

# Empowering youth meaningful participation in climate action

AAYUSH DWIVEDI AND THE VOLUNTĀS FOUNDATION



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The Voluntās Foundation conducts global research on youth meaningfulness and engagement, exploring what drives a sense of purpose in young people's lives. In addition, the foundation provides fellowship support to individuals pursuing initiatives that are personally meaningful and contribute to broader societal understanding. As part of this commitment, the foundation sponsored Aayush Dwivedi to attend COP 29. Aayush, a student at the Tata Institute of Social Science (TISS), is deeply engaged in climate action and youth advocacy.

In a world increasingly shaped by climate challenges, youth engagement in climate action is not merely a symbol of hope but an imperative of survival and resilience. This generation inherits an endangered planet yet holds the potential for innovative solutions and transformative change.

This article reflects Aayush's personal experience, illustrating the critical need to empower youth in political participation and ensure their voices are heard in global climate action forums.

Supporting young leaders like Aayush is not just an investment in their future—it is an investment in the future of our planet.

*"Reflecting on my journey, especially my experience at COP29, where I had the privilege of representing South Asia and the Voluntās Foundation, I am more convinced than ever of the transformative power that youth participation holds in creating a sustainable future."*

## Meaningfulness in Youth Participation

The significance of youth involvement in climate action lies in the outcomes and the process itself. Youth engagement in decision-making can generate a sense of resilience, purpose, and ownership—qualities essential to navigating the challenges of the 21st century. As highlighted in the Voluntās Foundation's Global Meaningfulness Index, when youth are meaningfully engaged, they foster a deeper connection to the cause, fueling collective energy.

"At COP29, this ethos was visible in the official inclusion of youth within the COP presidency statement and the establishment of the UN Youth Office."

Participation in such global platforms is an opportunity for representation and a life-shaping experience. Engaging in these discussions is not simply about representing

youth voices but empowering youth to become agents of change.

"One moment that remains etched in my memory was a bilateral meeting where financial reparations for vulnerable nations were discussed in depth. Sitting across from diplomats and policymakers, I realized the immense responsibility youth advocates carry—not only in raising concerns but in shaping the discourse on climate justice. The discussion was intense, yet there was a palpable respect for youth perspectives. I distinctly recall a Bangladeshi delegate, a veteran in climate diplomacy, acknowledging my arguments on the disproportionate impacts of climate change on marginalized communities. He said, "Your insights remind us why we are fighting this battle." That moment encapsulated the significance of youth in global climate discussions."

For many, COP29 was not just a diplomatic summit but a profound chapter in their

development as a climate advocate. Youth representatives found themselves at the intersection of passionate activist voices and seasoned policy experts. They had the chance to be deeply involved in bilateral negotiations with global stakeholders from diverse regions. Such experiences also reinforced the importance of equipping young researchers with platforms to share their findings, ensuring they translate into meaningful policy interventions.

*“My educational pursuits in Environment, Climate Change, and Sustainability Studies have always been guided by a commitment to implementing tangible, impactful change.*

*My ongoing research on urban flooding in Assam and West Bengal exemplifies this commitment. By modelling flood damage trends and analyzing contributing factors such as rapid urbanization, population growth, and shifting climatic patterns, my work seeks to inform localized, actionable strategies that can help mitigate future risks.*

*These insights became essential to my advocacy at COP29, where I called for policies integrating community-driven adaptation strategies into flood-prone urban zones. For instance, I advocated for including flood-resilient infrastructure in vulnerable zones.*

*This recommendation*

*gained traction with several policymakers, who expressed interest in adapting it to their local contexts.”*

## Lessons Learned: The Broader Implications

COP29 was a platform for youth participation and a vital space for reflection on how youth perspectives can be more deeply embedded in climate action. Moving forward, it is key to embed some critical lessons that are foundational for advancing youth involvement and shaping climate solutions:

### 1. Structured Platforms for Meaningful Participation:

Youth must be provided with formalized, accessible, and inclusive platforms at every decision-making level—local, national, and international. It is not enough for young people to sit at the table; their voices must be heard, valued, and integrated into developing policies shaping their future. Creating diverse avenues for youth to influence the process is essential, from youth councils to advisory roles within governmental bodies and international negotiations.

