

unicef 

for every child

# RISING TO THE CHALLENGE

Youth' Perspectives on  
Climate Change and  
Education in South Asia

**Cover:** Mostakima Aktar, 11, and her best friend Shamima Aktar, 11, sit close to each other during a class in a UNICEF-supported learning centre in Camp 9 of Balukhali refugee camp in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh.

© UNICEF/UN0346588/Modola

UNICEF Regional Office South Asia  
Lainchaur, Kathmandu,  
Nepal

[www.unicef.org/rosa](http://www.unicef.org/rosa)

© United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)  
November 2020

Permission is required to reproduce any part of this publication: All images and illustrations used in this publication are intended for informational purposes only and must be used only in reference to this publication and its content. All photos are used for illustrative purposes only. UNICEF photographs are copyrighted and may not be used for an individual's or organization's own promotional activities or in any commercial context. The content cannot be digitally altered to change meaning or context. All reproductions of non-brand content MUST be credited, as follows: Photographs: "© UNICEF / photographer's last name". Assets not credited are not authorized. Thank you for supporting UNICEF.

## UNICEF's Regional Office for South Asia (ROSA) works with all eight UNICEF Country Offices in South Asia (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka)



The information shown on this map does not imply official recognition or endorsement of and physical, political boundaries or feature names by the United Nations or other collaborative organizations. UN OCHA and affiliated organizations are not liable for damages of any kind related to the use of this data.

# CONTENTS



## Objective

4



## Sample and Methodology

6



## Detailed Analysis

10



## Findings

28

1

**OBJECTIVE**





# OBJECTIVE

The survey was structured to examine the following:

- Youth experiences and **perceptions** of climate change in their locality and surroundings.
- Youth perceptions of **climate change learning and action opportunities at school** and in their community.
- Youth experiences of, and involvement in, climate change **learning and action initiative(s) at school and in their community.**
- Youth views on support **needs to empower them** to become effective and confident agents of change.

# 2

## SAMPLE AND METHODOLOGY



# SAMPLE AND METHODOLOGY



**25,826**  
respondents



**8**  
countries



**10**  
languages

Over **25,000 individuals** responded to the survey across the **8 countries** of South Asia.

The survey was available in **10 languages\*** and conducted between August 7<sup>th</sup> and September 9<sup>th</sup> 2020.

Administered online:

- Through Facebook Messenger, Viber and WhatsApp.
- Respondents are those who have access to mobile technology or internet.

Cleaning steps included flagging cases that had erroneous entry, were outside the age range and empty cases:

- 4,231 cases were dropped.

\*Dari and Pashto (Afghanistan), Bangla (Bangladesh), English (Bhutan), Hindi (India), Dhivehi (Maldives), Nepali (Nepal), Urdu (Pakistan), Sinhalese and Tamil (Sri Lanka).

## SAMPLE AND METHODOLOGY

**Afghanistan**

 5,796

22.4%

**Pakistan**

 5,546

21.5%

**India**

 2,818

10.9%

**Nepal**

 4,197

16.3%

**Bhutan**

 510

2%

**Bangladesh**

 5,586

21.6%

**Sri Lanka**

 1,030

4%

Total respondents

 25,826

**Maldives**

 343

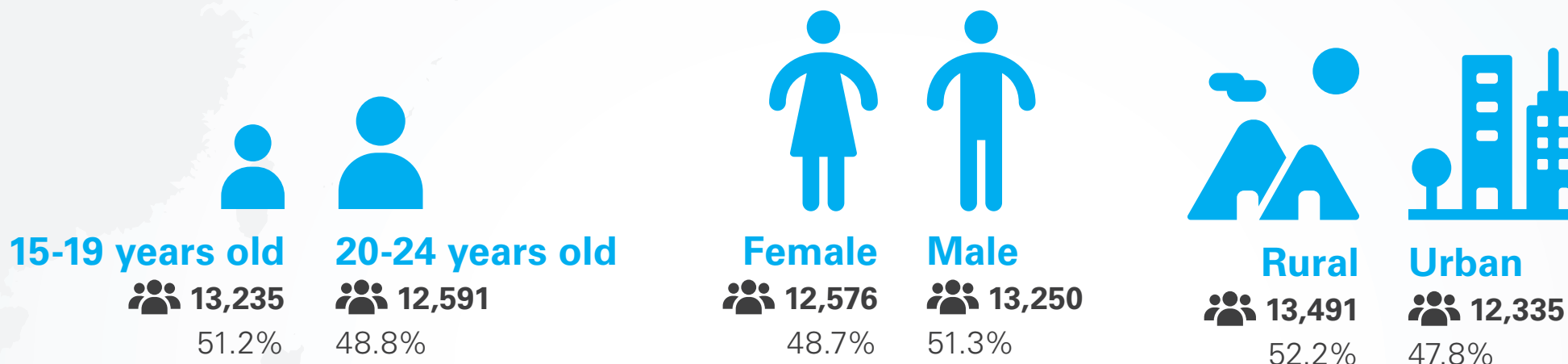
1.3%

### Weighting:

- **Iterative proportional fitting** was used to weight the sample intra-country to correct for non-response and selection bias across demographic factors.
- **Gender** and **age** were adjusted using 2020 population data from the International Labour Organization (ILO) database, ILOSTAT.



## SAMPLE AND METHODOLOGY




### Limitations:

- **Demographic:** Respondents were not asked questions about socio-economic status, education or region.
- **Imbalanced response:** Given the incomplete demographic profile of the respondents, data presented should be interpreted “in-sample”, meaning that these attitudes are from a sample population with internet access, literacy both in terms of reading and ability to navigate internet-enabled devices, and willingness to opt-in to a survey.
- **Drop-off:** As with many online surveys, there was a consistent drop-off in respondents throughout the survey. Missing data were treated as missing at random (MAR) with the assumption that auxiliary variables in weighting adjusted for missingness. It is possible, given point 1, that there are additional factors related to drop-off. Moreover, a respondent who does not know about climate change is potentially more likely to drop off than those that know a lot about the subject. Results should be interpreted with this in mind.

# 3

## DETAILED ANALYSIS



A vertical photograph on the left side of the page shows the silhouettes of two children against a sunset sky. The child on the left is carrying a large, light-colored bag or bundle on their back. The child on the right is holding a large, dark, woven basket. The background shows a horizon line over water.

## SECTION 1: **PERSONAL PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCE**

Respondents were asked about their knowledge of, and exposure to, climate change



## KNOWLEDGE OF CLIMATE CHANGE

**Students were asked:**

*How much do you know about climate change and global warming?*

*Do you learn about climate change in school?*

Despite the perceived inability to explain climate change, a majority of respondents (65%) reported "often" receiving lessons on climate change.

