

Effective Youth Consultation on Climate Actions in Ghana

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) predicts a 2°C global temperature rise by 2050 if actions to reduce our carbon emissions are not taken now. In other words, if actions are not taken immediately, the adverse impact of climate change on the environment and humanity will be extremely devastating. Already, over 800 million people globally are very vulnerable to the impacts of climate change [DARA, 2012]. Other studies have reported that the fluctuations of rainfall, coupled with the temperature surges, are having a toll on the major sectors of the economy, health, finance and especially agriculture, across all ecological zones. For instance, the increase in ocean level owing to the melting of the polar ice caps is displacing the settlements along the coasts whilst fluctuations in rainfall patterns negatively affect farmers in the Savanna zone who depend solely on the rains for irrigation purposes decreased yield and massive losses. With 70% of the population depending on agriculture, any slight anomaly can adversely impact the economy, which makes us vulnerable.

As young and energetic portion of the population, the youth ought to be given the opportunity to contribute their quota in the fight against climate change. Ghana's National Youth Policy (6.1.9) states that *"In view of the importance of a sustainable healthy environment to national development, this policy recognizes the role of the youth in ensuring good environment practices. This requires that young people are provided with adequate knowledge and information on environmental issues to help them understand the country's biodiversity. They require to be sensitized on good environmental practices and be encouraged to adopt same in their every-day life."*

This enjoins the youth as relevant actors together with policy makers, civil society organisations, development partners, private sector and media to not only deal with climate change but also work towards a green recovery. The youth constitutes a greater portion of the population and are full of energy, skills and intellectual abilities that can be harnessed and maximized towards achieving our climate change obligation.

There are two main mechanisms globally adopted in the fight against climate change, which are Mitigation and Adaptation. Climate mitigation involves reducing the flow of heat-trapping greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, either by reducing sources of these gases (for example, the burning of fossil fuels for electricity, heat or transport) or enhancing the "sinks" that accumulate and store these gases (such as the oceans, forests and soil). According to Ghana's Nationally Determined Contributions (Gh-NDCs), "Ghana's emission reduction goal is to unconditionally lower its greenhouse gas emissions by 15 percent relative to a business as usual (BAU) scenario emission of 73.95MtCO₂e by 2030. And additional 30 percent conditional emission reduction is attainable."

In other words, Ghana intends to reduce its carbon emissions by 45% (all things being equal) by 2030. On the otherhand, climate adaptation as defined by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) as adjustments in ecological, social or economic systems in response to actual or expected climatic stimuli and their effects (Smith et al, 2001). It is the means of modifying our actions as a reaction to the ongoing climatic situations.

Our national adaptation strategies hinge on;

- Good governance and inter-sectoral contribution.
- Capacity-building and the role of science, technology and innovation.
- Adequate finance from both domestic sources and international cooperation.
- Promoting outreach by informing, communicating and educating the citizenry.
- Adhering to accountable auditing and reporting.

Entry Points for Youth Inclusion in addressing Climate Change:

Youth are mostly vulnerable when it comes to climate change issues. For them to be able to overcome these challenges, they need to be given the space and opportunity to contribute to climate solutions. While the role of stakeholders notably government, private sector, civil society organisations and development partners are clearly defined, there has been limited attention to the role of young people at local and national levels. Fortunately, there are entry points to remedy this situation, which are as follows:

1. Capacity Building and Training: Building the capacity of young people as key actors in fight against climate change is very essential. Young people are very energetic and filled with influential abilities thus the need to help them harness these skills with relevant information and technical guidance to addressing climate change issues.

An example is the Bamboo Bicycle Project in Ghana. Due to this project, a bamboo bike factory was established at Achiase, which served as a training center as it built the capacity of the youth in promoting a healthy non-polluting form of alternative transport to meet the growing mobility needs while addressing climate change, environmental degradation, poverty and high unemployment among the youth. (Youth in action on climate change, 2013).