### 2. Capacity Building for Leadership and Advocacy:

To truly empower youth in climate action, we must invest in programs that build their capacity to advocate, lead, and drive change. Training initiatives, mentorship programs, and access to decision-makers and policymakers are crucial in helping young advocates develop the expertise to influence policy and lead community-driven solutions. This includes enhancing their knowledge of climate science, the intricacies of international negotiations, and practical solutions such as sustainable development strategies. Equipped with these tools,

youth can bring about real, impactful change.

### 3. Breaking Down Barriers and Addressing Inequities:

Climate change disproportionately impacts marginalized communities, and youth from these communities often face additional barriers to participation in global discussions. To ensure that youth engagement is inclusive and representative, it is essential to break down these economic, social, or cultural barriers. Special attention must be given to amplifying the voices of young people from the Global South, indigenous communities, and vulnerable regions, ensuring that climate solutions are equitable and just. Providing support and access to youth from these backgrounds can create a more diverse, dynamic, and impactful climate movement.

### 4. Intergenerational Collaboration and Knowledge Sharing:

One of the true power of youth is in the ability to build bridges between generations. Youth bring fresh perspectives, innovative ideas, and urgency to climate action, but they must also be able to learn from the experiences and wisdom of older generations. Creating spaces for intergenerational dialogue allows for sharing knowledge, skills, and strategies that can refine climate solutions and accelerate progress. This collaborative approach can enhance the capacity of young people to understand complex systems while empowering older generations to embrace new ideas and approaches to tackling climate change.

### 5. Long-Term Commitment to Youth Empowerment:

Youth participation in climate action cannot be a one-off event. It must be part of a long-term commitment to creating inclusive, sustainable, and resilient systems for youth leadership. The true value of youth engagement lies in its continuity. Efforts to support and elevate youth voices must be sustained over time, with investments in infrastructure, education, and institutional change that prioritize youth involvement as a permanent fixture in climate governance.

### 6. Empowering Youth as Innovators and Entrepreneurs:

Youth are not just advocates for climate action but innovators and entrepreneurs who can design and implement practical, local solutions to climate challenges. By fostering an environment that supports youth entrepreneurship, innovation, and technological development, we can unlock new possibilities for sustainable development. Young people are uniquely positioned to think outside the box and create solutions that are scalable, cost-effective, and adaptable to diverse communities. Supporting youth-driven innovation will be critical to addressing the multifaceted challenges of climate change.







Aayush Dwivedi and the Voluntās Foundation

# A call to action

As the world grapples with environmental degradation and social inequality, youth leadership in shaping a sustainable future has never been more crucial. Governments, institutions, and organizations must prioritize youth engagement—not as a symbolic gesture, but as a core principle of decision-making. Youth are not passive recipients of climate policies; they are visionaries, architects, and relentless changemakers working toward a resilient and sustainable future.

*“My journey has shown that when young people are empowered to lead, they infuse movements with energy, innovation, and an unshakable commitment to change. We are not just future leaders—we are today’s leaders, shaping the policies, solutions, and systems that will define tomorrow’s world.”*

The challenges ahead are daunting, but not insurmountable. Climate change is an existential crisis that requires collective action from all sectors of society. A world

where youth are empowered to drive climate solutions, where their voices are heard with respect and urgency, and where every action—no matter how small—contributes to collective change is not just a vision but a necessity. It is youth—empowered, educated, and equipped with advocacy and leadership skills—who will propel us forward. Our planet’s future depends on their innovation, passion, and drive.

Together, we have the opportunity to redefine progress, and leave behind a world that values sustainability, equity, and resilience. Climate action is not a burden—it is a shared responsibility that unites us all. With youth leading the charge, we can build a brighter, more sustainable future—one that honors the planet, its people, and generations to come.

