

The Climate Imperative of the 21st Century: Mobilising Youth Awareness and Action Amidst Global Warming

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Abstract

the 21 st century is also experiencing one of the most threatening issues in history of human generation, that is, climate change. the issue has come out with far reaching consequences on international governance and intergenerational justice. The evidence of the increasing speed of global warming has achieved scientific consensus in recent years, although there is a disproportion in social awareness and activeness of politically activists. The younger generations, who will take most of the impact of the long-term effects of climate action are yet on the passive end of awareness.

As it is depicted in this paper, youth awareness is crucial and can be used to deal with the climatic crisis that is being experienced today. Global climate governance is not a passive stakeholder but a critical actor of the young generations. The paper uses a conceptual and analytical approach to understand the structural and informational gap, which prevents successful engagement with the youth and assess the global initiatives to mobilise their efforts. The thesis that the scope of the current paper argues against is that the global response to climate without permanent actions to increase climate literacy and institutionalize the voices of youth will not be sufficient. This paper aims to make a contribution to larger discussions on climate governance and sustainability by making the engagement of youth to be viewed as a normative and political requirement.

Keywords

Climate Change; Global Warming; Youth Engagement; Climate Governance; Climate Awareness; Global Responsibility

Introduction

Climate change has been an issue of environmental concern over quite some time but currently it has turned into a multidimensional crisis worldwide not only does it cross the boundaries of politics, economics and social justice but also international governance. Climate change arguments have created more efforts of illustrating the existing position of political and institutional systems to act effectively in dealing with the emergency of climate as global temperatures rise, extremes in weather patterns and environmental destruction. Most Scientific assessment reports assert that the existing mitigation and adaptation measures are too small because in the future, worsening extreme events will pose even greater risks to human health and ecosystems. The world needs some immediate concerted efforts and climate change requires more sustainable interactions both nationally and internationally.

Youth role is highly crucial and under analyzed. They have the potential to influence most climate awareness movements, given that they have made an enormous contribution to the world population. They will be the citizens of the future, the policymakers and leaders that will bear the effects of the current-day climate choices. The youth engagements are not even due to the various differences that exist in education, inability to access authentic information, and poor socio-economic conditions. Although most of the youth-led climate movements receive international media coverage and challenge climate justice and intergenerational fairness. However, that is not sufficient to produce enough climate awareness in a large scale across youth populations.

Parental involvement among the young people, as it has been understood, is not simply a moral obligation anymore, it has become one of the most important political requirements. The long-term action on climate demands the backing of society, change in behaviour and democratic legitimacy, and all of them are provided by the more informed younger generations. The importance of youth involvement in climate processes has been realised by many international organisations. This leads to the implementation of youth voices in policy formulations and implementations that place youth at the centre of global transformation and SDG acceleration (United Nations, 2018). However, questions the inclusion and effectiveness of the current governance systems of such initiatives. In this paper, the author believes that youth awareness and youth action should not only be necessary, but a pressing necessity to tackle climate change and give a firmer foundation on which international climate management can be built. The paper aims at feeding into a wider discussion of encouraging youth participation and long term sustainability by searching gaps in the knowledge base of youth and institutional interventions.

‘Climate Change’- as the Central Crisis of the Century

The modern generation is quite susceptible to the effects of climate change that they can observe in numerous aspects. The increasing global temperature, the irregular distribution of rainfalls, the sweltering summers, and the sudden snowfalls all of which have become extremely noticeable in this century. What can not be easily comprehended however is that it is not necessarily about environmental effects but the economic systems, social implications and even political participation is also influenced by Climate change. It is due to this that it is not a challenge that should be encountered but a world wide emergency. Even tremendous environmental destruction has started to upset growth, livelihood and governmental systems in areas. It is not the same as other traditional global issues since it has long-term impacts on the planet and life on earth. This is when it comes to national and even international borders and generations. This raises a core question concerning the ability of the current political systems and international institutions in dealing with complex interboundary risks.

