

August 2025

www.cercindia.org



GRAHAK SATHI

Local Youth Actions for the Sustainable
Development Goals (SDGs) and Beyond

— *Papers by Law School Students*



12 August 2025



**CONSUMER EDUCATION AND RESEARCH CENTRE
AHMEDABAD**

HELPLINE NO. 1800 233 0332

Email : cerc@cercindia.org, grahaksathi@cercindia.org

Today, youth play a crucial role in shaping a sustainable and fair future. 12 August is celebrated as International Youth Day, a day to highlight the impact of youth on global development. This year's theme, "**Local Youth Actions for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Beyond,**" emphasizes the importance of youth-led initiatives in advancing the global sustainability agenda.

As part of our internship programme, we asked students from law colleges to share their insights on this theme. Their papers highlight how youth are driving change through community-based initiatives, from environmental projects to social activism. The students also discuss the challenges youth face, such as limited resources and access, and how they overcome these barriers with creativity and collaboration.

We are pleased to present these papers, which offer valuable perspectives on how youth can drive change and help build a sustainable future.



The material used in this e-book does not necessarily represent the views of CERC

Index

Sr. No.	Paper	Author	Page No.
1	Youth Empowerment, and Sustainable Development	Tanya Shetty (BA LLB, GLS University)	3
2	Youth Engagement and Sustainable Development in India	Om Thakker (BBA LLB, GLS University)	10
3	Youth Engagement and Sustainable Future	Pranali Bangar (BA LLB, MS University)	17
4	Building Future: Youth Engagement as A Catalyst for A Sustainable Future	Pooja Mewara (BBA LLB, GLS University)	22
5	Youth Engagement and Sustainable Development: A Call to Action and a Progress Report	Harsh Bhatt (BBA LLB, GLS University)	26
6	Not Just the Future, Youth Raising Their Voice for Sustainable Development Today	Harvi Bhalani (BA LLB, GLS University)	36
7	Youth Engagement and Sustainable Future	Kartik Mishra (BBA LLB, GLS University)	40

Youth Empowerment, and Sustainable Development

- *By Tanya Shetty*
BA LLB, GLS University

Introduction:

Sustainable development is no longer just a big idea for the future. It's something we need right now. It's about finding the right balance between meeting our needs today without hurting the chances of future generations to meet theirs. As the world faces growing problems like climate change, social inequality, and economic challenges, it's clear we need a better way to move forward that connects the environment, society, and the economy. A big part of this change depends on young people. Today's youth are more informed, active, and ready to make a difference. With the right education, support, and opportunities, they're not just participants, they're leaders in pushing for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This paper looks at how sustainable development has grown over time, why it matters so much today, and how young people can help create a fairer, stronger, and greener world for everyone.

Meaning of Sustainable Development:

Sustainable development is an approach to social, economic, and environmental planning that seeks to balance the needs of the present generation with those of future generations, while also preserving the natural environment. It encourages development that ensures long-term ecological balance, economic growth, and social equity.

While sustainable development lacks a universally detailed definition, it is generally understood to encompass several key goals and values:

- A global perspective on social, economic, and environmental policies that takes into account the needs of future generation
- A recognition of the instrumental value of a sound natural environment, including the importance of biodiversity.
- The protection and appreciation of the needs of Indigenous cultures
- The cultivation of economic and social equity in societies throughout the world
- The responsible and transparent implementation of government policies

The intellectual foundations of sustainable development stem from modern natural resource management, environmentalism, and reformed economic thought. Its early principles were formally introduced at the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (Stockholm Conference), which acknowledged the importance of protecting the environment while recognizing the ongoing necessity of industrial and economic development.

The concept gained international prominence with the 1987 Brundtland Report, *Our Common Future*, which defined sustainable development as:

"Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

Later, at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, more than 178 countries adopted Agenda 21, which presented a global action plan to support environmentally sound and socially equitable development.

Over the years, sustainable development has become a central theme in global development theory and policy. However, it has not been without criticism. Critics have pointed to the vagueness of the concept, the difficulty in measuring its outcomes, and the assumptions underlying economic growth models. Yet, many scholars and policy experts argue that the value of sustainable development lies in its aspirational nature, which encourages efforts to balance the three pillars of sustainability, even if perfect balance is unattainable.

Today, sustainable development is at the heart of major global initiatives. In 2015, the United Nations adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which introduced 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aimed at promoting prosperity, equity, and environmental sustainability on a global scale.

History of Sustainable Development:

The concept of sustainable development has evolved over decades, shaped by growing awareness of environmental challenges and the limitations of unchecked economic growth. Its development reflects humanity's increasing recognition that environmental protection, social equity, and economic progress must be pursued together to ensure long-term global well-being.

The earliest seeds of sustainable development were sown in the mid-20th century through foundational works that raised alarm about environmental degradation. Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) exposed the dangers of pesticide use and catalysed the modern environmental movement. Garret Hardin's *Tragedy of the Commons* (1968) illustrated the consequences of unregulated use of shared natural resources. Publications such as *The Blueprint for Survival* (1972) and the Club of Rome's *Limits to Growth* (1972) further highlighted the unsustainable nature of exponential population and economic growth. The first major global recognition of these concerns came with the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm. While the term "sustainable development" was not explicitly used, the conference emphasized that development and environmental protection were not mutually exclusive but could be harmonized.

The concept gained formal expression in 1987 with the publication of the Brundtland Report, *Our Common Future*, by the World Commission on Environment and Development. This landmark report provided the most widely accepted definition of sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." It also introduced the idea that environmental degradation and poverty are interlinked global challenges.

The importance of sustainable development was globally affirmed at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, which gathered representatives from 178 countries and various civil society

groups. This summit produced Agenda 21, a comprehensive plan for implementing sustainable development worldwide, and marked the first concerted international effort to integrate environmental concerns into development strategies.

A decade later, the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg aimed to assess progress since the Rio Summit. It brought together leaders from 191 countries and produced the Johannesburg Declaration and Plan of Implementation, reaffirming global commitments to address issues such as sustainable consumption, water and sanitation, and energy access.

These international milestones have laid the foundation for sustainable development as a global policy priority, leading to more recent initiatives such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted in 2015.

Sustainable Development in the Modern Context:

In the contemporary era, sustainable development has evolved into a comprehensive and globally coordinated effort to address the complex challenges of our time. This evolution is embodied in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted in 2015 as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. These 17 interlinked goals represent a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure prosperity for all by 2030.

The SDGs emerged from the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) held in 2012. They were envisioned as a successor framework to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which were launched in 2000 to tackle global issues such as extreme poverty, hunger, disease, and lack of access to education. Over 15 years, the MDGs achieved significant progress: over one billion people were lifted out of extreme poverty, child mortality and HIV/AIDS infections were dramatically reduced, and access to clean water and primary education improved globally.

However, the MDGs also left unfinished business, particularly in areas like gender equality, universal secondary education, and sustainable economic growth. The SDGs, therefore, aim not only to complete the work started by the MDGs but also to address newer and more pressing global issues such as climate change, inequality, peace and justice, and sustainable industrialization.

What sets the SDGs apart is their universality; they apply to all countries, regardless of their level of development. They emphasize that economic growth must go hand in hand with environmental protection and social inclusion. The SDGs also reflect a shift toward integrated policymaking, recognizing that progress in one area often influences outcomes in others. For example, combating climate change (Goal 13) impacts how natural resources are managed (Goals 14 and 15), while achieving gender equality (Goal 5) can drive improvements in health (Goal 3) and education (Goal 4).

The development of the SDGs was itself a reflection of sustainable development principles, involving a three-year participatory process with contributions from governments, civil society, academic institutions, and citizens. The Open Working Group, comprising representatives from 70 countries, produced the initial draft of the 17 goals. These were further refined through national consultations in 88 countries, thematic dialogues, and the global My World survey, which collected public input on priorities for development. The adoption of the SDGs also coincided with other landmark international agreements in 2015, including the Paris Climate Agreement (COP21) and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. Together, these agreements provide a cohesive roadmap for building resilient, equitable, and sustainable societies.

Importantly, sustainable development is helping youth in many ways. The SDGs focus on giving young people better education, job opportunities, and a voice in their communities. Young people benefit directly from goals related to quality education (Goal 4), decent work (Goal 8), and reduced inequalities (Goal 10). Many youth-led organizations are already using the SDGs to push for real change—whether it’s climate action, social justice, or innovation. Through sustainable development, youth are not only being supported, but they are also becoming powerful changemakers in building a better world.

The year 2015 was also important for other global agreements like the Paris Climate Agreement and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. Together with the SDGs, they provide a complete roadmap for a stronger and fairer future. Today, the SDGs are at the heart of global development plans. They aim to make sure no one is left behind and invite everyone, governments, companies, schools, and especially young people, to be part of a more just and sustainable future.

Youth and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):

Today, there are 1.8 billion people between the ages of 10–24, the largest generation of youth in history. Nearly 90% of them live in developing countries, where they represent a significant share of the population. Their perfect numbers and their global connectedness have made youth a driving force for change. From climate action and education equity to peacebuilding and gender equality, youth are contributing bold ideas, fresh energy, and strong moral leadership across all 17 SDGs.

According to the United Nations, *“the active engagement of youth in sustainable development efforts is central to achieving sustainable, inclusive, and stable societies by the target date of 2030.”* Youth today are not only the inheritors of the 2030 Agenda; they are its greatest hope for success.

Youth as Agents of Change

- **Critical Thinkers:** Youth question the world they inherit. They challenge injustice, identify contradictions, and demand accountability from governments and institutions.
- **Change-Makers:** Through activism and advocacy, often powered by social media, youth movements are growing in reach and influence.
- **Innovators:** Young people, especially those closest to the problems, are crafting creative, tech-driven, and community-based solutions.
- **Communicators:** They are uniquely positioned to communicate the SDGs to their peers and communities, bridging local realities with global goals.
- **Leaders:** With the right tools, education, and support, youth can lead meaningful transformation in their societies, especially through youth-led organizations and networks.

The Impact of Our Youth Today

In 2023, there were 1.2 billion young people aged 15 to 24, making up 16% of the global population. These youth are uniquely positioned to address global challenges such as climate change, unemployment, poverty, gender inequality, conflict, and migration.

As individuals and organizations, what we do today can change the trajectory of our planet's future. This includes the education, preparation, and involvement of our youth in sustainable initiatives, and it's never too early to start.

Youth Development in Action: EFL Global's Role

EFL Global, an international logistics company, has taken decisive steps to empower youth across various regions with education, training, and sustainable practices.

