution also as threats to the ecosystem in their communities.

Climate change is also a problem that young people expressed concern about, but only 35 out of 538 children online raised such a worry, 6.5% of the children.

The low number of children mentioning climate change as a major problem indicates that a large number of young people have no or little understanding on the effects of climate change (93.5%) and this was confirmed during the workshops where young people admitted that they lack knowledge and information about environment issues.

Deforestation manifested as a common problem and about 57 children online cited it as a problem in their respective communities. Children and young people indicated that in Zambia deforestation is triggered by charcoal production while in Zimbabwe, major culprits are tobacco farmers who use wood to dry their produce. It is evident that there is limited knowledge and interest to explore alternative clean energy sources by communities in Zambia as evidenced by the continued production and use of charcoal. Children also attribute poor waste management to damaged roads which makes consistent refuse collection difficult and almost impossible. Flooding was also raised by children as a major problem in most Sub-Saharan African communities mainly because of poor drainage especially in urban communities.

Children in Zimbabwe admitted that they are not fully knowledgeable on the nexus between child rights and environmental protection. However, it is important to note they understood the impact of environmental harm to the enjoyment of their rights. Moreover, the availability of environmental rights in Zimbabwe's 2013 Constitution makes it easier for most of the young people to identify and accept that they have a right to a clean environment. The presence of local constitutional bodies/agencies like the Environmental Management Agency (EMA) in Zimbabwe to safeguard the environment also is vital. It is therefore, easier for children in Zimbabwe to recognize that there are efforts to safeguard their rights to a clean environment although questions arose on the effectiveness of these institution in environmental protection. Some participants noted the lack of capacity and rampant corruption within these institutions for meaningful engagement on the environment issues.

Chapter 4

Challenges impeding children's environmental rights in Sub-Saharan Africa

The consultations gave children the opportunity to respond to how environmental challenges impact their own wellbeing. Children went on to discuss actors who contribute to environment pollution and degradation in their communities and countries.

Some of the most common challenges that were mentioned by children and young from all the countries include:

- Loss of the right to a safe and clean environment
- Increase of skin infections
- Drowning in gullies created by soil erosion
- Increase of respiratory challenges such as asthma
- Unprotected drinking water
- Exposure to hazardous chemicals in their households
- Loss of homes in cases of natural disasters
- Loss of family members perishing in natural disasters
- Loss of school time as a result of destruction of infrastructure caused by natural disasters.
- Loss of means of livelihood for parents and guardians





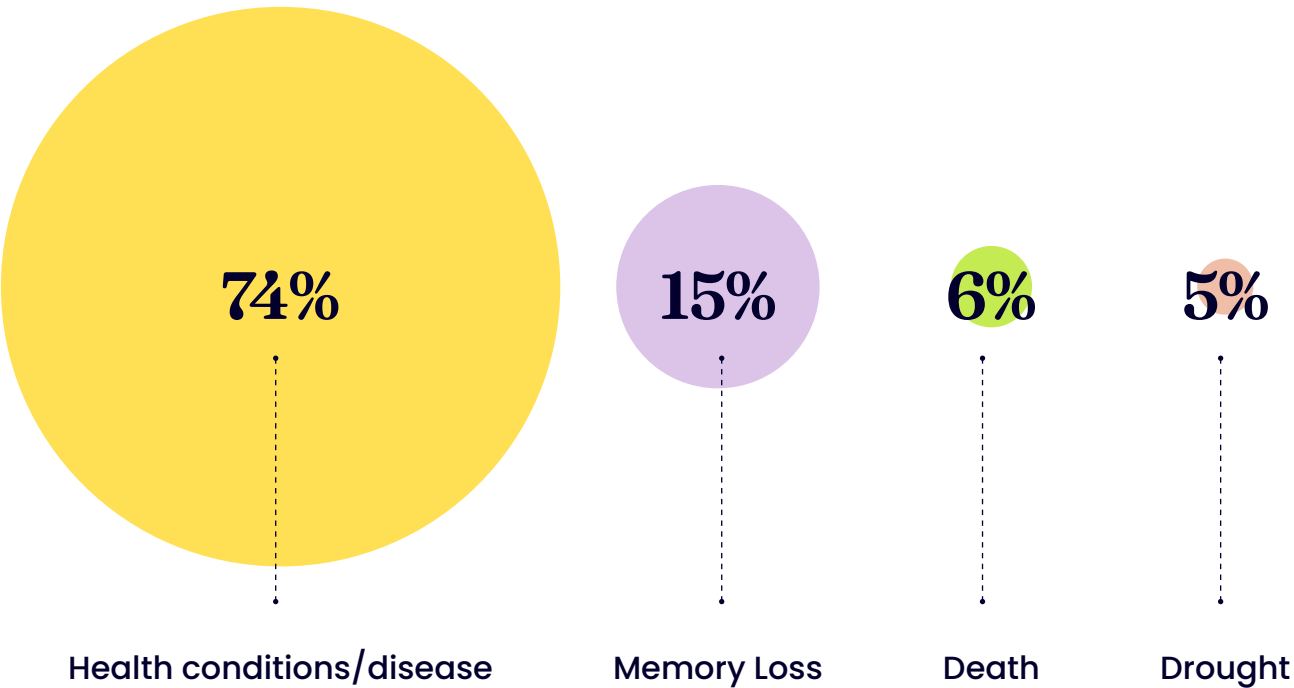
Children in Mozambique cited lack of investment in disaster risk reduction (DRR) as a key contributor to vulnerability of children to environmental disasters. Children and young people in Zambia also stressed that unavailability of early detection and warning systems increases vulnerability of children to environmental hazards. Some children have lost their lives owing to unavailability of basic services like water and road networks. Natural disasters due to climate change was also identified as an issue with children and young people citing the negative impact of cyclone Kenneth and Idai on the right to education, health and shelter. Young people highlighted that air pollution water pollution, climate change and toxic waste from industries and mines affect children in various ways.

