

EXPLORING THE EXTENT OF YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN DISASTER RISK REDUCTION IN BLANTYRE, MALAWI

MSc INTERDISCIPLINARY GLOBAL CHANGE STUDIES RESEARCH REPORT



UNIVERSITY OF THE
WITWATERSRAND,
JOHANNESBURG

By: Ruth Ntombihle Mughogho

Supervisor: Professor Coleen Vogel

Date: 9 June, 2025

A research report submitted to the Faculty of Science, University of the Witwatersrand, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science Interdisciplinary Global Change Studies

**School of Animal, Plant and Environmental Sciences
University of Witwatersrand
Private Bag X3, Wits 2050
South Africa**



Declaration

I **Ruth Ntombihle Mughogho** declare that this research report is my own, unaided work. It is being submitted for the Degree of Master of Science Interdisciplinary Global Change Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other University.



9 day of June 2025 in Johannesburg, South Africa

ABSTRACT

In recent years, the world has experienced an increase in the frequency and intensity of disasters. Globally, more than a billion people have been affected. Disaster risk has become more prominent in the context of climate change where global temperatures continue to rise due to anthropogenic and other activities. Climate projections indicate intensified and more frequent disasters. Southern Africa is a climate hotspot owing to its dry and warm climate. With climate change, the region is projected to become warmer and drier resulting in unprecedented extreme events such as drought and heavy rainfall. Disasters often follow extreme events due to people's exposure and vulnerability. Therefore, reducing exposure and vulnerability will lessen the likelihood of disasters. In order to achieve this, knowledge inputs from wider all facets of society is required. Youth, who make up more than half of the world's population are disproportionately affected by disasters. They also are often sidelined when it comes to participation in Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) work often being viewed as a vulnerable group and victims needing protection. Recent studies, however, have shown that they present an important demographic dividend that may be leveraged to further the DRR goal through their human and creative capital, employability, and civic involvement.

Malawi, a developing country in southern Africa, has a strong legal and policy framework foundation supporting the participation of youth in DRR. Nevertheless, youth participation in disaster risk reduction seems to be a challenge. This study explored the extent of youth participation in DRR in Blantyre, Malawi. Using qualitative methods, twenty youths ages 18 to 35 were engaged in focus group discussions and key informants from informal institutions working in DRR were interviewed. The focus group discussions revealed that youth participation in DRR in Blantyre is decorative; representing non-participation. This means that youth are engaged in DRR activity implementation, they understand the aim of the activities, but they are not usually involved in any planning and decision-making processes. A number of barriers were discovered through this research which have been categorized into five themes; *(1) DRR activities are politicized, (2) Non-consultation – adults plan and make decisions for youth without youth, (3) Limited access to information (4) Non-responsiveness – youth ideas are met with no response and (5) Financial benefits – youth are engaged where projects have no financial benefit, but excluded on ones that do.* The study also highlights key disaster impacts experienced by youth in Blantyre

and the strategies used for youth participation. Finally, the study provides opportunities, as suggested by the youth for enhancing youth participation which include: *(1) Train and empower youth, (2) Include youth in local government committees for DRR, (3) Youth's passion and motivation for action and (4) Platforms for communication, learning and feedback.*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to express my sincere gratitude to the people who have shown me unwavering support through my studies and made the production of this report a success.

I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Coleen Vogel who made herself sufficiently available anytime I needed guidance. From our first consultation to the completion of this research report, her expert feedback and guidance has significantly shaped the quality of this report.

To my husband Francis, thank you for being my biggest cheerleader and a constant source of encouragement. To my family, I am grateful for your belief in my abilities and for being the emotional support that saw me through this task.

I want to express my deep gratitude to the Mandela Rhodes Foundation for the financial support which made both my studies and this research possible.

I would also like to extend my appreciation to the youth in Blantyre as well as other participants in this study for supporting my research.

Above all, I am grateful to God, to Him is all glory and praise.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION	i
ABSTRACT	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS	v
LIST OF FIGURES	vii
LIST OF ACRONYMS	viii
1 CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.2 AIM	4
1.3 RATIONALE.....	4
1.4 RESEARCH QUESTION	5
1.5 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES	5
2 CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	7
2.1 CONCEPTUALIZING DISASTER RISK	7
2.2 CLIMATE CHANGE AS A DRIVER OF DISASTER RISK	9
2.3 SOUTHERN AFRICAN CLIMATE CHANGE	11
2.4 DISASTER RISK REDUCTION – WHERE ARE WE?	13
2.5 YOUTH PARTICIPATION AND DISASTER RISK REDUCTION – WHY THE YOUTH?	15
2.6 GLOBAL GUIDELINES FOR YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN DRR	17
2.7 MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION: STRATEGIES FOR YOUTH PARTICIPATION	21
2.7.1 THE YOUNGO	21
2.7.2 THE ASEAN SAFE SCHOOLS INITIATIVE	23
2.7.3 Youth-led DRR: Creativity and Innovation.....	24
2.7.4 YOUTH CLIMATE ACTION PLAN, SOUTH AFRICA	25
2.8 DRR AND YOUTH PARTICIPATON IN MALAWI.....	26
2.9 MALAWI’S DISASTER HISTORY.....	27
2.10 DISASTER RISK REDUCTION AND YOUTH PARTICIPATION LANDSCAPE: POLICY AND IMPLEMENTATION IN MALAWI.	28
2.11 YOUTH IN MALAWI – POTENTIAL CHANGE AGENTS.....	31
3 CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY	35
3.1 Study Area.....	35
3.2 STUDY GROUP	36
3.3 DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS.....	37
3.3.1 FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS	37

3.3.2	KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS	38
3.4	ETHICS PROTOCOL	39
3.5	DATA ANALYSIS.....	40
4	CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS	41
4.1	TYPES AND IMPACTS OF DISASTERS EXPERIENCED BY YOUTH IN BLANTYRE	41
4.2	LEVEL OF UNDERSTANDING OF DRR	42
4.3	YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN DRR.....	43
4.4	CHALLENGES OF YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN DRR.....	46
4.5	OPPORTUNITIES TO ENHANCE YOUTH PARTICIPATION	47
5	CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION.....	49
5.1	IMPACTS OF DISASTERS ON YOUTH	49
5.2	EXTENT OF KNOWLEDGE ABOUT DRR.....	50
5.3	STRATEGIES FOR YOUTH PARTICIPATION	51
5.4	TO WHAT EXTENT ARE YOUTH ENGAGED IN DRR IN BLANTYRE?	53
5.5	CHALLENGES TO YOUTH PARTICIPATION	56
5.6	WAY FORWARD – OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENHANCED YOUTH PARTICIPATION	57
6	CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION	59
7	REFERENCES	62
8	APPENDICES	72
8.1	APPENDIX 1: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS QUESTIONS GUIDE	72
8.2	APPENDIX 2: KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW GUIDE	73
8.3	APPENDIX 3: ETHICS CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	75

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1.1 IMPACT MAP OF A RECENT DISASTER; TROPICAL CYCLONE FREDDY IN SOUTHERN MALAWI EXCLUDING OTHER IMPACTS SUCH AS INFRASTRUCTURE DAMAGE. (SOURCE: OCHA, 2023)	2
FIGURE 1.2: MAP OF MALAWI SHOWING BLANTYRE CITY. (SOURCE: MAOULIDI, 2012)	3
FIGURE 2.1: DISASTERS OCCUR WHEN HAZARD, EXPOSURE AND VULNERABILITY INTERACT. REDUCING RISK INVOLVES THE PROCESSES OF MITIGATING AND/OR REDUCING THE DRIVERS OF VULNERABILITY, EXPOSURE AND HAZARD. (SOURCE: VINER, ET AL, 2020).....	8
FIGURE 2.2: HUMAN INDUCED WARMING HAS CONTINUED TO RISE. THE GLOBAL GOAL IS TO KEEP GLOBAL TEMPERATURE BELOW 1.5°C AND WELL BELOW 2° C. HUMAN INDUCED WARMING REACHED APPROXIMATELY 1°C ABOVE PRE-INDUSTRIAL LEVELS IN 2017. (SOURCE: IPCC SR1.5 FAQ).....	10
FIGURE 2.3: THERE HAS BEEN OBSERVED ADVERSE IMPACTS FROM ANTHROPOGENIC CLIMATE CHANGE AND IS EXPECTED TO CONTINUE INTENSIFYING INCLUDING EXACERBATED DISASTERS (SOURCE: IPCC, SR, 2012).	11
FIGURE 2.4: CLIMATE MODELS PROJECT A WARMER AND DRYER SOUTHERN AFRICA UNDER DIFFERENT CHANGES OF GLOBAL WARMING INCREASING THE RISK OF HEAT WAVES, DROUGHTS AND FIRES (SOURCE: ENGELBRECHT ET AL, 2024).....	12
FIGURE 2.5: A SIGNIFICANT SHIFT NEEDS TO OCCUR FROM SIMPLY RESPONDING TO DISASTERS TO PREVENTING AND REDUCING RISK BY REDUCING EXPOSURE AND VULNERABILITY OF COMMUNITIES (SOURCE: UNDRR, 2019).	14
FIGURE 2.6: DISASTER RISK REDUCTION CYCLE (SOURCE: UNDRR, 2017).	15
FIGURE 2.7: HART'S LADDER OF YOUTH PARTICIPATION. RUNG 1 TO 3 ARE CONSIDERED AS NON-PARTICIPATION AS YOUTH EITHER DO NOT UNDERSTAND THE PURPOSE OF ACTIVITIES, HAVE NO INPUT IN HOW ACTIVITIES ARE PLANNED, OR HAVE NO ASSURANCE OF WHETHER THEIR VOICES AND CONCERNS WILL BE TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT. RUNG 4 TO 8 REPRESENT MORE MEANINGFUL FORMS OF PARTICIPATION WHERE YOUTH HAVE INFLUENCE IN HOW ACTIVITIES ARE PLANNED AND EXECUTED (SOURCE: HART, 1992).	20
FIGURE 2.8: LOCATION OF MALAWI IN AFRICA (SOURCE: MISSANJO ET AL, 2019)	26
FIGURE 3.1: MAP OF BLANTYRE CITY SHOWING ADMINISTRATIVE WARDS. (SOURCE: MILLENNIUM CITIES INITIATIVE, N.D).....	36
FIGURE 4.1: DEFINITIONS OF DRR (WHAT DOES DISASTER RISK REDUCTION MEAN TO THE YOUTH).....	43
FIGURE 4.2: YOUNG PEOPLE ARE ENGAGED IN PHYSICAL IMPLEMENTATION ACTIVITIES BUT ARE NOT ENGAGED IN PLANNING AND DECISION-MAKING. THE ACTIVITIES RANGE FROM TREE PLANTING EXERCISES TO COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION FOR CAMPAIGNS BY ORGANIZATIONS. THEY ARE HOWEVER NOT ENGAGED IN THE PLANNING OF THESE ACTIVITIES.	44
FIGURE 4.3: LOCAL GOVERNMENT CONNECTS FORMAL AND INFORMAL INSTITUTIONS AND YOUTH FOR DRR PROJECTS.....	45
FIGURE 4.4: CHALLENGES TO YOUTH PARTICIPATION.....	47
FIGURE 4.5: OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENHANCING YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN DRR.....	48
FIGURE 17: SUMMARIZED CURRENT YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN BLANTYRE USING THE LADDER IMAGERY. THE SUMMARY INDICATES THE NEED FOR ENHANCED YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN BLANTYRE, MALAWI.	56

LIST OF ACRONYMS

DODMA	Department of Disaster Management Affairs
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
DYO	District Youth Officer
FGD	Focus Group Discussions
GoM	Government of Malawi
IFRC	International Federation of the Red Cross
IPCC	Intergovernmental panel on Climate Change
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NYCOM	National youth Council of Malawi
PDNA	Post Disaster Needs Assessment
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNDRR	United Nations Department for Disaster Risk Reduction
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNISDR	United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction
VCPC	Village Civil Protection Committee

1 CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change ([IPCC](#)) report states that every ‘increment of global warming will intensify multiple and concurrent hazards’ (IPCC, SR2023:12). The Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction (2015-2030) notes that disasters have affected over 1.5 billion people globally and that many of these disasters are exacerbated by climate change, are increasing in intensity and frequency and significantly impede progress towards Sustainable Development. In the wake of escalating disaster and climate change related costs and risks, governments worldwide are exploring various approaches to boost citizen participation and create technologies and resources to lower risks and improve adaptation (Cox et al., 2019).

The Sendai Framework calls for an “all-of-society” engagement and partnership approach to Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR). The framework acknowledges the crucial role of youth as partners in DRR, stating that:

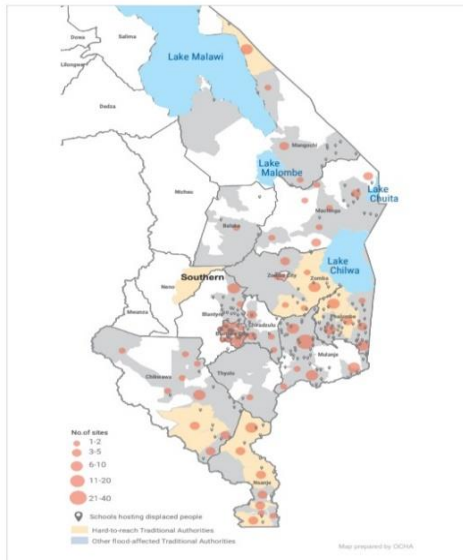
“Children and youth are agents of change and should be given the space and modalities to contribute to disaster risk reduction, in accordance with legislation, national practice and educational curricula.” (Sendai Framework 2015-2030:23).

It also stresses the importance of promoting youth leadership in processes of disaster risk reduction.

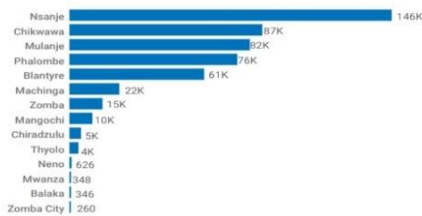
Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) has become a main area of concern particularly with the increase in the number of disasters (Khan et al., 2023). According to the IPCC, developing countries are at a high risk of disasters and owing several economic constraints, often take longer to recover from disasters.

Malawi, a small land-locked country in Southern Africa is no exception. In the past years, Malawi has suffered devastatingly from floods and Tropical Cyclones particularly in the Southern region.

ACCESS TO TRADITIONAL AUTHORITIES AFFECTED BY FLOODS



DISPLACED PEOPLE BY DISTRICT



KEY FIGURES

DISPLACED PEOPLE

508,240

sheltering in schools, camps / evacuation sites or host communities

DISPLACEMENT SITES

505

camps / evacuation sites (including schools)

DEATHS

499

reported deaths in 13 districts

PEOPLE INJURED

841

reported injuries in 15 districts

MISSING

427

people

AFFECTED DISTRICTS

15

districts impacted

HARD TO REACH PEOPLE

179K

in 87 displacement sites

SCHOOLS HOSTING DISPLACED

209

sheltering **175K** displaced people

Figure 1.1 Impact Map of a recent disaster; Tropical Cyclone Freddy in Southern Malawi excluding other impacts such as infrastructure damage. (Source: OCHA, 2023)

The most recent disaster, and the most devastating of the cyclones was Cyclone Freddy which hit Malawi in March of 2023. Country-wide, the cyclone affected more than 2,267,458 people, with 679 deaths, 659, 278 displaced, 530 missing and 2,186 injured (Government of Malawi Post Disaster Needs Assessment, 2023). One of the most affected areas was Blantyre City. According to the Post Disaster Needs Assessment (2023) for cyclone Freddy, the estimated cost for recovery is \$680.4 million.



Figure 1.2: Map of Malawi showing Blantyre city. (Source: Maoulidi, 2012)

Aside from floods and Tropical Cyclones, Malawi is also particularly vulnerable to droughts and dry-spells which affect agriculture. As Malawians mainly rely on agriculture for livelihoods, these climate risks increase other intersectional stressors such as food insecurity (FAO, 2019), health (malnutrition) and increased economic inequalities and vulnerabilities (UNDP, 2018). Floods also increase the risk and vulnerabilities to malaria, cholera and mental health issues such as stress and anxiety (WHO, 2021). Increased damage to infrastructure affect sectors including education and healthcare. During extreme weather events, gender-based violence is also exacerbated; disproportionately affecting young women (UN Women, n.d).

Malawi is a signatory of the Sendai Framework, and as such commits to the “all-of-society” approach to DRR. This includes viewing youth as active participants and enhancing their participation by creating opportunities for meaningful participation. In this context, young people present an underutilized demographic dividend that may be leveraged to further the DRR goal through their human and creative capital, employability, and civic involvement (Cox et al., 2019). This means acknowledging youth voices not only as a representation of youth needs, but also as a valuable resource for knowledge, innovation and implementation. Cox et al (2019:214) notes that the ‘challenge lies in how to engage youth broadly in ways that ensure their participation is more than a checkbox.’ This highlights the need to research these challenges and identify opportunities to enhance youth participation in disaster risk reduction. Various studies discuss the importance of community participation in DRR in Malawi, however, the focus on youth participation is minimal and particularly from the perspectives of the youth themselves has not been largely explored.

1.2 AIM

Given the aforementioned background and the apparent paucity of youth-led and engaged action in DRR in Malawi, the aim of the study was to critically explore the current state of youth participation in DRR in Blantyre, Malawi. The study also aimed to surface and identify the challenges and the opportunities that exist for youth participation from their perspectives. The study provides initial insights into the extent of youth participation in Blantyre and should not be taken as presenting the full extent of youth participation in Blantyre.

1.3 RATIONALE

There is a growing need for youth participation in disaster risk reduction, not only because they are one of the largest populations globally and they also experience disproportionately large impacts to their physical and mental health (Higuera-Roa, 2020). Youth are also a valuable resource for knowledge, innovation and implementation of effective DRR strategies and mechanisms.

Though Malawian studies have been conducted on participation in DRR, they have largely focused on the broader community as opposed to specifically the youth. Kayamba-Phiri & Abbott (2023), for example, assessed community-led resource mobilization and early warning systems processes in Malawi. Sakic (2018, 2019) focuses on indigenous knowledge particularly the

importance of communities and their knowledge in disaster risk reduction, in Southern Malawi. Dewa et al., (2022), assessed the capacity of rural communities to participate in flood risk management. All these address the issue of participation but not as regards youth.

Studies that have examined youth participation in Malawi have focused on other fields such as development and health (Zimba et al., 2021). Jumbe et al., (2022) for instance engaged youth in Malawi to inform the adaptation of a mental health literacy intervention and Kutani (2022) examined the level of youth participation in community development projects in Mzimba, Malawi. There is therefore a need for more research in the field of youth participation in DRR.

Given the varying definitions of youth participation (further discussed in *section 3*), the study followed the definition by the National Youth Policy of Malawi. The Policy defines youth as those aged between 10 and 35. The Policy however recognizes those under the age of 18 as children. This study was aimed at exploring the participation of *adult* youth in DRR in Blantyre. Thus, the study engaged youth between 18 and 35 who according to the Malawian law are legally adults and part of the youth population. In this study, the youth engaged are referred to as “adult youth.”

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTION

This study sought to answer the question: To what extent are the youth engaged in disaster risk reduction in Malawi and what opportunities exist for enhanced engagement?

1.5 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this study were:

1. To understand, document and establish information on youth perspectives of current engagement in reducing risks to climate and other intersectional stresses in Blantyre.
2. Identify youth engagement strategies and mechanisms in disaster risk reduction strategy development and implementation.
3. Identify challenges to engagement and opportunities for enhanced youth participation in DRR.

In Chapter 1, a general background of the study has been provided, including an overview of the aims, objectives and research question. In the next chapter, a literature review of the dissertation is presented. This is to provide an investigation into global and local Disaster Risk and Reduction and youth participation, providing an in-depth discussion into research that has been conducted in

the field as well as practical case studies. The literature provides a foundation for understanding the extent of youth participation in DRR in Blantyre Malawi.