- In India, EFL Global partners with Yein Udaan, an NGO in Chennai, to sponsor after-school programs for around 50 children. These programs focus on computer literacy, photography, martial arts, and sustainability awareness, all within a safe and nurturing environment.
- In Sri Lanka, EFL Global supported:
 - Sustinere'23, a sustainability innovation fair organized by the National Institute of Business Management (NIBM), where students showcased sustainable solutions.
 - The Campus to Corporate Career Fair at the National School of Business Management (NSBM), offering final-year students' insights on corporate leadership and environmental responsibility.
- Under the "Next Gen" initiative, EFL Global educates youth on sustainability-related topics such as climate change, clean water and sanitation (Costa Rica), disaster relief (Sri Lanka), and marine conservation (across Latin America and South Asia).

Youth Participation and the UN

The United Nations plays a key role in amplifying youth voices and ensuring their participation in global development:

- **Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth:** Ms. Jayathma Wickramanayake advocates globally for young people’s rights and involvement in policymaking, particularly around the SDGs.
- **Young Leaders for the SDGs:** Launched in 2016, this initiative brings together 17 dynamic changemakers from different regions to support the 2030 Agenda through advocacy, community work, and innovation.
- The UN emphasizes diversity, inclusion, and youth as rights-holders, promoting transparency and accountability from governments and institutions in responding to youth needs.

Opportunities and Resources for Youth Engagement

To foster meaningful youth participation, the UN and its partners offer numerous initiatives and tools:

- **Campaigns:**
 - Be the Change
 - Little x Little
 - Not Too Young to Run
 - Fearless Future (LGBTIQ+)
- **Tools & Resources:**
 - Lazy Person’s Guide to Saving the World
 - SDGs in Action App
 - The World’s Largest Lesson
 - Young Women’s Political Participation and Leadership
 - IASC Guidelines on Working with Youth in Crisis
 - Global Report on Protecting Young People in Civic Space
 - Guidance on Digital Safety and Protection

The Future Generation

By involving youth in educational, entrepreneurial, and environmental projects, they gain first-hand experience, develop critical skills, and are empowered to contribute meaningfully to their communities. The youth of today are the changemakers of tomorrow, and their engagement will determine whether we can build a sustainable, inclusive, and just world by 2030.

The role of youth in achieving the SDGs is not optional; it is inevitable, and with the right investments, they will be the generation that drives humanity forward.

Conclusion:

Sustainable development is about making smart, long-term choices that help people, the planet, and the economy grow in a balanced way. To make the 2030 Agenda successful, it's very important to include young people in every part of this journey. Today's youth are not just waiting for the future they are already working to create it. From leading projects in their communities to joining big organizations and taking part in important decisions, young people are showing that real change happens when everyone is included.

Groups like EFL Global show how powerful youth involvement can be. With the right support and opportunities, young people can lead the way in promoting sustainability and making a difference around the world. Supporting youth is not just about helping the next generation, it's also about solving problems we face today. When we include their ideas, energy, and creativity, sustainable development becomes more than just a plan, it becomes something we can achieve.

Youth Engagement and Sustainable Development in India

- *By Om Thakker*
BBA LLB, GLS University

Objectives of the Research

1. To explore the various dimensions through which Indian youth contribute to sustainable development, including environmental protection, education, employment, policy advocacy, and technological innovation.
2. To identify and document national initiatives and policies that promote and support youth engagement in sustainable development in India.
3. To examine youth-led case studies that demonstrate practical, on-ground applications of sustainable development goals (SDGs) by young people in India.
4. To assess India's youth engagement strategies in comparison to global trends, highlighting both strengths and areas for improvement.
5. To identify challenges faced by Indian youth in participating meaningfully in sustainable development activities and to try to find ways to negate the challenges.

Overview:

"Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" is the widely recognised definition of sustainable development. This idea infuses social justice, economic growth, and environmental preservation. Since the youngsters will inherit the future and make up a significant portion of the population, young people are widely acknowledged as essential actors in achieving sustainable development. According to UNESCO, young people are "crucial actors, leaders, and partners" in the battle against inequality and the creation of a sustainable future because they provide "creativity, innovation, and capacity to make change happen." In India, where over 65 crore young people—or half of the 140 crore people living there—are under 25, this potential is gigantic and unignorable. So, it is essential for India's development plan to include this population in social activities, environmental preservation, education, and the economy. This report examines the ways in which Indian youth can support sustainable development, national efforts to engage them, global trends that are comparable to their own, the obstacles they encounter, and suggestions for enhancing their role.

Dimensions of Youth Engagement

Indian youth often participate in a variety of tasks and initiatives that support all the pillars of sustainable development. Environmental conservation, education and skills, employment and entrepreneurship, policy engagement, and innovation are important components.

- **Environmental Protection and Climate Action:** Young people in India are actively involved in climate campaigns, conservation, and environmental awareness. In both rural and urban regions, grassroots youth organisations arrange waste management initiatives, river clean-ups, and tree planting efforts. A few examples of youth-led climate action programs include pressing local governments for improved trash recycling, building soak

pits to replenish groundwater, and planting mangrove saplings along sea coasts. students from India are participating in global youth climate strikes in support of climate legislation, motivated by movements such as Fridays for Future. Young activists advocating for local solutions (such water-saving measures in the home) and influencing policy by writing youth statements for COP27 are highlighted by UNICEF's youth climate program in Maharashtra. These types of events portray how Indian youngsters organise local environmental campaigns.

- **Education and Skill Development:** Both receiving and delivering education are aspects of youth participation. Many young Indians serve as tutors, mentors, and peer educators. As an example, they may be National Cadet Corps (NCC) or National Service Scheme (NSS) volunteers who teach underprivileged children and increase awareness of topics like sanitation and health. Online learning programs, such as free coding workshops or language classes for kids of rural India, are also driven by tech-savvy young in the digital era. Particularly, student involvement is now being included in official education. As a result of youth groups' activism, Maharashtra state has included curriculum about climate change and the environment in 65,000 elementary schools. This shows how youth influence curriculum to incorporate sustainability. Additionally, initiatives such as Maha Youth for Climate Action (MYCA) train young Indians (15–29 years old) in environmental science and green job skills, directly building and infusing the skill base essential to promote sustainable development.
- **Employment and Entrepreneurship:** Since there are many young people and a high danger of unemployment, sustainable development focusses on economic opportunities. Millions of young people receive vocational training under the Government of India's Skill India Mission and associated programs (including the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana), which aims to close the skills gap and match skills to the industry needs. A growing number of young Indians are launching green and social firms. Research indicates that young entrepreneurs employ creative business strategies to address regional issues and are driven by a desire to make positive social impact. For example, the student entrepreneurship network Enactus India, enables youth to create projects related to renewable energy, waste management, or agriculture, so transforming them into activists for change in their communities. Such initiatives both generate employment for youth and drive sustainable outcomes (e.g. eco-friendly products, efficient farming, clean-energy solutions). In sum, youth involvement in skill-building and entrepreneurship links economic growth with social and environmental benefits.
- **Civic engagement and policy participation:** Indian youth now have more opportunities to shape and influence public policy than they did a few years ago. To help students better grasp legislation, the National Youth Parliament Festival, which is being conducted annually since 2017, involves them in mock parliamentary debates. Young delegates contribute to drafting policy recommendations at youth conventions organized by the Indian government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), such as the Conferences of Youth. Maharashtra youngsters who were supported by UNICEF made a contribution to India's national youth declaration at the COP27 climate summit on a global scale. Yet young people continue to be underrepresented in decision-making. Just 2.6% of

lawmakers worldwide are under the age of 30, and India follows similar trends. Additionally, youth views are spread through various organizations such as State Youth Councils and the proposed National Youth Commission of the Ministry of Youth Affairs, though these are evolving. Engaging young people in governance – such as through mandatory youth seats on municipal councils or formal “youth advisory” committees – has been recognized as important by experts. Overall, youths in India are emerging as political actors but need stronger representation to shape sustainable development policies.

- **Innovation and Technology:** Young Indians are tackling ecological issues by utilising creativity and technology. Many clean-tech and social-tech businesses are becoming the part of India's youth-dominated startup culture (e.g. apps for pollution mapping, solar-energy markets, low-cost water purifiers). To assess greenhouse gas reductions from individual efforts, one participant in Maha Youth for Climate Action developed an app called Cool the Globe which was also seen in the show Shark tank. In other places, students studying science and engineering develop inexpensive sensors or biotech solutions for the environment and agriculture. Youth-led digital initiatives are also supported by government programs like Startup India incubators and the Atal Innovation Mission in schools. India's youth are in a good position to lead sustainable innovations because of the country's youthful, educated population and expanding internet availability.

Indian Initiatives and Programs

To encourage young people to support sustainable development, the Indian Government has started a number of policies and initiatives. They are as follows:

- **National Youth Policy (2014):** The plan addresses issues including education, employment, entrepreneurship, health, and community involvement in order to enable youth of the country to tap into their true potential. Its action plan and state-level youth policies address inclusivity and skill development, establishing a formal and strong framework for the roles of youth in development.
- **Skill India Mission:** This nationwide program, which was started in 2015 and is run by the Ministry of Skill Development, provides youth with free vocational training. Industry-approved certificates have been awarded to millions of young Indians through programs such as the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana. The goal is to develop "industry-relevant skills" that promote economic growth and contribute to sustainable livelihoods. For instance, (till 2024), PMKVY had taught or orientated roughly 1.48 crore applicants.
- **Green Skill Development Programme (GSDP):** The GSDP was started by the Ministry of Environment, Forests, and Climate Change (in collaboration with international partners such as UNEP) and offers youth training in "green jobs." It builds a workforce for environmental projects by focussing on issues like conservation, trash/waste management, and solar energy. Since its inception in 2017, the program has taught thousands of people various practical green skills, with the goal of engaging youngsters, particularly in marginalised areas. Although precise numbers aren't published and verified, this program is frequently mentioned in policy discussions.

- **Youth Exchange and Volunteering Schemes:** Programs to send Indian youth overseas on cultural or educational exchanges, which often contain sustainability themes, are run by organisations such as the Ministry of Youth Affairs. Students participate in community service programs through the National Service Scheme (NSS) and National Cadet Corps (NCC), which range from cleanliness drives (like the Swachh Bharat sanitation campaigns) to rural health camps. These institutional frameworks direct young people's energies towards the objectives of national development.
- **Digital India and Innovation Programs:** Initiatives like Digital India, which acknowledge the tech abilities of young people, increase internet access and digital literacy, allowing young people in remote areas to participate in e-learning and e-governance. In a similar vein, Startup India offers monetary support and guidance to young business owners, particularly those operating social and environmentally conscious ventures. Universities provide incubators and innovation labs (like the Atal Tinkering Labs in schools) that inspire students to tackle practical issues, particularly those pertaining to the SDGs.
- **Climate and Sustainability Platforms:** The Indian government works with NGOs and UN agencies to create youth forums. An example of a collaboration between the state government and UNICEF is the Maha Youth for Climate Action (MYCA) (see Case Studies). The Ministry of Youth Affairs has participated in UN Youth SDG Forums and hosted Sustainability Youth Summits at the national level. A growing institutional focus on youth-led sustainability is indicated by all of these.