In Zambia, young people pointed out that children who are exposed to lead are prone to mental impairment, stagnant growth, memory loss, fatigue, diarrhea, and chest pain. Children in Kenya complained about smoke from tobacco cigarettes having a negative effect on their health, leading to respiratory challenges such as asthma and tuberculosis.

One of the children in Zambia revealed that a mining company in their community exposes children to toxic air and noise pollution. Children and young people listed unavailability of recreational space as a major problem, forcing them to play in hazardous spaces like illegal dumping sites.

Children and young people therefore, are prone to infections and diseases such as diarrhea and cholera. Children and stakeholders from Zimbabwe, Burundi, Kenya, Mozambique and Zambia raised concerns on open pits as a result of illegal mining activities. They highlighted that children are at high risk of falling into open pits whilst playing or herding cattle in forests. School children are also affected by industry and mining activities with noise and air pollution especially around their learning environment.

Figure 3: Effects of environmental problems to children



The chart above shows most frequent problems that were mentioned by children across represented countries. Both online and physical workshop participants concur that environmental pollution has ripple effects to the health and life of children and youths with about 398 (74%) of the children online highlighting that poor environmental management result in physical infections, diseases and health conditions to young people.

Public health concerns and conditions that were mentioned include diseases, infections and physical conditions such as asthma, cholera, diarrhea, brain damage, skin diseases, and injuries.

Environment pollution was discussed by children as one of the causes of some of infant death and 31 children online were convinced that a toxic environment can cause death especially to children. Memory loss is one of the conditions that participants from Zambia especially mentioned as a direct effect of lead poison, a concern shared by 78 of the participants. Twenty-six (26) of the children who participated online refer to drought as a result of poor environmental management and climate change.

Children in different countries were disturbed that despite all the mentioned and other consequences of environment degradation on children, no real action or redress mechanism has been initiated by local and national authorities. They further believe that this situation will likely continue unless meaningful initiative is implemented. Children mentioned the lack of robust monitoring mechanisms on manufacturing and mining industries is causing a lot of challenges putting them at risk. Lack of sufficient public policies delivery by local authorities was highlighted as a huge risk to children and their rights as children are exposed to all kinds of pollution.

Lack of proper law enforcement by local and national authorities on environmental issues makes it easier for offenders to go unpunished as the laws are not deterrent to would be offenders. A number of children and young people especially from Uganda, Lesotho, Burundi, Mozambique, South Africa and Zimbabwe pointed out that climate change is manifesting through droughts and floods. Consequently, it significantly impact food production, leading to food insecurity and causing malnutrition, especially to children.



On responding to actors and major causes contributing to environment pollution, children refer to a number of stakeholders and the following were the most common actors that were identified across all the participating countries:

- legal and illegal mining companies
- manufacturers of various products, construction firms and almost all production companies
- business enterprises,
- factories,
- families,
- government,
- farmers.

Young people also listed the following as factors that fuel environmental problems:

How the Government's Negligence is Destroying Our Environment:

Ineffective of central and local government departments tasked with protecting the environment, negligent and corrupt institutions was cited several times as a key contributory factor to continued environmental degradation as they look away due to underfunding or corruption

Mining and Construction: Dangerous Environmental Neglect

Gold/Diamond rush or construction boom, leaving gullies and open shafts and holes with no environmental rehabilitation taking place. Children and young people have lost limbs and died in some of these physical environmental damages and they have also becoming become breeding grounds for mosquitoes and other pests, becoming a public health concern.

Dangers of Child Labor in Mining and Agriculture.

In some cases, some children participate in gold panning and are exposed to toxic chemicals which are used to clean gold. There are also children working in farms and exposed to dangerous chemicals such as pesticides used without proper protective clothing.