2 CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, relevant literature in disaster risk reduction and youth participation is examined. Firstly, the review helps to conceptualize disaster risk and examines how climate change acts as a driver of disaster risk, making disaster risk reduction more urgent than ever. Disaster risk reduction is then briefly discussed and a more in-depth explanation of why youth participation is crucial is provided. Global frameworks are then presented, particularly those that examine both disaster risk reduction and youth's participation in this process, followed by cases of meaningful youth participation. The chapter concludes with the DRR and youth participation landscape in Malawi, providing a brief background of legal frameworks and studies related to youth participation and disaster risk reduction in Malawi.

2.1 CONCEPTUALIZING DISASTER RISK

Disaster risk reduction according to the United Nations office for Disaster Risk Reduction ([UNDRR](#), n.d, Para. 1) is aimed at preventing new and reducing existing and residual disaster risks. They define risk as the “potential loss of life, injury, or destroyed or damaged assets which could occur to a system, society or a community in a specific period of time.” Risk is a function of hazard, exposure and vulnerability (Cardona et. al., 2012). The occurrence of disasters is therefore as a result of the interactions between hazards, exposure and vulnerability. In order to effectively prevent and reduce disaster risk, the concepts of hazard, exposure and vulnerability must be understood.

Hazards are a “potentially damaging physical event, phenomenon or human activity that may cause the loss of life or injury, property damage, social and economic disruption or environmental degradation” (Bonadonna et. al., 2021:2). The UNDRR identifies three causes of hazards: natural hazards that are as a result or predominantly caused by natural processes; anthropogenic hazards that are predominantly caused by human activities and socionatural hazards which are a combination of human and natural processes including climate change and environmental degradation. Examples of hazards include floods, droughts, heavy rains, earthquakes and volcanic eruptions.

Exposure refers to the nature or degree to which a system is exposed to significant climatic variations while vulnerability is the susceptibility of a system to hazards including its capacity to

cope and adapt (Dewan & Dewan, 2013). The impacts of disasters in this sense differ from location to location as it will be determined by the types of hazards a location is most exposed to as well as the populations' ability to cope and adapt to these hazards.

In order to understand complex disaster-related risks, many countries conduct risk assessments that often entail understanding the vulnerabilities of different locations. In the past, however, risk assessments have mainly focused on exposure and structural vulnerability, often failing to incorporate the social vulnerability of communities (Highfield et. al., 2014).

Comprehensive risk assessments thus must incorporate all aspects of vulnerability as they go beyond the physical and structural factors and relate to socioeconomic factors including age, socioeconomic status, religion and cultures, gender among others (*Fig. 2.1*). The elderly in flood-prone areas are most likely to have a lower ability to cope and adapt to floods and be vulnerable and therefore often at higher risk to floods (Highfield et. al., 2014).



Figure 2.1: Disasters occur when hazard, exposure and vulnerability interact. Reducing risk involves the processes of mitigating and/or reducing the drivers of vulnerability, exposure and hazard. (Source: Viner, et al, 2020).

2.2 CLIMATE CHANGE AS A DRIVER OF DISASTER RISK

Disaster risk reduction has become even more urgent in the context of Climate Change (UNEP; UNDRR). We currently live in what has been termed “the anthropocene” which refers to a world where human activities are bearing significant influence on the earth’s climate (Cotton & Pielke, 1995; Folke et. al., 2021). Activities such as changes in land use and particularly the emission of greenhouse gases, largely owing to industrialization, have led to the warming of the earth at an unprecedented rate (O’Connor et. al., 2002; Pielke, 2005). This has led to unprecedented weather events such as catastrophic fires as in the recent case of Los Angeles fires in the United States (Madakumbura et al., 2025; Sommer, 2025; The Standard, 2025) and extreme heat waves experienced in countries such as South Africa (Fazel-Rastigar & Sivakumar, 2024).

The human impact on global, regional and local climate is widely understood as climate change usually measured over a period of 30 years. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change’s (IPCC) special report on global warming of 1.5°C notes that global temperatures, influenced by human activities have risen by 0.8°C above pre-industrial levels (estimated to be a period between 1850 – 1900). The current rate of emissions is most likely to shift the temperatures beyond an irreversible tipping point (IPCC, 2023). The Paris agreement on climate change puts the earth’s temperature threshold at 1.5°C and aims to keep it well below 2°C. It projects that a temperature of 2°C will be unbearable for human existence, biodiversity and ecosystems across the world (Fendt & Inanova, 2021). The rising of the earth’s temperature has varying consequences ranging from sea level rise, to unprecedented dry periods leading to droughts, biodiversity loss, as well as heavily impacting the livelihoods of people (Jordan et. al., 2013). A world beyond 1.5°C degrees is more dangerous in terms of extreme weather events (Schleussner, 2016) including heavy precipitation and prolonged periods of heat.

FAQ1.2: How close are we to 1.5°C?

Human-induced warming reached approximately 1°C above pre-industrial levels in 2017

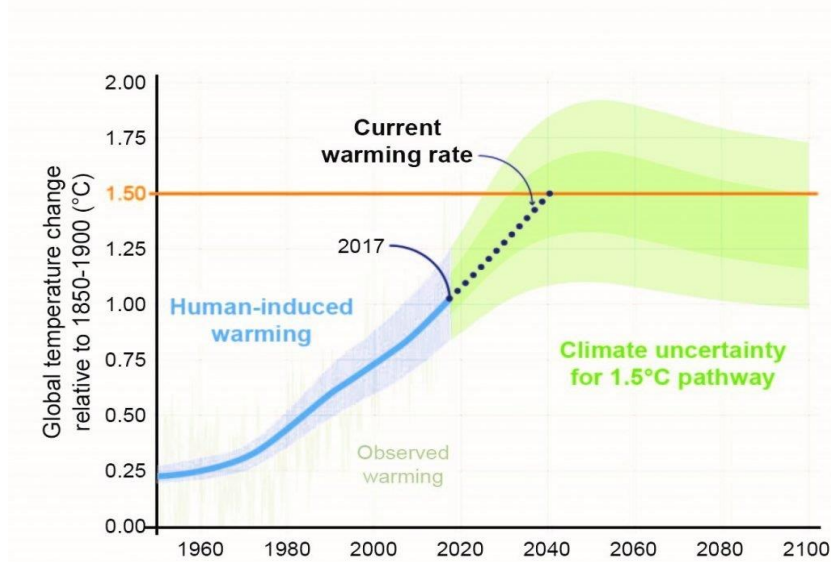


Figure 2.2: Human induced warming has continued to rise. The global goal is to keep global temperature below 1.5°C and well below 2° C. Human induced warming reached approximately 1°C above pre-industrial levels in 2017. (Source: IPCC SR1.5 FAQ)

Climate change is a global concern especially as it has become a driver of disaster risk in two critical ways: increasing the likelihood of hazards, and increasing vulnerabilities and exposure of communities to these hazards. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report states that every ‘increment of global warming will intensify multiple and concurrent hazards’ (IPCC, SR2023:12). Many regions in the world are projected to face further increases in climate hazards, increasing multiple risks to ecosystems and the human population. Compound heat-waves, and droughts are projected to become more frequent, including across multiple locations (IPCC, 2023). Models project increase in the frequency and intensity of heavy precipitation which will increase rain-generated local flooding (Tabari, 2020). Climate change is also likely to push migration and urbanization, increasing and introducing new exposures to several hazards (Adger et al., 2020). Concurrent hazards are likely to affect livelihoods and human health leading to increased vulnerabilities. Unless climate change is significantly mitigated, which involves a net zero Carbon emissions goal, this is the future that the world can anticipate and needs to prepare for.

Adverse impacts from human-caused climate change will continue to intensify

a) Observed widespread and substantial impacts and related losses and damages attributed to climate change

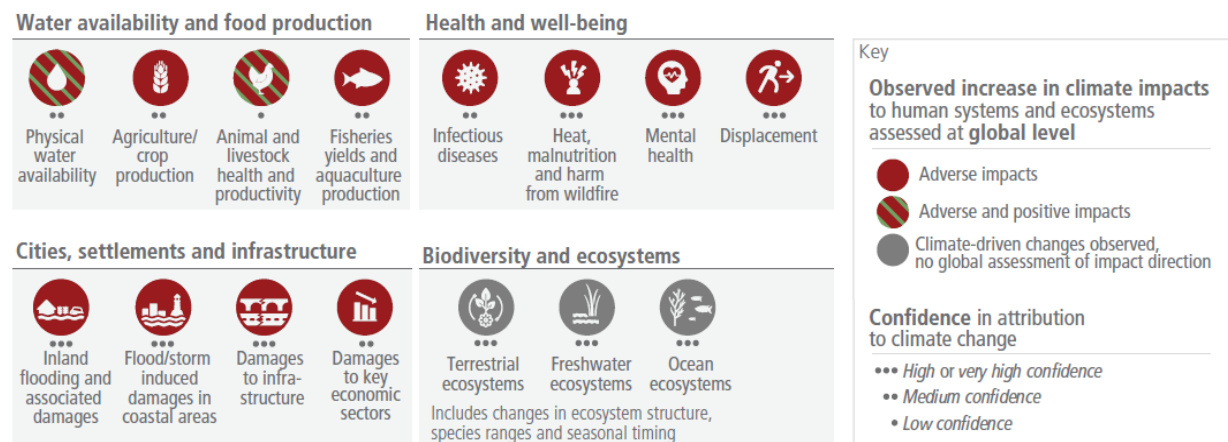


Figure 2.3: There has been observed adverse impacts from anthropogenic climate change and is expected to continue intensifying including exacerbated disasters (Source: IPCC, SR, 2012).

2.3 SOUTHERN AFRICAN CLIMATE CHANGE

Southern Africa is a hotspot for climate change especially as it is an already warm and dry region (IPCC SR1.5, 2018). Climate models project that southern Africa will become warmer and drier (Mengistu et. al., 2024); we therefore can expect more frequent, long-lasting droughts co-occurring with heat waves of unprecedented intensity (Engelbrecht et. al., 2024). While the model agreement is relatively low in terms of precipitation, projections indicate that the region is most likely to experience more intense rainfall events while a reduction in soil moisture is expected due to the projected warming and drying (Engelbrecht et. al., 2024). These projections mean that the agricultural sector, which is the driving sector for most Southern African economies potentially will be greatly affected. The health sector will also be affected in terms of increased heat health risk, as a result of more frequent and prolonged heat waves and the occurrence of other disasters such as flooding are most likely going to put pressure on the health, education and other development sectors. The risk of fires due to warming is also expected to increase (Justino et al., 2013; Chapungu et al., 2024; Engelbrecht et al., 2024).

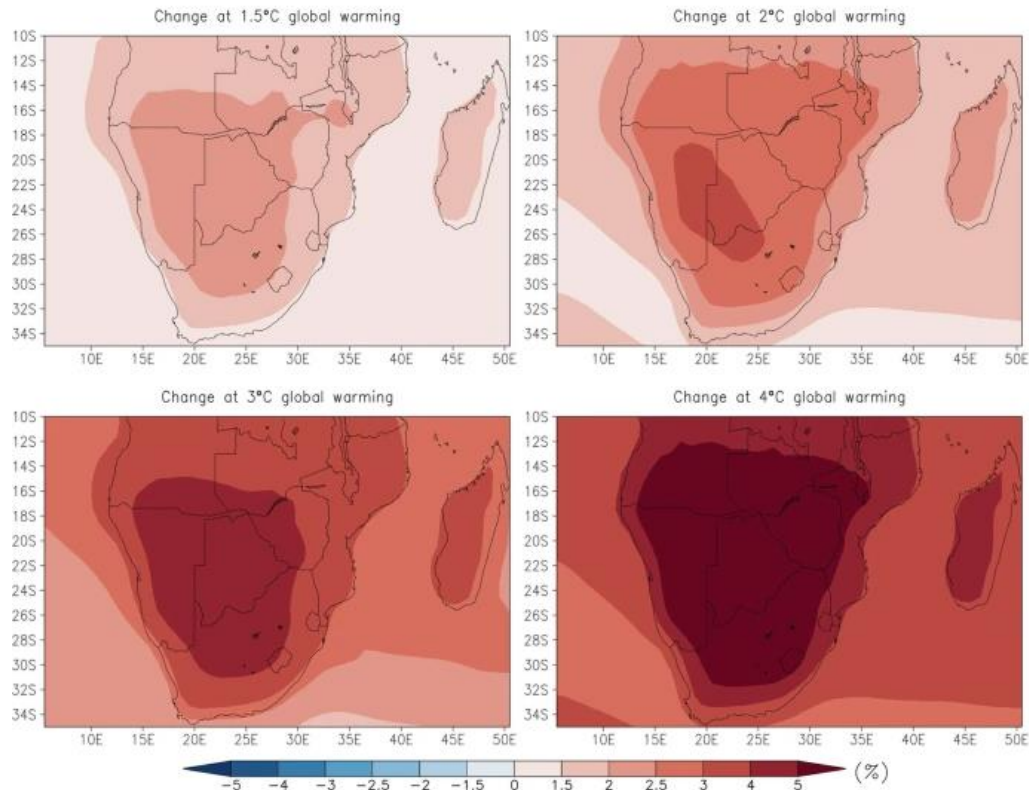


Figure 2.4: Climate models project a warmer and dryer Southern Africa under different changes of global warming increasing the risk of heat waves, droughts and fires (Source: Engelbrecht et al, 2024).

In the past few years, African countries have faced devastating disasters. In 2019, 2022 and 2023, for instance, Malawi, Mozambique and South Africa were hit by tropical cyclones (OCHA, 2023; IFRC, 2022; Nhama & Chikodzi, 2021). Collectively, Tropical cyclone Idai, Ana and Freddy killed thousands of people across these countries, with billions in loss and damage (OCHA, 2023; IFRC, 2022; Nhama & Chikodzi, 2021; Mercy Corps, 2019). To date, the countries are still recovering from the impacts of these cyclones which caused landslides and flooding (Cabot, 2024; UNDRR, 2023). In 2024, Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe also experienced an unprecedented drought affecting agricultural produce; significantly driving food insecurity and a decrease in livelihoods as well as exacerbating other vulnerabilities (OCHA, 2024). Malawi and Zambia both announced a state of disaster and the countries are currently struggling to recover (OCHA, 2024).

Developing nations, under which African countries are usually categorized, are disproportionately affected when it comes to climate change (IPCC, 2022). Driven by such factors as poverty, people are highly likely to build along or below flood lines, countries have weak institutions, and high inequality leading to increased vulnerabilities (Rentschler, Salhab & Jafino, 2022). The IPCC

(2022) finds that in the context of climate change, Africa contributes the least to greenhouse gas emissions but suffers the most consequences of climate change impacts. In terms of disasters, many that have been exacerbated by climate change, it has become increasingly difficult for African countries to rapidly recover due to limited economic capacities ([UNDP](#), 2019). Disaster Risk Reduction in this context has therefore become more necessary as it is understood to be more cost effective than recovery (Deelstra & Bristow, 2023). The threat of climate change makes DRR an urgent and important issue especially as we can already observe its impacts globally.

2.4 DISASTER RISK REDUCTION – WHERE ARE WE?

Disaster risk reduction refers to the policy objective of anticipating and reducing risk ([UNDRR, n.d](#)). DRR is often used interchangeably with Disaster Risk Management which can be understood as the implementation of DRR but also including disaster response such as disaster relief (Sivakumar & Vanitha, 2024). In this study, DRR is used to describe both the policy objective and implementation especially focusing on risk reduction. Historically, the approach to DRR focused on disaster management until research began to show that disasters were not only natural (even if the associated hazard is) and that exposure and vulnerability were significant determinants of disaster risk and related outcomes and vulnerabilities (UNISDR GAR, 2015). Advocacy for risk reduction therefore increased, with institutions such as the UNDRR and UNEP encouraging countries to change approaches from simply responding, to reducing risk. While there has been observable global efforts for risk reduction, the UNDRR shows that governments are still reactive and largely focus on disaster management and response as shown in *Fig. 2.5* (UNDRR, 2019).

"Innovation curve" – from destructive to regenerative approaches



Figure 2.5: A significant shift needs to occur from simply responding to disasters to preventing and reducing risk by reducing exposure and vulnerability of communities (Source: UNDRR, 2019).

The “how to make cities more resilient” handbook proposes five continuous steps for effective DRR. “Organizing and preparing for DRR” which involves awareness raising and the coming together of diverse actors and stakeholders; ‘disaster risk and resilience assessment’ involving the identification of vulnerability and understanding local risks and gaps; ‘development of DRR strategies and action plans’ including relevant interventions and timeframes; ‘implementation of DRR strategies’ and ‘DRR monitoring, evaluation and follow-ups’ (Fig.2.6) (UNDRR 2017:83). This process is specifically the process of Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and should not be mistaken for the Disaster Risk Management cycle (DRM).

Civic and community engagement has been noted in several cases to be key for effective DRR (Das, Becker & Doyle, 2024). The focus on youth has also increased (Higuera-Roa, 2020; Cox et al., 2019; Pickering et al., 2022). In this research, the study focuses on youth participation in this process and tries to understand the importance of their involvement at every stage of the DRR process. As will be argued, youth have the ability to contribute and enable the shift from disaster response to risk reduction.



Figure 2.6: Disaster Risk Reduction Cycle (Source: UNDRR, 2017).

2.5 YOUTH PARTICIPATION AND DISASTER RISK REDUCTION – WHY THE YOUTH?

‘Participation and active citizenship is about having the right, the means, the space and the opportunity and, where necessary and critically, the support to participate in and influence decisions and engaging in actions and activities so as to continue to build a better society’ (Barros et al., 2020:1). In the past, children and young people have more frequently been portrayed in disaster contexts as a particular vulnerable group that needs to be protected rather than as community change agents and participants in the creation and application of pertinent practices and policies (Cox et al., 2021). This paradigm is problematic because it has led, for a long time to the sidelining and suppression of young people’s voices in decision-making. “Seeing and therefore consequently treating them as passive victims or as a homogenous group misses the vast potential of their unique and collective capacities to drive solutions” (UNDRR WIA, 2020:18). Questions around youth participation as citizens of nations with the same fundamental rights and freedoms as adults have arisen over time with studies indicating the need for a paradigm shift in terms of how youth are engaged and viewed (Larsson et al, 2018; Zlobina et al, 2024). The United Nations’ declaration on the rights of the child (1959), for example, describes participation as the legal right of young people, upholding young people’s right to be fully and actively engaged in processes and issues concerning them. When it comes to disasters and climate change, youth are the ones who will benefit most from reducing the risk and impact of disasters. They are the ones to most likely live through the reality of projected climate change and its impacts (UNDRR WIA, 2020, Cox et

al, 2019). They are most likely to live through intensified and frequent disasters. In addition, young people below the age of 30 make up half of the world's population, and are disproportionately affected by impacts of disasters currently ([African Development Bank Group](#), 2023). As a result, youth participation in DRR as well as climate change mitigation is extremely important. Climate change and disaster risk reduction are concerned with long term change (IPCC, 2023). The inability to mitigate climate change, reduce risks and impacts of disasters today will have greater consequences for the future which most young people will be living through (UNDRR, 2020). This makes youth participation in DRR important as it ensures their active involvement in strategies, policies, programs and activities that will determine the kind of future they live through. It makes youth an important stakeholder in processes of disaster risk reduction.

In the last few years, young people have slowly become vocal about their rights and have been engaging in activism, calling on leaders to listen to their voices and to be taken seriously. They are driving the much needed paradigm shift, showcasing that they have the ability to drive change and that they are a powerful force that can be leveraged to reduce disaster risk if supported (Mort et al., 2020). They are also becoming vocal about their place in decision-making processes; from planning to implementation. Youth are “standing for their fundamental rights for protection, safety, survival, education and participation with millions across countries increasingly protesting and demanding climate justice from their governments” (UNDRR WIA, 2020:19). Globally, we see Greta Thunberg, a young climate activist who is extremely vocal about climate change and calling for real action to mitigate current climate change (BBC, 2024). Malala Yousefai, a young woman who won the Nobel peace prize in 2014 and through the Malala fund champions for the sharing of girls' experiences with climate change is another example of how much young people can contribute to challenges facing the world today (Filks & O'connor, 2022). These examples attest to young people's ability to engage in difficult issues and challenges, do not necessarily view themselves as victims, and that they can truly contribute to shifting systems. Cox et al (2019) in their study in Canada found that youth were genuinely interested to take part in discussions and planning for disasters and climate change, airing their discontent at the fact that adults tend to put them in the vulnerability box and undermines the contributions they can make.

