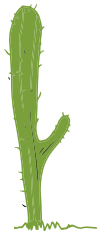
An illustration of a hand holding a rock sign in a desert landscape. The hand is brown and has a pink wristband. The sign is orange and has the text 'Climate glossary for young people' written on it. The background is a warm yellow-orange color with stylized green cacti and mountains.

# Climate glossary

for young people



## Climate glossary for young people

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Panama, Republic of Panama, 2020

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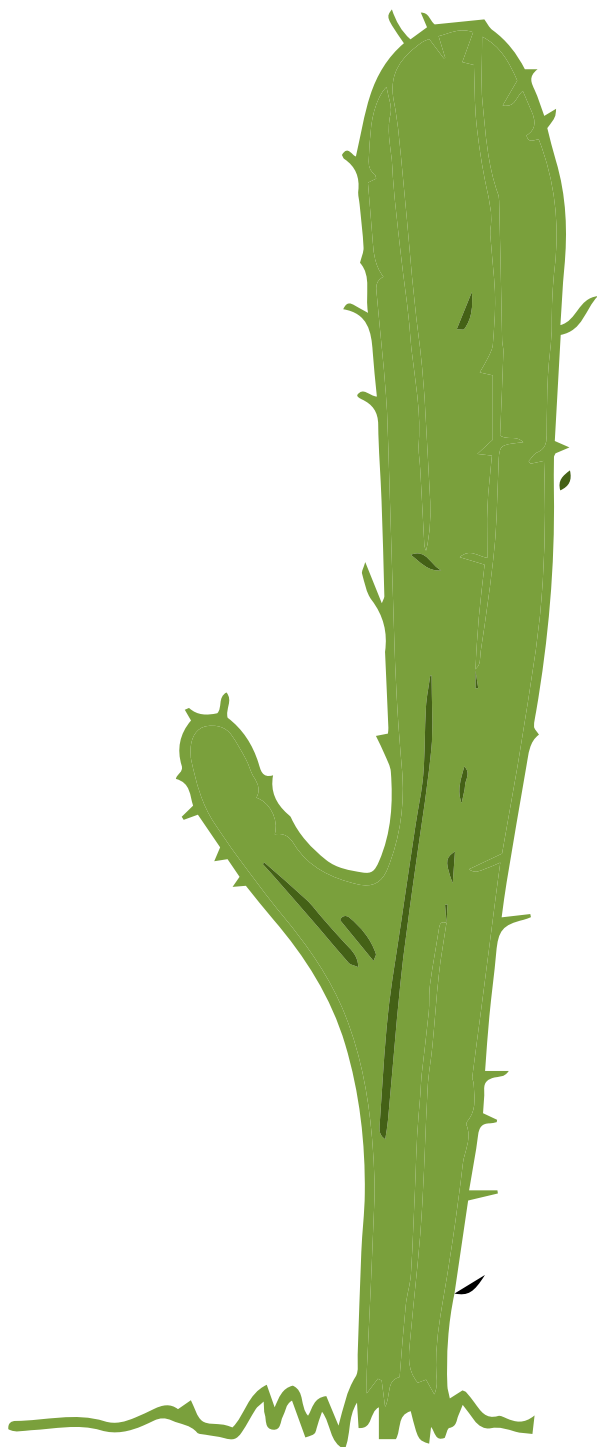
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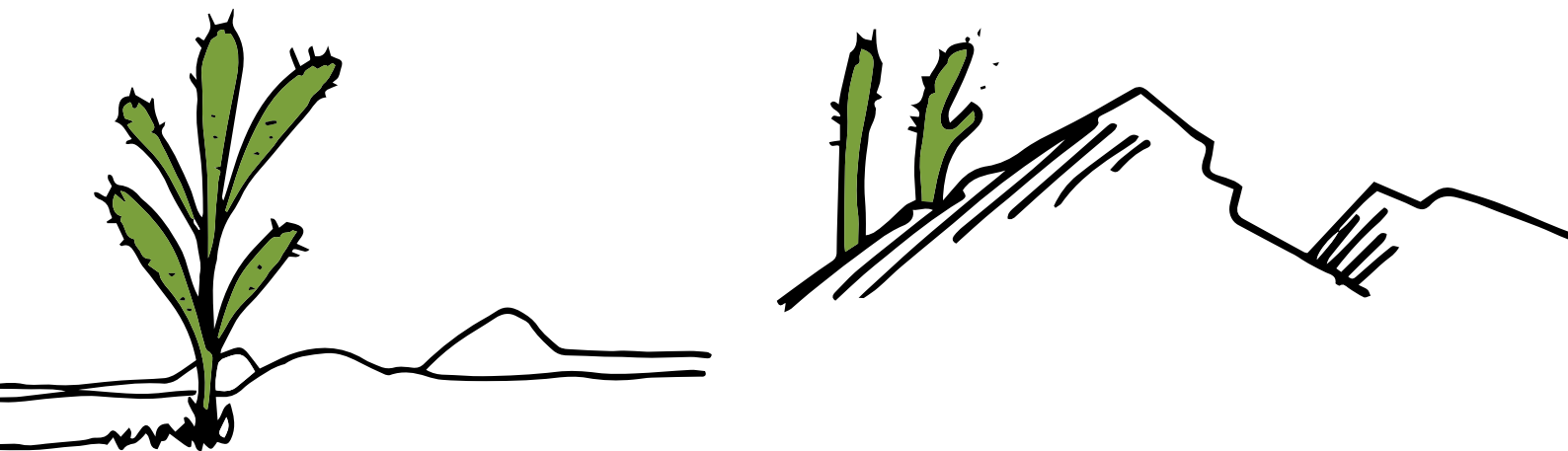
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# Climate glossary for young people

A glossary-style guide of the concepts and definitions that every climate activist, or budding climate activist, needs to know. Contains essential concepts on climate change, climate action, instruments and human rights.

unicef  | for every child



# Presentation

“We, as young people, are agents of change in different sections of society. We are not being left behind in **climate action**: our voices are being increasingly heard and we are demanding the right to **participate fully**. In fact, our participation is a right that should be central to the formulation of public policy.”

