

Youth Voices

Today's global youth population is the largest in history. Young people are also the most vulnerable to climate change and, arguably, the most vocal advocates for a better world.

We need to listen to them.





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This is a special excerpt of critical thoughts and action points by leading youth voices from around the world, captured during Expo 2020 Dubai.

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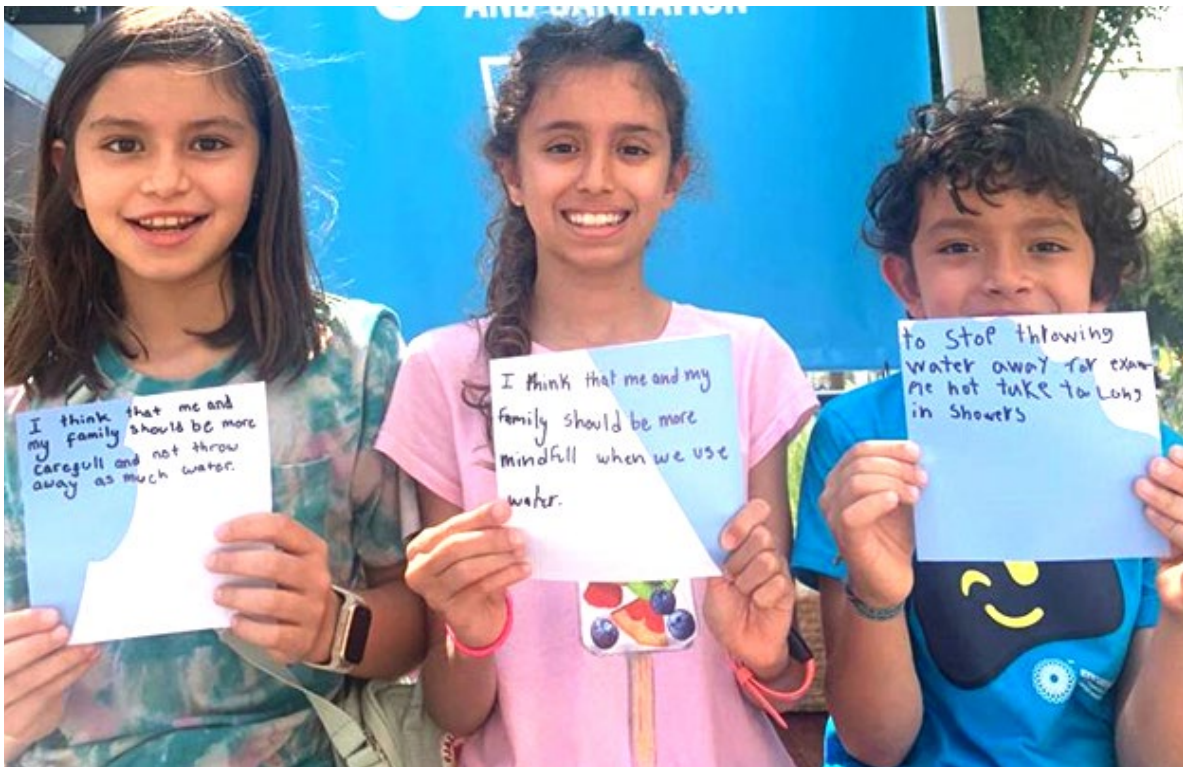
The good ancestor test

Those who will be most impacted by our environmental crisis may not yet be alive. One way to gauge planet-friendly behaviour is to constantly reflect on whether we are leaving the world a better place for future generations

Wales's Sophie Howe is the first person in the world to hold the position of Future Generations Commissioner – or, as British newspaper the Guardian has described her, “minister of the



unborn". Novel as her role may seem, it provides food for thought on how the decisions we make today – whether about the climate emergency or our consumption patterns – will fundamentally shape the lives of future generations and, indeed, determine whether they will exist at all.



Howe believes that it is only by shifting towards generational thinking that we will fully appreciate the actions we need to take now to guarantee our planet's future survival. Key long-term issues are difficult to make progress on, as policy makers work primarily in short-term cycles of four to five years. During their runs, they are more likely to support projects with higher, more immediate success rates, while slow-burning crises like climate change and biodiversity loss remain on the docket pile to be addressed later. Later may be too late. "Little positive long-term impact can be accomplished in such a short time, while permanent devastation can happen in the span of a single generation or less," says Howe.

The solution, she asserts, is simple. Every action, policy and response must undergo a litmus test to



ascertain its lasting viability. We must ask whether “the decisions that we’re taking today are going to help or hinder future generations to meet their own needs. I like to call it ‘the good ancestor test’. Are we being good ancestors or not?”

“In Kenya we have a Maasai proverb that says: ‘We do not inherit our land from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children’”

Natasha Elkington, Journalist and storyteller, speaking during Expo 2020 Dubai’s Climate & Biodiversity Week



The golden toad is lost to my daughters

By Christiana Figueres

At night, Costa Rica's golden toads were reflected in the moonlight as they performed their mating dance; and this ritual made me fall in love with nature. Many years later, as the mother of two young daughters, I wanted them to have the same connection to nature that had been instilled in me by my parents. Yet, when I took them to see the golden toads, to my horror, the species had disappeared.