Cox et al (2019) as well as the UNDRR (2019) both point to the fact that young people are technologically savvy, and that they are a valuable resource in solving the challenge of climate

change and the rising disaster risk. Innovations led by youth creatively use new technologies and outside the box thinking. Social media campaigns and education designed by youth have the capacity to mobilize local and global actions in languages and processes that motivate, engage and inspire (UNDRR, 2020).

An existing and critical concern, however, is that the burden of DRR and Climate Change might shift to young people or might be too much for young people to respond to given other challenges they face such as unemployment (Higuera-Roa, 2020). This concern, however, also still positions youth primarily as a vulnerable group and usually undermines the potential that youth have to participate in difficult conversations such as of DRR. It assumes that youth would be working in isolation, without support and collaboration from adults.

2.6 GLOBAL GUIDELINES FOR YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN DRR

The Sendai Framework for disaster risk reduction is notably the central global framework for disaster risk reduction. A successor of the Hyogo Framework for DRR, the Sendai Framework is a non-binding agreement signed by countries worldwide committing to the reduction of disaster risk (Sendai Framework, 2015-2030). It aims to “guide the multi-hazard management of disaster risk in development at all levels as well as within and across all sectors” (Sendai Framework, 2015-2030:36). The Sendai Framework contains four priorities for action:

1. Understanding disaster risk
2. Strengthening disaster risk governance to manage disaster risk
3. Investing in disaster risk reduction for resilience
4. Enhancing disaster preparedness for effective response, and to “Build Back Better” in recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction.

In order to successfully implement these actions, the framework provides guiding principles, one of which is engagement from all of society referred to in the framework as “all-of-society engagement and partnership” (Sendai Framework, 2015-2030:13). Here, the framework speaks to the importance of integrating a cultural, gender, age, disability perspective in all DRR policies and actions. Particularly, it calls for the promotion of youth and women leadership in DRR. In the framework, youth are referred to as “agents of change” and emphasizes that countries give the youth the space and the modalities to actively participate in DRR (Sendai Framework, 2015-2030:23). While the framework directly speaks to youth leadership and participation, a gap that has been noted by researchers in the field of youth participation in DRR is that it does not

necessarily state what the role of youth is in these processes and what strategies can possibly be used for youth participation to be meaningful (Pickering et al., 2021).

The United Nations office for Disaster Risk Reduction provides a comprehensive guideline for youth participation in DRR. The “words into action: Guidelines for youth and children’s participation” is a useful tool which governments, and informal institutions can utilize to enable active youth participation specifically in DRR (UNDRR, 2019). The document advocates for “collective participation” which refers to adult owned and youth led initiatives. This means that the collaboration is *initiated by adults* and *youth are invited to assist* in identifying and solving issues of concern and thus, collaboration is done on an equal footing. The collaborative approach is also generally characterized by:

1. Initiatives wholly led by youth but outcomes are owned by adults,
2. youth have the ability to influence and challenge the process and outcomes and,
3. the process allows for youth to transition into fully driving the initiative.

The words into action guideline document secondly advocates for “self-driven participation” which means youth lead the engagements (UNDRR, 2019). This means that issues of concern are identified by youth themselves and that the process and outcomes are controlled by them. Adults only come in as supporters when needed and do not assume leadership. Key to the self-driven approach to participation is peer approaches and accompaniment. The UNDRR’s guidelines are concerned with shifting the narrative of victimhood and promoting a higher degree of autonomy for youth as leaders and agents of change and upholds the Sendai Framework.

The UNDRR’s guide on meaningful participation aligns with Hart’s ladder of youth participation of 1992 which has become an important framework both for research and as an institutional evaluation tool. Hart’s ladder of youth participation was inspired by the work of Sherry Arnstein on citizen participation. Arnstein’s ladder was proposed in 1969 and describes how empowered public institutions and officials deny power to citizens and how levels of citizen agency, control and power can be increased (Posodobitev, 2025). Central to Arnstein’s idea of citizen participation is the redistribution of power. This redistribution of power enables citizens who are excluded from political and economic processes to be deliberately included in the future (Arnstein, 1969). This would involve strategies that enables excluded citizens the power to determine how information is shared, goals and policies are set, tax resources are allocated, and programs are operated (Arnstein, 1969).

Arnstein's proposed model contains eight rungs categorized into three: Non-participation, Degrees of tokenism and Degrees of citizen power. Non-participation involves manipulation and therapy (rung 1 and 2) which represent a distortion of participation. Citizens are purposefully misled into believing that they are being given power in a process that in actuality denies them that power (Varwell, 2022). Those in power create pseudo-participatory programs that attempt to convince citizens that they are the problem when in fact it is the established institutions and policies that are creating the problem (Posodobitev, 2025).

Degrees of tokenism involves informing, consultation and placation (rungs 3, 4 and 5). This degree of participation represent crucial steps towards participation but are still flawed forms of citizen participation (Arnstein, 1969). Informing citizens Arnstein (1969) notes often involves one-way flow of communication from officials to citizens and channels of feedback are non-existent. Consultation often offers no assurance of whether citizen concerns and ideas will be taken into account (Varwell, 2022). Placation occurs when citizens are given limited degree of influence in a process. A 'seat' on bodies or committees is reserved for a citizen but these usually go to local elites (Arnstein, 1969).

Degrees of citizen power involves partnership, delegated power and citizen control (rung 6, 7 and 8). This represents the most desirable forms of citizen participation (Arnstein, 1969). In these rungs, power is redistributed and citizens work in partnership with public institutions and officials and citizens hold significant influence to assure accountability (Varwell, 2022). Citizens also have control to govern and lead programs and be in full charge of policy and managerial aspects (Arnstein, 1969).

Hart (1994) inspired by Arnstein's ladder developed the ladder of youth participation which is used as the key framework for meaningful youth participation in this study. Hart's ladder consists of eight ladder rungs: *"1) Manipulation, 2) Decoration 3) Tokenism 4) Assigned and informed 5) Consulted and informed 6) adult-initiated and directed 7) young people initiated and directed 8) young people initiated and shared decisions with adults."* (Hart, 1992:8) (Fig.2.7)

ROGER HART'S LADDER OF PARTICIPATION

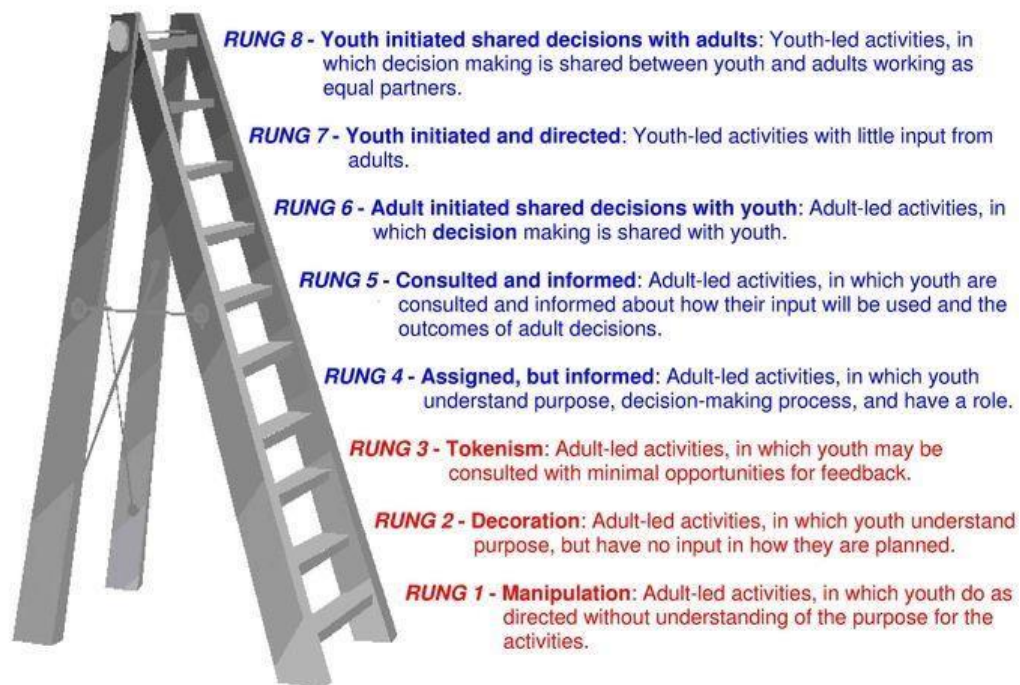


Figure 2.7: Hart's ladder of youth participation. Rung 1 to 3 are considered as non-participation as youth either do not understand the purpose of activities, have no input in how activities are planned, or have no assurance of whether their voices and concerns will be taken into account. Rung 4 to 8 represent more meaningful forms of participation where youth have influence in how activities are planned and executed (Source: Hart, 1992).

The bottom three rungs are regarded as non-participation and could therefore potentially be harmful to youth (Pickering et al., 2021). Meanwhile, the top five rungs are taken to be meaningful forms of participation, indicating an equitable distribution of power between young people and adults. Despite the imagery of a ladder, Hart (1992) emphasizes that it does not signify hierarchy where one form of participation is better than the other. It instead represents the youth's ability to choose how they want to participate and this is of the utmost importance. The framework has been critiqued mainly for a lack of acknowledgement of cultural context (e.g. participation for youth in disaster prone locations will look different from participation in lesser prone areas) within the ladder (Treseder, 1997). The imagery has also still been critiqued in that it still carries the connotation of hierarchy and linearity (Kellett, 2009).

This research is underpinned by the above discussed frameworks, specifically Hart's ladder of youth participation.

2.7 MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION: STRATEGIES FOR YOUTH PARTICIPATION

The UNDRR WIA (2020:30) states that meaningful engagement requires “more than an opportunity for children and youth of different ages and life experiences to have a presence in decision-making spaces or to share diverse views” but entails fairly reviewing and adopting youth ideas and contributions. Some studies have, however, shown that current youth participation in DRR is shallow, where participation falls within the bottom three rungs of Harts’ ladder (1992) (*Fig. 2.7*). Pickering et al (2022) in their study to gain youth perspectives of participation in DRR in Canada found that most of the young people interviewed felt that they speak and communicate with adults but their concerns, ideas and innovations are not taken on board. The youth stated that it felt like “speaking into a microphone which is not plugged” (Pickering et al, 2022:2131). Cox et al (2019) found similar results where young people believed that adults looked at them as “children” and therefore not possessing the ideas and innovations to contribute to DRR. Some of these perspectives came from young people involved in DRR projects, but they reported that their participation felt like “checking off the box” of youth engagement (Cox et al, 2019). Drawing information such as this from young people themselves is important for recognizing how and where to intervene to make participation meaningful.

Nevertheless, there has been efforts globally to improve the participation of youth in DRR both in decision-making processes, education and implementation. Interventions are being undertaken to ensure that youth voices are heard in crucial discussions regarding disaster risk reduction. Here, some of the strategies and case studies that show youth’s ability to meaningfully participate are discussed.

2.7.1 THE YOUNGO

The YOUNGO is a global network of youth working across climate change and related sectors created to ensure the participation of youth in climate global decision-making and implementation (UNFCCC, 2011). It is the official youth constituency of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). It consists of youth working across different sectors in relation to climate change at local, national, regional and international levels. The YOUNGO is actively engaged in climate negotiations with youth representatives supported to global events such as the Conference of the Parties (COP) organized by the United Nations.

The YOUNGO focuses on ‘awareness, knowledge and capacity building, collaboration, cooperation and network, policy, lobby and advocacy, and youth action.’ One of its key vision statements is “a UN where youth is sitting at the decision-making tables and is taken seriously” (YOUNGO, n.d. para. 5). It is comprised of numerous [working groups](#) by sector and focus area ranging from adaptation to disaster loss and damage. Through these working groups, the youth have the opportunity to share knowledge and raise awareness through avenues such as webinars and youth conferences. They also engage with parties, other than UN agencies such as interested stakeholders, institutions and NGOs in order to facilitate ‘collaboration and cooperation activities for young people to enhance their network and trigger projects’ in accordance with the YOUNGO’s vision for youth participation (UNFCCC, n.d).

One of the areas that still meets challenges is youth participation in decision-making processes (Zlobina et al., 2024). Usually, this is as a result of lack of support from adults. The UNFCCC supports the YOUNGO to actively advocate and lobby for policies through interventions and submissions in formal and official avenues of policy design, implementation, monitoring, follow-up and review ([YOUNGO](#), n.d).

The process to be a member of the YOUNGO is accessible to youth across the globe who have the passion for climate action. It has also been made easy as youth voluntarily fill out a simple form indicating their interest to be part of the YOUNGO. On a global level, the YOUNGO is a good example of a strategy to promote meaningful youth participation at all levels of Climate Action under which disaster risk reduction is classified by the YOUNGO under their working groups. It is strategy for meaningful youth participation because it creates spaces for youth voices to heard, with support from adults (UNDRR, 202). Youth are not simply represented but there is an assurance of their concerns and ideas being considered. At local and national levels, this strategy takes the shape of youth clubs, youth parliaments & councils and youth organizations. Whether these are as effective as the YOUNGO requires context specific research and evaluations.

For instance, a study by Fernandez & Shaw (2014) aimed at investigating the extent of youth participation in DRR through youth councils in the rural vs. urban locations in the Philippines. Youth councils in the Philippines are designed to oversee youth participation across sectors and are therefore not necessarily established for the sole purpose of youth participation in DRR. The study found that youth councils placed a high importance on the implementation of tasks outlined

in the then DRR global guiding framework, the Hyogo Framework. The councils, however, did not understand what was expected of them and that very little was being done to engage youth in DRR through the youth councils. Fernandez & Shaw (2014) discovered low levels of youth participation in community activities even with the existence of the youth councils. Largely, they found that the minimal understanding of what was expected of them as youth councils resulted in them not planning nor organizing and implementing their own DRR activities. This points to the importance of having clear aims, objectives and strategies as well as support from adults for the effectiveness of such strategies and for the full realization of youth potential (Pickering et al., 2022). A solid understanding of what DRR entails including local and international frameworks, strategies and governance documents is key (Fernandez & Shaw, 2014)

2.7.2 THE ASEAN SAFE SCHOOLS INITIATIVE

The ASEAN safe schools initiative is an example of a case which shows youth-led disaster risk reduction actions as well as meaningful participation of youth in DRR. The initiative was implemented in Asian countries of Thailand, Indonesia, Philippines, Cambodia, Myanmar and Lao PDR aimed at addressing disaster risk in schools (UNDRR, 2020).

In Indonesia, the initiative worked with students and teachers to strengthen their capacity in assessing disaster risks, developing and implementing action plans and creating standard operation procedures for emergencies. Prior to the development of any disaster risk reduction, preparedness and response actions for the target schools, a student-led risk assessment was conducted which identified critical structural improvements required in the schools to reduce the vulnerability of students and teachers at the school (UNDRR, 2020).

Since the risk assessment process was led by students, it was easier to identify the challenges faced specifically by the students and created the opportunity and space for the students to contribute to the planning and design of disaster management procedures at the school. This also ensured that a student council was established as a way of ensuring student participation in Disaster risk reduction work at the school. The involvement of children in Indonesian schools also opened the space for students to develop creative ways of advocating and raising awareness among their fellow students. For instance, in one of the schools, the students used hand puppet performances to teach fourth graders about disasters, improving the fourth graders' knowledge about disaster risk

(UNDRR, 2020). Students leading the process of risk assessment indicates meaningful youth participation according to Hart (1992), corresponding to rung 7 and 8.

2.7.3 Youth-led DRR: Creativity and Innovation

The youth, as noted by Cox et. al (2019) and the UNDRR are creative and since today's youth are born in the digital/technology era can utilize these to impactfully contribute to disaster risk reduction. When their creativity and innovation is supported by adults who are better resourced than them, the impact on risk reduction could be indisputable. Through innovation and creativity, youth are making their own contributions to reduce risk in their countries.

In Columbia for instance, a group of youth use music to share and learn about disaster risk and protect their schools from disasters. Their song "A school protected from risk" communicates the youth concerns about the hazards they face as well as their vulnerabilities. Through the song, they also communicate their ideas of what could be done to reduce risk and ensure the safety of the community. The song also speaks about armed conflict in their region and how this increases their vulnerability to disasters of varying types (UNDRR WIA, 2020).

In Indonesia, youth developed an early warning system using local materials to reduce the risk of flooding impacts. In order to promote their invention, they utilized digital story-telling, a skill they had learned as part of a project aimed at improving youth's knowledge and communication about climate change and its relationship to natural hazards. The invention was later supported by an Indonesian technology center, helping the youth develop their prototype and pilot it in flood prone locations (UNDRR WIA, 2020).

These examples show the contributions of youth to DRR and the influence their ideas and innovations can have. It makes a strong case for why they should be actively engaged in DRR. The examples indicate meaningful youth engagement as they show youth leading initiatives with little to no input from adults. In the second example, adults only come in to support the youth innovation. This represents rung 7 and 8 on Hart's ladder (1992) indicating meaningful youth participation.

2.7.4 YOUTH CLIMATE ACTION PLAN, SOUTH AFRICA

The development of the South African Youth Climate Action Plan ([YCAP](#), 2021) demonstrates the meaningful participation of young people in policy development processes. Launched by the Youth@SAIIA, the Global Change Institute (GCI) and the city of Johannesburg, the process was designed to engage youth at the *onset* of the policy development process (Vogel et al., 2022). This challenged the current paradigm where youth voices are often brought in for input after the policy has already been developed. This is often done to “tick-off a box” (Cox et al., 2019) without truly incorporating their voices into policies.

A diversity of youth were engaged in the process through an open call inviting interested youth between the ages of 13 and 30 to register for workshops. The process involved interactive workshops with youth from high schools, university, out of school as well as youth leaders in organizations with youth leading their engagement with the city. This meant that the processes were youth-led which enabled youth to lead and initiate inputs into the [YCAP](#). This also meant that the contents of the YCAP were not first developed by adults and youth coming in with ‘revisions’ but rather that the document was essentially written and developed by the youth, encompassing youth voices throughout (Vogel et al., 2022).

The development process was rooted in co-production and co-learning principles where adults created the platform for youth participation, took a ‘backseat’ and came in as support while the youth shaped their vision into the climate policy process representing meaningful participation according to Hart’s ladder (1992) (*Fig. 2.7*). The YCAP which started at municipal level with the city of Johannesburg, was adopted as the national youth policy for climate action as well as into the city’s climate action plan ([City of Johannesburg CAP, 2021](#)) ensuring that youth voices are represented at higher levels of governance (Terry, 2023).

The YCAP and the process of its development indicates an approach that works *with* youth and not only *for* them and represents an approach to learn from and one that can be adopted to ensure that youth are meaningfully engaged from the onset in policy development processes (Vogel, et al., 2022)

The above cases show the different ways in which youth have been engaged and the contributions which they can make to reduce risks of disasters in their communities. These indicate meaningful

youth participation and highlights the potential that youth have to actively participate when supported by adults. Having provided examples and strategies being used by youth to increase agency in DRR attention now shifts to focus on youth participation and DRR in Malawi.

2.8 DRR AND YOUTH PARTICIPATON IN MALAWI



Figure 2.8: Location of Malawi in Africa (Source: Missanjo et al, 2019)

Malawi is a landlocked country located in sub-Saharan Africa. The country has experienced different disasters which have over the years left its communities vulnerable and greatly impacted its socio-economic systems. According to a study conducted by Chirwa (2023), the frequency and magnitude of disasters experienced in Malawi prompted policy actions to shift direction from response to risk reduction which demands community engagement. Here, Malawi's experience with disasters is briefly discussed, the DRR and youth participation landscape in terms of governance and policy is presented, and finally, research conducted in Malawi in the area of youth participation within this broader demand for community participation in DRR is presented.

