

The Climate Future Children Want

CHILD-CENTRED INDICATORS
FOR CLIMATE CHANGE



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YR **YOUNG &
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Climate change and similar issues like biodiversity loss and pollution are getting worse. This has been named a 'Triple Planetary Crisis' by the United Nations. Unfortunately, children and young people will have to deal with the consequences of these issues more than adults – because they'll live longer and experience worse impacts.

But even though children and young people have the most at stake, they are often left out of decision-making about what climate action adults take.

Despite this, lots of children and young people are eager to help create and implement sustainable solutions. They want to ensure the world they, and future generations inherit, fulfils their basic needs, rights, and aspirations.

We need to understand more about children and young people's views on climate change.

That's what this report is about!

In 2023, the Young and Resilient Research Centre and UNICEF Australia set out on a mission to talk to children and young people in New South Wales about how climate change affects them – now and in the future.



What did we do?

We ran workshops in three NSW locations – Western Sydney, Northern Rivers, and the Upper Hunter - with 49 children and young people aged 10-18.

This research project had 2 key aims.

- 1 We wanted to hear from children and young people about their experiences with climate change and climate action, as well as their ideas, aspirations and more.
- 2 We wanted to develop a practical tool to measure how climate change **affects** children and young people, and if climate action **benefits** children and young people. This tool is called **Child-Centred Indicators for Climate Change**. We'll explain more about this later on.



49 children and young people



3 locations



What did children and young people tell us?

This is what we heard from the children and young people in these workshops:



They feel let down by older generations, and they feel like it's up to them to fix climate change.



They experience climate change differently depending on where they live, so the climate action they want to see changes from place-to-place.



They understand that climate change impacts every aspect of their lives and they want everyone to be educated about it.



They want governments and corporations to take action, stop making things worse, and start reversing the effects of climate change.



They want meaningful ways to participate in climate action so that they can help shape a better future.

→ Let's dive deeper into what children and young people told us.

How does climate change make children and young people feel?

Children and young people in our workshops associate climate change with negative emotions like sadness, worry, anger and fear.

They feel burdened by climate change, and it is constantly on their minds.

Children and young people feel that older generations aren't doing enough. They think that adults are less concerned about it because it won't affect them as much. This makes them feel abandoned and that adults don't care.

But, it's not all doom and gloom! The children and young people we spoke to are inspired by their generation's energy and commitment to a sustainable future. They feel stronger together - and this helps them stay hopeful.

'The sense of responsibility [and] burden put on teenagers to create change and solve climate crisis that they did not start... can take time from their education, self-care and simply growing up.'

15, FEMALE, WESTERN SYDNEY

'[Adults] haven't grown up with it so I believe they're not as worried.'

WHOLE GROUP, NORTHERN RIVERS

How do children and young people think about climate change and its impacts?

'Earth holds the resources to fulfill the needs of every single organism. However, the human tendency of greed disadvantages the environment.'

15, FEMALE, WESTERN SYDNEY

'Twenty years into the future [climate change will have] flooded Lismore out of existence.'

SMALL GROUP, AGES 13-15, NORTHERN RIVERS

'[I want] to have a clean and better future in which we... stop using gases that can and will pollute the air.'

12, FEMALE, UPPER HUNTER

The children and young people we talked to see that climate change and environmental degradation are closely linked. They believe these issues point to **deeper problems in the way that humans are using the world's resources**.

Participants also found many, many links between the environment, socio-economy and individual impacts. **Migration, mental health, pollution, economy, transport, education, safety - it's all connected to climate change.**

The way that children and young people experience these impacts is shaped by their lived experiences. This includes geographical differences. For example, we talked to some children and young people in the Northern Rivers - many of whom are concerned about how climate change might affect their education. (For a little bit of context, in early 2022 the Northern Rivers faced a massive flood, especially in the Lismore area. During this flooding, 331 schools were impacted and forced to close. So, it's no surprise the children and young people we spoke to in this area are concerned about these impacts!)

What action do children and young people want to see?

The top priorities for climate action for children and young people are:



accountability



a green transition



education



policy and regulation



sustainable practices

Children and young people in our workshops believe that the government and businesses have the most responsibility to act on climate change, but are failing to act quickly enough.

However, the participants were also very clear that everyone has a role to play in stopping climate change! From every age, community, business, industry, government – everyone needs to be united to take urgent, collective action!