Altogether, through policies, funding, and programs, India has created formal channels for youth engagement in education, skills training, entrepreneurship, and social action. These programs recognize that involving young citizens is crucial to achieving India's development objectives.

Case Studies of Youth-Led Initiatives

Maha Youth for Climate Action (MYCA), Maharashtra: Maharashtra's Maha Youth for Climate Action (MYCA): Established in 2022 by UNICEF Maharashtra in collaboration with the Government of India and the Centre for Environment Education, MYCA provides a forum for youth (ages 15 to 29), particularly those from rural regions, to cultivate climate leadership and green skills. Youth are trained in climate science and action planning through MYCA. Participants have pushed for policy reforms (including government agencies in waste management) and carried out neighbourhood projects (such as planting mangroves, creating groundwater recharge pits, and conserving household water). Notably, MYCA youth delegates contributed to India's statement at the Conference of Youth (pre-COP28), and its advocates helped incorporate climate and environmental modules into the curricula of 65,000 Maharashtra primary schools. MYCA has also selected young scholars (e.g. one youth developed the Cool the Globe app the one also showcased in show shark tank India) and coordinated extensive conservation initiatives (7lakh youngsters reporting on water conservation). This case shows how structured support for youth leads to concrete sustainable development outcomes, from grassroots projects to influencing education and policy.

Enactus India (Social Entrepreneurship): The Indian branches of the international student organisation Enactus serve as an example of how sustainability may be fuelled by youth entrepreneurship. "Empower[s] young individuals to become change agents in their communities by addressing social and environmental issues through innovative business models," according to an academic case study of Enactus India. Enactus student teams might create solar-powered gadgets for rural electrification, inexpensive water purifiers for villages, or recycled-material fashion businesses. Enactus projects integrate economic opportunity with SDG goals including "Affordable & Clean Energy" (SDG 7) and "Clean Water and Sanitation" (SDG 6), combining social impact with entrepreneurial skills. Youth-led inventions in India have been boosted by the organization's cooperative strategy and collaborations (with academia and industry). The success of Enactus India demonstrates how young people may get involved in business. and partnerships (with industry and academia) have amplified youth-led innovations in India. Enactus India's success illustrates how youth engagement in business and innovation creates sustainable value – turning local knowledge into scalable solutions.

These examples highlight the variety of youth-led action: Indian youth are starting initiatives that promote sustainability locally and connect to broader policy discussions through venues for climate advocacy and entrepreneurial networks.

Comparative Perspectives

Many nations around the globe acknowledge that youth are not only essential but the main component to sustainable development, and there are several models in place. The Envoy on Youth interacts with young leaders around the world, and the UN hosts Youth SDG Summits. Many nations host young Parliaments or Councils (like the UK Youth Parliament or Canadian Youth Council) to institutionalise young input, and youth climate campaigns (like Fridays for Future) have spread throughout the world. According to Plan International's research, young people everywhere serve as "mobilisers" and "connectors," fostering intergenerational collaborations and spreading knowledge of the SDGs. According to international studies (such as PwC's Global Youth Outlook 2024), young people prioritise social SDGs like health and education and feel empowered when they have a say in decisions.

There are parallels and differences between India's approach and international standards. India, like many other nations, invests in skill development and has a national youth strategy. One of India's most frequently mentioned strengths is the country's youth-driven innovation, such as the sizable IT startup scene. However, PwC reports that only 2.6% of lawmakers worldwide are under 30, and Indian legislatures have similarly low youth shares. This indicates that youth representation in governance is still low globally. Yet considering the size of its population, India has a wider network of youth volunteers (via NSS, NYKS, etc.) than most other nations. India's adoption of youth perspectives in education (e.g., MYCA-influenced climate curricula) is similar to UNESCO's focus on Education for Sustainable Development.

In a nutshell, international experience shows that successful youth engagement usually combines formal empowerment (e.g. youth quotas, leadership programs) with grassroots opportunities (volunteering, social entrepreneurship). India has a lot of creative young programs, but by increasing institutional youth representation and studying peer nations' youth-friendly SDG initiatives, it may learn from international best practices.

Challenges to Youth Engagement

- **Socio-economic Constraints:** Poverty and unemployment limit how much youth can participate in sustainable activities.
- **Lack of Resources and Support:** Youth-led ideas often lack funding and mentorship.
- **Limited Representation:** Young people have minimal formal say in policymaking.
- **Educational and Informational Gaps:** Many youth are unaware of SDGs and lack civic education.
- **Cultural and Structural Hurdles:** Social barriers, especially for girls, and lack of institutional recognition can deter youth engagement.

Recommendations

To overcome barriers and harness youth potential for sustainability, India can pursue several actionable measures:

- **Enhance Youth Participation Platforms:** To give young people an active role in policy, formalise Youth Councils or expand "youth parliamentarian" positions at the local and national levels. Youth delegates' participation would be institutionalised, for instance, if they were given seats on local bodies or in SDG implementation committees. According to international studies, governments and organisations should "actively listen" to the opinions of young people and establish platforms for discussion.
- **Investment in Education and Skills with a Sustainability Focus:** Increase the number of programs that develop green skills (e.g. through programs like GSDP, vocational courses in agro-technology, waste management, and renewable energy). As Maharashtra did with regard to climate change, incorporate sustainability concepts into school and college curricula to ensure that all young people are aware of sustainable development. In order to ensure that underprivileged youngsters may engage in innovation, increase funding for STEM and entrepreneurial education in neglected areas.
- **Enhance Financial and Mentorship Support:** Create dedicated youth funds or increase youth quotas in existing innovation grants to provide seed capital for green startups and community projects. Encourage corporate and philanthropic CSR investment in youth-led ventures. Establish mentorship programs that connect students with seasoned professionals. (e.g. social entrepreneurs, scientists) to guide project development. Research shows that "mentorship, capacity building programs, and access to funding" are crucial to the success of youth-led social ventures.
- **Promote Inclusion and Outreach:** Launch targeted awareness campaigns (digital and on-the-ground) to inform rural and marginalized youth about sustainable development programs and how to join them. Collaborate with local NGOs to conduct workshops and

civic education. Special outreach to girls and vulnerable groups (e.g. tribal youth) will widen participation and ensure no one is left out.

- **Leverage Technology and Media:** Outsource young people's sustainability ideas using social media and internet platforms (e.g. national hackathons on SDG solutions). To involve tech-savvy youth, the government might gamify participation through citizen science programs and mobile apps for reporting local issues. Programs that recognise student innovators (awards, internships) can promote greater youth participation.
- **Monitor and Evaluate Youth Engagement:** Track youth participation metrics in SDG programs (for example, how many beneficiaries are under 30) to identify gaps. Periodic surveys (like the PwC Youth Outlook) should include Indian samples to gauge attitudes and needs. This data can inform policy adjustments and ensure youth-targeted programs are effective.

These recommendations align with expert findings: youth need meaningful roles and support if they are to add value to sustainable development efforts. By implementing these steps, India can further energize its young population to achieve SDG targets.

Conclusion

A strong force for sustainable development is India's youth. Through civic participation, business endeavours, education programs, and environmental volunteerism, they are already making a difference. Their energy is channelled through initiatives like Skill India and new platforms like MYCA. Significant obstacles still exist, though, as many young people do not have access to resources, representation, or opportunity for full participation. Comparative experience demonstrates that the SDG outcomes are much improved by the systematic inclusion of adolescents through funding, policy, education, and dialogue. India can make use of its "650 million youth voices" by bolstering domestic programs (like the National Youth Policy and Skill India) and implementing tried-and-true international strategies (like youth councils and innovation centres). Engaging India's young people in sustainable development is not just desirable but essential: their ideas, energy, and leadership will shape the nation's future, and with the right support, they can help achieve a more equitable, prosperous, and environmentally resilient India.

Youth Engagement and Sustainable Future

- *By Pranali Bangar*
BA LLB, M.S. University

Introduction

Youth engagement refers to the active involvement of young individuals in decision-making processes and community activities, where their perspectives and ideas are valued. This participation allows for issues to be approached from diverse viewpoints, fostering innovative solutions through the fresh insights of youth. Engaging young people in such processes not only enhances their problem-solving abilities but also builds their confidence and strengthens their belief in the value of their unique perspectives. Young people are the pillar of our nation's future; therefore, it is crucial to prepare them from an early age to face future challenges. Without meaningful youth engagement, the long-term sustainability of a country is at risk, as young people play a vital role in shaping social, economic, and environmental progress.

Moreover, consistent involvement in meaningful activities contributes to their personal development. It encourages maturity, fosters healthy interpersonal relationships, and instils a sense of accountability and responsibility. These experiences play a crucial role in preparing young individuals for active citizenship and leadership in society. The objective of this research paper is to aware Indian people about youth engagement importance since in India, parents don't usually listen to their child and force them to do what they think are good for children without asking about the opinion of the child. Which result in change in behaviour of child making them think that their opinion doesn't matter and even if child try their best to do what their parents told them to do, they don't enjoy it and start to compare them from other people which result in depression in child

How we can aware people about youth engagement and sustainable future?

We can raise awareness about youth engagement and a sustainable future by conducting programs that focus on both these themes. These programs can be organized in collaboration with schools and colleges to ensure active student participation. For example, schools can establish Eco Clubs where students are encouraged to plan and implement activities related to environmental protection and sustainability. These clubs can also coordinate with other schools and communities to expand the impact of their initiatives.

One effective idea is to assign students projects such as growing a plant at home or in their school garden, and then asking them to maintain a report on its growth and care. This not only helps them understand the process of nurturing plants but also builds a sense of responsibility and connection with nature.

I recently learned that feeding animal's human food such as rice, wheat, or other processed items can be harmful. It disrupts the natural food chain and may negatively affect the health

of animals and the ecosystem. Many people are unaware of this and continue to feed birds and animals human food without understanding the consequences. Spreading awareness about such issues through school and community programs can make a real difference. In India, we can learn a lot from the way Japanese people educate and raise their children. In Japanese schools, the focus is not only on academic learning but also on practical life skills and discipline. Children are taught essential values and habits from a young age, which helps them, grow into responsible and independent individuals.

For example, in Japan, students are responsible for cleaning their classrooms, school corridors, and even toilets. This practice teaches them the importance of cleanliness, responsibility, and teamwork. Apart from cleaning, Japanese schools also focus on teaching basic survival skills such as cooking, proper table manners, and how to interact respectfully with others. These life skills help children become more self-sufficient and socially aware. They learn to value hard work, humility, and cooperation from an early age, which makes them more active and involved in all aspects of life.