2.9 MALAWI'S DISASTER HISTORY

Malawi has significantly been impacted by disasters over the past ten years. The most common hazards in Malawi are floods, landslides, heavy precipitation, cyclones and drought. The economic landscape of the country largely places the country's population at a high vulnerability to these hazards. According to the World Bank's poverty and equity brief (2023), Malawi ranked the fourth poorest country in the world with more than 70% of the population living below a dollar a day. While poverty does not always equate to vulnerability, studies (Basque & Fuje, 2020; World Bank, 2023) have found that this is one of the leading factors of vulnerability in Malawi. It also affects the rate at which the country recovers once hit by disasters, usually taking longer. Kawasaki (2020) found that poor populations are most likely to settle in disaster prone areas, which happens to be the case for Malawi (World Bank, 2023) resulting in increased exposure to these hazards. Besides poverty, many other factors affect the country including poor infrastructure as well as poor governing structures (UNDP, 2019).

In the period between 1967 and 2003, Malawi had experienced 18 incidences of flooding (PDNA, 2015). In 2012 and 2013, the country experienced floods in two districts: Nsanje and Mangochi consecutively (refer to map, *Fig. 1.2*). In 2015 however, the country faced probably the most devastating flooding event resulting from a rainfall event recorded to be the highest on record for Malawi at the time (PDNA, 2015). The floods affected approximately 1, 101, 364, with 230, 000 displaced, 106 killed and 172 reported missing. The estimated cost for recovery was \$494 million (PDNA, 2015)

Malawi occasionally experiences cyclones which largely affect the Southern region. They occur about three times a year on average usually in the months before May to June and after October to November (WorldData.info, n.d). Malawi has experienced several cyclones, but arguably the most notable was, for example, Tropical Cyclone Idai in March 2019 which brought heavy rains causing floods which affected major infrastructure in the country including, roads and bridges. Idai affected an estimated 975,600 people, killed 60 and displaced 86,976 with a recovery cost pegged at \$220 million (GoM, 2019). Other tropical cyclones included tropical storm Ana in January 2022 followed by Tropical Cyclone Gombe in March of the same year. Collectively, Ana and Gombe affected more than 945, 000 people, killed 53 people with 206 injured during the events (World Vision, 2022). The most recent and devastating Tropical Cyclone on record for Malawi was the

2023 Tropical Cyclone Freddy which made landfall in March. Country-wide, the cyclone affected more than 2,267,458 people, with 679 deaths, 659,278 displaced, 530 missing and 2,186 injured (Government of Malawi Post Disaster Needs Assessment, 2023)

Droughts are also one of the common hazards in the country. The 2023-2024 El-Niño induced drought is the most recent one the country has experienced. The drought significantly impacted the Agriculture sector (approximately 44% of the maize crop was affected), which is the leading sector for the country's economy ([United Nations in Malawi, 2024](#)). This meant that livelihoods were also significantly affected. In March of 2024, the president of the country, President Lazarus Chakwera, announced a state of disaster in the country calling upon development partners and humanitarian organizations for support (OCHA, 2024).

With projected climate change and weather for Southern Africa as discussed in section 2.3 above, Malawi will experience more frequent and intense disasters especially as the models show an increase in heavy rainfall days and hot days, with unprecedented increases in temperature (Manda & Thindwa, 2025; Jaffar & Nkhoma, 2024). Disaster risk reduction is therefore exceptionally crucial for Malawi.

2.10 DISASTER RISK REDUCTION AND YOUTH PARTICIPATION LANDSCAPE: POLICY AND IMPLEMENTATION IN MALAWI.

In 2015, the national disaster risk management policy of Malawi was developed. It aspires to sustainably reduce disaster impacts and losses through six priority areas:

1. Policy Priority Area 1: *Mainstreaming disaster risk management into sustainable development*
 2. Policy Priority Area 2: *Establishment of a comprehensive system for disaster risk identification assessment and monitoring*
 3. Policy Priority Area 3: *Development and strengthening of a people-centered early warning systems*
 4. Policy Priority Area 4: *Promotion of a culture of safety, and adoption of resilience enhancing interventions*
 5. Policy Priority Area 5: *Reduction of underlying risks*
 6. Policy Priority Area 6: *Strengthening preparedness capacity for effective response and recovery*
- (Malawi Disaster Risk Management Policy, 2015:5).

The policy does not exclusively state the importance of community participation and does not emphasize the importance of engagement of groups such as youth and women in the way the

Sendai Framework does. Malawi usually models local policies based on global frameworks to align with the global thinking (Hendriks & Boersma, 2019). At the time, it was a signatory to the Hyogo Framework, the predecessor of the Sendai Framework (of which Malawi is a signatory) which might be the reason why the policy does not detail the participation of “all-of-society,” which is a concept introduced by the Sendai Framework.

An assumption of youth participation can be made based on the policy’s decentralized institutional arrangement for implementation. The institutional arrangement provides for the creation of village disaster risk and area disaster risk management committees. The gap, however, is that there are no guidelines or principles provided for the composition of these committees as compared to the “national disaster risk management committee and the national disaster risk management technical committee and subcommittees” (Malawi Disaster Risk Management Policy, 2015:10-11) which have clear guidelines in the policy. When it comes to critical stakeholders, the policy recognizes Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), the private sector, development partners, media, academia and research institutions. Both community and youth participation are, however, notably excluded in the policy, and it remains ambiguous and unclear in terms of how the youth are to be engaged except on Policy Priority Area 3 on early warning systems where community voices (which the youth might be a part of) are expressed as critical. This is particularly evident even in practice as Malawi has multiple hazard community-based early warning systems today (Chinguwo & Dues, 2022) in disaster prone areas most of which attempt to ensure community collaboration and engagement but not without its challenges (Sakic et al., 2018; Sakic et al., 2019).

For instance, the M-CLIMES project by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in partnership with the government of Malawi through the Department of Climate Change and Meteorological Services and the Department of Disaster Management Affairs introduced community-based flood early warning systems in Zomba, a district in southern Malawi 285.2km from the capital Lilongwe and Karonga, a district in Northern Malawi located 596km from Lilongwe (*Map, Fig. 1.2*). Community engagement was in the shape of training community members including fishing communities on how the early warning systems works (UNDP, 2019). A community member, known as a ‘caretaker’ is selected and responsible for monitoring and disseminating messages coming through the system (UNDP, 2022). An automated alarm also goes off in cases of detected danger. One of the challenges however as Sakic et al., (2019) states is that

indigenous knowledge is not leveraged and often undermined in the development of these systems. Communities are treated as ‘recipients’ of aid and are not engaged in co-production processes which would ensure meaningful community contributions to the systems.

In 2023, the Malawian Parliament passed the Disaster Risk Management (DRM) Bill of 2023. The DRM Act currently provides a comprehensive disaster risk management framework. The Act also reinforces the establishment of institutional arrangements presented in the policy of 2015. The Act makes a clear provision in terms of the constitution of the local government area disaster risk management committees to be coordinated by the district commissioner. Concerning youth participation and representation, the act states that there shall be “one representative of the youth working in the disaster risk management sector in the local government area appointed by the district commissioner” (DRM Act, 2023:14).

To further decentralize the DRM system and ensure participation of people at all levels, the local government committee is responsible for creating the area disaster risk management committees to facilitate DRM at a community level. While the Act is more comprehensive than the policy in terms of youth participation, the implementation (creation of these institutional arrangements) has not yet began and according to the International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC), who partnered with the Malawian government in the development of the Act, the development of an implementation plan is currently underway for full implementation of the law (IFRC, 2023).

Institutionally, the Department of Disaster Management Affairs (DoDMA) is responsible for the coordination of all DRR work in Malawi. Another institution that works in close collaboration with DoDMA is the Department of Climate Change and Meteorological services often responsible for tracking weather patterns and communicating the same to the Malawian people. The government however, in the policy and act call for mainstreaming of DRR across all sectors and institutions (DRM Policy, 2015; DRM Act, 2023). Government institutions as well as local governments usually face funding challenges which at times limit the extent to which DRR work is implemented in different districts. Development Partners (NGOs, Civil Society, and private sector) thus play a pivotal role often collaborating with local governments and DRR formal institutions to implement projects (Sakic, 2019). Though there is a clear need for mainstreaming of DRR across sectors, it has been a challenge due to the lack of funding as noted especially as the government does not allocate adequate resources to disaster risk reduction activities at either

national or district level (UNECA, 2015). The DRM Act of 2023 provides for the establishment of the Disaster Risk Management Trust Fund. Malawi however continues to struggle with funding DRR activities especially in the face of recovery from recent disasters such as Cyclone Freddy (Kasalika, 2024). In these cases, the youth are an important partner as they usually have networks in their communities which work in different sectors. The importance of engaging them in planning and decision-making processes thus cannot be overemphasized.

2.11 YOUTH IN MALAWI – POTENTIAL CHANGE AGENTS

The youth in Malawi make-up 50% of the population (UNDP, 2024). Several legal frameworks exist solely for the purpose of promoting youth engagement and participation. The National Youth Policy (NYP) developed in (2013) and revised in (2023) provides a clear framework that mainstreams the delivery of youth programs and services across various sectors by creating enabling environments for youth to effectively contribute to national development. The National Youth Council Act, enacted in 1996 provide not only the coordination, promotion and implementation of youth development programs in Malawi; it also provided for the establishment of the National Youth Council of Malawi (NYCOM), to oversee the implementation of the frameworks. The NYCOM is well established and operational to date. The National Youth Policy involves a diverse number of guidelines to enable youth participation across all development areas and including their participation in climate related activities and efforts to reduce their social vulnerabilities, emphasizing the transformative leadership potential of youth.

Priority *number 9* of the policy, for example, focuses on youth participation in environmental restoration and climate change, stating “the policy will ensure that young people are engaged and empowered in the management of a safe, clean, secure, and sustainable environment that mitigates effects of climate change” (NYP, 2023:31). Priority *number 3* calls for a shift from youth “just participating” to “effective inclusion” of youth in governance systems without discrimination stating that “government commits to ensure that young voices and perspectives inform national, district and community-based policies and development agenda (NYP 2023:25). The policy also outlines the need to reduce young people’s economic vulnerabilities by focusing on youth employment, enterprise and skills development which is the first priority of the policy. For each of the ten priorities, the policy outlines the strategies for achieving them (National Youth Policy, 2023).

The Ministry of Youth and Sports is the lead government agency for coordinating youth development programs in Malawi. The National Youth Policy (2023:34) outlines key responsibilities for the Ministry:

1. Facilitating youth development and promoting their active participation in national development by providing direction to government and other stakeholders on mainstreaming youth issues,
2. Coordinate and strengthen joint planning, implementation and reporting platforms and frameworks,
3. Develop guidelines for youth mainstreaming, integration and budgeting,
4. Build capacity of youth workers, youth participation structures and regulate their professional conduct,
5. Develop a monitoring and evaluation framework and be a repository of all youth-related information, and
6. initiate the periodic review of the policy.’

At sub-national level, youth programs are coordinated by the District Youth Officers (DYO).

Despite the supportive policy and legal frameworks, youth participation in Malawi is not without its challenges when it comes to implementation.

There is a significant gap in the existence of research focused on youth participation in Disaster risk reduction in Malawi (Zimba et al., 2021). Most of the studies focus on development, climate change and community participation (Jumbe et al., 2022; Kutani, 2022; Sakic. 2018). While these areas are interlinked with disaster risk, it is important to develop research that specifically addresses disaster risk. It is particularly difficult, however, to identify youth voices in research that focuses on overall community participation in DRR in Malawi. This study therefore begins to fill this gap by specifically attempting to highlight the perspectives of youth about their participation in DRR. The current studies highlight some important issues as far as youth participation in Malawi is concerned. A study conducted by Zimba et al (2021) for example found that current stakeholder engagement strategies for climate action marginalize the youth. The study reviewed stakeholder engagement strategies namely; “the use of established local government structures, direct engagement with youth groups/clubs and the use of individual community leaders” (Zimba et al., 2021:312-314) and the extent to which youth are involved in the planning processes for climate action. It also examined the factors that affect youth engagement in local climate action planning processes.

The study was conducted in Mzuzu city, in the Northern region of Malawi. It revealed that while these strategies worked to an extent, there were some problematic practices present. In the first case, the study reported issues of elite capture which generally inhibits citizen engagement. This was because participation is usually fully dependent on local government structures. The participants (youths aged between 18 and 35, who had resided in Mzuzu for at least five years and active in community projects others as part of youth clubs, and others who were not) also reported issues of favoritism. Directly engaging youth groups/clubs meant that youth who did not belong to clubs did not have opportunities to participate. Organizations in DRR admitted that it was easier to work with youth in clubs but the major issue with this is that overtime, the very same youth are engaged. Lastly, using community leaders, most youth reported that community leaders used to identify stakeholders usually prioritize their friends, relations and party supporters. The study also stated that community leaders are often adults who do not always represent the voices and interests of young people. The youth had also noted that they had inadequate awareness of climate action planning processes and that the schedules of engagement activities occur during the week when they are in school or at work.

Another study conducted by Wadson et al (2024) revealed significant knowledge gaps in the level of understanding of climate change among youth in secondary schools (the study does not specify the ages of the students). Of the 64 students from eight schools in two different education divisions who responded to the study's questionnaire, 56% had little knowledge about climate change. In order for youth participation to be meaningful, the youth need to have a good understanding of issues of discussion. Fernandez & Shaw (2014) explain that lack of knowledge is one of the barriers to youth participation together with lack of resources and lack of community support. Meaningful youth participation in DRR requires knowledge about the issues being discussed including of risk, vulnerability, exposure and hazards (UNDRR, 2020). A lack of knowledge can hinder the extent to which youth are actively engaging in DRR processes even if strategies for their participation have been put in place. Therefore, investments must be made to ensure that youth are educated and knowledgeable about the topics in which they are participating (Higuera-Roa, 2020). These investments are made possible with the support from adults. Wadson et al (2024) recommend the introduction of climate change education into the secondary school curriculum which sets a good foundation for young people to increase their knowledge and active participation in such work.

In the same light as Zimba et al (2021), Sakic et al (2019) found that community participation in Malawi is hindered by the local governance structures because interventions, both by formal and informal institutions, utilize these structures to identify community members to be involved. This introduces issues as the choices of who to engage is often informed by such things as familiarity between officials in local governance structures and youth who are identified to participate in projects. They also mention that influential individuals are usually the ones engaged in DRR efforts such as Chiefs and the Village Civil Protection Committees (VCPCs). Sakic et al (2019) point to the indigenous knowledge which is existent in Malawi and that it is underutilized because of these challenges (Sakic et al, 2018). The study points to a rethink of how DRR planning and interventions are implemented to ensure full community participation.

In summary, an overview of critical literature has been provided in this chapter. The concept of disaster risk reduction was discussed including its urgency in a changing climate. Youth participation in disaster risk reduction was then presented discussing the importance of youth engagement, and case studies of meaningful youth participation were presented. Finally, the Malawian context was presented including the legal frameworks for DRR and youth participation as well as studies conducted within the field in Malawi. The following chapter (*Chapter 3*) highlights the methodology used in achieving the study's aim and objectives (*Chapter 1, Sections 1.2 & 1.5*)

3 **CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**

In this section, the methods used in this study are discussed. First, a description of the study area and the study groups is presented. The data collection methods are then discussed including the ethical procedure and ethical considerations employed in this research. Finally, the data analysis method is presented and discussed.

3.1 STUDY AREA

The study was conducted in the city of Blantyre. Blantyre is located in the southern region of Malawi (*Fig. 1.2*). It is the commercial and industrial capital of the country (Malawi Project, 2024). The city has a land area of 2012sq KM divided into urban and rural locations with the majority of the population dwelling in rural Blantyre (Blantyre City Council, n.d). 65.3% of the Blantyre population is characterized as poor, living below the poverty line (Blantyre City Council, n.d). The city is characterized by high urbanization and migration with people moving from districts across the three regions of the country into Blantyre in search of employment.

Though Blantyre city is not the most populated city in Malawi, it is the most densely populated with more than 3,269 people per sq. km (Maoulidi, 2012). Slums and informal settlements are a common feature of the city with many people settling in disaster prone areas with poor housing and challenges in access to resources such as water, energy, education and health. The Blantyre City Council is the government structure for governing the city and oversees development and well-being of the populace.

Blantyre is one of the most affected districts in terms of hydrological hazards in southern Malawi together with districts such as Phalombe and Zomba (FAO, 2021). In 2023, Blantyre was heavily hit by Tropical Cyclone Freddy (in the areas of Soche, Nancholi, Limbe and Chilomoni) recording one of the highest death toll of the flooding among the affected districts as shown in Chapter 2. The city suffered major infrastructure damage with communities losing their property, homes and over populated in camps. Blantyre city is one of the locations in Malawi that could greatly benefit from Disaster Risk Reduction, especially with the city's recorded history of disasters and can anticipate even more disasters in the future.

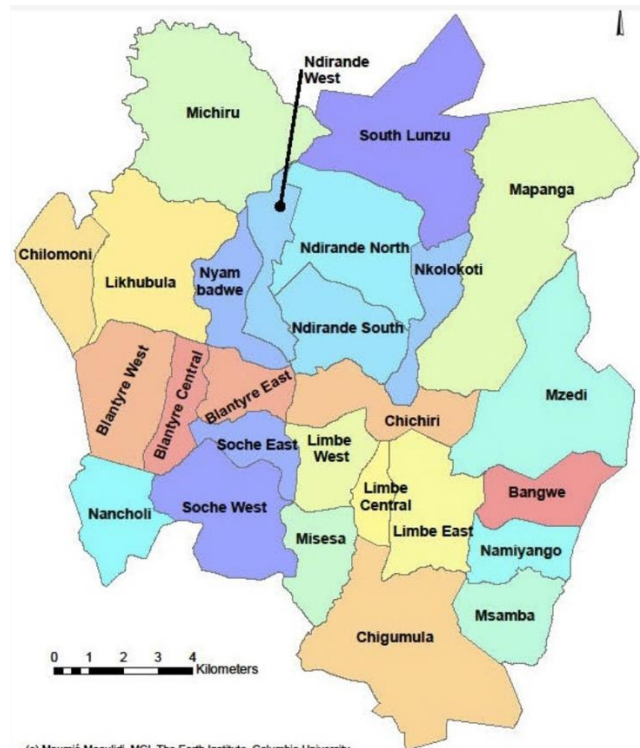


Figure 3.1: Map of Blantyre city showing administrative wards. (Source: Millennium Cities Initiative, n.d).

3.2 STUDY GROUP

In the study I engaged with youth residing in different locations in Blantyre City. The definition of youth differs from context to context and often contested as to whether the term is inclusive of children. The United Nations for instance defines youth as those aged 15 and 24 while the commonwealth defines youth as those between the ages of 15 and 29. The National Youth Policy of Malawi defines youth as those aged between 10 and 35, but considers anyone below the ages of 18 as a child and recognizes anyone between the ages of 18 and 35 adults who are part of the youth population. Since this study is aimed at engaging adult youth in Malawi, I followed this guideline and engaged youth between the ages of 18 and 35. The adult youth were randomly recruited in Blantyre city in order to ensure, as much as one can, an unbiased data set. The random recruiting was done by targeting youth hang-out spots such as the Blantyre Youth Center, and different market spots in areas where the recent Cyclone Freddy occurred and its surrounding areas. Eleven of the adult youth were aged 18-24, six between the ages of 25-30 and three were 31 to 35. Most of the youth between the ages of 18 and 25 were in school, while the rest were either

running their own small businesses, or looking for employment. Thirteen of the adult youth were linked to youth groups in their communities while the remaining did not belong to any youth club or group. Overall, twenty adult youth coming from different locations in Blantyre were engaged in the study.

In order to gain insight into strategies for youth participation, I also engaged key individuals from three key Development Partners in DRR. As Sakic (2019) states, Development Partners lead the planning and implementation (in collaboration with formal institutions) of DRR activities owing to the funding challenges faced by formal institutions in Malawi. As such, Development Partners are well positioned to give perspective into how youth are engaged in DRR work.

3.3 DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Qualitative approaches and methods were used. The aim was to gather participant experiences, perceptions, and behaviors to investigate and offer deeper insights into real-world issues (Tenny, Brannan & Brannan, 2022). Two main methods were used for data collection: Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews.

