



Youth Paper

The UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021-2030

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Photos from various on-ground youth consultations that took place in 2019 on the strategy for restoration decade

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**UN Major Group for
Children and Youth**
the space for children and youth in the United Nations

[0] Abbreviations

CFS	Commission on Food Security
COP	Conference of Parties
CPR	Committee of Permanent Representatives
CSU	Civil Society Unit
FAO	Food and Agricultural Organisation
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
LMIC	Low and Middle Income Country
MEA	Multilateral Environmental Agreements
MGCY	Major Group for Children and Youth
MGOS	Major Groups and Other Stakeholders
NDC	Nationally Determined Contributions
UN-REDD	United Nations Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation Forest Degradation
UNCBD	United Nations Convention for Biological Diversity
UNCCD	United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEA	United Nations Environment Assembly
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNEP MGCY	United Nations Environment Programme Major Group for Children and Youth
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNFF	United Nations Forests Fund
UNMGCY	United Nations Major Group for Children and Youth
WWF	World Wide Fund

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[1] Introduction and the need for inclusion of Children and Youth

A healthy and sustainable environment is the foundation of an equitable, functioning society and the basis for prosperity and security. There is no doubt about the ecological and climate crisis humanity is facing in this century. Youth and future generations are amongst the ones who will feel the most impact due to climate-induced natural disasters, food and water shortages, biodiversity loss, destruction of ecosystems, security threats, the climate refugee crisis, health crisis and sustained losses in economic productivity. These impacts will and are already affecting millions of children and youth globally, especially those living in developing countries, Small Island Developing States (SIDS), and the Least Developed Countries (LDCs). The Decade for Ecosystem Restoration (2021-2030) as proclaimed by the UN General Assembly in March 2019 (“Restoration Decade”) provides a strong avenue for averting this ecological crisis, and mainstreaming empowerment of those under-represented while doing so.

Currently, over 42% of the global population is under the age of 25¹. Brundtland Commission in 1972 (when UN Environment was established) stated in Our Common Future that the core of sustainable development is predicated on the idea of “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”² Intergenerational equity is thus inherent to the very foundation of sustainable development.

Youth-led environmental action gained significant public attention in 2019 due to the global movement of “Fridays for the Future (FFF)” or “School Strike for the Climate (Skolstrejk för klimatet)”. Young people on all continents took to the street to demonstrate their demands. It is worth noting that youth have long been active in the global environmental action scene. Youth-led initiatives, organisations, and movements happen at all levels of governance and in all areas of our society. Whether through educational advocacy or direct policy engagements, young people play a crucial role in shaping and enacting responsible environmental protection and climate policies around the globe. Indigenous youth in particular, on the frontlines of the climate crisis, have held the longest role in advocating for environmental action.

United Nations Major Group for Children and Youth, together with UN Environment Major Group for Children and Youth, since 2007 and 2013 respectively, have advocated for meaningful participation and engagement of young people in different pillars for sustainable development: knowledge, policy, capacity building and action.

It is therefore of utmost importance of voices and perspectives of children and youth are included in the design and implementation of the Restoration Decade at all levels.

¹ <https://blogs.worldbank.org/opendata/chart-how-worlds-youth-population-changing>

² Brundtland Commission 1987: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/5987our-common-future.pdf>

[2] Overview and statistics of on-ground and virtual consultation process

Between September 2019 - December 2019, the youth constituency facilitated conduction of various on-ground and online youth-led consultations. These consultations were done based on a guidance note developed in partnership with UNEP and FAO.

Key statistics -

- On ground consultations in 19+ countries reaching hundreds of youth,
- Scope of on ground consultations range from village communities, GLF, regional events, to UNGA, UNCCD COP and UNFCCC COP,
- On-ground consultations featured experts from UN agencies, governments, and other stakeholders,
- Two virtual consultations featuring experts from UN.