The climate change has been regularly characterized by the government opinion as a multiplier of threats, which intensifies the already vulnerable and unequal situations. The fact that the contribution to global emissions has been made least by the developing countries is discussed in numerous international organisations but ignored and, however, they continue to carry unequal burden of climate change. This resulted in the escalation of argumentation throughout the world on the issue of justice, fairness, and accountability in global climate talks (Leiserowitz, A., 2010). This explains the actual dilemma, much more than environmental

management is the rejoining of conflicting developmental interests of economic interest and moral obligation in the international system.

The existing responses in the world today are still insufficient and evaluated through different scientific evaluations in terms of its relation to the magnitude and urgency of the crisis. Throughout these decades, global negotiations and discussions regarding climate related agreements have occurred at different regional levels all over the world, but the green house gas emissions are still increasing indicating the persistent lack of coordination between the politics and the actual implementations (UNEP, 2023). This disengagement results in the structural weakness in global climate governance, cutting off implications of enforcement,; scraped policy approaches and absence of political will among the states. The collective action and multilateral cooperation is therefore weak, and the opposition of the short-term conflict of the national interest against the long-term benefits is indicated (Lee, 2023).

In addition to this, climate change has been overlapping with human security and sustainable development. There has been high rate of food insecurity, water instability, poor public health and economic instability with increased ecological degradation the long term effect of this has been reflecting on migration and social conflict patterns. Lack of dealing with the climate risk undermines the achievement of the sustainable development goals and accentuates global inequalities (Baumann, F., 2021). This means that climate change is not really a policy problem but a systematic problem that does not only redefine development pathways, but also government priorities at various levels.

With its profound political nature, we must step out of technical or environmental framing and see climate change in this century. The reality is that, the climate crisis does need solutions that are technological, and policy reforms, but societal transformations, with informed participation, should be significant and long-term commitments to politics. In the larger perspective of the general education, the youth involvement is of utmost importance (Schlosberg, 2011). Being a generation of future stakeholders, young generations hold a pivotal role in developing the socio-political basis which is required to take a permanent climate action.

Youth and Climate Awareness: A Conceptual Framework

The current generation has seen the youth becoming major participants in the modern discussions on climate change. They are not merely future actors, but they are involved in political and social processes right now as well. Global discourse of governance refers to youth as a group of individuals aged between 15 and 29 years, though it is different in some institutions and regions (Hujo, K., & Carter, M., 2019). This segment of the population is a very critical demographic group since the policy-making processes and responses are highly reliant on it. The mindsets, consciousness and trends of participation influence sustainable impacts in the long term particularly on matters such as climate change.

The theoretical knowledge of the youth engagement is analysable in terms of the political socialisation and establishment of norms. The political socialisation theory is the way individuals are taught political beliefs and values in the form of education, media and civil society. The meaning of awareness of climate change is not scientific knowledge as such; it

includes the established social discourses, cultural settings and interests of organizations (Dalton, R. J., 2017). The intentionality in determining the future and realization of environmental responsibility is significant in forming the political behaviours of the younger generation.

The youth engagement can be analysed in the framework developed by constructivist approach to climate change, which is an international relations perspective. It underlines the cornerstone of ideas, norms and common understandings in the formation of the political results. Norms is concerned with the way that they establish a social order and the contribution of establishment of political transformation as defined by Finnemore, M., and Sikkink, K. (1998). And youth here is used to refer to carriers that help in dispensing of climate related norms such as sustainability, justice and environmental responsibility worldwide. The young population is the most significant segment of the population that is operational in transnational networks, digital platforms and social movements, as a result of which they engage in the process of constructing and circulating climate norms. This has been shaping and continues to shape the discourse of the masses and policy agendas.

