



COP28 YOUTH RESEARCH

FINAL INSIGHT REPORT

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Contents

1. Context & Challenges	3
2. Participants.....	3
3. Summary by Questions	4
4. Analysis & Commentary.....	8
5. Recommendations	10

CONTEXT & CHALLENGES

In the lead-up to COP27 (December 2022), approximately 75 young people contacted Green Africa Youth Organization (GAYO) for financial and logistical support to attend COP - far more than ever before. Of these 75 youth, GAYO was only able to support 6. This dramatic increase in interest led GAYO to investigate why so many young people want to attend COP and how these young climate activists can be supported - the basis for this report.

I would have preferred to speak with more of the individuals who contacted GAYO, as the original

goal was 30. However, scheduling calls proved to be difficult - mostly due to time differences, load shedding, and lack of responsiveness from participants. Despite this, I noticed significant patterns and feel confident that I can draw helpful insights from the responses.

Some of the participants did not speak strong English, so I worry I misinterpreted some of their answers. However, I did my best to clarify when I didn't understand.

PARTICIPANTS

18

Total Participants

07

Countries Represented

08

Areas of Focus



9 participated via phone call



9 participated via online survey



12 participated in English



9 participated in French



GHANA



TOGO



MALI



NIGERIA



KENYA



BENIN

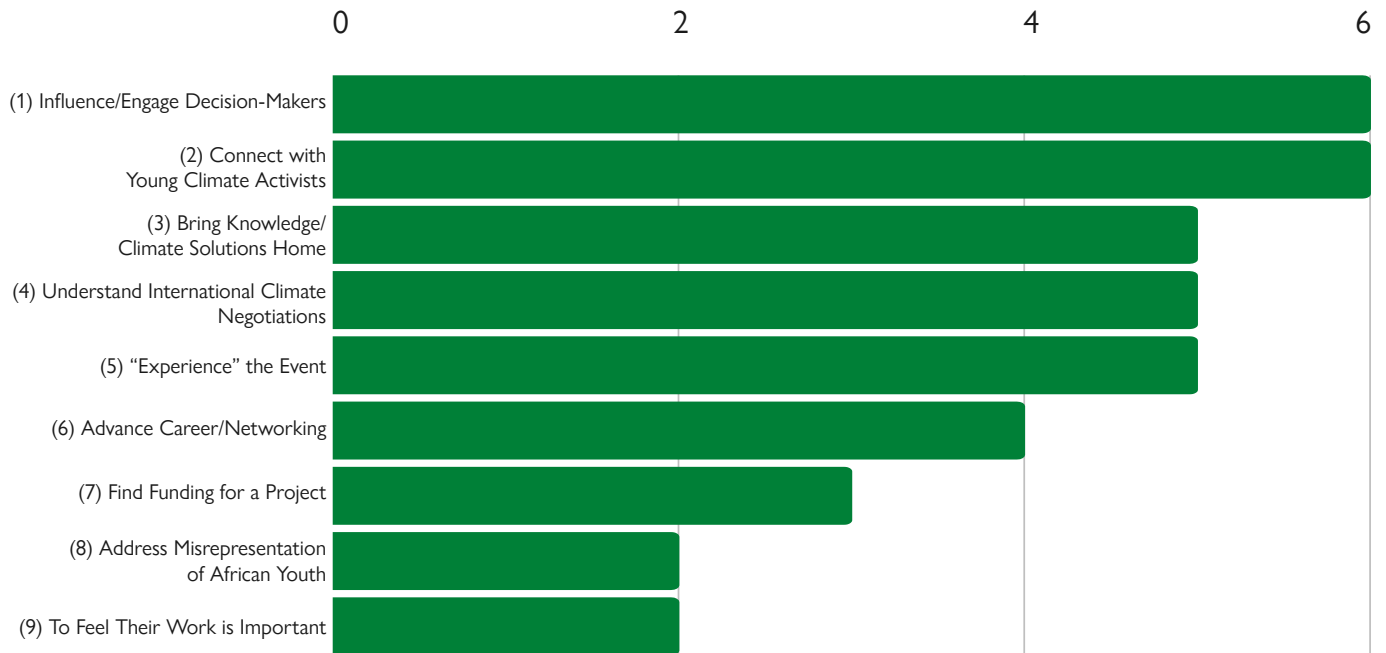


SOUTH AFRICA

- Climate change adaptation/mitigation
- Climate change awareness
- Youth climate engagement
- Indigenous knowledge sharing
- Spirituality & the environment
- Protected areas & conservation
- Agriculture & climate
- Public health & climate

SUMMARY BY QUESTION

1. Why did you want to go to COP27/what did you hope to achieve? (measured by frequency mentioned)



Expansions/clarification on statements in graph above:

(1) Demonstrate to officials via actions, marches, and their presence that youth want them to do more on climate.

Notable Quote:

"I want to keep older generations on their toes."

