

# LOSS AND DAMAGE:

**Challenges and opportunities for city leadership - A youth perspective**



C4O  
CITIES



Scottish Government  
Riaghaltas na h-Alba  
gov.scot

# Introduction

Loss and damage represent the stark reality of the unjust nature of the climate crisis. Loss and damage refers to the impacts of climate breakdown that cannot be averted through mitigation, or minimised through adaptation. This is the lived reality that millions of youth around the world face - not in the future, but now.

## Loss and damage is a core issue of climate justice

Those least responsible for historical emissions suffer the most from its adverse effects, particularly young people and children. While the wealthiest 10% of the population is responsible for half of global carbon emissions, populations in the Global South are ten times more likely to be affected by flooding and drought than their counterparts in the Global North.<sup>1</sup>

## Cities are at the frontline

Cities and their inhabitants are at the frontline of the impacts of climate change-induced loss and damage. With 90% of urban expansion in the next 30 years expected to be in Africa and Asia, and four out of five cities worldwide already dealing with serious climate hazards from flooding to extreme heat,<sup>2</sup> loss and damage will present urban residents with catastrophic consequences unless directly addressed by all levels of government. But leaders have room to act: climate-resilient cities are the foundation of social equity. Yet if cities are not prepared to face the challenges posed by climate change, the well-being of young people and other vulnerable populations is at risk.

## Youth rise to the challenge

The mounting risk presented by loss and damage poses an existential threat to youth and future generations, especially in cities. 85% of the youth population of C40 Cities reside in Global South cities. 84% of young people are worried about climate change and 75% think the future is frightening.<sup>3</sup> Yet, youth are already showcasing leadership to address climate-induced loss and damage. This synthesis document is designed specifically for a youth audience, to accompany the broader C40 report, 'Loss and damage: Challenges and opportunities for city leadership'. By engaging with this report, young people will gain a critical understanding of how to engage with policies and practices to address loss and damage in partnership with cities and mayors in an urban setting. When youth rise to the challenge, taking inclusive action and stewardship roles, they can ensure no one is left behind. This will ultimately result in a just and equitable response to climate impacts at the city level, where many of these challenges are faced.

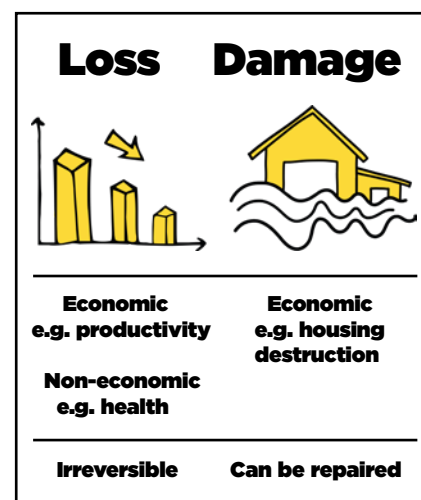
---

# 1. Loss and Damage: Why it matters to youth

---



The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) defines ‘loss and damage’ as the adverse impacts of the climate crisis that cannot be averted through mitigation or have not been sufficiently minimised through adaptation. This includes impacts due to sudden extreme weather phenomena as well as slower-onset ones and addressing those impacts that have not been – or cannot now be – avoided. Damages are usually quantifiable in monetary terms, while losses can be both non-economic and economic. Losses are generally understood to be irreversible.



## Young people are already experiencing the worst impacts of climate change

Loss and damage resulting from the climate crisis, including the loss of lives, livelihoods, cultural heritage, and damage to essential infrastructure such as schools and hospitals, represents a significant intergenerational injustice facing young people today, with profound economic and social consequences. With nearly half the global population composed of young people under 30 years old,<sup>4</sup> today’s youth will inherit the Earth amidst a climate crisis and bear the burden of climate change impacts longer than any other generation. We must act now.

