**Forum:** Environment Committee

**Issue:** Fully including the younger generation in environmental efforts

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**Introduction**

To this day, our world has experienced numerous environmental catastrophes, including global warming and climate change. It is essential to recognize the detrimental effects ecological disasters have on our society. The 21st century has been the warmest on record. Since the 1980s, each decade has been warmer than the previous one. The increase in global surface temperature led to an increase in the frequency of climate changes, including wildfires, drought, and storms. These detrimental environmental consequences are mainly evoked by humans. Human activities— burning fossil fuels, carbon dioxide emission, deforestation, and pollution- contribute to environmental disasters. In 2020, global carbon emissions already reached 34.81 billion metric tons. As humans provoke environmental catastrophes, individuals are responsible for solving the issues.

In particular, all ages but the young generation are vital to climate change actions. The earth will depend on today's children, youngsters, and future generations. The current world has 1.8 billion youngsters between 10 and 24. Not only are the younger generation the valuable stakeholders of climate change, but they are also the victims of climate change. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) states, "Approximately 1 billion children are at an 'extremely high risk of the impacts of the climate crisis". Unlike adults who only care about business developments, youngsters are the ones who are increasingly aware of the risks. The young generation renews, changes, and upgrades the current status of our society including environment, economy, political, innovations, skills etc. Without the young generation, there is no bright future, with the older generation passing out and no one taking actual action.

Despite the significance of the young generation in solving the environmental crisis, numerous young generations are vulnerable to climate change's impacts. Additionally, they face various obstacles, including a lack of access and resources to solve climate change. Investing in the young generation is essential to brighten the world's future. This can be done through spreading awareness and knowledge to them, cooperating with other environmental stakeholders, and providing extensive opportunities to them. As Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, US Politician & Activist, mentions, "We do not have time to sit on our hands as our planet burns. For young people, climate change is bigger than election or re-election. It is life or death."

**Definition of Key Terms**

**Global Warming**

Long-term heating of Earth's surface observed due to human activities including fossil fuel burning, deforestation for development, illegal waste, caron emission, etc. These activities lead to an increase in greenhouse gas emissions, leading to the heat-trapping level of Earth’s atmosphere to increase.

**Deforestation**

Large-scale removal of trees from forests for the facilitation of human activities. These human activities, cause of deforestation, include agricultural expansion, supply of wood products, land uses, mining, etc

**Greenhouse gases**

Gases that absorbing infrared radiation in the atmosphere have an influence on the earth’s energy balance, a major cause of global warming. Heat-trapping eventually causes the Earth to heat up, provoking different complications including storms, drought, and wildfire. Burning fuels for energy, use of fuel-based transportation, industrial development and production, forestry are major human activities that increase the emission of greenhouse gases

**Fossil Fuel**

Found in the Earth's crust and contain carbon and hydrogen, which can be burned for energy. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has found that emissions from fossil fuels are the dominant cause of global warming. In 2018, 89% of global CO2 emissions came from fossil fuels and industry.

**Genz**

The generational cohort follows millennials, born between the late 1990s and early 2010s. Genz is the generation that can make changes to environmental crisis which requires the most efforts from them

**Background**

With multiple severe environmental issues looming overhead, environmental awareness is increasing; steadily rising from 71% to 77% from 2014 to 2019, and another 70% of survey participants saying they are more aware after the 2019 COVID-19 pandemic (with better environmental reports after lockdown). Of this group, younger people are the most motivated and the most active in this matter. In the United States, more than two quarters of GenZ and Millennials believe climate should be a top priority for a sustainable planet and a third stating that they have personally taken action to help address climate change within the last year. These generations are the most willing to give up fossil fuels to transfer to a more sustainable source of energy and the most willing to change their lifestyle to become more environmentally friendly; 78% believing alternate energy development should be prioritized compared to 67% from the Gen X and Baby Boomer generations. They are also the generations to talk the most about climate change, in both social media and in person.