It is only by understanding the complete indivisible link between the protection of nature and the protection of the human species that we stand any chance of giving life on this planet a future.



Youth speaks out



Kehkashan Basu

Founder and President, Green Hope Foundation

Kehkashan Basu, born and raised in Dubai, believes that “there is a change maker in every single one of us”. All we need to do, she suggests, is “take that first step and continue to ask yourself the question: ‘have we done enough?’” Basu’s first step towards becoming a change maker happened when she planted a tree on her eighth birthday, which coincides with World Environment Day. Since then, she has made it her life’s mission to inspire climate action in youth around the world, and the 22-year-old has now been fighting climate change for more than a decade.

At 12, Basu was elected the UN Environmental Programme’s Global Coordinator for Children and Youth and established Green Hope Foundation after attending Rio+20, the UN Conference on Sustainable Development in Brazil.

Basu’s dedication has grown the foundation into a global solutions-based enterprise that is driving change across 25 countries with initiatives like tree planting and mangrove conservation in Dubai, as well as clean-energy solutions in climate-vulnerable communities around the world.



Clover Hogan

Founder and Executive Director, Force of Nature

At just 22, climate activist Clover Hogan has spent half her life fighting to solve the climate crisis. As a child in Australia's tropical North Queensland, Hogan learned about the climate crisis and became overwhelmed by feelings of despair and confusion: "I couldn't understand how the adults in my life were so good at pretending these issues didn't exist."

At 13, Hogan convinced her parents to move to Indonesia so she could attend Bali's environmentally focused Green School. By 16, she was on her way to Paris for the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference (UNFCCC). The experience compelled her to start Force of Nature, an organisation that empowers youth to turn eco-anxiety into action: "It can be easy to want to run away from these difficult emotions, yet every climate psychologist I've spoken to has said that these feelings are essential. They are proof of our humanity, of our empathy, of those internal alarm bells that tell us that something is radically wrong. We might not be able to change the climate overnight, but we can choose whether we step up or shut down in the face of this crisis."



Ineza Umuhoza Grace

**Co-director, The Loss and Damage Youth Coalition;
Founder and CEO, The Green Fighter**

Growing up on the outskirts of Kigali, Rwanda, 25-year-old Ineza Umuhoza Grace experienced climate change first-hand at the age of six, when intense rainfall destroyed her home's roof. She has since seen extreme weather events increase in frequency and intensity in Rwanda, where prolonged droughts and flooding threaten livelihoods in rural communities.

Today, Grace is Co-director of The Loss and Damage Youth Coalition, an alliance of youth from the Global North and South who campaign for vulnerable communities who are unable to adapt to or mitigate climate change. She is also the CEO of The Green Fighter, a youth-led NGO that is further driving environmental awareness and action in Rwanda.

According to Grace, the climate crisis affects communities in the Global South most severely, despite them being the least responsible. She is also concerned that the climate burden falls disproportionately on women and girls. Despite this, she has hope for the future: "I am from a generation of young people that don't want to only blame the global leaders, we want to be stakeholders in co-creating a future for us to feel safe."

Thinking it through together

Young climate activist Nisreen Elsaim and youth thought leader Renard Siew share their five learnings on navigating out of the climate crisis



Nisreen Elsaim

Chair of the UN Secretary-General's Youth Advisory Group on Climate Change, Chair of the Sudan Youth Organization for Climate Change

The biggest climate policy challenge is usually related to good governance. Most of the countries vulnerable to climate change don't have the capacity to implement climate change policies. And some others, usually those in the Global North, don't actually have the political will to put them in place.

Individual actions can limit the effects of climate change. If the seven billion people on our planet took seven billion different actions, then we would be in a better situation. If we are talking about mitigating climate change in relation to CO² emissions, then we also need large-scale industrial movement from the



oil and gas industry. It has to be both. Otherwise, we will not succeed.

Not enough is being done for vulnerable communities. These communities become marginalised and displaced for a reason and then climate change compounds the issue. In 2020, when the world was in quarantine, we did not have the privilege of quarantining because Sudan experienced its worst flood in 100 years. Unfortunately, the refugees and poor people who live by the river had already lost their homes because of conflict, climate change or another reason, and then the flood destroyed their homes again. They were doubly impacted.

Renewable energy is key. Seventy per cent of the Sudanese population 28 million people, don't have access to electricity. I think energy is the key for development and renewable clean energy is the key for sustainable development.

Most immediately, I would like to see the phasing out of coal, gas and fossil fuel. Also, for developing countries to get fair access to climate finance. We know that we didn't cause this, yet we are the ones who are most impacted by it.



