

Report outcomes: UNEP@50 Africa Youth Dialogue

Background

Africa is a unique continent, with a vibrant youth network that is driving towards a social and economic transformation anchored on the environmental pillar. The Africa Regional Youth dialogue was fundamental to capture and provide African youth with an opportunity to reflect on the 50 years of UNEP's existence while providing a futuristic outlook for the next 10 years which coincide with the Agenda 2030 and the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration as well as the key transformational outcomes of Agenda 2063.

Key note speech, Dr. Juliette Biao Koudenoukpo

Opening the session with a keynote speech on UNEP@50, Dr Juliette Biao Koudenoukpo, the Director and Regional Representative, expressed profound happiness on convening a strategic dialogue as youth voices matter as we draw close to commemorate and reflect on UNEP@50. Describing Africa as a youthful continent, she reiterated the importance to tap into youth's creativity. The environment has occupied a central place in policy and strategies and is key to socio-economic development. There has been a growing understanding by African members to translate policies and strategies into action

The 17th AMCEN under the theme "Taking action for environmental sustainable", has been built on the focus on turning environment policies into action and invest in the environment to accelerate implementation. Youth are considered key stakeholders. In commemoration of UNEP@50, it should be aligned to the aspirations of agenda 2063 on Africa we want and the broad programmes to support recovery from COVID. Lastly, Dr Juliette ended her speech by stating how the UNEP office believes in meaningfully engaging youth in environmental governance and conservation processes.

Technical perspective on Youth potential on UNEP@50, Mr. Mohammed Atani

Mr. Mohammed brought forward a fresh perspective on the strategic role youth play, and the potential to shape the narrative. He highly emphasized the need for youth to play an active role in moving the agenda and serve their interests towards the environment they want. Youth need to be at the centre of any discussion related to sustainable development and shaping policies to support our engagement. By engaging with UNEP, youth are not invited to be observers but instead to be engaged as strategic partners. As the future will be different, youth should actively participate to shape it. Youth need to an active role towards protecting, conserving and adding value to the central ecosystem.

He highlighted two key forums where youth voices should be channeled, which include the

- a. AMCEN, with 54-member states and youth, need to channel their voices through the Major group stakeholders. This year, it will happen virtually and launch the African Green Stimulus programme covering 12 pillars, which is a huge opportunity for youth. It will pave the way for a discussion focused on the mechanisms that will help transform ideas into action
- b. UNEA, to be held next year, with youth voices needed to be communicated to decision-makers

Panel Discussion led by Peter Frederick Moll (Founder of Stand-Up Shout Out),

Confirmed panelists

1. Ahmed Fathy (Egypt) Founder and president of the “Youth loves Egypt
2. Elizabeth Gulugulu Machache (Zimbabwe) AYICC
3. Kevin Ossah (Togo), Executive director for OJEDD
4. Patricia Mumbua Kombo, Founder of Petree Initiative
5. Mr Mohammed Atani, UNEP Africa

Setting the scene: Peter, ***“Having an organization like UNEP leading the way in the environment sector as a convener, negotiator and policy foundation is something we cannot take for granted as youth”***

What does UNEP@50 mean to us as youth

Ahmed: “UNEP has been fundamental to us, opening doors to attend and build our capacity. Beyond financial resources, important for youth to consider how they can be part of the solutions, move together and learn from the experiences. Great need for technical resources like capacity building’

Elizabeth, “I’m glad to be part of the journey, grateful for the technical capacity by UNEP. We are blessed with technology and science, by integrating science and IKS (Indigenous Knowledge Systems), we can best protect and conserve. I am hopeful for the future”

Patricia, “Through UNEP’s strong social media outreach, sharing easy-to-digest information on their platforms has been valuable as I have been able to learn more and share within my community. I highly commend their communication as they share user-friendly information, and it tends to bring more youth, motivating them while connecting them to the external world. I strongly encourage more young leaders who are part of UNEP to apply the knowledge gained, pass it on and empower more to have that ripple effect.”

What do we want to see in the next years?

Ahmed, “We need to see more capacity building opportunities, and propose to have a refresher every 5years for NGOs to track how youth-entities are operating and recovering especially in the wake of the global pandemic. In addition, the key to spotlight accredited, youth entities on what they are doing across Africa in UNEP newsletters

Elizabeth, “As young leaders, we should be conscious of the environment, and it depends on us to pass the button, transfer the knowledge gained. The digital divide has adversely impacted rural youth who do not share the same opportunities to access such valuable opportunities and knowledge. It is our responsibility to simplify and see the importance of the environment to secure our future. **UNEP IS Us** at the end of the day. We are responsible to assist governments and UN agencies to implement policies; responsible to pass that information to vulnerable communities, build more new leaders and strengthen our environment”

Mohammed, “I agree that **UNEP is Us**, and I am proud how youth are growing to understand that it is about us, that youth are part of what needs to be done towards shaping the agenda as youth are a key pillar in shaping that agenda. Youth need to look for the mechanisms and the channels.