**9%**

of respondents had "never heard" of climate change

**64%**

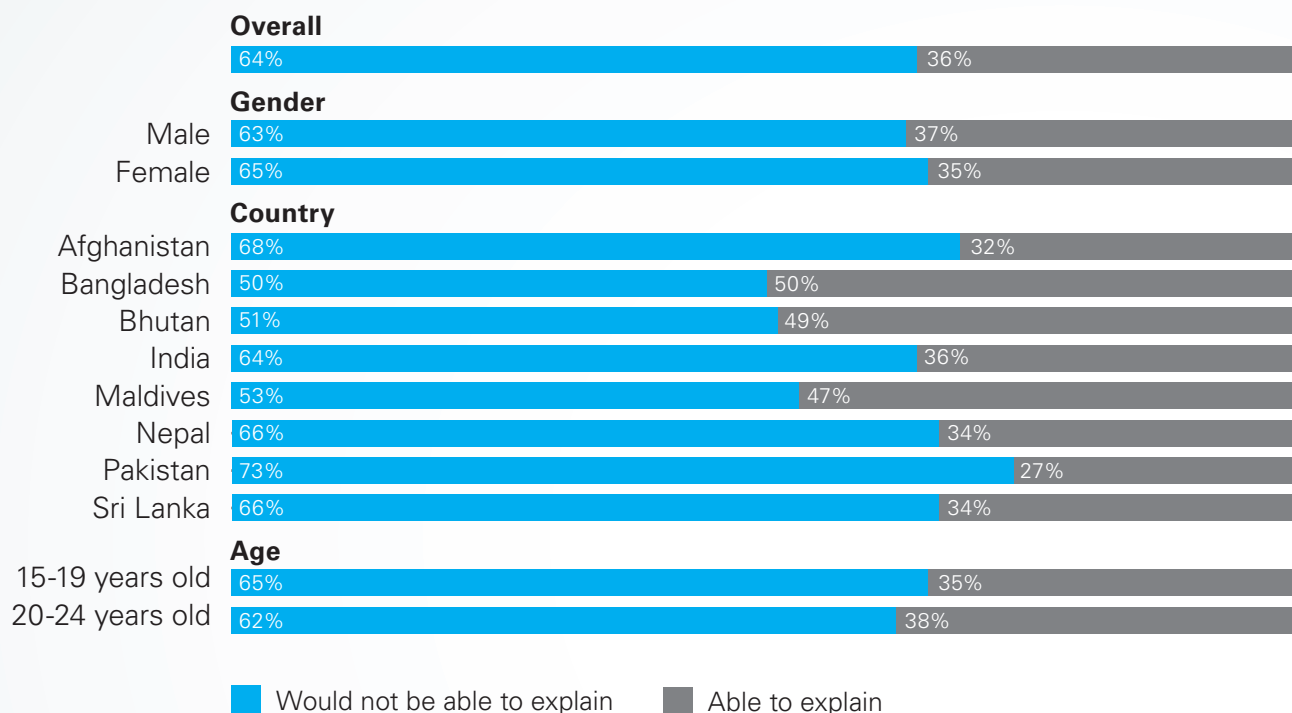
reported that they could not explain climate change

**65%**

reported that they "often or very often" learned about climate change in school

## KNOWLEDGE OF CLIMATE CHANGE

### How much do you know about climate change and global warming?



Number of Respondents: 25,364

- **Overall**, a majority of respondents reported not being able to explain climate change or global warming. This trend held across gender and age.
- **Country**: In no country did a majority of respondents say that they could explain global warming or climate change.
- Bangladesh had the highest proportion of respondents that could explain climate change (50%), while Pakistan had the lowest (27%).
- 1 out of 4 respondents from Pakistan, India and Afghanistan reported that they had “never heard” of climate change.

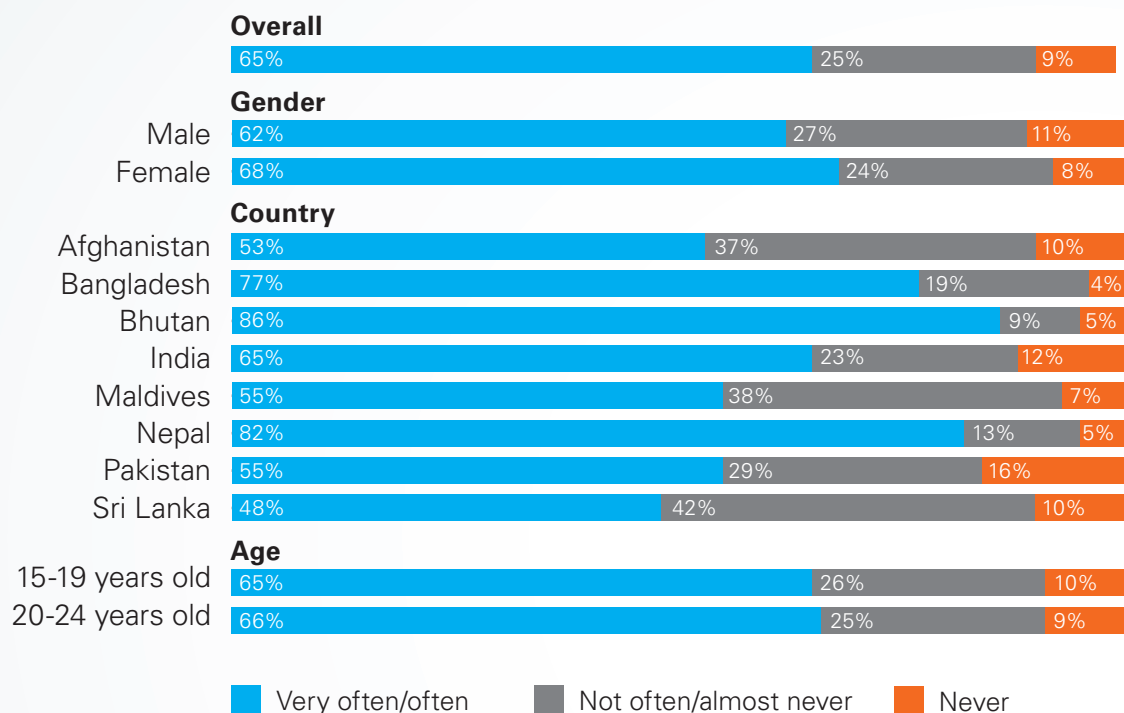


*‘Climate Change is the defining issue of our time and we are at a defining moment. From shifting weather patterns that threaten food production to rising sea levels that increase the risk of catastrophic flooding, the impacts of climate change are global in scope and unprecedented in scale. Without drastic action today, adapting to these impacts in the future will be more difficult and costly’.*

*Age 20, female respondent from India*

## CLIMATE CHANGE IN SCHOOL

### Do you learn about climate change in school?



Number of Respondents: 21,198

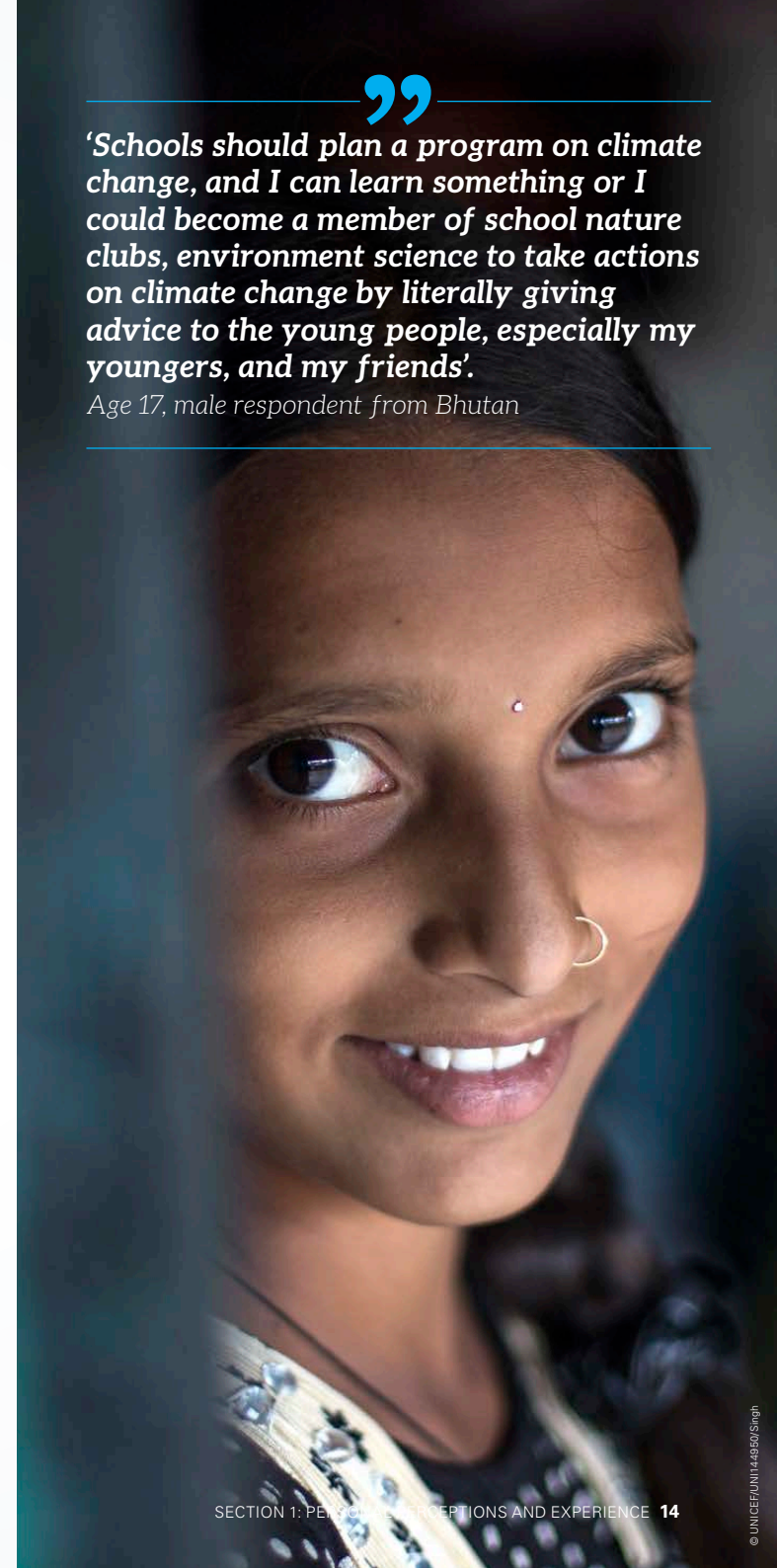
- **Overall**, almost 2 out of 3 respondents reported that they “often” learned about climate change in school. This held across age groups.
  - Conversely, 9% stated that they “never” learned about climate change in school.
- **A higher proportion (+6%) of female respondents** reported “often” learning about climate change in school compared to males.