The devastating impacts of the climate crisis disproportionately affect marginalised communities due to their limited resources, social and economic vulnerability, and lack of access to information and government support. These groups, such as the youth, children, women, older people, disabled

people, those with low incomes, and displaced people are particularly vulnerable. Impacts are often felt in developing countries. A study carried out by the *Vulnerable 20*, a group of economies systemically vulnerable to climate change including Ghana, Bangladesh, and the Philippines, showed that the V20 economies have suffered approximately \$525 billion in climate crisis-induced loss and damage over the past two decades alone, equalling a loss of one full percent each year on average GDP growth.<sup>5</sup> This affects these countries’ future development options, for young people and next generations. In an urban context, in the era of *‘global boiling’*, impacts like heat-related deaths are particularly severe in cities and worsening yearly – even beyond scientific predictions. As more people are concentrated in cities, as opposed to rural areas, climate risk and related loss and damage are becoming increasingly urban in nature.

## This is a critical issue of intergenerational justice for youth

This is not just an issue for the future - young people are already experiencing the worst impacts of climate change. This is especially true in urban areas in the Global South, where existing climate vulnerabilities are particularly pronounced with 80 out of the 100 fastest-growing cities at extreme climate risk located in Asia and Africa, and this is where the majority of the global youth population lives and continues to grow.

By 2050, almost 70% of the world's children will live in urban areas - many of them in informal settlements in the Global South. Between 2016 and 2021, 135 million people, including 43 million children were internally displaced due to extreme weather events.<sup>6</sup> The UN Migration Agency estimates that by 2050, between 25 million and 1 billion people could be displaced due to climate change.<sup>7</sup> It is clear, these impacts on vulnerable people

are only going to increase. Yet, while youth are especially impacted by loss and damage, both in the present and in the future, young people often have very little say in decisions that impact their present and future, despite having the least contribution. Globally, less than 3% of parliamentarians are below the age of 30; the average age of a politician is 62.<sup>8</sup> Despite this, young people have a critical role to play in tackling this global emergency.

Using fresh ideas, leveraging modern technologies, and sharing their first-hand experience of managing risks and impacts, young people are putting themselves front and centre and driving global climate action. By lobbying policymakers, holding leaders accountable, partnering with cities, raising public awareness, and inspiring collective responsibility, today's youth can drive the change we need and create action now.

### Loss and damage campaigning, COP28, Dubai, UAE



# Case study: Holding governments accountable

Nothing remained normal after 12 March 2023 in Blantyre, Malawi. Cyclone Freddy, one of the longest-lasting, most powerful cyclones to hit the region, claimed over 1,200 lives and displaced 659,000 people in Malawi alone.

Yet in the midst of this, Brenda Mwale, a proud farmer and youth advocate from Lilongwe, was training 50 young girls to be climate champions. The cyclone displaced 20 of the participants, stripping them of their homes and belongings. Brenda not only had to halt the training mid-way through, impacting her earnings and the professional development of the girls in her program, but also adapt on her own farm.

Climate impacts were already impacting Brenda's farm with prolonged droughts resulting in Brenda having to plant seeds twice. Even with this, when the crops do not grow as expected, it takes an emotional toll on Brenda and the farmers in her community.

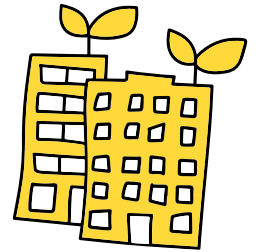
Brenda's persistence in making a difference in the field of climate action and environmentalism led her to the global stage in 2021 when she attended the 26th UN Climate Change Conference (COP26). It was here that Brenda learned about the concept of loss and damage. Recognising the lack of a negotiator for loss and damage from her country on such a critically important topic for Malawi, she closely followed the complex negotiations, with an aim to represent her country and shape decisions at global levels in the future.

For young people out there who want to make a difference, she underscores the importance of understanding national policies and holding governments accountable.