Poor Planning: Wetland Destruction and Water Scarcity

Poor town planning, some urban planners parcel out residential stands on wetlands and as a result, the water table continue to decrease culminating in water shortages.

Ineffective policies and poor implementation of legislation.

Corruption Hinders Environmental Protection in Urban Development

Corruption is a key hindrance in addressing the environmental challenges facing most towns and cities as these key concerns are ignored over the need for profit for example, local councils and authorities allocating wetlands for residential and commercial purposes.

Why We Need to Care for Nature: Communities and the Environment

Children and young people also noted that the lack of environment awareness, information and knowledge in communities is a contributing factor. Communities are also responsible for environmental pollution and are part of the problem through littering, deforestation and environment destructive practices..

Dumping waste, riverbank cultivation, veld fires and use of dangerous pesticides were cited by children both online and during workshops as some of the major human activities harming the environment.

Children showed optimism and believe that these could be stopped, but there is little knowledge and information available to the communities.



There was consensus among all participating children that resource exploitation through mining activities, dominated by illegal mining and construction companies leaving open cast after extracting resources is a direct threat to children’s right to a healthy environment. Children and young people from the two platforms confirmed that children also contribute to environment degradation although at a micro scale. . In Lesotho, herd young boys contribute by burning the grazing lands as well as over grazing. It was emphasized, however, especially during workshops that although children have little contribution to environmental degradation, they have a big role in protecting the environment and bringing awareness on their right to a clean and health environment.

Children and young people in Lesotho admitted that they are unaware and lack information about the effects of careless use of the environment. Children and young people identified poverty as a key driver and factor in negative coping mechanisms which are destructive to the environment through activities such as illegal mining, stream bank cultivation and unauthorized cutting of trees. In Zambia charcoal burners are causing deforestation and cite lack of options in income generating activities that are not reliant on exploiting the environment. Children further state that it is the responsibility of the community to look after the environment through proper handling of waste. Lack of education on best practices to support environmental wellbeing and a lack of government intervention particularly in ongoing illegal mining activities makes matters worse.

Population growth emerged as a factor leading to land pollution and land degradation as highlighted by children both online and during workshops across all countries. One of the children stressed via online participation that mining companies in their area deposit waste products in a stream, contaminating wells which are a source of drinking water.

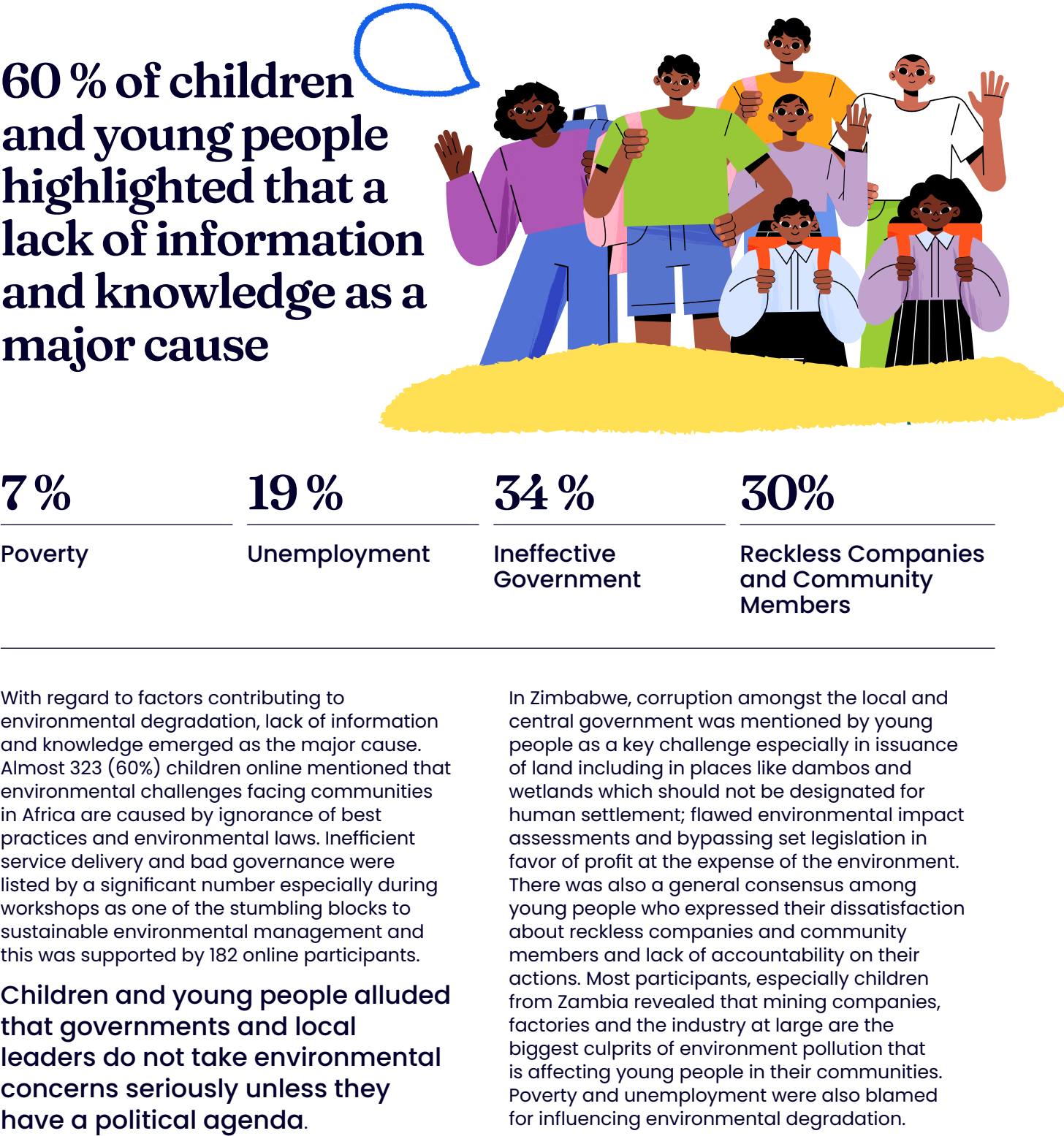
Children and young people attribute most human activities harming the environment to a lack of knowledge about the consequences of such activities to health and sustainable development as well as greedy and corruption.