- 1 in 10 respondents in Pakistan, India, Afghanistan and Sri Lanka reported “never” learning about climate change in school.
- 4 in 5 respondents in Bhutan and Nepal reported “often” learning about climate change in school.



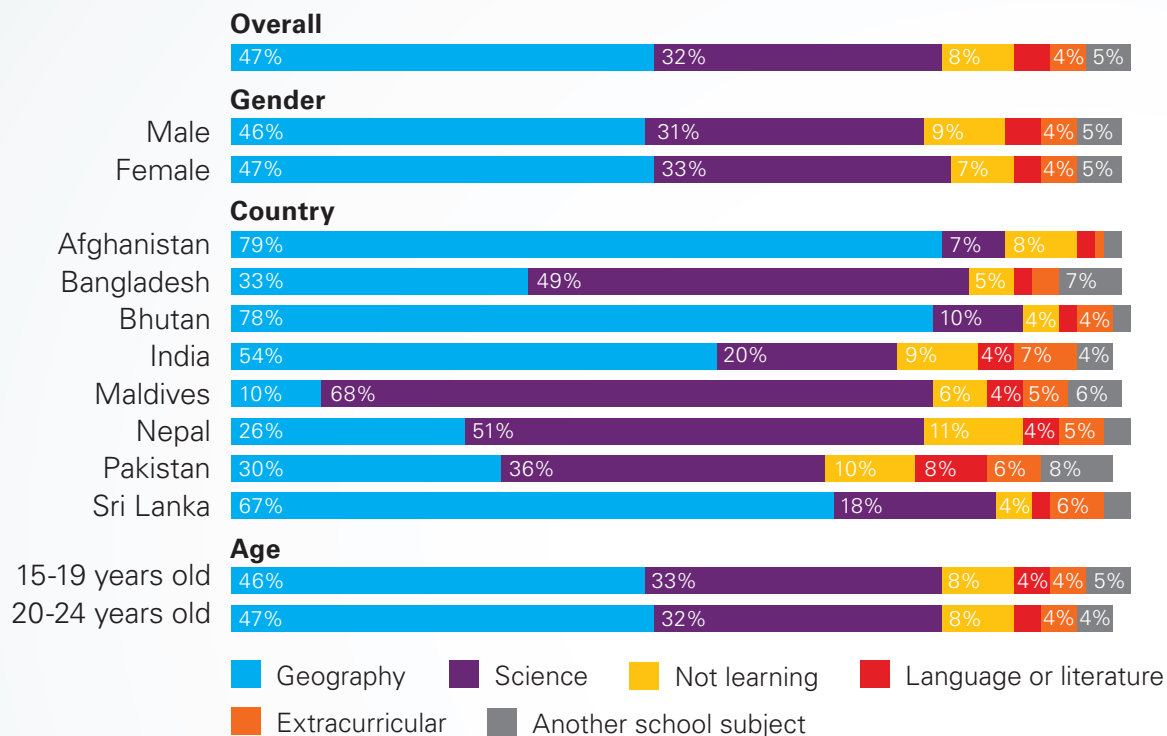
*‘Schools should plan a program on climate change, and I can learn something or I could become a member of school nature clubs, environment science to take actions on climate change by literally giving advice to the young people, especially my youngsters, and my friends.’*

*Age 17, male respondent from Bhutan*



# LEARNING ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE IN SCHOOL

## How do you learn about climate change in school?



Number of Respondents: 16,443

- **Overall**, respondents learned about climate change either in Geography (47%) or Science (32%). This did not vary across gender or age.
- **A high proportion of respondents in Maldives** (68%) reported learning about climate change in Science compared to Geography.
- **1 in 10 respondents in Nepal and Pakistan** reported “not learning” about climate change in school.



*‘I am currently a young Member of Parliament and also a law student. I would like to bring together schools, Dhamma schools and youth clubs to the district I represent, in a practical way’.*

*Age 24, male respondent from Sri Lanka*



## WORRY ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE

**Students were asked:**

*Are you worried about climate change and what it means for the future?*

**31%**

of respondents stated that they were not at all or not very worried about climate change

**69%**

reported being a little, or very worried about the future effects of climate change