**Brenda Mwale**, Lilongwe, Malawi



**Brenda's message to city representatives is to invest in disaster preparedness and resilience in urban areas, prioritising informal settlements and the most vulnerable groups.**



---

## 2. Understanding the urban dimension of loss and damage

---

Although the climate crisis impacts rural and urban areas alike, many extreme climatic events produce the highest economic and non-economic impacts in urban areas. Some climate change-induced losses and damages – most notably flooding and extreme heat – are also uniquely acute in cities, due to geographic location, existing urban design, and the higher concentration of economic activities and services.

Cities are home to more than half the global population, a figure that will only increase with growing urbanisation. It is the Global South, where 1 billion people already live in informal settlements and host to 80% of the globe's internally displaced people, which face the highest climate vulnerability.

### **Cities are already actively trying to reach the most vulnerable communities**

Cities are already actively trying to reach the most vulnerable communities with their loss and damage response efforts, but face critical challenges, notably including a lack of sufficient climate finance. The ability to implement needed global solutions to address loss and damage hinges on the existence of sufficient climate funding unlocked through the new and additional mechanisms that adequately consider local needs and actors.

Given the increasingly urban nature of loss and damage, climate finance mechanisms to address loss and damage must incorporate the experiences and perspectives of frontline cities and local communities into the global discussion on climate change. It is also critical

that new and existing loss and damage funding solutions do not overlook the systemic injustices that currently underpin the development and climate finance landscape. Yet existing climate finance, such as adaptation funding, directs only a fraction of funds to local actors and communities, due to a variety of systemic issues.<sup>9</sup> The global commitment by high-income countries at the 15th UN Climate Change Conference, COP15, in 2009 to deliver \$100 billion annually for climate action has yet to be met. This dynamic cannot be replicated with loss and damage funding, as existing climate finance to address the climate crisis today is already far less than required to help protect our futures.

---

## 3. Cities at the forefront of loss and damage response efforts

---



While national governments and international organisations debate future loss and damage funding, cities are stepping forward and bearing the brunt of the burden – despite their limited resources and powers to do so. Cities are responsible for managing urban infrastructure and essential services, which becomes especially critical during and after extreme climate events, disasters, and emergencies.

Cities also hold essential knowledge of local vulnerabilities and close ties with local communities, which is key to identifying the particular needs of individual target groups to develop effective, tailored responses. While effective local actions to address loss and damage in urban areas are already taking place, they often go unrecognised due to a lack of shared terminology and understanding.

Given limited resources, cities in the Global South are often forced to reallocate parts of their limited budgets from sustainable development initiatives to fund critically-needed resources in response to sudden climate impacts. This also includes the repurposing of loans from Multilateral Development Banks that were originally intended for sustainable development efforts<sup>10</sup> which only perpetuates vulnerability to future disasters, worsens the debt crisis, and hinders progress toward long-term development gains. This can significantly impact cities' capacity to drive sustainable development in a context where C40 research estimates that the financial cost of global urban damages from coastal floods will reach USD 19 billion per year by 2050 – more than four times higher than today.

**The following five key areas show where cities are already leading and taking action. Each draws on existing examples of city-led best practices and calls for action to be replicated by other local actors and brought to scale by leading national governments and international donors. More information on these examples can be found in C40's report:**

**1. Preventing and preparing for climate risks** beyond the limits of adaptation to address losses and damages before extreme climate events occur. For example, Rio de Janeiro invests in early warning systems and flood shelters to proactively minimise loss and damage from heavy rainfall, including in over 100 high-risk favelas.

**2. Acting as first responders in the immediate crisis aftermath,** ensuring continuity of

services and providing relief to those most in need (e.g., Quezon City, Philippines; Bangkok, Thailand; Medellín, Colombia).

**3. Generating data and evidence on economic and non-economic loss and damage,** leveraging local knowledge and proximity to communities (e.g., Accra, Ghana; Durban/eThekweni, South Africa; London, UK).

**4. Enhancing city-to-city cooperation and showing global solidarity** amid accelerating climate impacts through the sharing of expertise, knowledge, and capacity on responding (e.g., Paris, France; Copenhagen, Denmark; Milan, Italy).

**5. Influencing national and multilateral discussions** through mayoral diplomacy and advocacy (e.g., Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire; Vancouver, Canada).

