

## Young Environmental Voices

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By 2028, children and youth in tdh project countries act as young environmental citizens and organize themselves in civil society networks, inducing community-based solutions to the multiplicity of the environmental crisis and holding policy-makers accountable for ensuring their environmental rights and their protection from environmental hazards.

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### 1. Rationale behind this goal

#### Impact Hypothesis:

*IF we promote and maintain supportive and protective structures for young environmental citizens to voice their challenges, claim their rights on local, national, and international level, induce community-based solutions to the environmental crisis, and foster the intergenerational dialogue regarding these claims and solutions*

*THEN they will set positive examples of overcoming the injustices between currently living and future generations as well as between marginalized groups and the rest of the society that accompany the environmental crises*

*BECAUSE children and youth will be increasingly conscious of their environmental responsibility as a fundamental part of global citizenship and will claim their environmental rights, putting pressure on society as whole, including the private sector and on policy- and decision-makers.*

**Important remark:** The safety of young environmental citizens and activists shall always have top priority, pursuing a preventive Do-No-Harm approach and implementing safety protocols in case of threats or activities in repressive societies. tdh and partner organizations will create a safe and protected spaces, including digital spaces, for all young environmental citizens, regardless of whether they are organized in existing structures, aiming at creating new structures, or acting individually.

### 2. Key reasons for supporting and funding young environmental voices

By the early 2020s, the global environmental crisis has reached an unprecedented scope, leading to the destruction of the environment through climate change, biodiversity loss, and other natural processes induced by mankind that will have negative feedback effects on all living beings, including humanity. To date, these negative effects are most visible in

the global South and affect marginalized and poor population groups most, while wealthier parts of the world's population - mostly in the global North - are stuck in an economic and development model and limitless consumerism that perpetuate the destructive use of resources, amplifying environmental destruction and making real change difficult.

While children and youth gathered in a global environmental movement are gaining momentum, pinpointing these environmental crises and the urgency to establish consolidated action on all levels, political will, private sector engagement, and action on the ground altogether appear rather weak. At the same time, the recognition of the human right to a healthy environment in 2022 is paving the way for more (concentrated) action in this context. And the new General Comment No. 26 on children's rights, the environment and climate change by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child can serve as guidance for action to be taken with respect to environmental issues under the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The newly recognized human right to a healthy environment now requires implementation for children and youth, highlighting the intergenerational and disproportionate injustices of the environmental crises. Children and youth did not cause this crisis, but they will be the ones facing the most severe negative impacts in future; in many tdh project countries the negative feedback effects are already present, e.g., in the form of pollution, floods or droughts which lead to food insecurities and finally displacement of numerous people.

Children and youth, while being a large segment of the global population, are barely heard or represented in decision-making processes regarding the environmental crises. Therefore, an enabling surrounding, safe spaces and protection are required for children and youth to voice their challenges and concerns as well as solutions to the environmental crises from community-based activities to global advocacy. At the same time, it will be crucial to enable intergenerational collaboration between young environmental citizens and elder generations. Furthermore, it is necessary to include traditional and indigenous knowledge and experiences about nature and environment in discussions and decision-making and to strengthen approaches connecting cultures. In this regard, combinations of indigenous knowledge with scientific solutions - from global South and global North - appear promising to meet the future environmental challenges.

Backing such movements and activities will support putting children's rights into practice on a broader scale because the children's right to a healthy environment is closely intertwined with their rights to education, freedom of speech, information, right to food to name a few. Furthermore, pinpointing the environmental crises includes that children and youth challenge local and global inequalities and the unequal distribution of wealth, promoting environmental and climate justice. To conclude, young environmental citizens will act as representatives of an alternative development path and promote innovative solutions.

### 3. Approaches and child rights-based frameworks that support young environmental voices

Supporting and funding children and youth as environmental citizens is closely intertwined with a variety of international frameworks (for sustainable development). Foremost, the UN's Agenda 2030 points out the fight against and mitigation of the environmental crises in different Sustainable Development Goals; among them the Goals 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), 13 (Climate Action), 14 (Life below Water), and 15 (Life on Land). Moreover, the Paris Agreement includes a specific reference to children's rights and its implementation is focused on action for climate empowerment.

tdh's child rights-based approach is reflected in the support and funding of young environmental citizens due to the goal's significant contribution to a variety of children's rights that are closely connected to a child's right to a healthy environment. Furthermore, the goal is closely linked to tdh's recent paper „daring transformation“, which highlights the necessity of transforming destructive and discriminating models of power, decision-making, and accumulation of wealth.

