

# What Happens When Children Ask Questions About the Climate Crisis?

An array of thought-provoking questions reflects concerns regarding climate change beyond environmental concerns into questions of equity and justice.

*“What’s the point of progress if we can’t breathe or survive?”*  
*“How would you install rainwater harvesting in a house with no pucca roof?”*

These were just some of the sharp, unflinching questions raised by students from government and private schools across Bengaluru at the first-ever *Makkala Climate Action Sabhe* (Children’s Climate Debate), organised by the Greater Bengaluru Authority Climate Action Cell on November 7. Their debates reflected two clear themes: a growing anxiety about their future in the climate crisis, and a deep sense of responsibility towards protecting their city.

*“Is a fine really harsher than a child breathing toxic air?”*  
When the Climate Educators Network first joined hands with BCAC and partner organisations to design this debate, we wondered if children would be reluctantly pulled into yet another academic exercise. Would climate action become just another topic to memorise and present? Those fears vanished on the very first day. From the moment 85 schools entered the preliminary round, the energy was unmistakable. Children came prepared not only with research and arguments, but with lived experience, emotion, and urgency.



**Beyond social barriers**  
*“Is the impact of the climate crisis the same for everyone?”*  
The debates quickly moved beyond environmental concerns into questions of equity and justice. The students demonstrated a clear understanding that climate impacts are not evenly distributed. Social and economic realities shape who suffers first and worst.



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One student asked:  
*“Is a fine harsher than the experience of a waste worker handling toxic garbage every day? If you have the privilege to generate waste, you have the responsibility to segregate it.”*

Another warned:  
*“Every drop we waste today is the drop we will beg for tomorrow.”*

Many of these children have grown up watching trees disappear from their neighbourhoods, water tankers lining their streets, and plastic waste piling on footpaths. For them, the climate crisis is not an abstract future problem. It is part of daily life. The debate gave them the language and stage to articulate what they already feel and know.



*Why shouldn’t children receive climate education to protect their futures?”*

**The climate education debate**  
UNESCO defines climate education as enabling individuals to understand and address the climate crisis with knowledge, skills, values and attitudes to act as change-makers. But for that to happen, climate education must be rooted in lived reality, not just textbooks. Learning about climate change cannot stay confined to graphs of rising temperatures or images of melting glaciers. It must begin in the spaces students already observe.

When children begin to ask why their lakes are drying or who benefits when a tree is cut, they start developing systems thinking. We should aim to help them understand the interdependence of environmental, social, and economic systems.

*“Do you believe in action without knowledge?”*



PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

**Climate action clubs**  
All participants in the debate came from Bengaluru’s rapidly growing **Climate Action Clubs**, initiated by the Greater Bengaluru Authority’s Climate Action Cell. Out of 777 schools that registered, over 195 now have active clubs. These student-led clubs have begun auditing their school campuses across four themes - waste, water, energy and urban greening—and are designing **School Climate Action Plans** based on their findings. Their work aligns directly with the Bengaluru Climate Action and Resilience Plan 2023, proving that children are not just learning

about climate action; they are *practicing* it. In this context, the debate’s outcome mattered far less than the debate itself. The real victory was witnessing children evaluate solutions, question dominant narratives, and demand accountability. They challenged the fairness of imposing fines without ensuring infrastructure for segregation. They questioned why certain solutions were more readily accepted than others. And they asked who will pay the price for inaction. This is the **training of the mind to think** - echoing Einstein’s belief that education is not the mere learning of facts.

**Should climate education be part of the curriculum?**  
In the final round, students debated whether climate education should be integrated into the academic curriculum. One group argued that embedding it across subjects ensures every child gains awareness, not just those who voluntarily join clubs. Another argued that climate learning should remain experiential, joyful, and exploratory. Something at risk of being lost if formalised into exams. Perhaps both sides are right. What matters most is not where climate education sits, but how it is taught. If it is experiential, reflective, and rooted in local realities, it can transform not only what children know but how they think. As one student rightly put: *“Climate education shouldn’t just become another subject, it should become a culture. It’s a survival manual for the future.”*

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