Education system among others takes a central stage in this system. Climate education has become a known element in awareness initiatives and participation by the young generation. Nevertheless, it has been proposed that the disproportionate climate education distribution in content and accessibility is still high in most regions, especially that of global south (Shulla, 2020). The absence of international networks and connectivity does not even allow the younger generation to make a self-effort. Further, the socio-economic realities move them miles away in order to access the few choices to access global climate processes. Such disparity between meaningful understanding and availability of information is a major challenge in the active participation of youths.

Youth awareness has been in the last few years reforming its perspective. The digital media and online market has dominated to a great extent in popularizing different events and challenges across the globe. The social media especially contributes immensely; it has contributed to the rapid spread of information regarding the climate and international mobilisation of youths (Nasrin, S., & Fisher, D. R. (2022)). The entire meta network has resulted in climate issues being visible beyond the institutional agencies. However, these online areas are hazardous when stories spreading fake information or polarised news are sold with the sole purpose of drawing traffic. Even frightening messages can go viral in the social media to attract the minds of the younger generation. This renders all such tools useless in the motivation of a real personal engagement (O'Neil, S., & Nicholson-Cole, S., 2009). Knowledge about awareness is not exposure or access to information, but the ability to think critically, research and respond in the appropriate realm, climate knowledge.

Therefore the proposed conceptual framework seeks to bring the awareness of youth to the forefront as a multidimensional reality that was fashioned by my education, normative processes and social media settings. as rightly called upon by ban ki moon, on international youth day, in 2008 - which states that young people are experts in disseminating new habits and technology are best placed to make contributions in terms of combating climate change

(Pandve, H. T., Deshmukh, P. R., Pandve, R. T., & Patil, N. R., 200) However, the participation of youth in climate change is not going to arrive spontaneously and is expected to be homogeneous, however, it is conditioned by the structural conditions and institutional support. It is the dynamics of such gaps in the awareness of the youth that guide us toward how in reality inclusive and effective strategies can be elaborated to fight climate change.

Gaps in Youth Awareness and Engagement on Climate Change

This increased publicity of the issue of climate change in the international discourse has been the focal point. The climate change debate in the global arena, however, does not put enough emphasis on the still major gaps that exist in regards to youth awareness and their participation. These gaps are defined especially by structural factors, socio-economic factors and institutional factors and do not constitute any homogenous pattern. The impact on the youth is preceded by their experience and then followed by the interpretation of climate related information. The context-specific right knowledge is not that available as various international forums debated on climate change. The concern does not happen in isolation with the awareness, the more the younger generation is concerned the more they desire to take action in protecting the planet (Calculli, C., D'Uggento, A. M., Labarile, A., and Ribecco, N., 2021). These gaps however render the knowledge among the youth uneven.

The greatest divide that is present in the youth awareness is that between the global north and global south. The advanced part of the north is implied to be more exposed to climate education and digital materials which accompany participatory platform. However, according to the research on climate literacy, young people of third world countries of the south are way behind in terms of such exposure (UNESCO, 2019). This disparity is also visible because in the global south, economic interests, lack of employment and access to quality education are more likely to win over the environmental interests in the long term (Elfert, M., 2019). Consequently, the issue of climate change turns out to be less real and more abstract.

Education plays the central role in the creation of the gaps in the youth awareness, though the climate education is taught in the formal curricula. However, the content associated with the climate is still seen as a marginal issue and not the very subject of civic education. The lack of interdisciplinary climate education, as defined by UNESCO (2019), denies the young minds an opportunity to tie scientific knowledge to social and economic consequences. This loophole shows the vulnerability that is there in the ability of the youth to participate in climate policies and in government process (Anderson, A. (2011).

The awareness gap is widened by the social-economic reasons which lead to disparities in different spheres. A section of the youth population in the marginalised communities is often hindered by the digital technology and insufficient infrastructure. They have fewer chances of long-term engagement as their participation in making decisions is minimal and increases the political representation inequalities. Different studies about the young generation participation in the political process have indicated that socio-economic status plays an important role in determining the degree of awareness and participation in the issues of climate (Dalton, R. J., 2017).

