

Our Climate, Our Voices, Our Future: **YOUTH RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE NDC 3.0**



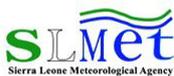
**Adolescent and Youth Perspectives on
Sierra Leone's Climate Commitments**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



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ACRONYMS

BUR:	Biennial Update Report
COP:	Conference of the Parties
iNAP:	initial National Adaptation Plan
INDC:	Intended Nationally Determined Contribution
NAP:	National Adaptation Plan
NDCs:	Nationally Determined Contributions
MTNDP:	Medium-Term National Development Plan
SDGs:	Sustainable Development Goals
UNDP:	United Nations Development Programme
UNFCCC:	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNICEF:	United Nations Children's Fund
YCC:	Youth Climate Council
YICA:	Youth Initiative for Climate Action
YOUNGO:	The Official Youth Constituency of the UNFCCC

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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The impacts of climate change are no longer a distant idea- from increasing rain, flooding and rising temperature the effects are widespread across Sierra Leone. The choices we make today will shape the future - impacting children now and generations to come. This position paper shares the views and recommendations of adolescent girls, boys and young people up-to 35 years old in Sierra Leone on the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) 3.0 review process. The findings are drawn from both qualitative and quantitative data, reaching a total of over 1,200 participants across Sierra Leone. This includes 143 in-person consultations, engaging a diverse group of young people—39% female, 61% male, and 22% adolescents. In addition, an online survey gathered insights from more than 190 young people to understand their awareness of climate change and the NDCs. A U-Report poll by UNICEF with over 900 young respondents further expanded the outreach.

Young people spoke about how climate change is affecting their lives. They mentioned extreme heat, floods, rising food prices, water shortages, and poor waste management as daily challenges. They also highlighted how climate change is affecting young people's education, health and livelihoods. Marginalized groups, young people living in rural areas, girls, young women, and persons with disabilities are often affected the most. Despite this, most participants stated that they had never heard of the NDCs before the survey or did not understand how they could get involved in climate action.

When asked, young people suggested practical ideas to help Sierra Leone reduce emissions and cope with climate impacts. They called for more use of solar energy, better farming practices, green spaces in schools, improved drainage, and support for youth-led recycling. They want better information, training, and funding to take action in their communities.

KEY MESSAGE

Young people- children, adolescents and youth want better information, education in the form of training and finance for youth-led climate action. They want a seat at the table when climate decisions are made and be active partners beyond consultation, in shaping the climate future in Sierra Leone.

Youth want to be included in indecision-making processes as well as implementation. Young people recommend the following:

- Involve youth in all stages of the NDC review and implementation.
- Provide training, information, and opportunities in schools and communities.
- Support youth-led climate solutions with funding and mentorship
- Improve access to clean energy, strong policies, and sustainable farming.
- Make sure climate action includes everyone, especially those often excluded

Sierra Leone's next climate plan must take youth voices seriously. Young people are not only affected by climate change; they are ready to be part of the solution.

2 INTRODUCTION AND CLIMATE CONTEXT IN SIERRA LEONE



Source: 2025/Wurie

The Paris Agreement recognizes the importance of NDCs as instruments through which countries communicate their climate targets and strategies. NDCs are nationally determined but globally significant. They serve as benchmarks for national ambition and accountability. Sierra Leone submitted its first NDC in 2016 and its updated NDC in 2021, setting targets in key sectors including energy, transport, agriculture, waste, and forestry. The 2021 NDC made commitments to reduce emissions and improve adaptation, with a focus on renewable energy, climate-smart agriculture, and reforestation. As the third cycle of NDCs approaches, there is an opportunity to correct gaps, strengthen ambition, and increase participation, especially that of children, adolescents and

youth who make up the largest percentage of the country's population

Sierra Leone is highly vulnerable to climate change. Rising temperatures, erratic rainfall, and an increase in extreme weather events such as floods, mudslides, and coastal erosion have disrupted lives, destroyed infrastructure, and undermined food and water systems. The country ranked 47th in the 2021 World Risk Index, reflecting high levels of exposure and low capacity to adapt to disasters. The National Adaptation Plan (NAP) highlights climate risks to agriculture, coastal zones, and water resources, and emphasizes the need for urgent adaptation interventions.

