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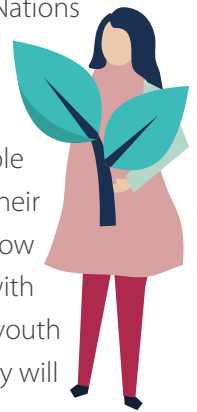


What Adolescents and Young People Can Do to Accelerate Action towards a Green Economy

The climate crisis and challenges from environmental degradation are a threat to young people's quality of life and economic opportunities. The climate and environmental challenges act as threat multipliers, compounding on existing inequalities and challenges, such as those brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. This is already their reality today, and it will grow more acute as the climate crisis worsens. Young people make up about 40% of the population of the Lower Mekong countries but will be 100% of the workforce of the future¹ – so green economic strategies and plans developed today will have direct implications for their livelihoods. With such a stake, young people are critical partners with government, businesses and civil society in determining the future for themselves and their countries' economies.

This brief is specifically targeted at young people and identifying opportunities through which they can play a role in accelerating action towards a green economy – building on the key findings and recommendations from the study commissioned by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) covering Cambodia, Thailand and Viet Nam.

The study conducted desk research and field consultations with around 250 young people aged 15–24 through focus group discussions and results validation workshops to talk about their experiences and their understanding of climate risks and mitigation, what is at stake and how young people can be more involved. In addition, key stakeholder interviews were also held with 28 adults from government, green businesses and civil society how they perceived youth empowerment and participation in matters that will affect the future environment in which they will work, conduct politics, raise families and live.



¹ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2019). World Population Prospects 2019: Data Booklet

What did they learn?

According to youth in the three countries of the study, knowledge about climate change remains relatively low among youth.

- These young people believe youth are aware of particular environmental problems, such as how plastic is destroying the oceans and the dangers of air pollution (including from PM2.5 particles).
- They think youth have heard about the Paris Agreement and policies regarding carbon emissions. But most young people are not able to connect the dots and understand the impact climate change has on the world.

The youth believe knowledge levels are low among young people because climate change issues are not taught in schools or are poorly taught.



We are afraid that we would be opposed by some people if we tell our opinions. ...

– Young Vietnamese respondent

- They see the education system as slow to adapt, especially since climate change became an important global issue and one that ultimately will have more impact on the youths of today rather than today's adults.
- The youth generally agreed climate change education needs to start at an early age at school.
- And many young people fear social norms expect them to remain students who observe rather than be embraced as agents of change.

The government officials contributing to the study acknowledged gaps in young people's understanding of climate change and its impacts.

- Many agreed that youth do not have enough knowledge to see its importance and that school curriculums need to incorporate climate change issues. But developing a curriculum is not enough.
- Teachers need training on climate, environment and green issues.

The green business owners consulted believed there is urgent need to engage youths in discussions on environmental sustainability and processes that address how climate change impacts society.

- Students should be involved in designing the environmental component of the curriculum.
- Young people should be a part of policy formulation.
- There are signs that things are changing, they said, and youth are becoming increasingly involved. More support from the government and the private sector should aim to broaden young people's involvement in climate actions and their country's transition to a green economy.

According to the study participants and current research, barriers for youth, to access green labour markets include lack of access to a comprehensive education system, green skills capacity-development programmes, limited platforms to engage on issues with the government and policy-makers and skills mismatches in the job market.

- Gender inequality can multiply the barriers by preventing girls from gaining access to the job market. Self-selection bias, family environment and gender stereotypes typically contribute to girls' disadvantage in science, technology, engineering and mathematic fields.
- The lowest female enrolment by subject is generally found in the fields of information, communication and technology; engineering, manufacturing and construction; the natural sciences, mathematics and statistics.²
- Sociocultural norms, policy frameworks and programme investments often do not factor in the needs of different target groups. Girls, young people with disabilities and those living in remote geographical areas are left out and have no knowledge or access to existing programmes and platforms.

Empowerment is needed

The study found a consensus among the participants that youth are not yet empowered enough to expand their unique perspective on solutions. NGOs and other development organizations are supportive with conferences and other events for youth to learn about environmental issues. But far more needs to be done to cultivate youth as partners.

How youth can be partners in the green transition

1. Through activism, advocacy and policy engagement

Youth have the potential to contribute to national discourses on climate change and green economy through campaigns, advocacy and other forms of public engagement. They can voice their opinions in global and national forums and contribute to shaping policies, such as the Nationally Determined Contributions, the COP Summits and other climate-related policies at the local, national, regional and global levels.

2. Through engagement in existing or potential green jobs and community- and youth-led initiatives

Youth can seek out green jobs and jobs that prioritize environmental sustainability in their products and services, including the renewable energy sector. They can also be part of the industries that can be made more sustainable and environment-friendly. For example, the garment industry is not considered a green industry, but some companies have switched to organic fabrics and dyes or set up a second-hand clothing store. Youth might start a project or initiatives for sustainability (recycling, clean energy projects, waste management) or environment conservation (planting trees, protection of natural resources in the community).



“

There is strength in numbers. [Young people] learn that if they work together and express their opinion, they have the power to change. [We need to] encourage young children to make the difference, and they need to be heard by the government and other people. There is hope that we can change. When kids come to [an] event and are inspired that things can be changed, they learn to take risks and push forward, be more resilient and have compassion for themselves and others.

”

– Thai youth leader

² Theophania Chavatzia, *Cracking the Code: Girls' and women's education in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM)*, Paris, UNESCO, 2017.

3. Through green entrepreneurship

Some youth might be inspired to be part of the green economy but may not have the skills or may not find a suitable green job. Youth can pursue the path of entrepreneurship and create businesses of their own that would contribute to sustainable production and consumption.

