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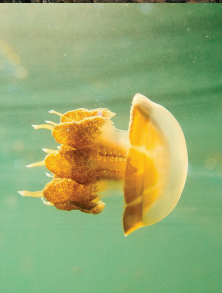


# youthXchange

Biodiversity and Lifestyles Guidebook



UNEP  
United Nations  
Environment Programme



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# youthXchange

## Guidebook Series

# Biodiversity and Lifestyles



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization



Convention on  
Biological Diversity



UNEP  
United Nations  
Environment Programme



# Foreword

Every day, we are reminded of the importance of biodiversity for the health of our planet and for sustainable human development. Today, due to human activity, the loss of biodiversity is increasing at the fastest rate known in recent geological history. We do not know the total number of living species on the planet, but we know that current extinction rates are 100 to 1,000 higher than the natural rate and we know that the human impact is growing. To sustainably manage biodiversity, we must first understand it better.

The importance of preserving biodiversity lies at the heart of the Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD), which seeks to conserve biodiversity, to advance the sustainable use of its different components, and to share fairly and equitably the benefits arising from the use of genetic resources. It covers all domains related to biodiversity and its role in sustainable development, science, education, agriculture, business, culture and much more. In 2010, the Parties to the Convention adopted the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011–2020, a 10-year framework for action to conserve biodiversity and the benefits it provides.

With nearly half of the world's population under the age of 25, young people are critical actors for these efforts. We must do more to support young women and men in understanding the scientific, economic, social and cultural dimensions of preserving biodiversity. Young people must grasp the connections between their everyday lifestyle choices and biodiversity. They must become empowered to propose solutions to stem the loss of biodiversity through their changes in their own behaviours.

Building green societies must begin with the way we think and behave. This idea underpins the United Nations Decade for Education for Sustainable

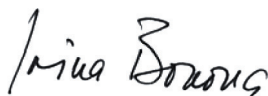
Development (2005–2014), which promotes critical and ethical reflection to foster attitudes and behaviours for a new culture of sustainability. This YouthXchange Biodiversity and Lifestyles Guidebook seeks to strengthen the foundations for this new culture.

Developed by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), in close collaboration with the Secretariat of the Convention of Biological Diversity, this guidebook helps young people, aged between 15 and 24, to learn about the different dimensions of biological and cultural diversity and to develop essential skills to take action for its conservation. The guidebook highlights the interactions between biodiversity and the lifestyle choices of young people, and it untangles the connections between food, consumption, culture and biodiversity conservation. Our goal is to promote learning to preserve biodiversity through responsible lifestyle choices, by providing also starting points for action by young people.

UNEP plays a leading role in developing and advancing the international agenda on biodiversity, by catalyzing awareness on global environmental problems, by building consensus on action to address challenges, and by promoting and supporting conservation programmes. For its part, UNESCO promotes cooperation in education, the sciences, culture, communication and information, to provide decision-makers and civil society with the tools and skills to preserve biodiversity and to empower young people as positive change agents. With this guidebook, we seek to help young women and men to understand the contributions of biodiversity to their development and the role they can play in preserving it, today and tomorrow.



**Achim Steiner**  
Executive Director  
UNEP



**Irina Bokova**  
Director-General  
UNESCO



**Braulio Ferreira de Souza Dias**  
Executive Secretary  
CBD



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# 1. The YXC Guidebook Series

The *YouthXchange Biodiversity and Lifestyles Guidebook* is the third in a series of thematic guidebooks supporting the UNEP/UNESCO YouthXchange (YXC) Initiative. The initiative was created in 2001 to promote sustainable lifestyles among young people (15-24 years) through education, dialogue, awareness raising and capacity building. The series is produced for young people and the people working with them, such as educators, teachers, trainers and youth leaders around the world.

*“Young people are not only aware of the trends of our consumer societies but they also contribute to shaping our markets and lifestyles. They have a great role in making our consumption and production patterns more respectful of biodiversity. Youth’s creativity, awareness and resourcefulness are powerful vehicles that can transform our everyday habits and reduce their negative impacts on biodiversity.”*

Braulio Ferreira de Souza Dias, Executive Secretary,  
Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity

The YouthXchange guidebooks provide young people with ideas, actions and starting points towards a sustainable world. With nearly half the world’s population under the age of 25, most living in developing countries, imagine the impact of young people as change agents in adopting more sustainable lifestyles. If we add together our small steps, we will move towards lifestyles that help sustain our planet, our global and our local communities.