Systematic environmental education could originate from the influence of philosophers like Jean-Jacques Rousseau and educators like Louis Agassiz who emphasized the focus of education on environment. However, some of the earliest signs of environmental conservation education would be in the 1930s following the event of "Dust Bowl." This was a period of dust storms that caused great damage to agriculture and economy in the American and Canadian prairies. It was caused by poor agricultural practices which caused wind erosion. This lead to a rise in conservation education, supported by both government and non governmental agencies and organizations. In 1935, conservation education was officially a part of schools and in 1946, conservation education became a degree offered by the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point. In the 1970s, multiple organizations (both government and non-government) would be established to form modern environment education.

Today, governments all around the world have implemented the education of the environment into their curriculums, creating an awareness of environmental issues from a young age, not only affecting Gen Z, but also the emerging Gen Alpha. Early education sparks interest, turns into passion, and inspires action. In schools children are taught first about the plants, animals, and diverse ecosystems around the world, introduced to the fragility of the environment. Usually around the age of 7-8 they learn how humans effect the environment and their own ecological footprint. At this point they are taught some of the ways they can personally take action, such as the "Three R's": Reduce, Reuse, Recycle. As they go further, students go more in depth, researching about a wider range of issues and how they can take action. In some schools, taking action will be a part of the curriculum in which students must select a topic, plan out, and perform action that benefits their chosen environmental problem. This can range from a personal project of creating new sustainable technology or to a group project of organizing a trash cleanup.

Apart from education, many organizations are incorporating youth programs and networks. These compose of discussions/conferences, labs, camps, classes, volunteer work, and more. These programs helps increase knowledge, build leadership and interpersonal skills, but that's about the extent of it. People can be persuasive, create movements and hold protests, but their audience can choose not to listen. This disregard and underrepresentation of young people is common. Statistics show that 2 of 3 countries do not consult young people in the process of decision making. In all countries listed in the OECD, central government employees below 35 years of age do not go above 32% of the total work force. In the UN, only around 5% of personnel are under 30 years of age. Older people are more experienced and believe they are more responsible and mature, which is not wrong, but can also create an underlying bias when recruiting younger people. In this kind of situation, younger generations are actually quite limited in how far their actions can take them, being unrepresented and uninvolved in creating new policies, and making decisions.

Governments and organizations must be able to recognize that young people are a big part of the population, the future of the earth, and responsible young adults; and with worsening reports of environmental issues, the responsibility now falls on these emerging generations to make sure such responsibilities do not continue down to the next generations.

**Major Parties Involved**

**ActNOW**

ActNOW is a campaign for individual action including the young generation on climate change, global warming, and sustainability established by the United Nations (UN). The ActNOW program was founded at the UN Climate Change Conference in December 2018 to limit global warming and make positive changes to our world.

**Youth Non-Governmental Organizations (YOUNGO)**

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change's (UNFCCC) official children and youth constituency is called YOUNGO (UNFCCC). YOUNGO is a dynamic worldwide network of young NGOs and children's and youth campaigners.

**UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme)**

UNEP is the leading authority in the United Nations system that strengthens environmental standards. “UNEP works on delivering transformational change for people and nature by drilling down on the root causes of the three planetary crises of climate change, nature and biodiversity loss, and pollution and waste”(UNEP). Through its campaigns, particularly World Environment Day, UNEP raises awareness and advocates for effective environmental action.

**United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR)**

UNITAR is the United Nation’s main training branch. They advocate for a long-term, strategic approach to educating about climate change, one that includes creating national strategies, creating learning resources for learning environments, and spreading awareness abroad of the importance of incorporating climate change fundamentals into national curriculum. According to UNITAR, “UNITAR is pleased to launch the United Nations Youth Leadership Development Programme, which aims to promote knowledge on climate change, economic and social development, science, and technology, while encouraging youth to pay attention to global issues such as environment, public health, climate change and refugees.”

**The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)**

UNICEF is a non-governmental organization (NGO) to advance child rights. According to UNICEF, they “are committed to [raise] youth voices on the climate crisis and by increasing youth participation to address climate change.” In the 2019 United Nations Youth Climate Summit, UNICEF provided opportunities for young people to engage with leaders.