Tapping into young people's wisdom and building partnerships with them as agents for change

From across the many voices of young people in the study came agreement that youth participation in environmental issues could be stronger:

- This can be done by changing the deep-seated hierarchies of power in communities that exclude youth from decision-making or from voicing their opinions.
- Participation needs to be institutionalized and culturally embedded by adolescents, including a more conducive legislative environment and budgetary support.
- Better human rights education in schools as well as for adults can develop their familiarity with their right to participate.
- Adults should also be provided with the knowledge and skills necessary to work with youth and invest in building their skills³
- If governments prioritize green economies in their policies through formal training and then support access to the green labour market, it will open the way for youth and adolescents to obtain jobs that are financially attractive to and contribute to the country's carbon-free economic growth.

Exposure to information on environmental issues and climate change influencers can spark enthusiasm and inspire young people to participate in the green economy.

- There needs to be space or channels suitable for young people to express their opinions and concerns to the right audience that could influence change.
- Youth are more likely to engage in climate change initiatives when they have agency and are included in public policy dialogues to mobilize climate change efforts.
- Meaningful participation⁴ can be a form of empowerment, especially when action is taken on the ideas and solutions provided by young people.

³ UNICEF, *Conceptual Framework for Measuring Outcomes of Adolescent Participation*, New York, 2018.

⁴ According to the UNICEF framework, features of meaningful participation have to consist of safe and inclusive opportunities to form and express views (space), expression of views must be facilitated freely in a medium of choice (voice), the view must be listened to (audience), and the view must be acted on as appropriate (influence). L. Lundy, *Voice is Not Enough: Conceptualizing Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*, Geneva, 2007.

Movements, campaigns and businesses open to youth involvement in Cambodia, Thailand and Viet Nam

Cambodia

- Rubbish Youths, a group of youth collecting garbage, cigarette butts, campaigning to transform a district of Phnom Penh into a trash-free model
- Zerow, a zero-waste education platform
- The Coconut School, a foundation offering innovative tuition programme called Trash to Tuition to give every child in rural areas a free education
- Mother Nature Cambodia, an organization working on protecting Cambodia's Natural Heritage
- Think Plastic, a social campaign to raise awareness of plastic pollution and encourage people to reduce use of plastic
- Compost City, a green business to improve waste management by composting organic waste
- DerPrey, an Earth-conscientious ecotourism operator who provides customers a unique experience of staying in natural places
- Mekong Seagull, a media and ecotourism travel operator

Thailand

- Climate Strike Thailand
- SOS Earth Thailand
- Seub Nakasatien Foundation, protecting forest, wildlife habitat, preserving biodiversity
- Bird Conservation Society of Thailand, one of the oldest organizations conserving birds and nature in Thailand
- Raks Thai, working with local communities on environment and climate change adaptation



Viet Nam

- Let's do it! Viet Nam- A group of volunteers who organizes local clean ups throughout the country and educate people about the importance of disposing of waste responsibly
- Saigon Compass, a social enterprise found by Ta Thuy Trang. In 2019, it organized and coordinated green activities in Ho Chi Minh City and other areas such as Ninh Thuan, Quang Ngai
- Chiến dịch Mùa Hè Xanh (Green Summer Campaign) organized by Communist Youth Union,
- Thanhnien forum, A youth forum to create participation and share their thoughts
- Challenge for Change, internet challenge for celebrities also known as the #Trashtag Challenge
- GreenViet, a non-profit organization that implements biodiversity and environmental protection measures

The Private Sector's Key Role in Partnering with Youth for Green Economic Transitions

“

I can feel that young people care about environmental issues, but they don't have a chance to accumulate knowledge.”

– Viet Nam green business owner

A significant proportion of the youth consulted had not considered working in green industries. Nearly all of them, though, expressed awareness of environmental issues and climate change impacts. Many knew of campaigns on an environmental problem. The private sector could play a key role in changing the perception of youth positively and making green jobs an attractive potential career option.

Countries in the region, including Cambodia, Thailand and Viet Nam, have made international and national commitments to tackle climate change and pursue green-


growth strategies. As green growth priorities expand, employment landscapes are going to change—youth will need twenty-first-century skills, including green skills, to adapt to the changes and new opportunities.

“

To improve the capacity of youth, we need to provide training and provide all the materials needed to conduct research on developing [environmental] issues.”

– Cambodian green business owner

How can the private sector contribute towards youth becoming more aware of opportunities and how to prepare for them?

“

I recruit students of electricity and energy majors, then train them on solar energy. I train them on many things, including how to install solar energy equipment, price, the origin of solar energy. I have to train them on marketing and sales for solar energy. Generally speaking, I have to train them from the beginning, and there is so much to share.”

– Viet Nam green business owner (solar energy)

- **Green skills and knowledge training for youth:** One key recommendation that came out strongly from the consultations were partnerships with the private sector to provide internships and training programmes on green skills, soft skills and entrepreneurship targeted to girls and boys. There is an opportunity for the private sector to increase engagement with educational institutions and the government to develop joint training and joint projects with schools, universities and vocational schools in green areas.



“Greening the Mekong: Action for a Greener Economy with Children and Youth” is a study to better understand the opportunities and barriers for young people to integrate sustainability into their current and future economic activity. Awareness of sustainability issues has grown over the past decade, but does not always result changes to the way we live and work. This series of policy briefs examines current levels of awareness and support mechanisms in Cambodia, Thailand and Viet Nam, and explores opportunities to empower youth to play more active roles as agents of change for a greener planet.

The full report and policy briefs can be accessed at:



- UNESCO website: <https://bangkok.unesco.org/content/report-greening-mekong-action-greener-economy-children-and-youth>
- UNICEF website: <https://www.unicef.org/eap/research-reports>

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