

Youth in Action

EXPERIENCES FROM
THE SMALL GRANTS PROGRAMME

Turning
the tide on
marine plastic
pollution

Traditional
knowledge
makes a
comeback

The future
of farming

Time
for action

Message from the GEF and UNDP

Youth are being referred to as the “torchbearers” of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. They indeed play a crucial role as key drivers and actors in the implementation of the Agenda as well as the beneficiaries of the actions and policies initiated. Active engagement of youth in global environment and sustainable development efforts is absolutely vital to achieving sustainable, inclusive and stable societies. We hope that the examples of active youth engagement, highlighted in this brochure from the GEF Small Grants Programme, will be an inspiration to all to address today's challenges and transform our society for a better future.



Pradeep Kurukulasuriy

Director - Nature, Climate and Energy
Executive Coordinator - Environmental Finance
Bureau for Policy and Programme Support
United Nations Development Programme



Françoise Clottes

Director of Strategy and Operations
Global Environment Facility



Message from the SGP Global Manager

As we collectively address the global climate and nature crises, it is absolutely critical to engage youth as agents of change, creative entrepreneurs and innovators. Through education, science and technology, young people are scaling up their efforts and skills to accelerate concrete actions. Through the support and partnership provided by the GEF Small Grants Programme, youth are acquiring knowledge and skills to build a more sustainable future, while actively engaging in developing a green and blue economy. I am pleased to share some of the great examples of youth innovations and intergenerational efforts on inclusive nature-based solutions through this publication. SGP is committed to continue investing in and working with partners to empower young people to become the future leaders of their communities and beyond.



Yoko Watanabe

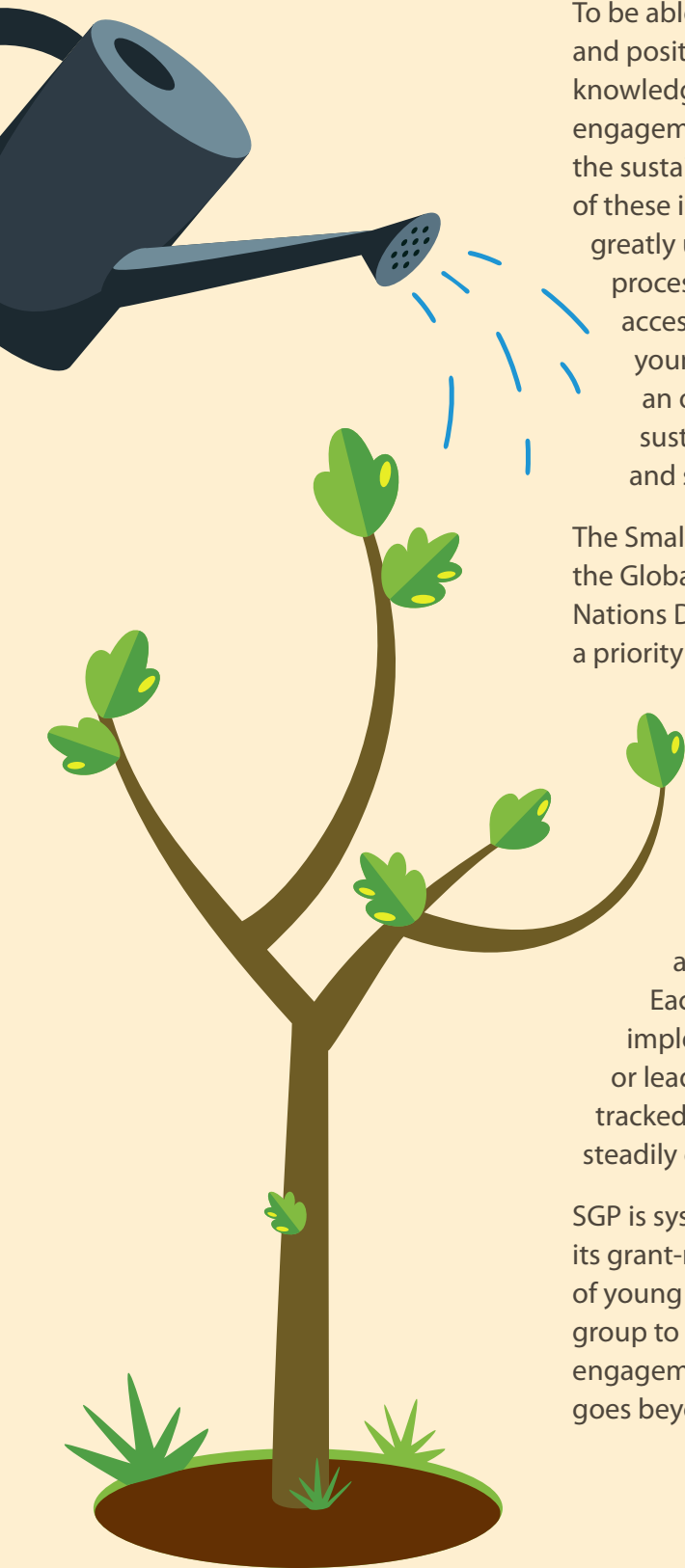
Global Manager,
GEF Small Grants Programme

