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Philanthropy, education and climate change: Trends in low- and middle-income countries

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Abstract

Targeted education policies have an untapped potential to promote climate-positive behaviour change across entire communities around the world. That is why a number of international frameworks have been encouraging co-ordinated action between all development finance providers at the education and climate intersection. In that context, this paper explores the role of philanthropy in low- and middle-income countries. It finds that, while evidence remains limited, philanthropic funding at this nexus is growing, increasingly supporting green skills, curriculum integration, teacher training, climate justice and basic child services. The paper also assesses challenges related to data reporting and impact evaluation. It recommends that foundations scale up their climate integration efforts and further invest in data and reporting to strengthen the evidence base. Further research is needed to track trends and support the development of more multi-stakeholder policies and programmes involving philanthropy at the education and climate intersection.

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Abbreviations and acronyms

COP	Conference of the Parties (to the UNFCCC)
CRS	Creditor Reporting System
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
EDPC	Education Policy Committee
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FCDO	UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office
GEP	Greening Education Partnership
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
netFWD	Network of Foundations Working for Development
ODA	Official development assistance
OECD CoP	OECD Centre on Philanthropy
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
STEM	Science, technology, engineering and mathematics
UNCC: Learn	United Nations Climate Change Learn
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNITAR	United Nations Institute for Training and Research

Executive summary

Holistic education policies can play a big role in tackling climate change by encouraging connected, system-wide solutions. For example, education policies that promote the development of green skills can enable collaboration among public, private, and philanthropic actors to build a more climate-resilient labour market and strengthen community resilience to climate change. For these efforts to truly make a difference, education and climate strategies should also address gender inequality and include indigenous knowledge, community movements, and a diverse range of views on how humans connect to nature and biodiversity.

A growing number of international frameworks, including UNESCO's "Greening Education Partnership" (GEP) and the Global Partnership for Education (GPE)'s "Climate Smart Education Systems" framework, seek to operationalise joint education and climate commitments. They recognise that addressing the climate crisis requires not only holistic policy responses but also multi-stakeholder engagement, involving *all* development finance providers, including philanthropy.

In that context, this paper explores the extent to which philanthropy, in particular education philanthropy, supports the education and climate intersection. Analysing both funding flows and practice, it seeks to identify opportunities to scale it up, align it further with international harmonisation initiatives and contribute to broader systems change.

Although international harmonisation efforts emphasise the importance of integrating climate across education efforts, data analysis finds that philanthropic funding at the intersection of education and climate remains modest in scale. According to data reported to the OECD Creditor Reporting System (CRS), philanthropic disbursements targeting environmental and climate objectives represented a small, though increasing, share of education funding, rising from 0.5% in 2020 to 4.8% in 2022. Yet, this growth reflects only a minor portion of overall philanthropic investment in education. Likewise, over 2020-23, total environmental philanthropy ranged from USD 654 million to USD 1.04 billion annually, with education-related projects accounting for just 0.4% on average.

Potential reasons for such a small percentage could relate to classification inconsistencies, time lags in data collection, under-reporting by foundations and the absence of data from smaller philanthropic actors. Consequently, actual philanthropic contributions in this space are likely underestimated.

Despite data limitations, additional research indicates that philanthropy, and in particular education philanthropy, actively contributes to the education and climate intersection in low- and middle-income countries across different priority areas. These include green skills development, teacher training, curriculum integration, education and climate justice, and support for essential child services.

These initiatives frequently involve collaboration between philanthropies, non-governmental organisations, governments and the private sector. They also often emphasise locally led approaches oriented towards climate justice. However, most are still at an early stage of implementation and lack comprehensive impact evaluations. As such, the extent to which these initiatives can be replicated and scaled to inform and support global harmonisation efforts on education and climate commitments remains to be determined.

These findings highlight the need for a stronger evidence base to demonstrate the growing engagement of philanthropy at the intersection of education and climate. The recommendations that follow outline practical ways for philanthropic actors to better measure and expand their contributions.

Recommendations for foundations

- Education philanthropy should expand its efforts to integrate climate across all programmes and scale up giving with this cross-cutting approach, especially in low- and middle-income and least developed countries.
- Both education-focused and climate-focused philanthropies should engage in sustained dialogue to identify synergies and opportunities for collaboration.[1]
- All foundations should report consistently to the OECD CRS to help build a clearer, more comparable, picture of philanthropic funding for the education and climate intersection.
- Education philanthropy should continue to support global harmonisation efforts, like the "Greening Education Partnership", leveraging its ability to act as a bridge, promoting the perspectives of grantees to ensure global frameworks remain inclusive and responsive, and championing locally led approaches.

Recommendations for future research

This paper provides the groundwork for a deeper investigation of philanthropy's role at the education and climate intersection with a view to scaling up philanthropy's support for this intersection and global harmonisation efforts.

- In the short term, while continuing to track the integration of climate objectives in education philanthropy, philanthropic networks should also undertake deeper analysis of the extent to which climate-focused organisations integrate education into their strategies, with the aim of fostering sustained dialogue between the education and climate communities.
- Over the medium to long term, more robust data infrastructure will be essential. Future OECD data systems should be designed to capture the intersections between education and climate, as well as other relevant cross-cutting areas. Advances in artificial intelligence will support this by enabling the analysis of project descriptions, disaggregating the tracking of thematic sub-areas. Rolling submission mechanisms will provide real-time data input required to access funding information in a more timely and efficient manner. Involvement from local expert groups and verification by the OECD Secretariat will be critical to ensure data accuracy and utility.

1 The role of education in combatting the climate crisis

Addressing the climate crisis requires holistic policy responses. After recalling the impacts of climate change on education outcomes, this section looks at how the education sector can simultaneously protect learning and support climate mitigation and adaptation. It then analyses international agreements' efforts to integrate education and climate change. Paying special attention to the needs of vulnerable groups, including girls and women, Indigenous Peoples and youth, it argues that education policies must become more globally inclusive to drive truly transformative climate action.

Addressing the existential threats of climate change is more urgent than ever. In 2024, the global temperature surpassed the critical 1.5°C threshold, triggering intensified global warming and a cascade of interconnected hazards (IPCC, 2023[1]; C3S, 2024[2]). As the negative impacts of the climate crisis accelerate, the need for holistic policy responses becomes ever more critical. One of the levers to address climate change and propel both climate action and, eventually, climate justice, is investment in education.

This paper uses the term "education and climate intersection" to reconcile the differences between many distinct terms that are often used interchangeably. Research revealed the use of many expressions to define the relationship between climate and education, sometimes even within the same publication. These include "education for sustainable development" (UNESCO, 2020[3]), "climate change education" (UNESCO, 2010[4]), "green(ing) education" (UNESCO, 2024[5]), "education for climate action" (Ehlers et al., 2022[6]; Sabarwal et al., 2024[7]), "education for climate justice" (Kwauk, 2021[8]) and "eco-justice education" (Martusewicz, 2018[9]). Within OECD education systems, the most common term is "education for sustainable development", followed by "environmental education" and "sustainability education" (OECD, 2023[10]). However, each term reflects distinct theories, priorities and points of tension. For instance, "green(ing) education" poses an issue for translation.

1.1. How the education sector can simultaneously protect learning and support climate mitigation and adaptation

Education, including infrastructure such as school buildings and child services, can be used as a powerful lever to foster effective adaptation and mitigation (see Box 2 for definitions) (UNESCO, 2021[11]; Sabarwal et al., 2024[7]).

Investment in climate-resilient infrastructure in the education sector can minimise the impact of heat, pollution and extreme weather on education, providing school communities with greater protection and capacity to bounce back and maintain their core functions (Feinstein and Mach, 2019[12]; Cooke, 2025[13]). Initiatives like the World Bank's Global Program for Safer Schools and UNICEF's sustainability guidelines support countries to construct resilient and accessible educational environments (UNICEF, n.d.[14]). Likewise, at COP28 in 2023, the Green Climate Fund, the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) and Save the Children launched a USD 70 million investment to build climate-resilient schools in vulnerable countries (Green Climate Fund, 2023[15]).

The education sector contributes relatively little to global emissions but can play a positive role in reducing the impact of climate change. In South Africa, for example, it is estimated that the education sector accounts for less than 2% of total energy consumption. However, climate-resilient building design supports mitigation efforts and offers hands-on learning opportunities, reinforcing sustainability principles among students (Cooke, 2025[13]).

Box 1. Education infrastructure and outcomes are vulnerable to climate change impacts

The education sector is increasingly vulnerable to loss and damage driven by climate change, which directly harms infrastructure, disrupts learning environments, and undermines educational outcomes (Dubai Cares and SEEK Development, 2024[16]; Nusche, Fuster Rabella and Lauterbach, 2024[17]; Sabarwal et al., 2024[7]). Vulnerable groups, especially developing countries, Indigenous communities and women and girls experience the impact of climate change most severely.

Although responsible for just 21% of global emissions in 1850-2011, according to Professor William Nordhaus' RICE model, developing countries incurred 78% of the social cost of climate change, which was projected to rise to 87% by 2035 (Busch, 2015[18]; Kwauk and Braga, 2017[19]). Environmental changes also threaten indigenous knowledge systems, further eroding these communities' abilities to maintain traditional livelihoods and ability to adapt to the changing climate (Bapna, Simpson and Colenbrander, 2024[20]).

Between January 2022 and June 2024, climate events caused school closures affecting 404 million students worldwide (Sabarwal et al., 2024[7]). For example, in Rio Grande do Sul, floods in May 2024 damaged 855 schools and displaced 293 500 students; 68 schools were converted into shelters (Education International, 2024[21]). Research indicates that climate-related school closures result in an average of 11 lost school days annually, although this figure is as high as 18 in low-income countries (Sabarwal et al., 2024[7]). Beyond school closures, damaged homes, displacement and transport disruptions further reduce attendance and deepen learning inequalities (Nusche, Fuster Rabella and Lauterbach, 2024[17]).

Climate change also indirectly affects education through health crises, economic shocks and migration. Extreme weather undermines nutrition and increases the incidence of disease, while economic shocks, declining family incomes and forced climate-related migration also forcibly remove students from their learning environments (Dubai Cares and SEEK Development, 2024[16]). Women and girls are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and school withdrawal following climate shocks, perpetuating cycles of poverty (Sabarwal et al., 2024[7]).

Climate anxiety among students, especially girls and young women (Sabarwal et al., 2024[7]), is rising, with 59% of 16–25-year-olds reporting being "very" or "extremely worried" about climate change (Hickman et al., 2021[22]). Heightened stress, trauma and health challenges compound learning disruptions, leading to long-term losses in educational outcomes (Hanushek and Woessmann, 2020[23]; Hammerstein et al., 2021[24]).

Source: The authors drew on a review of secondary literature, as well as insights from semi-structured interviews and the joint OECD netFWD–Abdulla Al Ghurair Foundation Policy Dialogue ("Enabling Green Education: Role of Philanthropy in a Sustainable Future") held in the United Arab Emirates in April 2025.

If students become agents of change, they could arguably help advance mitigation and adaptation efforts. A growing number of authors assert that, equipped with the appropriate knowledge, skills, values, behaviours and agency, students are converted into agents of change (Ehlers et al., 2022[6]; OECD, 2022[25]). This, in turn, lays the ground for adaptation and mitigation efforts (UNESCO, 2021[11]). Some academics have even argued that robust climate change education can be as effective as other climate solutions like rooftop solar panels or electric vehicles in reducing carbon emissions (Cordero, Centeno and Todd, 2020[26]; Cooke, 2025[13]). This claim is based on the research premise that suggests that individual behaviour change can influence 20% to 37% of the emission reductions needed to reach net zero (Williamson et al., 2018[27]).

Behavioural change should be understood as a whole-of-society collaboration. OECD (2025[28]) highlights that behavioural change is not about passing the responsibility for climate mitigation from governments to individuals and communities. Rather, behavioural change is one aspect of a systems thinking approach to climate. For example, behavioural change can help learners situate their own action through understanding

the broader sectoral and system changes necessary to address the climate crisis, and by focusing on skills for citizen participation. Systems thinking also encourages policymakers and practitioners to engage with holistic approaches. In this way, it can reflect interrelated social and environmental dynamics alongside flexible and responsive policy implementation (Hynes, Lees and Müller, 2020[29]).

Box 2. Definitions: Climate change mitigation and adaptation

Climate mitigation refers to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and atmospheric concentrations to limit global temperature rise (UNFCCC, n.d.[30]). Climate adaptation involves adjusting ecological, social and economic systems to mitigate climate risks and enhance resilience.