3.3.1 FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

In order to document a rich qualitative data of adult youth voices and opinions concerning youth participation in DRR in Blantyre, the study conducted Focus Group Discussions. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) are a qualitative method of data collection used to observe and record the responses, beliefs, perceptions and attitudes of the participants (Shabina et al., 2024). FGDs have been found to be an effective tool for research, involving an established group of people (for the purpose of the research) comprising of a specific number of participants engaged in an in-depth discussion of the research topic. Focus group discussions generate rich data with group interactions often offering deeper and richer insights than those obtained from one-to-one interviews (Thomas et al., 2000). Furthermore, focus groups can encourage those who believe have nothing to contribute or are hesitant to participate in individual interviews to participate (Kitzinger, 1995; Dreachslin, 1999), enabling a detailed, high quality and meaningful data collection process.

Two Focus Group Discussions of 10 adult youth participants each (Johnson & Christensen, 2004) between the ages of 18 and 35 were arranged. The first group were given codes number 1 to 10

and the second group was given codes number 11-20. The discussions were done in person (in groups) in Blantyre in November, 2024 and took approximately one hour. Open ended questions for the FGDs were carefully crafted to encourage an open and free expression of the youth's views and opinions. The thematic guide for the sessions was demarcated into four sections. The first section aimed to understand how adult youth understand disaster risk reduction, sharing their experiences with disasters and the impacts which disasters have on them. The second section was designed to measure the extent to which youth participate in disaster risk reduction planning, decision making and implementation. The third part of the guide sought to understand the barriers to participation as perceived by the youth; and finally, the last section was aimed at documenting the opportunities or recommendations that the youth had for youth participation in DRR.

The FGDs took a participatory approach where on certain parts of the discussion guide, they were requested to respond to a prompt using sticky notes and then share to the group why they perceived the topic at hand in that way. This process in part enabled the identification of common themes for specific discussion topics. Other parts of the FGDs however, followed a simple question and answer pattern where the entire group discusses the question, agreeing or disagreeing with each other's points and ensuring a rich conversation.

The discussion was conducted in a Malawian local language called Chichewa. This was done to ensure full participation from the youth as the groups consisted a diversity of youth some of whom are not well versed in the English language. I am a native Malawian and fluent in this language and so did not require any translation. I have resided in Blantyre non-consecutively for four years and I am a current resident of the city. Aside from being a resident, I do not have ties to the local organizations nor the local government structures. There are no potential biases nor influences that I have from being a resident that would have potentially affected the research.

Blantyre as a city has 23 administrative wards (*Fig. 3.1*) and thus making the sample of this study small to provide the full extent of youth participation in Blantyre. Therefore, the findings of the study presents initial insights into the extent of youth participation in the city.

3.3.2 KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

Key-informant interviews were also conducted with identified key individuals from DRR Development Partners in Malawi to gain insight into youth participation strategies. Key informant

interviews involve interviewing a select group of individuals who are likely to provide needed information, ideas, and insights on a particular subject (Kumar, 1989). They allow for knowledgeable individuals on the study topic to contribute a perspective that the researcher themselves lack (Cossham & Johanson, 2019). An advantage of key informant interviews is that information comes directly from knowledgeable individuals and often provide data and insight that cannot be obtained with other methods (Kumar, 1989). Semi-structured questions were developed for the interviews. While the interview guide consisted of a number of questions, the study aimed at documenting the key strategies used by institutions in engaging the youth. Thus, two sections of the guide were key to this study; the first section which involved a discussion on how the institutions involve youth in their planning processes, and the third section which focused on the key strategies which they use and why they use these strategies. I focused on Development Partners that work on DRR projects across Malawi including in Blantyre. Three institutions were identified (Development Partner 1, Development Partner 2 and Development Partner 3). All three Development Partners' work is largely focused on development with projects ranging from health, energy, environment, gender equality and education. Development Partners 1 and 2 fall into the international organizations category while Development Partner 3 is a local institution. According to their websites, they actively work with youth through various projects across Malawi. Through their official websites, I collected phone contacts through which I was directed to the person best positioned to provide the information I required. I interviewed one person from each institution. The Interviews were conducted online using Zoom, between October and November, 2024 and took approximately 30-45 minutes each.

Due to consent considerations, the names and identifying data of the individuals interviewed as well as their institutions have been purposely omitted.

3.4 ETHICS PROTOCOL

An application for ethics approval was lodged through the University of the Witwatersrand School of Animal, Plant and Environment Sciences and was approved. Anonymity for youth involved in the focus group discussions could not be guaranteed due to the nature of the method, however, confidentiality has been followed in the reporting of the data, as well as in the recording of the discussions, as codes, in the form of numbers were used as identifiers throughout the discussion.

Consent forms were issued for both focus group discussions and the key informant interviews, which were firstly signed by the participants before any data was collected.

3.5 DATA ANALYSIS

The data was analyzed qualitatively using the thematic analysis framework. Thematic analysis is a ‘method for analyzing qualitative data that involves searching for recurring ideas (referred to as themes) in a data set (Riger & Sigurvinsdottir, 2016). The data was analyzed in five key steps:

1. familiarization with the data,
2. identification of initial codes,
3. theme identification,
4. building a thematic map, and,
5. reporting of results.

In order to ensure familiarization with the data, the interviews were firstly transcribed, and the data for the focus group discussions was also first translated as the discussion was conducted in the local language of Chichewa. The transcripts were then read repeatedly to ensure familiarity with the data while noting possible code categories (Riger & Sigurvinsdottir, 2016). Initial codes were then generated from the text and color-coded for visual identification; this process was done inductively, meaning that the codes were data driven (Braun & Clark, 2006). The next stage involved searching for themes. This was done by organizing similar codes together and looking at how these codes fit in a broader theme (Attride-Stirling, 2001). The themes were then reviewed for relevance to the study and potential combinations into broader ideas or separate themes (Riger & Sigurvinsdottir, 2016). Finally, the results have been presented in this report and a discussion of the data has been done including direct quotes from the data to support conclusions (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

In summary, an overview of the methodology and approach used in this study has been provided. The qualitative approach was discussed. This included focus group discussions with adult youth between the ages of 18 and 35 to document rich qualitative data of youth voices and opinions concerning youth participation in DRR in Blantyre. It also included semi-structured interviews with key informants from Development Partners in DRR in Malawi to gain insight into youth participation strategies. Having laid out the methodology of this study, the following chapter (*chapter 4*) explores and outlines the results of the study which are further discussed in the subsequent chapter (*chapter 5*).

4 CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

In this chapter the analysis and results of the research are presented. They are clustered into five sections. The first section explores the types of disasters that youth in Blantyre experience and the impacts of these disasters on them. The second section details how adult youth define and understand DRR, providing a lens into the current level of understanding of DRR among Blantyre youth. The third section explores youth participation in DRR planning, decision-making and implementation processes. The fourth section outlines the key challenges faced by youth, that is, the barriers to their participation in DRR work. Finally, youth's suggestions of the opportunities that exist to enhance participation are detailed. The results are now outlined.

4.1 TYPES AND IMPACTS OF DISASTERS EXPERIENCED BY YOUTH IN BLANTYRE

In this research the aim was to firstly understand the types of disasters that youth in Blantyre experience and the impacts that they grapple with because of these disasters. The adult youth identified disasters caused by hydrological hazards as the main type of disasters that they experienced; which are the main type of disasters experienced in Malawi. They specifically mentioned tropical cyclones, floods, landslides and heavy winds and this mainly based on the recent Tropical Cyclone Freddy which hit Malawi in 2023. The impacts identified by the youth could be grouped into three main categories: Education, Health and Economic Impacts.

1. Education

Disasters destroyed properties including school materials which resulted in poor performance of students during exams especially the Junior Certificate of Examination (JCE) and the Malawi School Certificate of Education (MSCE) which determine whether a student moves forward to senior classes and required for selection into higher education institutions respectively. Schools are usually used as evacuation centers which means that classes are halted setting the students back in the progression of their education. School drop-out due to lack of tuition after the death of loved ones also increased. Most youth are still in secondary school while others are in college or the university. They rely on their parents and other family members for support with fees associated with their education. Disasters which have resulted in the loss of life of many leave some students without any help, and they decide to drop-out further heightening their vulnerability.

2. Health

The youth stated that they often struggle with their mental health when disasters occur. They pointed to the trauma that they experienced due to the loss of property and loved ones. After disasters, they have to return to the place that reminds them of what they lost and this exacerbates the trauma:

“Some of us lost our loved ones during Cyclone Freddy, and we had to return to homes that were destroyed and without our family. It is difficult to overcome such trauma.” Youth Participant 9

They also reported that they experience challenges to their physical health especially due to the scarcity of food and clean drinking water. They mentioned malnutrition as a health challenge they have observed that increases when disasters occur. One of the youth shared:

“When Cyclone Freddy happened, I was affected as the place I was renting was swept away. I was stranded and affording food and water became extremely hard and this affected my health both mentally and physically.” Youth Participant 7

They expressed that sexually transmitted diseases and early pregnancies radically increase during disasters especially among girls because they resort to sexual activities for money to take care of their needs.

3. Economic

Youth in Blantyre are economically active with most owning small businesses. They expressed that their businesses are always affected during disasters which sets them back financially. The cost for them to recover their businesses is usually high, leaving them without means for earning. A rise in food and basic needs affect youth's ability to afford food and other necessities.

4.2 LEVEL OF UNDERSTANDING OF DRR

In order to document the level of youth understanding of what disaster risk reduction is, they were asked to give definitions of what they understand DRR to be. They mostly defined DRR using examples based on the work that they have been engaged in. They displayed some level of

understanding of DRR bringing forward a number of definitions of what DRR means to them presented below:

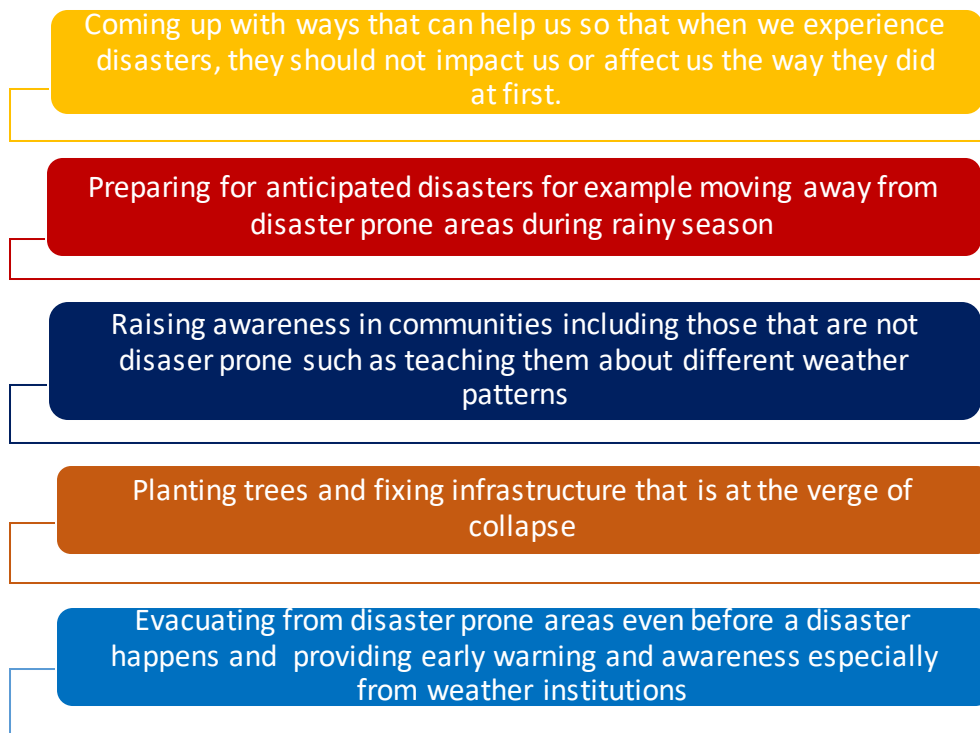


Figure 4.1: Definitions of DRR (What does Disaster Risk Reduction mean to the youth)

4.3 YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN DRR

In the study I also wanted to understand how youth participate in disaster risk reduction work and gauge the level of this participation. They were asked to describe the different ways in which they take part in disaster risk reduction work. The responses provided were divided into two: (1) implementation, where young people are working on projects and carrying out actual activities which they perceive to be DRR related and (2) Planning and decision making which particularly looked at the youth's engagement in the planning and decision making processes including designing the activities which they are engaged in and their contributions to policy. The responses pointed to youth only participating in the implementation of DRR interventions, and did not mention any activity that pointed to their involvement in planning and decision-making processes.

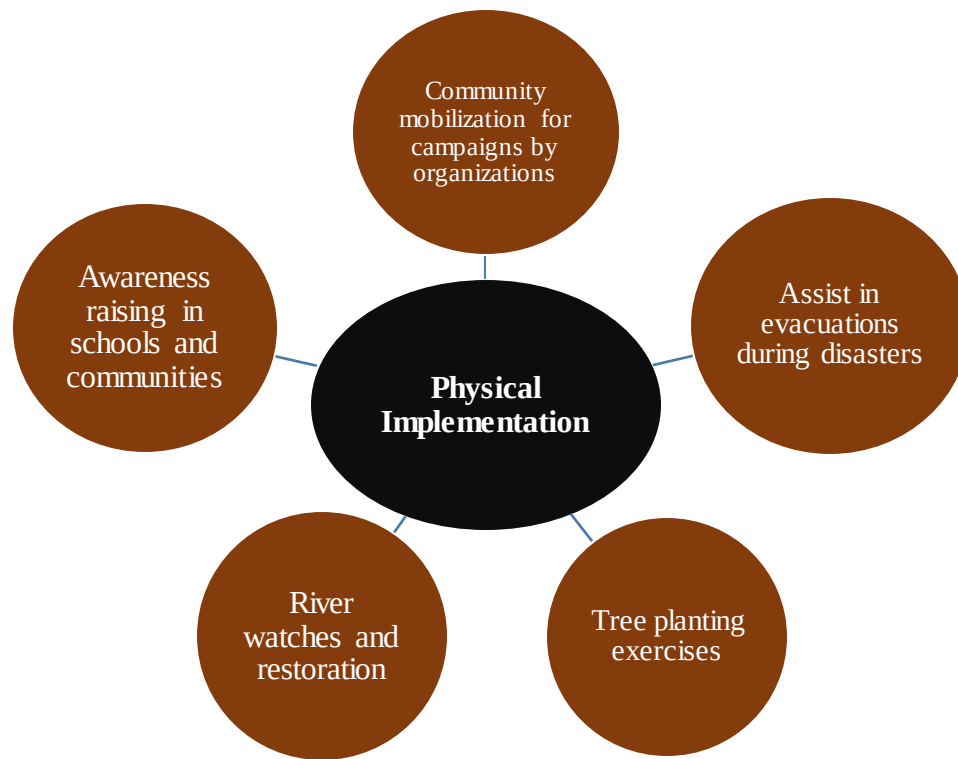


Figure 4.2: Young people are engaged in physical implementation activities but are not engaged in planning and decision-making. The activities range from tree planting exercises to community mobilization for campaigns by organizations. They are however not engaged in the planting of these activities.

One of the youth responded to the question concerning participation in planning and decision making stated:

“I feel that Youth participation in decision making is very low when it comes to DRR. I say this because when we look at the government structures, DRR will usually start from district to village levels. But involvement of youth in these committees is very low.” Youth Participant 3

This response was crucial as it gave some insight into the strategies that are used for youth participation.

One of the objectives of the study was to understand the strategies that are used to engage youth in different DRR activities. These were provided by key informants as well as the youth themselves. Three key strategies were identified. Through local government structures, through youth clubs and organizations and through volunteering in informal DRR institutions.

Formal institutions and Development Partners utilize local government structures to engage with youth at community level. Development Partners aim to collaborate with the government in the

implementation of DRR activities. As such, they approach the Blantyre City Council with the projects which they plan to implement in the district. The council, often through the district youth officers then identifies youth to be involved in the proposed projects.

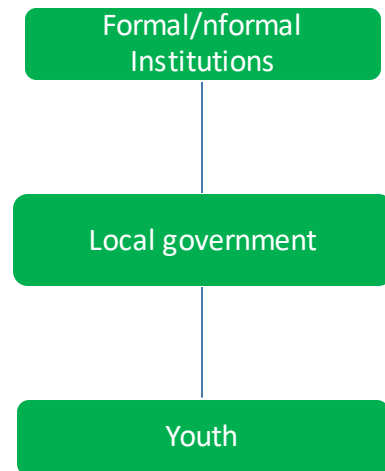


Figure 4.3: Local government connects formal and informal institutions and youth for DRR projects

Some Development Partners however utilize youth clubs for their projects. They directly approach youth clubs with projects which they would like to implement, at times with already designed activities, while others give youth the opportunity to design their own activities. Once these activities are designed, the institutions then evaluate the plausibility of the projects, and the ones which they would take on board.

“We usually sit down with the youth and together plan for the initiatives which we can do for each financial year. If the youth say that they want to plant trees, we ensure that we provide them with the trees.” Key Informant, Development Partner 2

Youth groups are usually funded through the projects brought forward by Development Partners either through the local governance structures, or through direct communications with the youth clubs. Calls for applications for youth projects are also put out with established themes by these institutions. According to the participants of this study, they normally receive information about different funding opportunities through the District Youth Officers. This in itself poses challenges in terms of who accesses such opportunities which are highlighted in 4.4 below.

Apart from these funding avenues, the youth usually mobilize themselves for different DRR activities within their groups through personal contributions and for some clubs, through

membership fees. However, these funds are usually not enough for the ideas and projects they wish to run.

Finally, institutions engage youth through volunteer opportunities. Calls for volunteers are put out usually by Development Partners inviting youth for volunteering opportunities of various projects. Once selected as a volunteer, youth undergo skills training in the specific field before being sent out to take part in different activities.

“I volunteer with the Red Cross, we build camps, and during disasters distribute basic needs. We also hold educational sessions to minimize the spread of diseases particularly HIV/AIDS as sexual activity increases during disasters which then create more problems later.” Youth Participant 9

4.4 CHALLENGES OF YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN DRR

In the focus group discussions, youth were also asked to outline what they perceived or experienced as challenges to their meaningful participation in DRR. They provided numerous challenges which have been grouped into five major themes: Political, financial benefits, non-responsiveness, non-consultation and access to information. Politics was mentioned as the number one challenge to youth participation in Blantyre. In addition to the above challenges, the youth also shared some of the reasons why they feel motivated to engage or participate in DRR. They stated that they are usually motivated to participate in disaster risk reduction activities because they are passionate about the safety of their communities, and that they understand that they can be just as impacted as others they have witnessed in the past.

“We are motivated to participate in DRR work because these are our communities and we do want to reduce risk because we might be the victims one day.” Youth Participant 17

They also stated that they are usually motivated when they get support from adults and that they also understand that disasters sets their communities back in terms of businesses, and the resources that should be used in sectors such as education are pulled into disaster response.

“As youth, we are motivated because we want to reduce the occurrence of disasters and when institutions come with trees and engage us in tree planting activities, we are motivated because we have somewhere to start.” Youth Participant 1

“When a disaster happens, government loses a lot of resources, but when we reduce risk, resources are better spread across sectors such as education, so that sectors are not suffering and can perform well despite hazards.” Youth Participant 9

“People including us as the youth own businesses and property, when disasters happen, we are set back as we lose a lot of our resources. When we reduce disaster risk, it means the development of our communities will go forward, rather than always using up resources to respond to disasters.” Youth Participant 10

This motivation, however, is often taken for granted and leads to demotivation especially when they put in a lot of effort in the work that they do. They expressed almost a sense of helplessness:

“We assist with tree planting for example, but if the government decides that they want the land for something, you find them cutting the trees down carelessly, and someone like me can't say anything, because I will be chased away, so we are involved when it's a good thing, but when it's a negative thing, we are not empowered to stand up when we see a wrong practice being taken by the leaders and our voices are not heard.” Youth Participant 2

Some of the key challenges mentioned by youth include a range of concerns (Fig. 4.4).

