**#CovidUnder19 Submission to the Committee on the Rights of the Child in response to the consultation on General Comment 26 on Children’s right to a healthy environment with a focus on climate change**

***“[****We] are captives of a civilizational system that more or les compels (us) to go on destroying the world in order to live*”- Daniel Quinn, Ismael

**“***Children are the least responsible for climate change, but they pay the highest price*.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

**Intro**

This submission was prepared by [#CovidUnder19](https://www.tdh.ch/en/projects/covidunder19), an intergenerational initiative supporting global child-led, child rights advocacy in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. This submission presents the analysis of data collected on 3rd February during a virtual focus group discussion (FGD) that involved 5 boys, 4 girls and 1 child who did not share their gender, which co-facilitated by 2 young men and 2 young women (aged 18-20 years old) in their capacity as #CovidUnder19 peer mentors.

The FGD was conducted using the [General Comment 26 Toolkit](https://childrightsenvironment.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Childrens-Second-Consultation-Toolkit.pdf) methodology, specifically the questions in Activity 2 and Activity 3. The raw data from that consultation was submitted through the GC26 online reporting form. This submission presents an interpretation of that data by the peer mentors with contributions of a supporting adult. It draws out common themes that emerged in discussions during Activity 2 (on the right to education and the right to information) and Activity 3 (seeking remedy, accountability and the right to be heard and the right to freedom of expression).

**Problems**

In the group’s discussions about the rights to information, to education, to be heard and to freedom of expression, the overarching theme that emerged was **the lack of an enabling environment for children to constructively learn about the climate crisis and use this learning to take action**. Children highlighted the different ways in which current models for educating and informing children and meaningfully engaging them in policy processes are, at best, fragmented and inadequate, and, at worst, do harm.

With respect to education and information, children said that curricula around climate change were often very technical and problem-focused, leaving them with feelings of helplessness and anxiety.

“*As a child, when I first heard about climate change, I thought I was going to die in a year*.” – 15 year old girl, Bangladesh

“*If [climate change] is taught in a wrong way, it can cause eco-anxiety*”

‘*We know that climate change exists, but we don't know what to do about it’*

*“Being told all the time that we are suffering and that the environment is damaged does help us to advocate so that we can solve this problem*”

*“Children don't know that it is their right to live in a clean healthy environment*”

With respect to participation rights, children were also critical of the way in which adults in positions of power did not provide them with an enabling environment to have their views heard and given due weight, as per Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This included inadequate investment by governments in mechanisms and structures that could support children in taking climate action.

"*When it comes to climate change, children are not involved in decision-making. Adults think that this is 'too big' for them to be involved*."

“*We feel heard and noticed by international organisations (like this one), but not by governments when they take decisions*”

“*Not enough funding dedicated to climate change. Governments know that they need to work in many areas, but they are not working holistically and sustainably*”

Finally, children also highlighted concerns around inequity and discrimination, for example in the way that information about climate change was less likely to reach ‘marginalised’ communities, who are often at the forefront of environmental degradation.

“*Climate hazards and social inequalities are woven together; why is this point not shared? Why is interactive climate education only provided to the elite? This has to change* »

“*Climate change [is] related to social inequalities particular to communities. Disproportionate impact of climate change is less talked about*”

**Solutions**

In the face of these challenged, children advocated for a holistic approach by governments. This involved shifting the paradigm around children’s engagement in climate action towards a recognition of climate action as a ‘common good’ and should be seen as an investment for future generations.

*“[Governments should]* *Incentivise climate action- a part of grade dependent on climate education. Having 'climate stories'- stories of experiences of children”*

*“Government should fund child club, networks, children's group, encouraging them to advocate and contribute to climate change*”

*“Government funds should be allocated to this awareness”*

*“ [Governments should] invite children to come and work with them. If you miss school, we will not make this a problem”*

*“Participation of children in policy-making. 'Whom to ask for their best interest but children?'. Including children in these conversation intergenerationally »*

Children also identified key components of what a safe and supportive environment for enabling children’s right to freedom of expression should look like:

“*Governments should not promote violence or abuse against children, even if children express views that are critical of the government”*

*“Any form of violence, abuse and harm that may arise during the expression of children's views and standing up for their rights should be completely [unaccepted]”*

*“Governments should protect children from harm when they express their views*”

“*Child-centred organisations should work in liaison with the UN so that complaints by children can be handled by those that have experience*”

“*Sensitive information about children should remain anonymous*”

“*Child safeguarding and child-friendly approaches*”

Moreover, children identified climate education as a key component of creating an enabling environment for actions to counter environmental degradation and counteract climate change. They particularly emphasized the importance of rights-based climate education with a focus on resilience. Specifically, children felt that this should include :

* + Reinforcing hope-based narratives

“*If we always talk about the problems, it can be quite overwhelming. So we need to talk about solutions. Like how the earth can heal*” – 17 year old boy, India

“*Speaking about how earth is beautiful, nature is beautiful : solutions-focused! This can reduce eco-anxiety* »

« *Environmental studies in school level curriculum should be available. Practical efforts should be made by the school administration and students themselves to protect environment; may be plantation campaigns, cleanliness programs, a class per week on disaster risk management and environment protection*."

* + Focusing equity and leveraging popular and creative methods

“*Designated days for reaching out to marginalised communities to spread awareness about climate change*”

*“Inform the people in the grassroots about the role of businesses and government in protecting the environment”*

*“Use of mass media- TVs to spread child-friendly information on Children's right to a healthy environment”*

* + Mentoring and support by adults using interactive, action-oriented learning :

*“[We need] drama, campaigns, clubs in schools for education on climate change*”

*“Teachers can engage their student by creating dialogues, by making comics, cards which can be fun and engaging way for children to learn about this”*

*“It is important for individuals to take steps to manage their well-being, such as limiting exposure to media that causes distress and engaging in activities that bring a sense of purpose, and hope*.”

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, we are very appreciative that the Committee has gone to such significant efforts to meaningfully involved children in the drafting of General Comment 26. We hope that our views can contribute to finalizing General Comment 26 and to supporting its dissemination as widely as possible, so that it can fulfill our expectations of being a solid framework to shape Governments’ and businesses’ actions on children’s rights and the environment.

1. Tdh & SRSGVAC (2022) [Our right to a safe and healthy world free from violence](https://www.tdh.ch/en/media-library/videos/our-right-safe-healthy-world-free-violence) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)