



CHIBEZE'S BLOG

YOUNG PEOPLE ARE KEY TO CREATING AN ENVIRONMENT OF PEACE



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Even a decade ago, few people could have imagined the highly vocal, visible role that young environmental activists are today playing around the world. Many cultural, technological and demographic shifts have played a part in this. But more than anything else, it reflects young people's growing sense that the generations that now hold power are not prioritizing the future; that through poor decisions and inaction, they are allowing environmental and security crises to grow, threatening future progress, planetary health and peace.

Young people will not sit quietly and let it happen. They have a voice – and must be heard!

Protecting the environment has been recognized as essential to development since at least 1972, when the United Nations convened the Conference on the Human Environment, better known as the Stockholm Conference. But still, 50 years later, carbon emissions, pollution, global heating and biodiversity loss are getting rapidly worse, while devastating droughts, heatwaves, floods and storms are becoming ever more common.

Thus young environmental activists continue to mount pressure on world leaders, policymakers and other decision makers to commit to environmental and development targets – and, more importantly, to honour those commitments.

As more is learnt about environmental problems, risky developments, and the irresponsible actions of governments and corporations, the environmental activist agenda is constantly evolving. But so far it has rarely highlighted one important set of links: between environmental issues and peace.

These links will be the focus of the [Environment of Peace report](#), which will be launched in May this year. I am proud to be a member of the international panel that is guiding this initiative.

The Environment of Peace team, based at the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), has been collecting evidence from around the world. Among other things, it has found that pockets of armed conflict appearing across the globe are associated with the adverse impacts of climate and other environmental change. For example, communities sometimes migrate when the water resources or pastures they rely on dry up. This can take them into the territories of other communities, creating new tensions that can spill over into fighting.

But the links are not always so straightforward. For example, in Somalia, al-Shabab has been able to recruit desperate young people who have lost their livelihoods or homes because of climate change impacts. Armed groups have also earned the support of climate-affected communities by providing essential help when government services failed.

The Environment of Peace team is also discovering that environmental conservation, climate adaptation or clean energy projects can also create risks and tensions, if they are not carefully planned with peace and justice in mind.

On one level, this gives us yet another good reason to get serious about tackling climate change and promoting environmental sustainability. But it also means that we need to think about peace and justice, and the interests of different communities, in the ways we respond to environmental crises. To put it another way, environmental actors need to pay more attention to issues of peace and security, and security actors like the UN Security Council need to pay more attention to the environment.

Platforms established to include youth in environmental issues—such as YOUNGO, the “youth constituency” of the UN climate change convention—could try to incorporate issues related to peace and security into their agendas. It is important this also happens in more local-level youth platforms and organizations, to increase coverage and maximize impact.

At the Strategic Youth Network for Development (SYND), we seek to promote youth inclusion in the governance of natural resources and the environmental sector. With the support of the World Bank and UNDP Ghana, we established the Youth in Natural Resources and Environmental Governance (Youth-NREG) platform in 2019 with the aim of creating space for knowledge sharing and learning among young environmentalists as well as to implement joint advocacy in a concerted manner.

Youth-NREG has not yet looked in depth at related peace and security issues. This presents an opportunity to bring those issues to a lot of people who can influence public discourse and policy. International campaigning organizations such as 350.org, [Fridays for Future](https://fridaysforfuture.org/), [Extinction Rebellion](https://extinctionrebellion.org/), [Africa Vuka](https://africavuka.org/) and [Climate Reality Africa](https://climateresponseafrica.org/) could also consider giving more space to peace and security issues in their advocacy work.

A healthy environment and a peaceful society are indivisible, and they are non-negotiable if young people are to identify, nurture and maximize their potential. Young people therefore should demand not just peace or environmental sustainability, but positive action to create an Environment of Peace. The run-up to the Stockholm+50 conference in June 2022, marking 50 years since the original Stockholm Conference, is a good place to start.