A photograph showing two men in a rural setting. One man, wearing a yellow safety vest over a dark long-sleeved shirt, is leaning over and touching a large blue solar panel. Another man, wearing a white cap and a dark jacket, stands next to him, looking down at the panel. In the background, there is a structure covered with a blue tarp and some dry vegetation.

Greening Farms Through Innovation

Bariq21, a civil society organization supported by SGP, introduced solar-powered irrigation pumps to three pilot farms in a protected wetland area in Algeria, and trained the young generation of farmers how to use and repair them. Bariq21 also taught the farmers how to market their produce and use organic practices, which improved conservation of the delicate local ecosystem.

Youth & SGP



There are currently around 1.2 billion young people (aged 15 to 24 years old) in the world, accounting for about 16 percent of the global population. Young generations have a unique relation to the interlinked planetary challenges of climate change, species extinction and pollution. The most severe impacts of these crises will affect future generations, who will be forced to address the threats and make radical transformations possible.

To be able to face these challenges and become innovators and positive agents of change, youth need the right tools and knowledge. Investments made now in young people and their engagement will dramatically shape the future of societies and the sustainable development agenda. The current levels of these investments are clearly insufficient, with young people greatly underrepresented in decision-making and development processes, often disproportionately unemployed, and lacking access to quality health and education services. Empowering young people to fully develop their potential presents an opportunity to lay the foundation for a peaceful and sustainable future, amplifying both environmental benefits and social co-benefits.

The Small Grants Programme (SGP), a corporate programme of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), recognizes youth as a priority target group that is a key stakeholder for sustainable development, with the potential to play the roles of future leaders and drivers of change. About 40 percent of SGP projects have active youth participation.

More than 73 percent of the SGP National Steering Committees, the primary governance and decision-making body of the programme, have appointed a Youth Focal Point to ensure that the needs and interests of youth are reflected in SGP portfolios.

Each year, about 350 to 500 SGP-supported projects are implemented around the world with youth participation or leadership. The share of these projects in the SGP portfolio tracked through monitoring reports since 2015 has been steadily growing, reaching more than 40 percent.

SGP is systematically working to empower young people through its grant-making process, actively encouraging the participation of young individuals and youth-led organizations to enable this group to make change in their own communities. While active engagement and participation of youth is a key first step, SGP goes beyond that by working with partners to bring youth

voices to the global stage, and making targeted investments to address key youth priorities. Since 2015, SGP has successfully convened an annual Global Youth Video Competition in partnership with the Rio Conventions Secretariats (UNFCCC, CBD, UNCCD). The winners are recognized at their Conferences of the Parties to showcase the power of young people in reaching innovative and ambitious solutions to planetary crises.

To address skills and capacity gaps identified by youth stakeholders, SGP has launched a dedicated Innovation Programme on Youth and Climate Change. The programme enables young people to qualify for green jobs, start green enterprises and lead climate actions locally and nationally. With targeted support, young people can acquire skills to restore natural resources, and transition to low-carbon pathways.

