

A Study on the Role of Youth in Climate Change: Youth Participation in Decision-making, Social Awareness, and Sustainable Development

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Introduction

Climate change has become a huge issue globally as it poses a serious threat to human well-being and ecological stability. The responsibility to respond to climate change has been placed on the governments and industries all over the world. However, individuals should also be held responsible in this matter. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), human activity mainly contributes to the greenhouse gas emissions to the Earth's atmosphere, causing the global temperature to rise and Earth's climate to change (IPCC, 2007). As per a Eurostat report, households constitute 19% of greenhouse emission while the energy sector has 27%, the industry has 26%, agriculture has 12% and transport has 11%. This shows the need for a societal response to climate change. But currently, public engagement is still limited. Many people do not appreciate the correlation between their individual behavior and their global impact, underestimating their power to influence climate change (Shaw, et al., 2015). There are several campaigns and initiatives that have developed with the purpose to address climate change and involve individuals in solving the problem.

The impact of climate change can affect the well-being of the present and future generations. Economic growth, environmental regeneration, and poverty reduction will be compromised in this problem. In the outcome document of Rio+20, The Future We Want states:

...all countries, particularly developing countries, are vulnerable to the adverse impacts of climate change and are already experiencing increased impacts including persistent drought and extreme weather events, sea level erosion and ocean acidification, further threatening food security and efforts to eradicate poverty and achieve sustainable development (The Future We Want, 2012).

This validates the importance of active involvement and participation of young people because they will be the ones to carry the burden of climate change over the course of their lifetimes.

Youth participation in decisions that affect their lives can occur in various settings such as the family unit, community, educational institutions, and workplace from local to global. The Participation Rights of Adolescents offers the following definitions of adolescent participation:

- Seeking information, forming views, expressing ideas;

- Taking part in activities and processes;
- Being informed and consulted in decision-making;
- Initiating ideas, processes, proposals, projects;
- Analyzing situations and making choices; and
- Respecting others and being treated with dignity (Rajani in UNICEF, 2001).

This study aims to identify the role of youth in addressing climate change, particularly in decision-making, social awareness, and sustainable development projects.

Significance of the Study

This study could provide useful insights on integrating youth's perspective and participation in the process of finding solutions in climate change problems and how to engage the youth in any climate change adaptation activities. The study could also be used by educational institutions, governments, and organizations in the development of their programs and activities to enhance the level of awareness and participation of the public on climate change. Lastly, this study could also serve as a reference for future researches.

Review of Related Literature

Youth play a crucial role in combating climate change. The skills of spreading new habits and technologies that young people possess could contribute to the fight against climate change (Pandve et al., 2009). It is necessary to empower the youth and enhance their level of awareness to address climate change because "they are the future citizens and decision-makers that must live with the impacts of climate change" as well as the future agents of action and implementation of the solutions to climate change (Narksompong & Limjikiran, 2015).

According to the United Nations (2004) report, youth make up 18% of the world's population with a majority (87%) living in developing countries. Youth's energy and knowledge could be utilized in raising awareness, conducting educational programs, conserving nature, promoting renewable energy use, adopting environmentally friendly practices, implementing adaptation and mitigation projects (Barreda, 2018).

Depending on the influences of socio-cultural, institutional, economic, and political factors, the definition of “youth” varies from country to country. Based on the United Nation’s definition, the term ‘youth’ include people between the ages of 15 and 24 years. (30) On the other hand, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Child (CRC) considers people up to the age of 18 as a youth while some definitions are below 30 years of age. In these varying views, youth represents not only age but a developmental stage of expanding capacities and broadening perspectives, together with the personal challenges associated with moving into adulthood (Arnett & Jensen, 2012).

Discussion

- **Youth on Decision-making**

Young people are concerned about the threats posed by climate change. Many of them are already experiencing impacts such as increasing disasters and disease risks, rising water scarcity, and declining food security. Young people have both the right and need to participate in responding to climate change because it is an issue of their present and future lives (Narksompong & Limjikiran, 2015). Therefore, youth should be part of the decision-making and planning discussions of the government, organizations, and institutions. However, adults who lead these discussions refuse to share power with youth and believe that youth lacks the capability and responsibility. Even though youth are progressively seen as an advantage and strength in responding to climate change, “they have been relatively absent in the climate change policies and plans formulated by many countries. Genuine participation of young people to climate change is lacking, as programs are still designed for them, rather than engaging with them as partners (Selby & Kagawa, 2010).”

