

TRANSFORMATIVE CLIMATE EDUCATION

*Harnessing the transformative power of education
to create knowledge, agency and practices
to respond to the climate crisis*



OXFAM

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This paper outlines Oxfam’s approach to Transformative Climate Education.



COVER PHOTO:
Two school children in northern Ghana.
Photo: Hans Bach.

CLIMATE JUSTICE & TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATION

Extreme weather and other derived effects of the climate crisis increasingly threaten livelihoods and living conditions around the globe. The effects of climate change and climate disasters are already being felt in schools and in the wider education system.

These effects will grow dramatically as the climate crisis intensifies.

Although these effects are felt globally, they disproportionately affect the poorest and most marginalised people who are generally part of the communities who historically have contributed the least to the climate crisis and who have the least resources to prevent, mitigate and adapt to the effects of the changing climate.

Climate change holds back millions of children and young people from completing their education, especially the most marginalised, including girls. Schools in poorer areas are often located on cheap land

e.g. land prone to flooding or drought. At the same time, the climate crisis adds pressure on education systems through increased forced migration, urbanisation processes, increasing poverty etc. Many of the processes of marginalisation intersect and take different forms in different contexts: a girl in a community threatened by climate change will not face identical challenges to those of a boy in a refugee camp.

Although education systems are affected negatively by the climate crisis, they can be a source of positive change and transformation. Transformative Climate Education is a key pillar in enabling the current and next generations to learn about the importance of our climate and environment, how to live more sustainable lives and how to organise for change. If education systems are to fulfil this crucial role, political will is needed to ensure adequate investment, accountability processes, support for teachers, and space for student activism.



SDG 4: QUALITY EDUCATION

SDG 4.7: Ensure all learners acquire knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including among others through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development.



SDG 13: CLIMATE ACTION

SDG 13.3: Improve education, awareness-raising and human and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning.



KENYA:
Gladys and her class mate.
PHOTO: HANS BACH.

CLIMATE JUSTICE

Increasingly, land becomes uninhabitable and uncultivable due to e.g. droughts, floodings, or conflicts as a result of the climate crisis. The major culprits, fossil fuel corporations and the world's superrich, are accumulating huge profits and great fortunes, while ordinary people bear the devastating consequences. To address structural, global, socioeconomic, and generational inequalities - and the intersections between these - every climate solution must be built on climate justice.

Climate 'solutions' attributing equal responsibility to all people will add an undue burden on regular people, while the responsibility of the richest and most powerful will be obscured and minimised.

To achieve an equitable and fair distribution of burdens, impacts, and benefits of our climate, we must safeguard the rights of

the most vulnerable people, and ensure that all people, especially women and the most marginalised, can participate in decision-making processes that are fair, accountable, open, and corruption-free.

Therefore, the task is not only to find ways of reducing emissions and protecting the environment, but to ensure that this is done in a manner which builds a fair and equal world.

UGANDA

Greening of school infrastructure and facilities is a focus in the West Nile sub-region in Uganda, where rainfall can be unreliable and sanitation systems are sparse. Oxfam and our partners install rainwater harvesting systems, bio pit latrines and solar powered lighting in schools.

TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATION

Transformative education has a directly redistributive impact, benefitting the poorest populations, especially women and girls, and enhances social mobility. Transformative education also strengthens political mobilisation and agency by enabling learning about individual and collective rights and responsibilities, nourishing capacities for participation and organizing and building active citizenship for children, youth and adults.

Education remains one of the best ways to combat inequalities and build resilience among the most vulnerable populations, who

are disproportionately affected by climate change.

SOUTH SUDAN

Climate change poses a threat to the provision of quality education in the country. Supported by Oxfam, teachers, learners, and Parent Teacher Associations are developing analysis and risk maps of their schools. Disaster risk reduction and conflict sensitivity can protect pupils and learning facilities from both climate-induced natural hazards and conflict.



MALAWI:
Grace cycling to school.
PHOTO: CORINNA KERN.

TRANSFORMATIVE CLIMATE EDUCATION

Just as climate justice is a topic for transformative education, so is transformative education for climate justice.

The relationship between climate change and education is bidirectional. On the one hand, climate change leads both directly (through e.g. floodings and droughts) and indirectly (e.g. forced migration and increasing poverty) leads to decreased learning outcomes, increased school dropout rates and overall negative impacts on education quality and access. On the other hand, education can improve the holistic skills needed to mitigate, adapt to, and prevent climate shocks.