Another admirable habit in Japan is their approach to environmental responsibility. People are taught to separate their garbage into different categories like burnable, non-burnable, and recyclable items. This helps in better waste management and reduces environmental damage. In addition, many Japanese people prefer walking, cycling, or using public transport instead of private vehicles. This lifestyle not only reduces fuel consumption but also helps in lowering pollution levels and keeping the environment clean.

We can introduce such practices in India, especially through the school and college system, it could bring a positive change in society. By teaching children these values and habits early in life, we can raise a generation that is more aware, responsible, and environmentally conscious.

Limitation of Indian society: Why it is difficult to engage youth and sustain our future

One of the major issues we face in India is the presence of gender stereotypes when it comes to activities like cleaning, cooking, and even education. In many places, these responsibilities are seen as tasks only for girls. People often believe that girls should focus only on household work and not on education, because they are expected to get married and leave the home. Due to this mindset, many families think educating girls is a waste of money. Sadly, such thinking is passed on to children, continuing the cycle of inequality and limiting the potential of half our population.

This is why it is important not only to teach children the right values but also to educate their parents. Parents play a huge role in shaping a child's thoughts and behaviour. If parents are taught the importance of equal opportunities, life skills, and sustainability, they will be more likely to support their children's growth in a balanced and fair way—regardless of gender.

In the context of youth engagement and a sustainable future, breaking these stereotypes is essential. When boys and girls are both encouraged to participate equally in activities like cooking, cleaning, environmental programs, and practical life lessons, they develop a deeper understanding of teamwork, responsibility, and respect. This creates a generation of youth who are active, capable, and ready to contribute to society in meaningful ways.

For a truly sustainable future, we must ensure that both girls and boys are given equal chances to learn and grow. By involving youth in hands-on activities and teaching them life skills—while also educating their parents—we can build a stronger, more aware society. One where both education and responsibility are shared, and where young people are empowered to create a better, more sustainable world for everyone.

There are other important reasons that limit youth engagement, especially for girls, and one of them is safety. Even if a girl wants to take part in various activities, she often cannot because of safety concerns. In many families, girls are not allowed to go out after dark due to fear for their safety. This restriction, although understandable from a protective point of view, ends up limiting the potential of girls in many ways.

They miss out on opportunities like evening workshops, study sessions, events, or outdoor programs that are important for their personal growth and skill development. While boys are often free to explore, learn, and participate in public spaces, girls are held back—not because of lack of interest or talent, but because of unsafe surroundings and social fears.

If we want true youth engagement and a sustainable future, we must also address the safety and freedom of girls. Creating safer environments in schools, colleges, and public places is necessary so that girls can feel secure and participate equally. At the same time, we must work on changing the mindset of families and communities, so they stop seeing girls as weak or as someone who always needs protection, and instead start seeing them as capable and strong individuals. Many parents force their children to follow the path they believe is right, without considering what the child actually wants. This often leads to sadness, frustration, and stress for the child. For example, I have a friend whose parents forced him to take science in school, even though he never wanted to. He had no interest in the subject, but he had to work hard just to keep up—not for himself, but only to make his parents happy.

He used to love playing football and was really passionate about it. But now, because of the pressure of studies and the stream he never chose, he hardly gets time to play or enjoy the things he once loved. Despite knowing their child is struggling, his mother goes around proudly telling everyone that her son took science. But what is the point of showing off when your own child is not happy?

This kind of pressure takes away the child's freedom to dream and explore their interests. For true youth engagement and a better future, it's important to let children make their own choices and support them in following their passions. Forcing a child into something just for societal approval or personal pride only harms their mental and emotional well-being. Parents

need to understand that a successful and meaningful life doesn't come from following what others expect—it comes from doing what makes you happy and fulfilled.

Roles of Social Media

Social media can play a very powerful role in helping the younger generation stay informed about a wide range of topics and opportunities. With just a few clicks, young people can learn about different fields, career options, scholarships, workshops, events, and ideas that can open new doors for them. Even if they are unable to physically attend or participate in certain activities due to limitations like location, financial issues, or personal restrictions, they can still engage online. Social media platforms give them the chance to be part of global communities, discussions, and movements without having to leave their homes.

One of the biggest advantages of social media is that it allows young people to connect with like-minded individuals. Sometimes, your immediate environment—like your family, school, or neighbourhood—might not support your dreams or share your interests. You may feel alone or misunderstood. But through social media, you can create your own space where you can connect with people who have similar goals, passions, and ways of thinking. This new online community can give you a sense of belonging and motivate you to keep going, even when your offline environment does not.

It's like building a new world for yourself—a world where you can express your true self and grow with people who understand and support you. For example, if you're passionate about art, writing, science, sports, or any other field, you can follow pages and creators, join groups, or even start your own page or community. This helps you not only learn more but also feel encouraged by seeing others working hard and succeeding in the same area.

And the most exciting part is that social media allows you to connect with people from other countries—something that would usually be very difficult in real life. International travel is often expensive and not easily possible for many, but online platforms remove that barrier. You can talk, collaborate, and share ideas with people from around the world, which gives you new perspectives and broadens your understanding of different cultures, lifestyles, and ways of thinking. These global connections can be both inspiring and life-changing. For example, if you want to expand your business to other countries, you can easily reach out to your online friends who live there. They can help you understand the local lifestyle, culture, and people's preferences. This way, you can build a product or service that fits their needs without having to live in that country for months to do research. This saves time, money, and resources; while still giving you valuable insights that can help your business grow globally.

Many people also look up to celebrities or influencers on social media for inspiration. Watching their journey and achievements can help boost motivation and push young individuals to work harder toward their own goals. In some cases, these online connections can lead to even more: collaborations, starting a small business, launching a project, or simply making friends who help you stay on track.

In today's digital world, social media is more than just entertainment—it's a tool for learning, growing, connecting, and transforming your life. When used wisely, it can be a powerful support system and a gateway to endless opportunities.

Conclusion

To build a truly sustainable future, it is essential to recognize and prioritize the engagement of youth. Young people are not just the leaders of tomorrow—they are the change makers of today. When given the right opportunities, freedom, and support, they can contribute immensely to social, environmental, and economic development. However, in India, societal barriers such as gender stereotypes, safety concerns, and rigid parental expectations continue to limit youth potential, especially for girls.

We must begin by reforming our education system to include practical life skills, equal opportunities for all genders, and a strong focus on environmental responsibility. Parents and communities must also be educated to support their children's interests instead of imposing decisions that cause emotional stress and suppress individuality.

Social media, when used wisely, offers a modern solution by creating global access to knowledge, inspiration, and like-minded communities. It opens doors to growth, learning, and collaboration beyond geographical boundaries empowering youth to follow their passion and stay informed about opportunities.

If we want a sustainable future, we must create an environment both online and offline where every young person is heard, supported, and allowed to thrive. By valuing youth engagement today, we are investing in a brighter, more responsible, and sustainable tomorrow.

Building Future: Youth Engagement as A Catalyst for A Sustainable Future

- *By Pooja Mewara*
BBA LLB, GLS University

Introduction

Sustainability today is not just a goal we should aim for it's something we must achieve if we want to survive and grow in the 21st century. Since young people are the ones who will inherit the future, they are an important part of the conversation around sustainable development. Sustainability means finding the right balance between social equality, economic progress, and protecting the environment so that we can meet our needs today without harming the needs of future generations. With more than 1.8 billion people in the age group of 10 to 24 worldwide, youth have huge potential to bring about change. But for this to happen, they need proper support through policies, legal structures, and meaningful opportunities to get involved.

In India, where more than 50% the population is under 25, involving young people in sustainable development is not just important - it's necessary. This paper focuses on how youth engagement can help build a more sustainable future. It looks at the current legal and policy systems, the challenges faced by young people, and also gives examples of how youth are already leading the way like in the global "Fridays for Future" movement and student-led climate protests in India. These efforts show that youth are ready to take action, but they still need stronger platforms and support to make a lasting impact.

Importance of Youth Engagement in Sustainable Development

Youth engagement is not just a symbolic gesture it's a key part of building a sustainable future. Young people bring energy, ideas, and the motivation to make real change, and there are several reasons why their involvement is essential.

- **Large in number:** Young people make up a big part of the population, both globally and in India. With nearly 50% of India's population under the age of 25, we are one of the youngest countries in the world. This gives us a powerful chance to direct the energy and passion of youth toward sustainability and development.
- **Tech-savvy:** Growing up with the internet and social media, today's youth know how to use technology to their advantage. They are skilled at spreading awareness, connecting with others, and running powerful campaigns online - whether it's through trending hashtags or viral videos on climate change and social issues.
- **Creative thinkers:** Young people are full of fresh ideas and often question old ways of doing things. Whether it's starting eco-friendly businesses or leading community clean-up drives, they bring new solutions to problems like pollution, waste, and climate change.
- **Future decision-makers:** The choices we make today will affect the youth the most in the coming years. So, it's only fair and smart to include them in the decisions that shape their future.

We've already seen the powerful impact youth can make. A great example is the "Fridays for Future" movement started by Greta Thunberg, which has inspired millions of students across the world to raise their voices for climate action. In India too, students in cities like Delhi and Bengaluru have led climate protests and pushed for environmental justice.

These efforts clearly show that young people are ready to take charge. But to make their actions truly effective, they need more support like proper platforms, funding, and guidance. Without this, their involvement might remain limited or only symbolic. To build a truly sustainable future, we must make sure that youth participation is regular, meaningful, and actually influences policies.

National Frameworks: Indian Perspective

India has shown interest in youth development and environmental protection through different policies and programs. But when it comes to actually involving young people in sustainability work, there are still major gaps. Many of these frameworks look good on paper, but their real-world impact is limited due to weak implementation and lack of coordination.

- **National Youth Policy, 2014:** This policy aims to empower young people and help them contribute to the country's development. It focuses on key areas like education, jobs, and civic participation. However, it doesn't clearly explain how these goals will be achieved, nor does it have specific steps or measurable outcomes. Because of this, youth participation in sustainability efforts remains mostly untouched (PIB, 2014).
- **National Education Policy, 2020:** The NEP 2020 encourages a well-rounded education that includes awareness about the environment and hands-on learning. But in practice, there have been issues such as confusion around the language of instruction and delays in updating school curriculums. These problems reduce its potential to truly shape environmentally conscious students (Times of India, 2024).
- **Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat (EBSB) & Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan (NYKS):** These initiatives aim to build national unity and promote youth involvement in cultural and community service activities. However, they don't focus much on sustainability or environmental education. Although NYKS runs thousands of youth clubs across the country, their environmental activities are limited, scattered, and not very well-planned (NYKS Guidelines).