'Greenwashing [is a problem]. Future generations are getting impacted by these big corporations to believe that they are taking part in climate change, but it is just for monetary gain.'

15, FEMALE, WESTERN SYDNEY

How do children and young people want to be involved in climate action?

[The federal government] should have a young ambassador program allowing them to contribute to their future rather than the adults taking their opinionated actions for our future where it does not impact them at all.'

15, MALE, WESTERN SYDNEY

'[In our ideal climate future] children and young people are in positions of power and have a voice.'

SMALL GROUP, AGES 12-17, WESTERN SYDNEY

Children and young people have an important role in climate discussions and often want to be involved. The children and young people in our workshops want opportunities to participate, act and create change.

Children and young people also told us that they have very limited influence over the decision-making processes that ultimately impacts their futures. Being unable to contribute meaningfully to climate action heightens their climate anxiety.

They call on governments to provide a wide variety of safe and accessible participation programs, enabling their views to be heard at all levels of decision-making.

So, what happened next?

We took all these insights and made a practical tool – called **Child-Centred Indicators for Climate Change**. This tool can be used to measure whether climate action is creating the best outcomes for children and young people – based on what children and young people told us is important. This is a way that children and young people's views can be carried into decision-making on climate change.

Here's an explanation of what the **Child-Centred Indicators** are, and how to use them!

What are indicators?

Indicators can be difficult to explain, and lots of adults struggle to understand them. We'll try to explain them as simply as possible.

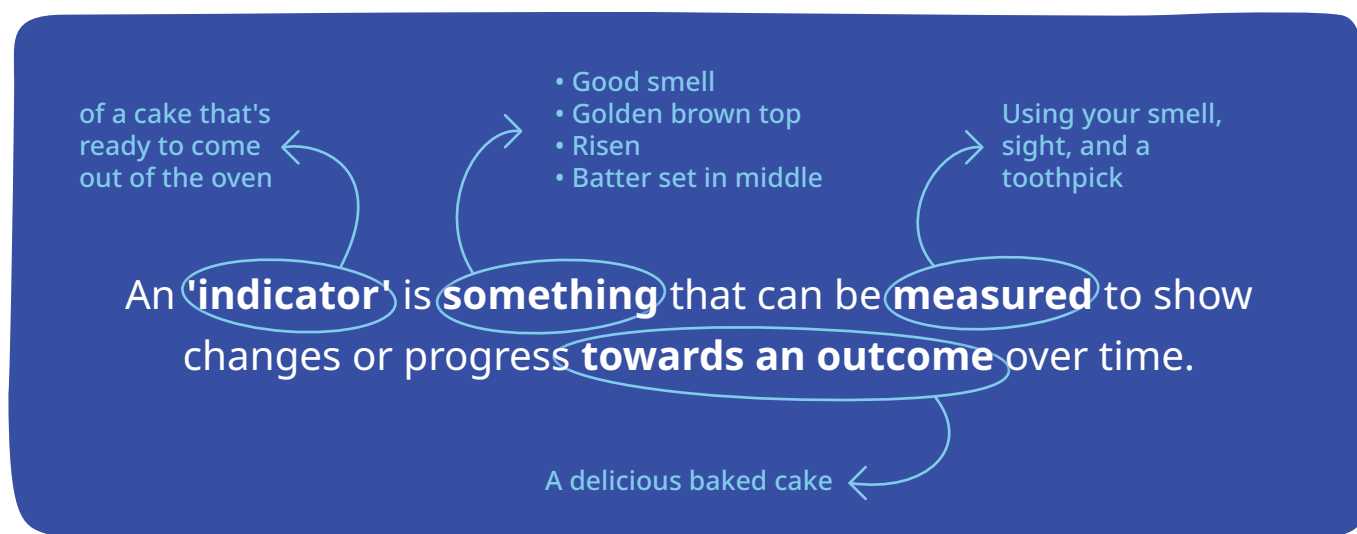
An 'indicator' is something that can be measured to show changes or progress towards an outcome over time. Still confusing? Let's use an example.

Imagine you're baking a cake and you need to know when it's ready to come out of the oven. What can you do?

- You could smell it to tell if it's starting to smell sweet and delicious.
- You could look at it to see if it has risen or turned golden brown on the outside.
- You could poke it with a toothpick to see if it comes out clean in the middle.

All these things will tell you whether the cake is ready.