The **Toolkit for Young Climate Activists in Latin America and the Caribbean** was created by young people who, like you, are concerned about our planet's situation and who, as activists, have faced many challenges when advocating and taking action.

Our goal is to share clear, concise, easily understandable information that describes the course that global, regional and national climate action is taking, in order to prepare you for **meaningful and informed participation**.

The booklets interrelate and are designed so that you can read them in succession and progressively deepen your knowledge of each of the topics. You can also consult them independently, according to your needs.

**Tools for climate action:** Key tools for making progress towards the global climate action goals and the Sustainable Development Goals, including the Paris Agreement, nationally determined contributions and other tools.

**What is climate governance?** Information about climate governance and the decision-making process at the national and international levels, including the Framework Convention on Climate Change, how it works and the mechanisms for participation.

**Prepare to take action!** Practical advice and accounts of other activists' experiences to help you develop the skills needed to take part in and influence the climate agenda.

**The Paris Agreement for young people:** Details of the Agreement, its importance, and all its articles in simple language.

**Escazú Agreement for young people:** Essential information about the Agreement, its importance, and its articles in simple language.

**Climate glossary for young people:** Important concepts and definitions that every climate activist needs to know.

This booklet uses the terms “youth” and “young people” to refer to adolescents and young people between 15 and 24 years old.

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15 to 24

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# Acknowledgements

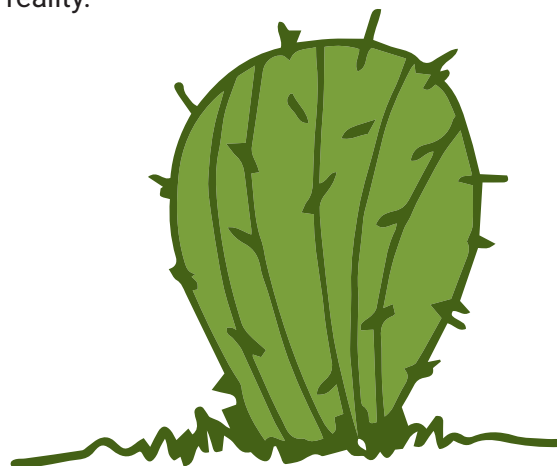
The toolkit was written by Sara Cognuck González, a young climate activist from Costa Rica, and Emilia Numer, a UNICEF consultant, with technical advice from Adrián Martínez and Hanoch Barlevi. All the content was co-created with young climate activists from 15 Latin American and Caribbean countries.

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# Acronyms and abbreviations

<b>GHG</b>	Greenhouse gases
<b>IPCC</b>	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
<b>LCIPP</b>	Local Communities and Indigenous People Platform
<b>SDG</b>	Sustainable Development Goal
<b>UNFCCC</b>	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

# Introduction

This booklet provides key definitions to help you better understand the main concepts of climate change and climate action. Many of these definitions are in the Paris Agreement, which establishes the objectives for global climate action. The Agreement was adopted in 2015 and currently has 195 signatories.

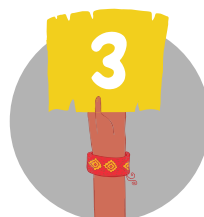
Many of the definitions come from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which is a body that **provides countries with scientific information** to strengthen the global response to climate change. These definitions have been adapted to a more familiar and simpler language. Other definitions can be found in official documents published by the United Nations and other organizations. You can always consult the main source for more details or additional information.



We'll start with the basic concepts to help you understand the problems surrounding **climate change**. This is important for identifying ways to take action.



Then we'll learn about concepts related to **climate action** and the tools we can use in our actions.



Lastly, we'll look at aspects related to **human rights and climate change**, as this is a crisis that affects our rights.

At the end of the booklet, you will find an alphabetical index to consult if you simply want to know more about a particular concept.





# Climate and climate change concepts

To foster effective climate action, it is important that we understand the challenge we are facing. This section explains the basic concepts that help us to understand what climate change is and its causes. It also contains concepts to help you understand the interactions that occur on the earth.



## Climate system

The climate system is formed by the interactions of its five components:

- Atmosphere: the mixture of gases that surround the earth.
- Hydrosphere: the earth's liquid water, including fresh and salt water.
- Cryosphere: the earth's ice and snow masses.
- Lithosphere: the continents and sea floor.
- Biosphere: the earth's marine and land biodiversity.



## Climate

The typical weather conditions of a specific region over a given period of time, with a minimum period of 20–30 years<sup>1</sup>.