Barriers to Sustainable Development within Youth Engagement

Even though there are several strong policies and frameworks in place, many challenges continue to get in the way of fully involving young people in sustainable development. These issues not only weaken the impact of youth programs but also limit how much young people can contribute to a greener, more sustainable future.

- **Lack of institutional support:** Many policies don't provide clear systems or long-term plans to include youth in sustainability efforts. As a result, their involvement tends to be short-term or inconsistent.

- **Fragmented implementation:** Different ministries and departments like education, environment, and youth affairs often work separately without proper coordination. This leads to overlapping work, poor use of resources, and mixed results.
- **Limited environmental education:** In most schools and colleges, topics related to sustainability are either missing or not given enough attention. Without proper education on these issues, students struggle to understand or take action on environmental challenges.
- **Urban-rural divide:** Youth in urban areas usually have better access to sustainability programs, clubs, and awareness campaigns. On the other hand, rural youth face problems like lack of infrastructure and fewer learning opportunities, which limits their involvement.
- **Tokenistic participation:** Often, young people are invited to attend events or discussions but are not given real decision-making power or leadership roles. This makes their involvement more symbolic than impactful.

These challenges show that while policies may talk about youth and sustainability, real change requires more than just words. What's needed is a stronger focus on building youth leadership, integrating sustainability education into the curriculum, and making sure all young people no matter where they live get equal chances to participate meaningfully.

Role of Legal Education in Empowering Youth

Legal education plays a critical role in equipping young people with the knowledge, skills, and confidence necessary to actively participate in democratic processes and contribute to sustainable development. By fostering legal awareness, advocacy capabilities, and community engagement, legal education empowers youth to become informed citizens and effective agents of change.

Firstly, legal education enhances awareness among youth about their fundamental rights and responsibilities. Understanding the legal framework enables young people to recognize injustices and seek remedies, thereby promoting social accountability and justice. Secondly, it develops advocacy skills that are essential for meaningful participation in public discourse, policy debates, and, where necessary, litigation. Law students learn to analyse complex issues, construct persuasive arguments, and engage with diverse stakeholders—competencies that are invaluable for driving social and environmental reforms.

Moreover, law students can contribute to legal literacy campaigns by organizing workshops and outreach programs that educate marginalized communities about their rights, environmental laws, and sustainable practices. These grassroots initiatives help bridge the gap between legal frameworks and public awareness, fostering community empowerment. In addition, legal education provides opportunities for policy research and drafting, where students actively engage in analysing existing laws, identifying gaps, and proposing reforms. This involvement not only enhances their academic learning but also supports the development of more inclusive and effective sustainability policies.

Institutions of higher learning facilitate these engagements through platforms such as university legal aid clinics, moot courts, and student parliaments. These forums provide practical experience in advocacy, negotiation, and legal problem-solving, nurturing youth leadership and fostering a sense of civic responsibility.

In sum, legal education is a powerful tool for empowering youth, enabling them to contribute thoughtfully and effectively to building a sustainable and just future.

Conclusion

Youth engagement is fundamental to achieving a sustainable future. Empowering young people transcends being a mere option; it is an urgent strategic necessity. When provided with education, opportunities, and genuine platforms for participation, youth transform from passive observers into proactive leaders driving innovation, equity, and environmental stewardship.

Their unique perspectives, energy, and commitment are indispensable to addressing complex sustainability challenges. To realize a resilient and inclusive future, policymakers, educators, and institutions must prioritize meaningful youth involvement today. The responsibility to act decisively lies with us all—not only to safeguard the planet but to empower the generation that will inherit it.

Youth Engagement and Sustainable Development: A Call to Action and a Progress Report

- *By Harsh Bhatt*
BBA LLB, GLS University

Introduction

The world today confronts multifaceted and profound crises, ranging from conflicts and climate chaos to poverty, inequality, and discrimination, which threaten both people and the planet. Achieving transformative progress towards global goals, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), necessitates collective effort and participation from all segments of society. Among these, young people hold a particularly significant stake in the future and possess unique, bold solutions to offer¹.... Recognizing this, the United Nations launched its first-ever system-wide Youth Strategy, "Youth2030," on 24 September 2018. This strategy was founded on the acknowledgment of the significant role young people play in building sustainable, inclusive, and peaceful societies and the importance of a strong partnership between the UN and youth to shape a better future. Five years after its launch, the Youth2030 Progress Report 2023 provides a comprehensive overview of implementation progress across the UN system, highlighting strides made in advancing global youth commitments and integrating youth focus into strategic planning processes⁴. This paper delves into the critical role of youth engagement in sustainable development, examining its definition, importance, the principles of meaningful engagement, progress and challenges within the UN system, and specific examples, particularly in the context of Education for Sustainable Development and climate action, based on the provided sources.

Defining Youth and Youth Engagement

Defining "youth" can vary, but the United Nations Secretariat often defines it statistically as persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years, while also recognizing that there is no universally agreed international definition and other definitions used by agencies, funds, programmes, and Member States are considered. Despite varied definitions, young people represent a diverse population with intersecting identities shaped by factors such as gender, class, geography, disability, and education level⁵.

Youth engagement refers to the active and meaningful participation of young people in decision-making processes, social development, community initiatives, and governance. Crucially, it goes beyond mere symbolic inclusion to ensure that youth possess the opportunity, capacity, and support necessary to influence the outcomes that impact their lives and societies. This engagement is not confined to formal political spheres but also encompasses civic activism, environmental action, entrepreneurship, digital advocacy, and cultural expression.

The Importance of Youth Engagement in Sustainable Development

Youth engagement in sustainability is deemed vital for the long-term health of communities and the planet. Young people contribute new perspectives, innovative ideas, and a sense of urgency to movements like the environmental one. As future leaders and decision-makers, their active involvement helps ensure that sustainability initiatives are inclusive and forward-thinking. Engaging youth in sustainability efforts also fosters a sense of responsibility and empowerment, encouraging them to adopt sustainable practices and advocate for broader systemic changes. This involvement can also drive intergenerational collaboration, uniting diverse age groups toward the common goal of preserving the environment for future generations.

Young people are not passive recipients of development; rather, they are creative problem-solvers and agents of change who often challenge traditional systems and propose alternative futures. The current generation of youth is the first to witness the accumulated impact of climate change crises and potentially the last generation capable of turning the tide and enacting necessary transitions. They are deeply concerned about the future and frequently demonstrate a greater willingness to think big, innovatively, and with a long-term perspective, which aligns with the efforts needed to secure the rights and interests of future generations. Responding to their perspectives makes decision-making more effective and builds greater trust in public institutions. Youth are key to identifying new solutions required for urgent breakthroughs.

Meaningful Youth Engagement: Principles and Requirements

Meaningful youth engagement is characterized by the principle that young people are respected as equal partners, their voices are genuinely considered, and their participation leads to influence and impact. When youth engagement deviates from core principles, it risks becoming tokenistic, potentially resulting in decision-making detached from young people's realities, expertise, and solutions. This erosion of trust in public institutions can render policymaking less effective.

Over the years, governments, youth organizations, and UN entities have developed a series of guiding core principles for meaningful youth engagement, which include:

Rights-Based and Safe: Young people should be informed about their rights and empowered to hold duty bearers accountable. Measures, including referral systems, must be established and strengthened to protect youth from threats and attacks.

Institutionally Mandated: Engaging youth in decision-making processes should be formally mandated to prevent ad hoc approaches and ensure integration of youth perspectives throughout the full decision-making process.

Accessible: Decision-making processes should be accessible to all groups of young people, especially those with disabilities.

Voluntary: Young people must not be coerced into participating or expressing views against their beliefs; they should have the right to cease involvement at any stage.

Informative: Youth should receive timely, clear, diversity-sensitive, and age-appropriate information about issues and their role/rights throughout the engagement process.

Youth as Partners: Young people should be recognized as equal partners in decision-making processes, and their engagement should be facilitated.

Achieving meaningful youth engagement requires access to decision-making forums, adequate resources, capacity building, and mechanisms for accountability. Capacity building programs are essential to enhance their skills. Policies and processes need to be strengthened within institutions to ensure engagement is truly meaningful. Providing resources, mentorship, and access to inclusive platforms are critical to sustain youth engagement.

Youth Engagement in the UN System

The United Nations system, since its establishment, alongside Member States, has repeatedly championed youth engagement. Discussions began with the 1965 Declaration on the Promotion among Youth of the Ideals of Peace, Mutual Respect and Understanding between Peoples. This commitment was strengthened in 1995 with the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and beyond, which called for "the full and effective participation of youth in the life of society and in decision-making," a commitment reiterated in numerous subsequent resolutions.

The launch of Youth2030 in 2018 by the Secretary-General aimed to expand the participation of young people across all UN work. Steady progress has been made at global, regional, and local levels. Key developments include the establishment of a High-level Steering Committee for strategic guidance and a Joint Working Group for technical leadership. Initial action plans for implementation were received from numerous UN entities and multi-stakeholder initiatives.

A significant step outlined in the 2023 report is the establishment of a United Nations Youth Office within the UN Secretariat. This office builds on nearly a decade of work by two Envoys on Youth and is expected to advance efforts toward stronger advocacy, coordination, and accountability for and with young people. The Office's mandate on ensuring system coordination and accountability on youth is expected to accelerate UN system-wide work with and for youth.

Further emphasizing the need for increased efforts, a Policy Brief launched in April 2023 calls for the adoption of a global standard for meaningful youth engagement in decision-making, the establishment of national youth consultative bodies, and the creation of a United Nations Youth Town Hall. The Brief also stresses the importance of new avenues of youth participation across all intergovernmental mechanisms, including the UN's own deliberative and decision-making processes.

Within the UN system, Youth2030 implementation involves various components, including the Youth2030 High-level Steering Committee, the Technical Leadership Team (Joint

Working Group), and the Youth2030 Secretariat. Youth engagement in decision-making processes is formally mandated in some UN entities and UNCTs, recognized as a key criterion for meaningful engagement.

Progress and Challenges in UN Youth Engagement

The Youth2030 Progress Report 2023 tracks progress using baseline data from 2020 (UNCTs) and 2021 (UN entities) compared with 2022 data. Progress is tracked across areas such as policies and processes for meaningful youth engagement, diversity of youth engaged, engagement in strategic planning, engagement in support to Governments/intergovernmental processes, and engagement in UN-led projects and campaigns. The Youth2030 Scorecards include indicators to track progress in these areas. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) are used to measure progress.

In 2022, the report shows that UN entities performed well in several areas of meaningful youth engagement. Engagement is institutionally mandated, diversity of youth engaged is notable, and youth are engaged in UN projects, campaigns, and in supporting Governments/intergovernmental work. However, there remains scope for improving youth engagement in entity-level strategic planning processes. Regarding policies and processes for youth engagement, 86% of UN entities had two or more in place in 2022, an improvement from 75% in 2021.

