



Youth at the forefront of sustainability

By Fideline Mborongong and Angga D. Martha¹

Earth is the one place that we all call home, but it is being suffocated by the exceptional pressure to provide natural resources to support demand from the ever increasing population. This excessive demand induced by the extreme capitalism logic, currently exceeds the earth's regenerating capacity and the situation looks to be worsening. Unsustainable production and consumption patterns/ lifestyles are the order of the day as countries strive towards economic growth. Consumption and production patterns have a great impact on people and the environment now and will continue for future generations.

With this in mind, the United Nations launched the campaign for this year's International Youth Day under the theme "[The Road to 2030: Eradicating Poverty and Achieving Sustainable Consumption and Production](#)," focusing on the leading role of young people in ensuring poverty eradication and achieving sustainable development through sustainable consumption and production.

According to the United Nations, sustainable consumption entails the use of products and services that meet the basic needs of communities while safeguarding the needs of future generations. The development and promotion of individual choices and actions that increase the eco-efficiency of consumption of all, as well as minimizing waste and pollution is critical to achieving equitable socioeconomic development.

With the youth population rising to about 1.8 billion (UNFPA, 2014), there is potential for economic and social progress. As young citizens, we must embrace and pride ourselves on sustainable consumption and production as we strive towards economic development and improving our livelihoods. Our daily lifestyle plays a great role in determining our consumption and production patterns and our environmental footprint and a more environmentally conscious youth could go a long way in reducing the current environmental impact and driving towards sustainable development.

We need to explore ways of dealing with poverty in a sustainable way, by empowering youth with sustainable production/consumption skills and knowledge. We need to encourage the youth to substantially reduce waste accumulation through recycling and reusing waste materials, e.g. exploring ways of recycling waste to produce creative works of art that can generate an income as many young people have done in some countries, which doubles as a means of addressing the issues of unemployment amongst many young people. For example, [Mbongeni Buthelezi](#), a 23 years old young man from Johannesburg, South Africa who has been recycling plastic and

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turning it into art. Another example of youth initiatives and sustainable entrepreneurship is the case of [La Recharge](#), a no-packing grocery store in Bordeaux, France created by two young men selling local food without any packing. We should inculcate a sense of environmental stewardship in the youth for they are the leaders of today and tomorrow. We must create a system where humans live in harmony with nature.

In the same vein, it is important to work with young people to ensure their input and participation on this matter. Young people are often neglected and only considered as a check box or targeted as just consumers. Mutual partnership is needed to ensure young people get information and the opportunity to voice their concerns and ideas. This means that participation processes will include and be accessible to youth in various backgrounds.

Youth participation is important because when young people participate, it draws upon their expertise, enables them to exercise their rights as citizens, and contributes to a more democratic society. It also promotes their personal development, and provides them with substantive knowledge of practical skills.

Concerted and collective actions will be required to drive youth towards sustainability and eradication of poverty. Youth are coming up with creative ideas that can contribute in alleviating poverty but at the same time gearing towards sustainable development. SODIAPLATIQUE for instance, is a centre for waste management in Conakry, Guinea, where youth are contributing to their city and creating jobs.² Governments must play a key role in creating the enabling environment for youth to strive. Youth projects and initiatives should be promoted at all levels especially those projects that are environmentally sustainable.

Promoting sustainable production and consumption is of essence in ensuring a healthy environment. We must embrace sustainability in our everyday life if we plan on leaving a healthy environment for future generations, and young people need to take part as key actors towards a better future.

Every little effort counts. The time to act is NOW!

² Guinee News “Environment : towards profitable plastic wastes for youth”
<http://guineenews.org/environnement-vers-des-dechets-plastiques-rentables-pour-les-jeunes-de-conakry/>