## Climate change

A change in the state or variability of the climate. Climate change is identified by variability in climate properties that persists for a prolonged period and can be identified through statistical tests. Climate change may be caused by natural internal processes or by external forces, such as volcanic eruptions or persistent anthropogenic actions<sup>1</sup>.

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is an international treaty with 197 State Parties that serves as a framework for international cooperation to combat climate change. The UNFCCC distinguishes climate change from climate variability. Climate change is attributed to human activities that may alter the composition of the atmosphere, while variability is attributed to natural causes<sup>1</sup>.



## Climate variability

Climate variability refers to variations in the average state of the climate, on all temporal and spatial scales, that exceed the typical scales of weather events. Climate variability may be natural or anthropogenic<sup>1</sup>.



## Anthropogenic

The effect, outcome or process of human activity<sup>1</sup>.



## Global warming

The current climate change comes from global warming caused by human actions. This warming refers to an increase in global temperature that has been recorded over a period of 30 years or more. It is generally expressed in relation to the levels that existed before the Industrial Revolution<sup>1</sup>.



## Anthropogenic global warming

Anthropogenic global warming is primarily caused by the increase in sources of greenhouse gas emissions, largely from the burning of fuels in the energy sector, which includes transportation, electricity generation, construction and infrastructure. The following sectors are also sources of emissions: farming, industrial processes, and the domestic and industrial waste sector<sup>2</sup>.

Activities that involve a change in land use also contribute to emissions because of potential modification of the soil composition, which can cause the greenhouse gases that were stored in the soil to be released. For example, marine and land ecosystems absorb and store carbon, which they use in their processes, such as photosynthesis. If these ecosystems are destroyed, the carbon they had stored is released.



## Greenhouse gases

The gaseous component of the atmosphere, which may be natural or anthropogenic. Greenhouse gases absorb and emit radiation, which causes the greenhouse effect. The primary greenhouse gases are<sup>1</sup>:

- Water vapour (H<sub>2</sub>O)
- Carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>)
- Nitrous oxide (N<sub>2</sub>O)
- Methane (CH<sub>4</sub>)
- Ozone (O<sub>3</sub>)

There are also other greenhouse gases in the atmosphere; these are anthropogenic in origin, such as **halocarbons**, which consist of carbon and certain **halogens** such as chlorine, bromine, fluorine and hydrogen.



## Climate risk

The potential for adverse consequences of indeterminate scale that endanger something of value. The risks depend on<sup>1</sup>:

- **Vulnerability:** predisposition to be adversely affected. Vulnerability is determined by sensitivity to damage and the lack of capacity to respond and adapt.
- **Exposure:** condition in which the system is exposed to the climatic phenomenon or trend.
- **Hazard:** a natural or human-induced event that may cause adverse effects on systems.





## Climate impact

The consequences of climate change on social and economic aspects, ecosystems and species. Economic, social and ecosystem goods and services are also affected. These impacts may be adverse or beneficial. They may be seen as consequences or results of climate change<sup>1</sup>.



## Loss and damage

The adverse effects of climate variability and climate change that people have not managed to cope with or adapt to. Loss and damage may be economic or non-economic. Non-economic loss and damage relates to impacts of climate change that are hard to quantify, but which influence the degree of vulnerability of human systems<sup>3</sup> (such as loss of traditional ways of living, cultural heritage, loss of life and human health, etc.)

There are moves to ensure that in the future, loss and damage suffered by other species and ecosystems in general will also be considered.



## Resilience

The ability of human and natural systems to face a dangerous phenomenon or disturbance and to respond or reorganize so that they maintain their functionality, identity and structure, as well as conserving their capacity for adaptation, learning and transformation<sup>4</sup>.



## Biodiversity

The diversity and variability of living organisms within each species, among species and within ecosystems<sup>1</sup>.



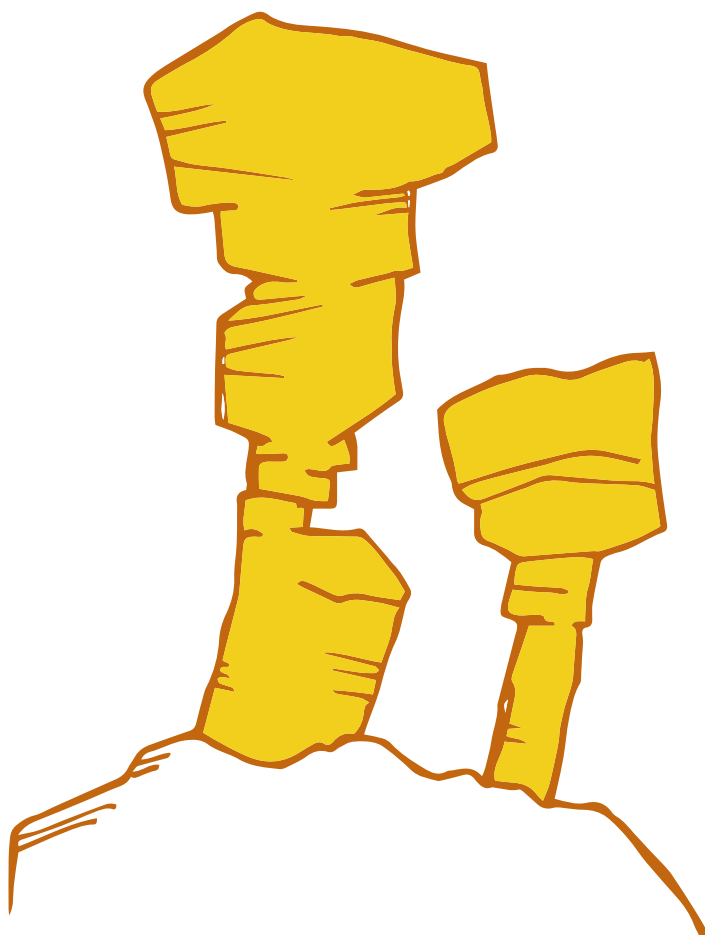
## Ecosystems

An ecosystem is a unit made up of living organisms and non-living components, and the interactions between them<sup>1</sup>. A forest is an example of an ecosystem.