For UN Country Teams (UNCTs), good all-round momentum on meaningful youth engagement is evident. Significant improvement is seen in youth engagement in strategic planning processes at the country level, specifically within UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCFs or CFs). In 2022, 57% of UNCTs had two or more policies and processes for youth engagement, similar to 2021 levels. While meaningful youth engagement was institutionally mandated in 46% of UNCTs in 2022, criteria like being informative, accountability of youth to UNCT, and resourced saw improvement compared to 2020. All surveyed UNCTs (100%) engaged youth in UNCT-led projects and campaigns in 2022.

Despite progress, the report emphasizes that policies and processes in the UN need to be strengthened for youth engagement to be truly meaningful. Actions to accelerate progress include mobilizing youth as a key stakeholder group for SDG transformation, engaging youth in advocacy for domestic policy and financial commitments for SDGs and climate action, advocating for inclusion of youth in national SDG delegations, increasing the proportion and representation of youth (<35 years) in the UN workforce, ensuring data-driven actions for fair internships, and stepping up youth engagement backed by strong policies and processes.

Youth Engagement and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Youth have a vested interest in the realization of the SDGs, with some 90 indicators considered youth-related. As "torchbearers" of the SDGs, youth played a major role in securing agreement on the 2030 Agenda. They stand to benefit significantly from the

achievement of these goals and are playing a major role as partners and participants in implementation.

Specifically, youth engagement is critical for:

Poverty Reduction (SDG): Children and youth account for two-thirds of the world's poor; financial inclusion can support youth in accumulating savings and reducing economic shocks.

Zero Hunger (SDG): Responsibly engaging youth in sustainable agricultural policies and practices is essential.

Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG): Youth face the highest unemployment rates; they must be better engaged in skills and capacity-building policies and programming for inclusive economic growth.

Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure (SDG): Youth have a stake in digital infrastructure, as nearly a third of those not connected to the Internet are young people; their active engagement can ensure greater inclusion.

Responsible Consumption and Production (SDG): Widespread behavioural change, such as recycling and using less plastic, often begins with children and youth.

Reduced Inequalities (SDG): Youth must be involved in creating social protection programs to reduce lifelong consequences of poverty and discrimination.

Climate Action (SDG): Youth are least responsible for environmental degradation but will bear the greatest burden. Close to half a million youth worldwide have taken climate action; supporting youth-led initiatives empowers them to act locally.

Life Below Water (SDG): Young people can provide local knowledge and innovative solutions for conserving marine ecosystems and coastal communities.

Life on Land (SDG): Youth are active agents in tackling deforestation and desertification and must be engaged in related policies and programs.

Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions (SDG): Youth engagement in capacity-building and institutional inclusion can foster more peaceful and just societies, helping to tackle violence faced by millions of young people.

Partnerships for the Goals (SDG): Partnerships must be youth-sensitive and inclusive, drawing on youth knowledge and experience for a greener, more prosperous, and safer future. Formal youth engagement in the follow-up to the 2030 Agenda is facilitated through mechanisms like the Major Group for Children and Youth, which allows young people to engage meaningfully in the sustainable development-related work of the General Assembly and Economic and Social Council. This includes opportunities like submitting position papers, participating in negotiations, and speaking during voluntary national reviews. There has been slow but steady improvement in engaging youth in national SDG follow-up and review efforts, taking forms such as engagement through national youth councils, participation in technical working groups, inclusion in national SDG councils, and participation in national delegations attending the high-level political forum. Youth are also often engaged in thematic policymaking processes related to specific SDGs, where they have strong interests, such as education policy, entrepreneurship, jobs and skills, adolescent health, and tackling the climate crisis.

Youth Engagement in Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and Climate Action

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is recognized as a dynamic and liberating form of learning, crucial for preparing young people to become agents of change for a more sustainable world. ESD is embedded within Agenda 2030 as SDG 4.7 and is called a key mechanism for moving towards a more sustainable future⁶¹. The concept suggests that young people are not just the focus of policies but active co-designers and pioneers in implementing policies and actions related to planetary preservation and human survival.

Youth participation is critical in the global effort to achieve sustainability goals. The UNECE Steering Committee on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD SC) recommended establishing the UNECE ESD Youth Platform to create a network for communication and interaction among young people in the UNECE region, allowing them to participate in political processes in the field of ESD and directly involving them in the work of the Steering Committee. This platform enables young people to put forward initiatives for their active involvement in ESD issues nationally and regionally and develop cooperation with other organizations.

The sources highlight the importance of leveraging both formal and non-formal education (NFE) settings for ESD and youth engagement. NFE is described as an efficient and effective setting for changing minds, hearts, and actions, and a powerful driver of change towards sustainable development, especially for sections of society that are 'hard to reach'. It offers a proven toolbox with methods to support youth as transformation agents, structurally integrating their energy and creativity into educational approaches.

Several initiatives and good practices in youth engagement in ESD and climate action are presented below:

UNECE Strategy for ESD: Youth has taken a more central role in recent years within the implementation framework of the UNECE Strategy for ESD, a trend the ESD SC wishes to promote. The creation of the UNECE ESD Youth Platform and increasing involvement of young people in the Steering Committee's work are testaments to the growing importance given to their voice.

Austrian Case Studies: Three examples from Austria illustrate the potential of NFE. The "Environmental Communication" program by NGO GLOBAL 2000 gives students the opportunity to communicate environmental protection issues to their peers. The "klimareporter.in" project, initiated by the Federal Ministry for Climate Action, Environment, Energy, Mobility, Innovation, and Technology (BMK) and now part of NGO Climates Austria, enables young adults to report on climate topics and participate in climate events. The Voluntary Environmental Year (FUJ), a BMK initiative, allows young people to volunteer in the environmental sector instead of mandatory military service, providing experience and training. These cases demonstrate how NFE, supported by government and civil society, can effectively engage youth and influence policy debate.

Higher Education Integration: Integrating ESD into higher education curricula is vital for disseminating sustainability values among youth. A case study from Westminster International University in Tashkent shows how an ESD-integrated course using participatory approaches can raise awareness, develop skills like teamwork, empathy, critical thinking, and ideation, and encourage students to discuss global challenges.

Informal Education in UNESCO Associated Schools: Integrating key environmental topics through informal education is seen as essential to empower youth to become change agents.

Central Asian Leadership Program (CALP): Developed as a platform for leadership, CALP promotes participation of young leaders in environmental decision-making by developing their leadership skills and increasing their knowledge. Given their digital interconnectivity, youth are capable of contributing to community resilience by proposing innovative solutions and driving social progress.

MIO-ECSDE Approach in the Mediterranean: The Mediterranean Information Office for Environment, Culture and Sustainable Development (MIO-ECSDE) systematically empowers youth to become active sustainability agents through policy formulation, advocacy, networking, capacity building of educators, and various educational interventions. Their approach includes learner-centered, multidisciplinary, and experiential actions that enable meaningful participation, combining hands-on and ICTs approaches, developing critical thinking, and enabling the creation of youth networks. They have trained educators, conducted awareness campaigns, and involved youth in decision-making and management activities in Biosphere Reserves.

German Youth Panel on ESD (youpaN): Since 2017, youpaN has been the official body for youth participation in ESD implementation in Germany. It influences decision-making processes by bringing young people's perspectives directly into national ESD forums and the National Platform on ESD. Through suffrage, they can directly influence processes. The youpaN members actively promote ESD via social media to reach more adolescents.

EIT Climate-KIC Young Innovators program: This program addresses the gap between youth interest in climate action and the skills needed to understand complex challenges and take impactful action. It empowers students to take climate action, helps them articulate their message, develops a systemic view on climate/sustainability challenges, fosters experience-based learning, and introduces systems thinking⁸⁰. Evaluations showed participants improved their ability to translate ideas into action and consider the whole rather than just parts to solve problems.

Act4Change's Project RAVE (Belgium): This action-oriented skills lab immerses young people in an ESD framework to strengthen resilience and equip them with competencies for sustainable change. It focuses on youth empowering youth to develop key competencies, creating a safe space for a community of changemakers. Act4Change believes in the power of

youth as creators of high-quality ESD, emphasizing empowerment, action learning, and letting youth take full ownership of their learning process.

Youth and Climate Innovation Program (Ukraine): This program addresses barriers faced by youth, such as lack of awareness, education, skills, and funding, to implement climate action. It empowers young people through training, awareness, and practical projects, fostering youth leadership, learning, sustainability, and self-reliance. It has generated innovative youth-led projects, supported the creation/promotion of 'green' jobs, and opened new learning environments where youth act jointly for the community and create social transformation. The program has strengthened youth associations and networks and helped young people influence policies related to climate change through targeted training and participation in advisory bodies

DuurzameStudies.nl (Netherlands): This youth initiative aims to bridge the gap between youth interest in sustainability and the availability of sustainability-focused study programs in higher education. By facilitating the choice of sustainability-oriented degree programs, it aims to increase the number of graduates equipped with the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values to contribute to sustainable development.

Future4US Project: This Erasmus+ project focused on stimulating creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurship in students aged 15-18 within VET schools, demonstrating methods for developing these skills important for ESD.

These examples collectively demonstrate that engaging youth in ESD and climate action requires providing them with knowledge, skills, means, and mechanisms to innovate and become agents of change. It involves moving young people from being just participants to shapers of educational systems and policies.

Overcoming Barriers and Sustaining Engagement

Despite the recognized importance and ongoing efforts, significant barriers to youth engagement in sustainable development exist. A key barrier is the lack of awareness and education about environmental issues affecting their communities and the importance of their involvement. Without a solid understanding, youth may feel disconnected. Limited resources and access also affect their ability to participate effectively, including lack of financial resources, transportation, and access to tools and materials.

To maintain youth interest and prevent fatigue or disengagement, it is crucial to:

- Ensure visible impact from their contributions. Youth lose interest when they feel unheard or unsupported.
- Avoid tokenistic inclusion and give real decision-making power. This contrasts with performative or symbolic inclusion which results in disillusionment.
- Provide capacity-building programs to enhance skills.
- Foster peer-to-peer networks and community.

- Recognize and celebrate youth achievements.
- Create safe, inclusive spaces for diverse voices.

Strategies for effective communication with a broader youth audience include using digital platforms (TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, podcasts), collaborating with influencers and artists, promoting visual storytelling, designing interactive campaigns (e.g., gamified SDG education), using clear, inclusive, and culturally relevant language, and integrating sustainable development into education systems⁹⁹. Young people respond more to authenticity, relatability, and peer-led initiatives than formal top-down messaging.

