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# From Climate Awareness to Environmental Responsibility

Practical, inclusive environmental education through international learning and local action

## Independent Civil Society Policy Contribution

Lumora Foundation
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## Independence and status

This paper presents independent recommendations of Lumora Foundation. It does not represent the official position of the United Nations, UNFCCC, the Government of Estonia or any other government or institution. Proposed pilot activities and partnerships are not confirmed or funded.

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## Editorial note

This web edition presents the existing English policy text in a readable publication layout. The policy arguments, illustrative country roles, pilot proposal and references are retained. Front matter and the closing status note have been clarified. Corporate authorship follows the supplied source; no individual author has been added.

## Executive summary

Climate education should help children not only understand environmental change but also develop the confidence, skills and opportunities to respond to it. In many education systems, sustainability is already part of the curriculum. The pressing question is whether every learner can translate that knowledge into sustained, meaningful action. Lumora Foundation proposes an approach grounded in regular, age-appropriate practical learning, equitable access, careful evaluation and international exchange.

Estonia offers a useful starting point: sustainability is integrated across its national curriculum, and environmental learning extends beyond classrooms. Our proposal is not to export an Estonian syllabus unchanged. It is to establish a two-way learning network in which Estonian educators collaborate with partners in Uganda, Kenya, Türkiye and India, adapting activities to local ecosystems, educational needs and risks. Estonia would also learn from its partners, particularly on water resilience and community-led adaptation. [1-4]

We ask governments, educators, development agencies and civil-society organisations to support a modest, evaluated pilot rather than a one-off awareness campaign. The proposed pilot is a programme concept, not an approved or funded activity.

## Five recommendations

• Make practical climate and environmental learning a predictable part of schooling, without prescribing a uniform curriculum or an untested universal hourly requirement.

• Prioritise learners facing financial, geographic, disability-related or climate-related barriers; finance transport, materials, accessible formats and teacher support.

• Use digital tools to support - not replace - contact with nature, local observation and community action.

• Give children a meaningful voice in selecting activities and assessing local solutions, with appropriate safeguarding and adult support.

• Evaluate changes in skills, participation and resource-use practices, not only the number of events or trees planted.

## 1 Why action-oriented education matters

Drought, flooding, ecosystem degradation and heat affect communities differently. Uganda faces both drought and floods in different regions; UNICEF documented young people raising concerns about water access, school disruption and damaged local ecosystems during its 2026 consultations. In Kenya, UNICEF has reported disproportionate effects of drought, flooding and related hazards on vulnerable children. These experiences reinforce a broader lesson: climate education must connect global concepts with the places where children live. [5-6]

Environmental responsibility cannot be assigned to children alone. Effective climate action also requires public investment, sound water governance, resilient infrastructure and accountable institutions. School initiatives should therefore complement - not substitute for - structural measures by governments and industry. This

reflects the UNFCCC Action for Climate Empowerment (ACE) framework, which links education to public participation, information and international cooperation. [7]

## 2 Build on Estonia's existing strengths

Estonia incorporated education for sustainable development into its national curriculum in 2002. Environmental and sustainable-development themes are addressed across subjects and may be carried into everyday school life, including cooperation with external education organisations. This established policy foundation deserves recognition; suggesting that Estonia needs to introduce environmental learning for the first time would be inaccurate. [1-2]

A constructive next step would be to examine, with Estonian teachers and environmental education organisations, how frequently students participate in hands-on activities, who may be excluded, and what learning outcomes persist. Potential improvements include repeat participation through the school year, accessible field learning, teacher exchange, youth-designed projects and longitudinal measurement. These are proposals for investigation, not findings that Estonia currently fails to deliver them.

## 3 Adapt learning to local circumstances

| Country / role proposed | Illustrative learning focus |
|---|---|
| Estonia - co-design and learning partner | Forests, wetlands, biodiversity monitoring, digital field observations; learn from partners' adaptation practices. |
| Uganda - potential pilot partner | Locally identified water-access concerns, soil and school gardens, flood or drought awareness appropriate to region. |
| Kenya - potential pilot partner | Water stewardship, heat and drought preparedness, flood awareness, school-community resilience. |
| Türkiye - potential expansion partner | Water conservation, drought adaptation, school greening and place-based environmental projects. |
| India - potential expansion partner | Youth-led innovation, low-cost environmental monitoring and community adaptation. |

Proposed roles are illustrative. No government, school, NGO or other institution listed here has committed to participating.