(3) Especially to rural communities they live or work in - not always having access to these kinds of events; isolation mentioned on multiple occasions

(6) Notable Quote:

"Most young people want to go to COP so they can advance their career and get contacts to make

partnerships." - from a non-profit staff person who supported 6 youth in attending COP27

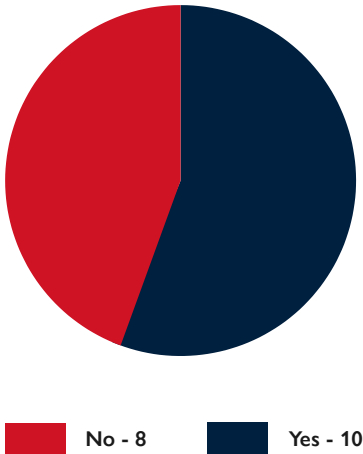
(7) Notable Quote:

"I couldn't get that kind of exposure anywhere else."

(9) Notable Quote:

"(After COP) I felt like my voice and opinion mattered."

2. Have you attended COP?



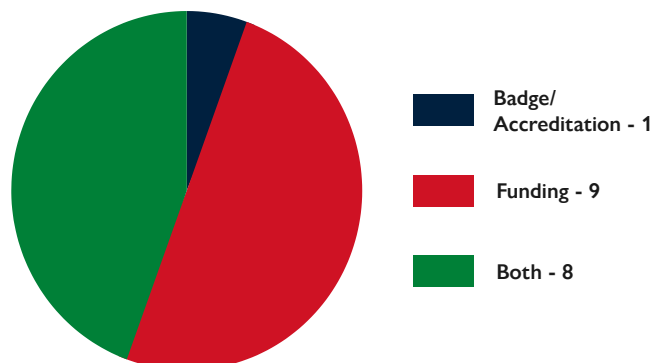
Additional Notes:

- Two youth who were unable to attend COP27 due to a lack of funds were able to attend COP 15 (UN Convention on Biodiversity in Montreal) after exploring alternate funding pathways.
- One research participant's employer (the European Climate Foundation) was able to financially support 6 African youth to attend COP27. The staffer wasn't able to attend himself, as the organization maxed their funds for this particular endeavor and they prioritize youth who don't often get these opportunities first. The organization hopes to send 10 youth to COP28 (2023).

3. What have you been hearing from your local climate movement and the global climate movement that made you think COP27 and COPs in general are important for you to attend?

- Youth aren't being taken seriously at COP and there isn't enough youth representation from African countries.**
Many participants said the organizations they work or volunteer with believe that the more youth who participate in side events, marches, demonstrations, or simply are present, the more they will be "taken seriously". One participant cited the new Children and Youth Pavilion that youth advocated for as an example of this, although they did not clarify if or how this pavilion allows youth to have more influence or access to decision-making spaces.
- Loss & damage fund - people from the Global South need to be there to participate in that conversation.** They did not speak to how they see themselves participating in these discussions officially, other than conversing with other youth and organizations about it.
- COP is the only platform or the platform to gather all climate leaders from across the globe.**

4. When you contacted GAYO (Joshua Amponsem) for support, were you requesting: a badge/ accreditation, funding, or both?



5. If you didn't have either, what led to you deciding you were going to try and attend?

- Encouraged by the organization they work for/are a part of to attend even after running out of funding or not having it in the first place
- *“So, I can achieve my dream of becoming a mouthpiece for my community.”; “I wanted to be heard despite everything.”* Although these are very vague responses (and there were many similar responses), some youth expanded by saying they hoped to meet government representatives/UN officials on the streets and in informal settings to have their voices heard, in addition to being heard by senior staff people at NGOs and youth from the Global North. A note on the vagueness of participant responses can be found in the analysis/commentary section.

6. Who did you most want to speak to and learn from at COP27?

Response	Frequency
Youth activists from other countries/regions	9
Youth activists from your country/region	6
UN officials	3
Government officials from your own country/region	0
Government officials from other countries/regions	0

7. If you attended COP27, how was your experience?

Response	Frequency
Achieved goal of meeting other young people and organizations	4
Rejuvenated/more motivated than ever to continue work	3
Enjoyed the youth pavilion and making connections there	2
Felt official negotiation spaces were completely inaccessible	2
Felt empowered by seeing other African/Global South leaders advocating and engaging with ease	1
Generally overwhelming & couldn't participate meaningfully in strikes and marches as planned due to restricted areas	1

8. What do you feel you can gain from or contribute to COP that you cannot get elsewhere/at other events?

- Ability to connect with such a large group of people from all over the world.
 - *“There are no other opportunities to meet all the world in one week”;*
 - *“It’s the biggest climate event in the world.”;*
 - *“COP is a one-stop shop for policy makers, scientists, government officials - meet potential employers, future personal projects, funding opportunities. That’s why it’s unique”.*
- Such an official event, even just attending *“makes youth feel important”*.
- Engage with negotiators on the streets of COP - *“opportunity youth don’t get anywhere else”*.
- Only place they seem to connect with young people doing the same work in other countries.

9. Apart from participating in COP, what else do you think you need to advance your climate action? Are there any other activities or support you require?