So, the indicators that your cake is ready are: it has a good smell; it has risen; it is golden brown; the batter has set in the middle. And we can measure these things using our smell, sight, and a toothpick!



Indicators can be used to measure changes over time. You can take a measurement at one point in time – but you can also measure it several times to see how it's progressing. So, you could check to see how golden the top of your cake is every twenty minutes, and this will tell you how far it has to go before it's ready to eat!

Examples of indicators

There are lots of examples of indicators being used to measure whether something is helping achieve a goal or an outcome:



Academic performance

Teachers use indicators like test scores, grades, and attendance rates to understand how students are learning and progressing towards the learning outcomes in the syllabus.



Healthcare

Doctors use indicators like life expectancy, hospital admission rates, and number of cases of diseases to track the health of a population over time, or measure how good the healthcare system is in a community.



Environmental protection

Scientists use indicators like air quality, water quality and reductions in pollution levels to measure how healthy the environment is, and track the impact of environmental protection efforts over time.

What are Child-Centred Indicators for Climate Change?

In this project, we worked with children and young people to develop **Child-Centred Indicators for Climate Change**.

That's a mouthful! Let's break it down:

- **'Child-Centred'** means that we focused on children's and young people's experiences and hopes for the future.
- **'Indicators for Climate Change'** mean that they can be used to track the impacts of climate change over time, and whether climate action is helping to reduce those impacts.

The indicators help us understand how climate change is impacting children's and young people's experiences, and if climate action efforts are helping to improve their lives.

An example of an indicator is: "children and young people have access to safe and clean water". If we measure this at different points and find that more children have access to safe and clean water over time, then we know that we're moving in the right direction! Importantly, our child-centred indicators for climate change measure change using criteria that children and young people say are most important



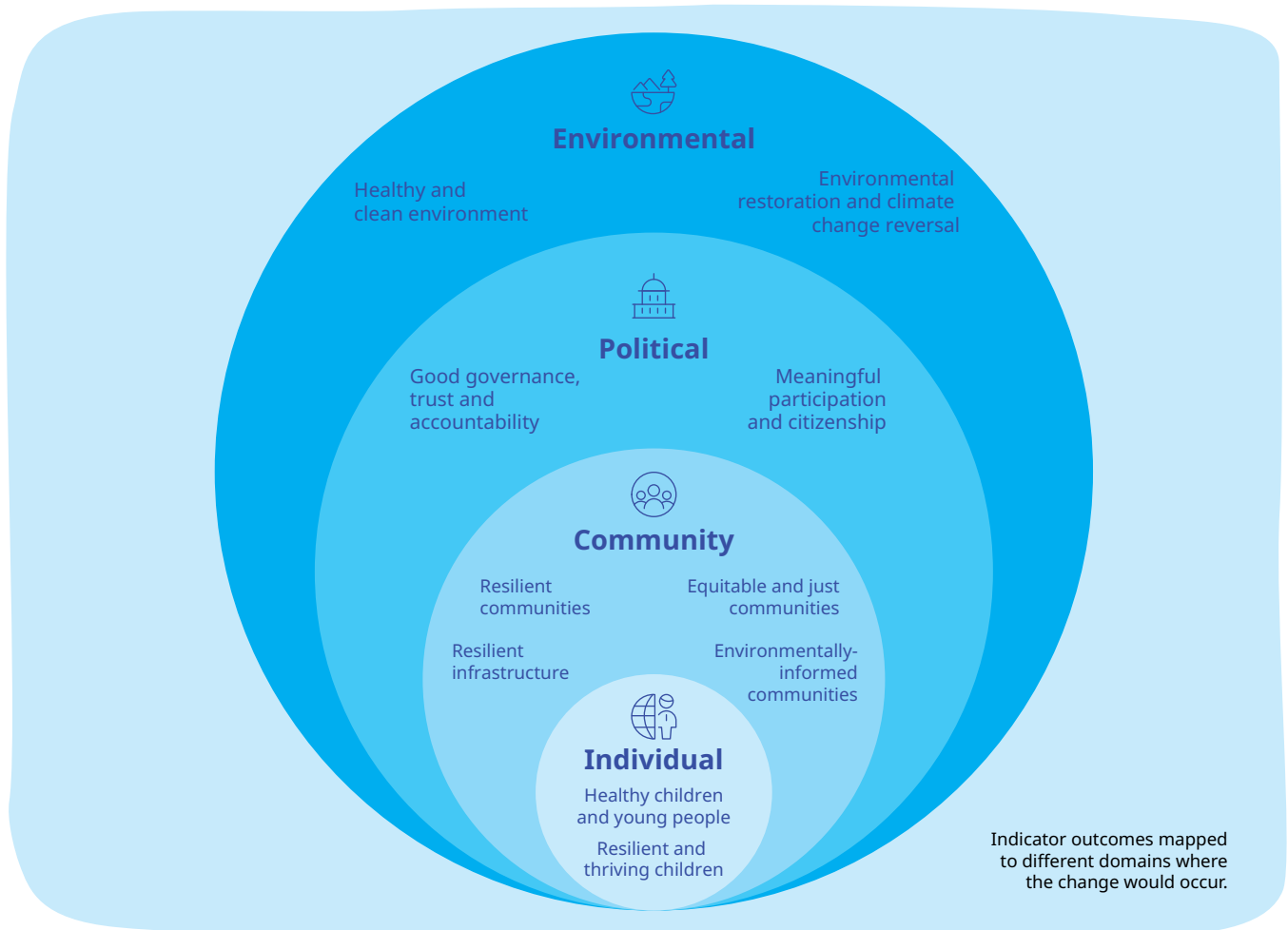
Our Child-Centred Indicators for Climate Change