## Case study: Education and activism

In 2009, Jeff (Jefferson) and his family narrowly escaped a life-threatening flood in Antipolo City, Philippines. The flood not only jeopardised their safety but also inflicted damage to the infrastructure and well-being of their community. From Jeff's first-hand experience, loss and damage encompasses not just the physical loss of property and livelihood, but non-economic forms such as emotional toll, anxiety, fear, displacement, and disruptions to everyday life.

Jeff is a passionate climate justice activist and the founding Convenor of Youth Strike 4 Climate Philippines. He has made a significant impact in addressing the climate crisis by engaging in education and activism, participating in community initiatives, and collaborating with like-minded individuals and organisations. He advises other young people to do the same.

Jeff proudly advocates for locally-led efforts, mostly due to his experience working with his local community. "Policy changes are undoubtedly crucial, but it's equally important to acknowledge the significance of grassroots efforts by local people; adopting sustainable practices; and implementing people-centred and community-led resilience initiatives. These actions are integral to global efforts to confront and mitigate the impacts of loss and damage," Jeff emphasises.

Echoing the recommendations of C40's urban dimension of loss and damage report, he strongly believes that it is time to bring the challenges faced by cities to the forefront. He is resolute in his belief that global discussions and policies should reflect the interconnectedness of urban challenges with broader climate issues.

**Jefferson Estela**, Antipolo, Philippines



**Jeff's message to his city representatives is to stay up to date on climate science and act on it, empower leaders to make informed decisions, and advocate for effective loss and damage policies.**





---

## 4. Efforts to address loss and damage at the global level

---

Following three decades of campaigning and advocacy led by Global South countries, civil society, youth, indigenous groups, and climate advocates, COP27 marked a crucial turning point in the movement to address loss and damage. In a landmark agreement, the COP27 agreement in 2022 called for the establishment of a new fund to address loss and damage in low and middle-income countries. Following a year of negotiations, COP28's first day was marked by the agreement to operationalise the fund by COP29. Governments are now making pledges, but so far, these are small compared to the total loss and damage that already exists and community needs.

This marked shift, from resistance to recognising the concept of loss and damage to directly funding the Loss and Damage Fund, highlights the critical role that advocacy leadership from the Global South on issues of climate justice can play in the larger climate diplomacy space. Much of this credit goes to young people, who have been at the forefront of this fight by organising grassroots movements, being a part of persistent advocacy efforts, and showcasing relentless passion. We have shown the power of our collective action and have inspired leaders to respond. But the fight continues.



Youth Climate Activist **Shreya K.C.** speaking at the Children and Youth Pavillion, COP27, Egypt

# Case study: Protect vulnerable communities

Lamis El Khatieb is a young environmental urban planner and policy specialist from Cairo with expertise in climate governance and urban sustainability. Like countless other young people, Lamis did not plan her journey into loss and damage advocacy.

During her study in environmental futures with climate change, she learned the devastating impacts of climate change on vulnerable communities, sparking a deep sense of responsibility. For Lamis, working in loss and damage is beyond her academic interest, it is her passion.

In her country, the effects of the climate crisis can already be observed, particularly in Cairo and Alexandria. These include extreme heat waves making daily life unbearable, and rising sea levels that threaten coastal communities.

“We’ve witnessed the degradation of Alexandria’s once beautiful beaches and experienced the challenge of adapting to increasingly harsh weather conditions in Cairo. These personal experiences drive my commitment,” adds Lamis.

Lamis believes young people are crucial in addressing the climate crisis. To her, every effort counts towards a more sustainable future, be it by organising local climate strikes, engaging with policymakers, or leading community resilience projects.

“I believe that addressing loss and damage is not only essential for climate justice but also for building a sustainable and resilient future for all”. She recognises the significant role of urban areas in mitigating climate-related risks, reflecting the findings from C40’s urban dimension of loss and damage report.