Recommendations and Future Directions

- **Formal Commitment and Standardization:** Member States should make a strong commitment to meaningful youth engagement at all levels (local, national, regional, global) and endorse a global standard for meaningful youth engagement based on core principles.
- **Establish National Youth Consultative Bodies:** Every country should establish a national youth consultative body that adheres to core principles, has a mandate, and possesses the resources to formally engage in policymaking and decision-making processes.
- **Systematic Integration in UN Processes:** Meaningful youth engagement should become a requirement in all UN decision-making processes, moving from the exception to the norm. This requires integrating participation into intergovernmental mechanisms and processes at global and regional levels.
- **Strengthen Institutional Capacities:** Build and strengthen institutional capacities within UN entities and Member States to meaningfully engage with young people.
- **Increase Youth Representation in Workforce:** Increase the proportion and representation of youth (<35 years) in the UN workforce and ensure fair and quality internships based on data.
- **Strengthen Policies and Processes:** Policies and processes for youth engagement in the UN need to be strengthened to ensure they are truly meaningful. This includes ensuring they are institutionally mandated, rights-based and safe, accessible, voluntary, informative, resourced, and promote accountability.
- **Prioritize Funding and Resources:** Provide adequate resources and funding for youth initiatives and engagement efforts.
- **Enhance Data and Reporting:** Make data and evidence on youth widely available and transparently report on youth-focused results and investments.
- **Integrate ESD and Climate Action in Curricula:** Integrate green career skills into education curricula, support experiential learning, expand access to knowledge platforms, and increase investment in youth-led startups related to climate action. Education systems have an important role in empowering young people to influence society's development.
- **Support Diverse Engagement Methods:** Support various forms of youth engagement, including advocacy, entrepreneurship, policy participation, digital engagement, and community initiatives.

- **Continuously Evaluate and Optimize:** Regularly assess and refine strategies for engaging youth effectively and seek feedback to adapt and improve processes for better outcomes.

The sources emphasize that while progress has been made, especially at the country level regarding strategic planning, there is a need to do even more. The call is to move from quantity to quality in youth engagement, ensuring participation is meaningful, diverse, and effective.

Conclusion

Youth engagement is not just a tool for inclusion but a critical driver of sustainable change. With their unique perspectives, innovative ideas, and deep stake in the future, young people are indispensable partners in addressing global challenges and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Initiatives like Youth2030 demonstrate the UN system's commitment to expanding youth participation. Progress has been made in integrating youth into strategic planning and supporting youth-led initiatives, particularly visible in areas like Education for Sustainable Development and climate action, through various formal and non-formal approaches across different regions.

However, challenges remain, including ensuring truly meaningful engagement, overcoming barriers related to awareness, resources, and tokenism, and strengthening institutional policies and processes. Moving forward requires sustained commitment, dedicated resources, capacity building, formal mandates for engagement, and a continuous effort to ensure that youth voices are not only heard but genuinely influence decisions at all levels. By embracing youth as equal partners and investing in their potential, societies can accelerate progress towards a greener, more prosperous, and safer future for all. The journey to 2030 and beyond requires all of us pulling together, with young people at the forefront of driving the necessary transformation.

Not Just the Future, Youth Raising Their Voice for Sustainable Development Today

- *By Harvi Bhalani*
BA LLB, GLS University

In the face of pressing global problems and challenges such as climate changes, social inequalities, limited access to quality education and healthcare, weak governance etc the role of youth has become crucial and vital in shaping a sustainable future. Youth are not just the future they are present who possess the energy, creativity and innovation skills needed to drive transformative changes. Youth's engagement is not only essential but also a legal and moral imperative in the pursuit of long-term sustainable development.

The United Nations has defined youth as an individual between the ages of 15 and 24 years. The member states of United Nations also in 2015 when adopted the 2030 agenda for sustainable development explicitly acknowledged the importance of youth participation. Despite growing awareness, young people often face structural barriers that limit their involvement in governance and policy making processes. Engaging youth meaningfully is not just about creating opportunities for their participation, it is about embedding their voices in legal frameworks and institutional systems that shape the world they will inherit.

Youth Empowerment and Leadership

Youth represent a vibrant and dynamic force in shaping the world. People today are more educated, connected and socially aware than any previous generation. Empowering youth through leadership development is very essential for building inclusive and equitable societies. Leadership is not merely a future aspiration it is a role young people are already playing in social movements, innovation, climate action and community development and guiding others toward positive change and when youth are empowered and motivated. They become catalysts for innovation, justice and progress.

Empowering youth is not only a developmental need but a democratic necessity. When young people are meaningfully engaged, they help societies benefit from their energy, ideas and resilience. Some young people are making global headlines for their impacts like Vaibhav Suryavanshi – a 14-year-old as the youngest T20 centurion who showcased the power of youth in Indian cricket, Ritesh Agrawal – at the age of 19 was the Indian billionaire entrepreneur and the CEO of a hospitality chain, Licypriya Kangujam – started advocating for climate action at age of 6 and had addressed global summits and campaigns for strong environmental laws in India. These are just some of the examples, like them there are many young people actively engaged in making a good sustainable future. Thus legal recognition, educational access and participatory governance are crucial for nurturing their leadership. As the world confronts complex crises, investing in youth leadership is no longer just an optional it is necessity.

The Role of Youth in Sustainable Development

Sustainable development aims to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generation to meet their own. As an individual or a team, what we do today can change the coming tomorrow. Within this context, the role of youth has become an essential component. Young people who make up a significant portion of the global population possess the creativity, energy and idealism needed to drive meaningful changes.

As future leaders, decision makers and innovators youth have the power to influence sustainable practices, advocate for environmental justice and shape inclusive policies. Their active engagement is not only a moral necessity but also a legal and strategic requirement for achieving long-term sustainable goals.

Youth are often the first to adopt new technologies and ideas. Young people are known for their innovative ideas and entrepreneurial spirit. They can develop sustainable solutions to pressing global challenges like climate change, inequality, poverty etc. Through activism and awareness raising campaigns they can mobilize others to take actions and demand change from government and corporations. They can also get engage with local communities and promote sustainable practices such as reducing waste, conserving water and using public transport. The youth can educate themselves and others about the importance of sustainability and actions they can take to contribute to it and by raising knowledge of other they can empower others to make informed choices. By working in unity youth can create a ripple effect and inspire others to adopt sustainable lifestyles.

The future of sustainable development rests in hand of the youth. Their energy, creativity and determination will be the driving force behind creating a better world. As the torchbearers of change the youth's role is not just important but very crucial. By empowering and supporting them we can ensure sustainable, equitable and prosperous future for all. The youth are not just the leaders of tomorrow; they are the change makers of today.

Youth Engagement in the Global Context

The youth has emerged as crucial actors in the global pursuit of sustainable development. Their engagement in sustainable development has gained significant momentum, reflecting a growing recognition of young people's vital role in shaping better future. International platforms and agreement have increasingly integrated youth voices. The United Nation has played a central role in promoting youth participation through frameworks like "The United Nations 2030 Agenda for sustainable development recognizes the critical role of youth in achieving the SDGs", "the UN youth climate summit provides opportunities for youth to influence global policy and collaborate on sustainable solutions". Global youth movements like Friday for Future, Youth Climate Strikes and Global Youth Biodiversity Network demonstrates how young people are mobilizing across borders to demand urgent actions and accountability from governments and corporations. These movements have bought globally visibility to youth led advocacy and have driven policy shifts in climate and environmental governance.

Youth are creating change through innovation, using digital tools and entrepreneurship to promote sustainability. From climate tech startups to online education platforms and grassroots campaigns, young people are developing scalable solutions to global issues.

Through cross border collaboration and digital engagement, they are breaking traditional barriers and making development more inclusive, equitable and future focused. Youth engagement in the global context is not only about representation but it also signifies leadership, innovations and accountability. By empowering and investing in youth the international community strengthens its capacity to achieve lasting, transformative development for current and future generations.

Social Justice and Human Rights: The Role of Youth

Social justice and human rights are fundamental to creating a fair and equitable society. Young people have crucial role to play in promoting and protecting these values. By advocating for social justice and human rights young people can drive positive change and build a better future for all.

Social justice refers to the fair distribution of resources, opportunities and privileges within a society. Human rights on the other hand are the fundamental rights and freedoms that every individual is entitled to regardless of their background identity or status. Young people who understand and advocate for social justice and human rights can help create a more just and equitable society. They are more open to new ideas and are more willing to challenge the status quo and more passionate about creating positive change. There are many examples of youth led initiatives that promote social justice and human rights like the Black Lives Matter movement which was the concept of young people that brought attention to issue of racial injustice and police brutality.

When young people are involved in social justice and human rights they can benefit in many ways as they can develop skills like leadership, communication and problem solving. They can also build relationships with like-minded individuals and organizations which can lead to new opportunities and collaboration. Ultimately, the engagement of young people in social justice and human rights efforts is essential for driving positive change and building a brighter future for all.

Barriers/Challenges in The Path of Youth

The journey of youth is a critical phase of life, marked by significant growth, exploration and self-discovery. However, this journey is often fraught with challenges that can hinder young people's development, participation and future prospects. From socioeconomic constraints to cultural and education barriers young people face a complex array of obstacles that can limit their potentials.

Socioeconomic constraints such as poverty, unemployment and economic instability can restrict access to quality education, healthcare and essential services. Cultural and social norms can also pose barriers with discrimination stereotype and societal expectations restricting youth participation and self-expression. Furthermore, limited access to quality

education, inadequate infrastructure and poor teaching quality can hinder academic achievement while socioeconomic constraints can force young people to drop out of school.

Moreover, mental health challenges such as stress, anxiety and depression can impact youth wellbeing and potential and the stigma surrounding mental health issue can prevent them from seeking help. Political barriers including restrictive policies, lack of youth representation in governance and limited civic engagement opportunities can also limit youth participation and influence. Lastly young people often lack representation and opportunities to participate in decision making processes leading to their voices being ignored and their needs and concerns being overlooked.

These obstacles can significantly impact young people's growth, development and participation in society. Addressing these barriers requires a comprehensive approach that involves governments, organizations and communities working together to create opportunities and support systems for youth to thrive. By acknowledgement and overcoming these challenges we can empower young people to reach their full potential and contribute to building a brighter future.

Conclusion

The role of youth in shaping a sustainable future is crucial and multifaceted. Young people possess the energy, creativity and idealism needed to drive transformative changes and promote sustainable development. Through their engagement in social justice and human rights initiatives youth can develop important skills, build relationships and contribute to creating a more just and equitable society. Despite facing numerous barriers, including socioeconomic constraints, cultural and educational barriers and political limitations young people continue to raise their voices and demand action. By empowering and supporting youth we can ensure a sustainable, equitable, and prosperous future for all.