The examples in this publication from different countries and contexts illustrate the ingenuity, dedication, and energy of young people. Youth have led innovative initiatives based on treasured ancestral knowledge and practices in Guatemala and Viet Nam; established farms and rural enterprises with renewable energy, agro-ecological and climate-smart technologies in the Dominican Republic, Barbados, Bhutan and Togo; learned to install and maintain renewable energy equipment in Armenia; and built awareness of plastic pollution and advocated for ocean restoration in Seychelles and The Bahamas.

This incredible richness and variety of local solutions championed by youth brings hope and optimism to overcome the climate and nature crisis around the world. It is also increasingly evident that, to pursue a more sustainable future for our planet, society needs to invest in and support young people to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to become future leaders in their communities and beyond.

SGP will continue to support youth-led civil society and community organizations globally. Furthermore, in addition to mainstreaming youth empowerment in all relevant projects, SGP will continue to work with youth as key target groups and invest in specific interventions and policy dialogues at the national, regional, and global levels. In partnerships with other development partners, governments and private sector, these initiatives supported by SGP will actively remove barriers to youth participation, support their innovation and creative solutions, and develop their skills and capacity to address the global environmental challenges we face today and contribute to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.



SGP Samoa



SGP Armenia



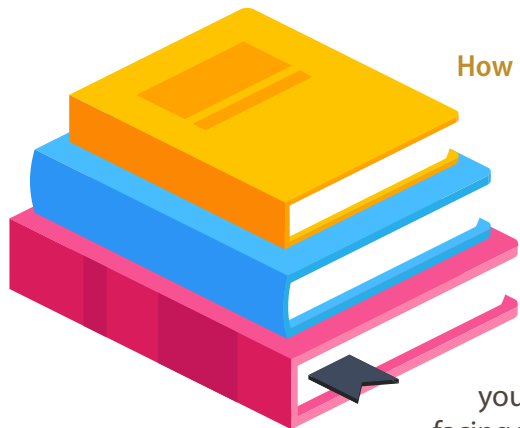
SGP South Africa



SGP



Traditional knowledge makes a comeback



How Indigenous youth are protecting ancestral wisdom to safeguard the future of the planet

Indigenous Peoples have been contributing to nature conservation in diverse and sustainable ways for centuries. As a result, they have built a rich repository of traditional knowledge that can serve as a source of innovation to develop local actions that provide nature- and culture-based solutions for the multiple global crises that the world faces today: climate change, biodiversity loss, and the global pandemic. However, this potential is at risk of being wasted as younger generations of Indigenous Peoples continue to be marginalized, facing various challenges and barriers that lead them away from their traditional cultural practices.

“Nature-based solutions developed by Indigenous Peoples and local communities can play a key role in tackling climate change and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals,” says SGP Global Manager Yoko Watanabe. “We are committed to identifying, replicating, and accelerating the dissemination and adoption of scalable local solutions for sustainable development, while contributing to the empowerment and repositioning of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, especially women and youth, from beneficiaries to agents of change.”

In Guatemala, 28-year-old Fabiola Quijivix is a perfect example of how young generations of Indigenous Peoples are rediscovering traditional knowledge and applying it to safeguard the planet’s future. “My goal is to be a key player in the change that our community needs,” she says.

A Mayan-k’iche Indigenous woman, Fabiola lives in the village of Xepache, in the Valley of Palajunoj. Her community is affected by high levels of poverty, malnutrition and illiteracy due to the lack of development opportunities. Many young people have been prompted to quit their studies and migrate to the United States. Pollution and other negative effects from the local mining industry are also major problems.

“This has moved me to lead other young people, women and children to get involved in the conservation, restoration and protection of our mountains,” Fabiola says. “According to ancestral practices, humans have a deep connection with the forest and Mother Earth to satisfy their basic needs. I want to help my village transform through good practices and the sustainable use of natural resources.”

Fabiola’s main involvement with neighbouring Indigenous communities is as president of the association of local community tour guides, called Exploring the Valley: “This way, we can rethink the value of biodiversity in the forests and in our communities, finding new job alternatives for young people without affecting the environment while caring for people’s health.”