Let's take a closer look at the indicators we created with the input of children and young people in this project. The indicator set is made up of five categories: **domains**, **outcomes**, **ideal states**, **indicators** and **factors**.

Domains

Our indicators are sorted into four areas (or domains): individual, community, political and environmental.

- Indicators in the **individual domain** show changes in individual people – like a child's health or wellbeing improving (or getting worse).
- Indicators in the **community domain** show changes in communities – like more sustainable transport options or community disaster preparation.
- Indicators in the **political domain** show changes happening in government – like better policies, laws, and legislation for climate change.
- Indicators in the **environmental domain** show changes happening in the natural environment – like better (or worse) air quality, water quality, or biodiversity.



Outcomes

Within each domain, there are 2-4 outcomes (10 in total) which the indicators are grouped into. The outcomes explain how the world would look if the climate action that children want to see is taken.

An example of an outcome (in the community domain) is:

"Environmentally-informed communities"











Ideal States

Each outcome has an ideal state associated with it. These are the things that matter most to young people. They tell us how children and young people want to live in an ideal world (where climate change doesn't exist, or is not having a big impact), and what that world will look like if the indicators are achieved.

The ideal state associated with the 'environmentally-informed communities' outcome is:

“Children and their communities know about climate change and how to take care of the earth.”

This means that one of the goals we want to achieve is that everyone knows about climate change. Indicators tell us how we can know if we have achieved that.

	Outcomes	Ideal states
Individual	 Healthy children and young people	Children and young people are physically healthy
	 Resilient and thriving children and young people	Children and young people are safe, hopeful and thriving
Community	 Resilient and sustainable infrastructure	Children and young people have access to climate-resilient infrastructure and built environments
	 Resilient and sustainable communities	Children and young people live in sustainable and climate-resilient communities
	 Informed communities	Children, young people and their communities are educated and climate-informed
	 Equitable and just communities	Children and young people believe their communities are fair and equitable
Political	 Meaningful participation and citizenship	Children and young people's perspectives and needs shape decision-making about climate change
	 Good governance, trust and accountability	Children and young people trust governments, corporations and the media to take action on climate change
Environmental	 Healthy and sustainable environments	Children and young people live in and enjoy healthy and sustainable environments
	 Environmental restoration and climate change reversal	Children and young people live in a world where climate change has reversed and the environment has been restored

Indicators

Within each of the ideal states, there are between 3 and 8 indicators. Indicators are the things that can be measured to show changes or progress over time. They are similar to the ideal states, but they are more specific and measurable.

For example, an indicator for the ideal state "Children and their communities know about climate change and how to take care of the earth" is:

"Children and young people learn about climate change and how to prepare for it at school."