**Lamis El Khatieb**, Cairo, Egypt




**Lamis’ message to city representatives is to integrate climate considerations into all aspects of urban planning, invest in resilience-building, and ensure vulnerable communities are adequately protected and supported.**

---

## 5. Role of young people in addressing urban loss and damage

---

Based on the five areas of opportunities for city leadership, identified in C40's report, the following section presents different ways young people are already helping address loss and damage in their cities. This spotlights the unique role young people can play - including in collaboration with cities and mayors - in integrating these learnings into their evolving leadership to address urban loss and damage. For a comprehensive view of key recommendations to cities, national governments, multilateral development banks, and international funding agencies to effectively address the loss and damage at scale tailored for cities, please refer to C40's report, '[Loss and damage: Challenges and opportunities for city leadership](#)'.



**Shreya K.C.** speaking on behalf of global youth and children on integrating a holistic approach to achieve climate justice at SB58

# Ways young people are helping to address loss and damage in their cities

## 1. Preventing and preparing for climate risks

- Engaging in city-level youth councils, meetings, and discussions to learn more about policies that address urban loss and damage.
- Initiating or participating in projects at the community level to put sustainability at the heart of urban development through the creation of open urban green spaces, sustainable waste management, clean energy systems, and climate-resilient infrastructure.
- Empowering youth with the knowledge and skills to advocate for sustainable practices and policies, raise awareness about climate change, and advocate for policy reforms at local and national levels.

## 2. Championing inclusivity and accountability

- Organising or supporting targeted workshops at the city level to share the significance and benefits of inclusivity in locally-led efforts for effective decision-making and behavioural change.
- Encouraging the integration of local and indigenous knowledge and practices with modern technology.
- Leveraging the use of digital platforms to raise awareness and put positive pressure on local governments to adopt measures for new and evolving urban solutions to address systemic injustices and to shape the needs and priorities of the most impacted population, including informal settlers.

**Brenda Mwale** teaching women in Malawi



# Ways young people are helping to address loss and damage in their cities

## 3. Generating evidence and data on loss and damage

- Taking initiative, including as young entrepreneurs, to design solutions that work for cities and young people. Some initiatives created by young people include Map&Rank from Cameroon, sharing information and facilitating disaster preparedness in vulnerable communities, and Similie in Timor Leste, developing an Early Warning System and low-cost sensors to assess risk levels and reduce the effect of disasters.
- Conducting studies on loss and damage to generate evidence and compile data on the good practices of young people. An example is the policy brief on 'Non-Economic Loss and Damage' prepared by Lamis El Khatieb and her team in the Loss and Damage Youth Coalition (LDYC).

## 4. Enhancing generational cooperation and solidarity

- Joining national, regional, and global networks focused on collective impact, sharing good practices and success stories in tackling urban loss and damage impacts. Youth Strike 4 Climate Philippines is the alliance of young Filipino climate activists and advocates mobilising youth in their country for additional and accessible loss and damage funding. Similarly, LDYC is a coalition of youth from the Global South and Global North who have come together to demand action to address loss and damage caused by climate change.
- Collaborating with older people to learn from their wealth of experience dealing with past climate events and to plan for sustainable urban infrastructure.

Youth climate activist **Hilda Flavia Nakabuye** at the opening plenary of the C40 World Mayors Summit 2022

HILDA FLAVIA NAKABUYE  
Founder and Organiser of  
Fridays for Future Uganda



# Ways young people are helping to address loss and damage in their cities

## 5. Influencing national and multilateral discussions

- Lobbying national governments on loss and damage, youth-led organisations are diplomatically engaging to ensure their concerns are heard and addressed.
- Participating in loss and damage negotiations at conferences like COP to advocate for new and grant-based loss and damage funding. Brenda Mwale and Farhana Shukor, youth negotiators from Malawi and Malaysia respectively, are actively taking part in loss and damage discussions. They represent youth and Global South voices in the decision-making processes ensuring that the urban dimensions of loss and damage (including key issues such as displacement) are acknowledged, and that city and urban communities are included and recognised in international negotiations and decisions.
- Ensuring that loss and damage funding can be accessed by cities, local governments, and local communities in order to enable essential urban loss and damage action.



