

## Youth Drought Summit Concept Note

### 1. Background

The severity of the drought in NSW is undeniable. The media has regularly reported about the pressures on farmers and their families. Latest reports show that 99.2 per cent of the state is drought-affected, experiencing drought or intense-drought conditions, with indications that the drought will continue for the foreseeable future.<sup>1</sup>

As in previous droughts, the specific ways in which children and young people are impacted by the drought is less known and discussed. Given the extent of the drought in NSW, this means hundreds of thousands of children and young people are impacted in largely unknown ways.

UNICEF Australia's (UA) decision to conduct consultations with primary and high school students and their communities was informed by our global approach, which is to listen to children and involve them in problem solving. It is also intended to start a conversation with government agencies and service-providers about how to better support children, young people, their families and the communities that support them.

One of our key findings was that children and young people, as well as their families, are experiencing significant ongoing stress as a result of the drought and that existing structure of mental health and wellbeing support does not necessarily provide the support they need. Furthermore, the impacts of drought on children and young people are not necessarily well understood by community leaders, educators, and decision makers.<sup>2</sup>

### 2. Why a Summit?

This year is the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). It is, a year of action for children and their rights. As such, UA is particularly focused on identifying concrete ways that children and young people can more actively participate in decisions affecting their lives.

Discussions in recent UA consultations UA with children and young people shone an important light on what matters most to them and what can be done to address these concerns. These concerns included a worrying deficit of trust in the media and political actors and a sense of marginalisation and exclusion from decision-making spheres – matters particularly relevant to drought-affected children and youth. With this in mind, the Drought Summit aims to enhance opportunities for them to participate in political and policy areas relevant to their lives – an essential ingredient in building active members of

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<sup>1</sup> See: <https://edis.dpi.nsw.gov.au/>

<sup>2</sup> See UNICEF Australia, *In their own words: The hidden impact of prolonged drought on children and young people* (February 2019), available at: <https://www.unicef.org.au/our-work/unicef-in-australia/the-drought-report>

our democracy.

Much has been done to reduce the stigma associated with mental health challenges in rural and regional areas. Based on what UA heard, more could be done. Young people could lead the conversation to shift attitudinal barriers – in identifying the need for both greater assistance and appropriate prevention strategies.

Coordinated and whole of government approaches are required to ensure that existing risk factors for children in rural and remote areas – such as mental health and suicidality, family violence, social isolation and poor education outcomes – are not exacerbated during times of drought.

UNICEF Australia, with support from the NSW Government, will host a statewide Summit, working with a steering committee of young people in its design and implementation. The objectives of the Summit are for children and young people to discuss the challenges they face living with drought, as well as appropriate responses, and to examine ways to strengthen preparedness. This is one way in which UA will contribute to this international “year of action” for children. For those involved in drought, health and child/youth responses, the summit will present an opportunity to hear directly from these young people about how they can be better supported.

### **3. Summit Objectives & Outcomes**

These objectives and outcomes have been developed in partnership with the Youth Steering Committee.

#### **Summit objectives:**

- Connect young people from across NSW with their peers to create a support network based on shared experiences of the challenges of living with drought
- Develop a shared understanding of the impact of drought on young people, the current support available (what works, what hasn't worked), and the key gaps that need to be addressed
- Provide a forum for meaningful, action-oriented discussion between young people, policy-makers and service providers about how to more effectively support young people and children experiencing drought
- Strengthen confidence in advocacy, analysis, collaboration and leadership among young people in attendance.

#### **Summit outcomes:**

- Implement a participatory, co-designed Youth Summit on Living with Drought
- Identify actions to support young people in drought affected communities and frameworks for long term preparedness and resilience
- Provide a quality public report for action/advocacy.

#### 4. Collaborative Approaches

A Youth Steering Committee comprising young people aged 15 to 24 years from various parts of regional/remote NSW, significantly affected by the drought, is leading the design and implementation of the Summit, using a youth-led participatory process. The Steering Committee includes members living on and off farms, in remote and closer to town areas, boarding students and young people attending local schools, as well as Aboriginal young people working in mental health, and local young leaders working in health, mental health and agriculture. The Steering Committee will meet regularly throughout the Summit planning process.

In addition, the planning and designing process will include regular consultation and discussions with policy-makers, service providers and experts.

An Advisory Group has been created, consisting of individuals and organisations with expertise in areas relevant to the summit's themes. These themes include drought/rural and remote communities; health in rural and remote communities; mental health (either in rural/remote communities or with children/youth or both); and education (of children and young people in rural/remote communities). It will meet regularly to advise on and support the Summit planning process.

#### 5. Costs and Funding Sources

At this stage, funding will be provided from the NSW Government and UNICEF Australia. Additional funding sources will be sought to ensure all participants can attend the Summit without incurring out-of-pocket costs, and to cover additional pre, during and post-summit costs.

#### 6. Further enquiries

To discuss any aspects of the NSW Youth Summit on Living with Drought, please contact UNICEF Australia at:

**Email:** [droughtsummit@unicef.org.au](mailto:droughtsummit@unicef.org.au)

**Phone:** 02 8917 3261 – *business hours are 9am-5pm*