



Economic and Social Council Youth Forum

10th Anniversary

CONCEPT NOTE

Planet/SDG12&13

IDENTIFICATION	
Session title as per programme	Accelerating Action for the Planet
Session co-lead UN	UNEP: Diego Padilla Duran, Lilah Gaafar, Ines Pereira UNCCD: Marcos Montoiro
Session co-lead Youth	UNEP Major Group for Children and Youth: Yugratna Srivastava and Teresa Oberhauser YOUNGO - youth constituency of UNFCCC: Marie-Claire Graf, Heeta Lakhani and Saher Rashid Baig
Session co-organizers	Indian Youth Cafe - Dega Ramya Tulasi
	Youth advocates - Devanshu Jha, Lamia Mohsin, Kervelle Baird
	UNICEF - Amy Wickham

	UNESCO - Xu Hui, Martha-Marie Vogel and Tawanda Gijima
	UNDP - Noella Richard, Giulia Jacovella
Session moderator(s)	Elliott Harris, ASG of UN DESA
	Cathy Li, <i>youth advocate</i> , China
Session note-taker(s)	Ujin Jargalan, Sustainable Lifestyles and Education Intern, UNEP Paris
	One youth advocate - to be identified

BACKGROUND & KEY ISSUES
(approx. 750 words)

By 2050, the world’s population may reach a whopping 10 billion. With more people comes more consumption – for basic needs as well as a thirst for well-being, fashion, travel and better living. Two to three billion of these will be new urban, young consumers, who receive 90% of their information from social media (i). They will also be tomorrow’s decision makers. And yet globally, though some are consuming more, many are increasingly finding it hard to meet basic needs. The evidence on what we can do as individuals and what governments and businesses can do to make sustainable living (for all) the default option is clear. And change is burgeoning around the globe though it remains fragmented and piece-meal.

With the emerging potential of youth (and cultural influencers) who are seen as policy wildcards, there is potential to turn the tide for transformational change. In essence, our future depends on how we - particularly youth - live, work and play as global consumers and citizens. In a world stretched thin for resources - and under threat from climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss - how can we upscale effective change?

The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services states that we can observe an unprecedented biodiversity decline in human history where changes in land and sea use; direct exploitation of organisms; climate change; pollution; and invasion of alien species are the main drivers (IPBES, 2019).

In addition, we can observe negative impacts of global warming already with warming levels at around + 1.2°C compared to the pre-industrial baseline (WMO, 2020). Thus, strong mitigation and adaptation action is needed. Research notes that households are responsible for an estimated 72% of GhG emissions(ii), with an uneven global distribution. To keep global warming well below 2 °C; and to pursue efforts to limit the increase to 1.5 °C as stated in the Paris Agreement, households in the Global

North need to reduce their carbon footprint by about 80%. In this regard, our household decisions have a significant impact! Emerging economies in urban contexts, where consumption is anticipated to grow will also have to address similar challenges. Technology can support this transition but our lifestyles themselves (food, mobility, housing and leisure) need to change profoundly and align with global policies.

Unprecedented events have thrust us to re-examine how we live. Not only our healthcare, but all interlinked systems that meet our daily needs and even what we really want in life. In a world under threat from global health concerns, economic challenges, biodiversity loss and climate change impacts, our political, living and lifestyle decisions will (collectively) determine our future. We want to win this race, and although it is closing rapidly, the window of opportunity is still open and real action is needed now.

It is urgent to recognize, promote and support young people's positive role as engaged citizens, positive agents of change, bold innovators and committed partners.

Public pressure for tougher action is rising in many nations, especially among young people who will inherit a warmer planet. In many countries, all sectors of society are getting involved – regional governments, cities, investors, private companies, civil society and others – as they observe an already worsening variety of impacts from climate change.

For young people, climate change and environment preservation are a matter of justice and intergenerational equity. Those who are most responsible for it rarely feel the worst impacts. It is those who are already vulnerable to extreme weather events, rising sea levels, pollution, biodiversity loss – often those who are socially marginalized due to their economic status, age, race and gender – who bear the brunt. Climate change and environment degradation are exacerbating existing inequality, particularly for those youth in LDCs in vulnerable positions. Competition over scarce natural resources also increases the likelihood of conflict and violence, leading to destabilization of societies and governments.

Siloed approaches are no longer feasible. Integrated and innovative solutions must be identified, developed and scaled-up based on how we actually spend our time and resources. Looking through the lens of the needs and wants we pursue enables us to prevent and reduce pollution, including marine and plastic pollution, reverse forest loss, ensure water security, halt and prevent biodiversity loss, restore ecosystems, reach land degradation neutrality, fight poverty, end hunger which are part of the environmental crisis and we can restore the earth systems that we require to meet our needs – ALL OF US.