## Ecosystem services

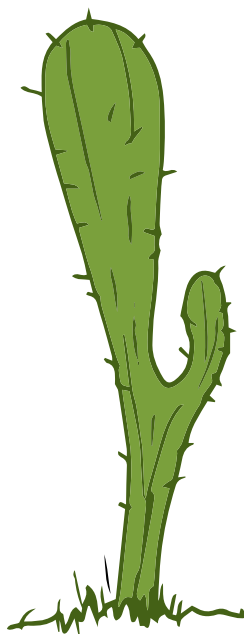
The processes or functions provided by ecosystems that benefit people or societies<sup>1</sup>. Climate regulation is an example of an ecosystem service.



# Climate action concepts

Now that you have understood the main definitions, let's move on to the concepts related to climate action at the local, national and international levels. We will build on climate change mitigation and adaptation, which are the main directions of global climate action.

The concepts in this section help to guide actions and to establish the objectives or goals that implementing climate action is expected to achieve.



## Mitigation

Human actions that seek to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, for example eliminating the burning of fossil fuels. Mitigation also refers to actions that enhance sinks of greenhouse gases, for example conserving mangrove ecosystems, which are considered sinks<sup>1</sup>.

Mitigation measures may be carried out at different levels:

- **International:** countries may cooperate to mitigate their greenhouse gas emissions
- **National:** governments may opt for renewable energy to replace fossil fuels
- **Local:** a community may integrate waste management and establish its own programme, led by community members.

You may also make changes on a personal level in your consumption habits, for example by using public or alternative transport to get around, such as bicycles.



## Sink

A sink is a reservoir where greenhouse gases are stored. They may be natural or the result of human activity in land and marine ecosystems<sup>1</sup>. Oceans and forests are examples of natural sinks, while sinks resulting from human activity are linked to processes such as reforestation.



## Carbon market

A trading system in which reduced emissions or captured concentrations of greenhouse gases are traded, exchanged, bought and/or sold. Markets are important because they regulate and balance emissions<sup>5</sup>. There are two types of markets<sup>6</sup>:

- **Regulated carbon market:** regulated by mandatory national, regional or international carbon reduction guidelines.
- **Voluntary carbon market:** markets that trade in carbon reduction but are outside official and mandatory requirements.



## Cooperation actions

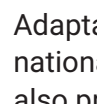
Interactions that focus on inter-country cooperation for mitigation, adaptation, financing, technology transfer and capacity-building measures. Cooperation actions are known as “non-market” actions and are included in article 6 of the Paris Agreement.



## Adaptation

The process of adjusting human systems to the actual or expected climate and its effects. Adaptation aims to moderate damages or take advantage of beneficial opportunities. Natural systems can also adapt, and human intervention may facilitate this adjustment process<sup>1</sup>.

An example of adaptation in human systems is the construction of infrastructure that is resilient to the effects of climate change, while an example in natural systems is the creation of biological corridors that allow species to migrate between areas.



## Adaptive capacity

The ability of human and natural systems to adapt to potential damage, take advantage of opportunities or address consequences<sup>1</sup>.



## Adaptation limits

The point at which the objectives or needs of a natural or human system cannot be protected from risks through adaptive actions. There are two types of adaptation limit<sup>1,7</sup>:

- **Hard adaptation limit:** when adaptive actions cannot prevent climate risks, meaning impacts and risks become unavoidable.
  - > For example, irreversible biodiversity losses or projected losses of 90 per cent of tropical corals under a 1.5°C temperature increase scenario.
- **Soft adaptation limit:** when technology and social and economic changes cannot prevent risks through adaptive action, meaning that impacts and risks are unavoidable at that time.
  - > For example, heat waves affect people living in very large cities or coastal livelihoods, making them unviable.



## Community-based adaptation

An approach that places communities at the centre of processes to reduce their vulnerability and increase their ability to adapt to the effects of climate change<sup>8</sup>.



## Ecosystem-based adaptation

An approach that seeks to protect human systems from the effects of climate change, using ecosystem services. Ecosystem-based adaptation seeks to maintain and increase resilience, and to reduce the vulnerability of ecosystems<sup>9</sup>.

This makes it possible to address other problems that are exacerbated by climate change, such as the loss of biodiversity. Ecosystem-based adaptation also allows natural carbon sinks to be conserved, which means that implementing this type of adaptation helps mitigate greenhouse gas emissions.



## Nature-based solutions

Actions that seek to protect, sustainably manage and restore natural or modified ecosystems by addressing social challenges in an effective and adaptive manner, while simultaneously providing benefits for human well-being and biodiversity<sup>10</sup>.