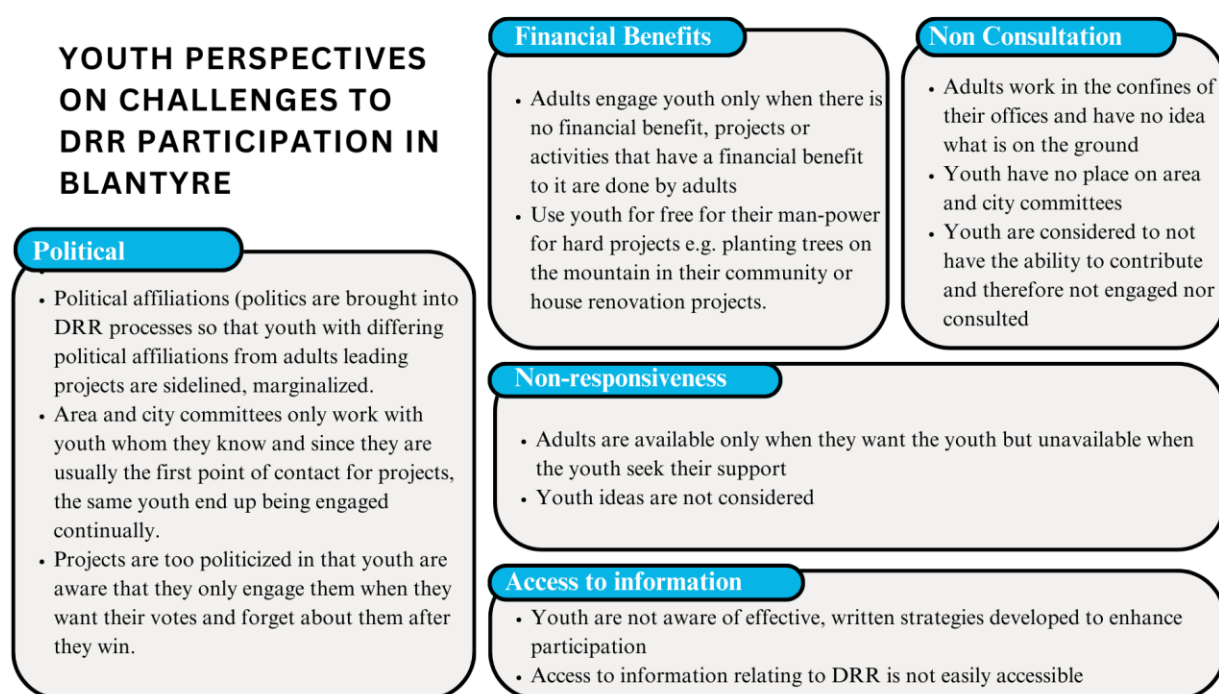


Figure 4.4: Challenges to youth participation

4.5 OPPORTUNITIES TO ENHANCE YOUTH PARTICIPATION

Finally, opportunities for enhancing youth participation in Blantyre were discussed. Mainly, the youth suggested and discussed four key elements to ensure that youth participation is enhanced and is more meaningful in Blantyre. These have been presented below.

Element	How it can be utilized
Train and empower youth	Youth require training in DRR and interconnected sectors which will ensure their active participation in DRR discussions. Empowerment in the form of supporting their ideas and innovations, and creating the modalities for their voices to be heard.
Local governance committees	Though identified as a problematic strategy, youth recognize that local governance is crucial for community level participation. They suggested a strong representation of youth within these committees so that planning and decision-making has a strong youth voice. The request is to eliminate politics in DRR work that comes through these committees.
Passion and motivation	Youth are passionate about DRR and they are committed to serving their communities. They have the ability to raise awareness, run campaigns and mobilize their communities to action, but will require the full support from adults as they (youth) do not have the same resources as adults. Rather than taking advantage of this passion, there needs to be genuine commitment to involve youth in DRR.
Platforms for communication, learning and feedback	Better forms of communication need to be created where youth and adults are engaged in productive discussions, and feedback is given and received. Platforms where youth can access DRR information, including strategies can be created as currently, these platforms are non-existent

Figure 4.5: Opportunities for enhancing youth participation in DRR

To conclude, the results of the qualitative research conducted in this study have been outlined. The chapter highlighted the types and impacts of disasters experienced by youth in Blantyre, and the level of understanding of DRR among Blantyre youth. Importantly, the chapter has highlighted the current extent of youth participation in Blantyre, the strategies used, the challenges as well as the opportunities that exist for enhanced youth participation. Ultimately, the results of the study provides an opportunity for enhancing youth participation by highlighting the key issues and critical gaps that currently exist in youth's participation in DRR. The results also give perspective into where Malawi is in terms of youth participation according to Hart's ladder of participation (Fig. 2.7) and through the comprehensive summary of youth participation that has been provided in (Fig. 4.6) above. This creates an opportunity for understanding where to intervene to improve participation. Through the highlighted opportunities; *train and empower youth, youth representation in local governance committees, passion and commitment for action, and platforms for communication, learning and feedback*, the results provide a platform for actionable steps to enhance youth participation. Having laid out the results of the study, the following chapter (Chapter 5) further discusses the results.

5 CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

The occurrence of complex and compound disasters has been described in previous chapters. Most notably Topical Cyclones and El Niño induced drought have all resulted in major fatalities and loss of livelihoods and infrastructure in Malawi. Interviews with a small sample of urban Malawian youth have revealed several key insights including perceptions of disasters, what is enhancing compound disaster risks and what role youth can play in addressing such disasters. In this chapter, a comprehensive discussion of the results are presented.

5.1 IMPACTS OF DISASTERS ON YOUTH

Youth in Blantyre are greatly exposed to hydrological disasters which often impact the southern region of Malawi. Of the impacts highlighted by the youth, disruptions to their education came out the most followed by health and economic impacts. In 2023, for example, with Cyclone Freddy, schools were used as evacuation centers which shows where Malawi is as a country in as far as anticipatory governance (an element of DRR) is concerned. Anticipatory governance is a “broad-based capacity extended through society that can act on variety of inputs to manage emerging knowledge-based technologies while such management is still possible” (Guston, 2008:6). Such responses show that Malawi, is still functioning in a reactive manner in the way disasters are governed. This may be understandable given the lack of resources, financial support and governance challenges. Nonetheless, efforts in Malawi need to include the construction of appropriate evacuation centers which will ensure that schools are not completely halted because they are being used as evacuation centers. With Malawi’s history of disasters, the country should have to date made significant efforts to reduce such impacts through investments in infrastructure for evacuations, this however is not the case. Schools can become more actively engaged in DRR by educating youth who can then spread risk reduction approaches and methods to parents, friends and wider society.

These impacts also show how with each disaster, youth’s vulnerabilities increase as recovery has thus far not involved elimination of residual risk, as well as reduction of risk created when disasters occur. For instance, youth spoke about how their businesses are affected which leave most them without a means of earning as they are unable to recover their businesses. With Malawi’s poverty rate being one of the contributing factors to disaster risk, this means that numbers of vulnerable

adult youth to disasters increase with each disaster. Strategies must be developed to ensure that new vulnerabilities introduced with disasters are addressed and this needs to be done in tandem with young people.

As shown in the previous chapter, the youth in Blantyre expressed major impacts to their education when disasters occur. In the discussions, they spoke about the various DRR activities which they have been a part of which have largely been in form of project implementation as opposed to planning and decision making.

Awareness and more proactive DRR responses and approaches in schools is thus critical and Malawi could learn from the ASEAN school safety initiative where students are actively engaging to make their schools safe but to also promote a sense of resilience among students. Awareness can take the shape of mental health training as well, one of the issues quoted by the youth.

“Some of us lost our loved ones during Cyclone Freddy, and we had to return to homes that were destroyed and without our family. It is difficult to overcome such trauma.”

Youth Participant 16.

According to a study by Jumbe (2022) mental health is a topic that most youth in Malawi do not speak about, and yet was mentioned as one of the larger impacts on youth. Studies in Malawi have not documented the impacts of disasters on the youth, but these are important in understanding the ways in which DRR initiatives can target to minimize impacts on the youth. These impacts, should not be the justification for viewing youth as vulnerable, as has been the case in many countries (Cox et al., 2019; Pickering et al., 2022), but rather form the basis for the promotion of opportunities and spaces for youth to lead and meaningfully participate in reducing their own risks and impacts, as well as their communities. Ensuring that youth are engaged in the identification of problems and in the designing and implementation of solutions is key, and adults must only come in as support (Hart 1992; UNDRR WIA, 2020).

5.2 EXTENT OF KNOWLEDGE ABOUT DRR

There is a clear need for more education and training about DRR among the youth in Malawi. Zimba et al., (2021) discovered a substantial knowledge gap among secondary school students about climate change, recommending the introduction of climate change education in the school syllabus. This study also found a knowledge gap among the youth in Blantyre concerning DRR.

The youth understood more of the physical factors and determinants of vulnerability and exposure but with very little understanding of social vulnerabilities. They understood the basic idea of DRR but lacked a satisfactory in-depth understanding of the concept of Disaster Risk Reduction. The initiatives and projects brought to them by adults have in a way shaped what they understand as DRR – which is usually response and reaction rather than actions for effective risk reduction. Since they are usually engaged outside of planning and decision making DRR is largely framed in the context of activities such as tree planting and disaster relief. The youth have the passion to actively participate in DRR, but they require training and capacity building to strengthen their knowledge and understanding of DRR.

These outcomes concurs with Fernandez and Shaw (2015) where a lack of knowledge proved to be a barrier to youth participation. In the same way, in their 2014 study of youth councils in the Philippines, they found that youth councils did not implement DRR activities largely owing to the gaps in knowledge of what DRR entailed. It is important that youth understand that Disaster Risk Reduction goes beyond environmental initiatives such as tree-planting in this case, and that it involves social factors that place communities at either high or low risks. A good knowledge foundation will also spark more creativity and innovation among the youth, addressing disaster risk as encompassing more than hazard and environmental factors.

5.3 STRATEGIES FOR YOUTH PARTICIPATION

The strategies documented in this study for disasters engagement and understanding compare well with Zimba et al (2021) particularly concerning the use of local governments to reach the youth. In Blantyre, just as Zimba et al (2021) found in Mzuzu, youth are engaged through their local government institutions. They discussed how favoritism and elite capture is the consequence of this arrangement, which is also what this study found. The distinction, in this Malawian study being presented here, is that youth in Blantyre identified politics as the driver of this favoritism. This strategy creates opportunities for DRR to be politicized as government officials give opportunities to youth they share same political positions and affiliations with. Marginalization based on political affiliation characterizes the youth participation in DRR landscape in Blantyre. The study by Sakic (2019) also found that the use of VCPC's for community participation affects engagement as they select participants based on familiarity. While the use of local governments as a strategy might be effective in getting more grassroots participation, where power is decentralized,

the current practices expressed by youth indicate that the strategy requires major reforms in order to achieve this.

Zimba et al., (2021) also discusses the use of youth clubs as a strategy for youth participation. In Blantyre, youth clubs and organizations are quite active. Most of the youth involved in the focus group discussions carried out numerous DRR activities as part of their youth clubs. For example, one youth shared that they usually conduct river restorations to prevent flooding.

“We have other groups that deal with rivers because they also tend to flood. When there are few rocks in the rivers and the sand is taken out, it results in high risk of the rivers flooding. When we can, we put back rocks and sand. We have also tried to have conversations with people who pollute and erode the river. What we wish for is that government would intervene when it comes to protecting the rivers because it is the communities close to the rivers that suffer the consequences.”
Youth Participant 14.

Youth clubs have proven to be effective and demonstrate the potential that youth in Blantyre have to lead initiatives and create solutions to reduce the risk of disasters. While this study did not find any major challenges with this strategy, the concern brought by Zimba et al., (2021) might be valid i.e. youth who are not part of youth clubs or youth organizations might be sidelined especially in projects with informal institutions who prefer working with youth clubs. In the key informant interviews, informal institutions expressed that it was easier to work with youth who are in clubs, just as Zimba et al (2021), had discovered, which means that, informal institutions are most likely to work with the same youth for different projects, and completely disengage youth who are not in clubs.

One strategy that was not found in the literature especially in Malawi was volunteerism. Youth in Blantyre expressed that Development Partners such as the Red Cross in Malawi has volunteering opportunities for youth. These opportunities are open to youth, in clubs or not, and often involve an expression of interest from the youth. Once registered as a volunteer, The Malawi Red Cross for instance trains the youth in various skills. They are then deployed for example during disasters to assist with disaster relief. While this strategy ensures involvement from all youth, the participation is usually also during implementation and disaster relief and response as opposed to planning, and relief-focused, as opposed to risk reduction. Equipping youth with various skills through training however is of extreme importance especially as gaps in knowledge on different issues in DRR has been noted as a major barrier to youth participation.

5.4 TO WHAT EXTENT ARE YOUTH ENGAGED IN DRR IN BLANTYRE?

Youth participation in Blantyre according to Hart's ladder (*Fig. 2.7*) can be analyzed as overall **decorative**. This is a level of non-participation where youth are involved in DRR project implementation, understand why these projects are being implemented, but do not participate in planning and decision making processes of DRR. A few things shared by the youth indicate this.

1. Adults make decisions in “closed doors”

Youth participation in Blantyre usually only occurs during implementation of projects which have already been planned and designed by institutions. Youth are treated as the last stakeholder/actor consulted, and then only briefly given information about what the projects are about and where they as youth are needed. Youth also often do not have the choice to decide how they participate, they are not engaged in problem identification processes, nor in risk assessments as the case with the ASEAN School Initiative case study. This means they cannot participate in the design of the solutions as well. Adults planning and making decisions “in their offices” and deciding what is best for the youth and their communities “behind closed doors” came out very strongly in the discussions.

“We are approached only when things get tough. When they are planning, which is where as youth we can also influence, we are just never engaged. We are not taken as people who can contribute ideas, they just look at us as children.” Youth Participant 1

“Adults need to stop making decisions on our behalf behind closed doors, in their offices. They have no idea what we as youth are going through and what they have on paper is not a true reflection of what is on the ground. They need to consult us more and listen to us.” Youth Participant 9

These observations and inputs that have been made indicate a **decorative** form of youth participation because youth in Blantyre understand the purpose of these initiatives (or at least what the projects present as the objectives) which is to minimize the risk and impacts of disasters. They unfortunately have no input in how these initiatives are planned.

2. Youth participation as a “checkbox”

Cox et al., (2019) speaks of youth participation as being more than a checkbox and creating the spaces for youth to be active participants. In Blantyre, from the youth's perspectives, engagement

is to tick off a box rather than genuine interest in promoting and pursuing youth participation in DRR. Projects, which have a “youth” element to their checklists create simple initiatives such as tree planting, distribute these trees to the youth and ask them to plant the trees as part of conserving the environment. Once these initiatives are completed, the institutions tend to move on to other projects, and since the youth are not necessarily engaged in planning of such, they do not have a sense of ownership of the projects. This results in wasted resources.

“We at times feel as though we are being involved just for the sake of it. We do not really participate in anything else apart from when they come and say to us, plant trees and do this and that.” Youth Participant 12

3. Youth “speaking into an unplugged microphone”

The youth in Pickering’s (2022) Canadian study had expressed that it felt like they were speaking into an unplugged microphone when being engaged in DRR activities. The results of this study also show that youth in Blantyre feel as though they *speak* but adults do not *listen*. They were vocal about the non-responsiveness of adults when they (the youth) initiate communication for DRR work and that their voices are never heard. Meaningful participation, both according to Hart (1992) and the UNDRR involves “youth-led” initiatives, meaning that young people lead the identification of problems, designing the solutions and implementing it, adults come in as support. In Blantyre, the youth are active and come up with diverse ideas and initiatives for DRR, however, when they approach institutions for support, they are often met with non-responsiveness. Some of the requests from the youth have not been monetary, a simple request for the presence of a local government official in their for instance awareness campaigns and other self-organized activities is denied or met without any feedback.

“When we share ideas, adults do not listen to us. When we plant trees and they keep getting taken down or stolen and we share our ideas for protecting them, adults do not listen to us.” Youth Participant 19.

“They once held a parliamentary forum here where the community as a whole was engaged in a participatory process of sharing challenges in terms of disaster risk and what can be done so that we are not too impacted. We had some members of parliament present. However, after the forum, we have not seen anything materialize.” Youth Participant 9.

4. Youth as co-opted labor during times of disasters

The danger of rungs 1-3 of the Hart ladder which represents non-participation is that it can be harmful to youth (Pickering et al., 2022). This study found this to be true as youth in Blantyre felt

taken advantage of for their labor. The literature reviewed in this research did not capture a similar issue about how youth's labor is used in DRR processes. The youth expressed their discontent with how initiatives are run, stating that they are only engaged on difficult activities within the whole project.

“When it comes to simple things, they never engage us. But when they want to plant trees on large areas of land, or in the mountain, that’s when they call us. They do the same with mobilization, when they want people to walk throughout the community mobilizing people for an activity that is when they call us.” Youth Participant 13

“To add on that, they engage us only when these activities are difficult and have no monetary benefit attached. We do difficult work, without any monetary benefit. But when the activities have money attached, for example, they will say, for this, you will receive K2000, you find that youth are not involved at all or they will start calling the youth who they know or share the same politics with for those activities.” Youth Participant 20

Overall, according to Hart's ladder of youth participation (Fig. 2.7), youth participation in Blantyre is what may be termed as 'decorative'. According to Hart (1992), a decorative level of participation is considered non-participation as it reflects adult-led DRR activities where youth understand the purpose of the activities but do not have any input in how they are planned. As discussed in (section 3.3), youth in Blantyre are mainly engaged during implementation of DRR activities and demonstrate an understanding of the reasons for these activities. The youth, for example, understand that river restorations are aimed at reducing the risk of floods. They, however, expressed the lack of engagement during the planning and decision-making stages of these activities.

Though the overall participation is decorative, there are a few themes that came out during the discussions as well as the interviews which speak to certain forms of participation. For example, youth in Blantyre plan, develop and implement DRR activities through their groups (youth clubs and organizations) which means that these activities are led and initiated by them. However, the challenge they meet is non-supportiveness from adults as their initiative ideas are met with non-responsiveness. This affects the degree to which youth initiate, implement and lead DRR activities. Therefore, in order to provide a thorough summary of the results for extent of youth participation, a ladder of participation in Blantyre has been developed, borrowing from the imagery of the ladder from Hart (1992).

SUMMARIZED CURRENT YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN BLANTYRE BASED ON HART (1992)

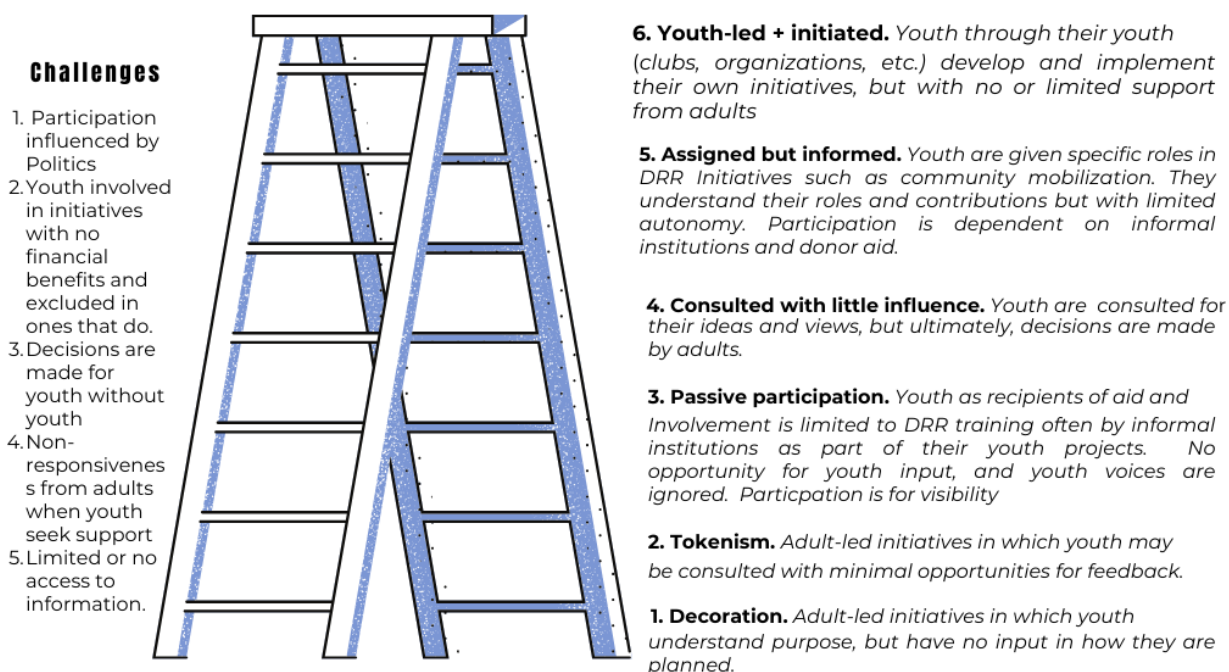


Figure 6: Summarized current youth participation in Blantyre using the ladder imagery. The summary indicates the need for enhanced youth participation in Blantyre, Malawi.