Climate education holds the potential to contribute to climate action and sustainable solutions, reducing the inequality and injustice of the climate crisis. However, most climate education is currently heavily grounded within the natural sciences and is rarely translated into practice. Transformative Climate Education should be included in all subjects, be built on local knowledge, and be relevant to students and communities. Truly Transformative Climate Education must include a broad range of knowledges, values and skills. From knowledge of ecosystems to

the skills needed to build e.g. bio pit latrines or solar panels. From appreciating values such as biodiversity and care, to developing the self-confidence to talk about the climate catastrophe with a language that is accessible to everyone.

To create a climate education capable of transformation it must be holistic, contextualised and concrete and it must be rooted in action, from school gardens to the political demands of student councils and youth movements.

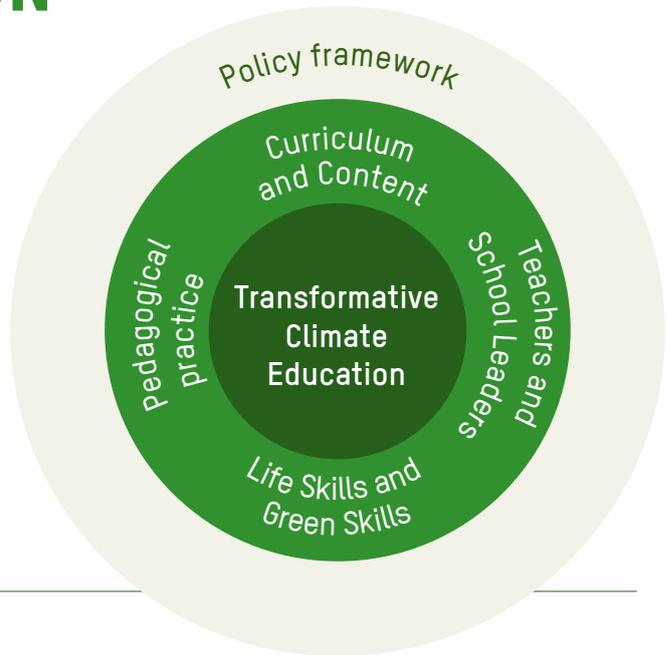
NIGER

In technical and vocational training centres, Oxfam and partners have developed climate-related teaching material in local languages, which have been implemented in 11 subjects ranging from agro-sylvo-pastoral skills and rural mechanics to home economics and knitting. Under the current programme, 300 women have completed this education in the Tahoua and Maradi regions. These women, representing ten municipalities, have then developed local action plans to address issues such as reforestation and land reclamation in the context of their own municipalities.



KEY PRIORITIES FOR TRANSFORMATIVE CLIMATE EDUCATION

Oxfam supports Transformative Climate Education and lifelong learning, including Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET). We advocate for public investments in education systems needed to ensure resilience to climate crises and deliver quality and gender transformative climate education. This education must at the same time protect students during climate crises, develop and strengthen their capacities to prevent, mitigate and adapt to the effects of it, and stimulate students' empowerment and active citizenship for climate justice.



CURRICULUM AND CONTENT

... increase students' awareness of the climate emergency, injustice and inequalities. It develops critical thinking about causes and consequences while encouraging sustainable solutions and actions.

Learning about the interconnectedness of the climate crisis is crucial for students' understanding of the links between causes, scenarios and impacts and how these affect different societies, peoples and genders.

Transformative Climate education must be integrated into core curriculum subjects such as Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics (STEAM), civics, languages, geography, and history. Modules on green skills must be integrated into vocational training, providing learners with market-relevant qualifications that also promote sustainable practices and just transition. Education must be contextualised and learn from and build on indigenous knowledge. Students and teachers should influence and shape their education both in their school and on a national level.

MALI

Prompted by an Oxfam partner, a review of the national climate education curriculum has begun. This curriculum covers education on the impact of climate change, adaptation, resilience and prevention against global warming and the fight for climate justice. It builds on quality climate education, which incorporates gender perspectives, learner-centred, and active citizenship approaches. The curriculum changes aim at building adaptation, resilience and preventative measures.

COLOMBIA

In La Guajira, Oxfam is working with indigenous teachers to organise and develop educational material in the local wayuunaiki language and from their cosmovision focusing on reproductive health, peace and climate change. In a region prone to conflict and where one in five girls will have been, or is, pregnant by the time she turns 18, linking peace, reproductive health and climate is key. As ethno-education is allowed to be developed outside of government control, this bottom-up approach has been possible and fruitful.



SOUTH SUDAN:
Salam Girls Primary School.
PHOTO: WILLIAM VEST-LILLESØE.

PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICE

... stimulates students' agency, hope and action to challenge existing practices. Participatory pedagogy and action learning increases students' problem solving, ability to organise and ability to demand political change.