In nature-based solutions, ecosystems and their services form the basis for responding to the various challenges facing societies. This approach can also include **ecosystem-based adaptation**.

It is important to conserve the planet's biodiversity because life depends on the relationships between the different levels of biodiversity and ecosystems. Mitigation and adaptive actions also depend on these relationships, so if we do not manage to conserve biodiversity, we will not be generating effective climate action.



## Co-benefits

The positive effects that climate action aimed at one objective may have on others. Co-benefits depend on local circumstances and implementation practices<sup>1</sup>. For example, a mitigation action like enhancing the conservation of an ecosystem as a sink also increases the ecosystem's resilience and adaptive capacity and allows human systems to use the ecosystem services.

Similarly, declaring a forest a protected wildlife area to enhance its conservation as a sink also helps the forest to maintain its structure and functionality and to adapt to the adverse effects of climate change. This allows communities living close to the forest to increase their resilience and adaptive capacity because of the ecosystem services the forest provides.

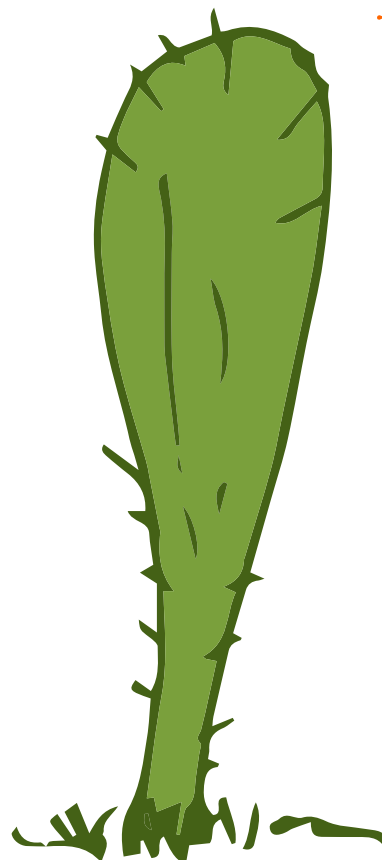


## Climate ambition

Ambition may be associated with a strong desire to achieve a goal; however, climate ambition goes beyond this concept. It refers to the collective commitment of countries to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and concentrations and to prevent further temperature increases. It also refers to the collective commitment to adaptive measures and the promotion of sustainable development and environmental integrity. Climate ambition considers the national action of countries, as well as any international actions they may take part in. Climate ambition is a key part of articles 4 and 6 of the Paris Agreement

Climate ambition also refers to actions to adapt to the adverse effects of climate change, with special consideration to the vulnerabilities of individuals, groups and ecosystems.

more information in  
the 'Paris Agreement'  
booklet





# Essential approaches and concepts for climate governance

This section contains the essential approaches and concepts we need to know to engage with climate governance. It also presents the concepts needed to ensure inclusive and transparent climate governance, where all groups and individuals can participate and contribute.



## Climate governance

Voluntary mechanisms and measures aimed at directing social systems towards preventing, mitigating or adapting to the risks of climate change<sup>11</sup>. Climate governance also enables social actors to participate in the different decision-making processes and the implementation of climate actions.

Climate governance should be seen as a “**multi-level**” process that includes the following levels<sup>12</sup>:

- **Local:** communities
- **National:** countries
- **International:** a region or involving multiple countries

Climate change affects different sectors of society in different ways, so it is important that each sector is represented in the decision-making spaces at these levels

more information  
in the [‘What is climate governance?’ booklet](#)



## Indigenous knowledge

The knowledge, skills and philosophies that have been developed by indigenous peoples through their interactions with natural systems. This knowledge provides the basis for decision-making about daily or long-term activities. It combines language, classification systems, resource use practices, values, rituals and spirituality<sup>1</sup>.

An example of indigenous knowledge is the way indigenous peoples shape their economy, which ensures that their natural capital is not depleted and is managed sustainably. As such, indigenous economies are made up of practices of sustainable natural resource use<sup>13</sup>.



## Local knowledge

The knowledge and skills developed by people and populations in a specific place. This type of knowledge forms the basis of decision-making on day-to-day or long-term issues, as well as informing decisions about local governance<sup>1</sup>.

For example, there are gaps in climate data at the local level because of the complexity or lack of resources to generate them. People in a community represent a valuable source of knowledge: they can identify changes in the climate because they have lived in that specific community for a long time and have managed to create techniques and solutions to adapt to climate change based on their experience and knowledge of the territory.





## Just transition

A set of principles, processes and practices that develop the economic and political power to move from an extractive economy to a regenerative one. This means an integrated and zero-waste approach to the cycles of production and consumption<sup>14</sup>, based on the principle that a healthy economy and a clean environment can and must coexist<sup>15</sup>.

The transition itself must be fair and equitable; it must repair past damage and create new power relationships for the future<sup>14</sup>. The process for achieving this vision should be fair and should not cost workers or community residents their health, environment, jobs or economic assets. It must also ensure that those who might be affected are considered by decision makers and participate in developing solutions<sup>15</sup>.



## Transformation

Profound change in the fundamental characteristics of human and natural systems. In a **social transformation**, the communities initiate the change, which occurs in individual and collective values and behaviours, facilitating changes in political, cultural and institutional power<sup>1</sup>.



## Sustainable development

Development that meets the needs of present generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Sustainable development seeks a balance between social, economic and environmental issues<sup>1</sup>.