## Aims of the YXC Biodiversity and Lifestyles Guidebook

The YouthXchange Biodiversity and Lifestyles Guidebook is designed to help young people familiarize themselves with the dimensions of global biological and cultural diversity, as well as help them to develop essential skills while engaging with biodiversity.

The guidebook aims to:

- Explore the interactions between biodiversity and lifestyle choices by explaining the interrelatedness of food, consumption, culture and biodiversity conservation;
- Help young people familiarize themselves with the dimensions of global biological and

cultural diversity, as well as help them to develop essential skills while engaging with biodiversity; and

- Help young people consider how they can preserve biodiversity through responsible lifestyle choices, engagement and action.

## Towards preserving biodiversity

Biological diversity – or biodiversity – is the variety of life on Earth and the natural systems it forms. Human activities, being magnified by population growth and climate change, are leading to significant loss of biodiversity around the world. This has potentially grave consequences, including impacts on food systems and food security and for human well-being. If current unsustainable consumption and production patterns continue, we risk irreversible decline in biodiversity, which is not only essential to the proper functioning of the earth systems, but also key to the provision of ecosystem services that are crucial to human life and well-being. It is up to every one of us, particularly young people, to take action to preserve biodiversity and reconcile it with human life.

The global annual economic cost of biodiversity loss has been estimated between 1.35 and 3.1 trillion U.S. dollars. This burdens young people in particular, as it affects their job opportunities and future well-being. The energy, motivation and creativity of youth are essential assets to stimulating change and preserving the Earth’s biodiversity.

*“73.4 million (12.6%) young people are expected to be out of work in 2013.”*

ILO Global Employment Trends for Youth 2013

*“People under 25 make up 43% of the world’s population. When young people can claim their rights to health, education and decent working conditions, they become a powerful force for economic development and positive change.”*

UNFPA State of World Population 2011



## Case Study

Earth Overshoot Day is the day when we have consumed all the new resources the planet have produced for the current year (according to [Global Footprint Network](#) calculations). For the rest of the year, we are in the ecological equivalent of deficit spending, drawing down our resource stocks – in essence, borrowing from the future. Earth Overshoot Day comes earlier every year, since the first Earth Overshoot Day on December 31, 1986. So, what can be done? We, as citizens, can take action to get out of overshoot in our own lives: eat less meat, drive and fly less, and use less energy in our homes and offices. We can also encourage government and business leaders to build communities with smart infrastructure planning and best-practice green technology.

This guidebook is designed to educate and inspire young people to actively participate in protecting biodiversity, as well as to help them understand the relationship between the long-term co-evolution of people, animal and plant species, and biological and cultural diversity. While biodiversity conservation needs the support of governments and business, young people must be part of the dialogue to make this a reality. Young people can contribute to fostering biodiversity conservation and preservation and protecting biological resources, which are the pillars upon which we build civilizations.

*“In Jakarta, young people are almost 30% of the population and if this number can work together as active agents for our environment we believe we can tackle the issues affecting us and our environment at large.”*

Putri Ayusha,  
Responding to Climate Change (RTCC) student



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The YouthXchange Biodiversity and Lifestyles Guidebook can be downloaded from the [YXC website](#) and is also available on the [UNEP](#) and [UNESCO](#) websites.



## 2. Biodiversity: a key to learning and change

How is biodiversity reflected in our education and learning? What can we do to address biodiversity through education?

### Learning about biodiversity

Biodiversity is the interconnected web of life on earth and we humans belong to it. In many traditional cultures, this web is sacred and rooted in daily life.

*"Humankind has not woven the web of life.  
We are but one thread within it.  
Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves.  
All things are bound together.  
All things connect."*

Chief Seattle, Native American leader, 1854

In light of this, we need to be more educated on the matter; we need to understand that we are part of it. We cannot be disconnected and unconcerned about it. Biodiversity can no longer be a scientific concept only understood by intellectuals and protected by nature conservationists.

How are our daily lives related to the continuing loss of biodiversity? Reflecting on this question is a beginning for change. There can be no standardised curriculum. Revising our own values and convictions, and understanding our own assumptions will help design our own curriculum for change.

### Reconnecting with nature

To begin with we need to become mindful of the fact that we are one element of 'life' present in a great variety of forms on earth and that it is the whole of this web that operates to 'provide for' our needs and 'bears the consequences of' our actions.

Do you know the Four Laws of Ecology of Barry Commoner, a cellular biologist and environmentalist (1917-2012)? He explains:

- *Everything is connected to everything else.*  
There is one ecosphere for all living organisms and what affects one, affects all.



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