Each consultation produced an outcome document based upon the guidance note, and those outcomes together with inputs received from youth virtually were used in crafting these recommendations. An overview of the on-ground consultations is presented below

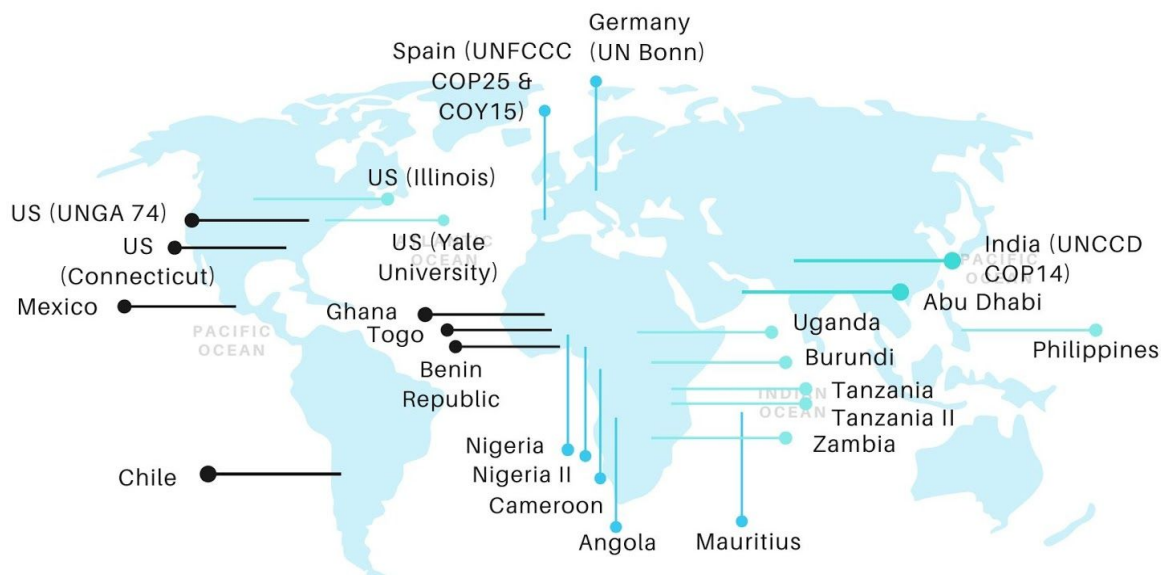


figure 1: youth-led on-ground consultations conducted in different continents on the strategy for the Restoration Decade

[3] Strengthening foundations for engagement [pre-launch & early phases of implementation of Decade]

Engagement of the youth audience means catering to their needs and empowering them in a way that they can meaningfully engage - both on policy and implementation levels.

Throughout the consultations, need was felt on how there should be more awareness, and training on the focus topics of Restoration Decade to equip children and youth with skills and knowledge. Specifically, activities recommended include -

- **[3.1] The need for more capacity building and knowledge among young people -**

Hosting online course / activity space on Restoration Decade in partnership with UNEP, FAO and other interested partners: The Youth constituency proposes the creation of an online capacity-building course for children and youth audience to further their understanding. This hub, among other things, could start with focusing on user-friendly reading material on Ecosystem Restoration, synthesized materials (videos, blogs...) on youth can engage, and highlighting youth-led best practices. An online course (6-8 weeks long, or more) could be hosted in partnership with UNEP, FAO and other interested partners - that should be available free of cost, providing “certificates” or equivalent incentives to those that complete it. Youth constituency through its member organisations is in capacity to implement such a platform and course in conjunction with UN partners. Some successful examples include, online course on climate change negotiations developed by Youth Climate Scholarships, Climate Tracker, etc. A pilot of this could be run for 2020, and further formalised and continued from 2021 into the Decade. The strategy of the Restoration Decade should reflect the need for such a program to be institutionalised.

- **[3.2] Making a global movement locally implementable and relevant - *story-telling and knowledge sharing***

Ecosystem Restoration is not a “new” concept - but a practice that needs to be further propagated. “Heroes” of Ecosystem Restoration have existed and continue to exist in different parts of the world. The need is for the stories of these champions to be visible and further amplified, in a way that they make concept of restoration more “relatable”. Youth constituency suggests that UNEP and FAO should run a social media campaign during 2020 on #RestorationDecade featuring stories of champions, including youth. Youth constituency would be able to facilitate stories from youth when needed.

- **[3.3] Teaming up-with UN75 process**

United Nations system is commemorating its 75th anniversary in 2020 as part of which UN75 consultations have been launched and different stakeholders have been asked to conduct it in different avenues ranging from village communities to high-level events. It will be helpful to use this for amplifying messaging on Restoration Decade in these consultations - or dedicated ones on it.