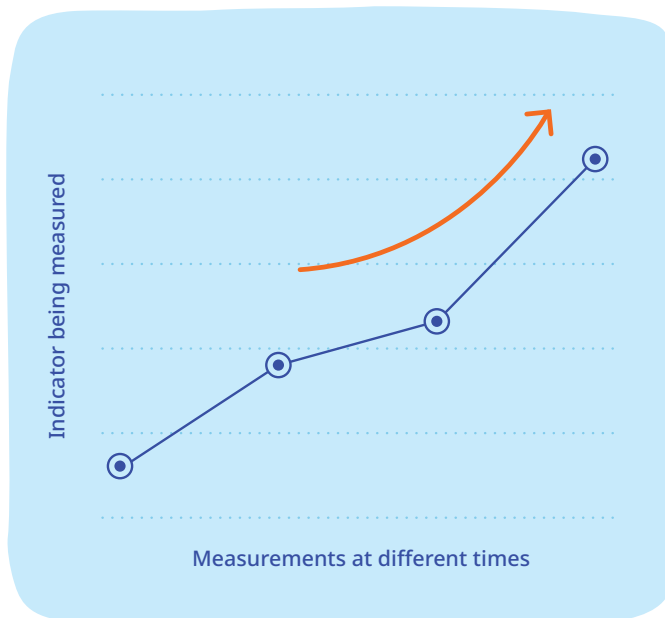
We can measure this indicator by:

- Looking at what children are taught at school, to find out how much, and what children and young people learn about climate change.
- Asking children and young people what they learned about climate change at school.
- Talking to teachers to understand if and how they teach climate change to their students.

Because indicators show progress over time, we can measure the indicator over several years to see if we are getting closer to the ideal state. Each time we take a measurement, we can compare it to the measurement we took before to see if there has been an improvement.

So, if we are getting closer to the ideal state, we would see more content on climate change in the curriculum, more children and young people would say they learned about climate change, and teachers would be teaching climate change more in their subjects.

In total, we made 57 indicators across ten ideal states, and four domains. Each indicator measures something that is important to children and young people when it comes to climate change and climate action.



Factors

The last part are the factors. Factors are the changes that need to occur to achieve the indicators, and ultimately the ideal states. These factors were made directly from ideas children and young people in our workshops told us!

There are two sets of factors:

- ① Factors that need to be achieved by or before 2030.
- ② Factors that should be prioritised post-2030.

Factors should either increase or decrease over time. These are represented by a + (increase), a - (decrease), or a ≠ (completely stopped).

For example, the factors for the indicator above (“Children and young people learn about climate change and how to prepare for it at school.”) are:

- + (increase in) compulsory climate education in schools (including causes, impacts, how children can prepare, and how to reverse climate change)

- + (increase in) compulsory environmental education in schools (including environmental degradation, and how to take care of the environment).
- + (increase in) climate change education based on current research in schools.

So, if we see an increase in these two things over time, we will be able to tell whether we’re getting closer to achieving the indicator and ideal state.


For this indicator, the factors are the same pre- and post-2030. This is because we should always be working to increase compulsory education on climate change and the environment, and education based on current research.


Let’s look at another indicator and its factors. In the diagram below, you can see the pre-2030 and post-2030 factors that need to change.


Indicator


“Children and young people think that people in their communities make changes in their day to day lives to be kinder to the planet.”


Factors (pre-2030):

 + (increase in) effective recycling programs (including composting)

 + (increase in) use of recycling programs by the community

 - (decrease in) water usage

 - (decrease in) use of plastics

 - (decrease in) food waste

Factors (post-2030):

+ (increase in) effective recycling programs (including composting)

+ (increase in) use of recycling programs among the community

- (decrease in) water usage

≠ (zero) use of plastics

≠ (zero) food waste

As you can see, the first three factors are the same pre- and post-2030, but the last two are different. This is because we should continue to improve our recycling programs, and decrease our use of water after 2030, but we should aim to completely stop using plastics and wasting food.

How can the indicators be used?

The indicators can be used with other existing frameworks that have a similar purpose: for example, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child which lays out children's rights, and UNICEF's Children's Climate Risk Index which measures the impacts of climate change on children. When used together with other frameworks, we can create the best outcomes for children and young people.

The complete Child-Centred Climate Indicator report can be found at unicef.org.au/publications. Class resources using the indicators have been developed to engage students on climate change and are available at unicef.org.au/teacher-resources.

So, what next?

Well, we want organisations, governments, schools, universities, doctors, parents, young people, and everyone who cares about young people to use these indicators to measure whether climate action is helping to make young people's ideal worlds a reality. When we use these indicators, we are centring young people and their views, and making real life improvements for young people, now and in the future.