Renard Siew

Sustainability and climate change specialist, Head of Corporate Sustainability at Yinson in Malaysia, member of the World Economic Forum's Global Future Council on SDG Investment

A lot of existing climate policies are not well integrated. They typically sit under the jurisdiction of just one ministry and lack intersection with others. To fully address climate change you need to ensure there is 'systems change', which requires the involvement of multiple actors. There also needs to be a much stronger enforcement of climate policies. What are the penalties or consequences for failing to adhere to such policies? Without this, climate policies will just remain a 'nice to have' on paper without serious action.

Climate action doesn't have to be large scale, even small actions cumulatively add up. Imagine if one billion people all opted to cycle to work every day instead of driving combustion engine vehicles.

So much more needs to be done for marginalised communities from poorer backgrounds. I can cite so many examples of how their voices are usually left out (it's almost as if they are invisible) when it comes to policy-making or big decisions that affect their



livelihoods. This needs to change drastically; we must leave no one behind.

I came across this project called Treelionaire which intends to plant one trillion trees worldwide. Trees are such an important carbon sink which we must protect together. We need stronger regulation on deforestation and the EU has recently enacted such legislation. Hopefully, it will have a spillover effect on other countries.

The delivery of much-needed climate financing for developing countries has to happen now. At COP26, more than USD 130 trillion was committed through the Glasgow Financial Alliance for Net Zero. We need to make sure this happens!



How youth can transform our cities

By Nadine Bitar

Nadine Bitar is a global thought leader advocating Place-led 4.0©, a people-centric approach to urban planning, and adviser at the United Nations Development Programme. Having worked extensively with youth over the past two decades, she describes the five key traits that make them ideal contributors to strategies for inclusive, resilient and sustainable development

Thriving cities are essential to transforming the world we live in, but they face a diverse set of challenges. From contributing over 70 per cent of global CO² emissions to the growing population which flocks to them in search of (in many cases, unrealised) quality of life improvements, there is an



urgent need to transform our urban centres. Solutions which are already underway include technological innovation to support businesses, social services and quality of life; the prioritisation of mental health in urban policies in the wake of COVID-19; and a globe-sweeping green transition that places planetary well-being at the heart of development initiatives.



However, the most critical solution will be including young people, whose resourcefulness will be key to forging transformational pathways that improve lives. So, how can decision makers tap into the potential of youth to transform our regions and cities? Five key factors stand out for me.

First, young people think outside the box. They don't approach challenges burdened with the weight of precedents such as benchmarking studies. Instead, they make novel connections between how life could be lived and how their talent could be leveraged to achieve ideals. It is important that this creative, explorational knowledge is retained and used.

Second, young people are growing up in an era where social media is ubiquitous. While older



“It’s time to capitalise on this potential and empower this generation”

generations may use social media, they don’t live their lives through it like younger people do. Their innate ability to create content can be an avenue for rethinking regions and cities. For example, using social platforms to crowdsource both funds and ideas allows them to collaborate with the entire world, not just the ‘people in the room’.



Third, young people are familiar with the hybridisation of everything. In the future, fluidity between the virtual and physical spheres will be ever more relevant. We are already seeing the value of digital twins in planning solutions, as well as digitalisation for developing regions and the possibilities of the metaverse. Young people are eager to explore new spaces where such technologies are used to propel us to a better urban future.

Fourth, young people have a strong desire to make a difference, and to do so on their own terms and



based on their unique abilities. Old career models are dying out as young people promote purpose-led work that benefits everyone. This values-driven approach needs to be harnessed, and decision makers can help such initiatives thrive by supporting the development of pilot projects into full programmes, for which positive impact is the primary metric.

Finally, mental health is driving life choices for the next generation as they navigate an increasingly complex and uncertain world. Youth voices can provide creative perspectives to the dialogue around well-being policies.



It's time to capitalise on this potential and empower this generation. We need to put support systems in place that allow this generation to hone their innately futuristic skills and contribute to a better quality of life for all people in all settings. Regional development strategies and urban programmes have much to learn, and much to gain, from giving youth a space to thrive.



What if young people were in charge of cities?

During Expo's Urban & Rural Development Week, schoolchildren came together to brainstorm ideas for the future of urban areas. Here's what they envisaged



TECH DRIVEN



Keep it simple; things don't need to be complex to be better

Optimise city management with sensors, monitors and AI

Use glass windows that generate solar energy

ACCESSIBLE



Make sure everything a citizen needs is close to home

Build cycle lanes

Incentivise reduced car use, and champion electric vehicles



INCLUSIVE



- Use competitions to turn suggestions into actions
- Provide places to connect both virtually and physically
- Be diverse and welcome people from all cultures
- Involve young people. In 10 years it will be their city to care for
- Listen to older generations and learn their lessons

WELL LED



- Give citizens a seat at the decision-making table
- Be proactive in recognising and solving problems
- Provide vision and be imaginative in plans for the future

SAFE



- Technology shouldn't be able to track people
- Maximise cyber security to keep our online worlds safe

SUSTAINABLE



- Champion local sourcing
- Include green spaces. Cities shouldn't have more malls than parks
- Provide affordable, adequate housing
- Implement solutions to reduce pollution
- Promote urban agriculture
- Provide recycling facilities



A GLOBAL INITIATIVE BY EXPO CITY DUBAI

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