For education to play a positive role in addressing the climate crisis, it must foster critical thinking and active citizenship. In teaching and learning about climate change, it is imperative not only to focus on current destructive paths, which may instil fear and hopelessness. Instead, learner-centered pedagogies that cultivate agency at the level of the individual student— and, by extension, within households, schools and local communities— are key when carving out a route for hopeful and sustainable futures. Contextualised pedagogical approaches must never individualise the issues, but draw links and parallels to global trends and developments. The pedagogical approach should be participatory and encourage students and teachers to actively question current gender and social norms while challenging systems

of discrimination and inequality that are further exacerbated by climate change.

SOUTH SUDAN

In South Sudan, extreme heat, flooding and an influx of internally displaced people can shut down schools for weeks at a time. After a temporary lack of access to education, vulnerable children and young people, especially girls, might not come back to school. In periods of increased domesticity, levels of gender-based violence rise. During Covid-19, Oxfam supported continued learning and wellbeing of learners in various communities, with the teachers visiting and organizing follow up sessions in small groups of learners – while keeping a distance. Specific education and homework materials were developed to help the individual learner continue their studies. Simultaneously, psychosocial messaging was developed and distributed to parents and teachers to help children through the period of isolation and crisis. This experience and lessons learned from it are relevant for situations where school closures are

TEACHERS AND EDUCATION PERSONNEL

...are recognised and supported as essential in the green transition. Their professional development enables them to use action-oriented pedagogies of hope for a climate just world.

Participatory, critical pedagogy builds on knowledge, skills and understanding of teachers and educators. Therefore, they need to be able to access knowledge sources and tools and be meaningfully engaged in developing policies and curricula for climate education. Teachers' fora for discussing pedagogical practices and methods and reflecting on own practices are key. On a global level, teachers are overworked and underpaid. Teaching transformative climate education must not become an additional task, but instead be an integrated approach to teaching and learning. This new important

role underscores the need for sufficient training of and support for teachers. School leaders and education personnel (e.g. school inspectors; school principals) must be meaningfully engaged in developing policies and framework for transformative climate education (e.g. via school development plans).

NIGER

Across 50 schools in the Tahoua and Maradi regions, new teacher training has been implemented on how to teach climate education in school. Oxfam and partner have supported regional authorities in developing materials on education, agriculture, climate and environment and has also been implemented in vocational training centres.

LIFE SKILLS AND GREEN SKILLS

... are linked to climate education in formal and non-formal education. They can be skills for active citizenship, adaptability, creativity, and negotiation and/or practical green skills that enable students to navigate and act in the unpredictability caused by the climate crisis.

Life Skills such as self-confidence, problem-solving, critical thinking, creativity, and negotiation are key in creating resilience to adapt and mitigate to the climate crisis. Life Skills must therefore be prioritized in all education interventions—in and out of schools, in class and through extra-curricular activities (e.g. school clubs), ensuring that students can transform their lives, and those of their communities, through activism. Strengthening student and young people's movements at local, national, regional and global level is in fact crucial to influence policies and systems and demand climate justice.

Life Skills must therefore be prioritised in basic education and TVET for green transformation. Learning practical green skills is central to all education interventions: ensuring continued access to education and TVET is essential to a just green transition, one in which the burdens of climate change are shared equitably and livelihood opportunities are expanded. This includes increased investment in green skills for green jobs and entrepreneurship (e.g. solar panel installation), which serve as pathways toward a green economy and a more just and sustainable future.

UGANDA

Oxfam is supporting green skills training. In the West Nile region of Uganda, young people are participating in courses on domestic solar power and energy-saving stoves. Through our four-year programme, 500 young people will have been trained.



GUATEMALA:
Mayra in her
classroom in Rabinal.
PHOTO: HANS BACH.

POLICY PRIORITIES

To tackle the root causes of the climate crisis, Oxfam works in tandem between programmes and influencing to embolden and amplify the

GLOBAL

Forging Futures – a Climate Education Caucus was organised by Oxfam and the Global Partnership for Education in collaboration with UNESCO, UNHCR, Education Cannot Wait and the University of Copenhagen. The Caucus had over one thousand online participants and hundreds of attendees. The Caucus combined high-level talks between ministers, donors and policy makers with grass-root movements to ensure representation and to carve out space for civil society and young people.

voices of marginalized people to speak truth to power. We need to rebuild better and to commit and act for a green and fair society. The people most capable and qualified to identify needs and suggest change, are the ones most involved in the education systems. Therefore, key stakeholders, such as students, teachers and parents, need to be included into decision-making processes at all levels.