As reiterated by Ahmed that youth need more capacity building and engagement with UNEP to advance youth commitments. Once accredited, youth should not disappear. We are aware that youth are going through challenges and our doors are open for engagement. Capacity building is key, but it is important to build capacity on what is needed. It is important to translate that knowledge to practice; hence capacity building needs to be specific which can be linked to the UNEP's mandate. From statistics, in the next 9 years, some 230 million jobs in Africa will require some level of digital skills, hence it is not enough to say that I am a youth but you should clearly show that you can do the job. With skills youth can become trusted as partners, hence they should open their eyes to existing opportunities. In the mind of UNEP's mandate as a science-based institution which has built a strong foundation in terms of networking and partnerships, an important aspect to convene strategic dialogues with youth and relevant stakeholders to foster sustainable partnerships."

Peter, "Young people should see themselves as partners who add value as we envision the future we want. #WeAreUNEP

Kevin, "Institutions need to support us not only for capacity but also strategy support to be able to allow youth to design better projects which can be recognized while learning from us. Moving forward, UNEP should allow youth to be in the decision-making processes, including us and also important to consult us in all their processes towards coming up with creative solutions that tackle environmental challenges."

Peter; "When it comes to inclusivity and mainstreaming of youth from cocreation, co-planning, co-implementation, co-management and benefit-sharing it is not always easy but it is a needed task. As we have these dialogues, having that engagement that brings together youth to move forward together, Youth must be included in the process. As young people our dreams need tomorrow and tomorrow needs nature, and nature needs us to do what we need to do to reduce emissions, restore ecosystems and ensure less biodiversity loss and more climate action!"

How can youth help UNEP do their job at a higher impactful level?

Elizabeth, "We as young people are always asking for financial support, but it is key to be co-leaders as we bring something to the table and being part of the solutions. Let's identify the projects that UNEP is pioneering and add value to them, for example, the #AnatomyOfAction campaign focusing on sustainable livelihoods and how to practice sustainable consumption. We need to start adding value to what UNEP is doing, and it is not a matter of asking but offering solutions to the problems we have identified towards the future we dream of, and make UNEP accountable for the initiatives that they are doing. We are at the table and here to offer solutions. We are here to add value to the programs UNEP is doing. It takes two to tango!"

Patricia, "We should be ambassadors of change! It's not always crucifying what is not being done, but our responsibility to help implement what UNEP is doing. They have done the research, so it's up to us to help add value to it."

Your one vision and how UNEP can contribute to it

Ahmed, "Environment education from primary to secondary level, with such real education helping to transform our lives and habits, leading to change. Important to encourage governments to integrate the environment into education with a practical approach, as our children are our future

and the future is real environment education. Build more capacity so that we can be key ambassadors’”

Elizabeth, “Great need for more visibility, as it is saddening that almost 17% do not know about UNEP, hence it is important to understand the reason behind this statistic. By increasing visibility, youth are aware of UNEP’s existence beyond media, while making sure that policies are done in an inclusive and consultative manner, with continuous engagement of young people.”

Peter, “Everyone has a dream, you don’t have to love the oceans, air etc., but you have to love the future. Your future cannot exist without clean water, clean air, it cannot exist without a nature positive 2030. Tell people to love themselves, love their future and they will know they need to protect it because you need it tomorrow for your dreams to be a reality, and for your dreams to be a reality, tomorrow must exist and nature needs to exist”

Key Takeaways

Ahmed Fathy (Egypt) Founder and president of the Youth loves Egypt

- Invest in children education for environmental issues
- Give youth the chance to make different
- UNEP must make capacity building for accredited organizations staff yearly.
- UNEP must do an archive for the NGOs programs and put each NGO in each line to be easy when the search for NGO works for one field, they can find it easy.
- UNEP has to make a monthly newsletter about NGOs activities so it helps NGOs to do more work.
- UNEP must put accredited organizations in touch with partners of the program

Kevin Ossah (Togo), executive director for OJEDD,

- Young people in Africa are in the frontline tackling climate change. We have to deal with climate change issues and also poverty to contribute to the resilience of our communities who are mostly in rural areas.
- To be effective, we need support from the UNEP.
- We have to be involved in every decision-making process to contribute actively to the Africa we want.
- We also need small grants and funding to scale up our creative and innovative solutions to tackle climate change in Africa.
- All programmes have to be underlined on our realities, and climate-resilient agriculture has to be developed to support small farmers and mostly rural women's can.

Patricia Mumbua Kombo, the founder of Petree Initiative

- To me, UNEP has been my source of reference in providing timely and easy translation messages which I use when carrying my environmental conservation education.
- To meaningfully engage us they should empower youths by showcasing what they are doing in grassroots and also start a media campaign on UNEP is us where youths will post what they are doing which will enable them to learn and Collaborate with fellow youths