Enshrined in Article 7 of the Paris Agreement (UNFCCC, 2015[31]) the Global Goal on Adaptation aims to strengthen adaptive capacity and reduce vulnerability while supporting sustainable development. Education itself is a powerful adaptation tool.

Source: (UNFCCC, 2015[31]; n.d.[32]).

Education on climate mitigation and adaptation needs to equip learners with both technical and non-technical skills for the green transition. As noted in Section 3, the global green transition is expected to create 103 million new jobs, while rendering about 78 million jobs obsolete. As a result, integrating skilling and reskilling initiatives into education systems is essential (Ehlers et al., 2022[6]; ILO, 2022[33]). Green skills development provides both adaptation and mitigation benefits, equipping workforces to drive resilient, low-carbon economies (OECD, 2025[28]). Although a universally agreed definition of green skills remains elusive, the skills encompass *both* technical and non-technical competencies. Examples of technical skills would include Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) expertise, such as engineering for renewable energy. Non-technical skills would encompass communication, leadership, ecosystem thinking and critical analysis.

Higher levels of education can help communities better prepare for disaster and recover more quickly. Research shows that higher levels of education consistently correlate with higher levels of climate-related knowledge, as well as self-reported pro-environmental attitudes and actions (OECD, 2025[28]; 2024[34]). Education is also a key driver of adaptive capacity. For instance, studies from Senegal, Mali, Thailand, Cuba, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador and Brazil link higher levels of education with greater disaster preparedness, faster response times and improved recovery, reducing the overall impact of climate-related hazards (World Bank, 2024[35]).

Beyond the reduction of immediate physical danger, education has the potential to influence behaviours, norms, values of environmental sustainability, justice and responsibility. Research has shown that learning institutions can showcase ideal mindsets and encourage students to adopt sustainable lifestyles (OECD, 2024[36]). This is particularly significant for women, who are reported to benefit from increased knowledge, skills and agency in addressing climate risks (Kwauk and Braga, 2017[19]).

Researchers have also argued that the impact of climate education extends beyond learners to their families and communities, creating a spillover effect and potentially promoting widespread evolution in behaviours and norms (Damerell, Howe and Milner-Gulland, 2013[37]; OECD, 2022[38]; Nusche, Fuster Rabella and Lauterbach, 2024[17]). Research suggests that parents are more receptive to climate outreach when relayed through their children (Bhattacharya et al., 2024[39]). In India, for example, climate-related outreach to children reportedly increased the pro-climate behaviour of their parents by nearly 13% (Sabarwal et al., 2024[7]). However, the impact is not uniform; a study in Chile found that environmental education programmes did not significantly influence the opinions or behaviours of students' parents (Marcela et al., 2023[40]). By nurturing critical thinking, communication skills and an understanding of

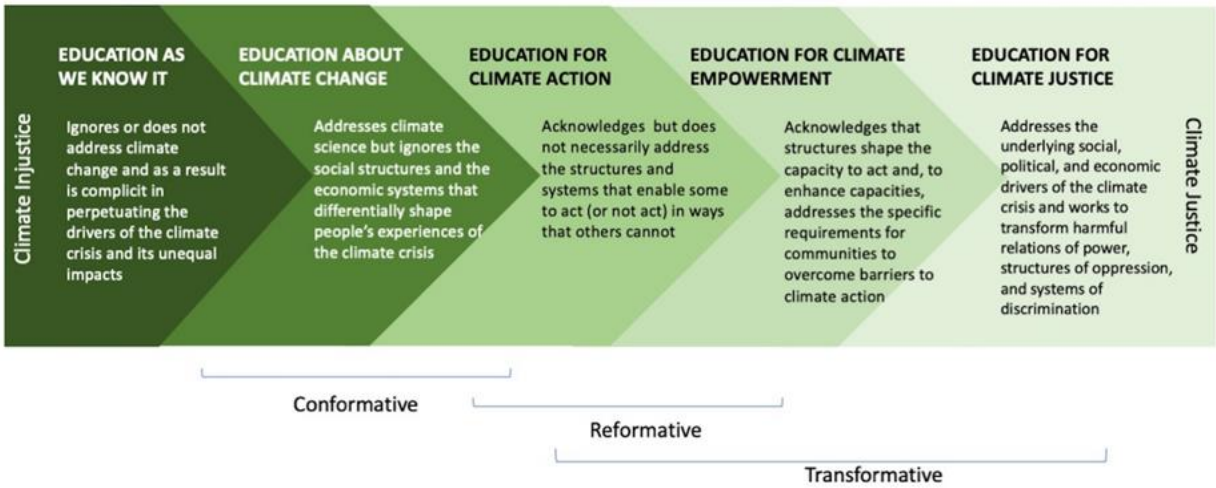
relevant issues, climate education can encourage students to promote ecofriendly behaviour and contribute meaningfully to climate change debates. High youth engagement is essential to shape public discourse and further drive collective climate action (OECD, 2024[36]).

Education policies must become more globally inclusive to drive truly transformative climate action. To be more globally inclusive, education policies must consider how they affect women and girls differently. They must also draw from grassroots movements, the expertise of Indigenous Peoples and non-Western environmental philosophies. Indigenous communities safeguard 80% of the world's remaining biodiversity, and hold invaluable knowledge of sustainable land management, climate resilience and environmental stewardship. Indigenous and local knowledge systems, passed down through generations, have long supported adaptation and mitigation strategies, yet climate change threatens their survival (Bapna, Simpson and Colenbrander, 2024[20]). Despite their proven effectiveness in managing natural hazards and conserving ecosystems, indigenous knowledge systems are frequently overlooked in formal climate and education policy (Nagrenda, 2018[41]).

Kwauk (2022[42]) systematises how education funders can contribute to climate education by repurposing the logic of the Gender Equality Continuum (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Education for Climate Justice Continuum

Repurposing the logic of the Gender Equality Continuum for education and climate



Source: (Kwauk, 2022[42])

The Gender Equality Continuum spans from "gender negative" policies (which reinforce inequalities) to "gender neutral" or "gender blind" policies (which do not challenge existing power structures) to "gender transformative" policies (which seek to redress and restructure inequitable systems). Similarly, Kwauk's Continuum of Education Approaches towards Climate Justice spans from "education as we know it" (which is complicit in perpetuating the drivers of climate) to "education for climate justice" (which actively seeks to address and dismantle structural inequalities) (Kwauk, 2022[42])

Both frameworks highlight the limitations of approaches that focus solely on knowledge dissemination or individual action without engaging with the underlying social, political and economic determinants of inequality. Gender-responsive and gender-transformative approaches aim to shift power dynamics and promote meaningful empowerment. In the same way, climate justice education moves beyond awareness and incremental action to challenge and transform systemic barriers, ensuring that climate responses are not only inclusive but also structurally equitable.

1.2. Bridging climate and education: Efforts to integrate climate change and education into international agreements

While the concept of environmental education has featured in global discourse since the 1960s, the integration of education and climate has gained increasing prominence in international frameworks over the past three decades (see Figure 2, which outlines education agreements in red and climate in green).

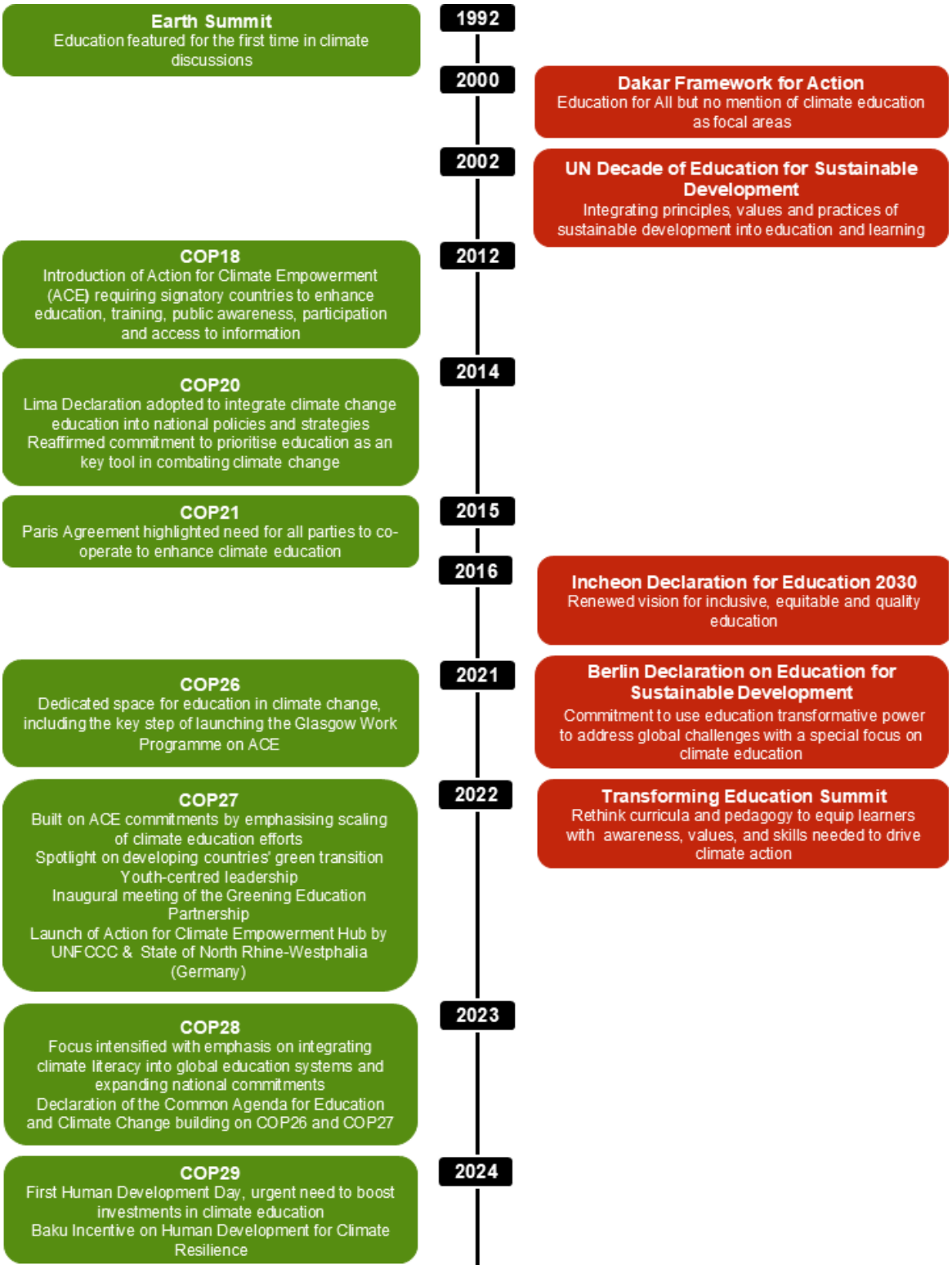
On the climate side, a gradually increasing number of agreements speaks to a wider political momentum. In 1992, the Earth Summit in Rio first linked climate and education, calling on signatories to deliver climate and education awareness programmes (Dubai Cares and SEEK Development, 2024[16]). Further key milestones include the launch of Action for Climate Empowerment at COP18, the Lima Declaration at COP20 and Article 6 of the Paris Agreement in 2015. Momentum gathered pace following the COVID-19 pandemic, and COP27 marked a turning point with the launch of UNESCO's Greening Education Partnership (GEP) and first Climate Literacy Hub (Beardmore, 2022[43]).

COP28 and COP29 further intensified climate efforts. COP28 underscored education's role in climate adaptation and mitigation and enhancing cross-sectoral co-ordination through initiatives like the Green Climate Fund and Global Partnership for Education's BRACE initiative.[2] Meanwhile, COP29 represented the first-time education was included in the official political programme as part of the multisectoral "Baku Initiative on Human Development for Climate Resilience" (Beardmore, 2024[44]).

On the education side, the UN General Assembly declared 2005-15 as the Decade for Sustainable Development, emphasising the need for education systems to integrate sustainability principles. Although this ambitious initiative aimed to place sustainability at the core of education systems, its implementation was often diluted, fragmented and lacked the necessary momentum to drive systemic change. Nevertheless, it played a foundational role in paving the way for the adoption of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, and specifically Target 4.7, which commits to ensuring that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development.

As was the case for the climate community, the COVID-19 pandemic exposed deep structural vulnerabilities in education systems and underscored the urgency for education actors to build long-term resilience. In response, the UN Secretary-General convened the Transforming Education Summit in 2022 at the UN General Assembly, highlighting the climate and education nexus (Dubai Cares and SEEK Development, 2024[16]). In particular, the UN Secretary-General's Vision Statement on Transforming Education further urged nations to reshape curricula and teaching methods to foster awareness, values and skills essential for driving climate action (UNESCO, 2022[45]). Likewise, in their Declaration on Building Equitable Societies Through Education in 2022, OECD Education Ministers called on the OECD's Education Policy Committee and other OECD committees to support countries "in fostering environmental sustainability through education" and in "building a new vision for skills development that supports the transition of societies to net-zero carbon emission" (OECD, 2022[46]).