Additionally, local communities have limited information on how to deal with waste and recycling of plastics, metal and glass.

Some young people asserted that local councils, water and sanitation companies can also be blamed for shortage of water resource in some communities. People including children have to walk long distances in search of water. Children also blamed community members for poor environment management and indicated that most people lack information and some are just careless when utilizing natural resources. Children and young people agreed that almost everyone has a role to play in preserving the ecosystem for future generations.

Image Top Page: Zimbabwean youths during consultation

Figure 4: Factors contributing to environmental degradation.



Chapter 5

Approaches, strategies and opportunities for strengthening children's environmental rights in Sub-Saharan Africa

This chapter analyses responses from children on initiatives they are partaking in curbing environmental degradation. Children cited that they have taken part in various initiatives concerning the environment. They also discussed a number of activities organized by local or national governments to protect the environment, involve and educate children about the environment in the school or the community. This provided children with the opportunity to assess windows of opportunities for young people to be included and actively participate in environmental protection. Children hence, discussed the willingness of solution holders to listen and take up child specific environment concerns for policy or discussion. Most children and young people from the participating countries pointed out that they participated in the following activities to counter the impacts of environment degradation:

- **Afforestation through tree planting activities**
- **Clean up campaigns, cleaning immediate environments such as schools, market place and homes.**
- **Awareness campaigns**
- **Home based initiatives like promoting recycling and creating safe dumping spaces to deal with waste, erosion and pollution**
- **Forming and running eco clubs who are mobilizing communities and their peers to plant trees, recycle, influence policy and educate their communities.**



In Zimbabwe, children acknowledged they participated in some environmental protection policy developments and review, but their participation has little to no effect as these are often influenced by lobbyists at national level. Children in Kenya echoed that informed participation is there but it can be improved over time. Children and other stakeholders suggested that child-led groups should be strengthened and equipped with knowledge on right to the environment, impact of climate change and how to engage with policy makers and contribute to development of sustainable solutions.

In Zambia, children and young people revealed that they are covering up the surfaces with black soil to minimize contact with lead soil and they are being supported by the government. Other young people from Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Lesotho highlighted that they participate in tree planting activities organized by their schools and their governments. However, some children, particularly in Zimbabwe and Kenya, claimed that decision makers do not give young people enough attention unless it is for their political interests. Zambian young people plant lawn, trees, flowers and sprinkle water on their yards to minimize dust contaminated with lead. Some children claim that they are active in cleaning the environment they live in such as at home and school.

Children and young people disclosed that governments are doing little to address environmental concerns, but that a few NGOs are coming on board to complement through awareness raising and movement building for environmental protection.