## 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Known as the **2030 Agenda**<sup>16</sup>, this is a universal call for action to end poverty, protect the planet and improve the lives and prospects of all people throughout the world. In 2015, all the United Nations countries [approved the 17 Sustainable Development Goals](#) that make up the 2030 Agenda. It also includes an action plan to implement the goals within 15 years.

Goal 13 addresses climate action and was created to prompt urgent action on climate change and its adverse effects. It includes targets related to adaptation, resilience, empowerment for climate action and vulnerabilities.



## Transparency

An effective response to climate change requires reliable, transparent and comprehensive information on greenhouse gas emissions, the climate actions underway and support or cooperation between countries. Climate transparency<sup>17</sup> allows us to monitor the actions that a country takes.



## Climate justice

Links human rights and development in order to achieve a people-centred approach, protecting the rights of those who are most vulnerable to the effects of climate change. The concept also proposes that the burdens, impacts and benefits of climate change be shared in an equitable and fair manner. Climate justice responds to science and also recognizes the need for an equitable distribution of the world's resources<sup>1</sup>.



## Intergenerational equity

Equity between generations that recognizes that the effects of past and current emissions, vulnerabilities and policies impose costs and benefits on people in the future and across generations<sup>1</sup>.

The present generations have obligations towards future generations, so they must ensure sound management of resources and that these conditions and elements can satisfy the next generation.



## Child-sensitive climate policy

Guidelines established so that adaptation, mitigation and other areas of climate action guarantee the protection and enjoyment of children's rights, paying special attention to their specific risks and vulnerabilities. Child-sensitive policies involve children in the process of their formulation, implementation and monitoring<sup>18</sup>. Mechanisms need to be created to enable children to participate in each country's climate action plans.



## Gender perspective

Observing, analysing and promoting transformations to tackle inequalities and inequities in the condition, construction of roles, and position of women and men in society<sup>19</sup>.

Climate action must consider gender-based inequalities, which have social and economic consequences, as well as political and cultural implications for people and their responses to climate change. These inequalities lead to disproportionate suffering from the effects of climate change. This makes it important to integrate the gender component into climate action and to ensure the inclusion of different realities and vulnerabilities<sup>20</sup>.



## Environmental democracy

The participation of social actors is important and needed to guarantee that interests in environmental decisions are considered from an adequate and equitable approach. Environmental democracy encompasses the rights of access to environmental information, environmental justice and participation in environmental decision-making spaces<sup>21</sup>. The Environmental Democracy Index monitors the progress of countries in establishing regulations to promote transparency, access to justice and citizen participation in environmental decision-making.

The Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean (known as the Escazú Agreement) seeks to protect and guarantee the rights inherent to environmental democracy.

see the  
'Escazú Agreement  
for young  
people' booklet



## Multilateralism

This concept is hard to define because there is no single definition. In the context of climate action, multilateralism is defined as the process of dialogue or diplomatic interaction among three or more countries (or other actors) to create policies, make decisions or take joint action in line with certain principles, values and standards of climate action<sup>22</sup>.

# Human rights and climate change

Climate action is closely related to human rights, as climate change directly impacts on our well-being and human dignity. This section explains the importance of protecting and guaranteeing human rights; the rights of children, adolescents and young people; the rights of access to information; and indigenous peoples' right to prior and informed consultation on issues related to climate change. As a young person, you can promote these approaches and make sure your country always considers them in its climate action plans.

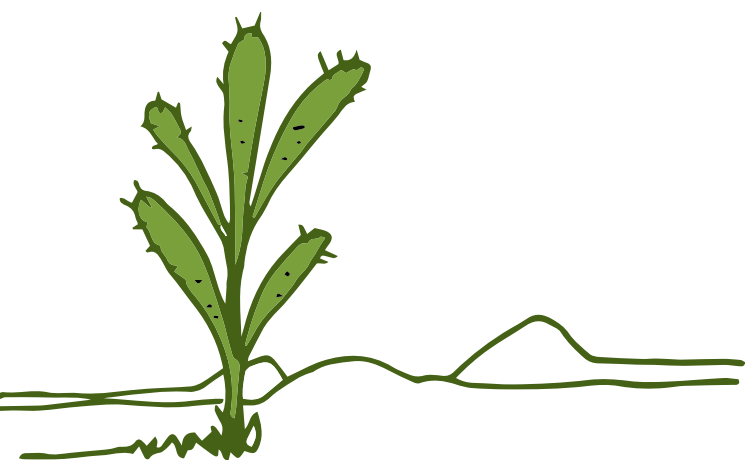


## Human rights-based approach

The application of internationally established human rights standards to development-related policies and practices. The approach is based on the observation that sustainable human development depends on and contributes to the realization of human rights. Its fundamental principles are universality, accountability and participation. It aims to promote and protect human rights and to eliminate existing inequalities, discrimination and unfair distribution<sup>23</sup>.

The human rights approach to climate change considers the ways and levels at which the effects of climate change can impact people, limiting economic and social progress. It also analyses climate actions in terms of their potential human rights impact. Similarly, it considers aspects such as poverty reduction, the strengthening of human rights and the improvement of health and well-being as actions that help to reduce inequalities and vulnerabilities in the face of climate change.

If climate change mitigation and adaptive actions do not integrate a human rights approach, these rights may be affected.