[4] Critical youth priorities

The consultations received different diverse range of inputs on what youth feel is most needed to accelerate their engagement in Restoration Decade. The following two were referenced most number of times and identified as key priorities -

- **[4.1] Need for capacity building among youth**

As highlighted in the preceding section, the most common demand / priority coming from the consultations was the need for education, awareness and capacity building among youth. Both members states and custodian UN agencies must mainstream resource mobilisation for this within their strategy. Focus must also be laid on how youth organisations and groups can be empowered to further empower those within their communities, while having the ability to monitor and report. For instance, UNCC:Learn is a good online model.

- **[4.2] Need for access to finance: pilot micro-financing restoration youth projects in 2020.**

Another most common challenge / need highlighted by youth NGOs especially those undertaking consultations in the developing countries was access to finance to conduct projects - both on action, implementation or policy level. Youth NGOs and entities traditionally rely upon volunteer donors, and those in LMICs have much restricted access to grants from developed countries, or UN agencies due to stringent requirements or other structural barriers. Therefore, custodian UN agencies and member states must take into account how youth entities can be supported. One model can be to implement **micro-financing schemes for youth projects in 2020** - so some selected youth projects with clear deliverables could be piloted toward implementation of the Restoration Decade. These projects could be chosen to have mix of outcomes: lobbying, action, capacity building, etc.

[5] Structural elements of the Strategy

● [5.1] Suggestions for secretariat structure for Restoration Decade

Youth constituency welcomes the Secretariat that would be created for the facilitation of Restoration Decade, and highlights following suggestions toward its structure -

- **Secretariat from both UN and non-UN entities:** implementation of Restoration Decade means that on-ground organisations, movements and groups are equal partners in the facilitation of activities. Youth constituency suggests that the Secretariat that would coordinate the work of Restoration Decade should come from both UN agencies and non-UN bodies such as Indigenous Peoples organisations, NGOs and non-formal groups working in this field. This does not imply only “hiring” from these groups, but rather having a formalised/institutional structure that makes representatives from these groups in the steering side of the Restoration Decade, instead of holding traditional “advisory” or similar roles. UNEP MGCY will be happy to suggest more details on this if needed;
- **Secretariat should have ‘regional’ component:** while the coordination could be centered at UNEP or FAO headquarters or other locations, the operations should be decentralised such as to have a staff in different regions (such as in the regional offices of UNEP). These staff could again come from partner organisations and entities.
- **Secretariat should have a ‘youth’ component:** youth constituency also recommends for age and gender balance within the Secretariat. The Secretariat should comprise at least one (and preferably more!) staff that would act as contact point, or Focal Point for youth issues.

● [5.2] Structured youth engagement and representation

- It is important that the voices of children and youth are legitimately represented within the processes of Restoration Decade. Similarly, their engagement should be at all levels - consultation, implementation, and linking national level efforts.
- Wherever youth representatives are required, efforts should be made to have youth choose their representatives, through democratic processes.

- **Appointing dedicated thematic Focal Points / Facilitators for Restoration Decade** - UNMGCY within its working structures has youth entities (organisations / individuals) as thematic Focal Points (who serve in conjunction with elected Global Focal Points or GFPs) for different topics, as deemed relevant by the constituency. Given the nature of tasks, and work that would be needed in coordination of activities for youth and Restoration Decade, UNEP MGCY will consult internally together with youth working group to FAO for appointment of dedicated Facilitators (through a due process) who would work together with GFPs to facilitate engagement of youth in these processes. These facilitators could be identified regionally, and can be youth organisations already leading efforts on these topics. This request was also echoed in several consultation outcomes.

[6] Substantive elements - policy advocacy and implementation hand-in-hand

- **[6.1] Policy Coherence**

Large scales of restoration can be achieved through key policy changes by those in decision-making. There is a need therefore to encourage political will on this, demonstrate interlinkages when taking action for restoration. For instance, UNEP and FAO must develop policy toolkits that provide information on how countries' commitments under existing frameworks such as Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), national biodiversity plans, and Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) targets could be linked towards restoration; Similarly, guidance must be developed on mitigation and adaptation co-benefits of restoration, so the restoration is increasingly viewed as more "implementable".

- **[6.2] Political landscape of youth engagement on national level**

Several consultations, especially in LMICs, highlighted barriers that young people face in political and civil engagement on national level. This ranges from several countries not having environment or climate change ministry, or lacking structures to engage with youth entities or civil society in general.