### 4. Outcomes to be achieved by supporting and funding young environmental voices

At the micro level in the individual project areas, projects contributing to establishing young environmental citizens aim at creating enabling and protective structures and platforms, mobilizing children and youth to use these structures to voice their individual concerns and challenges. Good practices for adaptation to and mitigation of negative environmental feedback effects, and data collection and preparation concerning children's rights and the environment will be launched. Environmental education as means of supporting children's rights shall be considered as crucial enabler of these activities. Environmental education also lays the seeds for reflecting and ultimately overcoming destructive ideologies and patterns that characterize global inequalities. Concrete measures to mitigate the climate crisis on community level are the basis for defining good practices and subsume activities in areas such as biodiversity revitalization and protection or afforestation, mitigating e. g. with food insecurity or water shortages due to climate crisis embedded in an intergenerational dialogue.

At the meso level, these project outcomes feed into joint programs and civil society alliances that bring together young environmental citizens with civil society organizations and environmental activists of other generations on local, national, regional, and global level. These collaborations enable sharing technical and theoretical knowledge about translating international frameworks into national legislation and put them into practice on the ground in a coherent format, holding duty bearers and violators accountable. Good practices from community level will be an important compass for the practical implementation of environmental frameworks on local level. Drawing on the outcome of the past period of strategic goals at tdh, these civil society networks will also inform and provide technical guidance for states, governments, and the economic sector to translate

the General Comment 26 into national laws, policies, and decisions. Additionally, at the meso level, a closely interlinked support system reaching from local (project) level to international policy level shall be established; creating feedback mechanisms that enable results from project level to be used for international advocacy and at the same time translate international policies into activities on project level.

At the macro level, young environmental citizens - aiming at individual action as well as embedded in civil society networks - with the support of tdh and partner organizations push for the end of intergenerational, disproportionate, and societal injustice in the context of environment and children's rights.

The goal overlaps with the other strategic goals established by the tdh Delegates Conference 2023. The multiple environmental crises are causing migration streams from affected areas worldwide, including children and youth who are forced to leave their home communities and countries due e. g., to natural disasters. The environmental crises also aggravate gender inequalities and gender-based rights violations because particularly girls and women suffer from negative feedback effects. For instance, in many societies girls and women are responsible for fetching water, forcing them to walk long distances to water sources when close-by wells dry out. While traveling to fetch water, girls and women face higher risks of sexualized and physical violence as well as health impairments. The closest link exists with the goal education and empowerment for life perspectives not least because environmental education can significantly contribute to the empowerment of children and youth for issues and challenges that affect communities and even broader societies rather than themselves individually. tdh and partners can strengthen youth green entrepreneurship and therewith supporting environmentally friendly economy and life perspectives for youth.

## **5. Lasting effects envisioned by supporting and funding young environmental voices**

Achieving the goal's aims will contribute to not only strengthening global policy frameworks for children's rights and the environment but also to translating these policies into national legislation on the one hand and action on the ground on the other hand. The scope of the goal, covering local (adaptive) activities concerned with mitigating the environmental crises as well as international advocacy, allows for establishing blueprints and good practices, which can be shared through networks and alliances. tdh can act as knowledge base and consultant for other organizations that engage in children's rights and the environment. Given the momentum of a global environmental movement driven especially by children and youth, creating ownership of the goal and its outcome is likely and will support the perpetuation of the goal's outcome.

## 6. Five criteria for supporting and funding young environmental voices

The following supporting and funding principles define tdh's approach to accompanying children, youth and partner organizations and civil society movements worldwide in their struggles and fight for establishing and protecting young environmental citizens. Through this kind of engagement, tdh will support particularly grassroots and frontline activities, which will induce sustainable social changes in the long term.

### *Definition of addressed groups*

The goal's target group comprises foremost children and youth who act as environmental citizens. In addition, the involvement of grassroots communities is just as important as the involvement of policy makers and the private sector on local, national and international level.

- Fund mobilization efforts and collective action among young environmental citizens aiming at justice in local, national and international environmental legislation.
- Support young environmental citizens by fostering environmental education, creating safe spaces, and providing protection for them to voice their concerns, challenges, and potential solutions.
- Fund and support institutional capacity building within tdh and accompany children, youth, and partner organizations that aim at translating international frameworks on community level. This includes the funding of projects aiming for concrete measures of environment protection, such as biodiversity protection and revitalization or climate change adaptation and mitigation among other community-based solutions.
- Fund the formation of coalitions within civil society networks concerned with the environment and children's rights, tapping on tdh's expertise in the child rights perspective to lead coalitions and push forward political change.
- Create and fund structures and programs that ensure evidence-based political decision-making and local actions through knowledge creation and sharing information.