Moreover, there is the modern tendency in the environmental information which puts new challenges. It has surpassed structural constraints, into the proliferation of falsehood and fractured stories by growth of digital media. With a huge network of digital media at their disposal, the youth is more exposed to information about the climate, but equally to opposing accounts of climate change, potentially causing confusion or even lack of interest (O'Neil, S., and Nicholson-Cole, S., 2009). Awareness is therefore not all about being informed or being exposed to information, it ought to be a well-stipulated capability to critically judge all in the basket as a way of making claims. Until such gaps are filled and education disparities and socio-economic inequalities are reduced, mobilisation of youth will only be mere symbolism and not radical (Hart, R. A., 1992).

Mobilising Youth Action: Global and Institutional Responses

The current trends in the international attempts to fight the climate challenges have realised the need of involving the youth. The United Nations including other international organisations have gone a mile further and integrated the youths in their systems. This has made it a cross-cutting priority thus the young people have become partners in the attainment of sustainable development goals (Robertson, M., 2021). The climate conferences and the youth forum platforms have been advanced as the broad ways of enhancing the voice of the youth in the global decision-making processes. In the climate governance realm, such projects as youth observer groups and youth-oriented events have contributed to increased visibility of the youth point of view. These attempts have perpetually led to agenda-setting and attracting attention to such issues as intergenerational equity and long-term climate responsibility. Nevertheless, researchers have indicated that involvement among youths is just substantive and not consultative. In addition, their impact on the ultimate policy decisions is also minimal (Cummings, J., 2022). That leads us to ask questions of the richness and efficiency of institutional inclusion of youth in climate governance.

The issue of climate literacy has been encouraged in large scale by many international organisations and civil society actors. The society requires urgent reformation of the formal education, mass awareness campaign and the digital tools to be made available to make the educational programs effective. These are geared towards providing the young individuals with the knowledge and skills required to be active citizens. Although these are done, there is no coordination and continuity over time, minimizing the overall impact (Conceicao, 2020). Institutional approaches towards youth engagement make an effort, although the already active and visible groups receive opportunities once more even when efforts are being made. The marginalised segment of the youth is neglected. This method of selectivity of inclusion also contributes to the risk of inequality in representation and participation. Through academic literature, it has also been emphasized that meaningful youth engagement demands not just access, but equipments to facilitate policy processes and outcomes (Checkel, 2005). Therefore, Mobilising youth action requires inclusive and structural types of involvement. The most necessary tools that must be employed in extending the awareness into a long term climate action are strong climate education, increasing the means of participation, and considering the youth perspective to the policy design.

Conclusion

The climate change issue characterizes the ability of political systems and societies to react to a long-term threat of a global challenge. It challenges the actual power of collaboration and mutual understanding between the countries to fight something that is threatfully global. This paper has proposed the importance of youth in dealing with this challenge. The awareness and participation of the youth was an essential but poorly developed aspect of global climate action. Youths are major stakeholders towards the outcomes of climate and this is why their role becomes very crucial. Nevertheless, there still exist major gaps in terms of awareness, education and significant participation. The inequalities extend to the digital divide to the developed and developing countries at huge levels.

This paper identifies the drawbacks of the institutional approaches by studying the structural factors, which influence youth engagement. It is not only a technological approach to have a solution to climate change. It needs more knowledgeable and involved societies that are able to use the policy promises and deliver them. The young as future citizens are placed in the centre of this process.

Inclusive education in building more awareness of youth and reduced socio economic barriers to participation are important measures to effective climate governance. Such initiatives do not receive a lot of emphasis now but in the absence of these, climate risks are always there and ongoing. Incorporation of the youth in the fabric of the climate governance is a behavioural requirement as well as a practical requirement to deal with the climate imperative of the 21 st century.

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