

# Exploring strategies for climate action: An active engagement by *Active Citizens*

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## ABSTRACT

Climate change has become one of the biggest threats and defining issues the world has ever faced. According to the many lines of evidence it is proven that human actions like burning of fossil fuels are the major cause of the problem. It has resulted in disrupting national economies and affecting each and every human life and the environment. The climate change has made its footprints especially in every aspect of global context, from shifting of weather patterns which is a threat for food production to rising sea levels that would intensify the risk of disastrous flooding. There is a need to act urgently adopting sustainable remedial measures along with international cooperation and knowledge sharing. Drastic action with the frameworks of adaptation and mitigation is recommended for climate change. British Council, through the Active Citizens programme, is being engaged with youth in addressing climate change and issues arising from the same and acts in collaboration with University of Jaffna as well. The participants of the AC programme are required to do social action projects addressing climate change issues. The researchers of this paper, being facilitators of the Active Citizen programmes for the undergraduates of University of Jaffna investigate in this paper the causes of climate change in the respective areas of the selected undergraduates, the nature of their projects, the influence of the projects in the framework of mitigation and adaptation in mixed method approach. The participants of the research are 34 undergraduates reading their BA degree in the Department of Translation Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Jaffna. Due to the pandemic scenario their projects were conducted online. The results of the study, to a certain extent, have proven that the projects are not only assisting to the mitigation and adaptation frameworks but also have highly increased the motivation and awareness among youth and have ensured their active participation and engagement in climate change action.

**Key words:** adaptation, climate change, fossil fuels, mitigation, youth

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Generally Climate change is the term mostly-debated as the change in the modern climate brought by the human beings or activities. It is

considered to be one of the most serious environmental issues that is faced by the world. Climate change refers to the changes of the earth's temperature, humidity, air pressure, wind, clouds and precipitation patterns over

the time. Lacking action by world's nations, the effect would be severe by costing millions of lives to suffer. It is investigated that food, water, health, ecosystem, human habitat and infrastructure are the most vulnerable sectors under climate attack and remarked that Africa is the most vulnerable region to climate change variability [1]. As it has become the central issue of the present, not anymore an issue for a distant future immediate actions are required.

According to the 15th edition of the global risks report 2020 prepared by the world economic forum highlighted the areas that are greatly affected. The risks identified in such areas are loss of life due to health hazards and natural disasters, as well as excessive stress on ecosystem, especially marine or aquatic systems [2]. A special report presented in an Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) also projected the risks associated with two levels of global warming, 1.5°C & 2°C. The report also analysed climate change impact on key economic sectors such as tourism, energy and transportation [3]. There is a negative impact by global warming on freshwater sources, food security and food production system, ecosystems, human health, urbanization, poverty as well as changing structures of communities. It is concluded that the world is in a current state of climate emergency.

Upon this the nations started to react and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change was set up by the World Meteorological Organization in collaboration with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to provide governments and official bodies with

scientific knowledge and information that can be used to formulate climate related policies (IPCC 2013). The critical action taken in this regard was the adoption of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 1992. The main objective of the convention has been the stabilization of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere to prevent severe impacts on the climate system [3-4].

Setting out the commitments to all parties involved the convention put major responsibilities on developed countries to implement national policies to limit anthropogenic emissions and enhance greenhouse gas sinks. Moreover it called developed country parties for assisting vulnerable developing country parties financially and technologically in taking climate action [4].

As a developing country and tropical country, Sri Lanka is highly vulnerable to impacts of climate change. Being a small island in the Indian Ocean, the coastal region of Sri Lanka is susceptible to changes in sea level. Important sectors of the economy such as tourism and fisheries could be affected due to impacts of sea level rise [5-6]. A significant population of the country is dependent on livelihoods connected to agriculture. Studies show that food security of the nation can be adversely affected due to impacts of climate change [7-9]. In Sri Lanka the researchers have found danger and threat in the natural systems connected to water cycle, eco systems and bio-diversity of the country to be altered by climate change [10]. Thus the impacts of climate change are widespread in Sri

Lanka and they could create perils and negative socio-economic outcomes in many sectors in Sri Lanka.

As a responsible member of the global community Sri Lanka has the responsibilities to take immediate actions and work towards sustainable development goals. Sri Lanka signed the Paris Climate Agreement in April 2016 and submitted its Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDC) covering national commitments for mitigation of and adaptation to climate change [11]. The Government of Sri Lanka, following this, has launched a national initiative to face the threat of climate change and focused more on the vulnerability and adaptive capacity of its people in terms of adaptation strategy to climate change. Sri Lanka has already started the NAP process and reached two important milestones, namely: the National Climate Change Policy (NCCP) and the National Climate Change Adaptation Strategy for Sri Lanka (NCCS): 2011 to 2016 (NCCAS 2011-16) [12]. These important policy documents elaborate the national vision and strategic priorities with regard to facing the threat of climate change.