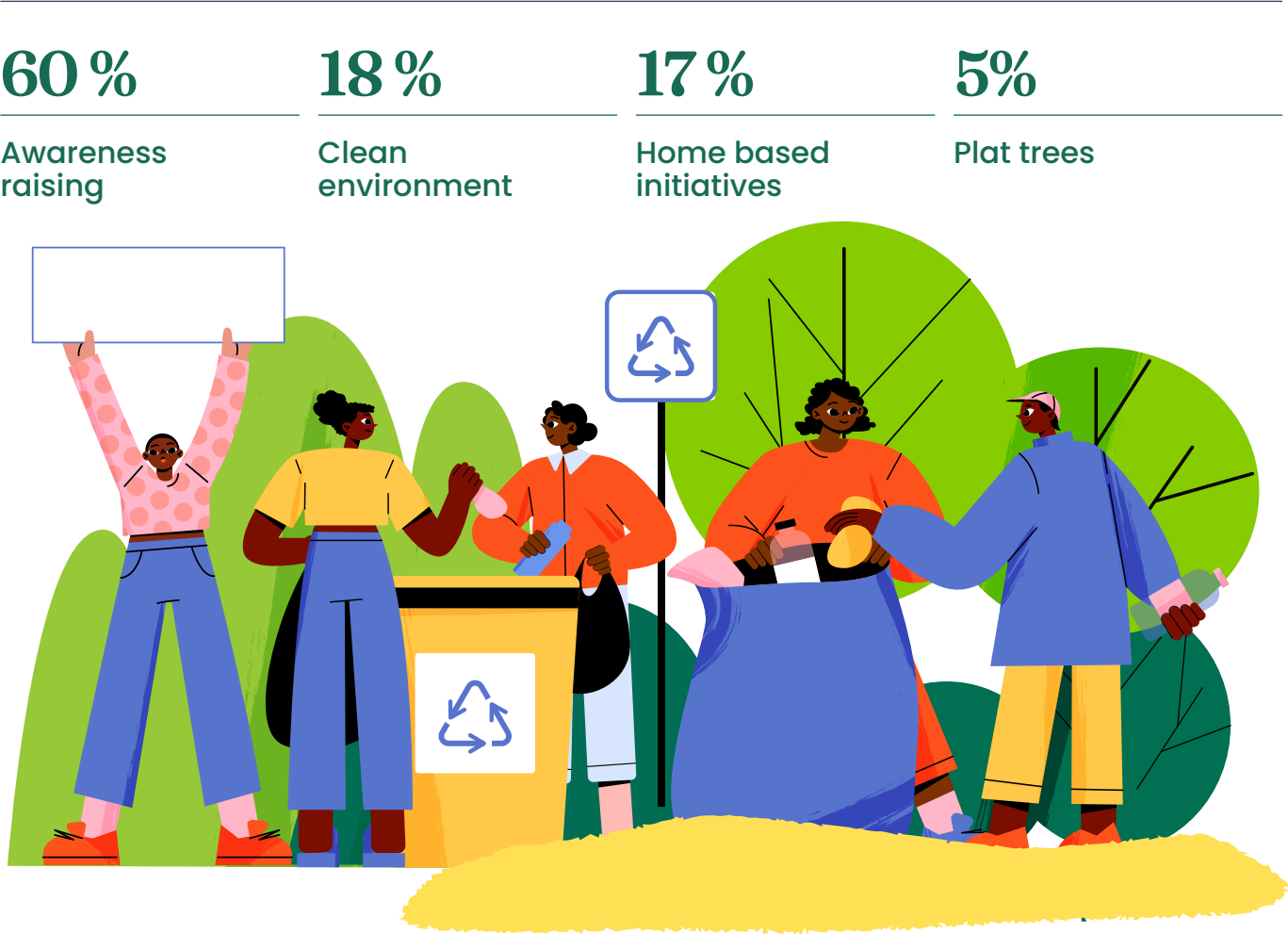
Some children state they are members of environmental protection movements and are engaged in sensitizing people on afforestation as opposed to deforestation. They also encourage their peers not to play in contaminated areas; such as dumping sites and water with significant success. Most young people agreed that decision makers sometimes listen to their concerns but they lack the zeal to take them up for policy decision making. Young people in Burundi pointed out that some leaders have little political will to effectively implement child friendly environmental policies.

A few local governments in Zambia, Burundi and Uganda were commended for conducting awareness campaigns on waste management and creating convenient dumping sites. Children indicated they are being involved in sensitizing the community on the effects of environmental pollution and on recycling plastics, metal and glass with notable improvements on environmental hygiene.

Children and stakeholders in Zimbabwe pointed out that children are being encouraged through education, to participate in Village and Ward Environmental committees, where there is a platform to engage with key stakeholders. Children are also establishing environmental clubs in schools, with a mission of raising awareness to their peers about the positives of environmental protection.

The majority of children commended the formation of environmental clubs in schools and highlighted that the clubs have increased young people's participation in environmental issues. Youths in Zimbabwe are working with civil society organisations such as Zimbabwe Environmental Law Association (ZELA), who play a vital role in the development of Local Environmental Action Plans (LEAP) by Mutare Rural District Council. Young people also contributed and participated in National Environmental Action Plan (NEAP) consultations which aims at promoting and facilitating the coordination of strategies, plans and activities relating to the environment and ensuring the protection and sustainable management of Zimbabwe's environment. The NEAP shall focus on consented stakeholder efforts to address key environmental challenges and awareness raising in communities.

Figure 5: Children’s participation in environmental protection.