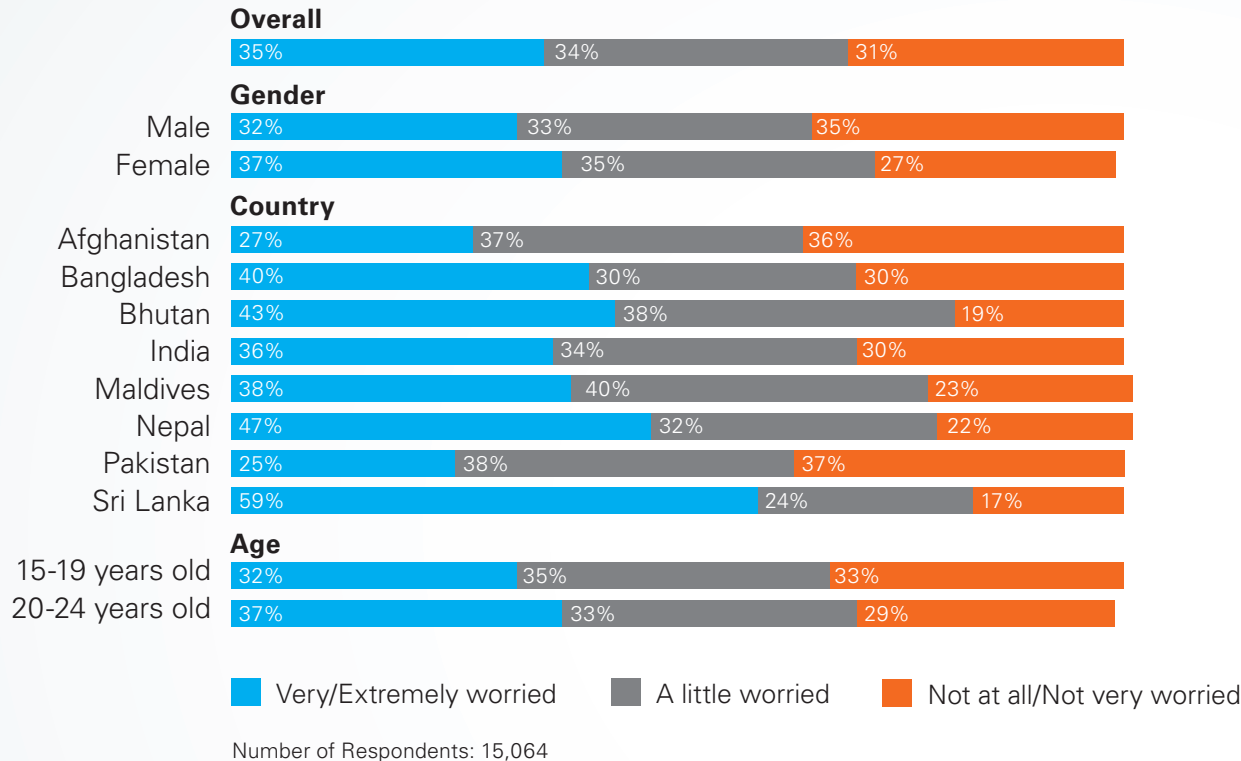
**35%**

reported being “very or extremely” worried about the impacts of climate change



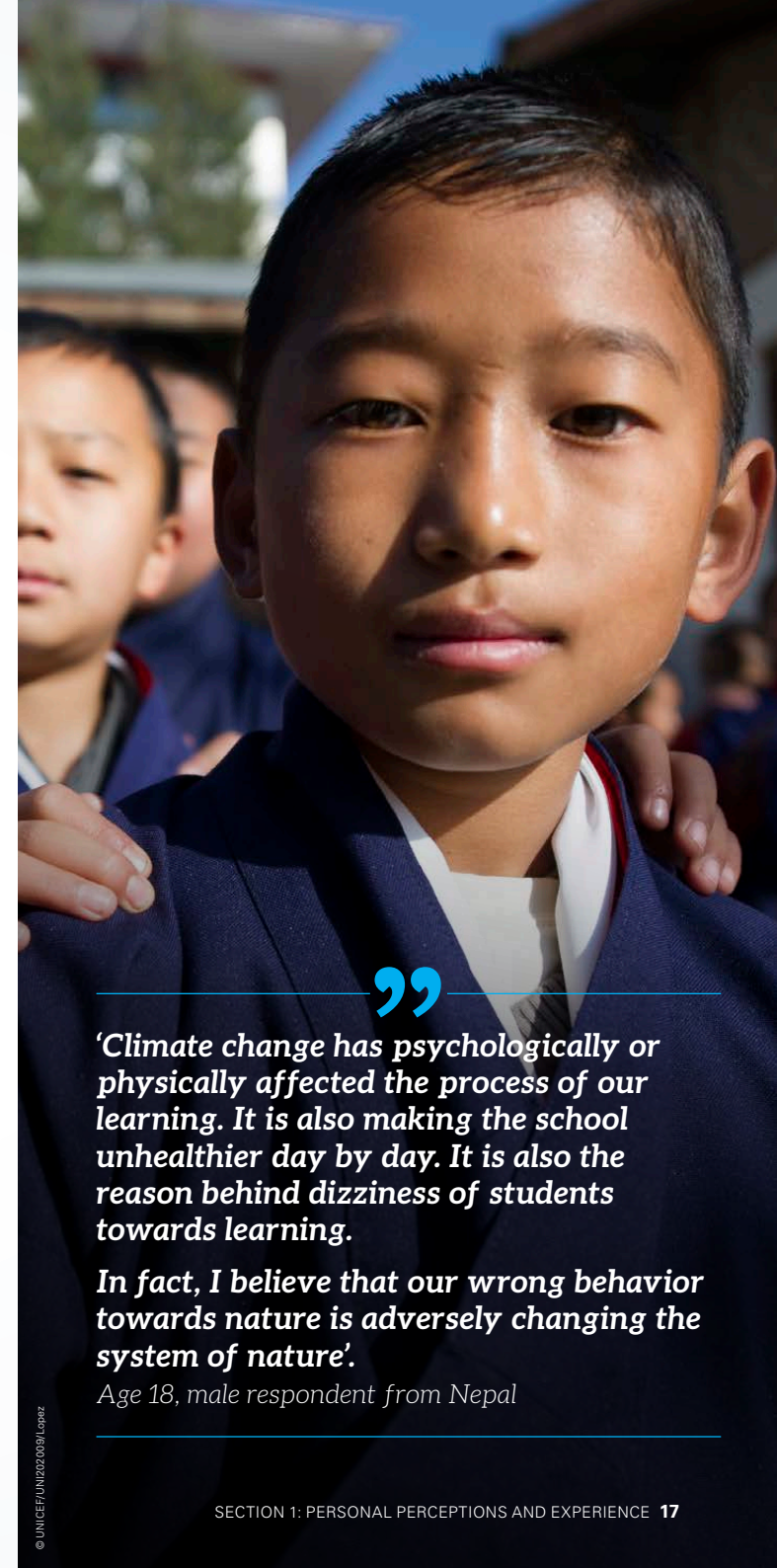
## WORRY ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE

### Are you worried about climate change and what it means for the future?



- **Overall**, 69% of respondents stated being a little worried or very worried about climate change's impact on the future.
- **More than a third of male respondents** stated that they were "not at all or not very worried" about the impact of climate change. This was +8% higher than their female counterparts.

- **Almost 60% of Sri Lankan respondents stated that they were "extremely worried"** about the impact of climate change on the future. This is **more than double** the proportion of their counterparts in Pakistan and Afghanistan.



*'Climate change has psychologically or physically affected the process of our learning. It is also making the school unhealthier day by day. It is also the reason behind dizziness of students towards learning.*

*In fact, I believe that our wrong behavior towards nature is adversely changing the system of nature'.*

*Age 18, male respondent from Nepal*

## INTEREST IN LEARNING

**Students were asked:**

*What do you most want to learn about climate change?*

**41%**

of respondents responded that they wanted to learn about “all” aspects of climate change

**16%**

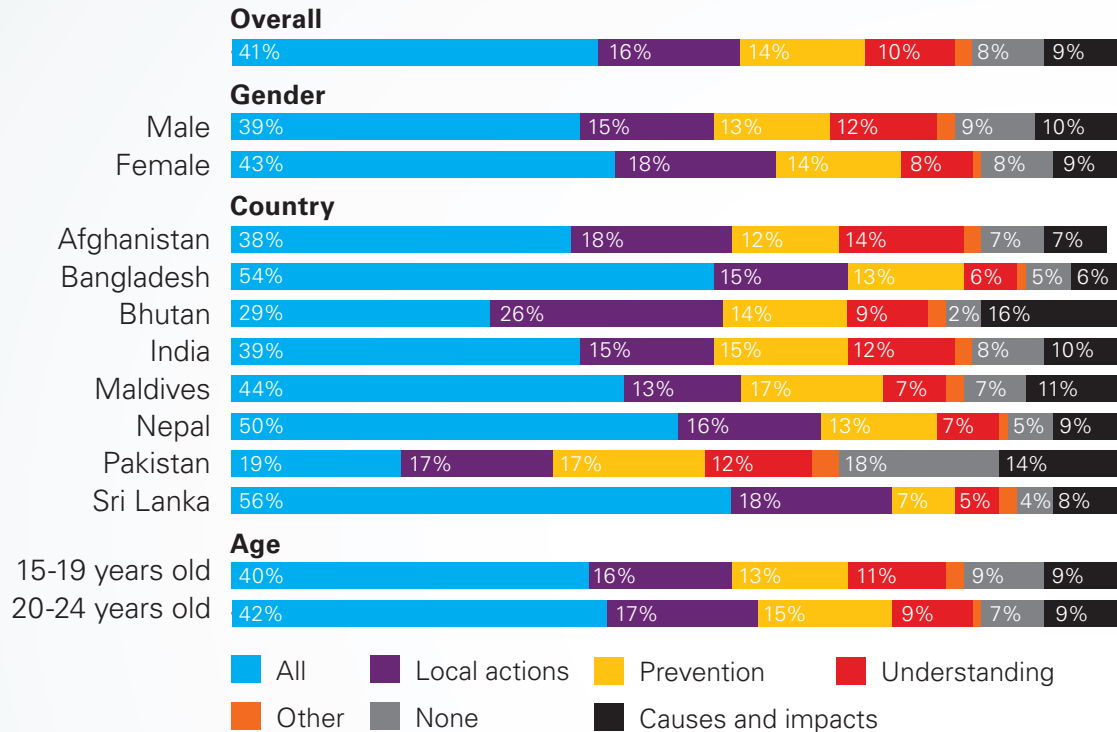
of respondents stated that they were interested in “local actions”