The British Council in Sri Lanka has a history of being engaged with young people in addressing climate change and issues arising from the same. The International Climate Champions programme was one such initiative that engaged youth while Low Carbon Futures was another programme that engaged school children in creating low carbon alternative futures for the world. In November 2021 the United Kingdom will host the landmark UN Climate Change Conference (COP 26) [13]. The

British Council is working with partners worldwide to support the success and legacy of COP26 by creating opportunities for cooperation, dialogue and action in arts, education and science that address the shared challenges of climate change. There will be an innovative and creative programme of activity and engagement which includes bringing together young Active Citizens from around the world to share learning, engage in advocacy and build networks.

As a part of this programme British Council works in collaboration with Sri Lankan universities training the staff to be the facilitators of Active Citizen programme. The researchers of this paper are also the trained facilitators of the British Council and investigated in this paper the nature of the projects and their impact on climate change. Thus this study analyses the results of the projects held by the undergraduates of University of Jaffna, Sri Lanka.

## **2. MATERIALS AND METHOD**

### *2.1. Research location*

The study was carried out at the Faculty of Arts, University of Jaffna, Sri Lanka.

### *2.2. Research Design*

A descriptive analytical approach was adopted for this research. The researchers collected and analysed qualitative and quantitative data employed from questionnaires, focus group discussions and observers' notes. The participants were trained for four days to contemplate on Me and My Identity, Me and

You, We Together incorporating the themes that address climate change. At the end of their training session the participants were divided into groups based on the areas they come from and were required to design their community maps and locate areas with climate change issues.

### 2.3. Respondents

The participants were 34 undergraduates from the Department of Translation Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Jaffna. The participants were from various parts of the country and divided into six groups. Eventually each of the group planned proposals for the projects that address the mitigation and adaptation strategies for climate change. Some of the samples of the projects were planting trees, beach cleaning, and garbage disposals. Due to the travel restrictions for Covid-19 situation the projects were online, having turned into promoting planting trees online, conducting art competitions, poetry competition and webinars that focus climate change issues.

### 2.4. Data Collection and Analysis

The responses given in the questionnaires were analysed through deductive and inductive qualitative and quantitative analysis techniques. In the deductive analysis method, the data were collected and examined through categorization of the responses depending on the categories in this research. The data were analysed depending on the recurring ideas in the inductive way.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The participants' projects focused solely on climate change issues. The participants' responses are shown in the charts and tables. The respondents are from the different parts of the country out of which 97% of respondents were female and only 3.4 % were male (figure 1). The respondents were subjected to various questions and they provided suitable answers. Out of all the respondents about 38.7% were members of some or the other environmental organization (figure 2). It was important to know that the respondents know about climatic issue and all the respondents were familiar with recent climatic issue and get updated from various sources like internet, television and academic institutes (figure 3). It is important to know about the climatic changes over the time. Majority of respondents gets the information from academic institutes [14]. It is observed from the study that the students feel that more relevant knowledge is provided in academic

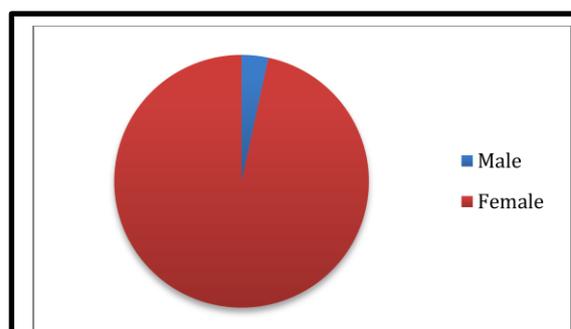


Figure 1. Respondents' count as per gender

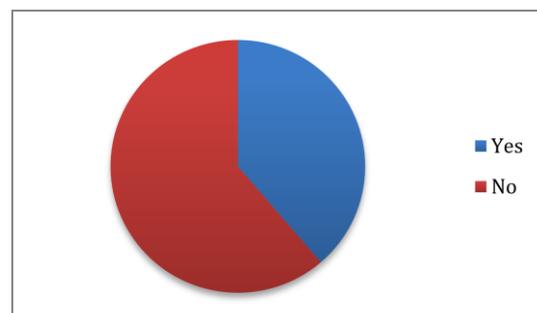


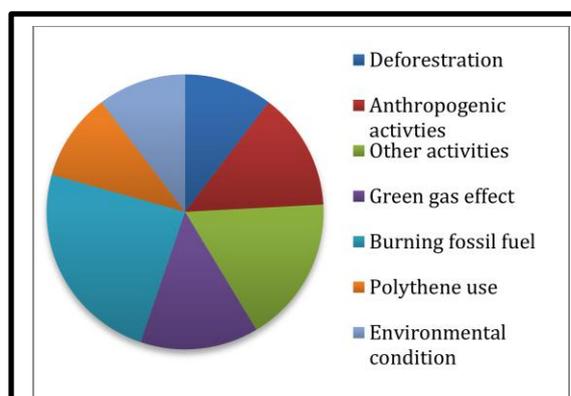
Figure 2. Member of Environmental organization