## Children's rights

Climate action must be designed to protect and guarantee the rights of children, as set out in the [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#). Childhood is a unique stage of physiological and emotional development, meaning that exposure to major risks has potentially lifelong consequences.

The most vulnerable children are those located in the geographic areas most exposed to climate change and which face the greatest social and economic risks. The effects of climate change exacerbate the risks and inequalities experienced by children and threaten their ability to cope with adverse scenarios. This may mean that children's rights are not guaranteed<sup>24</sup>.

Mechanisms should be promoted so that in official spaces – at the country level or international level, such as in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) – children's rights are considered one of the basic approaches to global climate action.

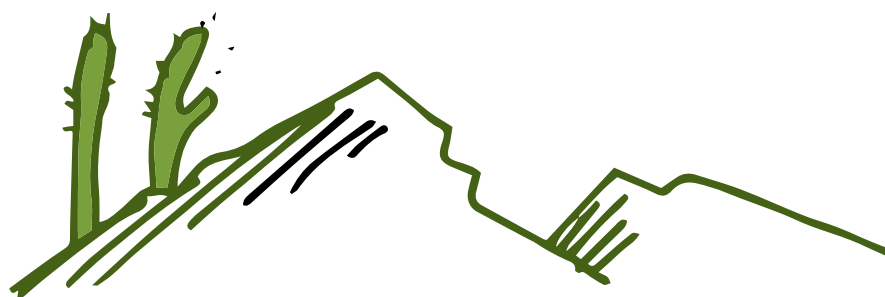
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## Indigenous peoples' rights

Climate actions must also consider indigenous peoples' rights, as set out in the [Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#). Indigenous peoples are considered one of the most vulnerable groups to climate change because they live in conditions of socioeconomic and political fragility, which will be exacerbated by the effects of the climate. They are also susceptible to changes in nature, due to their close relationship to natural resources. In addition, indigenous peoples are located in geographical areas that have high exposure to climate effects<sup>13</sup>.

Indigenous peoples are one of the most important groups for global climate action because of their relationship with nature. They have based their economy on sustainable practices and have essential knowledge from their long history of adapting to highly variable and changing social and ecological conditions<sup>13</sup>.





## Access rights and climate governance

Access rights are:

- the right to information on climate change,
- the right to participate in decisions on climate change,
- the right to justice in matters related to climate change.

It is important to guarantee access rights within the framework of climate governance to ensure the genuine and effective integration of individuals, groups or communities into processes or decisions related to potential climate actions. This may be at the local, national or international levels. Access rights and climate governance are part of Environmental Democracy, and the Escazú Agreement is a tool to ensure that they are protected and can be guaranteed for everyone.



## Right to information

A person's right to ask for and receive information from public institutions and entities, unless it is classified as a state secret or access is restricted by the constitution and/or by law<sup>25</sup>.

The right of access to information is fundamental for the full development of a democratic and transparent society, and is vital for holding authorities to account. It is a right that boosts other rights, since it is essential to the full exercise of our rights<sup>25</sup>.



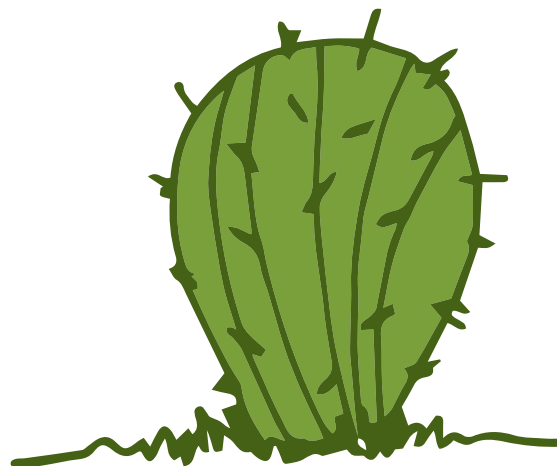
## Right to participate

The right of citizens to participate directly or indirectly in the decisions made on different issues in the country. It is the means by which citizens and their organizations are able to express their free will on issues that may affect them or to which they are connected<sup>26</sup>.



## Right of access to justice

The opportunity of every person to receive a response to their legal needs and to have the means to resolve a dispute or protect their rights. Without access to justice, people cannot make their voices heard, exercise their rights, challenge discrimination or hold decision makers to account<sup>27</sup>.