Youth Climate Activist **Nicole Becker** with Mayor of Paris Anne Hidalgo at the C40 & Scottish Government Event, Loss & Damage - An Urban Perspective at COP28

# About the contributors

This synthesis document was generously funded by the Scottish Government's Climate Justice Fund.

This document was written by Shreya K.C., a youth climate justice activist from Nepal. She is involved with the Loss and Damage Youth Coalition (LDYC) and her [story on loss and damage](#) in Nepal was featured by the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED). She actively follows the global climate negotiations on loss and damage as part of her national delegation.

We sincerely express our thanks to Brenda Mwale, Jefferson A. Estela, and Lamis El Khatieb, the youth featured in this document, for sharing their inspiring stories with us and for their relentless advocacy and action to address loss and damage.

Edited and designed by: Sarah Emberson, Wildfire Collective  
With special thanks to C40 Staff: Emma Blunt, Jazmin Burgess, Earl Burgos, Krisztina Campbell, Madeleine Forster, Claudia Huerta, Aaron Kiely, Ahmed Mokgopo, Giovanni Pagani.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Eckstein, D., Künzel, V. and Schäfer, L. (2021) Global climate risk index 2021. [http://www.germanwatch.org/sites/default/files/Global%20Climate%20Risk%20Index%202021\\_2.pdf](http://www.germanwatch.org/sites/default/files/Global%20Climate%20Risk%20Index%202021_2.pdf)

<sup>2</sup>CDP (2022) Protecting people and the planet: Putting people at the heart of city climate action. [https://cdn.cdp.net/cdp-production/cms/reports/documents/000/006/567/original/CDP\\_Cities\\_Protecting\\_People\\_and\\_the\\_Planet.pdf?1665068434](https://cdn.cdp.net/cdp-production/cms/reports/documents/000/006/567/original/CDP_Cities_Protecting_People_and_the_Planet.pdf?1665068434)

<sup>3</sup>The Lancet (2021) Climate anxiety in children and young people and their beliefs about government responses to climate change: a global survey. <https://www.thelancet.com/action/showPdf?pii=S2542-5196%2821%2900278-3>

<sup>4</sup>United Nations (2021) Our Common

Agenda Report of the Secretary-General. <https://www.un.org/en/content/common-agenda-report/assets/pdf/>

<sup>5</sup>Climate Vulnerable Economies Loss Report, Vulnerable Twenty Group (2022). <https://www.v-20.org/resources/publications/climate-vulnerable-economies-loss-report>

<sup>6</sup>UNICEF (2023) Children displaced in a changing climate: preparing for a future already underway. [http://www.unicef.org/media/145951/file/Climatedisplacement-report-\(English\).pdf](http://www.unicef.org/media/145951/file/Climatedisplacement-report-(English).pdf)

<sup>7</sup>IOM (2014) IOM outlook on migration, environment and climate change. Brief 5: state of knowledge on migration, environment and climate change. [https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/mecc\\_outlook.pdf](https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/mecc_outlook.pdf)

<sup>8</sup>Be Seen Be Heard (2022) Understanding Young People's Political Participation. [https://beeseenbeheardcampaign.com/static/media/UN\\_REPORT\\_TBS\\_ACCESSIBLE.b891cbcf84c773f78e5.pdf](https://beeseenbeheardcampaign.com/static/media/UN_REPORT_TBS_ACCESSIBLE.b891cbcf84c773f78e5.pdf)

<sup>9</sup>Richmond, M., Upadhyaya, N. and Ortega Pastor, A. (2021) An analysis of urban climate adaptation finance: A report from the Cities Climate Finance Leadership Alliance. <https://www.climatepolicyinitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/An-Analysis-of-Urban-Climate-Adaptation-Finance.pdf>

<sup>10</sup>UNFCCC (2023b) Report of the first workshop on addressing loss and damage in the context of decisions 2/ CP.27 and 2/CMA.4. [https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/WS1\\_Report.pdf](https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/WS1_Report.pdf)