The consequences are already visible,

especially among young people living in informal settlements, flood-prone areas, or coastal zones. Their access to education, livelihoods, and health services is regularly disrupted by climate shocks. The climate crisis is deepening inequalities and placing

additional stress on an already fragile economic and social system. Addressing these realities requires inclusive climate governance, where young people are involved as contributors, co-creators, and watchdogs.

Importance of Youth Participation in the NDCs



Source: 3 2025/Wurie

Over 35% of Sierra Leone's population is youth aged 15-35 years old (Status of Youth Report, 2025). They are not only vulnerable to climate change but are also active in climate education, innovation, advocacy, and grassroots action. Excluding them from climate planning processes ignores their lived realities and risks missing practical, community-based solutions. Recent youth-led assessments, such as the UNICEF-supported Youth Led Action on Advocating

for Climate Education, confirm an increasing desire among young people to be involved in climate action, from school-level awareness campaigns to national dialogues on policy. Inclusion must go beyond consultation. Youth must have access to information, capacity-building opportunities, and formal roles in climate action and NDC planning, monitoring, and review. Their participation strengthens transparency, equity, and accountability.

3 METHODOLOGY AND FINDINGS

Data Collection Approach

This position paper draws on both primary and secondary sources. Primary data was generated through regional youth consultations, a national knowledge assessment survey and U-Report Poll. These sources were used to capture youth voices directly and ensure that their

experiences and priorities are reflected accurately. Secondary data from national climate policy documents and international guidance materials was used to align youth input with Sierra Leone's existing climate commitments and to assess where youth perspectives are currently included.

Findings



Source: 4 YCC, YICA/2025 (Regional Consultations)

Youth Consultation- Dialogues and Sessions

This position paper is informed by a series of regional youth consultations held in three regions Bo (southern region), Makeni (northern region), and Freetown (western region) in June 2025. Each session brought together young people aged 15 to 35 from diverse backgrounds, including students, youth-led organizations, informal workers, people with disabilities, and rural and urban

communities. The consultations were organized through an open call process in collaboration with youth networks and partners.

In each location, participants were divided into breakout groups around key thematic pillars of the NDCs: mitigation, adaptation, loss and damage, and means of implementation. Additional discussions were held on cross-cutting themes such as gender equality, climate justice, and

youth inclusion. Facilitators guided the sessions using open-ended questions designed to encourage critical thinking and real-life reflections. Participants brought out climate challenges within their communities and suggested actions for inclusion in the updated NDCs.

Raw inputs from the sessions were recorded manually and compiled into a master document. While these notes remain unedited, they provide a direct reflection of the concerns, experiences, and priorities of youth across the country. The consultation process also captured regional variations in vulnerability, such as coastal erosion in the Southern region, and Western Area, farming challenges in the Southern, Northern, and Eastern regions, and water stress in Western Area and Eastern Region.

Youth Insights- Online Survey and U-Report Poll

To assess young people's level of climate change awareness and understand their perspectives on the NDCs involvement, both an online survey and a U-Report poll was deployed and made accessible on various channels, including SMS and WhatsApp. These platforms provided complementary insights into both digitally connected youth and those in harder-to-reach communities, offering a better representation of youth understanding, experiences, and interest in climate action.

Climate Education

The online survey engaged 194 respondents aged 10–35 from across Sierra Leone. Three children and a total of 32 youth aged

24 years or younger participated. Most of the respondents were youth aged 25–30 years. Among adolescents, 66.6 reported receiving adequate climate education in school. However, this percentage declined among youth aged 17–24, with 44.8% reporting that their schools or universities provided enough environmental education. This suggests an educational gap during the transition from secondary to tertiary institutions, where environmental education may either be absent or de-emphasized.

