

# WAGGGS POSITION PAPER

## GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN TACKLING CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENSURING A SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENT

Climate change is the defining challenge of our time and poses a critical threat to our future. As the leading voluntary organisation for girls and young women, with 10 million Girl Guides and Girl Scouts in 152 countries, the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS) has a responsibility to speak out on behalf of girls and young women and their right to inherit a liveable planet.

In many countries around the world, girls and young women are disproportionately affected by climate change and environmental degradation because they are more likely to live in poverty, they have less access to basic human rights and face systematic violence that escalates during periods of instability, such as natural disasters<sup>1</sup>. A youth consultation conducted by WAGGGS in 2020 found that the environment is the top concern for Girl Guides and Girl Scouts between the ages of 13 and 17 years old, in over 100 countries. In addition, 70% of respondents felt that being a girl makes it harder for them to achieve their goals, with people not believing in their potential being the main reason for this.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the fact that girls and women can and do play a critical role in responding to environmental degradation and climate change, they are often excluded from relevant wider discourse, and their participation in decision making at all levels is limited. This further undermines their ability to influence measures designed to address climate change and environmental degradation. WAGGGS believes that girls and young women must participate at all levels of decision making and, in the design, delivery and implementation of all relevant environmental programmes, in order to shape a sustainable and equal future for us all. WAGGGS has identified the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, to ensure climate action and environmental sustainability, as one of the priority issues on which to take a stand, speak out, and take action.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/how-climate-change-affects-women/>

<sup>2</sup> WAGGGS U-Report poll on International Day of the Girl 2020





WAGGGS calls on national governments, and the international community, to actively include girls and young women in climate change and environmental sustainability processes by:

- **Meeting and strengthening their commitment under Article 3 of the UN Climate Change Convention**, which states: The Parties should protect the climate system for the benefit of present and future generations of humankind, on the basis of equity and in accordance with their common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities.
- **Ensuring girls and young women have access to relevant information and opportunities** to develop their skills through both formal and non-formal climate change and environment education. Empowering girls and young women to conduct research on the quality of the environment and to communicate their findings to the wider community.
- **Allocating funds for training and resources to build girls' and young women's capacity** to take action, providing adequate budgets for relevant ministries to support and scale up their actions.
- **Ensuring the gender dimension is considered** across all policies, budgets, programme and projects to enable girls and young women's needs to be visible and addressed.
- **Ensuring effective participation and equitable representation** of girls and young women in all stages of environmental sustainability. Girls and young women's inputs are valued, and listened to, rather than simply numerical participation.
- **Ensuring equitable access to resources** (i.e. to land, water, sanitation, clean energy, safe shelter and locally grown food, etc.) for all girls, young women and their families. This will increase their resilience to climate change, and in turn, their ability to remain in school, to access employment and live a stable life.
- **Prioritising partnerships with youth, young women's and children's organisations** recognizing the disproportionate effect of these issues on young people and the importance of empowering organisations that work with them



### WAGGGS Member Organisations (MOs):

WAGGGS recognises efforts already made by many of its MOs to address environmental issues, biodiversity loss, and plastic pollution. 20 MOs have started tree planting schemes, 14 MOs are working on recycling, and a further 12 are involved in environmental clean-up initiatives. Nevertheless, more needs to be done, so we urge all Girl Guiding and Girl Scouting Associations to:

- **Deliver non-formal education programmes** to girls and young women to enable them to take an active part in shaping and ensuring a sustainable environment for future generations.
- **Promote a sustainable lifestyle** that takes into account what impact our actions have on our natural and social environment.
- **Raise awareness on the right to an environment that is adequate for health and well-being** and safe and sufficient access to resources.
- **Highlight environmental values** by “*Connecting with My World*”, one of the essential elements of the Girl Guiding and Girl Scouting non-formal educational method. Girls and young woman should be given opportunities to experience and connect with nature and learn about the need for environmental protection.
- **Help balance relationships of women and men in resource ownership and management**, especially among girls and young women in rural areas, and other marginalised communities.
- **Encourage and create platforms for intergenerational dialogue, exchange and mentoring** with the aim of building a cohesive and sustainable society, where girls and young women are involved in all decision making processes and have space to develop girl-led initiatives and solutions.
- **Develop and expand partnerships** to help alleviate many of the world's environmental problems, such as climate change, declining biodiversity, and the exhaustion of natural resources including water.
- **Support girls and young women to take the lead in advocating for climate justice** and better education at all levels including providing practical knowledge, skills, and opportunities for achieving environmental sustainability.



