

? From the Youth to the future Youth: bottom-up initiatives and redefinition of multilateral spaces to reorient climate change governance | Marina Tovar i Velasco



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Ganador de la **UNIVERSIDAD AUTÓNOMA DE BARCELONA**, en la categoría [Cambio climático: una amenaza creciente para la seguridad global](#), con su proyecto «*From the Youth to the future Youth: bottom-up initiatives and redefinition of multilateral spaces to reorient climate change governance.*» que puedes leer aquí:

Climate change's effects on youth are incredibly harmful, impacting their physical and mental health as well as their socioeconomic conditions. Despite that youth and their voices have been incorporated into the climate change's multilateral frameworks, their real impact remains little due to lack of power and authority to implement policy alternatives. Creating youth-only spaces to promote bottom-up inputs into intergovernmental multilateral institutions while redefining the latter by including a diverse set of voices away from the mainstream ones will help redefine the discourses and solutions associated with these.

"We need a multilateralism where the voice of youth is decisive in shaping our future" – [António Guterres](#).

Recent [studies](#) have portrayed the adverse effects of climate change as devastating for the youth's physical and mental health and the socioeconomic conditions in which they live. The youth have been seen as [environmental stewards](#) for the future as they have engaged in activism, advanced lawsuits against governments and fossil fuel companies for non-compliance with environmental standards, and encouraged UN institutions to fund youth-led environmental projects. Nevertheless, due to lack of authority, they have lacked to bring about immediate policy changes and alternative policies. For this, bottom-up approaches and a re-definition of multilateral spaces are needed to include youth's and marginalized youth's voices into the policy discourse to create a more inclusive and diverse culture of security and defense that effectively addresses the threats associated with climate change.

Climate change's governance: problems and possible solutions

The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Post-Paris climate change governance have [drastically changed](#) since 2015 by including non-state actors (NSAs) and sub-state actors (SSAs). Youth NGOs are included to participate in conferences, mobilizing them to pursue collective action. However, Thew, Middlemiss & Paavola noted that [youth](#) struggle to use their participation to expand their networks and pursue their solutions because they are ignored as governments seek to collaborate with businesses and lack the power to make their voices heard. *Should the Youth create new spaces for policy discourse, or should we aim to redefine the already existing spaces?*

A two-fold approach would allow for a rapid and drastic change of youth's voices in the climate

change governance. On the one side, youth's inclusivity in existing spaces will facilitate pursuing a vast range of solutions while creating transparency amongst the actors involved. Furthermore, re-defining power dynamics will create trust and delegate authority and accountability to marginalized actors to undertake governance tasks, creating a dispersed and polycentric climate change governance. On the other side, fabricating new spaces made up of youth under the existing spaces that interact and complement the intergovernmental and supranational multilateral spaces will aid in effectively including youth's voices in the climate change governance. Replicating spaces like UNFCCC's observer constituency of youth NGOs (YOUNGO), the Conference of Youth (COY), the #Youth4Climate, and the SDG Youth Climate Roundtable are needed to ensure their voices are heard and included in the policy discourse.

Another problem is that the UNFCCC and other climate change multilateral spaces are intergovernmental, and NSAs' participation is subject to a protocol aimed at not disrupting the liberal nature of those organizations. The youth who participate in UN multilateral institutions represent and reproduce a [mainstream discourse](#) that does not bother the liberal democratic codes, not disrupting the intergovernmental nature of these institutions.

[Studies](#) of climate change politics have illustrated the significance of discourse and narratives. The culture of defense is made up of narratives, ideas, preferences, and values. Therefore, introducing new values and preferences – the youth ones – will aid in reshaping and prioritizing areas previously not considered. [Narratives](#) shape policy preferences and behaviors towards climate adaptation; narratives define problems, their causes and potential solutions and can illustrate the actors' preferences and ideas. To create a fundamental change – and effective one translated into new and feasible solutions – we need the inclusion of more voices, those that are far from the mainstream discourse. *How does climate change affect indigenous youth? Or the youth in marginalized areas from Western countries?* To create a culture of defense and multilateral spaces that engage youth voices, diverse voices must be included so that the mainstream narratives, and thus the mainstream solutions, are redefined. Who better than the youth to participate and shape the solutions for the future youth?

Conclusions

Bottom-up multilateralism initiatives to complement the intergovernmental and supranational institutions will reinforce and complement them to make a more inclusive and diverse climate change governance more participative and resilient. Including youth's voices in spaces solely dedicated to them and transferring their results to intergovernmental institutions through mechanisms of accountability will help ensure their demands are met. Complementing these

mechanisms with a more fair and transparent inclusion of youth's voices into intergovernmental institutions will aid bottom-up approaches to be effective. New values and preferences need to be incorporated to change mainstream discourses and solutions, where the youth have a crucial role as they are the policy-makers and citizens of the future.

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