**8%**

stated that they had no interest in learning about climate change

## INTEREST IN LEARNING

### What do you most want to learn about climate change?



Number of Respondents: 18,266

- **Overall**, respondents were most interested in learning about all aspects of climate change (41%), followed by local actions (16%) and prevention measures (14%).
- At least **half of respondents** in Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh wanted to learn about “all” aspects of climate change.
- **1 in 10 respondents** in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and India stated no interest in learning about climate change.



*‘I am currently studying at the undergraduate level. The books we read do not cover much on the subject of climate change. We have not yet been able to fully understand climate change at our level. I think climate change is a big problem in the world. There is still a need to raise public awareness about this. When the individual becomes aware, then the world will become aware along with the community and the nation. This is even more important for young people like us.’*

*Age 19, female respondent from Nepal*





## SECTION 2: **POLICY AND LEADERSHIP**

Respondents were asked about who they believed should be responsible for addressing climate change



## INTEREST IN LEARNING

**Students were asked:**

*Who should be taking the most action to address climate change?*

*Do you think your government will take actions to address climate change after the COVID-19 pandemic?*

**62%**

of respondents believed that governments should take the most action

**18%**

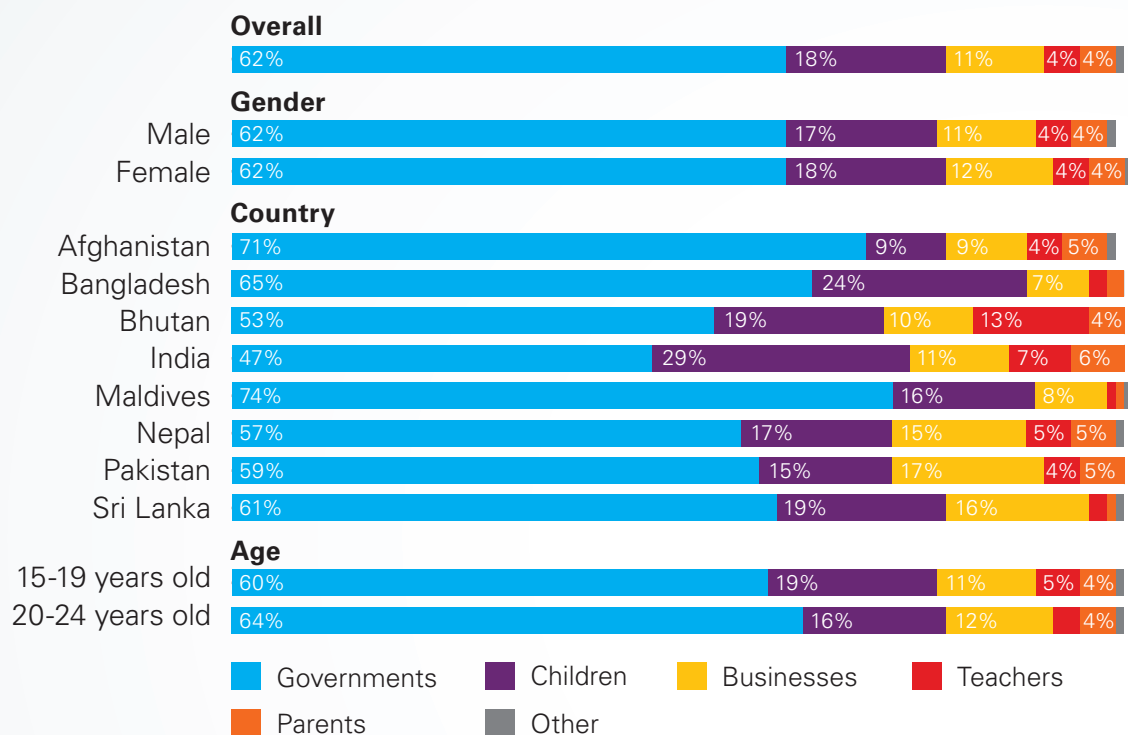
of respondents stated that children should be taking the most action to address climate change

**64%**

believed that the government is likely to, or would definitively do something to address climate change after COVID-19