Figure 2. An overview of joint climate and education-related international agreements



Note: The boxes in green designate climate conference; the boxes in red designate education conferences.
Source: Authors' elaboration.

While international agreements have increasingly recognised the critical link between education and climate, translating these commitments into concrete action requires effective implementation mechanisms. In response, a growing number of multi-stakeholder initiatives have emerged to operationalise these global commitments and scale greater integration of education and climate policies.

The most influential multi-stakeholder platform to date is the GEP, launched at the 2022 UN Secretary-General's Transforming Education Summit to drive implementation of climate change education. The GEP serves as a collaborative platform for all governments, intergovernmental organisations, civil society, youth, academia, and private and philanthropic sectors across the world to co-ordinate and enhance efforts towards adaptation, mitigation and funding. As of November 2024, the GEP comprised 96 member states and 1 600 organisations. The GEP also aims to mobilise additional investments to support member states in scaling up of high-quality education through the establishment of a Multi-Partner Trust Fund (UNESCO, 2023[47]; n.d.[48]).

The GEP broadly aligns with systems-thinking principles in that it engages a diverse range of stakeholders around a multi-level approach through four key action areas: greening curriculum, greening schools, greening communities, and greening teacher training and capacities (Figure 3) (UNESCO, n.d.[48]).

Figure 3. Greening Education Partnership's four action areas of transformative education

Source: Authors' elaboration based on (UNESCO, n.d.[48]).

Each action area has a specific target to drive co-ordinated global progress at the intersection of climate sustainability and education:

- By 2030: 90% of countries have a green national curriculum.[3]
- By 2030: 50% of world's schools are green-ready.[4]

- By 2030: Communities offer at least one lifelong learning programme on climate change.
- All GEP member states have professional teaching standards that include climate change.

While the term “greening” is broad and could be misused for greenwashing purposes, the GEP’s efforts are firmly rooted in internationally recognised, evidence-based standards. Developed in collaboration with ministries, non-governmental organisations, curriculum experts and youth voices, the “Greening curriculum guidance: Teaching and learning for climate action” provides a flexible, consultative framework for embedding climate education into national curricula. Piloted in multiple countries and refined through extensive stakeholder input, including at COP28, the guidance is built around four core principles: action-oriented, justice-promoting, quality-driven and contextually relevant. It outlines a ten-step process, from policy reviews and stakeholder engagement to curriculum integration, resource development and educator training. Whole-institution approaches, multi-sector partnerships and continuous monitoring support its effective implementation.

To assess progress, UNESCO recommends a multi-level monitoring and evaluation approach. National and school-level tools such as attendance records, curriculum audits and government reviews are complemented by global student assessments. This includes the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment global competence framework and the International Civics and Citizenship Study. Qualitative tools such as surveys, instructional logs and classroom observations offer deeper insights into learning outcomes and behavioural change.

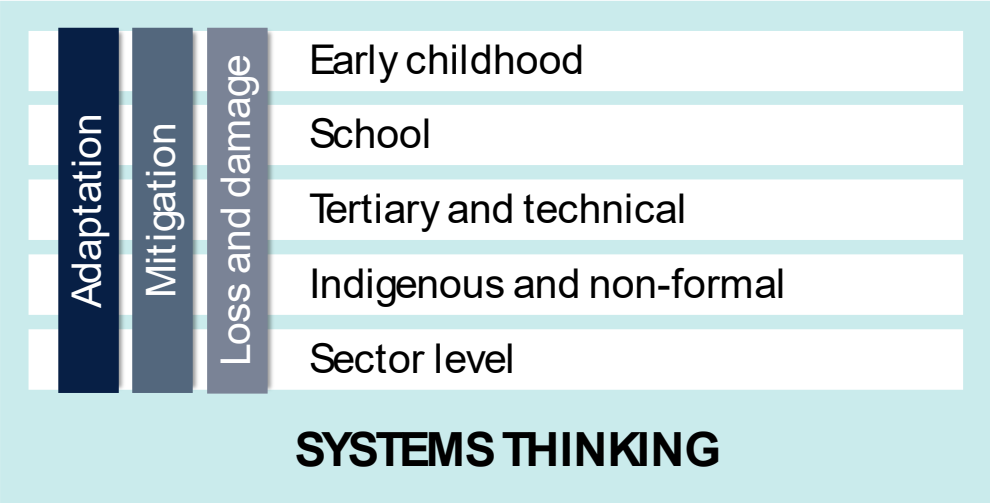
The GEP framework also supports alignment with broader sustainability goals through third-party verification and accreditation systems. These are structured around four key dimensions: inclusive school governance, climate-resilient facilities and operations, curriculum-based climate competencies and meaningful community engagement to foster local climate action.

In 2023, the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) launched a framework entitled “Towards Climate Smart Education Systems”. The framework aims to help low-income and lower middle-income countries enhance their adaptive capacity;[5] mitigate environmental impacts; and ensure their education systems are both protected from climate disruptions and actively contribute to sustainability efforts. It outlines seven key dimensions: data and evidence; policy and planning; co-ordination; finance; infrastructure; teaching and learning; and schools and communities.

Drawing on the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office’s Framework “Addressing the climate, environment, and biodiversity crises in and through girls’ education”, the GPE integrates the importance of gender equality throughout (GPE, 2023[49]). However, the framework has recently been criticised for taking “an input-driven approach to climate education without considering the reverse causality of the impact of education on climate change” and because “it also fails to include indigenous knowledge” (Bapna, Simpson and Colenbrander, 2024[20]).

In 2024, building on existing initiatives, ODI Global designed a Climate-Education Research Framework that seeks to consider the full complexity of the relationship between climate and education (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Adopting a systems-thinking approach for climate and education



Source: (Bapna, Simpson and Colenbrander, 2024[20]).

The framework links adaptation, mitigation, and loss and damage with five identifiable areas of education: early childhood, school, tertiary and technical, indigenous and non-formal, and sector level. The structure of the framework is informed by systems-thinking approaches used to indicate how different levels of education "shape culture, social norms and individual choices to inform low-carbon development paths and equip people to adapt to the impact of climate change". It is accompanied by examples of cross-cutting research questions for each intersection that are intended to help policymakers develop localised, holistic policies (Bapna, Simpson and Colenbrander, 2024[20]). By anchoring the framework within a lifelong learning perspective, it provides a clearer basis for designing, evaluating and scaling context-specific interventions. What constitutes effective practice will vary significantly across education levels, making it essential to distinguish strategies and outcomes by sector (OECD, 2025[28]).

OECD (2025[28]) argues for a holistic, lifecycle approach to sustainability education that offers age-appropriate learning opportunities to various groups. While initiatives for school-age children can reach learners at a critical developmental age, focusing on adult education is equally important. Given the urgency of the climate crisis and the speed of change in societies and economies, supporting relevant lifelong learning is essential to fostering effective societal responses within the timeframes required.

The growing integration of education and climate into international agreements has been accompanied by a proliferation of initiatives and frameworks to provide direction and coherence at this intersection. Each seeks to serve as an orienting compass for translating global commitments into systemic action. However, will these efforts deliver truly transformational change or risk enabling fragmented approaches and superficial engagement that are potentially vulnerable to greenwashing? Section 2 examines the available data, exploring the extent to which education development assistance and philanthropic funding have integrated climate objectives.

2 The role of education philanthropy in advancing climate objectives: Data insights

Official development assistance (ODA) and philanthropy are major financing streams for global education and climate action. This section explores how these two streams integrated climate and education objectives during 2020-23. In addition to analysing data from 40 large philanthropic foundations reported in the OECD Creditor Reporting System, the section examines philanthropy data to highlight trends, funding volumes, major funders and geographical focus. After comparing disbursements between ODA and philanthropies, the section explores why philanthropic funding is limited at the intersection of education, environment and climate.

To what extent is the political momentum around the integration of education and climate reflected in both philanthropic funding and official development assistance (ODA)? This section compares how education and climate objectives are integrated across these two financing streams over 2020-23. Specifically, it examines philanthropic funding reported to the OECD Creditor Reporting System (OECD CRS) by approximately 40 large philanthropic foundations in one of two ways:

- The "Environmental Education/Training" Purpose Code (43081) of the "General Environmental Protection" sub-sector
- Education philanthropy projects screened against the Environment and Rio markers (see Box 3).

Philanthropy data are analysed alongside ODA data to highlight trends over time, funding volumes, major funders and geographical focus.

Box 3. Tracking funding to the education and climate intersection using the OECD Creditor Reporting System

- **OECD Creditor Reporting System**

The OECD Creditor Reporting System (OECD CRS) is the central statistical reporting system of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC). Bilateral and multilateral providers of development co-operation report at item level in the OECD CRS on all flows of resources to developing countries. It is the internationally recognised data source of comparable and transparent data on official development assistance (ODA) and other resource flows to developing countries. Since 2009, it has included activities in support of development from philanthropic foundations, including bilateral activities and core contributions to multilateral organisations. In the latest update, 2022-23, approximately 40 cross-border international foundations reported to CRS. The CRS database focuses on cross-border flows for development (the equivalent of ODA). Consequently, it does not include either the full portfolio of data on domestic funding from its reporting foundations or data from foundations based in developing countries.

According to the DAC classification system, initiatives that target the education and climate intersection should be classified under the "multi-sector/cross-cutting" sector and the "General Environmental Protection" sub-sector.

- **Classification under the "Environmental Education/Training" Purpose Code of the "General Environmental Protection" sub-sector**

According to the DAC classification system, initiatives at the intersection of education and climate are generally reported under the "General Environmental Protection" sub-sector when environmental objectives are predominant. Activities designed to build knowledge, awareness and capacities for environmental sustainability are classified under the Purpose Code "Environmental Education/Training" (43081) (OECD DAC, 2024[50]).

This purpose code captures initiatives such as environmental education programmes; public awareness campaigns; and training activities that support climate change mitigation, adaptation and broader environmental protection goals. Following DAC reporting directives, if a project integrates objectives across sectors (e.g. education and climate), it should be classified under the sector that reflects the primary objective. The activity's secondary objectives, such as environment and/or climate co-benefits, are then recorded using policy markers, notably the Environmental and Rio markers (OECD DAC, 2024[51]).

However, some philanthropic organisations consider themselves to be primarily education funders. Consequently, they may classify their funding under the education sector instead. To account for this

possibility, this paper also looks at education-sector funding that targets at least one of the five Environment and Rio markers.

- **OECD Environment and Rio markers**

These policy markers serve as statistical tools that allow members to capture and assess the cross-cutting environmental dimensions of development co-operation activities. The DAC employs the markers to monitor development finance targeting. This comprises either environmental management/protection in general (1 "aid to environment" marker) or the more specific objectives of the Rio Conventions – i.e. UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity. The five Rio markers cover biodiversity, desertification, and climate change mitigation and adaptation (the latter two introduced in 2009).

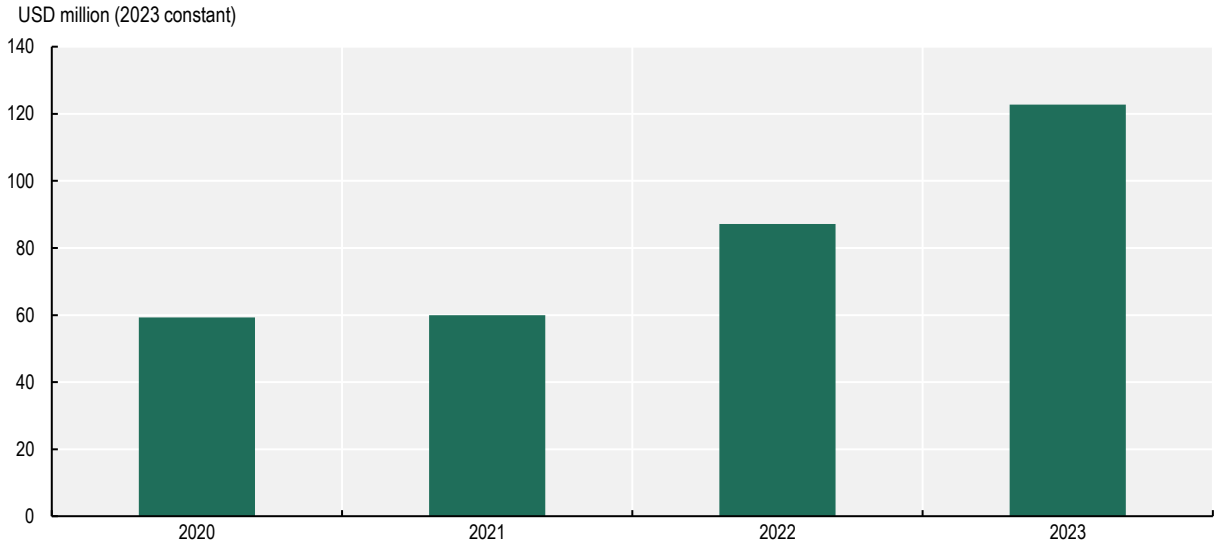
The five markers are designed to assess the degree to which DAC members integrate environmental and climate concerns into their development co-operation activities and to support members in preparing their national reports to the Conventions (Capacity4Dev, n.d.[52]).