Tackling environmental problems requires a “whole society” and “all sectors” approach. In doing so, involvement of young people from developing countries, rural communities, indigenous communities, from LGBTQI+ communities and right-holder groups needs to be ensured at all levels. The groups in the frontline, communities from Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and Least Developed Countries (LDCs), those traditionally excluded, must be given the opportunity to be in leadership.

As noted, young people are not only to be considered as victims of the climate crisis and environmental degradation as they are setting today's consumption trends and are tomorrow's leaders – we need their inspiring and bold actions. Youth are full of potential for innovation and will be the drivers of global change. Their unprecedented mobilization all around the world shows the advocacy power to hold decision-makers responsible for their actions and to demand change. Youth are knowledge holders, innovators and agents of change at all levels, including at the local and grassroots levels in their communities. They are also entrepreneurs and innovative minds are needed to accelerate progress and find solutions. Facing different crises in the world (economic, environmental, etc.), they focus on solving issues of sustainable development. Quality of environmental education (Education for Sustainable Development) plays a crucial role here. This applies to all young people, including from developing countries, including rural youth from LDCs, and indigenous people who have huge potential for innovation.

In addressing the potential of youth, the United Nations provides a platform for their voices to impact the global agenda and scale-up environmental action at all levels. Some examples of initiatives that greatly benefit from the active participation of youth include:

- One initiative to promote sustainable solutions, especially for SDG 12, is the Anatomy of Action (AoA). The toolkit was developed by Unschools and UNEP in 2019 and is being used by UNEP, other UN agencies and youth oriented efforts by the IUCN and SDSN. Operating around the world to launch discussion on sustainable consumption, direct action and offer youth the evidence, social media material and inspiration to showcase mindful consumption and set planet positive trends. By changing what we eat, what we buy, how we spend our money, how we get around and what we do for fun, we can create new ways of living more sustainably in a post-Covid-19 context.
- UNESCO designated sites, such as biosphere reserves and global geoparks, offer sustainable solutions according to local needs and the chance to connect through their networks. For example, the World Network of Island and Coastal Biosphere Reserves (WNICBR) launched in 2018, a transdisciplinary working group on Zero Plastic to combat plastic pollution in biosphere reserves. In addition, WNICBR biosphere reserves were able to start projects to mitigate the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. The numerous Youth Networks of UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere Programme -MAB Youth bring Youth-led activities to the biosphere reserves at the international, national and regional levels.

The ECOSOC Youth Forum offers a great opportunity to show and promote solutions at all levels that address SDG 12 and 13, (i.e. climate change, land degradation, biodiversity loss, environment degradation and their consequences). As the Decade of Action on SDG's started, it is time to hear and listen to what young people can bring to society and implement youth-led and youth inclusive climate and environment action on a bigger scale and more sustainably.

(i) <https://ourworldindata.org/rise-of-social-media>

(ii) Carbon Footprint of Nations: A Global, Trade-Linked Analysis, Hertwich & Peters (2009)

<https://pubs.acs.org/doi/10.1021/es803496a>

SESSION OBJECTIVES

(approx. 100 words)

- To give youth a global platform to share, engage and connect with peers, UN agencies and experts on solutions for environmental challenges, (i.e. positive concrete climate action, and what responsible consumption and production patterns mean and look like in different corners of the world).
- Highlight the role of designated sites such as UNESCO designated biosphere reserves, global geoparks, world heritage sites, RAMSAR sites etc. as model regions for sustainable development that provide local solutions
- To highlight scientific evidence for change and foster the transfer into policy recommendations
- To breakdown SDG 12 & 13, into evidence-based, achievable everyday / positive planet actions according to regional needs
- Foster inter-regional (youth) collaboration to address global imbalance in environmental action
- To identify concrete initiatives such as the Great Green Wall in which land restoration is serving to provide livelihoods for youth, while increasing food and water security in those areas and at the same time addressing climate change by sequestering carbon.
- Create momentum for awareness raising at a national, community and online/social media level worldwide.
- To unite the shift towards global sustainability and sustainable living amongst youth.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

(approx. 100 words)

- A collection of contributions from young people on the gaps, opportunities and priority actions that they want to put forward and where they call for change;
- A compilation of integrated strategies and actions which have been successfully used by young people on climate change mitigation and adaptation, sustainable consumption and production and environmental protection solutions based on sector specific efforts;

- Ideas and guidelines for Youth on how to concretely contribute to and initiate activities in their regions
- A set of evidence-based concrete recommendations to governments on how they can best respond to climate and environmental crisis to better engage the power of the youth movement in a meaningful way;
- A set of key recommendations and messages for the HLPF that could feed the important processes in 2021 (CBD COP15, UNFCCC COP26, UNEA-5.2, UNCCD COP15, launch of the Decade of Ecosystem Restoration, UN Food Systems Summit and Stockholm+50);
- Enhanced awareness of efforts, networks, knowledge platforms and action/social media tools exist for youth to learn and activate change efforts toward SDG12&13;

APPROACH USED TO GENERATE CONCRETE CONTRIBUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

(approx. 200 words)

The narrative of the session will focus on the role of youth as an agent and accelerator of change ensuring that everywhere, everyone is a vector of change and individual and collective action matters given a global policy framework.