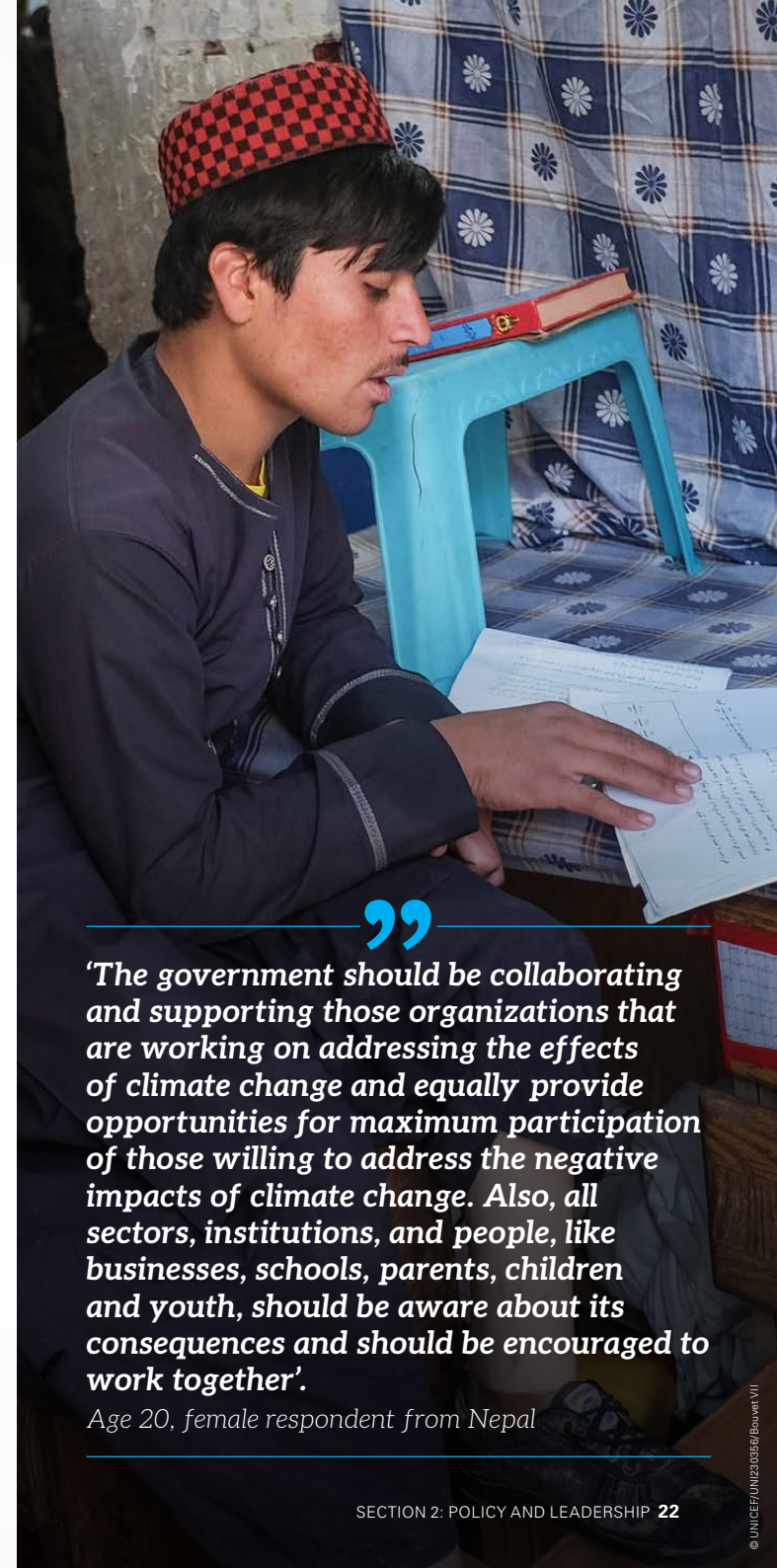
## RESPONSIBILITY FOR ACTION

### Who should be taking the most action to address climate change?



Number of Respondents: 13,532

- **Overall**, 62% of respondents believed that governments should be taking the most action to address climate change. This held across gender.
- This trend held across countries, though **less than half of Indian respondents** identified governments as being responsible for taking the most action to address climate change.
- Besides governments, **18% of respondents stated that children** should be taking action to address climate change.

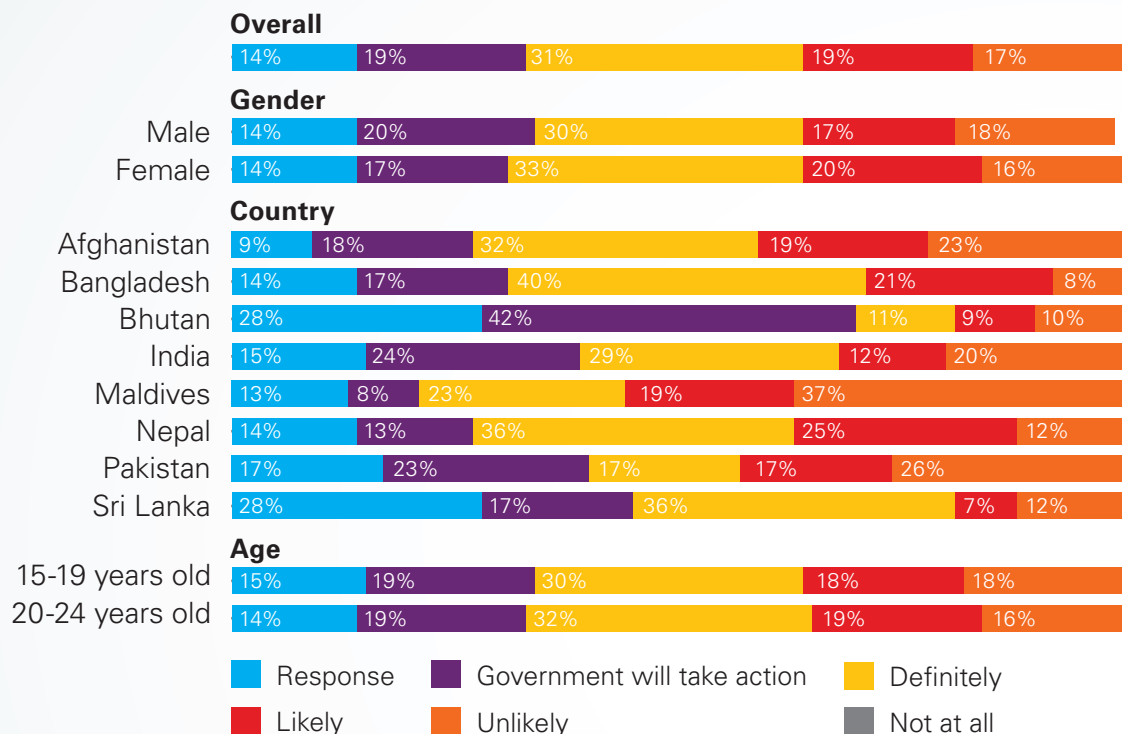


“The government should be collaborating and supporting those organizations that are working on addressing the effects of climate change and equally provide opportunities for maximum participation of those willing to address the negative impacts of climate change. Also, all sectors, institutions, and people, like businesses, schools, parents, children and youth, should be aware about its consequences and should be encouraged to work together’.