As with all DAC policy markers, a three-point scoring system is applied to reported activities. This distinguishes between activities that address environmental objectives as a "principal" objective, a "significant" objective or an objective that is "not targeted". Activities marked as "principal" would not have been undertaken without that specific environmental objective. Those marked as "significant" pursue other primary goals but are formulated or adjusted to contribute to environmental management or the aims of the Conventions. Activities marked as "not targeted" have been assessed as not intending to produce improvements in the physical and/or biological environment of the recipient country, area or target, and – in the case of the Rio markers – are considered unrelated to the objectives of the respective Convention. This report considers all projects that targeted one of the five markers as a principal or significant objective as having climate and environment purpose.

2.1. ODA disbursements for environmental education and training remain limited but show gradual growth

Figure 5 illustrates total ODA disbursements for environmental objectives, distinguishing between total environmental funding and the portion classified under Purpose Code 43081. Disbursements classified under this purpose code remained relatively limited over the period, ranging from USD 59 million in 2020 to USD 123 million in 2023. This accounted for approximately 1.3% to 2.7% of total environment-related ODA, which exceeded USD 4 billion annually.

Figure 5. ODA disbursements for environmental education and training, 2020-23



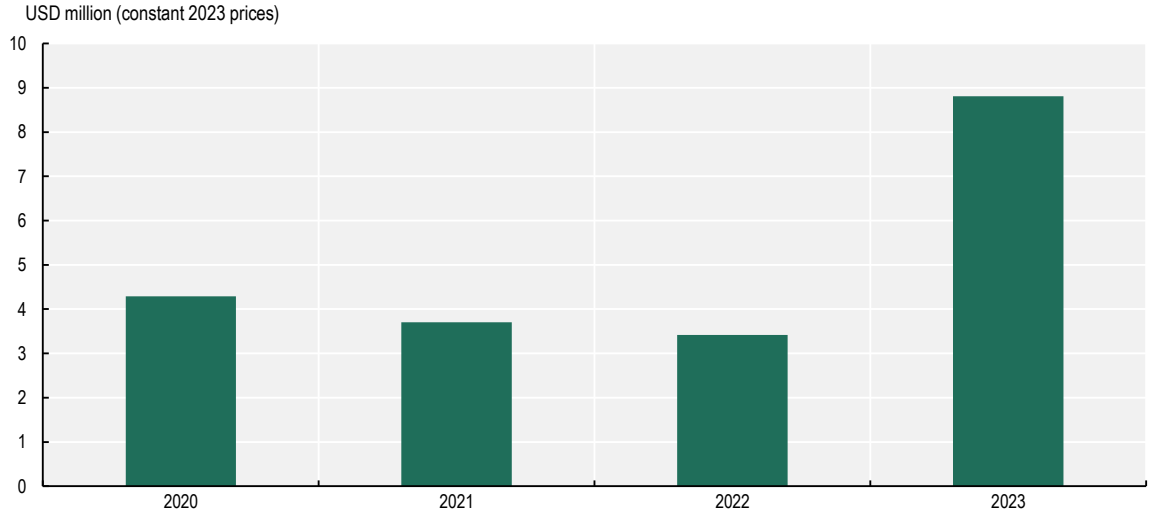
Note: Activities classified as targeting the intersection are all activities that fall under the "Environmental Education/Training" Purpose Code (43081) of the "General Environmental Protection" sub-sector in the OECD Creditor Reporting System.
Source: (OECD, 2024[53]).

2.2. Compared to ODA, philanthropic support for environmental education and training is modest in scale and less consistent over time

Cross-border philanthropic disbursements for projects that simultaneously target education, environment and climate goals remain limited and have not shown a consistent upward trend.

Figure 6 presents philanthropic disbursements classified under Purpose Code 43081 *only*, without comparing these to total environmental funding. These disbursements remained modest between 2020 and 2022, decreasing from USD 4.3 million to USD 3.4 million, before increasing sharply to USD 8.8 million in 2023. This sharp increase was mainly driven by new projects launched by three large donors (Dutch Postcode Lottery, Ford Foundation and Open Society Foundation). Over 2020-23, total environmental philanthropy ranged from USD 654 million to USD 1.04 billion annually, with education-related projects accounting for just 0.4% on average.

Figure 6. Philanthropic disbursements for environmental education and training, 2020-23



Note: This figure depicts activities that fall under the "Environmental Education/Training" Purpose Code (43081) of the "General Environmental Protection" sub-sector in the OECD Creditor Reporting System only.
Source: (OECD, 2024[53]).

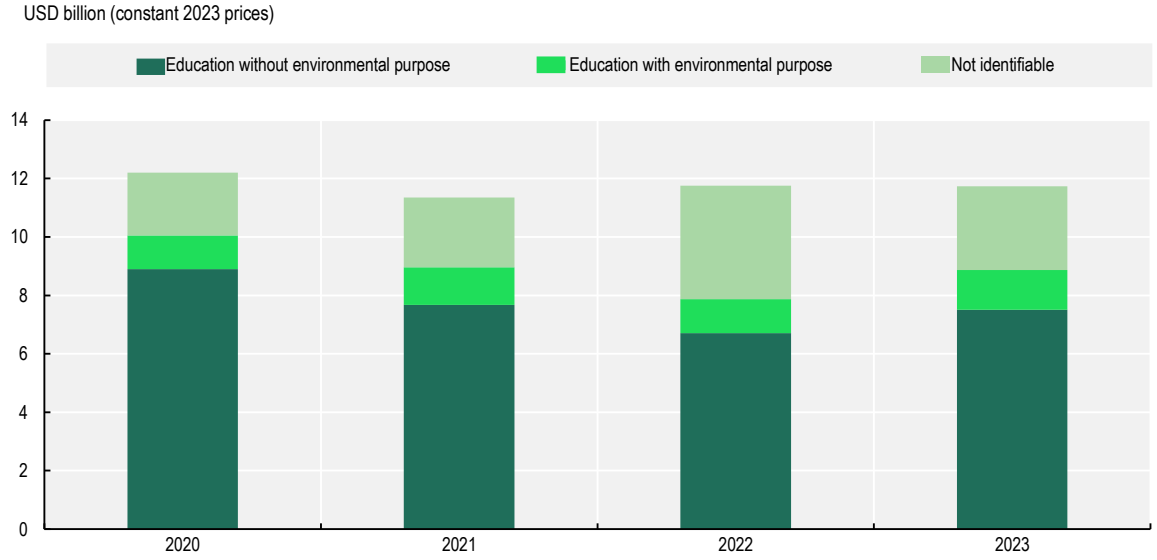
2.3. ODA funding for education is increasingly integrating environmental and climate objectives

Analysis of philanthropic disbursements that fall under Purpose Code 43081 in the OECD CRS likely underestimates the broader set of education initiatives with environmental objectives that may be classified under other sectors. Therefore, Figure 7 employs a different methodology, illustrating the share of ODA education disbursements that target environmental and climate objectives over the same period. This second methodology uses Environmental and Rio marker screening to identify education sector projects that address the environment, climate change mitigation or adaptation, biodiversity or desertification as either a "principal" or "significant" objective.

As shown in Figure 7, using this second method identifies a larger share of ODA disbursed at the intersection of education, environment and climate. In fact, ODA for projects that simultaneously target education, environmental and climate goals was USD 1.36 billion in 2023. In addition, the figure shows that ODA for education, environment and climate experienced a 20% increase between 2020 and 2023, suggesting that ODA funders have growing interest in this intersection.

However, funding for the education, environment and climate intersection remains a limited share of total ODA education disbursements. It represented 9.5% of total education funding in 2020 and 11.6% of total education funding in 2023.

Figure 7. ODA disbursements on education screened against the Environment and Rio markers



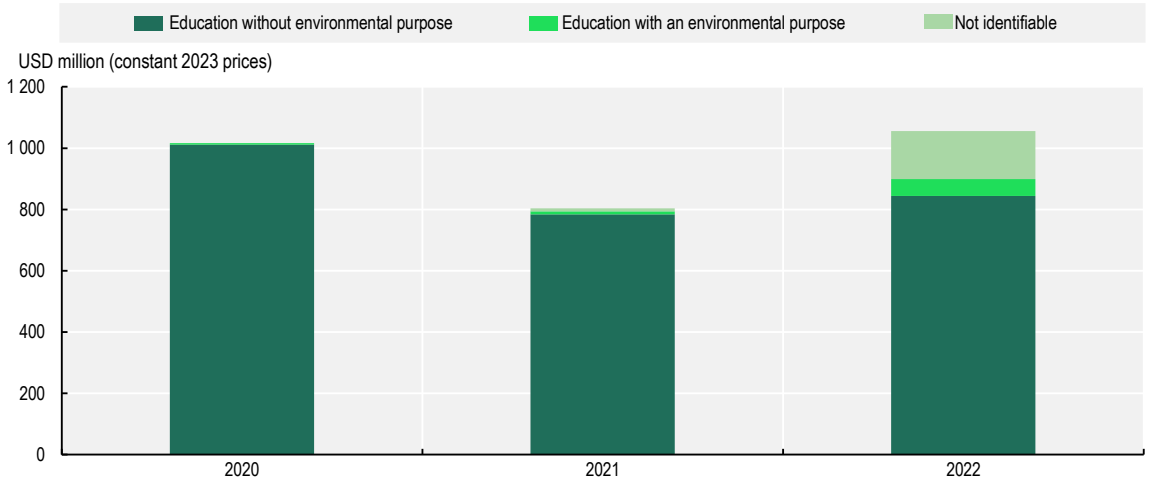
Note: The category "Education with environmental or climate purpose" includes activities in the education sector targeting one or more of the Environment or Rio markers as a principal or significant objective. Education-sector activities not screened for these markers have been classified as "Not identifiable".
Source: (OECD, 2024[53]).

2.4. The integration of environmental and climate objectives remains limited across education philanthropies

Figure 8 applies Environment and Rio marker screening to identify the proportion of education disbursements targeting environmental and climate objectives to philanthropies between 2020 and 2023. The data indicate that philanthropic support for projects at the intersection of education and climate remained modest in scale and less consistent over time compared to ODA disbursements.

The data show that education-sector disbursements tagged with environmental objectives using Environment and/or Rio marker screening accounted for just 0.5% of total philanthropic education funding in 2020, rising to 1.2% in 2021. They rose to 4.8% in 2022, when disbursements reached USD 55.2 million.

Figure 8. Philanthropic disbursements on education screened against the Environment and Rio markers



Note: The category "Education with environmental or climate purpose" includes activities in the education sector targeting one or more of the Environment or Rio markers as a principal or significant objective. Education-sector activities not screened for these markers have been classified as "Not identifiable".
Source: (OECD, 2024[53]).

2.5. All measurements show that sub-Saharan Africa is the top recipient of both ODA and philanthropy, at the intersection of education, environment and climate

Figure 9 and Figure 10 present the regional distribution of disbursements for ODA and philanthropy, respectively, using the two different classification methods outlined above. The left-hand side of each figure shows disbursements classified under Purpose Code 43081. The right-hand side of each figure shows education disbursements screened against the Environment and/or Rio marker to identify education-sector projects that also pursue environmental or climate objectives.

