

UNICEF EDUCATION

Education Case Study

MONGOLIA

Youth act against climate and air pollution impacts

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Air pollution is the world's leading environmental cause of illness and premature death. It comes from the same sources that drive climate change, exacerbating the triple planetary crisis of climate change, nature and biodiversity loss, and pollution and waste. Young people in Mongolia understand that we need to tackle air pollution and climate change jointly to protect their health and future. If air pollution levels in the capital city of Ulaanbaatar, where approximately half of the country's population lives, do not decrease in the next few years, [the financial cost of treating air pollution related diseases in children will increase 33 per cent by 2025](#). This means that the public health systems will face an additional cost of MNT 4.8 billion (just over US \$2 million) per year 2025. Urgent action is needed and young people have responded to the call, engaging in evidence-based climate action with UNICEF's support.

[Young people](#) are using citizen-science research to investigate how air pollution affects them and to take a leading role in educating and mobilising local action. UNICEF Mongolia partnered with the Scout Association of Mongolia to pilot two programmes: the Air Pollution Youth Mappers Programme and Youth Fight Air Pollution. The Smog-Free Bayankhongor Action Plan supported the training of young people to measure and monitor air pollution, as well as engage in social campaigns (such as social media posts, blogs, posts on UNICEF's '[Voices of Youth](#)' platform and school events) to increase awareness on the impact of air pollution on children's health, development, and education. The campaigns included maps of the most polluted areas in the community.

In 2019, UNICEF and the Scout Association of Mongolia used the knowledge gained from these two pilot programmes to launch the [Youth for Climate and Clean Air Network \(YOUCCAN\)](#). The specific objectives are to:

- Reduce children and adolescents' exposure to air and climate pollutants and improve air quality to address the disproportionate adverse effects of air pollution on them. This will support their health,

development, learning, protection, participation, psychosocial wellbeing and overall wellbeing.

- Implement programming and advocacy efforts that are driven by adolescents to reduce air pollution and promote positive developmental, health, environmental and climate outcomes for adolescents and the wider society.

Young people in YOUCCAN measured air pollution levels with monitoring devices and used this information to develop and disseminate awareness messages and resources for their peers, teachers and parents. This included data about air quality levels, the sources and impact of air pollution on maternal and child health and good practices for combating air pollution in their communities.

RESULTS

- To date, the UNICEF-supported YOUCCAN network has engaged over 60,000 young people to disseminate information on climate change and air pollution, reaching 1,015,250 people and youth across 11,600 kilometres in Mongolia through their social messages and campaigns.
- Just from September to December 2021, about 3,250 children participated in these youth-led actions, exemplifying that speed and scale are possible when young people come together to act collectively on behalf of the environment.
- In November 2020, the SDGs Sub-standing Committee of Parliament of Mongolia and UNICEF jointly initiated the [Teen Parliament project](#), under YOUCCAN, to create a platform for adolescents to learn, speak and act on climate and environmental issues. To date, the Teen Parliament has directly brought together and trained 180 adolescents aged 15-17 years as drivers of change and influencers on climate change and education. After completing the training, the students go back to their schools and communities and generously

share their new knowledge, benefitting over 15,800 children and adolescents so far, with plans to reach 90,000 through ongoing peer advocacy.

LESSONS LEARNED

- **To reach the most remote areas, team up with local partners.** By partnering with the Scouts Association of Mongolia, which has branches in every school in the country, UNICEF found an entry point in places that are hard to reach and where some of the most vulnerable children live.
- **Youth-focused and youth-led organisations must be empowered and capacitated.** Already, 14 organisations and schools have joined YOUCCAN, but they need skill sets, training, tools and other resources to lead children's activities in their communities and schools.
- **Green entrepreneurship can fight against air pollution and the negative impacts of climate change.** By learning about green entrepreneurship, young people can drive a culture of sustainable consumption and create more opportunities in the circular economy. Young people add creativity and innovation in the space, contributing to their local contexts and positively influencing their friends, parents and neighbours toward greener lifestyles.

NEXT STEPS

In the coming five years, UNICEF, together with Scout Association of Mongolia, will be experimenting with ways to integrate youth green entrepreneurship, climate adaptation, greening the school, disaster risk reduction and biodiversity conservation into the YOUCCAN programme. In 2023, UNICEF is developing quarterly themes that will engage young people around environmental health issues such as using sustainable construction materials in schools, reducing consumption and waste and switching to energy efficient and clean solutions.

Cost effectiveness: From 2021 to date, UNICEF Mongolia has invested about US \$300,000 in YOUCCAN, supporting 3,250 young people to measure and monitor air pollution. This work has helped educate their peers and communities about ways to stay safe from toxic air, act on the ground and influence policy decisions to reach 1,015,250 people.

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