As the local tourism industry suffered the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic



SGP Guatemala



SGP Viet Nam

in 2020, Fabiola stepped up to coordinate a project supported by SGP through the Global Support Initiative for territories and areas conserved by Indigenous Peoples and local communities (ICCA-GSI), in partnership with the Global ICCA Consortium, the International Union for Conservation of Nature, and the United Nations Environment Programme's (UNEP) World Conservation Monitoring Centre, with funding from the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety.

Implemented by the young members of Exploring the Valley, the Heart of the Mountain project seeks to improve the quality of life of the people of the Palajunoj Valley by restoring forests and conserving forest biodiversity in the tourist forest area. It also focuses on protecting traditional knowledge by teaching young people about the use of medicinal plants.

One of its most important achievements was the creation of a nursery where native forest species, including medicinal plants and other shrubs, are grown for transplantation to areas that need to be reforested. The nursery also provides raw plant materials for a group of 60 Mayan-k'iche women who have been trained to produce various artisanal products, such as teas, jams and soaps, which are sold to tourists.

"This has strengthened our community with the production of 51,000 plants, which were used to restore 20 hectares of forest area," notes Fabiola. "It also allowed the creation of 60 family gardens, where Indigenous elders trained groups of women how to use medicinal plants. A manual was created so that everyone can learn how each species can be used to treat different diseases."

SGP has also helped Indigenous youth to use traditional knowledge about medicinal plants to conserve biodiversity and promote sustainable development in Viet Nam. It supported the Centre for Research and Development of Ethnomedicinal Plants to implement a project in the community of Nam Dam, located in the Dong Van Karst Plateau UNESCO Global Geopark. Inhabited by the Dao people, Nam Dam still retains a strong cultural identity and a long tradition of using medicinal herbs for health care.

The project helped the Nam Dam Community



SGP Guatemala

"My dream is to be able to walk below the shadows of the trees that my hands and feet have planted, to breathe the air of those trees, while listening to the birds singing by my side."

– Fabiola Quijivix, president of Exploring the Valley

Cooperative to professionally organize its herbal bath services to tourists, including the production and sale of traditional herbal medicines according to national standards and regulations. It also contributed to the conservation of the genetic diversity of local medicinal plants by training community members to use sustainable collection methods and cultivate species at risk of extinction. Most participants were women between the ages of 18 and 35, and all were from the Dao Cham ethnic group.

The head of the Nam Dam Community Cooperative, Ly Ta Den, says that the number of visitors to the herbal bath services has been increasing since the project started, which is generating more income to the community: "This project is very meaningful to us. It has opened a new window, connecting us with universities and the private sector. Our villagers had many chances to participate in various international and local fairs and exhibitions, where we presented our traditional herbal medicines to the world. It has also helped to sustainably conserve the traditional knowledge of the Dao Cham and it has significantly improved our livelihoods."

Traditional knowledge conservation, Indigenous youth engagement and promotion of Indigenous herbal products through the development of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises are all key elements of SGP's approach in Viet Nam.

Turning the tide on marine plastic pollution

How local NGOs in Seychelles and The Bahamas are working with youth to raise awareness and inspire action

Our oceans are drowning in plastics; this stark realization is all it took for three young women to co-found The Ocean Project Seychelles (TOP), a local NGO set up to tackle issues affecting the state of the marine environment in Seychelles through education, outreach, research and action. A core component of the work carried out by TOP since 2016 is raising awareness to promote positive behaviour change at the individual level, but also at national and policy scales.

For Small Island Developing States (SIDS) like the Seychelles, the ocean and marine ecosystems such as coral reefs, seagrass beds and mangroves are critical to sustaining life, livelihoods, and economic development. However, plastic pollution and marine litter have become widespread problems affecting islands from the Caribbean to the Indian Ocean. This not only threatens the stability of marine ecosystems, but also affects food safety and security, human health, and marine-based tourism, to name a few.

UNEP estimates that at least eight million tonnes of plastic enter the ocean every year, with SIDS being exposed to concentrations of plastic waste greater than their own consumption. In the Seychelles and other SIDS, plastics and litter washing up along coastlines and beaches can have negative impacts on the local tourism and fishing industries, which are often the basis for entire national economies.

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https://www.yunbaogao.cn/report/index/report?reportId=5_11410

