

## **Africa's youth are a driving force for sustainable development.**

*-Krishna Pentayab*

- How can investments in skills, education, and digitalization (as called for in the 2025 ASDR) empower young people to contribute to SDG 8 (decent work) and Agenda 2063's goal of "empowered citizens"?
- What specific policy or programmatic support do youth need from governments and partners to overcome barriers to their full participation in ensuring environmental sustainability (vis-à-vis SDG 14)?

### **Investing in Skills, Education & Digitalization – SDG 8 & Agenda 2063**

- UN Youth Office
- Founder of Sov Lanatir: a youth-led NGO initiated in Mauritius and now in some other Indian Ocean Islands working at the intersection of ocean conservation, community knowledge, and science-based advocacy, we are also a cultural organism in works of decolonisation; mainly of our inner landscapes — language, the way we define ourselves ; our relationship with Nature, our relationship with community; UBUNTU, which was fully ecocentric compared to the anthropocentric values imposed by colonialism. And also reclaiming deep-sovereignty. One simple example is advocating for islands as Big Ocean State with a decolonised lensed and perspective with regards to the bigness of our oceans compared to our lands.

The 2025 *Africa Sustainable Development Report* is clear: without urgent investment in education, skills, and digital access, the continent's youth dividend risks becoming a missed opportunity. Nobel Prize-winning economist James Heckman's research indicates that every \$1 invested in quality early childhood programs can yield returns between \$4 and \$16.

But let's go further: because we don't just need *jobs*. We need **meaningful work** rooted in dignity, purpose, and planetary care.

### **Policy & Programmatic Support for SDG 14 – Environmental Sustainability**

To advance SDG 14 and ensure environmental sustainability, we must recognise the **central role of African youth—not just as beneficiaries, but as knowledge holders, innovators, and leaders.**

“William Kamkwamba's invention of a windmill to power his village in Malawi; as featured in the documentary *William and the Windmill* and Netflix's *The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind*; is a vivid reminder that transformative energy solutions can emerge from youth-led action even in resource-constrained environments.

While there have been meaningful efforts to include youth in sustainability initiatives, challenges remain.

Right now, grassroots initiatives are confronting a big problem of lack of transparency.

The GCF is there and mostly funded by the European Union, but many grassroots do not see where the money is. Evidence from the *OECD and IIED report* shows that **less than 2% of climate finance**

currently reaches youth- or community-led organisations directly, and **over 80% of conservation funding for Africa** is still managed by institutions based outside the continent, mostly in Global North, coming with not-fully-suitable non-local methods. Local problems, foreign experts, foreign leadership, global profit. We are not against foreign collaboration; we are against exclusion, what we are against is building Africa without Africans. We are against deciding for us without having us fully at the table.

This reveals an opportunity: to move from participation to **co-creation**, where young people and local experts are meaningfully involved from the earliest stages of policy design and programme development.

Talking about experts, it is essential to decolonise science as well and promoting Ancient / Indigeneous Knowledge Systems as ecocentric sciences (rather than extractive anthropocentric sciences) the norms lead.

**To support this shift, I see two key priorities:**

### **1. Policy Support**

- Governments can establish **formal youth advisory roles within marine and environmental ministries**, ensuring continuity and not just consultation.
- National frameworks should also consider **recognising and supporting youth-led and community-based marine conservation efforts**, including those rooted in traditional knowledge systems.

### **2. Programmatic Support**

- Partners and donors can create **more accessible and flexible funding mechanisms** that respond to the realities of youth-led work, especially at the grassroots level and a proper monitoring mechanism.
- Investment in **science- and community-based training programmes (making space of Ancient Knowledge Systems)** is also critical. At Sov Lanatir, we combine scientific tools like GIS and drone mapping with local ecological knowledge to inform coastal restoration. This kind of hybrid capacity-building should be scaled and institutionalised.

By creating inclusive, well-resourced, and trust-based frameworks, we can enable young people to contribute fully to marine protection; not just in rhetoric, but in practice. We are ready to lead; what we ask for is partnership.

We are not just advocates; we are scientists, stewards, and solution-builders. What we ask is clear: **Let us lead, and give us the tools to do so. Let us be part of the solution, as African leaders, in unity; in UBUNTU.**

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