A large number of children (60%) claimed that they participate in environmental protection through raising awareness in their communities. Some young people are members of different movements for environmental protection while others act individually. Children also indicated that they participate in cleaning of the environment with 18% of them participating in clean-up campaigns in the community, at school, and at home. Most children both through online and through face to face engagements registered that they do home based initiatives to make sure that there is proper waste management. Some young people indicated during workshops that they dig pits where they deposit waste while others are interested in recycling of waste. Another initiative towards environmental protection implemented by young people is afforestation as 5% indicated partaking in tree planting activities at school and in their respective communities.

Children who are not active in environmental protection have appreciated that they also have a role to play and can be agents of change if they seek to understand environmental issues. Active participation in environmental programming can help them understand the environment and its value to them and future generations. Children and young people also highlighted that under-resourcing of water and refuse management remains a major stumbling block in urban areas. Hopley, a resettlement area in Harare established in 2005, had been without water, sewer or refuse collection since 2013 until late 2022. A number of children and young people complained that there is too much window dressing when it comes to the participation of children and young people in policy making processes. Children are there for show, to serve the agenda of decision makers, nothing meaningful so far has been realized.

Children discussed common activities organized by their local or national government to protect the environment, involve and educate children about the environment in the school or the community. Children and young people across all countries concurred that their governments have been active in the following activities:

- Organizing tree planting activities
- Refuse collection
- Urban planning
- Organizing and conducting awareness campaigns

Children and young people in Zimbabwe clearly understood the role that their government must play and in environmental protection and management. They acknowledged that they have adequate legislation to support sustainable environmentally friendly initiatives and have institutions like Environmental Management Agent. However, they note that they remain not fully capacitated to execute their mandate. Children take part in national events like the Presidential national clean-up and tree planting days with government officials to ensure they safeguard the environment and raise awareness.

Through child and young people led groups, some children in Burundi, Mozambique, Kenya and Zimbabwe indicated that they are mobilizing themselves and educating their peers on environmental protection via club meetings and making use of digital platforms to educate each other on environmental protection. Beyond capacity development, young people in Zimbabwe also reported that they are mobilizing to conduct clean-up and door to door campaigns and other innovative means to ensure they sensitize their peers.

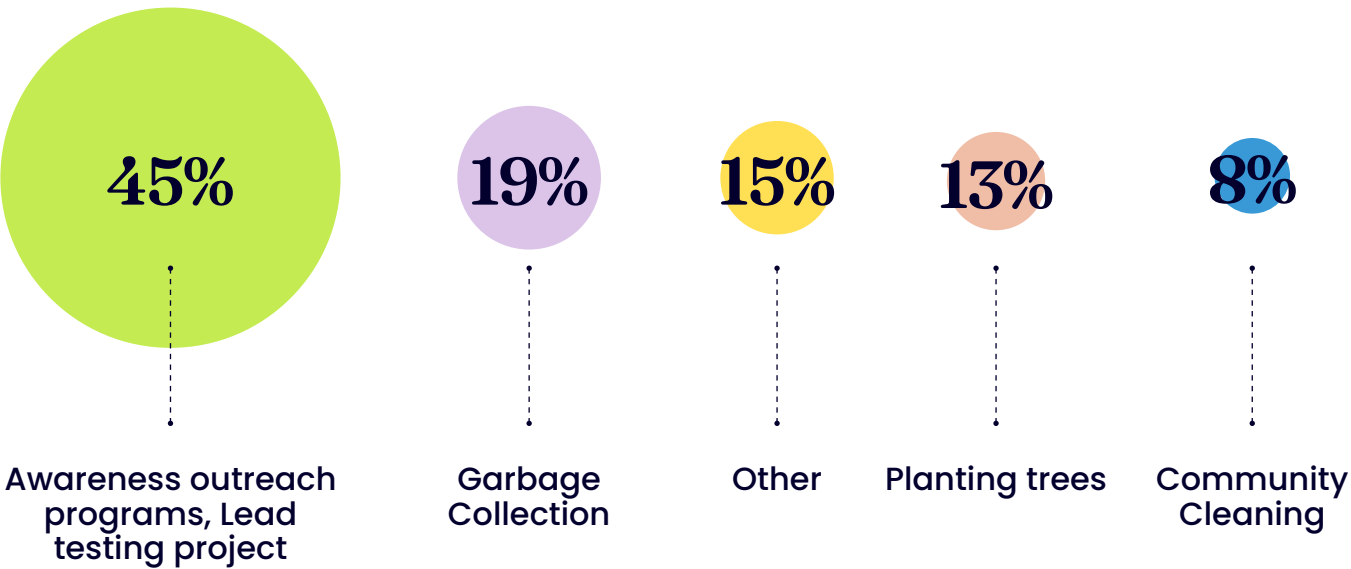
Children and Young people in Zambia admitted that their government is proactive in vaccinating and treating children exposed to lead and educating them on how to prevent contact with Lead, to prevent poisoning. The Zambian government through the health departments, often conducts lead awareness outreach programs, and implement a Lead testing project. The children also claim that they are involved in tree planting activities, and clean ups organized by their schools and government.