Age 20, female respondent from Nepal

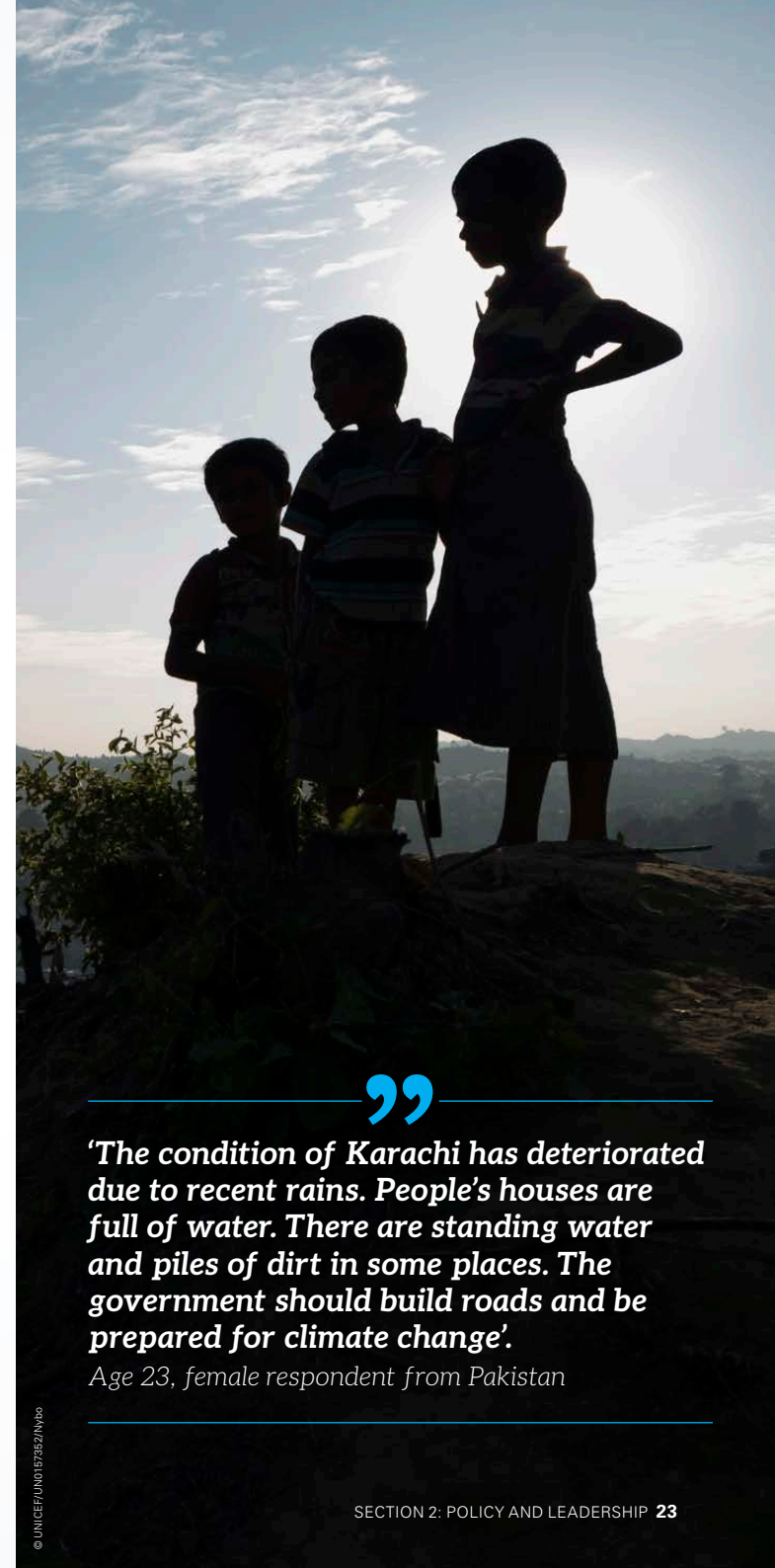
## GOVERNMENT ACTION

### Do you think your government will take action to address climate change after the COVID-19 pandemic?



Number of Respondents: 12,776

- **Overall**, 64% believed that the government is likely to, or will definitely do something to address climate change after the COVID-19 pandemic.
  - Conversely, 36% did not think government is likely to act (17% stated "not at all").
  - This generally held across gender and age.
- Maldives was the only country where a majority of respondents did not believe that their government would take actions to address climate change.
- Sri Lanka and Bhutan held the most optimistic view of government action, **each with 8 out of 10 respondents** believing that their governments would or would likely take action after COVID-19.



**'The condition of Karachi has deteriorated due to recent rains. People's houses are full of water. There are standing water and piles of dirt in some places. The government should build roads and be prepared for climate change.'**

Age 23, female respondent from Pakistan



## SECTION 3: **IMPACT AND ACTION**

Respondents were asked about the ways climate change has personally impacted them, as well as ways they will act in the future





## EFFECT ON STUDIES AND COVID-19

**Students were asked:**

*How has climate change affected your education/ studies?*

*What would you like to do to address climate change in the future?*

**78%**

of respondents believed that climate change has had an effect on their studies

**19%**

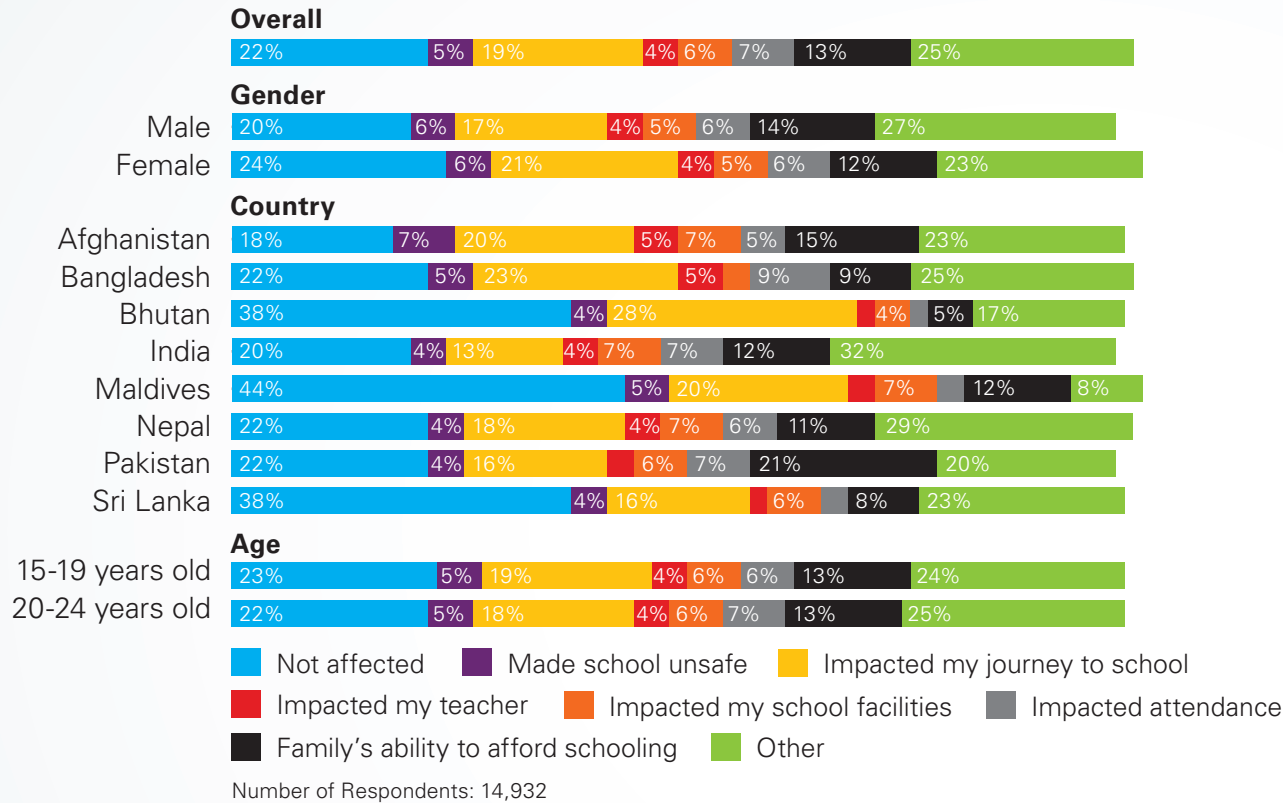
stated that climate change has impacted their journey to school

**28%**

of respondents would like to join an organization

## EFFECT ON STUDIES

### How has climate change affected your education/studies?



- **Overall**, 78% of respondents stated that their education or studies was affected by climate change.
- **25%** stated other reasons, including inability to concentrate due to heatwaves and drop out of school related to flooding.

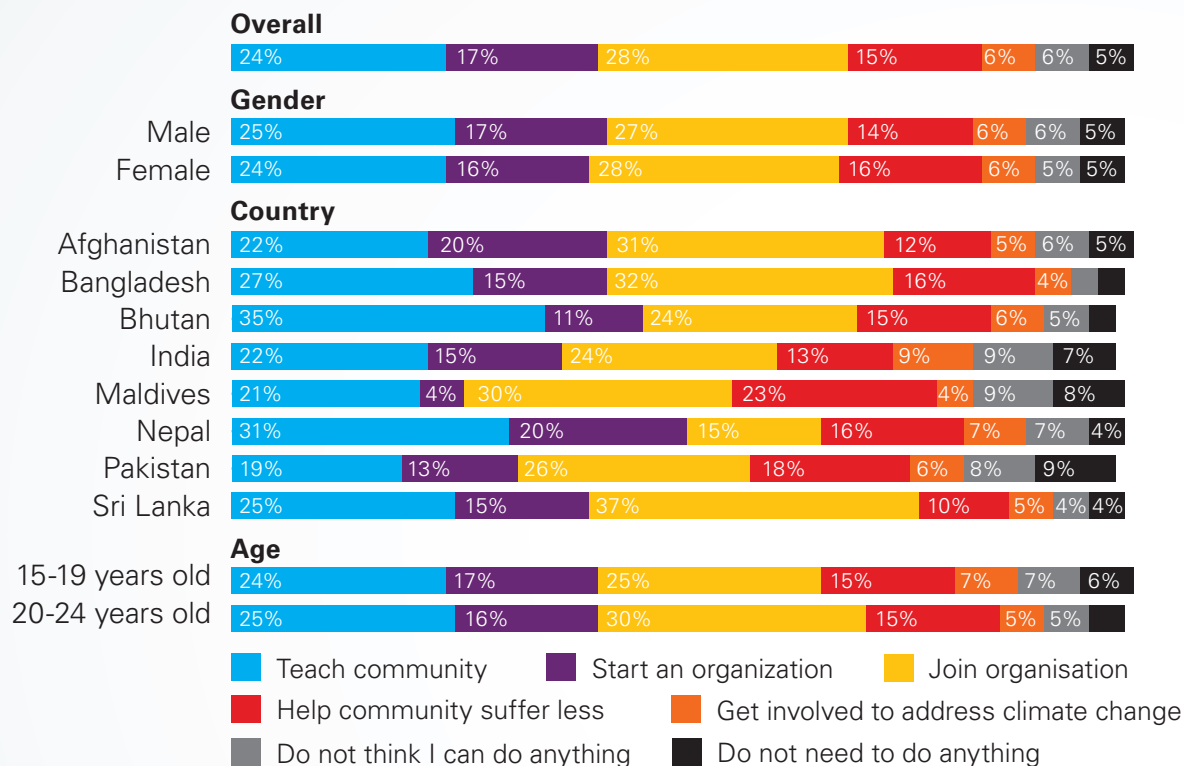
- **19%** stated that their journey to school was affected, while 13% responded that it had affected their families' ability to afford schooling.
- **Over 1 out of 3 respondents from Sri Lanka, Maldives, and Bhutan** stated that climate change has not affected their studies.