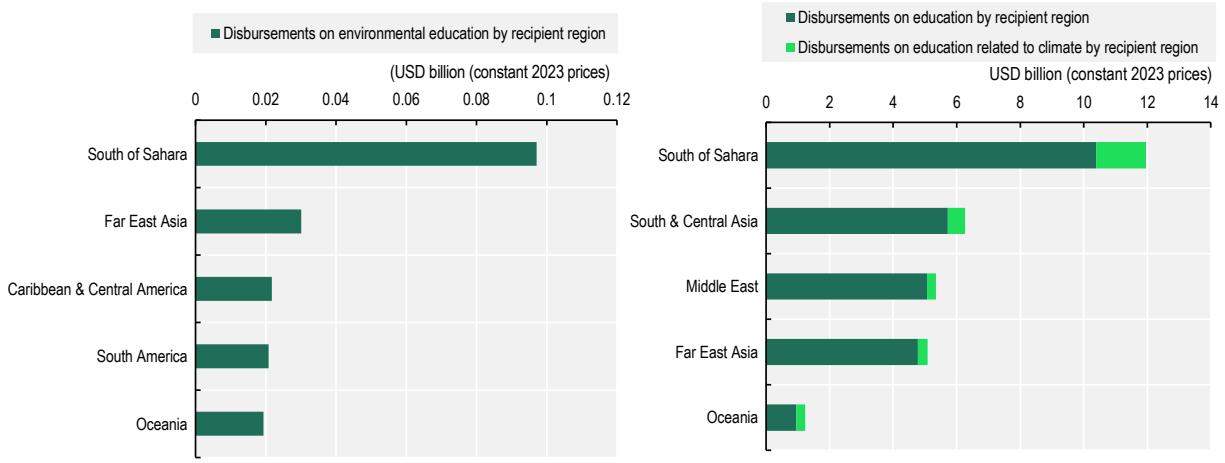
For ODA classified under Purpose Code 43081, sub-Saharan Africa received the largest share (51%) of environmental education disbursements between 2020 and 2023. Smaller volumes were directed to Far East Asia (USD 30 million, or 16%), the Caribbean and Central America (USD 21 million, or 11%), South America (USD 20 million, or 10%) and Oceania (USD 19 million, or 10%). Funding was concentrated in a limited number of regions, with no reported disbursements in most others.

ODA education projects identified through screening against Environmental and Rio markers show a similar regional pattern, with a strong concentration. Sub-Saharan Africa again received the largest share (51.1%), totalling USD 1.56 billion. South and Central Asia, the Middle East, Far East Asia and Oceania also received substantial volumes (USD 1.39 billion). Together, these five regions accounted for just over a quarter of total disbursements in the category of marker-screened, education-sector projects with an environmental and/or climate purpose (27%).

Philanthropic disbursements classified under Purpose Code 43081 were concentrated in sub-Saharan Africa and in regional or unspecified allocations, each accounting for over USD 6 million between 2020 and 2023. Much smaller amounts were directed to Africa (unspecified), South America, and the Caribbean and Central America.

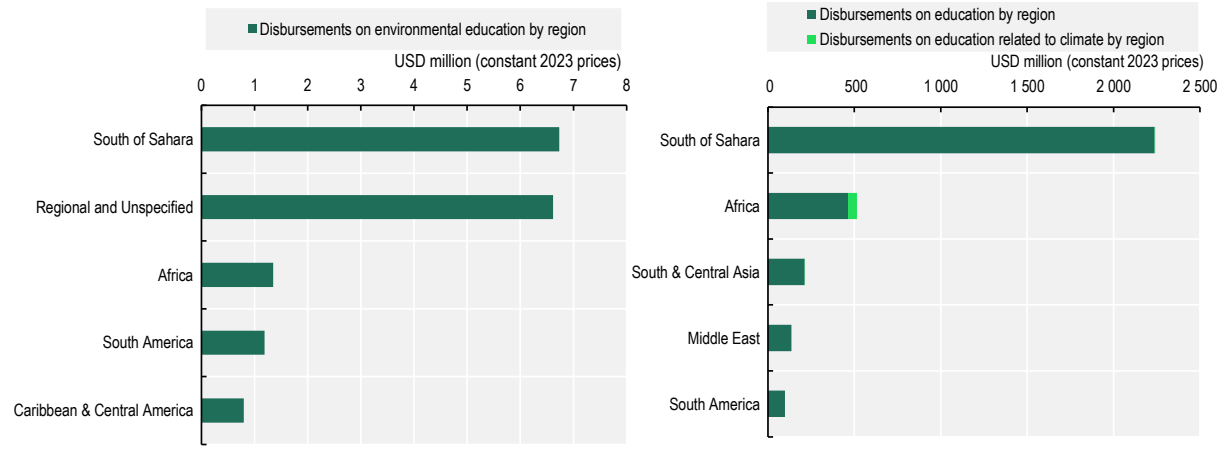
Philanthropic education projects identified through screening against Environmental and Rio markers were even more geographically concentrated. Africa (regional) received the largest share, totalling USD 51.7 million. Sub-Saharan Africa followed with USD 2.4 million, and South and Central Asia with less than USD 20 000. Philanthropic support in this area was more geographically concentrated than overall philanthropic education aid. Regional-level allocations dominated, with limited disbursements reported at the subregional or country level.

Figure 9. Regional distribution of ODA disbursements targeting the education, environment and climate intersection, 2023



Note: The left-hand side presents projects reported under "Environmental Education/Training" Purpose Code (43081) of the "General Environmental Protection" sub-sector in the OECD Creditor Reporting System only. The right-hand side presents education-sector activities marked as targeting the Environment and/or the Rio markers as a "principal" or "significant" objective. These fall under the category "Education related to environment and climate".
Source: OECD (2024), Creditor Reporting System (CRS), www.oecdlibrary.org/development/data/creditor-reporting-system_dev-cred-data-en.

Figure 10. Regional distribution of philanthropic disbursements targeting the education, environment and climate intersection, 2023



The left-hand side presents projects reported under "Environmental Education/Training" Purpose Code (43081) of the "General Environmental Protection" sub-sector in the OECD Creditor Reporting System only. The right-hand side presents education-sector activities marked as targeting the Environment and/or the Rio markers as a "principal" or "significant" objective. These fall under the category "Education related to environment and climate".
Source: (OECD, 2024[53]).

2.6. Explaining the limited philanthropic funding at the intersection of education, environment and climate

What factors help explain the gap between the growing political momentum for integrating education and climate, and the limited philanthropic funding at this intersection? A definitive explanation for the limited philanthropic funding at the intersection of education and climate remains elusive. However, several plausible theories are explored below.

2.6.1. The perceived role of education funders

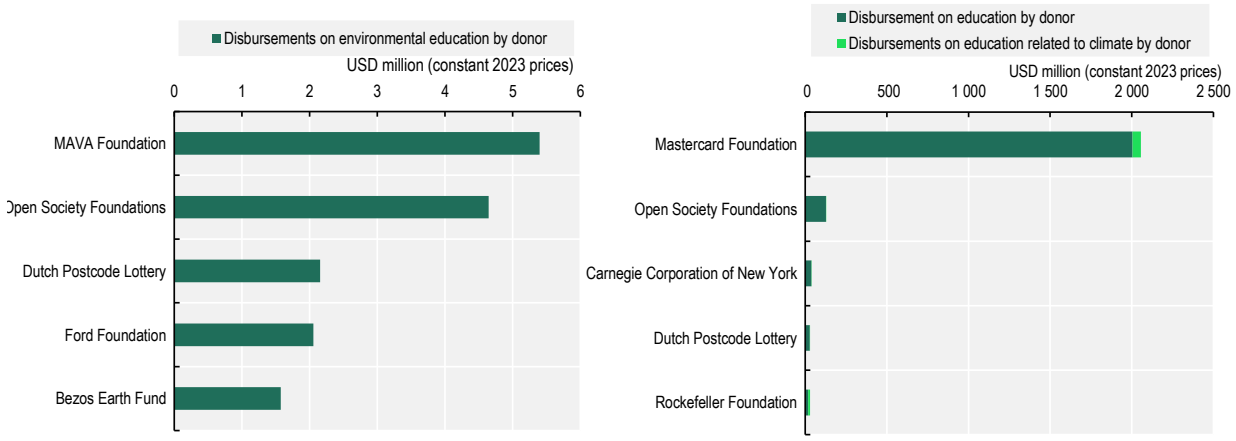
Historically, many education-focused philanthropies have not engaged directly with climate-related issues. As climate concerns have intensified, there is now an urgent need for these funders to reconsider and broaden their mandates. However, the education sector itself remains highly siloed, with actors frequently divided by thematic or disciplinary "tribes", thereby creating structural barriers to cross-sectoral engagement.

The data support this theory, showing that climate funders investing in climate education are a different community compared to education funders integrating climate objectives. Figure 11 presents philanthropic disbursements using two classification approaches: the left-hand side shows projects reported under Purpose Code 43081 and the right-hand side shows education-sector projects tagged with environmental or climate objectives based on Environment and/or Rio marker screening.

Disbursements reported under Purpose Code 43081 were led by the MAVA Foundation and Open Society Foundations, followed by the Dutch Postcode Lottery, Ford Foundation and Bezos Earth Fund. In all cases, disbursements were under USD 6 million over 2020-23.

Projects that simultaneously target education and climate goals by foundation over the same period were led by the Mastercard Foundation, which disbursed USD 51.1 million, followed by the Rockefeller Foundation (USD 11.3 million). Other funders in the top five, namely the Dutch Postcode Lottery, Open Society Foundations and Carnegie Corporation of New York, each disbursed under USD 2 million. Although these actors were also among the leading funders of education overall, such projects represented only a small share of their philanthropic portfolios.

Figure 11. Top philanthropic donors targeting the education, environment and climate intersection



Note: The left-hand side presents projects reported under "Environmental Education/Training" Purpose Code (43081) of the "General Environmental Protection" sub-sector in the OECD Creditor Reporting System only. The right-hand side presents education-sector activities marked as targeting the Environment and/or the Rio markers as a "principal" or "significant" objective. These fall under the category "Education related to environment and climate".
Source: (OECD, 2024[53]).

2.6.2. Lack of awareness of the urgent need to resource education and climate priorities

Philanthropic organisations and foundations may not have yet fully recognised the critical urgency of resourcing initiatives at the intersection of education and climate, particularly across low- and middle-income countries. Funding patterns continue to indicate a preference for supporting traditional education priorities. Between 2023 and 2030, the annual financing gap for education in low-income and lower middle-income countries is projected to reach USD 97 billion (UNESCO, 2023[54]).

This gap has been exacerbated by the enduring impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, reductions in national education budgets and a decline in international aid for education. Consequently, constrained resources have obliged policymakers to prioritise foundational literacy and numeracy, relegating the integration of climate change education to a secondary concern (Kwauk, 2020[55]). This dynamic is particularly pronounced in lower-income countries, where educational systems are simultaneously attempting to navigate acute climate vulnerabilities and fundamental service delivery challenges. As a result, education initiatives that integrate climate concerns, or adopt a climate justice approach, are frequently perceived as additional rather than integral to national education strategies.

Closely related to these funding dynamics is the prevailing orientation of education systems towards standardised assessments and core subject areas. Such an approach often reinforces social structures rather than promoting transformative change. Certain scholars argue that a radical reimagining of education is required, one that embraces an inclusive vision oriented towards climate justice alongside the traditional emphasis on literacy and numeracy (Kwauk, 2020[55]; UNESCO, 2021[56]; Droubi et al., 2023[57]).

However, a key impediment to such a shift is the lack of sufficient teacher training. A recent UNESCO survey of 58 000 teachers across 144 countries found that fewer than 40% felt confident teaching climate change topics. Meanwhile, only 55% had received formal training related to climate change and sustainability. Furthermore, less than half of the schools surveyed had implemented structured action plans to address climate-related challenges. Without a systemic overhaul in funding priorities and educational strategies, the gap between climate education and broader learning goals is likely to persist.

2.6.3. The limitations of OECD data collection

A third possible explanation for the patterns lies in the limitations of the OECD data collection architecture:

- As outlined in Box 3, the current methodology relies either on Purpose Code 43081 or on the Environmental and Rio markers. Many initiatives embed educational components that are not easily identifiable under existing codes. Consequently, this classification system may inadvertently obscure the extent of philanthropic activity at the intersection of education and climate.
- Not only are the Environmental and Rio markers a subjective way to capture climate engagement, but they were also primarily created for bilateral donor reporting. Foundations may not be familiar with how the markers operate when reporting project-level data, resulting in under-reporting or misreporting of relevant initiatives.[6]
- The time lag inherent in data collection further complicates the picture: many new initiatives, such as the Greening Education Partnership, have been launched within the past five years, making it premature to assess their full impact on philanthropic strategies.
- The OECD CRS only includes data from approximately 40 large foundations that voluntarily report their activities. This limitation excludes smaller cross-border and domestic philanthropic actors, potentially overlooking significant contributions by smaller organisations working at the intersection of education and climate. This limitation will be addressed in the forthcoming third edition of the *Private Philanthropy for Development* report from the OECD Centre on Philanthropy. This report, which informs the work of the OECD Network of Foundations Working for Development, is due for release in early 2026. For the first time, the dataset will include two Rio markers, enabling the

identification and tracking of education-related funding that also targets climate change mitigation and adaptation.

