

Count the Youth Delegates, Youth Delegates count!

How many youngsters live in your country? How do *you* include them in decision making processes? What do you know about their ambitions, visions and opinions?

According to the UN, youth are people between the age of 15 and 24 years old. And these days, you see a lot of them walking through the halls of the UN basement. Most of them work for NGO's, but this is not the case for all of them.

The World Programme of Action for Youth has invited Governments to strengthen the involvement of young people through the inclusion of youth representatives in their national delegations to the UN Commission on Sustainable Development.

Nowadays, four countries include an official Youth Delegate into their delegations and involve them in the decision making process about sustainability. These are Belgium with 3 delegates, Canada has got 1 delegate, Germany 2, the Netherlands 1 and Sweden 1.

These delegates do not have a symbolic value, they are actually participating in the work of the delegations. They participate in meetings, in informal negotiations with the major groups and with other delegations. They can provide substantive support. Overall they fulfill a dual role. On the one hand they interact with youth in their home countries, gather their opinions and present it as input to their National Delegation, the Youth Caucus and the CSD. On the other hand, they take the decisions being made at the UN back to the youngsters in their home country.

Youth participation is vital to the success of sustainable development. Youth are the largest group of stakeholders. Youth up to the age of 24 comprise 65% of the Earth's population. There are 1,2 billion people between the age of 15 and 24 worldwide. This makes youngsters the largest group of stakeholders on short-term sustainable development policies.

But they are also the ones that in the future decades have to implement decisions that are being made today. That makes them the group of stakeholders on long-term sustainable development policy outcomes as well.

The realisation of sustainable development depends also on coherence, communication and compliance. People need to understand why we should work together for a sustainable future. Young people in particular have a responsibility to make changes as it literally affects and determines their own future. And as the next generation, they have the ability to change paradigms, and be the action owner for the future. What happens today, what is decided today and what is being educated today, has an effect on the opinion, opportunities and choices of future generations.

Einstein said: the world will not evolve past its current state of crisis by using the same kind of thinking that created the situation. With the borders of the earth carrying capacity in sight, we need innovative, fresh solutions. Youngsters can make an excellent contribution.

Katja Walter and Marlon Hassel, German Youth Delegates

Jakop Dalunde, Swedish Youth Delegate

Lisa Develtere, Daniel Niessen and Anne Bocquet, Belgian Youth Delegates

Joanne Dafoe, Canadian Youth Delegate

Maayke Damen, Dutch Youth Delegate