“  
 ‘In the flood-hit provinces, it has certainly created serious problems for students, such as flooding their homes and causing them to be displaced and to drop out of school, or their schools have been destroyed by floods altogether. And there are dozens of other climate impacts that disrupt students’ lessons’.  
 Age 23, male respondent from Afghanistan

## FUTURE ACTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE

### If you had the necessary support, what would you like to do to address climate change in the future?



Number of Respondents: 11,607

- **Overall**, more than 1 out of 4 respondents said that they would join an organization, while 24% stated that they would “teach their community”. This held across gender and age.
- 11% of respondents didn’t think they needed to, or didn’t think they could do anything.

- 6% of respondents didn’t think they could do anything while 5% did not believe they needed to do anything.
- **1 in 10 respondents** in Afghanistan, India, Maldives, Nepal and Pakistan believed that they couldn’t or didn’t need to do anything related to climate change.



“I need support from an organization because a girl cannot work alone on such topics in Afghanistan. In addition, we need brochures to better train people about global warming and air pollution’.

Age 24, female respondent from Afghanistan



# 4

## FINDINGS



## FINDINGS

***In no country in South Asia did a majority of respondents say that they could explain climate change or global warming.***

### Knowledge versus confidence

The majority of respondents stated that they had heard about climate change. However, when asked if they were able to explain it, only 36% felt able to do so, despite 65% reporting that it was taught in school. This contrast may be explained by the quality of education that is delivered, which affects the rate of confidence of youth and their capacity to understand and explain climate change.

In no single country in South Asia did a majority of respondents say that they could explain climate change or global warming. Bangladesh had the highest proportion of respondents that felt they could explain it (50%).



© UNICEF/UN1202391/Lopez

Geography (47%) and Science (32%) were the primary subjects through which respondents learned about climate change. There was no variation among gender or age. However, there are other carrier subjects where it is taught. This is promising as climate change should be considered a multi-disciplinary subject and should be reflected across various subjects as a key component of 21st century skills. It should also be a key component of the teacher training curriculum if we want to ensure good quality education around climate change.

As a multi-disciplinary subject, climate change should be reflected as such in curriculum across disciplines and linked to 21st century skills and to teachers training to be able to impart good quality education.

## FINDINGS

***Respondents from Sri Lanka reported being extremely worried (59%) about the impact of climate change on the future.***

### ***A worrying trend***

69% of respondents reported being at least a little worried about climate change's impact on the future and female respondents were over 8% more worried than their male counterparts. 59% of respondents from Sri Lanka reported being extremely worried (59%) about the impact of climate change on the future. This is more than double the proportion of their counterparts in Pakistan and Afghanistan.



41% of respondents were most interested in learning about all aspects of climate change; including understanding what climate change is, what it causes and impacts, and how society can prevent climate change; as well as how anyone can take effective actions at home, school or in the local community. This trend reveals the importance of schools, teaching and learning materials and teachers providing a good understanding of climate change.

## FINDINGS

**60% of respondents believed that governments should be taking the most action to address climate change followed by children and young people (18%) and businesses (11%).**

### A clear call for action

Over 60% of respondents believed that governments should be taking the most actions to address climate change, followed by children and young people (18%) and businesses (11%). 64% believed that governments would react to the call for climate action after the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is important for Government to recognize the relevance that children and young people attach to climate governance processes, and that they should involve them as active stakeholders in informing national policies and in supporting climate change responses at the sub-national and community levels.



**'While COVID-19 has turned our world upside down, one thing has remained unchanged: We need all levels of government to cooperate in taking bold climate action now, so that after the pandemic, we don't return to our normal ways that weren't serving most of us or the planet. We can set ourselves on track to come through these crises safely and with resilience.'**

*Age 15, male respondent from India*

## FINDINGS

**78% of the respondents believed that climate change has impacted their education and learning.**

### Continuous education in a changing climate

Across the survey rang a general theme related to climate change impacting respondent's education and studies (78%) from inability to concentrate due to heatwaves and drop out of school related to flooding (25%), to impacting the journey to school (19%).

This demonstrates the magnitude of impact of climate change on education and learning, ranging from extreme weather events (such as heatwaves, floods and storms) to issues caused by longer term climate impacts (such as sea level rise, and desertification). The impact of these challenges ranges from destruction of infrastructure to student absenteeism and increased dropout rates.



Education systems responding to extreme weather events may have to explore alternative modalities such community-based education and/or accelerated programmes to ensure continuity of learning. Lessons can be drawn from the rich range of responses to COVID-19 in future. Technology can have a critical role to play.

The majority of respondents (+85%) stated that they were keen to act to address climate change if they were given the necessary support, including 28% who were willing to join an organization; 24% who were willing to teach community members; and 17% who were willing to start an organization. Conversely, only 6% of respondents didn't think they could do anything while 5% did not believe they needed to do



***The fact that most children feel able to do something to address climate change and that 17% are even willing to start their own organization is highly encouraging.***

anything. The fact that most children feel able to do something to address climate change and that 17% are even willing to start their own organization is highly encouraging. It speaks volumes about awareness levels and concerns and the proactive potential of youth to rise to the challenge and engage with their own communities in climate change responses.

Finally, the results of this survey may seem sobering given that climate change is yet another concern that children and young people have to struggle with, but they also provide reason for hope. Youth in South Asia - the most populous and the most densely populated geographical region in the world – are mainly quite aware of the challenges posed by climate change to their education, lives and futures. The education systems on which they depend can do much to help operationalize the youth as agents of positive change in response to climate change, not least if other key actors, such as governments, civil societies, faith-based organizations and businesses join forces going forward.



”

***“COVID-19 has badly affected my education but my passion for knowledge is still alive. I am very interested in meteorological science’.***

*Age 20, male respondent from Pakistan*

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

## **Authors**

Reis Lopez Rello, Climate Change Adviser, UNICEF ROSA

Jim Ackers, Education Adviser, UNICEF ROSA

Significant contributions were made by:

Fumiyo Kagawa, Research Director, Sustainability Frontiers

Frank van Cappelle, Education Specialist, UNICEF ROSA

JiEun Lee, Education Officer, UNICEF ROSA

Emma Hamilton Clark, Education Knowledge Management Consultant, UNICEF ROSA

## **Data Analysis**

Randy Tarnowski, Consultant

Cary McCormick, Technology for Development Specialist, UNICEF ROSA

## **U-report South Asia Platform**

Afrika Mukaneto, Consultant, UNICEF ROSA

Aasha Chhetri, Consultant, UNICEF ROSA



 **Report**  
SOUTH ASIA  
VOICE MATTERS



UNICEF Regional Office South Asia  
Lainchaur, Kathmandu,  
Nepal

[www.unicef.org/rosa](http://www.unicef.org/rosa)

© United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)  
November 2020