Climate Actions

Participation in climate-related activities such as public dialogues, workshops, or school-based projects was reported by 38% of respondents aged 24 and below. The findings also revealed that a significant majority of respondents were unaware of the NDCs or had never heard the term. Nevertheless, interest in engagement was high, with 88.6% of all respondents sharing a desire to participate in national climate processes, including workshops, public awareness campaigns, and the NDC review. Climate change impacts were widely acknowledged, with flooding being the most reported issue, followed by drought, food insecurity, and coastal erosion. Adolescents particularly pointed to flooding and sea-level rise as the most pressing challenges affecting their communities.

The U-Report poll, deployed via SMS and WhatsApp in July 2025, attracted a total of 971 respondents from across Sierra Leone, out of a reach of 27,546. Respondents were predominantly male (76%) and mostly

between the ages of 20 and 30. Specifically, 12% Adolescents, 21% aged 20–24, 40% aged 25–30, and 22% aged 31–34.

Findings from the U-Report poll reinforced several trends observed in the online survey. Less than half of all respondents (48%) believed they received adequate education on climate change in their schools or universities, while 25% reported receiving insufficient education, and 27% indicated they were not currently in school. Climate-related activity participation stood at 46%, revealing that more than half of respondents had yet to be engaged in organized environmental initiatives. However, over 90% of participants want their voices to be heard and expressed interest in climate action, policy and NDC discussions.

Climate Impacts

When asked to identify the main climate-related challenges facing their communities, responses ranged from flooding and crop failure to heatwaves and environmental degradation. Many adolescents selected “all of the above” rather than choosing a specific impact. This may suggest a lack of contextual understanding or an acknowledgment that climate impacts are multidimensional

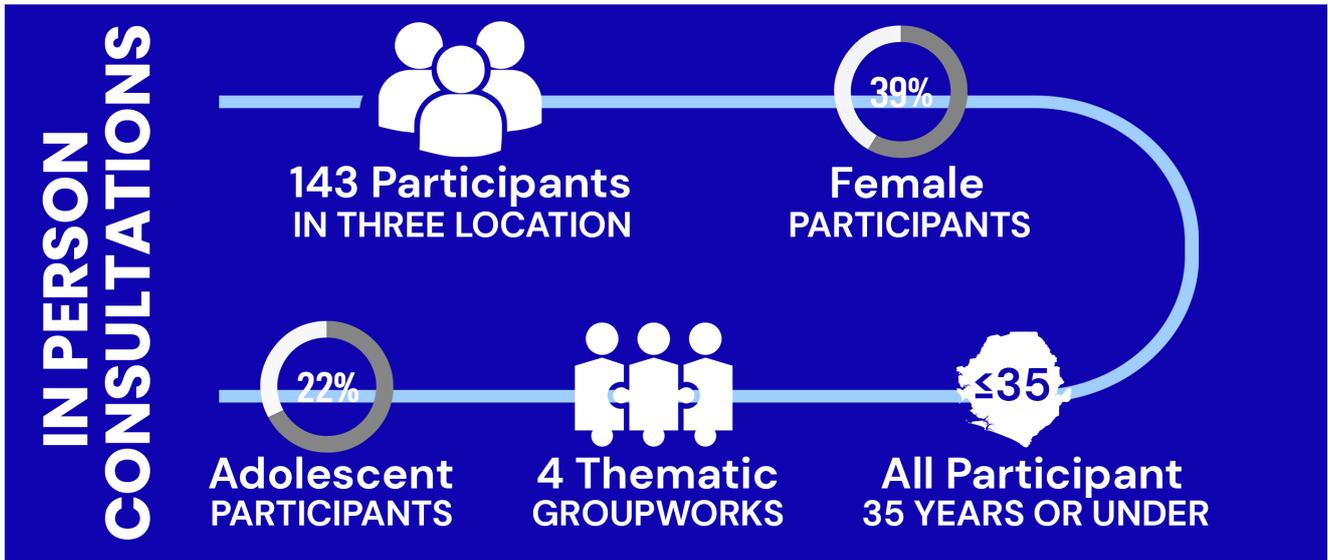
and interconnected.

Overall, the combined data from both surveys presents a clear message: young people in Sierra Leone are concerned about climate change and eager to contribute to national efforts. However, their capacity to do so is constrained by inadequate education, limited exposure to climate programming, and a lack of structured opportunities for participation.

Addressing these gaps is essential if youth are to be meaningfully involved in climate action and the development and implementation of the country's NDCs.

The survey shows a low level of awareness about the NDCs, but a high level of concern about climate-related issues such as flooding, extreme heat, and food insecurity. It also revealed a strong interest in participating in climate education and local adaptation efforts. Additional responses from UNICEF's U-Report platform were included in the analysis to complement the online survey and increase participation of marginalized groups in remote areas to strengthen representativeness. The results from UNICEF U-Report poll confirmed most of the trends in the online survey and consultations.

Key Data



UReport UNICEF

(900+ Young respondents)

48%

Respondents said their school/university provides enough education about the environment and climate change.

46%

Respondent have taken part in climate-related activities like school projects/workshops/sharing your views in public discussions.

93%

Respondent would like more opportunities to participate in Sierra Leones climate policy or NDC discussions.



4 YOUTH PERSPECTIVES ON NDC PILLARS

Mitigation Priorities

Young people across all three consultations expressed a strong interest in reducing emissions through practical and locally relevant actions. Many linked the worsening heatwaves, deforestation, and increasing energy costs to the need for cleaner energy and better environmental management.

Green Energy and Mobility

Participants consistently called for more investment in renewable energy, especially solar, at both the household and institutional levels. Youth both in the south and north of (Bo and Makeni) in Sierra Leone emphasized the need for solar installations in schools, hospitals, and community centers, citing unreliable electricity as a barrier to education and productivity. Some participants recommended youth-led energy cooperatives and rural electrification projects.

In transport, youth called for investment in non-motorized and low-emission transport, including cycling infrastructure and electric vehicles. They suggested government incentives to promote clean public transport, especially in congested cities like Freetown.



Source: 5 2025/Wurie

Waste Management

Waste was another major concern. Freetown participants highlighted the link between unmanaged waste, methane emissions, and environmental pollution. Young people proposed structured waste separation, composting, and plastic recycling systems, with support for youth enterprises in this sector. They also recommend nationwide awareness campaigns to reduce the use of single-use plastics and promote alternative materials.

Mitigation Priorities

Adaptation was the most frequently discussed area in all three regional consultations.

Agriculture and Farming

Participants described how heavy rainfall and rising temperatures have disrupted agriculture, and worsened health conditions. Young farmers in Bo, Makeni, and Kenema spoke of reduced yields and pest outbreaks due to changing seasons.

They proposed promoting climate-smart agriculture techniques, including composting, organic fertilizers, agroforestry, and the use of drought-resistant crops. Youth also recommended building climate information systems to provide farmers with weather forecasts and planting guidance.

Water Access and Flooding Control

In urban areas, adaptation priorities focused on improved drainage, flood control, and greening initiatives. Freetown youth stressed the need to restore natural buffers such as wetlands and tree cover, particularly in flood-prone informal settlements. Greening school compounds with trees and vegetable gardens was seen as both a mitigation and adaptation strategy.

Loss and Damage

Youth emphasized that many communities have not recovered from past disasters and lack the resources to prepare for future ones. They called for government support in disaster risk reduction, including early warning systems, emergency shelters, and relocation support for at-risk families.

Several participants also raised the emotional and psychological impacts of climate-related disasters, particularly on children and adolescents. They urged the inclusion of mental health support in post-disaster responses.

To address future loss and damage, youth suggested stronger enforcement of environmental laws, protection of high-risk areas from construction, and insurance schemes for farmers and informal workers.

Implementation

Young people widely recognized that achieving NDC goals requires more than ideas, it needs financing, skills, and partnerships. Participants strongly emphasized the need for youth-accessible climate finance, such as grant schemes, innovation funds, or community green enterprise programs. They argued that most funding opportunities are difficult for young people to access due to complicated processes and lack of awareness.

They also called for more capacity building opportunities in green skills, including solar installation, sustainable agriculture, and environmental monitoring. Youth in all regions stressed the need for practical, hands-on learning that can directly support employment and resilience.

Technology was identified as both a barrier and opportunity. Participants urged greater support for local innovation, including digital tools for farming, low-cost climate data systems, and platforms for sharing youth-led solutions. Many called for youth innovation hubs focused on climate action.

Young people also expressed a desire to engage directly with local councils, ministries, and development partners. They recommended that the NDC process include clear roles for youth in monitoring, evaluation, and implementation at both local and national levels.

Cross Cutting Issues

While the core pillars of mitigation, adaptation, loss and damage, and means of implementation shaped much of the discussion, young people also emphasized several cross-cutting issues that directly affect the fairness and impact of climate action in Sierra Leone. These reflect wider values and concerns that youth believe must be integrated into the NDC 3.0 process.

Gender Equality and Social Inclusion

Youth participants pointed out that climate change does not affect everyone equally. Girls and young women, persons with disabilities, and youth from rural and underserved areas often face greater obstacles in accessing education, resources, and decision-making spaces. These existing inequalities are made worse by the effects of climate change. Participants recommended that national policies and programs be both inclusive and gender-responsive, addressing different vulnerabilities and levels of access. They called for targeted support to young women in sectors like green entrepreneurship, farming, and clean energy, and for outreach to youth with disabilities and those living in hard-to-reach communities.

Climate Justice and Intergenerational Equity

Participants frequently expressed frustration over the injustice of climate change, where those least responsible for emissions often suffer the most. They called for climate justice to be a guiding principle in Sierra Leone's climate policies, including support for communities displaced by floods and landslides, fair access to adaptation resources, and accountability for pollution and environmental damage. Youth also stressed the importance of intergenerational equity, urging leaders to adopt long-term thinking that prioritizes resilience, biodiversity, and the responsible use of natural resources for the benefit of future generations.

Just Transition and Green Jobs for Youth

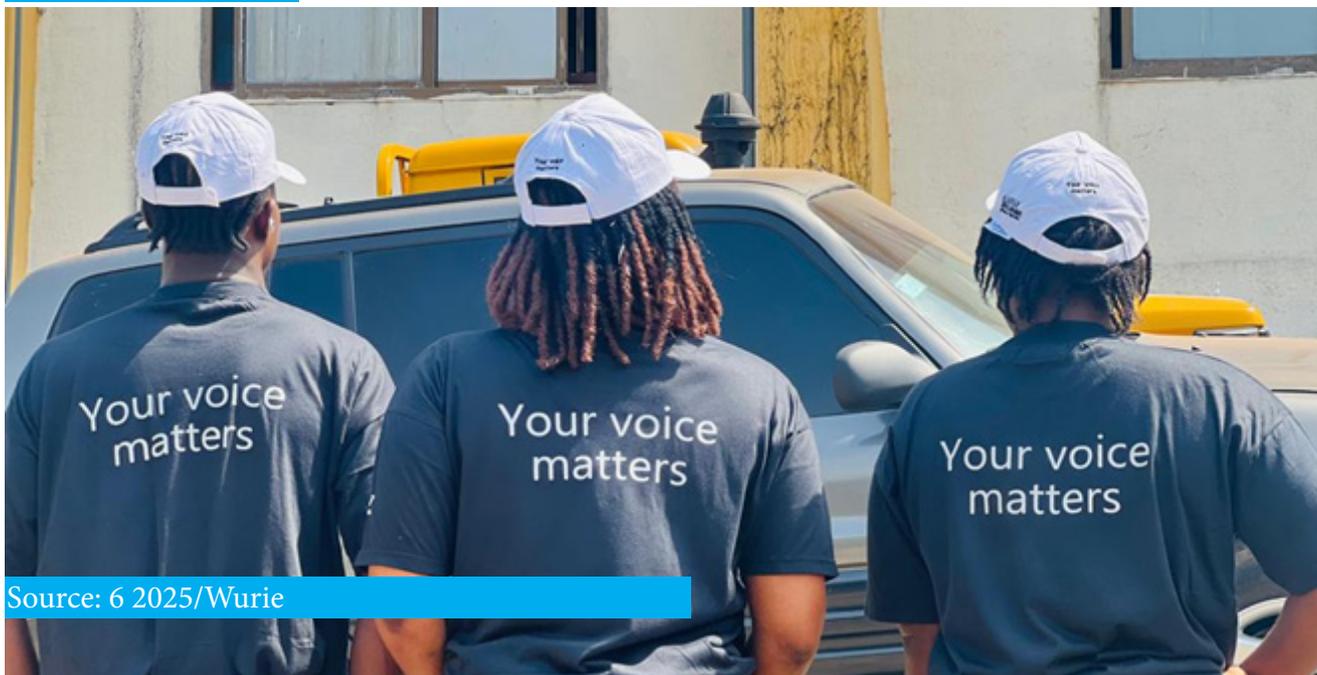
High levels of unemployment and underemployment among young people were raised in all consultations. Participants noted that while climate action can open new economic opportunities, current policies often fail to connect with the realities of youth livelihoods. They recommended a transition approach that includes technical training, business support, and investment in youth-led green innovation. A national green jobs strategy was