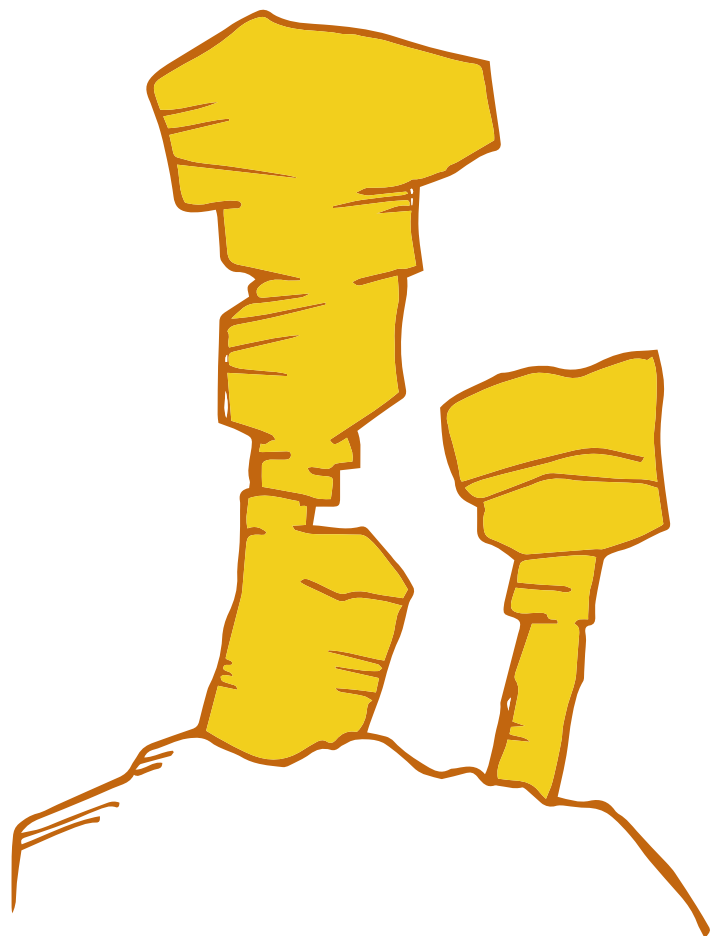
## Indigenous consultation

Indigenous peoples have the right to prior consultation on the use of resources in their territories. Consultation is an ancestral practice used by indigenous peoples when indigenous territory will be used or a project will take place there. The countries that have ratified [Convention No. 169 of the International Labour Organization on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples](#) should create the necessary mechanisms to guarantee this right<sup>28</sup>.

Indigenous peoples are the most affected by the adverse effects of climate change because of their connection to ecosystems and their services, and their close relationship with nature. Climate change also exacerbates the economic, political and social inequalities experienced by indigenous peoples. Indigenous peoples are essential to increasing the response capacity of ecosystems to the adverse effects of climate change. They also interpret and react to these effects by using traditional knowledge and other techniques to generate solutions<sup>29</sup>.

Indigenous consultation on climate change issues should consider the vulnerability of indigenous peoples, but integrate the capacity to respond and the importance for ecosystem resilience in indigenous territories<sup>29</sup>. In the context of the UNFCCC, the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform<sup>30</sup> (LCIPP) was created to:

- preserve and strengthen indigenous knowledge systems,
- increase the participation of local communities and indigenous peoples in the Convention process,
- integrate their considerations into climate change and climate action policies.



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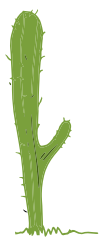
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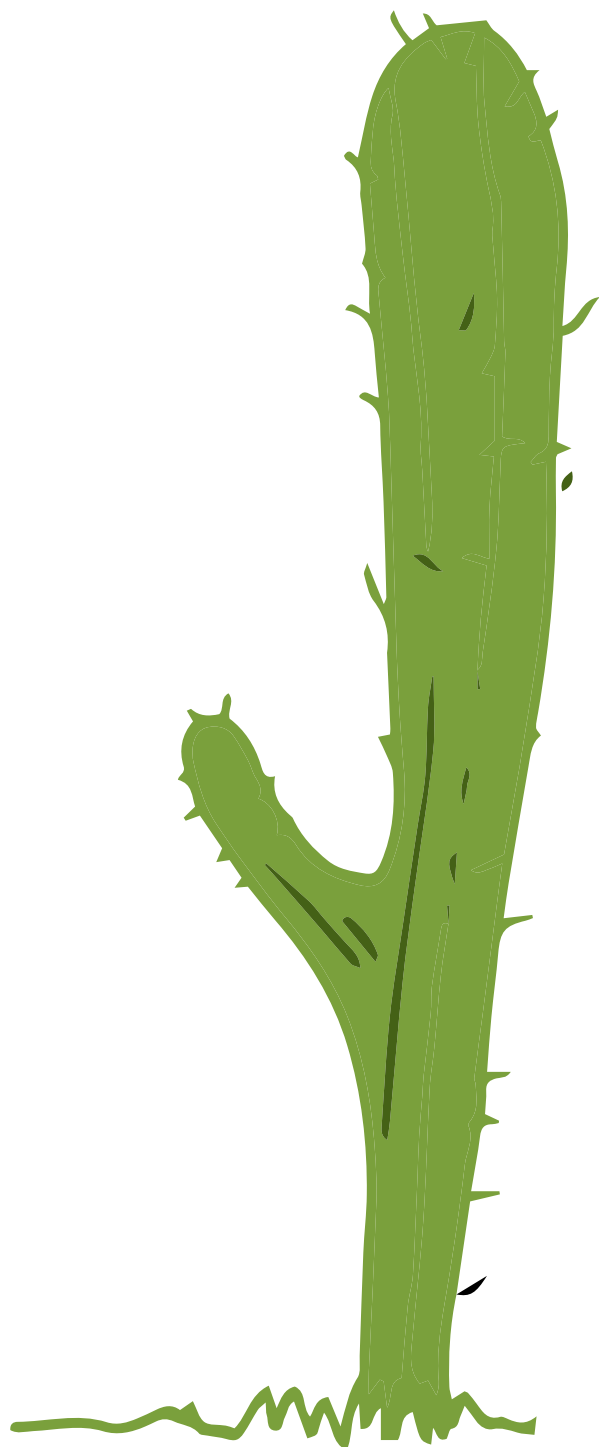
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