A study conducted by UNICEF in Indonesia found that children and youth want to participate in combating climate change. The participants were asked about what would help them to cope with and adjust to climate change. A majority responded that they sought to do something tangible about climate change for their communities. They also wanted to be involved in planning for a future with climate change (Urbano et al., 2011).

There is a need to highly consider the possibility of youth in building ideas and plans that could be beneficial to the environment. The perspectives, insights, and opinions of youth will be a significant source of information that could produce new strategies or methods in dealing with the problem.

- **Youth on Social Awareness**

As Al Yousuf (2016) stated, it is essential to use the power and responsibility of education in raising the awareness of, and empowering the young people to get involved in addressing the challenges of climate change. This could lead to the enhancement of an individual's general awareness and determining the ability to produce solutions and innovation for fighting climate change (Al Yousuf, 2016).

Moreover, Calvo and Apilado (2014) emphasized the importance of mass media in improving youth's level of awareness. Mass media such as radio and television improved young people's awareness through the regular broadcast of information on climate change (Calvo and Apilado, 2014). Additionally, with the advancement of technology, reaching a wider audience has become easier with the emergence of new media. Youth, as one of the active users of the internet, particularly social media, can receive valuable information about climate change and share it with others thus promoting climate change awareness. They can also influence others to participate in environmental protection.

Based on the data collected from a study in Australia, over half of the youth participants are aware of climate change. Additionally, Australian youth suggested the Internet, Google, as well as journal articles to find information on climate change (Chiw & Ling, 2019).

Ojomo et al. (2015) claimed that youth's personal experience could provide the motivation to address climate change as well as knowledge building and attitude formation. The knowledge could be applied to produce advocacy material that could ensure a comprehensive knowledge of climate change impacts in any given place (Ojomo et al., 2015).

- **Youth on Sustainable Development Projects**

The United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014) "has actively emphasized education for sustainable development as a holistic and interdisciplinary strategy. It seeks to instill the knowledge, skills, and values needed for citizens to improve their quality of life for a sustainable future (Narksompong & Limjikiran, 2015)."

The study conducted in a high school in Leyte, Philippines asked the students what organization do they belong to. The majority of the students with a percentage of 98.32 stated that they did not

belong to any organization. They belong to the following community groups or organizations: altar boys (0.56%), a village youth group (0.56%), and Children's Choir (0.56%). These results show that students are not involved in any organization-based community activity that promotes environmental conservation (Yanger, 2016).

Recognizing the potential role of education in addressing climate change is growing. The area of climate change education is still in its early stages and often regarded as part of the science curriculum, as a component of geography and earth science. It can focus on changing lifestyles, such as mitigation behaviors that promote individual action to reduce carbon emissions (Bangay & Blum, 2010).

Thru establishing, building, and developing the youth's capacity to participate, young people will be empowered to yield climate change responsive action as youths. They will also protect future societies when they become adults. As early as young people can, they will be able to apply the practices and make it a habit to live an environment-friendly lifestyle. They can also provide insights, ideas, and actions to influence other people in supporting sustainable development projects.

Conclusion

Climate change is a pressing issue of the current times that should be taken seriously and carefully. Effective responses and solutions are urgently needed for the fight against climate change. Offering education and participation to youth signifies a vital investment in building capable citizens to be responsive in an unpredictable future. It is essential for the governments, institutions, and organizations to create and implement programs set for the youth. Furthermore, they should make education for awareness, participation in decision-making, and involvement in sustainable development available for the youth.

Youth has the potential and ability to provide a significant contribution to combat climate change and strengthen action on sustainable development. They should be given the right and opportunity to be involved in addressing social issues that they are affected.

As citizens of the Earth, all people regardless of age and status are responsible for the world we live in. Adults and youth can both learn from each other and have a collective approach in dealing with issues to make a better and improved society.

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