

# Assessing the Role of Youth in Achieving Responsible Consumption and Production

*Dialogue Between Young Environmental  
Journalists and University Students*

*16th November 2020*



## DISCUSSION NOTES

# Introduction to the 'Young Environmental Journalists' campaign

The Young Environmental Journalists initiative is facilitated by the joint Swedish Environmental Protection Agency - UNDP Environmental Governance Programme (EGP): *Integrating Environment and Human Rights into the Governance of the Mining Sector*. The 2020 edition provides learning and networking opportunities to 100 young talents and students from 27 countries. The campaign is organized in partnership with the UN Volunteers programme (UNV) and the UN Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR).

In 2019-2020, the focus has been on stories from Colombia, Kenya, Mongolia and Mozambique. The ambition of the campaign is to capture stories that inspire action & replication, focusing on grassroots and youth-led innovations to improve environmental and human rights protection in the mining sector.

For more information see:

<https://www.environmentalgovernanceprogramme.org/categories/young-environmental-journalists>

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# 1. Resource use - Discussion group notes

*12.2 By 2030, achieve the sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources*

**In what ways can we ensure that natural resources are used efficiently? How can we reduce our material footprint per capita? And, what role(s) can youth play, both as individuals and organizations? Think creatively!**

Key comments/questions/issues

- Change the way we behave as consumers, think about the kind of product we are consuming and if we are managing it efficiently. Do we need to buy what we see advertised as often (i.e. technology)?
- We need to analyse the consumer-demand patterns and understand it. We need to also pressure the private sector into strengthening the sectors in the supply chain to ensure everything is being extracted sustainably.
- Understand why companies create demand for their products and tackle that behavior. It's not just the responsibility of the consumer but also of the companies.
- We should look at the systems are we impacting with extracting each resource?
- As consumers we have to look at the global supply chain and decide if it is being worked properly.
- As consumers, we should avoid waste.
- The price breakdown hides the waste and injustice behind the product. We might think it's a cheap shirt but it has a much bigger impact, on people and the environment, that we don't see and doesn't affect us as much.
- When we talk about upstream and downstream, there needs to be more understanding of the product. Transparency for the consumer and the distributing the data gathered is key in understanding these concepts.
- Keep in mind the pillars of sustainability: economic development, social development, environmental protections.

Actions

- Through laws, push the three pillars of sustainability into the protection of the environment.
- Creating a network of imperfect produce that is locally grown and would otherwise end up in the trash because the farmers couldn't sell those products to the supermarkets.
- Supporting local farmers by connecting them to consumers directly, to encourage consumption of local products and fostering the local economies.
- Changing pricing strategies to tackle the problems we're seeing with sustainability joined with consumerism.

## 2. Role of companies - Discussion group notes

*12.6 Encourage companies, especially large and transnational companies, to adopt sustainable practices and to integrate sustainability information into their reporting cycle*

**How can we help promote corporate social (and environmental) responsibility? What roles can individuals play as both citizens and consumers? What roles must other actors play?**

Key comments/questions/issues

- As citizens we should push our national authorities to adopt sustainable practices.
- As consumers we can demand more sustainable products by companies since we are the ones who buy them, we have the power to push companies to produce more sustainable products.
- Reduce carbon footprints, ask companies to process waste water before they let it out. we can boycott products if producers don't follow these.
- But before we boycott we should try and make companies adopt sustainable practices. we should have clear information. Some companies don't have such clear reporting systems, we should work on that and try and hold companies accountable for their actions.
- Governments have a key role. they can incentivize companies who are doing good. For example decrease taxes etc.
- Strengthening laws and policies, it is important for governments to come up with strong governing mechanisms.
- Example from Brazil: deforestation which is subsidised by the government gives rise to almost slavery like working environment where people who are more vulnerable are used as cheap labour.
- Government should give good examples to consumers - only sustainable companies should work and participate in licitations.
- CSR should reorganise - it should involve environmental responsibility too. Companies that use natural resources and degrade our environment should be charged. Economic or they can introduce technology, or campaign as ways of taking responsibility.
- Governments have to protect human rights! Protection of social movements, social leaders and human rights is super important in the fight for environmental protection. There is a risk connected to being involved in the fight for sustainable practices - a risk for humans lives in some parts of the world. International organisations should also take responsibility in this fight. Especially when it comes to mining practices where a lot of threats to human rights exist.

### Positive examples:

- The city of NY has programs that encourage companies to reuse surplus material - redistributing surplus to individuals/communities in need = a positive example of more sustainable practices.
- Smartphone app example from Brazil - searches brands in supermarkets etc and categorises them after their effect on environment, animals, humans etc.
- Bangladesh - a policy that our rivers are living entities so if anybody pollutes our rivers it will be charged as a breach of human rights (sort of). The rivers are giving a legal right status which gives them a higher level of protection.