## 4 A 12-month demonstration pilot

A feasible first phase would work with a small number of volunteer schools and local education partners in Estonia, Uganda and Kenya. Türkiye and India could participate in remote exchanges or a later expansion, subject to partnership agreements, safeguarding checks and funding. Local partners would determine priorities; Lumora would seek to coordinate cross-border learning and dissemination.

| Period | Activities and deliverables |
|---|---|
| Months 1-3 | Joint needs assessment; school and partner selection; child safeguarding and consent protocols; baseline surveys; teacher co-design. |
| Months 4-6 | Teacher workshops; locally selected field activities (e.g., school water audit, habitat observations, garden management); low-cost materials. |
| Months 7-9 | Repeat activities and peer exchanges between students; accessible offline and digital documentation; review of participation barriers. |
| Months 10-12 | Endline assessment; feedback from children, teachers and communities; public methods note and recommendations for adaptation or scale-up. |

## 5 Safeguards, equity and measurement

Participation should be embedded in ordinary learning rather than becoming unpaid child labour or an additional cost for families. Planting activities must use locally appropriate species, approved sites and realistic maintenance arrangements; any water collection or reuse activities must follow local health and safety rules. Activities should be inclusive for children with disabilities and accessible where internet connectivity is limited.

The pilot should track: (a) reach and inclusion, disaggregated where appropriate and lawful; (b) student understanding and applied skills using simple pre-/post-activities; (c) participation in repeated activities rather than one-off attendance; (d) teacher confidence and feasibility; and (e) carefully defined local outputs such as monitored school water use. A comparison group, if ethically and practically suitable, could help distinguish programme effects from broader trends. Any claims of changed behaviour or environmental impact should depend on observed results.

## 6 International policy requests

• Education ministries: integrate meaningful, age-appropriate experiential learning into climate education strategies, while preserving local curricular autonomy.

• Environment and local authorities: open public environmental learning sites to schools and support safe, sustained community projects.

• Development partners: provide flexible grants for teacher training, access costs and locally led evaluation - not just high-visibility events.

• UNFCCC and COP31 stakeholders: encourage sharing of evidence, inclusive participation and cross-border peer learning under ACE; provide appropriate channels for independent civil-society contributions.

## Conclusion

A child may be able to explain drought or biodiversity loss and still never have the opportunity to respond to either. The educational gap we seek to address is between awareness and supported action. Estonia's existing experience provides a foundation for exchange, while local knowledge in Uganda, Kenya and other partner countries should shape the solutions. Lumora Foundation invites dialogue on a small, responsible and measurable pilot that could inform longer-term cooperation.

## Sources and reference framework


[1] Estonian Ministry of Education and Research, "Ten years of Education for Sustainable Development in Estonia." https://www.hm.ee/en/news/ten-years-education-sustainable-development-estonia

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[3] UNESCO, Greening Curriculum Guidance (2024; page updated 2026). https://www.unesco.org/en/sustainable-development/education/greening-future/curriculum

[4] ESTDEV, 2026 Africa call results and priorities (22 April 2026). https://estdev.ee/en/articles/nine-projects-three-african-countries-receive-funding-after-2026-call-proposals

[5] UNICEF Uganda, Children and youth call for climate action (5 October 2026). https://www.unicef.org/uganda/stories/ugandas-children-and-youth-call-climate-action-protects-their-future

[6] UNICEF Kenya, Climate Landscape Analysis for Children in Kenya (July 2025). https://www.unicef.org/kenya/reports/climate-landscape-analysis-children-kenya

[7] UNFCCC, Action for Climate Empowerment. https://unfccc.int/topics/education-and-youth/big-picture/ACE

[8] UNESCO, Green School Quality Standard (2024). https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/green-school-quality-standard-greening-every-learning-environment



Status: Independent civil-society contribution submitted for consideration. It is not a UNFCCC publication, COP31 decision, endorsed government position or funded project.