To generate concrete contributions and recommendations, the following actions will be undertaken with a sector specific or sustainable living lens, during the session:

- Run the virtual event with the participation and social media streams being pushed into this space, explore digital partners.
- Guiding questions will be used by the moderators to steer the discussion. The moderators will have an important role to ensure that discussions are focused and result-oriented, and focused on tangible, more sector specific solutions.
- The session will be solution-oriented and will highlight concrete examples that show how environmental challenges are addressed already today
- Specific speakers/contributors could be identified prior to the session to help highlight specific messages or help generate a debate around specific issues.
- Collection of minutes/notes by designated Rapporteur(s), both to inform the outcome documents;
- Report back to the plenary and global network of youth with a summary of several key points/outcomes from the discussion, while also indicating how these elements from the Youth Forum would feed into the larger process.

OVERALL STRUCTURE AND FLOW

(approx. 300 words)

- The session will be steered by two moderators, with at least one young person;
- The moderators will briefly introduce the purpose and format of the session, as well as the modalities of reporting back and intended outcomes;
- Structure for Virtual Session:
 - Introduction by co-moderators (including an invitation for attendees to actively participate live via Padlet); (2 min)
 - Introductory statement by presenter of the abstract and results of the consultative processes to highlight the voices of youth; (6 min)
 - Interaction between session moderator and speakers (25 mins)
 - Interaction between audience and speakers through chat moderators (22 min)
 - Closing remarks by co-moderators (5 min)
- The moderators should keep a very strict time limit on the participants' intervention (3 minutes at most) to allow maximum dialogue among participants. There will be no statements.
- Specific speakers/contributors ('respondents') could be identified prior to the session to help highlight specific messages or help generate a debate around specific issues. These speakers (to be determined and confirmed) could be Member States, representatives from COP Presidency, UNEA Presidency who would provide their perspectives and responses to views expressed and "critical" questions captured during the session.
- Social media participation could be explored, such as Facebook, padlet and Insta-live with the possibility to send live comments.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (approx. 300 words)

The questions might be further adjusted/refined in the run-up of the preparation of the session.

- What are policy demands, recommendations and priorities from young people for the upcoming COPs of Rio Conventions, UNEA-5 and process leading-up to Stockholm+50?
- How can long-term and systemic youth leadership be enabled on climate action? What role can member states and the UN play in that?
- What are good examples and areas of improvement on meaningful youth engagement in key environmental processes? Are young people from environmental movements being heard in the broader "UN reform" underway?
- How can we leverage the potential of synergies across climate, SDG12 and environmental education? Especially the need to integrate it into the national curriculum?
- How the actions and individual efforts contribute to the global achievement of SDG 12, along with domains of Anatomy of Action (Food, Stuff, Move, Money and Fun)?
- How do UNESCO designated sites (Biosphere Reserves, World Heritage Sites and Geoparks) and RAMSAR Sites provide solutions for environmental challenges? How can young people directly contribute to activities in their regions?

PREPARATORY EVENTS (approx. 200 words)

- Consultation during the 2021 Youth Environment Assembly
- Local COYs on climate change held during 2020 and 2021
- Pre-introductory webinars on current initiatives
- The UNEP MGCY hosted an Anatomy of Action social media challenge in the run up to UNEA-5 in which the youth constituency ran a 15-day challenge in their network - working with MG Youth Coordinators in the regions - to build momentum before the youth assembly and introduce sustainable lifestyles and action areas for living better and lighter

SUGGESTED READING

- [Youth Paper on the Decade of Ecosystem Restoration](#)
- [WED 2020 Youth Engagement Overview](#)
- [Principles and Barriers of Meaningful Youth Engagement](#)
- <https://www.oneplanetnetwork.org/sustainable-lifestyles-and-education/anatomy-action-aoa-10> - Anatomy of Action main webpage + evidence and communication products linked here.
- <https://www.childrenenvironment.org/declaration-children-youth-climate-action>
- <https://www.unicef.org/lac/en/toolkit-young-climate-activists>
- <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/02/1084132>
- UNESCO designated sites - Biosphere Reserves: <https://en.unesco.org/mab/about>
- UNESCO designated sites – Geoparks: <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/natural-sciences/environment/earth-sciences/unesco-global-geoparks/>
- UNESCO designated sites - World Heritage sites: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/>
- RAMSAR sites: <https://www.ramsar.org/>
- Preparatory dialogues for the Food Systems Summit

ADDITIONAL DETAILS