### How WAGGGS is addressing the challenges related to environmental sustainability:

WAGGGS' mission is to enable girls and young women to develop their fullest potential as responsible citizens of the world. Girls and young women are supported to speak out for themselves, for other girls and for the natural world.

- Since 1986, WAGGGS has run the Helen Storrow Seminar, an annual international event enabling participants to explore issues surrounding environmental sustainability. Attendees discover new methods to raise awareness and leave with an action plan for improving the environment at a local level.
- Since 2009, WAGGGS has taken a youth delegation to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)'s Conference of Parties (COP) and other related UN conferences to lobby international decision makers on behalf of girls and young women worldwide. At the COP events, our youth delegates run side events, workshops, and social media campaigns. They talk to the media to raise awareness of the perspectives of girls and young women on climate change, and they work with other youth-focused NGOs to run campaign actions. Youth delegates then often use the international advocacy experience they have gained to implement their own environmental advocacy projects.
- WAGGGS is a founding member of the Youth and United Nations Global Alliance (YUNGA), an NGO network that coordinates efforts to achieve common goals such as eliminating hunger and poverty, ensuring gender equality, respecting the environment and providing better education for all. YUNGA develops publications, activity packs and other resources for children and young people such as the Tide Turners Plastic Challenge Badge, a Clean Seas initiative that educates young people about plastic pollution giving them the tools to change their personal behaviour and inspire their communities to reduce their use of single-use plastic.
- WAGGGS has developed a climate change curriculum as part of its 'Girl-Led Action on Climate Change' programme to support direct climate adaptation and mitigation measures, and increase the capacity of girls and women to take on leadership roles in the global response to climate change. During the programme's pilot phase (2021 to 2022), this programme aims to reach 45,000 girls and young women and 90,000 community members.
- WAGGGS has developed other non-formal education resources on environmental sustainability informing girls and young women about climate change, including the Climate Change and Food Security badge curriculum, the Biodiversity badge and the Climate Change - Take Action Now! guide.

- WAGGGS has adopted an overarching environmental theme, Our World = Our Future, for its World Thinking Day campaigns from 2022 to 2024. The theme will focus on supporting Girl Guides and Girl Scouts to become environmentally conscious leaders. Each year this environmental theme will explore the links between the environment and other global concerns. The themes are as follows:
  - 2022: Our World, Our Equal Future: The environment and gender equality
  - 2023: Our World, Our Thriving Future: The environment and global poverty
  - 2024: Our World, Our Peaceful Future: The environment, peace and security

- WAGGGS will furthermore commit to:

-Keep encouraging MOs to work on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals most appropriate to their national context and relevant for their members.

-Track and reduce the environmental impact of its activities to reduce its carbon and environmental footprint.

-Maximise the use of connecting and learning online as an alternative to short-haul or long-haul flights.

-Create opportunities for girls and young women to take the lead in tackling environmental degradation and climate change, including further expansion of its 'Girl-Led Action on Climate Change' programme in partnership with its MOs.

## **ABOUT THE WORLD ASSOCIATION OF GIRL GUIDES AND GIRL SCOUTS**

The World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS) is the largest voluntary organisation for girls and young women in the world. We are the umbrella organisation for 10 million Girl Guides and Girl Scouts in 152 countries and we understand the issues that matter to girls because they tell us. Around the world, girls and young women face barriers, discrimination and inequality but we believe that every girl has the potential to change this and we empower and equip them to do so.

We are here for every girl and any girl.