



Climate Change and Young Children

A Perception Survey of Children, Parents, and Early Childhood Educators in Bhutan

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Overview

Since 2019, ARNEC has been advocating for clean, safe and sustainable environments for early childhood. Through a joint scoping study, we have been building foundational work linking early childhood and climate change with University of Wollongong-Early Start Australia in partnership with Save the Children, UNICEF EAPRO and Bernard van Leer Foundation. Our pioneering scoping study highlighted that climate change and environmental degradation undermine all nurturing care areas affecting young children, families, and their abilities to survive and thrive. Young children who have emitted the least amount of greenhouse gases are paying the heaviest price.

ARNEC's ECD-Climate framework for action recognizes research and evidence generation as a key action pillar in elevating the needs of young children to inspire collective actions in addressing the impact of climate change and environmental degradation. Building on the joint scoping study with support from Early Opportunities, we have since supported micro research 4 countries in Bhutan, India, Pakistan, and the Philippines. These studies have provided empirical evidence to support the participation of young children in climate and environmental discourse and actions. This is one of a series of four micro research reports that summarize findings, lessons learned, and recommendations requiring urgent actions.

Background

Climate change poses significant risks to human well-being and health, particularly impacting vulnerable populations like young children. The effects of climate change on children's health, including air pollution, extreme weather events, and food shortages, can lead to developmental disorders, malnutrition, and diseases. To address these challenges, raising awareness about climate change and its impact on children is crucial. This report presents the findings of the micro research conducted to gauge the awareness levels of children, parents, and early childhood educators in Bhutan regarding climate change and its effects on young children. While the study does not directly address climate change, it provides insights into related environmental issues and their causes and effects.

Methodology

The study employed a mixed-methods approach, including interviews with children aged 3 to 6, parents of young children, and early childhood educators. The sample size consisted of 271 respondents from two districts in Bhutan, purposively selected for the study.

Limitations

The study faced several limitations, such as the sample size being limited to two districts in Bhutan, which may not be representative of the entire country's perceptions. Moreover, the study relied on self-reported awareness levels, which may be subject to bias or inaccuracies. Additionally, cultural factors might have influenced respondents' responses, impacting the generalizability of findings.

Results

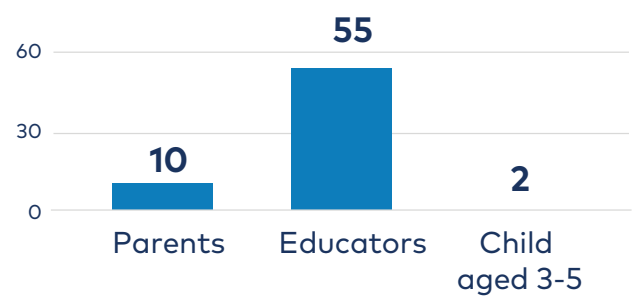
While the study focuses on understanding the awareness level of children, parents and educators on climate change, it predominantly captures their perceptions on causative factors, such as environment degradation, pollution, and dynamics

around these themes. Perspectives of the three categories of respondents including children, parents and early childhood educators show limited awareness of the immediate issues surrounding climate change:

i. Awareness of the Existence of Climate Change as an Environmental Issue:

Approximately 65% of adult respondents recognized climate change as a global issue, identifying erratic weather patterns, pollution, natural disasters, and environmental degradation in their locality. However, awareness levels were lower among children, with only 2% of young children demonstrating awareness of these global climate events.

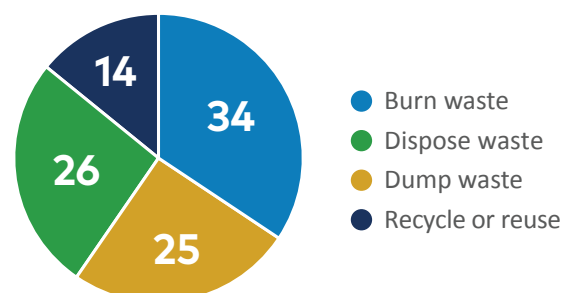
Figure 1: Awareness level of climate change as a phenomena



ii. Knowledge of the Causes of Climate Change:

While many respondents were unable to relate specific causes of climate change, most understood that improper waste management and pollution negatively affect the environment. Nevertheless, only 60% of educators attributed climate change to pollution, while parents and children had limited understanding of the causes.

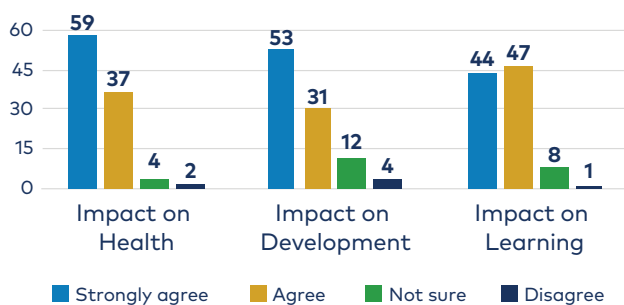
Figure 2: Waste disposal by adults in %



iii. Knowledge of the Impact of Climate Change in General and on Children:

Most parents could explain the impact of climate change in simple terms, such as the effects of pollution or environmental degradation. However, when it comes to specific impacts, only 59 percent strongly agreed on its impact on health, while 53 percent strongly agreed with impact on children's development and 44 percent strongly agreed with the impact on learning. Children were vaguely aware of the direct impact of climate change but could relate it to getting sick or dying due to poor air and environment quality.

Figure 3: Educators' perception on impact of climate change on children



iv. Knowledge of Mitigation Measures:

The survey reinforced the need to take actions at multiple levels involving multi-stakeholders.

Educators demonstrated a better understanding of climate change mitigation measures, including sensitization, advocacy, and reducing greenhouse gases. Parents expressed a willingness to contribute to mitigating climate change through education, waste management, and environmental conservation. Children believed that climate change could be mitigated by reducing waste and planting more trees.

Lessons Learned

The micro research highlights a lack of awareness about climate change among children, parents, and educators in Bhutan. While some awareness exists about environmental issues, understanding climate change as a global phenomenon remains limited. Children exhibit a need for age-appropriate education on environmental matters and climate change.



The fact that many people, even in a highly acclaimed 'Carbon Negative Country', are unaware of the causes and impact of climate change is a huge concern.

Recommendations

Based on the micro research study's insights, the following recommendations are made to enhance awareness on climate change and its impact on children:

1. Raise awareness among parents and educators about climate change and its impact on young children.
2. Implement climate change education in the early childhood curriculum and parenting education programs.
3. Strengthen society-wide climate change education and advocacy, including children.
4. Establish climate action groups and networks within communities to promote awareness.
5. Develop strong legislation addressing climate change's impact on children and future generations.
6. Ensure that climate change mitigation measures and financing include considerations for children.
7. Conduct further studies to explore specific impacts of climate change on children and identify measures to address these impacts effectively.

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