The available data on philanthropic approaches to integrating climate action and education provide limited insight into how foundations are funding initiatives at this intersection. This paper seeks to address this gap by examining to what extent education philanthropy integrates climate objectives in its practices across low- and middle- income countries. Findings from this research are presented in Section 3.

3 Education philanthropy for climate: Mapping of practices and insights

A growing number of international agreements and platforms seek to integrate education and climate, emphasising the contributions of all providers of development finance. This section explores the alignment of philanthropic organisations with these objectives, including where they concentrate their efforts and the extent to which their programmes contribute to systemic change and justice. It draws on various sources for this analysis, including secondary literature, semi-structured interviews and a policy dialogue on the role of education philanthropy in supporting climate action. Rather than identifying good practices, the section provides a snapshot of emerging activity at the intersection of education and climate.

To what extent does education philanthropy engage and align with the international agreements and platforms that seek to operationalise education and climate commitments? Where within the education and climate intersection does education philanthropy concentrate its efforts? Within these efforts, and to what extent, do education-focused philanthropic programmes contribute to systemic change and climate justice?

This section explores these questions to understand how philanthropy is supporting the intersection between climate and education across low- and middle- income countries. To that end, the authors drew on an extensive review of publicly available secondary literature on the intersection, including publicly available information on philanthropic programmes. They also conducted semi-structured interviews with philanthropic organisations and philanthropic-affiliated entities (see Annex A for a list of participating organisations and Annex B for detail on the questionnaires). Finally, they took part in a policy dialogue co-hosted by the OECD netFWD and the Abdulla Al Ghurair Foundation. The dialogue – "Enabling Green Education: Role of Philanthropy in a Sustainable Future" – was held in the United Arab Emirates in April 2025.

The authors contacted both education and climate philanthropic organisations for interviews. However, low response rates meant that most interviews were held with organisations that self-identified primarily as education funders beginning to integrate climate objectives rather than with climate funders incorporating education objectives. While further research is needed, this finding is noteworthy: despite growing political momentum around climate action at the international level, there appears to be greater momentum, and perhaps greater perceived responsibility, among education-focused philanthropies to integrate climate considerations rather than the reverse.

Most initiatives presented in this section are relatively recent. As such, comprehensive impact assessments or long-term evaluations have not yet been conducted. It remains to be seen which approaches will prove most effective over time. This section does not seek to promote any specific programme as best practice; rather, it aims to provide a snapshot of emerging activity at the intersection of education and climate. The mapping and examples included are intended to inspire and inform education funders that are beginning to engage in this space. This dialogue will evolve, including through ongoing exchanges within the OECD Network for Foundations Working for Development (netFWD) Education Working Group.

3.1. Key messages from the semi-structured interviews

3.1.1. Respondents conveyed a range of terminology and approaches to this intersection, including varying engagement with international harmonisation processes

During the semi-structured interviews, participants explained taking varied approaches to defining the education and climate intersection. These definitions reflected diverse priorities, geographies and strategic outlooks. While some participants aligned with international frameworks such as UNESCO's Greening Education Partnership (GEP), others chose to adopt terminology that resonates with their local grantee organisations. Many adopt a systems-thinking approach, either focusing on climate resilience with education seen as a pathway or focusing on leveraging technical or curriculum-based solutions to help shift mindsets and paradigms. Many organisations acknowledge a tension between fixed definitions and flexible, context-driven approaches, preferring adaptability to meet evolving educational and environmental needs. Some are wary of politicised terminology, particularly "green education", which they argue will likely lead to greenwashing.

3.1.2. Many organisations highlighted the difficulty in tracking the impact of their education and climate interventions

Participants highlighted a wide range of approaches to assessing impact in education and climate initiatives, reflecting both the diversity of their operational contexts and the evolving nature of the field. While some organisations have begun integrating baseline and post-intervention assessments into programme design, others remain in the early stages of formalising measurement frameworks. Some interpret impact through long-term, qualitative insights rather than standardised metrics, embedding reflection and adaptation into their implementation cycles. Others are experimenting with participatory evaluation strategies or developing shared indicators aligned with teaching and learning outcomes, gender inclusion and climate awareness.

The tension between measuring systemic transformation and capturing short-term outputs was evident across the board, especially given the often cross-cutting and localised nature of climate education. While a few organisations are piloting evaluation models in partnership with research institutions, others acknowledge that earlier efforts lacked rigour or continuity. Despite these challenges, many are moving towards more structured approaches, including sustainability planning, longitudinal tracking of trained individuals and the creation of internal units dedicated to impact assessment. Still, capturing the collective effect across diverse geographies and programme types remains complex, particularly as many efforts operate within systems that prioritise agility and responsiveness over rigid evaluation frameworks.

3.1.3. Respondents see the value of philanthropy continuing to invest and scale projects at this intersection

Respondents expressed a shared belief in the unique and evolving role of philanthropy at the intersection of education and climate, while highlighting the complexity and fragmentation of current efforts. Many see philanthropy as a powerful convening force that can bridge silos between education and climate actors, facilitate more dialogue and elevate locally rooted solutions that align with both environmental and educational priorities. Some noted the need for philanthropy to be more agile in responding to emerging policy windows, such as national climate commitments or global education strategies, when education and climate do intersect. While certain foundations focus on supporting government-led implementation and curriculum integration, others are investing in grassroots, non-formal education and ecosystem-based programming that emphasises long-term impact over short-term deliverables.

The value of networks like the OECD's netFWD emerged as a consistent theme, both as a mechanism for sharing lessons learnt and as a foundation for co-funding scalable models. However, respondents indicated that networks could do more to unlock finance. Networks could also work harder to build a collective vision around reaching underserved beneficiaries through partnerships that elevate the work of those closest to the ground. Across the board, there was awareness that philanthropic actors must not only invest but also reflect, constantly asking who is missing from the conversation and how power can be shared in shaping sustainable futures.

3.2. Where within the climate and education intersection does education philanthropy concentrate its efforts?

Findings from the mapping of secondary literature, the semi-structured interviews and the policy dialogue reveal that philanthropic engagement at the intersection of education and climate action in low- and middle-income countries can be grouped into five interconnected thematic areas (Figure 12). These areas comprise green skills development, teacher training, curriculum integration, education and climate justice, and support for climate-friendly essential child services. This section explores each of these areas in more detail, painting a picture of varied philanthropic activity at this intersection. It reveals growing emphasis on collaboration for

innovative and locally led, context-sensitive approaches to building education systems fit for a climate-affected future.

Data reported to the OECD Creditor Reporting System (CRS) fall under either the "Environmental Education/Training" Purpose Code (43081) of the "General Environmental Protection" sub-sector or against the Environmental and Rio markers. Even together, they do not provide sufficient granularity to determine how funding is distributed across the five thematic sub-areas of the education and climate intersection. As such, further research will be required to uncover more detailed patterns of philanthropic investment. This could potentially apply artificial intelligence tools to analyse project descriptions. Such a deeper analysis could be undertaken following the release of the upcoming *Private Philanthropy for Development – Third Edition* report, once the updated dataset is released in 2026.

Figure 12. Mapping philanthropic support for education and climate across low- and middle-income countries

Source: Authors' elaboration.

3.2.1. Green skills development

As clarified in Section 1, green skills encompass a broad range of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) skills, as well as problem solving, leadership and adaptability, making them relevant across industries (Sabarwal et al., 2024[7]). For instance, studies from Egypt, India and Kenya indicate that less than half of green job postings explicitly require STEM qualifications, demonstrating that green skills can be applied across diverse career paths (Sabarwal et al., 2024[7]).

Studies have clarified the expected impact of the global green transition on the labour market, highlighting (i) the emergence of new job types; (ii) the displacement of certain roles; and (iii) the evolving demands for skills and knowledge across many occupations (Chang and Mann, 2024[58]; OECD, 2024[59]). This analysis is consistent with observable trends in labour markets across low- and middle- income countries. For example, in Africa, green skills are essential for the development of renewable energy and sustainable infrastructure, sectors expected to generate millions of new jobs by 2050 (AUC/OECD, 2024[60]). However, such skills are equally relevant in industries that are not conventionally considered "green". Studies show

that in Brazil, 25% of skills required in the food and beverage sector and 17% in creative industries incorporate green competencies. This highlights how sustainability is becoming an essential part of business operations across various fields (Sabarwal et al., 2024[7]).

Indeed, the actual skill sets needed for green jobs are essentially the same as those used in emission-intensive roles, even if they are applied at varying levels and intensities (OECD, 2024[59]). As Chang and Mann (2024[58]) indicate, the transition to a green economy is not solely about creating new jobs; it is also about transforming existing roles. In Indonesia, 76% of businesses acknowledge that adapting current job functions to incorporate sustainability practices presents their greatest challenge (Sabarwal et al., 2024[7]). This underscores the need for training programmes that equip workers with green skills in their current professions rather than forcing an occupational overhaul.

The transformative potential of green skills, both for the labour market and for strengthening community resilience, becomes especially evident when applied to marginalised populations. Some 1 billion children, for example, live in countries with extremely high risks of climate and environmental shocks (UNICEF, 2025[61]). Other groups at high risk include women and girls, displaced individuals and vulnerable youth. The examples below illustrate varied approaches to building green skills in marginalised populations:

- In Saudi Arabia, King Khalid Foundation's "Green Opportunities Grant" upholds the GEP's commitment to greening education as a lifelong learning opportunity. To that end, it helps non-profit organisations implement projects that equip low-income communities with green vocational skills, such as organic farming, eco-tourism and renewable energy. In so doing, it fosters inclusive green employment and sustainable development (Alsharan, 2023[62]).
- In India, the ReNew Foundation, a climate-focused philanthropic organisation, exemplifies how environmental funders are expanding their scope to include education through green skills development. In partnership with the Self-Employed Women's Association and the United Nations Environment Programme, ReNew launched Project ReNew Surya to train low-income women salt-pan workers as solar technicians. By offering skills that directly translate into employment, with some participants earning up to seven times their previous income, the initiative addresses both economic exclusion and environmental sustainability (ReNew, 2024[63]).

Displaced and vulnerable youth also stand to benefit significantly from green-skilling initiatives (see Box 4). Certainly, with over 60% of the global workforce engaged in the informal sector, targeted green training programmes can provide economic opportunities for those traditionally excluded from stable employment pathways (Sabarwal et al., 2024[7]).

Both the mapping and semi-structured interviews revealed that philanthropy and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have a unique capacity to test innovative green skills policies and programmes relevant for local contexts that governments can later help promote and scale. In Egypt, for example, the Greenish Foundation's student-led Greenish Clubs have reached more than 270 students over at least 20 governorates. They engage youth in hands-on projects and workshops focused on climate change, waste management, biodiversity and renewable energy (Greenish Clubs, 2025[64]). During the semi-structured interview, the organisation also shared that it is actively working to gain government recognition and attract donor support to scale this model nationally, demonstrating how grassroots innovation can help inform systemic change.

Box 4. Education Above All Foundation: Empowering youth as global citizens for climate action in Viet Nam

Led by the Education Above All Foundation in partnership with ActionAid, the "Engaging Youth as Global Citizens" programme in Viet Nam aims to equip marginalised youth with green skills to advance sustainable development and climate resilience. The initiative targets young farmers (particularly women); ethnic minority youth; and youth with disabilities across rural, mountainous and urban areas. In so doing, it builds technical competencies, transferable skills and transformative capacities.

Participants engage in activities such as climate-smart agriculture training, leadership and networking development, and advocacy for environmental action. Scholarships support environmental research, while seed funding enables youth-led climate and sustainable development projects.

Since its inception, the programme has reached over 13 900 youth, supported 20 youth-led initiatives, strengthened the green skills of 433 young farmers and researchers, and established the Viet Nam Green Generation Network, now with 303 active members. Broader outreach campaigns have engaged 10 000 additional stakeholders offline and 2 000 youth online.

This example illustrates the role of targeted philanthropic investment in building inclusive, youth-driven pathways for climate action.

Source: Example adapted from (UNICEF, 2024[65]).

3.2.2. Empowering teachers as agents of change

As trusted messengers who bridge schools and communities, teachers can link climate issues to cultural, social and economic contexts, and equip learners with necessary green skills (Drewes, Henderson and Mouza, 2017[66]; FCDO, 2022[67]). Nevertheless, many teachers lack the training, resources and institutional support necessary to teach climate change effectively (Sabarwal et al., 2024[7]). Two cases are highlighted below:

- As previously noted, the 2021 UNESCO survey of 58 000 teachers across 144 countries found that fewer than 40% felt confident teaching climate change topics. Meanwhile, only 55% had received formal training related to climate change and sustainability.
- Also in 2021, the OECD-UNESCO-Education International Teaching for Climate Action initiative surveyed 850 teachers across 157 countries, revealing limited access to professional learning, rigid curricula and weak support for collaboration (OECD, 2022[25]). These challenges are especially acute in low- and middle-income countries. For example, analysis of six low- and middle-income countries found that 87% of teachers included climate topics in their lessons. However, nearly 71% answered at least one basic climate-related question incorrectly (Sabarwal et al., 2024[7]). This insufficient training is also reflected in learning outcomes, with 70% of students reporting that their education had not equipped them to face climate challenges (Dubai Cares and SEEK Development, 2024[16]).

Mapping and interviews revealed emerging initiatives – including those led by philanthropy – that aim to equip teachers with the tools and autonomy to teach climate change in locally relevant ways:

- In 2019 and 2020, the Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE) invited teachers to co-develop action-oriented pedagogy by submitting lesson plans linked to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Eco-Schools, 2025[68]). The organisation also developed the FEE

Academy, which contains free online resources for teachers and others to support climate action and environmental protection (FEE, 2025[69]).

- The Aga Khan Foundation, Learning Planet Institute and Teach for All collaborated to create Teachers for the Planet, a community of practice that showcases more than 100 teacher-led climate solutions from over 60 countries (Teachers for the Planet, n.d.[70]).
- In the United States, the Climate Academy offers intensive professional development for teachers, including a summer institute and follow-up sessions on both climate content and pedagogy. Analysis found the programme had helped both teachers and students to understand scientific concepts. However, it also had limited impact on fostering student engagement with real-world climate solutions such as adaptation and mitigation (Drewes, Henderson and Mouza, 2017[66]).

While these initiatives mark important progress, Kwauk (2020[55]) has highlighted they often depend heavily on individual teacher or local initiative. Without systemic support for teachers, climate education will remain fragmented and ineffective in equipping students with the knowledge, skills and agency needed to address climate challenges. Transforming teaching into a truly green profession is more than an educational imperative: it is also a critical climate resilience strategy that can empower future generations to drive sustainable and equitable change (Dubai Cares and SEEK Development, 2024[16]). As such, a multi-stakeholder approach is essential to upskilling educators and ensuring that climate education is both scientifically accurate and socially transformative. Two good examples are CO-CREATE (Box 5) and the GEP's efforts to establish professional teaching standards that include climate change and make teaching a truly "green" profession (UNESCO, 2024[71]).

Box 5. CO-CREATE: Advancing climate-responsive education in Tanzania

Launched in 2023, CO-CREATE (Collaborative Opportunities for Climate Resilience, Empowerment and Transformation through Education) partnered with the Tanzanian Government to operationalise nationally recommended climate coping strategies for education into teacher-led and youth-led climate solutions, with a particular focus on advancing gender equality and inclusion.

Implemented through the Aga Khan Foundation's Schools2030 programme, CO-CREATE partnered with 90 schools and 12 civil society organisations in the Lindi Region (rural, coastal and climate vulnerable with significant gender inequality markers) and Dar es Salaam (urban, marked by overcrowding and rising youth unemployment). In 2024, CO-CREATE was able to reach 50 000 boys and girls by prioritising teacher and youth-led climate action solutions, fostering inclusive learning environments and innovative pedagogical practices that address climate challenges and reconnect individuals and communities with nature-based education. Key components include:

- Government partnership: CO-CREATE partnered with Tanzania's Ministry of Education to translate its eight National Climate Coping Strategies for Education into school- and community-level climate actions through action research and human-centred design. In schools, CO-CREATE supported teachers to answer the question, "How might my climate action solutions be used as more effective pedagogical practices to improve holistic learning outcomes and inclusive learning environments for all?".
- Teacher empowerment: CO-CREATE equipped educators and youth development organisations with tools and training to lead climate education and action initiatives. In collaboration with Creative Action Institute (2024[72]), CO-CREATE co-designed educational materials and delivered professional development courses that enable teachers and youth to develop their capabilities in essential climate knowledge, while encouraging innovative thinking about the intersection of climate, gender and local culture. The semi-structured interview with the Aga Khan Foundation also indicated how CO-CREATE engaged teacher evaluation

systems in Tanzania to assess and report progress. Initial evaluation findings indicate that teachers are implementing innovative climate solutions, including developing micro-forests for natural cooling and creating eco-coolers from recycled material (Charlton, 2024[73]).

- Community and youth engagement: CO-CREATE provided flexible funds to teachers to drive climate action solutions and local youth-led organisations so communities could design, test and implement their own climate resilient solutions.

By placing educators and learners at the heart of its strategy, CO-CREATE seeks to build a scalable model for climate-responsive education, enhancing both learning outcomes and community resilience.

CO-CREATE conducted workshops, including one on the UN-supported Disaster Risk Reduction SCORECARD, to evaluate and strengthen the resilience of the education system in Tanzania (UNDRR, n.d.[74]). It has also completed a statistical analysis of teachers' climate education knowledge (Charlton, 2024[73]). The approach focuses on generating "data insights" as opposed to formal monitoring and evaluation.

Source: (AKDN, 2024[75]; Restless Development, n.d.[76]).

3.2.3. Integrating climate education into curricula

Curriculum development, closely linked to teacher training, is a cornerstone in building learners' green skills and has remained central to policies integrating climate change into education systems (Dubai Cares and SEEK Development, 2024[16]). Notably, the UN Secretary-General's Vision Statement at Transforming Education Summit in 2022 called to embed climate across education systems. It urged curricula to challenge and empower learners with the awareness, values and competencies needed to address climate challenges (United Nations, 2022[77]). Similarly, UNESCO (2021[56]) has called on member states to rethink and reimagine curricula to "instil a fundamentally new way of looking at the place of humans as part of the planet". Elsewhere, UNICEF has called on member states to protect children by explicitly integrating climate change education into education systems (UNICEF, 2025[61]); likewise, Education in Emergencies Hub has called on its network to "embed green skills and climate education into national curricula" (EiE Hub, 2024[78]).

These calls reflect a perception among youth that current curricula are not fit for purpose when it comes to climate. For example, Indigenous youth leader Takota Iron Eyes has said, "at school, there was never actual information within the curriculum about the climate crisis" (Thomas, 2020[79]). In another relevant example, OECD (2025[28]) found that "adolescents are not being sufficiently challenged by sustainability curricula". Meanwhile, in a recent survey of youth and climate change, 98% of respondents said that climate change should be taught during primary, secondary and higher education (UNCC: Learn, 2023[80]).

Although there is broad agreement on the need for reform, stakeholders are still divided on the practical implementation of integrating climate into curricula. For example, Education International (2019[81]) argues that efforts to integrate "should not only [be] about studying climate change but also understanding it…it needs to be embedded in the DNA of today's very educational concept". OECD analysis also points to examples of high-income countries' efforts to integrate climate as a cross-curricular theme (as opposed to a standalone subject) as examples of good practice. For instance, Norway's core curriculum is structured around three interdisciplinary topics; similarly, Australia has included sustainability as one of its three cross-curricular themes (OECD, 2023[82]).

However, evidence suggests that policies in high-income countries are not necessarily replicable in low- and middle-income countries contexts. Across eight low- and middle-income countries, 45% of teachers believe climate should be a separate subject (Sabarwal et al., 2024[7]). As Kwauk (2020[55]) notes, many lower-income countries see climate change education as relatively "low on the to do list when basic literacy is still an unmet global goal".

Nevertheless, examples are emerging of low- and middle- income countries that are integrating climate change education into curricula. In Africa, Kenya (Government of Kenya, 2021[83]) and Ghana (UNITAR, 2020[84]) are developing locally relevant examples of climate change for foundational learning. In Latin America, the Office for Climate Education's ALEC (*América Latina para la Educación Climática*) is tailoring curriculum development and teacher training to national contexts. ALEC collaborates with ministries of education and local stakeholders to co-develop climate education resources and training programmes in countries such as Colombia, Mexico and Peru. In this way, it aims to reach more than 500 000 students through context-specific, materials aligned with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (OCE, n.d.[85]). On the philanthropic side, Lemann Foundation, Porticus, and the Climate and Land Use Alliance are working to boost both literacy and climate literacy in Brazil's Amazon region by contextualising local ecological knowledge in early education (Lemann Foundation, 2022[86]). Elsewhere, in the United Arab Emirates, the Abdulla Al Ghurair Foundation is working with the Ministry of Education to integrate climate into curricula (see Box 6). OECD research has highlighted the value of place-based and collaborative approaches, including whole-school models and school-community partnerships. Such approaches respond to local priorities and engage a broader range of learners, particularly those from disadvantaged or marginalised communities (Nusche, Fuster Rabella and Lauterbach, 2024[17]).

The importance of mainstreaming climate change across diverse subject areas is echoed in the findings of different research studies. Drewes, Henderson and Mouza (2017[66]) emphasise the need to foster learner engagement with real-life climate contexts and solutions. For its part, UNESCO's GEP Greening Curriculum Guidance recommends that content be action-oriented, justice-focused, high quality, and both comprehensive and contextually relevant (UNESCO, 2024[87]).

A range of both foundations and NGOs are piloting programmes linked to these approaches. Quantedge Foundation's BRAC Play Labs in Bangladesh has successfully linked early childhood education with climate empathy and adaptation (Quantedge Foundation, n.d.[88]). Meanwhile, eco-schools supported by the FEE (Eco-Schools, 2025[68]) and Plant-for-the-Planet both demonstrate how schools can connect climate learning with local community action.

As the GEP guidance suggests, curriculum integration can also serve to reinforce the link between the education and climate intersection, and social justice. For example, Instituto EVA – a Brazilian NGO – seeks to integrate socio-environmental and climate education into public school curricula, especially in rural and underserved areas. By contextualising learning through the lived realities of marginalised groups, it emphasises education as a tool for social transformation. In this way, it connects climate action with issues of racial justice, equity and community resilience (Instituto EVA, n.d.[89]).

Box 6. The BIG GREEN Legacy: Integrating climate education across schools in the UAE

The BIG GREEN Legacy is a nationwide initiative co-founded by the Ministry of Education in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and the Abdulla Al Ghurair Foundation, in collaboration with Project Everyone and Play Verto. Launched in 2024, and in alignment with the "We the UAE 2031" vision, the programme aims to shape educational policies and embed climate education across all levels of the national curriculum.

Central to the initiative is the BIG GREEN Legacy Pulse Survey, a gamified survey designed to capture the perspectives of students aged 12-22 on climate education. In its inaugural year, more than 73 000 students participated, generating 1.6 million data points to inform curriculum development and policy decisions. The survey findings generated 42 recommendations for school and university curricula, educator training and non-formal programme planning.

The programme provides educators with a suite of resources, including six structured lesson plans available in multiple languages, tailored for various educational stages from lower primary to high

school. These resources are designed to foster interdisciplinary learning, integrating climate literacy with subjects such as ethics, social sciences and indigenous knowledge.

By actively involving students in the discourse on climate education, the BIG GREEN Legacy empowers youth to help develop sustainable education pathways, reinforcing the UAE's commitment to environmental stewardship and the goals of UNESCO's Greening Education Partnership.

Source: (United Arab Emirates Ministry of Education, 2025[90]).

3.2.4. Connecting climate and education with critical child services

Good nutrition is essential for learning, yet climate change is intensifying food insecurity, malnutrition and health challenges that hinder children's education. Rising temperatures, shifting rainfall patterns and extreme weather disrupt food production and access, putting 1 billion children at risk of food insecurity and 180 million school-age children at risk of malnourishment (Pastorino et al., 2024[91]). Nutritional insecurity is correlated with higher rates of absenteeism that can, over the long term, reduce academic performance by up to 15% (Sabarwal et al., 2024[7]). Evidence from India and the Philippines shows that school meal programmes improve foundational learning outcomes and enrolment, demonstrating the vital role of school-based nutrition in fostering climate resilience in low- and middle- income based countries (Sabarwal et al., 2024[7]). Meanwhile, food systems contribute one-third of global greenhouse gas emissions (FAO, 2021[92]), making school meals an opportunity to support both climate adaptation and mitigation efforts.

School feeding programmes, reaching 418 million children daily, provide a scalable solution to both nutrition and climate challenges (Pastorino et al., 2024[91]). With 42% of national school meal programmes linked to agricultural policies, integrating home-grown food systems can strengthen local economies, reduce emissions and improve food security (Dubai Cares and SEEK Development, 2024[16]). Research suggests that shifting school meals to plant-based, climate-smart diets could reduce emissions by up to 43% (Pastorino et al., 2024[91]).

Further to the importance of school meals, nutrition – described by one interviewee as the "smart phone of development" – has a powerful multiplier effect across different SDGs. Estimates suggest that an investment of USD 1 generates a return of roughly USD 23 (World Bank, 2024[93]). Schools also serve as hubs for climate-sensitive food education, equipping students with the knowledge to make sustainable food choices. Governments must prioritise investment in climate-resilient school nutrition, leveraging climate finance to support sustainable agriculture and food security, ensuring both educational success and long-term planetary health (Pastorino et al., 2024[91]).

Philanthropies are increasingly engaging with the benefits of supporting nutrition. Global philanthropies recently committed to leverage approximately USD 2 billion in financing for nutrition at the 2025 Nutrition for Growth Summit (Stronger Foundations for Nutrition and OECD netFWD, 2025[94]). As illustrated in Box 7, school-based nutrition offers another promising area where philanthropies (particularly climate-focused philanthropies seeking to expand their work on education), governments and the private sector can collaborate to scale programmes at the intersection of education and climate.

Box 7. Kenya's National School Meals Coalition: Advancing climate-smart nutrition with philanthropic support

In October 2024, Kenya's Ministry of Education launched the National School Meals Coalition, aiming to expand school meal coverage from 1.9 million learners in 2023 to over 10 million by 2030. This initiative, developed with support from the UN World Food Programme and the Rockefeller Foundation, seeks to provide universal access to nutritious, climate-smart school meals.

The Coalition's operational plan emphasises integration of locally sourced, drought-tolerant crops and a transition from traditional firewood cooking methods to cleaner energy solutions. These measures aim to enhance food security, reduce environmental impact and support Kenya's clean energy transition.

The Rockefeller Foundation has committed significant resources to support this initiative, including a USD 100 million investment to serve 100 million children with nutritious school meals globally. In Kenya, the Foundation's support focuses on improving the nutritional quality of meals, fostering local economic development and facilitating sustainable financing mechanisms.

Interestingly, the Rockefeller Foundation identifies primarily as a climate foundation, meaning that it considers all its investments to be climate sensitive. Nutrition therefore offers a compelling example of how climate investors can design policies and practices that also yield positive outcomes for education systems.

By aligning educational, nutritional and environmental objectives, Kenya's National School Meals Coalition exemplifies a holistic approach to addressing climate change and food insecurity, with public-private-philanthropy playing a pivotal role in its implementation and scalability.

Source: (The Rockefeller Foundation, 2024[95]).

3.2.5. Philanthropies as advocates: Connecting education and climate with transformative social change on race and gender

As outlined throughout this paper, various programmes at the education and climate intersection offer a vital opportunity to drive transformative social change, particularly in relation to race and gender inequalities. Marginalised communities, including girls and women, Indigenous Peoples and communities of colour across low- and middle- income countries, continue to experience the first and worst effects of the climate crisis while contributing least to its causes (Kwauk, 2021[8]). Conventional approaches to climate education that focus narrowly on raising awareness or individual behavioural change often fail to address the deeper structural inequalities that underpin climate vulnerability (Kwauk, 2021[8]). A more transformative vision of education is required, one that critically engages with the social, political and economic systems rooted in colonialism, patriarchy, racism and extractive capitalism (Kwauk, 2021[8]; UNESCO, 2021[56]). Education for climate justice, like gender-transformative approaches in girls' education, moves beyond knowledge dissemination to actively build political agency, collective solidarity and systemic change (Kwauk, 2021). In this way, education becomes not only a tool for resilience but also a catalyst for the achievement of climate justice, racial equity, gender equality and more sustainable socio-ecological futures (UNESCO, 2021[56]).

Evidence suggests that some funders are integrating education for climate justice throughout their programmes. Opportunities to integrate education for climate justice exist across other areas highlighted in this report, such as green skills, teacher empowerment, curricula and nutrition. However, research also shows that some funders pursue this as a concerted strategic commitment through all their fundings and programmes (see Box 8). This is particularly relevant in countries such as Brazil, where environmental degradation intersects with entrenched social inequalities, disproportionately affecting Afro-Brazilian and

Indigenous communities. Initiatives such as the Rede Comuá for "Comuá for Climate" programme and the Brazilian Environmental Education Fund's "Guidelines for Climate Environmental Education" illustrate how community-led climate education can support local climate solutions rooted in justice and equity. These efforts prioritise the leadership of historically excluded groups and promote pedagogical practices that are culturally responsive and aligned with climate resilience. In this way, they reinforce the transformative potential of education in contexts of overlapping climate and social vulnerabilities (Biasoli and Brianezi, 2024[96]; Rede Comuá, 2024[97]).

Box 8. Addressing the structural inequalities in Brazil that underpin climate change

Imaginable Futures supports education initiatives in Brazil that aim to address structural inequalities while strengthening climate resilience. Recognising that Black, Indigenous and Quilombola[7] communities face the greatest risks from climate change, their work focuses on policies and programmes that centre racial equity and community-led solutions.

This includes support for Black-led organisations developing inclusive education policies, as well as advocacy to protect and improve affirmative action laws that expand higher education access for marginalised students. These efforts help diversify leadership in climate-related fields and promote more equitable access to green jobs.

Imaginable Futures also partners with local organisations to support place-based education models. In this approach, schools are connected to their communities and used to building civic participation and environmental awareness. In the Amazon region, they have supported Indigenous and Quilombola educators to integrate traditional knowledge into climate education, making curricula more locally relevant and empowering students as environmental stewards.

Together, these approaches illustrate how education can be a key pathway to achieving climate justice in Brazil by ensuring that communities most affected by climate impacts are equipped to lead sustainable change.

Publicly available information on impact assessment is limited. However, based on the semi-structured interviews, the Foundation is committed to conducting "rigorous assessment based on participatory evaluation approaches where you have those involved in the work collecting information at a qualitative level and reflecting on causality".

Source: (Imaginable Futures, 2023[98]).

4 Conclusion

This paper contributes to a better understanding of how philanthropic organisations are engaging at the intersection of education and climate across low- and middle-income countries. It introduces a multifaceted analysis that draws on philanthropic data reported to the OECD Creditor Reporting System (CRS), a mapping of publicly available philanthropic initiatives and semi-structured interviews with selected philanthropic organisations working at this intersection. Interviews were conducted primarily with education funders integrating climate objectives – rather than climate funders incorporating education – which may indicate where current and perceived responsibility for advancing this agenda lies.

This paper illustrates how education outcomes are threatened by climate change before outlining education's untapped potential to contribute to climate solutions. This sentiment is reflected in the growing number of initiatives and platforms like UNESCO's "Greening Education Partnership". These initiatives seek to operationalise joint education and climate commitments through multi-stakeholder collaboration involving all development finance providers, including philanthropy.

Despite the growing call for all development finance providers to contribute to the education and climate intersection, analysis of flows reported to the OECD CRS indicates that philanthropic funding that targets both education and climate and environment objectives remains limited. In 2022, education-sector disbursements tagged with environmental objectives accounted for just 4.8% of total philanthropic funding for education reported to the OECD. In addition, over 2020-23, total environmental philanthropy ranged from USD 654 million to USD 1.04 billion annually, with education-related projects accounting for just 0.4% on average.

Although open to interpretation, this paper puts forward several potential explanations for the limited philanthropic funding that targets both education and climate. These include the relatively recent political momentum; how education-focused funders often remain siloed, both in general and from climate-related agendas; how data architectures do not yet allow for a comprehensive capture of the scope of activity in this space; and the likelihood of under-reporting, particularly from smaller or non-reporting foundations.

The analysis identifies five key thematic areas where philanthropic engagement is emerging: (i) green skills development; (ii) teacher training and empowerment; (iii) integration of climate education into curricula; (iv) support for essential child services such as school nutrition; and (v) climate justice and equity. Across all areas, there is evidence of local leadership, collaborative delivery and experimentation with new models. However, most initiatives remain at an early stage and lack robust, long-term impact evaluations. Until then, it is difficult to say to what extent they can be replicated and scaled to inform global harmonisation efforts.

Building on this first comprehensive attempt to map both philanthropic support to the education and climate intersection will require more consistent reporting from foundations to OECD CRS to help build a clearer, more comparable, picture. It will also require updates to the OECD's data architecture, to allow it to better capture the intersections between education and climate, as well as other relevant cross-cutting areas. With a stronger data foundation, philanthropic networks will be better equipped to sustain dialogue between education- and climate-focused philanthropies to identify synergies and opportunities for collaboration, while also continuing to identify and strengthen philanthropic alignment with existing multistakeholder global harmonisation efforts.

Notes

[1] The OECD Network of Foundations Working for Development (netFWD) Education Working Group can facilitate such dialogue.

[2] Building the Climate Resilience of Children and Communities through the Education Sector (BRACE) is a USD 70 million initiative launched at COP28 jointly by the Green Climate Fund, the Global Partnership for Education and Save the Children. The first major climate finance investment in education, the initiative aims to strengthen the resilience of education systems in climate-vulnerable countries. BRACE supports green school infrastructure, integration of climate change into curricula and enhanced early warning systems, and was initially piloted in Cambodia, South Sudan and Tonga.

[3] In practice, the initiative seeks to at least double the number of countries integrating climate education into school curricula at the pre-primary, primary and secondary levels from current levels of approximately 45%.

[4] UNESCO defines a “Green School” as a learning institution that applies a whole-institution approach to Education for Sustainable Development, using climate change as a focal point to enhance resilience, sustainability and active citizenship. These schools integrate sustainability into governance, operations, teaching and community engagement.

[5] The Global Partnership for Education defines “adaptive capacity” as the ability of education systems, particularly in low- and lower middle-income countries, to anticipate, absorb, respond to and recover from climate-related shocks. This includes strengthening infrastructure resilience, improving system readiness and responsiveness, ensuring inclusive and flexible learning continuity, and investing in institutional and human capacity for climate-informed planning and risk management.

[6] Acknowledging this, the OECD Development Co-operation Directorate (DCD) held a first online seminar in June 2025 to support data collection efforts, offering capacity building on reporting standards, including practical guidance, and incorporating a section on climate markers. The session will also highlight key output products that use CRS philanthropic data, including the forthcoming report referenced here. It will be open to foundations reporting to the OECD, as well as selected prospective reporting foundations.

[7] Quilombola communities are Afro-Brazilian groups descended from enslaved Africans who escaped captivity and established independent settlements known as quilombos. These communities have preserved distinct cultural, social and economic practices. They are recognised under Brazil’s 1988 Constitution, which grants them rights to their ancestral lands.

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Annex A. List of organisations interviewed

Foundations	Networks	Multilaterals	NGOs	Researcher(s) in green education
Abdulla Al Ghurair Foundation Aga Khan Foundation Education Above All Dubai Cares Foundation Imaginable Futures King Khalid Foundation Lemann Foundation Porticus ReNew Foundation Rockefeller Foundation	International Education Funders Group	UNESCO – Greening Education Partnership Office for Climate Education	Foundation for Environmental Education Greenish Foundation Instituto EVA Plant for the Planet Project Everyone	Christina Kwauk

Annex B. Questionnaire

1. How does your organisation define environmental/green/climate education? Which terminology do you use? Do you reference an international definition (e.g. UNESCO's Greening Education Partnership)? Do you use your own definition? If so, could you please explain how you came to define environmental/green/climate education?
2. What is your organisation's top priority for funding today? How does green education fit into your overall foundation strategy? Why are these issues pressing? What makes them compelling?
3. Please tell me about initiatives your organisation has supported in the past that you considered to be environmental/green/climate education? Why did your organisation classify this project as environmental/green/climate education?
4. What were the main drivers that pushed your organisation to engage in this domain?
5. What was/is the overall project goal/objective/desired impact?
6. What is the average ticket size for your green education projects?
7. Did you face any challenges in the implementation of this project? How were these overcome? Were there any lessons learnt?
8. Do you take any steps to monitor or measure the impact of these projects? If so, could you please explain your impact strategy and the results?
9. Have you engaged in any partnership in relation to environmental/green/climate education? With other foundations/public sector/governments/local authorities? With NGOs/CSOs/communities? With schools?
10. Does your organisation have any planned/future initiatives in this same sector? What do you see as the future of philanthropic programmes engaged in environmental/green/climate education?
11. Are you a member of any philanthropic networks? If so, what role do you see for philanthropic networks in supporting philanthropy to work more at this intersection?