



IFMSA
International Federation of
Medical Students' Associations

Youth Leadership at the Nexus of Health, Gender, and the Environment

Dr. Enas Omer

A Defining Reality for This Generation

Generation Now is not a narrative about the future. It is a description of current health system stress.

This generation is experiencing overlapping **environmental, social, and governance** shocks earlier in the life course than any previous generations with measurable consequences for health outcomes.

Why this is structurally new

Life-course epidemiology demonstrates that exposures during childhood and adolescence disproportionately shape:

- lifelong NCD risk,
- mental health trajectories,
- socioeconomic and health resilience.

Climate instability and social inequality are now occurring within this sensitive window altering population health before adulthood.

Climate change operates as **a risk multiplier**, not a standalone crisis.

Evidence consistently shows amplification of:

- heat-related morbidity,
- malnutrition and water-borne disease,
- air-pollution-related NCDs,
- disruption of essential health services.

Youth are the cohort accumulating this compounded risk earliest.

- Worry, grief, uncertainty
- Impacts daily functioning
- Anxiety → engagement

Climate anxiety in youth is often framed as fragility.

But what we see is that this anxiety often **mobilizes action.**

Gender mediates exposure, vulnerability, and recovery.

During climate stress, evidence shows:

- earlier interruption of girls' education,
- deterioration of SRHR access,
- increased unpaid care burdens,
- higher GBV risk during displacement.

Because this occurs during adolescence, impacts are long-term and often irreversible.

Nigeria — WaSH Vanguard

Medical students addressed recurrent infectious diseases by targeting water, sanitation, and hygiene as upstream health determinants. The program combines preventive medicine, community engagement, and advocacy to reduce hygiene-related disease risk at system level.

Albania — GreenPulse

Youth identified improper disposal of expired medicines as a public health and environmental risk linked to antimicrobial resistance. GreenPulse integrates education, advocacy, and toolkit development to address regulatory and awareness gaps.

Indonesia — PLEURA

Medical students implemented a community-based waste and environmental health intervention using 3R principles and peer education. The focus is sustained behavior change through child and community empowerment.

Successful youth leadership is:

- System-embedded rather than consultative
- Focused on prevention and structural determinants of health
- Linked to accountability and outcome evaluation
- Designed for continuity beyond advocacy moments

Drawing from IFMSA planetary health and youth participation policies:

- Embed youth leaders in health and climate governance bodies.
- Finance youth-led, evidence-based implementation.
- Mandate gender-responsive climate–health policy.
- Integrate planetary health longitudinally in medical education.

Take away messages

- Youth are already absorbing disproportionate health risk.
- Effective systems align leadership with exposure.
- The question is no longer whether youth can lead — but whether institutions are willing to redesign governance to let them.

THANK YOU!

email address: einasosama@gmail.com