The future of sustainable development rests in the hands of the youth, and their determination will be the driving force behind creating a better world. It is essential for governments, organizations, and communities to work together to create opportunities and support systems for youth to thrive. By doing so, we can unlock the full potential of young people and enable them to become catalysts for innovation, justice and progress.

Ultimately, the engagement of youth in sustainable development is not just a moral necessity but also a strategic requirement for achieving long-term sustainable goals. By investing in youth leadership and empowerment, we can build a brighter future for generations to come.

Youth Engagement and Sustainable Future

- *By Kartik Mishra*
BBA LLB, GLS University

In today's world which is changing at a great pace and constantly progressing. And in this there is the great involvement of our youth. The word 'Youth Engagement' means when the young people getting involved in the communities, in decision making process, in climate change and in building a better and prosperous life not only for themselves but also for everyone. And hence without the active participation of youth this cannot be possible and the progress of the sustainable future gets slow down. Youth people through their new ideas, enthusiasm, creativity can make a lot big and great differences. Hence, it is important for them to given the chance to make big differences and to contribute to the society.

The word 'Sustainable Future' means to preserve the resources for the future utilization or for the future generation to be used. It is our core duty and responsibility to utilize such resources. And to take such measures to not to use such products which are harmful for the environment. And nowadays people are also getting aware of protecting our environment. And started using products which are producing less carbon emissions or no carbon emissions. And it is very important for us to protect our environment. There are various laws and regulations that are made by our Indian government for this like Environment Protection Act 1986, Wildlife Protection Act 1972, etc. Also, there were several international laws for the sustainable future and one of them is Paris Agreement which was made for climate change hence it was adopted in 2015 by 196 countries.

"Youth are not only the leaders of tomorrow, but also the partners of today" said Kofi Annan (former secretary general of United Nations). Hence it is our sole duty to left something for the future generation. And youth should also be encouraged to must participate in development and the betterment of the world. As they also have rights and duty to serve in conserving the world and its beautiful creations.

Empowerment and Skill Development:

1. Government Schemes for Youth Empowerment

- The government launched some schemes for the welfare of the youth in our society.
- **RYSK (Rashtriya Yuva Sashaktikaran Karyakram)** – It is a national program by the ministry of youth affairs and sports in India for empowering and developing the youth of India. It brings young people to awareness activities to make them feel confident and can make difference.
- **NSS (National Service Schemes)** – It is a program where students are encouraged to volunteer the underprivileged kids for nation building and social activities.
- **RGNIYD (Rajiv Gandhi National Institute of Youth Development)** – The Rajiv Gandhi National Institute of Youth Development (RGNIYD) Central Library was started in 1999. It is a special library focused on social science and youth development. The library has a good collection of books, magazines, and publications related to youth issues and development.

- **Green Skill Development Program** – Through this initiative the youth people are taught about the water conservation, waste management, etc and are given such jobs where they can help in protecting the environment.
2. **India's Demographic Dividend and Economic Growth**
With the average age of citizens being 29, these schemes help young Indians become skilled, employable, and capable of leading India toward its \$5 trillion economy target.
 3. **Role of Youth in Achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**
The youths can play a major role as they bring fresh ideas, energy and awareness among the people. They can also make a pivotal role in making actions on climate change, education and gender equality, etc. Hence, they can also help in creating a sustainable environment.
 4. **Budget Allocation for Youth Development**
The budget allocation from 2021-22 to 2025-26 is Rs. 2710.65 crore. In the year 2016-17 the budget for the other two schemes National Service Scheme (NSS) was Rs. 120 crores and for the Rajiv Gandhi National Institute of Youth Development (RGNIYD) it was Rs. 30 crores.
 5. **Supporting Institutions and Allied Schemes**
There were several other schemes which was summed up with the Rashtriya Yuva Sashaktikaran Karyakram (RYSK) such as National Youth Corps (NYC), Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan (NYKS), International Cooperation (IC), etc.

Climate Actions and Environmental Sustainability:

1. **Understanding Climate Change and Its Causes**
From the past recent years, we have noticed some changes in our climate and the reason behind this is global warming. And it is because of the carbon emissions produced by the industries and vehicles. Hence due to this the temperature of our climate is increasing.
2. **The Ozone Crisis and the Montreal Protocol**
In the year 1985, scientists discovered a hole in the ozone layer caused by chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs). This led to the 1987 Montreal Protocol, where countries agreed to phase out CFCs. Today it is the most successful environment treaties.
3. **The Paris Agreement: A Global Climate Pact**
This agreement was signed by 196 countries in 2015, the Paris Agreement aims to limit global warming to well below 2°C, ideally 1.5°C. Countries must submit emission reduction plans, known as Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), and update them every 5 years.
4. **Renewable Energy and Resource Conservation**
Many countries are now switching from fossil fuels like petrol or diesel to hybrid or electric or solar power. Because of which as they are not polluting our environment which is also good for wildlife and water as they will not get polluted due to these wastes of the industries.

5. Sustainable Practices and Community Awareness

We can help the environment by recycling, composting, and using less plastic. Farmers are also using eco-friendly farming methods to protect soil and wildlife. Small actions by everyday people, like saving energy and supporting green projects, can make a big difference.

Youth Led Initiatives:

1. YOUNGO – UNFCCC Youth Constituency

YOUNGO is a global group of young climate activist young people under 35 years who speak up at the UN about climate change. Since 2009, they've helped youth share ideas, influence decisions, and lead local climate actions—giving young people the power to create a fairer, healthier future.

2. Fridays for Future

Fridays for Future began when Greta Thunberg, a Swedish teenager, started protesting to raise awareness about the urgent need to fight climate change. Millions of young people now join her every month, marching to demand that world leaders take real, immediate action to protect the planet. Their main goal is to stop global warming and secure a safe, healthy future for everyone. Their passion has inspired hope and made climate change a global priority.

3. Indian Youth Climate Network (IYCN)

The Indian Youth Climate Network (IYCN), started in 2008, is run by passionate young people who want to make a real difference in the fight against climate change. Their mission is to spread awareness, encourage the use of clean energy, and create long-lasting, eco-friendly solutions.

4. Zero Hour

Zero Hour is a youth-led movement that makes sure young people from all backgrounds have a voice in the fight for climate and environmental justice. Their mission is to give new young activists the tools, training, and support they need to take real action against climate change.

5. Youth Climate Justice Fund (YCJF)

Youth Climate Justice Fund (YCJF) stands beside young people fighting climate change. It gives them support, tools, and funding to bring their ideas to life—helping them lead the way toward a fairer, greener world.

Meaningful Engagement:

1. Youth as Decision Makers, Not Just Participants

- Encouraging youth to take part in leadership and policy making which is essential for the challenges of climate change and sustainable development.
- According to UNESCO, meaningful engagement involves
- Making institution which can collaborate with the youths easily.

- To develop the tools which has understanding and institutional culture which can support the youths. Making people understand the importance of youths in decision making process and in leadership.

2. Platforms that Welcome Every Voice

We want to make sure that young people from all walks of life, particularly those from marginalized communities, have a chance to share their voices. Programs like UNESCO's Global Youth Community and the SDG4Youth Network create welcoming spaces for young people to connect, lead, and influence policies that impact education and global development.

3. Building Future Leaders Through Skills and Mentorship

The Youth Leadership Academy (YLA) is a yearlong opportunity for young activists to gain skills in leadership and advocacy. Throughout the program, participants take part in workshops, create their own leadership projects, and get continuous support for making a difference. They also attend an in-person retreat and have monthly virtual meetings to connect with each other.

4. True Partnerships: Youth + Institutions

Real partnerships between youth and institutions are based on mutual respect, recognizing young people as valuable contributors rather than just participants. These collaborations give youth a voice in important decisions, helping them build leadership skills. In turn, institutions gain new insights and deepen their connection to the community. When young people feel supported and heard, everyone benefits, making their collaborative efforts more effective.

5. From Listening to Co Creating Solutions

Meaningful youth engagement isn't just about hearing what young people have to say; it's about letting them take part in all parts of the decision-making process. When we involve them in creating policies and programs, we address their actual needs rather than just guessing. Collaborating leads to better, more inclusive solutions and fosters trust between generations.

Conclusion:

Young people play a crucial role in creating a better and more sustainable future. With the help of various government programs and youth-led initiatives, today's young generation is gaining opportunities and the support necessary to step up and make a difference. It's not just about giving them a chance to share their thoughts; it's about involving them in real decision-making and allowing them to take on leadership roles. Listening to their ideas and concerns is essential.

When young individuals, especially from marginalized communities, feel included and valued, everyone benefits. Initiatives that focus on skill development and mentorship can help young adults build confidence and become effective leaders, which is vital for driving meaningful change. Strong connections between young people and institutions foster an environment where their voices matter and their contributions are recognized.

Moreover, involving youth in crafting solutions means that policies and actions can truly address the issues they face. This collaboration builds trust between generations and ensures the changes we implement today will have lasting impacts. By equipping young people with the right resources and platforms, we empower them to thrive and protect our planet.

Investing in our youth and embracing their ideas ultimately leads to a future that is more just, clean, and healthy for everyone. The enthusiasm and creativity of young people are essential for tackling climate change and promoting sustainability. Working together, adults and youth can create solutions that benefit both people and the planet, paving the way for a brighter future for all.

When we see young people as key decision-makers and creators, we open the door to amazing innovation. Their unique viewpoints can shake up traditional methods and spark new ideas. It's not just about thinking ahead; it's about taking action now, together with a sense of urgency and optimism. By working hand-in-hand across generations and building supportive environments, we can make sure everyone's voice is heard and valued. This teamwork is what will guide us toward a fair and sustainable future for everyone.

About CERC

Consumer Rights protection and justice for consumers have been the focus of Consumer Education and Research Centre (CERC) since its inception in 1978. CERC is India's only Consumer Rights Organisation that provides 360° services to the consumer in terms of Education, Empowerment and Protection.

A broad range of activities are undertaken in the organization – grievance redressal through mediation and litigation, consumer education and awareness building through various publications and outreach activities, testing and analysis of consumer products in our in-house product testing laboratories, advocacy for laws and regulations that better protect consumers, as well as a number of projects executed in various areas pertinent to consumer protection and empowerment. Promoting environmental awareness, energy conservation and sustainable consumption are also major activity areas in CERC.

Grahak Sathi - your weekly e-magazine is available free in English, Hindi, Gujarati, Malayalam, Marathi, Tamil and Bengali. If you want to receive a free copy, write to us at grahaksathi@cercindia.org.

Consumer Education Research Centre (CERC)

“Grahak Suraksha Kendra”,

801, Sakar-II, Nr. Ellisbridge Police Station, Ellisbridge,

Ahmedabad - 380006