### Actions

- We share our knowledge (today). A first step - we need to continue with this sort of communication and sharing knowledge (like we do today). We have to continue the conversation even after this seminar.
- We should invest our money in sustainable products, use our purchasing power to invest in good products.
- We should try and inform ourselves even more to ensure that we support companies that are doing good things.
- Reuse, lend, borrow, extend products' lifetime.
- Turn lights off!
- Follow facebook pages and pages where companies give out information - try and collect more information and if I see that companies are not doing the right things I will inform the public.
- Partner with a grassroots organization around me and engage them to work toward sustainable consumption/reuse plastic bottles for example.
- In the role as an environmental journalist - use the opportunity to amplify a story. If you know that a company is doing bad things then I can spread that info to the community around us The media/journalists should act as watchdogs and whistleblowers. They should amplify/highlight instances where companies are implementing harmful practices and also companies adopting sustainable practices
- We can also educate people around us like family and friends about sustainable practices.
- Spread information on our social media.

# 3. Information and awareness - Discussion group notes

*12.8 By 2030, ensure that people everywhere have the relevant information and awareness for sustainable development and lifestyles in harmony with nature*

**What are the current barriers to awareness of environmental issues (especially in relation to resource consumption and mining)? How can we help address these issues?**

Key comments/questions/issues

- Inequalities, social differences, lack of education
- Environmental education tends to be left for people with a different level in terms of social class
- Engage communities
- Introduce environmental issues to different sectors of society
- Lack of exposure and understanding of the issues and their impacts
- Not all stakeholders have incentives to raise awareness of these issues and share this information
- Lack of tools to raise awareness
- Fake news / fake reports
- Technicalities of the mining topic

Actions

How can we minimise or reduce these issues?

- Campaigning could be a way of approaching this issue and reaching out to different sectors of society.
- Government programmes initiatives to introduce environmental issues

How can we make people interested in this?

How can the government do this?

What are the channels that we can use to raise awareness and share information.

- Creating materials for easy read /creative materials to get educated on mining
- Work at the education level, the information is out there, but we need government initiatives for education.
- Work also on the private sector to encourage consumers to make more responsible choices.

# Plenary discussions

## New comments/questions/issues

- Resource use:
  - The importance of not only individual behavioral change but also governance, laws and regulations.
  - The group also discussed the importance of pricing and internalizing the true sustainability cost of certain products.
  - The group also touched upon the issue of transport and how our system encourages long-way transport of goods (e.g. fruit in Sweden) instead of locally produced things.
  - The group also talked about the importance of seeing sustainability from a three-dimensional perspective. We need to think about concepts such as e.g. poverty and justice to ensure that we transition fairly in a holistic manner.
- Role of companies:
  - We need to share knowledge around the globe on sustainable practices and learn from each other.
  - The group also emphasized the need to be conscious consumers.
  - The role of grass-root movements and the role of environmental journalists to shed light on both positive and negative trends.
  - The government can enforce and put in place policies that can nudge the system in a sustainable direction. The government can also take part in education activities.
  - Energy is a crucial part of sustainability. We need to promote renewable energy sources as input to production and development processes.
- Information and awareness:
  - There is global lack of understanding and education around the consequences of unsustainable practices. Fake news can enforce already existing structures and systems that might not be supporting the 2030 Agenda.
  - The group also discussed the role of both the government and the private sector in educating sustainable consumption practices. Companies should communicate the environmental footprint from the products to enable more sustainable consumption patterns and choices.
- Overarching question: how do we ensure that the resources are shared in a fair way? Actions and reflections:
  - We need to think about which countries have the largest footprint. Is it really fair to impose all countries to reduce e.g. their carbon emissions equally much? The countries that got the chance to industrialize are

responsible for reducing more as well as providing technology transfer and support.

- We need to consume in a balanced way where more fragile and vulnerable economies that, in turn, provide crucial welfare aspects can be supported. More progressively developed countries need to lead. We need to tackle the root causes to the issues of consumption and production.
- We need to ensure public participation in change processes related to sustainability. Both government and private sector actors are crucial.
- We need to globally and nationally safeguard environmental aspects of development.
- We should think about the economy as something circular and not linear. We as consumers should also think about how we can reuse materials and products.
- There are important barriers to consider. Corruption is one of the most important one. We need guiding policies that ensure political accountability. This can also provide a moral compass for government and economic reform.
- Journalism can be an important tool to induce change and environmental sustainability, e.g. through communicating and educating on sustainable change. However, environmental journalists are often very exposed to threats. This needs to be safeguarded to ensure that journalism and journalists can continue to act as change agents.