Excluding youth from planning and decision-making can easily yield the feeling of being used as opposed to being engaged as important stakeholders. Institutions must recognize that when youth are engaged in planning processes, implementation of activities becomes easy and they would be more willing to participate because they understand that they are a part of the process. In this case, because youth participation is very decorative, it created a level of resentment and demotivation among the youth, making them unwilling to fully support Disaster Risk Reduction activities.

5.5 CHALLENGES TO YOUTH PARTICIPATION

Politics play a vital role in creating barriers to meaningful youth participation in Blantyre. Political affiliation determines who is identified to participate in various projects. Unfortunately, this sidelines youth who do not share the same political views and those who are not actively in politics. This challenge plays into a larger problem in Malawi as expressed by Gilman (2017), where

political parties tend to be self-serving and often position devout party individuals in different national and local government institutions to oversee operations. They use activities as described by the youth such as tree planting to garner the youth's support, particularly close to elections, after which youth participation dwindles once voted into office.

Seriously engaging and surfacing politics in transparent ways in disaster risk reduction activities will present a better opportunity for diverse youth to participate and contribute to reducing the risks and impacts of disasters in Blantyre. Choosing youth to participate in DRR based on politics means that DRR work misses out on the potential that different youth have to reduce community vulnerability and exposure. It creates superficial youth participation which as this study found is noticed by the youth who in turn become demotivated to pursue participation.

Challenges such as non-responsiveness largely has to do with adults' perspective of youth. Youth as expressed by the UNDRR; Cox et al., (2019) and Pickering et al., (2021) have historically been viewed as victims and incapable of contributing to the challenge of disasters. This study found that this is still the overarching paradigm from the youth's perspective. Adults view them as incapable of contributing to planning, decision-making and designing of solutions often regarding their views as "not worth the attention of adults" as expressed by one of the participants. Intertwined in non-responsiveness is the lack of resources for youth to lead DRR initiatives. Fernandez & Shaw (2014) speaks of lack of resources as one of the barriers of youth participation and this is true for Blantyre. Young people are most active when they receive resource support from adults. In Blantyre however, this support only comes on the terms of adults and youth are not supported when they initiate DRR activities. There is need for appropriate modalities and deliberate spaces created to enhance youth participation in DRR.

5.6 WAY FORWARD – OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENHANCED YOUTH PARTICIPATION

In this study of youth in DRR youth were noted to be self-motivated and passionate about disaster risk reduction even though this is sometimes affected owing to the above discussed challenges. Still, there are steps that can be taken to enhance youth participation in DRR in Blantyre.

1. As the implementation plan is currently being developed for the disaster risk management act of 2023, **the role of youth should be clearly stated**, giving them the opportunity to be

in rooms and spaces of planning and decision making, by giving them an equal footing in committees being created at village, district, and national levels.

2. **Platforms for communication where youth can bring their ideas, suggestions and innovations and where feedback is appropriately given are crucial.** These platforms must also incorporate an easy access to information regarding disaster risk reduction in Malawi including legal frameworks, and activities being undertaken in their communities and country.

3. **Training and empowering youth will assist in utilizing the full potential of youth.** Training in the form of DRR knowledge so that they understand the full extent of disaster risk (not only physical vulnerability dimensions but social ones as well) that will enable their meaningful participation. Empowerment in the form of providing support for youth initiatives, ideas and suggestions, providing them with resources and modalities to create and lead DRR efforts.

6 CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

Disaster Risk Reduction has become more popular over the years particularly with challenges such as climate change which increase the likelihood of disasters. In the wake of escalating disaster and climate change related costs and risks, governments worldwide are exploring various approaches to boost citizen participation and create technologies and resources to lower risks and improve adaptation (Cox et al., 2019). Young people present an underutilized demographic dividend that may be leveraged to further the DRR goal through their human and creative capital, employability, and civic involvement (Cox et al., 2019).

Historically, youth have, however, been viewed as a vulnerable group, in need of protection and treated as victims rather as potential agents of change. These types of engagements have led to the undermining of the contributions that they can make to reducing disaster risks. Today, global and national frameworks such as the Sendai Framework for disaster risk reduction recognize the potential of young people and calls on countries to give youth the spaces and modalities to meaningfully participate in Disaster risk reduction work, calling them “agents of change.”

In this study an important knowledge gap has been illustrated. Not many studies in the area of youth participation in disaster risk reduction in Malawi have been undertaken, working *with* rather than only *for* youth. Understanding where we are in terms of youth participation in DRR is crucial for informing the way forward and designing efforts that truly reflect meaningful participation. As such, this study sought to understand the extent to which young people are engaged in DRR work in Blantyre, Malawi. The insight that the study provides can be used to inform the way future youth participation in DRR work is implemented in Malawi.

Overall, youth participation in Blantyre was found to be **decorative, representing what Hart (1992) refers to as non-participation**. Decorative participation means that youth are involved in the implementation of DRR activities, they understand why these activities are being done but are not involved in the planning and decision making processes. Both groups of young people engaged in this study vocalized the non-representation of youth in important DRR committees, and the fact that planning and decisions are made by people in the offices who do not have a solid understanding of the issues on the ground. **Pickering et al (2022) comments that this extent of participation can be harmful to youth and this study found this to be true**. Particularly, youth are mostly engaged in difficult DRR activities for their labor without any form of compensation

while being sidelined on projects that are easier and have monetary compensations to them i.e., adults do such work themselves, or select youth with similar political affiliations with them to participate.

This brings us to the biggest challenge to youth participation discovered through this research which is politics. This study found that **DRR work is politicized in two ways**: (1) local government structures will often work with youth belonging to their political party and (2) political leaders engage youth to gain their vote. In the first instance, this study found that informal institutions working in DRR use local government institutions as a strategy for identifying and working with youth at community level. Through this approach, youth who belong to the same political party as local government officials were favored and always selected to participate in these projects. This means that youth belonging to other political parties or those who are not active in politics are sidelined and do not have opportunities to participate in meaningful DRR work. In the second scenario, political leaders only engage youth when they are seeking to be elected/re-elected into office. This is when youth engagement is intensified where leaders pretend to care and to listen to the youth, only to completely abandon projects once election season is over.

Despite these challenges, opportunities for enhanced participation exist. Youth expressed that if institutions can focus on:

- (1) **Training and building the capacity of youth in DRR**, much can be achieved. For instance, youth expressed interest in learning about designing early warning systems which they can implement in their respective communities. They spoke to their passion and ability to raise awareness and mobilize their communities for action but would require a deepened understanding of DRR and the technologies that exist.
- (2) **Youth representation in committees**. While local government institutions were seen as a challenge, the youth believe that if they can have representation within local committees, their voices could potentially be heard, of course with an emphasis on eliminating the politics that is brought into DRR work by these governance structures. The law and policy landscape in Malawi strongly supports this, however, implementation has been slow, especially with the Disaster Risk Management Bill only being passed in 2023. If done correctly, local governance is the best way of ensuring community youth representation in planning and decision making.

- (3) **Support from adults.** The youth expressed their tech savviness and mentioned that with the right support from adults, they could have a platform where ideas are shared and exchanged with other youth and institutions working on DRR.

Ultimately, this study has shown that youth participation in DRR in Malawi has a long way to go for it to be meaningful. There is a need for an urgent shift, given the growing number of complex and compound risks, in how youth engagement is perceived, especially as DRR institutions seem to understand youth participation as project-based as opposed to an incorporation of their voices in planning and decision-making. A number of approaches can be replicated to ensure this shift, such as modelling after the ASEAN **safe schools initiatives** where youth are leading risk assessments and contributing to solutions for reducing vulnerabilities. Deliberate efforts can be made to **create youth councils** fully supported by adults such as the case of the YOUNGO which specifically address climate and disaster related risks and challenges especially as councils such as the Youth Council in Malawi which are responsible for youth representation in all facets of development might not always prioritize DRR as in the case of the Philippines (Fernandez and Shaw, 2015).

Engaging youth in disaster risk reduction is not just an investment in the future – it is a recognition of their unique capacity to innovate, lead, and create resilient communities. To achieve this approach, investments will also be urgently required from ‘all of society’ including financial institutions and serious configurations of institutional governance. The growing concerns around funding in complex geopolitical settings and the effective use of funding also remain critical considerations.

“There is need for a mindset change in terms of how we approach disaster risk reduction and how youth are engaged in this process. This needs to start from the government to the communities. There is need to create opportunities for youth to lead especially as we have shown the potential for leadership through our youth clubs and organizations. Adults need to realize that as youth we have ideas and that our ideas and contributions could potentially combat disaster risk.” Youth Participant 15.

7 REFERENCES

- Adger, W., Crépin, A.S., Folke, C., Ospina, D., Chapin, F.S., Segerson, K., Seto, K.C., Anderies, J.M., Barrett, S., Bennett, E.M., Daily, G., Elmqvist, T., Fischer, J., Kautsky, N., Levin, S.A., Shogren, J.F., Van den Bergh, J., Brian Walker, B & James Wilen, J. (2020). Urbanization, Migration, and Adaptation to Climate Change, *One Earth*, Volume 3, Issue 4, Pages 396-399, ISSN 2590-3322, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.oneear.2020.09.016>.
- African Development Bank Group (2023). https://www.afdb.org/sites/default/files/2023/08/11/setting_the_scene_presentation_for_g-cop_on_youth_s.pdf
- Attride-Stirling, J. (2001). Thematic networks: An analytic tool for qualitative research. *Qualitative research*, 1, 385–405.
- Barros, R.M., Leite, C., Monteiro, A., Lopes A., Fernandes, P & Rodrigues, M. (2020). Models of youth Participation Handbook. *volumen 74• n. ° 1*
- Basque, S & Fuje, H. (2020). Vulnerability to poverty after extreme events in Malawi. <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/372641602594949318/pdf/Vulnerability-to-Poverty-Following-Extreme-Weather-Events-in-Malawi.pdf>
- BBC, (2024). Greta Thurnberg: Who is the Climate Activist and What has she Achieved. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-49918719>
- Blantyre City Council, (n.d.). <https://blantyre.gov.mw/about-blantyre>
- Bonadonna, C., Frischknecht, C., Menoni, S. *et al.* (2021). Integrating hazard, exposure, vulnerability and resilience for risk and emergency management in a volcanic context: the ADVISE model. *J Appl. Volcanol.* 10, 7. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13617-021-00108-5>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3, 77–101.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2013) Successful qualitative research: A practical guide for beginners. *Sage Publications*. London, England.
- Brito, .M., Evers, M & Höllermann, B. (2017). Prioritization of flood vulnerability, coping capacity and exposure indicators through the Delphi technique: A case study in Taquari-Antas basin, Brazil, *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction*, Volume 24, Pages 119-128, ISSN 2212-4209, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijdrr.2017.05.027>.
- Cabot, C. (2024). We Lost Everything That Day After Cyclone Freddy, Malawi Struggles to Rebuild. <https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20241110-we-lost-everything-that-day-after-cyclone-freddy-malawi-struggles-to-rebuild>
- Cardona, O. D., Van Aalst, M. K., Birkmann, J., Fordham, M., Mc Gregor, G., Rosa, P., Pulwarty, R. S., Schipper, E. L. F., Sinh, B. T., Décamps, H., Keim, M., Davis, I., Ebi, K. L., Lavell, A., Mechler, R., Murray, V., Pelling, M., Pohl, J., Smith, A. O., & Thomalla, F. (2012). Determinants of risk: Exposure and vulnerability. In *Managing the Risks of Extreme Events and Disasters to Advance Climate Change Adaptation: Special Report of*

- the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (Vol. 9781107025066, pp. 65-108). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139177245.005>
- Chapungu, L., Nhamo, G., Chikodzi, D. *et al.* (2024). Trends and impacts of temperature and fire regimes in South Africa's coastal national parks: implications for tourism. *Nat Hazards* 120, 4485–4506. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11069-023-06384-1>
- Chinguwo DD, Deus D. Assessment of community-based flood early warning system in Malawi. (2022) doi: 10.4102/jamba.v14i1.1166
- Chirwa, J.A (2023). The challenge of doing participatory communication in disaster risk reduction in Malawi. *Global Media Journal*, 21 (63). ISSN 2196-4807. Doi: 10.36648/1550-7521.21.63.370
- City of Johannesburg: Climate Action Plan. (2021). [https://joburg.org.za/departments/Documents/EISD/City%20of%20Johannesburg%20-%20Climate%20Action%20Plan%20\(CAP\).pdf](https://joburg.org.za/departments/Documents/EISD/City%20of%20Johannesburg%20-%20Climate%20Action%20Plan%20(CAP).pdf)
- Cossham, A., & Johanson, G. (2019). The benefits and limitations of using key informants in library and information studies research. *Information Research*, 24(3).
- Cotton, W. R., & Pielke Sr, R. A. (1995). Human impacts on weather and climate. *Cambridge University Press*.
- Cox, R., Hill, T., Plush, T., Heykoop, C & Trembley, C. (2019). More than a checkbox: Engaging youth in disaster risk reduction and resilience in Canada *ResearchGate*: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/328226838_More_than_a_checkbox_engaging_youth_in_disaster_risk_reduction_and_resilience_in_Canada
- Das, M., Becker, J & Doyle, E (2024). Fostering civic participation and collective actions for disaster risk reduction: Insights from Aotearoa New Zealand case studies. *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction*. 114. 104954. 10.1016/j.ijdr.2024.104954.
- Deelstra, A & Bristow, D.N. (2023). Assessing the effectiveness of disaster risk reduction strategies on the regional recovery of critical infrastructure systems, *Resilient Cities and Structures*, ISSN 2772-7416, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rcns.2023.05.001>.
- Dewa, O., Makoka, D., & Ayo-Yusuf, O. (2022). A Deliberative Rural Community Consultation to Assess Support for Flood Risk Management Policies to Strengthen Resilience in Malawi. *Water*, 14(6), 874. <https://doi.org/10.3390/w14060874>
- Dewan, A., & Dewan, A. M. (2013). Hazards, risk, and vulnerability (pp. 35-74). *Springer Netherlands*.
- Disaster Risk Management Act. (2023). <https://www.refworld.org/legal/legislation/natlegbod/2023/en/147705>
- Dreachslin, J. L. (1999). Focus groups as a quality improvement technique: a case example from health administration education. *Quality Assurance in Education*, 7(4), 224-233.
- Engelbrecht, F.A., Steinkopf, J., Padavatan, J., Midgley, G.F. (2024). Projections of Future Climate Change in Southern Africa and the Potential for Regional Tipping Points. In: von

- Maltitz, G.P., *et al.* Sustainability of Southern African Ecosystems under Global Change. Ecological Studies, vol 248. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-10948-5_7
- FAO. 2021. Evaluation of the project “Strengthening community resilience to climate change in Blantyre, Zomba, Neno and Phalombe districts”. Project Evaluation Series, 10/2021. Rome
- FAO, (2019). <https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/40f4a6d4-9852-4478-94cc-15c280cba1cc/content>
- Fazel-Rastgar, F & Sivakumar, V. (2024). A case study on more recent heat wave occurred in South Africa, based on background weather synoptic and dynamic characteristics analysis. *Bull. of Atmos. Sci.& Technol.* 5, 5. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42865-024-00068-9>
- Fernandez, G & Shaw, R. (2015). Youth Participation in disaster risk reduction through science clubs in the Philippines. *Wiley & Sons Ltd.* Oxford, UK. <https://doi.org/10.1111/disa.12100>
- Fernandez, G & Shaw, R. (2014). Participation of youth councils in local-level HFA implementation in Infanta and Makati, Pllipines and its policy implications. *Risk, Hazards and Crisis in Public Policy.* Wiley & Sons Ltd. Oxford, UK <https://doi.org/10.1002/rhc3.12060>
- Filks, L & O’Connor, P. (2022). Girls' education is a climate solution': Malala Yousafzai joins climate protest. <https://www.reuters.com/business/environment/girls-education-is-climate-solution-malala-yousafzai-joins-climate-protest-2022-06-10/>
- Folke, C., Polasky, S., Rockström, J., Galaz, V., Westley, F., Lamont, M., & Walker, B. H. (2021). Our future in the Anthropocene biosphere. *Ambio*, 50, 834-869.
- Gilman, L. (2017). Dancing for Our Mother: Performance, Maternalism, and Joyce Banda's Brief Presidency in Malawi. *Africa Today*, 64(1), 29-52
- Government of Malawi, Malawi Post Disaster Needs Assessment, Tropical Cyclone Freddy (2023): https://malawi.un.org/sites/default/files/2023-06/Tropical%20Cyclone%20Freddy%20Post%20Disaster%20Needs%20Assessment%20Government%20of%20Malawi%20%20April%202023-12_05_2023.pdf
- Government of Malawi, (2019). The Impact of Cyclone Idai. <https://www.tcd.ie/time/assets/pdf/the-impact-of-cyclone-idai.pdf>
- Hart, R. A. (1992). “Children’s participation: From tokenism to citizenship.” *United Nations Children’s Fund International Child Development Centre.* Florence, Italy.
- Hendriks, T. D., & Boersma, F. K. (2019). Bringing the state back in to humanitarian crises response: Disaster governance and challenging collaborations in the 2015 Malawi flood response. *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction*, 40, 101262.
- Highfield, W. E., Peacock, W. G., & Van Zandt, S. (2014). Mitigation planning: Why hazard exposure, structural vulnerability, and social vulnerability matter. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 34(3), 287-300.

- Higuera-Roa, O., (2020). “The power of youth engagement in disaster risk reduction activities,” Koln, Germany.
- IFRC, (2022). Malawi Africa Tropical Storm Ana. <https://reliefweb.int/report/malawi/malawi-africa-tropical-storm-ana-2022-emergency-appeal-n-mdrmw015>
- IFRC., (2018). “Case Studies: Red Cross Red Crescent Disaster Risk Reduction in Action – What works at local level.” *International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies*, Geneva.
- IFRC., Development of Malawi’s Disaster Risk Management Act (2023). https://disasterlaw.ifrc.org/sites/default/files/media/disaster_law/2024-01/Development%20of%20Malawi%E2%80%99s%20%20Disaster%20Risk%20Management%20Act%202023%20%282%29.pdf,
- IPCC, (2023): Summary for Policymakers: Synthesis Report. Contribution of Working Groups I, II and III to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [Core Writing Team, H. Lee and J. Romero (eds.)]. IPCC, Geneva, Switzerland, pp. 1-34, doi: 10.59327/IPCC/AR6-9789291691647. https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/syr/downloads/report/IPCC_AR6_SYR_SPM.pdf
- IPCC, 2022: Summary for Policymakers [H.-O. Pörtner, D.C. Roberts, E.S. Poloczanska, K. Mintenbeck, M. Tignor, A. Alegría, M. Craig, S. Langsdorf, S. Löschke, V. Möller, A. Okem (eds.)]. In: Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [H.-O. Pörtner, D.C. Roberts, M. Tignor, E.S. Poloczanska, K. Mintenbeck, A. Alegría, M. Craig, S. Langsdorf, S. Löschke, V. Möller, A. Okem, B. Rama (eds.)]. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK and New York, NY, USA, pp. 3–33, doi:10.1017/9781009325844.001
- IPCC SR1.5 FAQ (2018). <https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/faq/faq-chapter-1/>
- IPCC, (2018). Global Warming of 1.5°C. An IPCC Special Report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels and related global greenhouse gas emission pathways, in the context of strengthening the global response to the threat of climate change, sustainable development, and efforts to eradicate poverty [Masson-Delmotte, V., P. Zhai, H.-O. Pörtner, D. Roberts, J. Skea, P.R. Shukla, A. Pirani, W. Moufouma-Okia, C. Péan, R. Pidcock, S. Connors, J.B.R. Matthews, Y. Chen, X. Zhou, M.I. Gomis, E. Lonnoy, T. Maycock, M. Tignor, and T. Waterfield (eds.)]. *Cambridge University Press*, Cambridge, UK and New York, NY, USA, 616 pp. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009157940>.
- IPCC, 2012: Managing the Risks of Extreme Events and Disasters to Advance Climate Change Adaptation. A Special Report of Working Groups I and II of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [Field, C.B., V. Barros, T.F. Stocker, D. Qin, D.J. Dokken, K.L. Ebi, M.D. Mastrandrea, K.J. Mach, G.-K. Plattner, S.K. Allen, M. Tignor, and P.M. Midgley (eds.)]. *Cambridge University Press*, Cambridge, UK, and New York, NY, USA, 582 pp
- Johnson, B., & Christensen L. (2004). Educational research: Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed approaches. *Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon*.