Forty-one of the participants across countries confirmed that their governments carry out clean-up campaigns. Participants from different countries acknowledged that governments are trying to make improvements on waste control and management through raising awareness in communities and in schools, by planting flowers and providing bins. The town councils are also pivotal in giving communities information on the environment and encouraging schools to plant grass, especially in Zambia, to minimize lead exposure. In Lesotho environmental movements educate communities against land degradation and pollution. National clean up campaigns are organized and governments monitor and document environmental issues and formulate environment policies.

It came out strongly during the consultations that governments should do more in environmental policy formulation and enforcement as well as funding of environmental projects. Civil society groups and other agencies were encouraged to widen their advocacy and sensitization of communities on environmental protection. Some children proposed that education departments should put in place curriculum on environmental protection in schools.



Figure 6: Governments’ Activities or roles in Environmental protection as mentioned by participants



Both online and face-to-face participants agreed that their governments organize and conduct awareness raising on environment conservation. About 242 of the children indicated that their governments lead in raising awareness to communities about the environment. Young people from different countries argued that most of these governments led environmental initiatives end up being politicized thereby limiting most children from taking part.

Stakeholders and young people suggested that governments should open up leadership spaces to provide an opportunity for young people to organize themselves and push for favorable environmental policies through robust community mobilization.

Children emphasized that a comprehensive and focused approach to addressing environmental concerns needed to be developed and implemented by their governments. Most of the countries already have specific legislation that speaks to conserving the environment however lack of prioritization towards environmental issues and under resourcing means these have been pushed to the sidelines.

Young people implored their governments to robustly fund measures against environmental issues in their countries and act decisively on the corruption and inefficiency that has taken over agencies and departments tasked with protecting the environment.



Recommendations

This section includes an analysis of the recommendations from children and young people who proposed possible solutions to environmental breakdown.

Children and young people and other stakeholders suggested the following ideas, activities and course of action;

- Investment in refuse collection and water supply must be prioritized to ensure all citizens get water and refuse collected
- Investment in clean energy and expanding solar energy will help ensure that communities conserve the environment
- Awareness campaigns must be stepped up to ensure more people are actively taking part in environmental protection
- Governments must adopt robust policy and budgets to address the environmental catastrophe
- Children suggested vehemently that capacity building and availing spaces to them would help in ensuring an ideal child friendly environment for them and the world at large.
- Education and information dissemination remains the best solution to mitigate environmental degradation
- Policy development and implementation should improve on the part of governments
- Coordination and monitoring of environmental programming should be enhanced by a partnership of different players such as governments and civil society.
- Civil society should invest more in awareness raising to help reshape understanding of environmental degradation and what communities can do to help address this through roadshows, drama, songs, support to eco-clubs and advocacy
- Governments should provide employment for people so that young children are not involved in mining.



Most young people admitted that they envision an environment where a child's right to play is not hindered by environmental degradation or its effect, indoor or outdoor.



Some young people suggested that afforestation can be one of the starting points in correcting the damage caused by mostly human activities. Children and young people in Zambia proposed that the government should improve urban planning and find better ways of separating industrial sites from residential areas to reduce direct exposure to all types of pollution. Farmers were also encouraged to practice safe farming with the correct ways of tilling land and use of harmless pesticides and other chemicals. Local governments were urged to set aside safe and suitable places for dumping waste.

Majority of online respondents, about 188 believe that afforestation is one of the best ways of dealing with land degradation. Young people from almost all countries indicated that they participate in tree planting activities.

Given that a large number of children identified lack of knowledge as one of the factors leading to environment decay, 139 of the young people are confident that education and information sharing will go a long way in environmental protection.

Participants expressed their concern about corruption and suggested that departments and agencies tasked with safeguarding the environment must work according to the laws to improve efficiency and effectiveness. One of the participants opines that communities and governments may consider promoting indigenous alternatives in protecting the environment.

Figure 7: Recommendations to environmental protection stakeholders



Conclusion

The report presents findings from the CERI Sub-Saharan Regional Consultations conducted in Zimbabwe, Zambia, Lesotho, Mozambique, Kenya, Uganda, South Africa and Burundi through an online platform and face-to-face workshops.

The consultations provided children and young people with the opportunity to respond to a number of environment issues and to establish their knowledge about environment topics in relation to child rights.

Young people responded to environment problems they are facing in their respective communities or countries; how environment challenges affecting children and the youths; causes of environmental insecurity; the role of children in environmental protection; the role of governments in securing the environment and lastly, they proposed ideas that may lead to the ideal child friendly environment.

Young people expressed their environmental concerns and they indicated that they are feeling the ripple effects of environmental pollution and climate change and they are eager to participate in environmental protection initiatives at policy level. Young people expressed their disappointment that they are not being included in environmental related decision-making processes suffering under the “best interest of the child” mantra where policy makers claim to know what is best for children without actually consulting them.

The recommendations from the consultations emphasize more on children and young people’s inclusion in all environmental protection initiatives, as they must be involved in all discussions and regarding their own environmental rights.



Annex

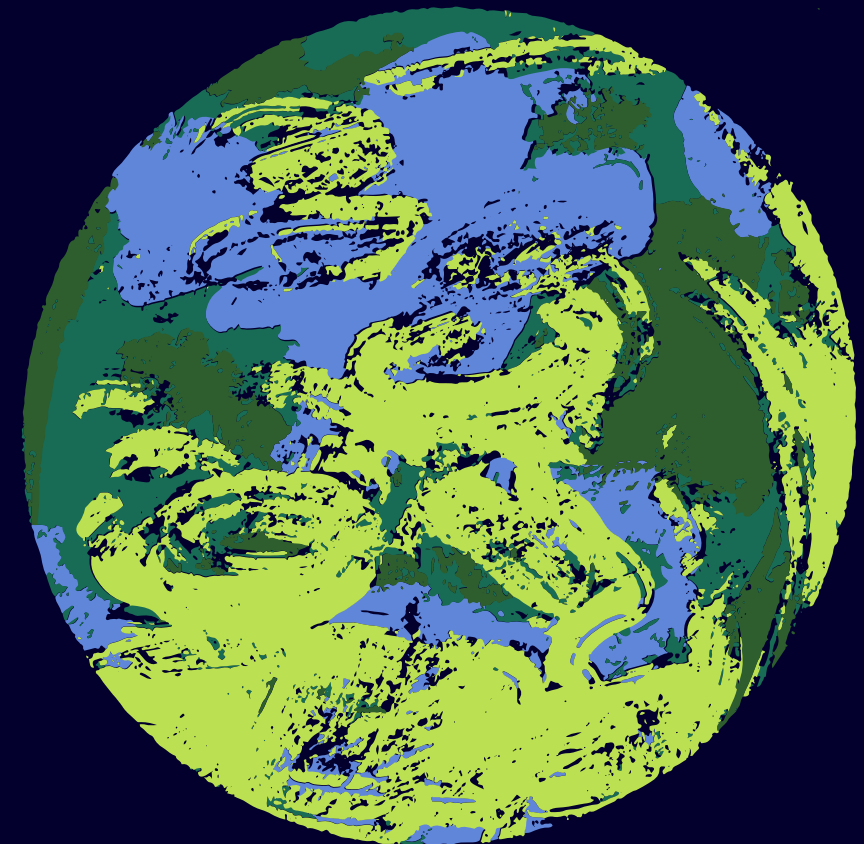
Proposed recommendations by children and stakeholders to different actors in environmental protection.

Stakeholder	Recommendations
Governments	- Local authorities must invest in robust refuse collection and waste management mechanisms to process waste and clean-up urban areas. This should include community based initiatives of waste collection by providing adequate dustbins and education on waste management. - Councils’ must conduct environmental impact assessments or consultations before any land is distributed to ensure appropriate conservation and environmental sustainability and protection. - Governments need to engage in intensive land rehabilitation strategies to ensure the protection of land and limit further devastation and impact on communities. - Governments must prioritise underground water harvesting for areas where portable water is not available. - Local and national budgets and policies must reflect exisiting and emerging needs of communities epically related to environmental issues. - Environmental and land policies and national and local levels must reflect investment and budget allocation in disaster risk reduction, early detection and warning systems. - Governments should invest in child orientated disaster preparedness - Through government institutions like schools, health centres and community centres regular drills on natural disaster response to educate children and communities should be conducted to minimize the impact of disasters. - Policy makers should enable and facilitate child participation in environmental decision making processes. - Environmental policies should include accountability and monitoring mechanisms, to ensure the implementation and enforcement of current environmental legislation. - Impact assessments fro commercial activities which affect the environment must be implemented with continued awareness and engagement to minimise impact and rehabilitee environments where degration has occurred.

Stakeholder	Recommendations
Civil Society	- Awareness campaigns need to be supported, instituted and implemented to ensure children are aware of their rights and are given avenues to advocate for their right to clean-safe environment and challenges relating to their environment. - Civil-society should continue to support and conduct environmental assessments and studies on the children’s rights to the environment to influence policy and lobby for the right to a healthy environment. - Ongoing support from civil-society to child and youth led movements on the right to a healthy environment should be priorotised to prevent further degradation.
Learning institutions	- Academic insititutions should integrate and institutionalise environmental education across learning area’s to ensure improved awareness and knowledge and instil a value of responsibility that children and young people have in protecting their environment. - Learning institutions to organize environmental protection activities such as tree planting and clean up campaigns.
Traditional leadership and the community	- Parents and guardians should be educated on the negative impact of secondary smoking on children such that smoking is not done around children. - Traditional and community leaders should mobilise communities to defend and protect their environments from further degradation and extraction.



Take Charge



Make Change



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