proposed to align climate goals with inclusive economic development and employment for young people.

Nature-Based Solutions and Ecosystem Restoration

Youth strongly supported restoring and protecting ecosystems as part of climate action. They proposed youth-led tree planting, better enforcement of environmental laws, and investment in nature-based solutions that create income, build resilience, and reconnect communities with the land.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO GOVERNMENT & STAKEHOLDERS



Source: 6 2025/Wurie

Young people across Sierra Leone are calling for deeper inclusion, stronger accountability, and more practical support in the country's climate response. Their recommendations, drawn from consultations and surveys, focus on creating lasting change for communities. The following are key recommendations for national and local authorities, development partners, and other stakeholders:

PARTICIPATION

Ensure Youth Participation, Engagement and Social Equity in Climate Efforts

1. Institutionalize youth participation in all levels of climate governance, from local councils to national ministries and international representation.
2. Appoint youth representatives to serve national climate bodies, technical working groups, and advisory panels related to NDCs, adaptation planning, disaster risk reduction, and energy transitions.

3. Create or adopt formal mechanisms for regular engagement between youth networks and government agencies, such as youth climate councils or advisory bodies
4. Involve youth in community vulnerability assessments and local adaptation planning, especially in flood-prone, coastal, and agricultural areas.
5. Ensure that youth from marginalized groups, including girls and young women, rural youth, and persons with disabilities, are actively involved and represented.
6. Include commitments to gender equality, intergenerational equity, and climate justice as guiding principles across all NDC pillars
7. Monitor and report on the distribution of climate resources to avoid reinforcing inequalities.

EDUCATION

Strengthen Climate Education, Awareness

and Skill Development

1. Integrate climate change and environmental education into school curricula at all levels, with a focus on practical, locally relevant knowledge.
2. Conduct public education campaigns targeting youth and communities using local languages, radio, and social media.
3. Support youth-led climate clubs and awareness programs in schools and universities.
4. Expand green skills training programs for youth in areas like solar installation, sustainable agriculture, ecotourism, forestry, and circular economy.
5. Incorporate climate adaptation and mitigation priorities into youth employment strategies and national job creation plans.
6. Support incubation hubs and technical centers focused on green enterprise and climate services.
7. Support capacity-building for youth organizations to meaningfully engage in policy processes, monitor implementation, and contribute to climate reporting.

FINANCE

Support Youth-Led Climate Solutions

1. Establish dedicated climate finance windows accessible to youth-led organizations and entrepreneurs.
2. Launch national and district-level grant competitions or innovation funds for youth climate projects in areas such as solar energy, waste management, and agroecology.
3. Provide mentorship, technical support, and access to markets for young climate innovators.
4. Fund community-based adaptation projects that engage youth in afforestation, early warning systems, and disaster preparedness.

These recommendations are practical actions that reflect the urgency of the climate crisis and the readiness of Sierra Leonean youth to contribute meaningfully. Including these in Sierra Leone's updated NDCs will make the country's future climate plans not only more inclusive but also more sustainable, because youth voices matter and we are the future.

Nothing for us, without us!.....

ANNEX

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