- Jordan, A., Rayner, T., Schroeder, H., Adger, N., Anderson, K., Bows, A., ... & Whitmarsh, L. (2013). Going beyond two degrees? The risks and opportunities of alternative options. *Climate Policy*, 13(6), 751-769.
- Jumbe S, Nyali J, Simbeye M, Zakeyu N, Motshewa G, Pulapa SR (2022) ‘We do not talk about it’: Engaging youth in Malawi to inform adaptation of a mental health literacy intervention. *PLoS ONE* 17(3): e0265530. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0265530>
- Justino, F. , Stordal, F. , Clement, A. , Coppola, E. , Setzer, A. and Brumatti, D. (2013) Modelling Weather and Climate Related Fire Risk in Africa. *American Journal of Climate Change*, 2, 209-224. doi: [10.4236/ajcc.2013.24022](https://doi.org/10.4236/ajcc.2013.24022).
- Kawasaki, A., Kawamura, G., & Zin, W.W. (2020). A local level relationship between floods and poverty: A case in Myanmar, *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction*, Volume 42, 101348, ISSN 2212-4209, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijdr.2019.101348>.
- Kayamba-Phiri, F., & Abbott, D. (2023). Community-led resource mobilization and early warning systems process assessment: Full report. *Intl Food Policy Res Inst*.
- Kellett, M. (2009). Children and young people’s participation. In H. Montgomery & M. Kellett (Eds.), *Children and young people’s worlds: Developing frameworks for integrated practice* (pp. 43–60). Policy Press.
- Khan, M.T.I., Sarkodie, S.A., Yaseen, M.R., Nadeem, A.M., and Anwar, S., (2023). Do natural disasters affect economic growth? The role of human capital, foreign direct investment, and infrastructure dynamics. *Science Direct*. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2405844023001184>
- Kitzinger, J (1995). Qualitative research: introducing focus groups. *British Medical Journal* 311, 299–302 [CrossRefGoogle ScholarPubMed](https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.311.6978.299)
- Kumar, K. (1989). Conducting key informant interviews in developing countries (pp. 1-40). *Agency for International Development*. Washington DC.
- Kutani, Lovemore. (2022). An assessment of the level of youth participation in community development projects: a case of TA M'mbelwa Dissertation Title: An Assessment of the Level of Youth Participation in Community Development Projects: A Case of TA M'mbelwa. *Research Gate*
- Larsson, I., Staland-Nyman, C., Svedberg, P. *et al.* (2018). Children and young people’s participation in developing interventions in health and well-being: a scoping review. *BMC Health Serv Res* 18, 507 . <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12913-018-3219-2>
- Madakumbura, G., Thackeray, C., Hall, A., Williams, P., Norris, J & Ray Sukhdeo2, (2025). Climate Change A Factor In Unprecedented LA Fires. <https://sustainablela.ucla.edu/2025lawildfires>
- Manda, S., & Thindwa, T.T.M. (2025). “This one caught us unaware’: Disaster politics and institutions during Cyclone Freddy in Malawi, *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction*, Volume 117,105144, ISSN 2212-4209, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijdr.2024.105144>.

- Manda, M.Z, (2014). “Where there is no local government: Addressing disaster risk reduction in a small town in Malawi.” *International Institute for Environment and Development, Sage Publications*: <file:///C:/Users/HEWLET%20PACKERD/Downloads/manda-2014-where-there-is-no-local-government-addressing-disaster-risk-reduction-in-a-small-town-in-malawi.pdf>
- Malawi Project, (2024). Blantyre Malawi’s Commercial Center. <https://www.malawiproject.org/blantyre-malawis-commercial-center/>
- Maoulidi, M. (2012). Water and sanitation needs assessment for Blantyre city, Malawi. *Research Gate*.https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Map-of-Malawi-Showing-Blantyre-City_fig7_270703804
- Mengistu, A.G., Woyessa, Y.E., Tesfuhuney, W.A. *et al.* (2024). Assessing the impact of climate change on future extreme temperature events in major South African cities. *Theor Appl Climatol* 155, 1807–1819. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00704-023-04712-w>
- Mercy Corps, (2019). The Facts: Cyclone Idai’s Effect on Southern Africa. <https://europe.mercycorps.org/en-gb/blog/cyclone-idai-facts>
- Millenium Cities Initiative (n.d.). Blantyre Maps. <http://mci.ei.columbia.edu/millennium-cities/blantyre-malawi/blantyre-maps-and-population-data/>
- Missanjo, Edward & Utila, Henry & Munthali, Maggie & Mitembe, William. (2019). Modelling of climate conditions in forest vegetation zones in Malawi. *World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews*. 1. 036-044. 10.30574/wjarr.2019.1.3.0023.
- Mort, M., Rodriguez-Giralt, I & Delicado, A. (2020). Children and Young People’s Participation in Disaster Risk Reduction: Agency and Resilience. *Bristol University Press, Policy Press*. United Kingdom.
- National Disaster Risk Management Policy. (2015). https://www.preventionweb.net/files/43755_malwidrmpolicy2015.pdf
- National Youth Policy., (2023-2028). <https://pachimalawi.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/National-Youth-Policy-2023-2028-Final.pdf>
- Nhama G, & Chikodzi, D, (2021). Cyclones in Southern Africa. Springer Nature. <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-030-74303-1>
- OCHA, (2024). Southern Africa: El Nino Regional Humanitarian Overview. <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/mozambique/southern-africa-el-nino-regional-humanitarian-overview-september-2024>
- OCHA (2024). Malawi: Drought flash appeal July 2024 – April 2025. <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/malawi/malawi-drought-flash-appeal-july-2024-april-2025-july-2024>
- OCHA (2023). Malawi: Tropical Cyclone Freddy’s Impact. <https://reliefweb.int/report/malawi/malawi-tropical-cyclone-freddys-impact-22-march-2023>

- OCHA, (2023). Southern Africa Tropical Cyclone Freddy Flash. <https://reliefweb.int/report/mozambique/southern-africa-tropical-cyclone-freddy-flash-update-no-7-14-march-2023>
- O'Connor, R. E., Bord, R. J., Yarnal, B., & Wiefek, N. (2002). Who wants to reduce greenhouse gas emissions?. *Social Science Quarterly*, 83(1), 1-17.
- Perry-Haza, L., & Bauml, A., (2023). On youth participation and adult manipulation: Exploring the lowest rung of Hart's ladders in a youth organization. *Childhood*, 30(2), 194-209.
- Pickering CJ., Guy E., Al-Baldawi Z., McVean L., Sargent S., & O'Sullivan T. (2021). "I believe this team will change how society views youth in disasters": the EnRiCH Youth Research Team: a youth-led community-based disaster risk reduction program in Ottawa, Canada. *Can J Public Health*. Oct;112(5):957-964. doi: 10.17269/s41997-021-00486-8. Epub May 18. PMID: 34008134; PMCID: PMC8130802.
- Pickering CJ., Al-Baldawi Z., McVean L., Amany RA., Adan M., Baker L., Al-Baldawi Z & L O'Sullivan T. (2022). "It's Like Youth are Talking Into a Microphone That is not Plugged in": Engaging Youth in Disaster Risk Reduction Through Photovoice. *Qual Health Res*. Dec;32(14):2126-2146. doi: 10.1177/10497323221136485. Epub 2022 Nov 9. PMID: 36350782; PMCID: PMC9709556.
- Pielke Sr, R. A. (2005). Land use and climate change. *Science*, 310(5754), 1625-1626.
- Pistrang, N., & Barker, C. (2013). Varieties of qualitative research: A pragmatic approach to selecting methods. In H. Cooper (Ed.). *APA handbook of research methods in psychology* (Vol. 2, pp. 5–18). *American Psychological Association*. Washington, DC.
- Posodobitev, Z (2005). Ladder of Citizen Participation. <https://organizingengagement.org/models/ladder-of-citizen-participation/>
- Post Disaster Needs Assessment (2015). <https://www.gfdrr.org/sites/default/files/publication/pda-2015-malawi.pdf>
- Rentschler, J., Salhab, M. & Jafino, B.A. Flood exposure and poverty in 188 countries. *Nat Commun* 13, 3527 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-022-30727-4>
- Riger, S., & Sigurvinsdottir, R., (2016). Thematic Analysis. In L. Jason & D. Glenwick (Ed). *Handbook of methodological approaches to community based research; Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods*. PP. 54-62. *Oxford University Press*, NY.
- Šakić Trogrlić, R., Wright, G. B., Adeloye, A. J., Duncan, M. J., & Mwale, F. (2018). Taking stock of community-based flood risk management in Malawi: different stakeholders, different perspectives. *Environmental Hazards*, 17(2), 107-127.
- Šakić Trogrlić, R., Wright, G. B., Duncan, M. J., van den Homberg, M. J. C., Adeloye, A. J., Mwale, F. D., & Mwafulirwa, J. (2019). Characterising Local Knowledge across the Flood Risk Management Cycle: A Case Study of Southern Malawi. *Sustainability*, 11(6), 1681. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su11061681>

- Schleussner, C. F., Lissner, T. K., Fischer, E. M., Wohland, J., Perrette, M., Golly, A & Schaeffer, M. (2016). Differential climate impacts for policy-relevant limits to global warming: the case of 1.5 C and 2 C. *Earth system dynamics*, 7(2), 327-351.
- Shabina, S., Amit, T.K., Eram, P., Pranav, K & Deeksha, G. (2024) Focus Group Discussions: An emerging qualitative tool for educational research. *International Journal for Research and Review*, Vol. 11, Issue 9. <https://doi.org/10.52403/ijrr.20240932>
- Sherry R. Arnstein's "A Ladder of Citizen Participation," *Journal of the American Planning Association*, Vol. 35, No. 4, July 1969, pp. 216-224.
- Sivakumar, A & Vanitha, V. (2024). Basic Concept of Disaster Risk Management. April. DOI:[10.26524/royal.215](https://doi.org/10.26524/royal.215)- In book: child protection and child rights in disasters and emergencies (pp.21-36). Edition: 1. Chapter: 2. *Royal Book Publication*
- Sommer, L., (2025). Here's how climate change fueled the Los Angeles fires. <https://www.npr.org/2025/01/29/nx-s1-5273676/la-fires-climate-change-rainfall-extreme-weather>
- Tabari, H. (2020). Climate change impact on flood and extreme precipitation increases with water availability. *Sci Rep* 10, 13768. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-020-70816-2>
- Tenny, S., Brannan, J., and Brannan, G., (2022). Qualitative Study. National Library of Medicine.
- Terry, M. (2023). Speaking Youth to Power. *Palgrave Studies in Media and Environmental Communication*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-14298-7>
- The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015 – 2030) <https://www.preventionweb.net/files/resolutions/N1516716.pdf>
- The Standard., (2025). Climate change made devastating LA fires more likely, scientists say <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/climate-change-la-wildfires-study-imperial-college-london-b1207730.html>
- Thomas, L, MacMillan, J, McColl, E, Hale, C & Bond, S (1995) Comparison of focus group and individual interview methodology in examining patient satisfaction with nursing care. *Social Sciences in Health* 1, 206–219 [Google Scholar](https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=...)
- Treseder, P. (1997). Empowering children and young people training manual: Promoting involvement in decision-making. *Save the Children*.
- UNECA, (2015). Assessment report on mainstreaming and implementing disaster risk reduction measures in Malawi. https://archive.uneca.org/sites/default/files/uploaded-documents/Natural_Resource_Management/drr/malawi-drr-report_english_fin.pdf
- UN Women. Gender Dimensions of Disasters. <https://wrd.unwomen.org/practice/topics/gender-dimensions>
- UNDP (2024). Malawi national action plan on youth, peace and security. https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2025-01/malawi_national_action_plan_on_youth_peace_and_security_2024-2029_2_0.pdf

- UNDP (2022). Modernized Climate Information and Early Warning Systems in Malawi. <https://www.adaptation-undp.org/resources/videos/modernized-climate-information-and-early-warning-systems-malawi>
- UNDP, (2019). https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/publications/Baseline_Study_on_Disaster_Recovery_in_Africa.pdf
- UNDP (2019). M-Climes protecting communities from the effects of extreme weather events and climate change in Malawi. <https://www.undp.org/malawi/news/m-climes-protecting-communities-effects-extreme-weather-events-and-climate-change-malawi>
- UNDP, (2018). Human development report. <https://www.undp.org/malawi/publications/human-development-2018-statistical-update>
- UNDRR, (2023). Southern Africa Cyclone 2023 forensic analysis. <https://www.undrr.org/resource/southern-africa-cyclone-2023-forensic-analysis>
- UNDRR, (2020). Words into Action. “Engaging children and youth in disaster risk reduction and resiliencebuilding.” https://www.undrr.org/sites/default/files/2020-10/67704_67704wiachildyouthundrr202067704undrr_1.pdf
- UNDRR (2017). How to make cities more resilient: A handbook for local government leaders. *United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR)*. Geneva, Switzerland.
- UNDRR, Disaster Risk Reduction Terminology (n.d.) <https://www.undrr.org/terminology/disaster-risk-reduction>
- United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. <https://unfccc.int/topics/education-youth/youth/young>
- United Nations in Malawi. (2024) <https://malawi.un.org/en/274886-united-nations-and-humanitarian-partners-appeal-us1365-million-assist-people-affected-e#:~:text=On%2023%20March%20this%20year,area%20has%20been%20severely%20impacted.>
- United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction. <https://www.undrr.org/terminology/disaster-risk-reduction#:~:text=Disaster%20risk%20reduction%20is%20aimed,the%20achievement%20of%20sustainable%20development.>
- UNDRR (2019). Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction. *United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR)*. Geneva, Switzerland.
- UNISDR (2015). Making Development Sustainable: The Future of Disaster Risk Management. Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction. *United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR)*. Geneva, Switzerland.
- Varwell, Simon. (2022). A Literature Review of Arnstein’s Ladder of Citizen Participation: Lessons for contemporary student engagement. *Exchanges: The Interdisciplinary Research Journal*. 10. 108-144. 10.31273/eirj.v10i1.1156.

- Viner, D., Ekstrom, M., Hulbert, M., Warner, N.K., Wreford, A & Zommers, Z. (2020). Understanding the dynamic nature of risk in climate change assessments – A new starting point for discussion. *Royal Meteorological Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/asl.958>
- Vogel, C., et al., (2022): South African Youth Co-Engaged in Climate Policy Making, Chapter 17, In: *Special Journal NORRAG Issue, Education in Times of Change*, pages 90-95.
- Vogel, C., et al., (2022): ‘Empowering youth as change agents for climate change in South Africa’: challenges, caveats and course corrections, *Journal of Youth Studies*, DOI: [10.1080/13676261.2022.2046259](https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2022.2046259)
- Wadson, D., Mulenga, I., & Milupi, I. (2024). Climate change education in Malawi: examining learners’ knowledge, attitudes and practices towards learning climate change education content in senior secondary schools. *Zango: Zambian Journal of Contemporary Issues*, 37(2), 67-86.
- WHO, (2020). Mental Health Atlas <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240036703>
- World Bank, (2023). Poverty and equity brief - Malawi. https://databankfiles.worldbank.org/public/ddpext_download/poverty/987B9C90-CB9F-4D93-AE8C-750588BF00QA/current/Global_POVEQ_MWI.pdf
- World Data Info (n.d.). Cyclones in Malawi. <https://www.worlddata.info/africa/malawi/cyclones.php>
- World Vision (2022). Tropical Cyclone Gombe claims lives and increases vulnerability in Malawi. <https://www.wvi.org/stories/malawi/tropical-cyclone-gombe-claims-lives-and-increases-vulnerability-malawi>
- Youth Climate Action Plan. (2021). https://www.saycap.org/_files/ugd/c9ca7e_b676add1d0894bae82eda1f93b0e598f.pdf?index=true
- Zimba, J. M., Simbeye, B., & Chirwa, S. C. (2021). Towards intergenerational equity: Analysis of youth engagement strategies in climate action planning in Mzuzu, Malawi. *Urban Planning*, 6(4), 309-320.
- Zlobina, A., Davala, MC., & Zapater, MB. (2024). Are Today's Young People Active Citizens? A Study of Their Sensitivity to Socio-Political Issues and Their Social Participation. *Journal of Social and Political Psychology*, Vol. 12(1), 5–22, <https://doi.org/10.5964/jspp.10299>

8 **APPENDICES**

8.1 **APPENDIX 1: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS QUESTIONS GUIDE**

SECTION 1
Understanding Disaster Risks
1. What type of disasters have you experienced here in Blantyre? 2. How have they impacted you and how do you perceive risks of these disasters? 3. What comes to mind when you hear disaster risk reduction?
SECTION 2
Youth engagement in Disaster Risk Reduction planning, decision making and implementation
4. Do you know of any DRR activities or programs in Blantyre? 5. Have you or your peers participated in any DRR activities? If yes, please describe your experience. If no, why do you believe that is? 6. What motivates or demotivates you from participating in these activities?
SECTION 3
Youth perspectives on barriers to participation
7. What are the main barriers or challenges that you face when it comes to participating in DRR activities in Blantyre? 8. How do these barriers affect your willingness or ability to get involved?

SECTION 4
Opportunities and Recommendations
9. What kind of support or changes would encourage more youth participation in DRR? 10. What role do you think youth should play in Disaster Risk Reduction? 11. Can you suggest any new ideas or initiatives for engaging youth in DRR?

8.2 APPENDIX 2: KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW GUIDE

SECTION 1
Background and Context
1. Can you describe your institution's role in DRR and the specific areas you focus on? 2. How important is youth participation in your institution's DRR activities? Why?
SECTION 2
Planning and Implementation
3. How are young people involved in the planning phase of your DRR projects? Can you give specific examples? 4. What roles do youth typically play in the implementation of DRR initiatives? 5. Are young people involved in decision-making processes regarding DRR? How are their voices integrated?
SECTION 3
Strategies and Approaches
6. What strategies do you use to engage youth in DRR activities? 7. How does your institution support the capacity building of young people for effective participation in DRR?

--

8.3 APPENDIX 3: ETHICS CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE



SCHOOL OF ANIMAL, PLANT AND ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES ETHICS COMMITTEE
CONSTITUTED UNDER THE UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

PROTOCOL NUMBER: HA2407

PROJECT TITLE

Exploring the extent of youth participation in disaster risk reduction in Blantyre, Malawi

INVESTIGATOR

Ruth Mughogho

SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT OF INVESTIGATOR

School of Animal, Plant and Environmental Sciences

DATE CONSIDERED

14 August 2024

DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE

Approved unconditionally

RISK LEVEL

MINIMAL RISK

EXPIRY DATE

Date of submission of the Research Report

ISSUE DATE OF CERTIFICATE

22 August 2024

CHAIRPERSON


(Dr Justice Muvengwi)

cc: Supervisor: Prof Coleen Vogel

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Chairperson of the School/Department ethics committee.

I/we fully understand the conditions under which I am/we are authorized to carry out the above mentioned research and I/we guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure be contemplated from the research procedure as approved, I/we undertake to submit an amendment of the protocol to the Committee.



Signature

Date

22/08/2024

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES