

Lessons from Maharashtra, India on Youth-Led Action towards Climate Advocacy and Policy

Maha Youth for Climate Action (MYCA) training workshop on climate advocacy planning with the Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA).

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Context

In the last decade, Maharashtra State - the economic “capital” of India - has witnessed a 7-fold increase of drought and 6-fold increase of floods and cyclones, resulting in loss of life, crop loss, relocation and disruption of essential basic services like nutrition, health, education, and water and sanitation services. Compounded indirect impact also leads to limited access to market cash/finance, disruption in schooling, increased incidences of child labor, social and mental stresses, distress migration and most importantly breakdown in social structure and system.

Climate risks undo all the gains achieved over the years on child survival, development, environment, protection and learning. Youth constitute more than 50% of Maharashtra’s population below 40 years old. Despite the uncertainty of their future survival, growth, skilling and overall development, young people do not have a say in the policies related to Climate Change. With Maha Youth for Climate Action (MYCA), UNICEF has reached 350 young people (15 to 29, 45% female), online (150) and face-to-face (200), to represent populations most vulnerable to extreme climate across Maharashtra state, India.

Adolescents plan, report and advocate for climate action in India

Programme Approach

UNICEF’s Youth-led Action against Climate Change Programme (YACC) supports young climate change advocates to influence national and sub-national climate change related policies. In each country, UNICEF hires a young coordinator responsible for creating a coordination unit among youth organizations and individuals who are active in advocacy on climate change and implement plans to influence policies. Plans are developed along a four-step journey: Awareness, Advocacy, Policy negotiation and Strengthening of youth led movement.

This case study describes results achieved by UNICEF in India’s Maharashtra state on Awareness and Advocacy by a youth led movement called Maha Youth for Climate Action (MYCA). MYCA is a programme in partnership with UNICEF Maharashtra and Centre for Environment Education for youth advocates (15-29 years old). The programme provides three levels of training in climate action planning, climate action reporting, and climate advocacy and policy, followed by self-paced training modules on climate advocacy.

MYCA 3-Level Trainings

Level 1: Climate Action Planning

- ▶ Workshop-led presentations at district level on climate change impacts and challenges; waste management, circular economy and water conservation
- ▶ Climate action plans made by youth in their local community groups or individually

Level 2: Climate Action Reporting

- ▶ Youth present the implementation of their climate action plans at district level to their other peers
- ▶ Documenting journeys of advocacy, awareness, and policy implications of ground level actions
- ▶ Sharing localised actions on social media to amplify and motivate youth-led actions

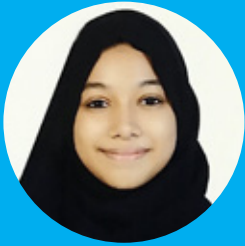
Level 3: Climate Advocacy and Policy

- ▶ Training workshop on policy negotiation, understanding government administration systems and climate related policy schemes
- ▶ District and/or state parliamentarian to create interface between policymakers and youth



“ It’s important to know we are all in this together. In MYCA, we are part of a nurturing community in this climate journey.”

— Ayadi, age 23, Maha Youth Climate Action (MYCA) youth advocate, Mumbai



“ I got to know a lot about climate through MYCA, I really enjoyed the company of youth like me who are also interested to take climate actions.”

— Anum, age 16, Maha Youth Climate Action (MYCA) youth advocate, Mumbai

Resources

- ▶ Majhi Vasundhara Curriculum on climate change for student textbooks: [MVA_Book_1_1st to 4th Standard_210914_A](#) and [MVA_Book-2_Main_V-VIII Std_210914_G](#)
- ▶ [Maha Youth for Climate Action \(MYCA\) Instagram](#)
- ▶ [Workshop recaps: one, two and three](#)

Contacts

Fabio Friscia, ADAP NYHQ
Yusuf Kabir, WASH-CCED India

Written by: Priyanka Shendage
Edited by: Jason Gonzalez

Awareness and Advocacy

Mentorship. Since April 2022, weekly online sessions have been conducted to support youth advocates with their queries, fine-tuning climate solutions and connecting fellow advocates for crosslearning. The sessions help build the advocates’ communication skills to speak up for climate action. To accelerate climate actions, UNICEF will support MYCA Fellowships which will enable outstanding advocates to undertake green climate actions in their field. The MYCA Fellows will receive a stipend and a mentor to help strengthen green skilling and incentivize long-term youth engagement.

Climate Action Planning. For youth to engage effectively in Awareness and Advocacy, capacity building on planning is a critical component to empower youth. Since August 2022, five district level workshops are being conducted with 250 young people across four locations in the state. The workshops aim to build young people’s awareness and knowledge of climate science and local issues of waste management and water conservation, empowering participants to plan their climate advocacy campaign in their locality.

Examples of climate action plans designed by youth:

- ▶ Planting saplings of *Sonneratia alba* species of mangroves at riverbank and creeks which are always affected by cyclone;
- ▶ Constructing soak and leach pits to recharge ground water through grey water management in water stressed areas;
- ▶ Advocacy at the local level by involving local government representatives for waste management and circular economy to reduce the quantity of wastes going to landfill; and
- ▶ Reducing tap-water flowrate at the household level to encourage water stewardship.

Climate Advocacy. UNICEF supported ten MYCA youth members’ participation in Local Conference of Youth (LCOY) India 2022 along with 110 national youth delegates from 23-25 September 2022. The conference participants drafted a national youth statement to be submitted to the COY17 (Conference of Youth) – the biggest and most substantial youth conference related to the multilateral UN climate processes – and later to the COP Presidency at COP27 in the form of a Global Youth Statement

Results

- ▶ Successful advocacy led to the integration of climate action and environment lesson plans for 1st and 2nd grade curriculums covering 65,000 primary schools at the State level, and plans to build capacity of 100 master trainers and 10,000 schoolteachers through related trainings.
- ▶ Four Young Scholars have been selected as part of the COP27 Young Scholar Award, including one scholar, Prachi Shevgaonkar, who is part of the Level 3 Cohort of Maha Youth for Climate Action (MYCA). Prachi developed an app called Cool the Globe, which measures how much greenhouse gas emissions are saved by taking different climate actions.
- ▶ The work of MYCA has been reflected in the India COY17 Youth Statement for COP27.
- ▶ Learnings from the MYCA platform led to a youth engagement and stewardship initiative spanning 700,000 young people who, in the next 3 years, will be engaged in low touch action and in reporting on water conservation.

Key lessons

- ▶ **‘Glocal’ from Local to Global.** It is critical to share the lessons learnt from local actions to inform and inspire global advocacy, as UNICEF did through supporting young advocates on their journey from local COY to COY27 and COP27.
- ▶ **Mechanism for policy negotiations.** Government institutions need formal mechanisms to interact with youth on climate agenda work. The MYCA programme leverages “Youth Parliamentarian” as a platform to empower youth to provide inputs to policymakers and decisionmaking bodies.
- ▶ **Building leadership from diverse socio-economic backgrounds.** By collaborating with established youth groups in rural areas, UNICEF reached young people from diverse backgrounds, different agroclimatic zones and created a mechanism for knowledge sharing between youth experiencing the worst forms of climate change impacts with limited access to climate science and opportunities to work on solutions.
- ▶ **Connecting climate experts and young people.** Young MYCA members have presented innovative climate solutions and technologies (e.g. bioplastics) to tackle various issues. UNICEF has a role to play in connecting young people with climate change experts to help accelerate the scaleup of innovative solutions.