



## **Children, Youth and Climate Change: Realities and Lessons Learned**

### *Background note*

Perhaps the greatest crisis facing humankind in the contemporary world is the threat of climate change. Of the various segments of society that are adversely impacted by this crisis, children and youth are the most vulnerable. They have little or no voice of their own in decision making processes that affect their well-being and often receive very little attention from those who draft policies related to climate change or even development itself. This despite the fact that they will be the ones to live most years of their lives in a world altered by the ominous consequences of this crisis.

This neglect of children is not new. Most policy and institutional frameworks fail to regard the impact of policies, programs and legislations on development for children as a separate and unique category among vulnerable populations. Where policies are made about the interests and well-being of children, they tend to be paternalistic and lack a perspective that takes into consideration the capacities and potential of children.

Children are the most precious treasure a community possesses and in them are the seeds of the future of society. They are a trust of society which no generation can afford to neglect. The interests and well-being of children must thus be made a fixed criteria that all development policies, plans and programs must be required to meet. Further, rather than treating children paternalistically by considering them lacking in maturity or understanding, a spirit of adult behaviour must be shown to them where their capacities to understand profound issues, contribute their perspective on serious issues and take responsibility for addressing issues as a member of society is recognized and fostered. Yet, the questions remain of how this profound change in thinking and behaviour will come about in relation to children? How can the plight and dangers facing children be not only made visible but also foregrounded in all analysis of impacts of crises such as climate change on vulnerable populations? How can their capacities to be proactive participants in addressing challenges be recognized and fostered without imperilling their particular developmental needs as children?

The effects of Climate Change directly impacts the lives and future of 1.8 billion young people around the world. Youth are amongst the major victims of the climate crisis which is leaving an uncertain future with high carbon emissions and less access to the resources young people are increasingly aware of the challenges and risks associated with it. In this current context young people are left behind and not given equal opportunities and spaces for participation at all levels to raise their concerns. However, young people have shown the power of action through mobilization around the world and are demanding for Climate Action as the need of the hour. Sustainable development seeks for innovative approaches and ideas and young people are the valuable contributors to Climate Action.

In order to open a space for a deeper exploration of these questions in the context of climate change, YWCA of India, India Alliance for Child Rights and Bahá'í Office of Public Affairs are organizing a symposium with development practitioners, policy makers, academics, educationists, children and parents.

The symposium intend to explore the issue of children, youth and climate change through the following themes:

- Children and Youth as Protagonists of Change
- Towards Climate Justice and Hope for an Inclusive and Sustainable Future
- Children, Youth, Community and Climate Change – Finding the Nexus in policy making
- Climate Change and Migration – The Impact on Children and Youth