Communities hold tremendous amounts of transformative power. But for them to realise these, certain local, national and international structures must be changed or abolished to guarantee free and equal access to quality education and a just climate solution. These changes must include:

AT NATIONAL LEVEL

- **Transformative climate education integrated** into education policy and systems—including teachers' education and professional development—national curricula, and in TVET and complementary education.
- **Increased and improved education spending**—including climate education—to ensure sufficient numbers of well-paid, trained and supported teachers, adequate learning facilities and materials, and free quality education for all students at all levels.
- **At least 12 years guaranteed free quality education for all**—including climate education—to ensure sufficient numbers of well-paid, trained and supported teachers, adequate learning facilities and materials, and free quality education for all students at all levels.
- **Guaranteed continued access to climate education and skills training** for those affected by the climate crisis, especially girls, women, and those forcibly displaced or migrating, to strengthen opportunities, resilience and livelihoods.
- **Increased investments in skills for green jobs and a green economy** including funding for technical, vocational education and skills training, creating pathways to green jobs.
- **Education in the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)** which countries report to the UNFCCC under the Paris Agreement.
- **Strengthening local and national civil society coalitions** to demand action on climate-induced education Loss and Damage (LSD).

AT GLOBAL LEVEL

- **An increase in education financing globally.** High-income countries must increase their ODA, their aid to education, and their support to climate education.
- **Education as a key part** of the global climate negotiations at the COP-meetings, along with other public services.
- **Financially supporting efforts** on climate change adaption, mitigation and Loss and Damage, which include a focus on education and other public services.
- **Real involvement of people and countries** most affected by the climate crisis: in matters relating to climate education, students, teachers, and parents must be central in decision-making. INGOs and donors should reflect and act on locally generated recommendations to share and shift power.

GLOBAL

Globally, young people are key change-makers and the collective knowledge, experience and strength of youth-led movements hold tremendous power. Oxfam seeks to combine and strengthen these through international cooperation. Based on this, Oxfam has arranged regional and global conferences of students and young people, developed toolkits to strengthen the activist capabilities of these movements and supported the collaboration between youth-led organisations prior to international conferences such as the COP.



GHANA:
Rafik school in Northern Region.
PHOTO: HANS BACH.

OXFAM ADDED VALUE

Education holds transformative power to build knowledge, resilient practices and agency to address the climate crisis and exacerbating inequalities.

Oxfam’s added value is bringing a systemic and transformative approach to climate education through two separate but interconnected processes. Firstly, all our work builds on meaningful community engagement, which centers grassroots, women, young people, indigenous communities, and other marginalised groups as change makers. All Oxfam programmes are spearheaded by local civil society partners who have expertise on their context

NIGER

Creating ownership and commitment among community members is a cornerstone of the Oxfam best practices for transformative education. Transformative Climate Education therefore emphasises the training of school clubs and students’ councils, parent-teacher associations, school management committees and teachers in climate change and climate justice, including the active citizenship that is exercised by these different actors through dialogues, collaboration and decision-making processes in schools.

and its needs. They are therefore better able to transform the education system into becoming more sustainable, adaptable and resilient to climate change.

As a part of our transformative and participatory approach, we design programmes with our partners to empower students and young people and other community groups to organise and take action themselves. We do this through critical pedagogical approaches to learning, through gender transformative- and democratic decision-making processes in the school and through community involvement. This ensures that transformative climate education not only seeks to improve education but livelihoods more generally.

Secondly, we recognise that communities that have endured centuries of colonialism, exploitation and underfinancing continue to face structural disadvantages. Centuries of overconsumption in the rich countries now disproportionately fall on the poorest countries and their most marginalised people. This has led to environmental degradation and intense pressure on social services due to limited funding. Oxfam challenges these structural causes and works to expose and remove structural

barriers to people exercising their power and rights. This is a consistent principle in our work, whether we are supporting students movements demanding climate action , lobbying a national government to increase its domestic education financing, or pushing solidarity-based climate financing through internationally redistributive mechanisms such as the Loss and Damage Fund to address climate-induced losses to education.

This ensures that transformative climate education, through democratic decision-making processes in and out of schools, improves everyday life.

COLOMBIA

In the northern region of La Guajira, young people are engaging in environmental projects in their schools. Through Oxfam programmes, across 100 schools, pupils are engaging in raising awareness through painting murals telling stories about the importance of the environment and preventative measures.

UGANDA

In the West Nile region of Uganda, Oxfam supported climate justice clubs are engaging young people in climate awareness work. At the school compound, young people learn how to plant trees. The clubs are used to start discussions on climate and environment. From here the participants take their knowledge and raise awareness in their local communities through work such as the climate caravan.



GUATEMALA:
Pupils in Rabinal.
PHOTO: HANS BACH.