Sources of information	Percentage
Academic Institute	51.6
Television	19.4
Internet	29
Total	100

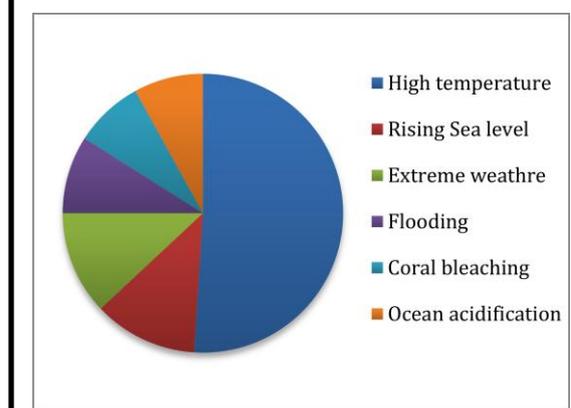
textbooks than online [15]. The information from textbook remains in memory for longer time. The respondents also agreed that it is important to know about climatic issues and its effect on self (table 1). John S. Hoffman (1986) stated that anthropogenic activity is major cause of climate change and its important for all the individuals to work about it sooner or it will be too late to take the action [16]. According to the respondents about causes of climate change they have agreed that human actions such as deforestation (10%), increase of greenhouse gases (14%), burning of fossil fuel (24%) and polythene use (10%) are the major causes (Figure 4). To the questions of climate change issues in Sri Lanka the participants had responded various issues found as the impacts in Sri Lanka such as high temperature (51%), sea level rising (12%), extreme weather conditions (12%), flooding (9%), coral bleaching (8%), ocean acidification (8%) (figure 5). For the questions that addressed the impact of climate change on people the students had responded that it has economic impact on the sectors of agriculture, tourism, infrastructure and livelihoods; they had mentioned the impacts on health and environment as well. Limitation of the overall consumption of natural resources, and carbon dioxide emitted, wetland conservation, and habitat restoration were important adaptation

approaches mentioned by the participants. To tackle the issues 40% of the participants have suggested planting trees as a crucial remedy. Almost 17% of them opted for using renewable energy. 10% of the participants have suggested eco-friendly means to tackle the issue. 21% of the respondents have stated that having knowledge and being aware of the problem could help tackling the problem (figure 6).

The students from the northern area had proposed a project of garbage disposal. They had selected an area and planned various sub projects that could cover their main project. Students from western part of Sri Lanka did Calido beach cleaning. The eastern and central parts of Sri Lanka chose lake cleaning. The north-western part of Sri Lanka's participants had opted planting trees. These projects, even



**Figure 4.** Cause of climatic changes



**Figure 5.** Causes of Climatic changes in Sri Lanka

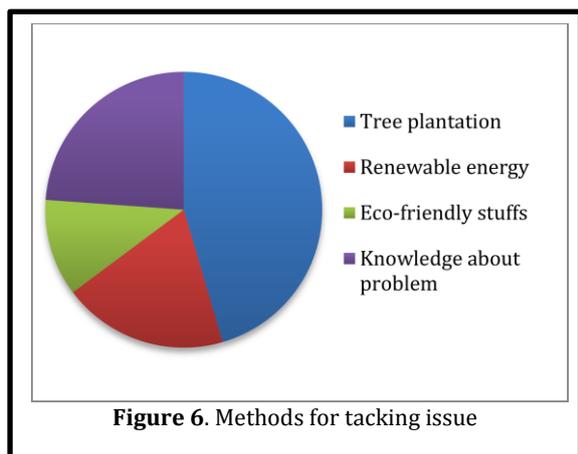


Figure 6. Methods for tackling issue

though they were undertaken by the less number of students could at least help to a certain extent to mitigate the issues of climate change.

In the researchers' observation it was noted the participants had truly become active citizens showing real concern towards mitigation and adaptation strategies for climate change. They had actively engaged in the promotion. They were highly motivated and engaged. They were certain that they could contribute to some extent to mitigate the climate change issues in the nation. Moreover, they were conscious about sustainable development while focusing the climate changes. It was also observed that the competitions, the webinars and the hypes conducted by the participants through social media prove that technology plays an important role for the awareness to be created for climate change issues.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The projects undertaken by the undergraduates under the Active Citizen programme conducted by University of Jaffna in collaboration with British Council highly engage the youth, especially the young undergraduates and

motivate them to act on climate action. The students had displayed enthusiasm and high spirit in working for their environment. Their projects addressed both mitigation and adaptation strategies with an overview to sustainable development. These programmes should be recommended not only to the university students but also for the school children and all the youth. When each and every individual realizes the need of the hour the mitigation and adaptation is possible everywhere.

#### 5. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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#### 6. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors have declared that there is no conflict of interest.

#### 7. SOURCE/S OF FUNDING

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