

Education is key in mobilising SA youth on climate change challenges

By [Nkokheli Mankayi](#)

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Encouraging and providing opportunities for the youth to exercise their rights regarding climate change issues, comes down to education.



Nkokheli Mankayi. | Source: Supplied

Activate! Change Drivers, an NGO with a youth network of 4,500 youth, hosted a Climate Change Imbizo in November, to discuss the Involvement of Youth in Climate Change and Environmental Rights. Organisations participating, included the WWF and Youth@SAIIA. The keynote speaker was NDP 2030 ambassador and political commentator Gugu Nonjenge.

The Imbizo aimed at mobilising youth for climate and environmental justices in South Africa; integrating the National Youth Climate Action plan and climate change strategy; and through partnerships, creating a nationwide educational campaign on climate change and environmental health, towards economic growth in South Africa. Every generation faces a particular defining political crisis. For our parents this crisis was Apartheid; for our generation, it is the climate change crisis.

Climate change is already a measurable reality, posing significant social, economic and environmental risks and challenges globally. Like many other developing countries, South Africa is especially vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, and we have the task of balancing the acceleration of economic growth and transformation, with the sustainable use of environmental resources and responding to climate change



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Many of the solutions to combating climate change involve using climate restorative technologies, improving climate and environmental literacy, promoting citizen science and ensuring equity and social justice. Central to achieving this is ensuring that local and national policies address the climate crisis and that action plans are in place down to the local level.

A conducive environment to promote development, environmental rights, and a just climate change adaptation and mitigation agenda requires cross-sectoral cooperation in decision-making at all levels of government, which is why getting young people involved is so important in meaningful participation, as well as civil society. This is in line with the United Nations SDGs and the recognition by the UN of the key role that youth can play in tackling climate change and driving awareness.

However, many young people are not involved in climate change initiatives, as they do not believe it affects them personally. We found that education was the main issue, as well as understanding. Do you know that in some of our indigenous languages, there isn't even a word for climate change? Much of the conversation at the Imbizo centred around how to engage with young people in addressing climate justice – from speaking out in favour of a coal-free South Africa, while understanding that there needs to be an alternative; as well as a solution for those who currently make a living out of selling coal.

From 2022, Activate Change Drivers will continue engaging champions in this sector, collaborating, engaging with local government and national government, and taking the lead on various programmes to educate young people on climate change. These conversations around climate change have not trickled down to grassroots level. We need the youth to lead in these spaces too. Young people's voices need to be heard in policy too. We are not just here to tick the right boxes.

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