Response	Frequency
More networking opportunities without extensive travel (with youth from their own regions, other regions, mentors, non-profit staffers)	6
Personal funding to participate in other seminars/conferences	4
Organizational funding to carry out projects and activities	4
More educational and awareness programs for rural communities, especially semi- economically developed communities	2
More funding specifically to countries in East Africa - West Africa prioritized	1

ANALYSIS & COMMENTARY

The research question being: Why are more and more youth wanting to attend COP despite their inability to participate in negotiations?

With the general curiosity/thesis: Due to COP's notoriety, are many youths attending simply to feel as though or prove that they are contributing to the issue of climate change?



- I didn't get this sense generally. Of course, you have to take into account that they're aware they were speaking to a researcher and may not have been honest. Most of the youth I spoke with believed they could genuinely make an impact at COP, make important connections, and bring back invaluable learnings to their communities. However, it's important to note that most of the youth who said this hadn't actually attended COP. Those who had attended still felt it was a valuable experience but seemed less optimistic about it being a productive environment to contribute and learn. Most participants who attended COP27 (all who did so for the first time) said they would enthusiastically attend again, but they would lower their expectations regarding their ability to engage in decision-making spaces. Alternatively, others noted they would change
- their focus next year to engaging with decision-makers instead of other youth, but did not clarify how they would do this successfully.
- The response from the non-profit staff person who supported 6 youth in attending COP last year ("*Most young people want to go to COP so they can advance their career & get contacts to make partnerships*") and the frequency with which networking/finding funding for projects was mentioned is significant. These responses lead me to believe that these youth don't get enough opportunities to network generally and that personal recognition and opportunities is a critical motivation in their attendance.
- About half of participants seemed to lack specific motivations for attending: to "*experience the event*", "*advocate on climate*", or "*have their*

voice heard". This leads me to believe that there is widespread misunderstanding of the event and how youth can contribute, and that many youth seek to attend COP simply because it's an official event.

- About half of participants spoke generally about environmental & climate issues that they wanted to discuss at COP. The specific mention of the *"loss and damage fund"* by at least four participants as a motivating factor for attending stood out to me for this reason.
- It's notable that all participants were adamant that COP is the only place to meet climate decision-makers, such as UN officials, but those who attended also mentioned that they didn't get a chance to speak with any of them.
- Every participant I asked the follow-up question: "is it still important for young people to participate even though they can't participate meaningfully in the negotiations?" said yes, in order to push older generations and decision-makers to do more, and show (if only via their presence alone) that youth care and are paying attention.
 - A notable quote that echoes many participant responses regarding young people's lack of ability to engage with relevant stakeholders is as follows: *"There's more than one way to influence decision-making – collaboration is one of those ways. When we network at events like COP, we form new alliances that are in a better position to influence decision-making or that have better alliances that are willing to make decision-making spaces accessible for us"*.
- Organizations seem to be encouraging youth to attend even when they don't have the resources to support them by telling them that not enough youth attend.
- It's significant that in Questions 1 and 6, the majority of participants mentioned wanting to connect with and learn from other youth activists, either in their own region or other regions, above meeting government/UN officials or learning about international climate policy negotiations.
- Although this is likely an obvious point, it was clear that African youth feel misrepresented or underrepresented in international negotiations, so believe their participation is ultimately necessary regardless of having the resources to attend. Especially in terms of the loss and damage discussions, several youth mentioned that the Global South must be well-represented.



RECOMMENDATIONS

1. I cannot conclude that most of the participants want to attend COP only for the notoriety & photo ops. Notoriety does seem to be a strong motivation for some, indicated by lack of vision for their participation, lack of understanding of the event, and the prioritization of personal networking and funding opportunities over contributions. Many, however, seemed incredibly focused on bringing back knowledge to, for example, the rural communities they work with, connecting meaningfully with particular youth and organizations, and influencing decision-makers on the streets or wherever possible.
2. I see a significant opportunity for more in-person, regional events for young climate activists to network and compare climate solutions. Most participants wanted to connect with youth from their own or other regions over government/UN officials and see COP as the “only place” to do so. And, even when those who attended COP recognized that they weren’t able to participate as meaningfully as they hoped, they noted that they would attend again because of the connections they made. Many also seemed to feel isolated in their climate work in their respective countries and concerned about the cost of attending international events. Regional events would likely fill a gap that these youth are experiencing. Based on my conversations, however, it would be difficult to convince most youth that there is a more notable and important global climate event than COP where they could encounter decision-makers.
3. Perhaps avenues and opportunities need to be explored for youth from the Global South to participate in discussions surrounding the loss and damage fund outside of COP.
4. Most of the research questions for this insight report were designed to understand why more and more youth are seeking support to attend COP, not how they intend to participate. Therefore, further research could include interviewing youth climate activists, non-profit staffers, and even older activists who have participated in multiple COP negotiations to understand how young people intend to/could participate more meaningfully, engage decision-makers, and access official negotiation spaces at COP.
5. Further research could also include interviewing environmental NGO staffers in these countries re: why they are encouraging youth to go to COP even when they don’t have resources and/or education for these organizations about the restrictions around youth participation at COP before they invest their time and resources. It would be very interesting to understand, from the perspective of NGOs, what of value and significance the young people they sponsor to attend COP bring back.

Notes



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