The Global Environment Facility (GEF)

GEF is cooperation with h 18 different agencies — including United Nations agencies, multilateral development banks, national entities, and international NGOs. Through the partnership, they tackle current environmental issues. Small Grats Programme (SGP) is a cooperate program of GEF. SGP emphasizes the participation of youngsters as the efforts for the global environment and sustainable development. According to SGP, “Children and youth actively participate in campaigns to protect species and local habitats, tree planting, creating home and community gardens, and renewable energy initiatives that provide solar power for studying – and television watching – among others.”

**Timeline of Events**

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| Date | Description of event |
| **1963** | In order to improve the performance of the UN via suitable training and research, United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) was formed in 1963 by the UN General Assembly. |
| **1972** | United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) was founded |
| **March 17, 1995** | The first Conference of the Parties (COP) happened in 1995. The conference became an annual UN Climate Change Conference that takes place in different countries.  |
| **2004** | Since 2004, 4500 youngsters attended the annual United Nations Environment Programme(UNEP) Tunza international Conferences, discussing a variety of topics including climate change and green jobs |
| **2009** | The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) extended a constituency status to admitted youth NGOs to participate in meetings, receive official environmetnal information, request speaking slots, and receive support at UNFCCC conferences |
| **November 30, 2017** | UNICEF worked with youth to spread environmental message in UNICEF’s first-ever Climate Comic Contest. Sathviga ‘Sona’ Sridhar, a 21-year-old artist from Chennai, India, was the winner of the contest in 2017 |
| **December, 2018** | The ActNow campaign, the United Nations campaign for environmental issues, was launched |
| **September 21, 2019** | UNICEF helped young people participate in climate action by engaging with leaders at the 2019 United Nations Youth Climate Summit in New York City. There were ten young participants, coming from as far as Kenya and Bangladesh.  |
| **November 5, 2021** | Greta Thunberg, a teenager environmental activist, gave a speech during 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference to mock and pressure the government to meet carbon emissions targets and take actions to global warming |

**Possible Solutions**

The question of fully including the younger generation in environmental efforts is mainly about spreading awareness worldwide to stimulate and persuade the generation to take action. While spreading awareness, one thing to keep in mind is that the question explicitly targets the younger generation, chiefly millennials and Genz. While spreading awareness, it is also crucial to let the younger generation understand the cause and the effect of the environmental crisis to further engage and empower them to take more environmental actions.

As the targeted audience is the younger generation, it is strongly recommended to use social media to spread awareness. According to the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, Surveys show that ninety percent of teens ages 13-17 have used social media. With the vast majority of teenagers using social media, it is effective in spreading messages by social media. Additionally, it is possible to use relevant Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) to establish credibility and effectively spread messages. Relevant NGOs like the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and World Wildlife Fund (WWF) are well recognized by young generations. Collaboration with NGOs allows more freedom to actions and access of environmental issues to youngsters. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) admitted youth NGOs to participate in meetings, receive official environmental information, and make free speeches, etc. These NGOs can further collaborate with influential social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Google.

Furthermore, to effectively target the audience and spread awareness, the delegates might also consider about school curriculum. As about 74 percent of global teenagers attend school, spreading awareness by targeting school curricula and activities might also be an effective solution. Delegates can derive a solution that encourages schools to implement lessons in school curriculums with the help of professional climate change experts from relevant NGOs such as Action for the Climate Emergency (ACE) to teach students about the different aspects of climate change and everyday steps to mitigate its effects. Additionally, the additional solution might encourage school events such as plays and parades related to climate change to entertain the younger generation, further spreading awareness of the environmental crisis.

Moreover, another solution can be encouraging NGOs to create programs and campaigns for the younger generation to discuss the severity of environmental disasters, strategies that can be implemented to limit carbon footprint, and the impact that the strategies have on the environment. Another solution is encouraging and allowing the younger generation to attend annual meetings, programs, and campaigns already created to target the current environmental crisis. The eminent meetings, programs, and campaigns include the ActNOW program and COP meetings hosted by the United Nations (UN). This effectively spreads awareness of environmental climate changes and allows younger generations to recognize the seriousness and fatal impacts of climate change, further sympathizing with them.

In brief conclusion, delegates must use relevant sources and methods to derive solutions that effectively spread awareness. The delegate must keep in mind the targeted audience of younger generations. The solutions should be feasible, reasonable, and detailed.

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