- **[6.3] Mainstreaming narrative of Restoration**

While this ties somewhat to the communications aspect, it is important to develop steps on how topics of Restoration can be mainstreamed among policy-makers who may not be that engaged on conventional social media channels. One model to learn from is how Nature Based Solutions was mainstreamed in 2019 when it was a track of the SG Climate Summit. Different avenues, especially regional consultation meetings of UNEP, meetings of MEAs that UNEP is custodian of could be utilised to build understanding - in a more bottom-up manner.

[7] Features of “online-hub”

There have been a lot of discussions on creation of an online-hub that would facilitate engagement, and features key Ecosystem Restoration activities. The Youth constituency suggests following features -

- **[7.1] A dedicated section for Youth**

The hub must contain a dedicated section enhancing on the one hand the work of youth and on the other hand sharing the perspective of youth on the topic. The online-hub should not only contain a specific section for youth engagement opportunities like NGOs, programmes and grants but also a part for non-partisan political engagement channels towards national governments and the UN. This provides not only the possibility for cooperation on practical projects like planting trees, but also possibilities to associate for awareness raising and advocating for ecosystem restoration at any level of governance. Furthermore, the youth section should also generate and broadcast information about youth initiatives and pressing issues for young people. This allows other stakeholders to learn about the role and concerns of youth through respective articles and experience reports.

- **[7.2] Learning Material**

Young people have their own requirements when it comes to learning and capacity building. The online-hub should be a meaningful tool facilitating those needs. Learning material for youth and general users should be available on the hub in accessible formats. As language skills and level of education varies tremendously between users including youth, depending on age, level of education and prior knowledge on environmental issues, the hub has to provide material reaching any of the

preconditions of knowledge. Similarly, hub could also provide space for content or publications generated by users to be published.

- **[7.3 Incentivising engagement on the Hub**

The major question when using an online hub is of “perks” associated with it - why should a user gravitate to it ? To address this hub could facilitate incentives, such as allowing small scale projects to raise funds using the platforms, or allowing direct donations. Similarly, non-monetary incentives such as certificates of recognition, etc could be provided to active or most contributing members.

[8] Expanding engagement

It is important that the processes of the Restoration Decade engages groups that are not engaged traditionally. The engagement process must draw from the already existing constituencies, networks and groups - to work together as partners - and expand engagement. Efforts must be especially made to engage Indigenous communities, groups such as farmers’ associations, land miners’ unions, fishermen communities and others that are directly impacted by degrading ecosystem.

The budgetary needs of the implementation, and a Secretariat structure must allocated dedicated resources and capacity to help this expansion. In many developing countries, forming a legal entity (or registering as NGO, faith-based groups, enterprise) is not feasible. A special focus must be given to non-formal groups and the way to reach people from less established engagement mechanisms and small organisations

In the context of youth, there are existing youth networks and constituencies that need to work as partners moving forward. A list of especially those engaged in this consultation process is included with this report.

[9] Feedback on the visual identity for the Restoration Decade

The question on -- “ what is the plastic bag for restoration” received mixed responses. While some groups suggested the recycling symbol could be used, other suggested to use a symbol of a person planting a tree, or a general landscape with sun and oceans. A few consultations also indicated that there was no need or additional benefit in having a visual identity.

It is therefore important to keep marine ecosystem components in perspective when designing a visual identity, as the general perception of “ecosystem restoration” is very land-centric.

[10] Conclusion and looking into 2020

The paper captures and elaborates upon view of youth to be captured in the first draft of the Strategy of the Restoration Decade - this is however a start of a long process which would last for a decade, and has the potential to contribute in averting the planetary crisis. With the Restoration Decade formally commencing in 2021, 2020 must be utilised effectively to consult different groups at different avenues, and establish a strong foundation for the Restoration Decade.

In the span of less than 3 months, youth organisations in **more than 19 countries organised consultations in voluntary capacity** - this demonstrates the seriousness, and passion with which the youth groups have welcomed this topic and engagement in it. Similarly, all consultations indicated the strong need to continue this momentum.

The youth constituency will work in the coming days to consolidate a timeline of activities that would be relevant to further consult youth on iterations of the Strategy, and will further invite different youth NGOs and groups to submit their plan of action - what they are already doing in 2020 to conserve ecosystem. Similarly, we are committed towards implementing the different pilot ideas mentioned in this paper in cooperation with UNEP, FAO, and other interested agencies.