2. Youth in climate advocacy

Advocacy is the public support for a particular cause. The youth can contribute to climate action processes through advocacy by educating more young people and communities on climate change as well as influencing governmental to raise ambitions and ensure the enabling environment needed towards attaining climate solutions. This goal can be achieved by engaging the youth as climate champions. There are a number of youth-led organizations that can be engaged on such issues. The youth are usually enthusiastic about social media, which provides more avenue to reach out to them.

For example, the youth can take up the task to increase the carbon sink through a massive re-afforestation and forest watch campaigns. Initiatives like '1-Student, 1-Tree' and 'My Forest, My Future' can greatly help reduce the widening gap created by deforestation and illegal mining.

3. Involvement of youth in decision making: According to the National Youth Policy of Ghana, one challenge the youth face is "inadequate opportunities for youth participation in decision making. To overcome this challenge, young people have to be consulted in decision-making processes at all levels (local to national). Consultation with youth groups on climate actions should be hinged on a participatory and fully transparent principle.

4. Mainstreaming Climate Change into Educational curriculum: Government ought to be congratulated for mainstreaming climate change into the basic level curriculum as it is a critical phase to educate and imbibe in children climate issues thus preparing them not only to cope as they age but stand up to ways of fighting climate change. This process should be extended to the Junior and Senior High Levels as a deliberate effort in reaching out to youth in school.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS:

Government

1. **Develop a database of youth groups:** Given that there are a number of youth-oriented organizations across the country working on different environmental actions, government is encouraged to develop a database of these groups particularly at the district level to help involve more young people in climate actions at the local levels leading to the achievement of national plans or programs.
2. **Create space for youth contribution:** One of the limitations in government's consultative processes is inadequate spaces for active youth participation. It is essential to obtain first-hand information (knowledge and experiences) from young people on their climate actions to feed into the national processes. Youth representation on Technical Working Groups or Committees is highly encouraged.
3. **Institutionalize Annual Youth Engagement Forum:** We are of the view that organizing a Annual Youth Consultation Forum on Climate Change will not only increase the climate change awareness level of young people but will trigger climate solution ideas and networking opportunities among the youth.
4. **Institute Reward System:** There should be national and local reward mechanisms to appreciate the effort of outstanding young people involved in climate actions as a means of motivating more young people to participate or join in the fight against climate change.

Civil Society Organisations

Civil Society Organisations and/or Non-Governmental Organisations also have a role to play in promoting youth participation in climate actions by:

1. Providing capacity building and training opportunities for young people on climate solutions
2. Providing mentorship to youth activists.
3. Collaborating with young people in the planning and implementation of climate actions

Private Sector

The private sector is also a major stakeholder when it comes to climate change hence it can:

1. Co-create job opportunities or green jobs with young people.
2. Offer climate-friendly training and apprenticeship and/or internship opportunities
3. Sponsor green entrepreneurial development
4. Institute financial schemes to fund youth-led climate solutions.

Development Partners

Given the pivotal role that development partners play in our national development architecture, they are encouraged to:

1. Establish a small grant scheme to support and finance climate actions by young people.
2. Organize periodic meetings with young people to seek their views or opinions on the climate related support interventions by development partners.
3. Provide training and capacity building opportunities for young people help them hold government accountable on climate investments among others.
4. Provide knowledge learning and sharing opportunities including cross-cultural exchanges among young people in Ghana, Africa and globally on climate actions.

Media:

The media is also encouraged to:

- Include young climate activists in climate discussions
- Provide space for young activists to share their experiences and efforts in the fight against climate change.
- Recognize and highlight the work of young people evidently contributing to the fight against climate change at all levels.

CONCLUSION

Ghana is on track in the fight against climate change given the availability of policies and strategies at the national and local levels. Additionally, there are plans to develop a Climate Change Bill to help enforce climate related regulations. However, more efforts can be done with respect to expediting set plans or actions including a strong political will to provide the investments and strengthening the key institutions. It is also worth noting that the role of young people is pivotal to the success of these interventions – particularly as custodians of the future. Arguably, the sustainability of climate solutions is dependent on the level of understanding and knowledge-base of young people hence the need to involve them actively at all levels of the decision-making process.

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