

Summary Report

UNEP Tunza European Youth Conference

6-7 September 2011, Bonn, Germany



1. Introduction

60 youth representatives from 27 countries of the EU, Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Southern Europe participated in the “UNEP Tunza European Youth Conference” which took place on the 6th and 7th of September 2011 in Bonn. The UNEP Tunza Youth conference aimed to prepare Youth input for the upcoming United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio 2012 (Rio+20). The conference was organized by UNEP (European Office) with logistic support by WECF (Women in Europe for a Common Future).

The two day UNEP Tunza youth meeting was held subsequently to the UNEP Global and Regional Consultation with Major Groups and Stakeholders on Rio+20 (September 1 and 2) and the 64th annual UNDP/IOE Conference for Non-Governmental Organizations (September 3-5). These conferences also treated topics on Green Economy in preparation of policy recommendations for Rio+20, and allowed active participation of several of the UNEP Tunza Youth participants.

The Rio+20 UNCS/SD 2012 conference will agree on a policy document which will address the transition to a “green economy” in the context of poverty eradication and sustainable development, will identify options for a renewed institutional framework for sustainable development, and will prioritize emerging issues of key importance for future sustainable development. The role of youth in the transition to “green economies”, poverty eradication and sustainable development is vital to success.

Key issues on the agenda of the UNEP Tunza Youth meeting included:

- The concept of a green economy and the way to get there,
- The role and responsibilities of businesses, politics and media in a green economy,
- Young people in green jobs,
- The role of the United Nations activities in respect to young people
- The institutional setup for a green economy, including the international institutional framework for sustainable development

Youth representatives came from following 27 countries: Albania, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, France, Georgia, Germany, Netherlands, Hungary, Italy, Macedonia, Malta, Montenegro, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, UK.

Video-reports, - in a short and long version – of the UNEP Tunza Youth meeting are available on the UNEP website at: www.unep.org/tunza/

This Summary report aims to give a short overview of key activities, discussion highlights, conclusions and recommendations.

2. Programme

6. September (Day 1):

- Welcome by Wondwosen Asnake, Head of the Tunza programme, Department of Major Groups and Stakeholders, UNEP - European regional office
- Introductory speech by the Executive Director of WECF, Sascha Gabizon introducing the conference and the role of major groups in UNEP.
- Opening remark of Diego Le Gallou, TUNZA Youth advisor, France
- Film: the international year of Forests
- Introduction to UNEP by Wondwosen Asnake, presenting the establishment, tasks and the organization of UNEP.
- Dialogue session on the greening of the economy, with a representative of the Bayer Chemical Company, Germany
- Brainstorm; Group discussion lead by Michaela Hogenboom of “Rio+twenties” → association game: what associations go with green economy?
- International Environmental Governance (IEG), presentation by Sara Svensson UNEP Major Groups Youth representatives on the Facilitating Committee and Civil Society Advisory Group on IEG) → What is Governance? What are the problems with the existing governance framework? What is needed to improve IEG?

7. September (Day 2):

- Participants’ presentations of outcomes of previous group work on green Economy, and how to get there
- Presentation introducing the WHO CEHAPE Youth network by Ildiko Almasi, Alina Bezhenar and Jovana Dodos, giving an overview of CEHAPE’s history and activities
- Presentation by WHO CEHAPE Youth network coordinator David Rivett

3. Discussion highlights

3.1. Transformation to a “green economy”

The youth participants developed the following key messages regarding their role, and the overall strategy towards greening economies.

→ Positive Associations

Youth had the following associations with “green economy”

Sustainability, renewable energy, more nature, bio products, sustainable urban development, education, CSR, tourism (eco), equal opportunities, social justice, fair trade, synergy, healthy jobs, healthy lifestyle, collective responsibility, zero footprints, limited material growth, happiness☺, best available technology, resource efficiency and sufficiency, recycling

→ Greener consumption and less consumption on the individual level

In order to deliver on the ambitious targets to arrive at a green and sustainable economy it is crucial to consume better, but also to consume less. Propositions were made for consumption of greener products. Also, proposition on cutting down on consumption per se, corresponding to the thought that we live on a planet with limited resources and that endless growth and consumption is not an option. Instead, growth should take place in other areas, for example in quality of life. (...)

A localized, bottom-up approach on the side of communities and municipalities should be promoted. Incentives should be given also for each and every individual’s contribution to a green economy.

Each person should live up to demands made to others, to get active, to engage and contribute to solving environmental problems on the very local and individual level. Examples were given of recycling, being aware and get informed on one’s personal lifestyle in regards to sustainability, eco-footprint.

“Basically consumers should consumer green products, and consume less” (Marian Schreier, Germany)

“I try to always use a bicycle or public transportation” (Jovana Dodos, Serbia)

→ Media has to live up to its responsibility

The media (print, TV, advertising, internet and social media) is very influential in terms of shaping people’s mindset and buying behavior, and in that way have a great responsibility in contributing to promote good practices on the individual level. It is not enough to merely entertain, but also to educate.

‘Media is one of our bridges to society to help us move to greener economies’ (Alina Bezhenar, Russia)

→ **Young people in green jobs**

Young people, often highly educated, increasingly face difficulties getting adequate jobs matching their qualifications. The “green” sectors such as renewable energy have a huge potential to provide opportunities for young people, both in management positions, research and production.

“The way to do it, is to empower youth to start their own business, so that little by little we build our green society” (Alexandre Florentin, France)

→ **What contribution can companies make to a transition to the green economy?**

It is crucial that companies review their products and its supply chain as a whole in order to identify and eradicate harmful practices and products.

Continuous efforts on R&D are necessary in order to ensure permanent innovation and development of cutting- edge technologies. These new technologies should be assessed independently prior to wide-scale market application, as sometimes new technologies can do more harm than good.

Companies should not go for just “Greenwashing”. Just offering ‘green’ or ecological products in addition to existing, environmentally harmful product lines, or donating a fraction of the annual revenue to environmental organizations or campaign, is only a way to ‘greenwash’ names and companies.

“People should not always buy the cheapest, for example clothes, which often lead to more pollution and compete with food production” (Toni Stoykova, Bulgaria)

3.2. Governance and Institutional framework for the Green Economy

→ **Institutional capacity**

It has to be ensured that the institutional framework for a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication has sufficient capacity to address important issues and to assess new and existing technologies (science based and political).

Especially the younger generation has to be included to play a role and get a voice in the existing institutional framework, across all levels (local and regional as well as on the national and international level).

“Young people should be more informed about their opportunities, and how they can have an influence on policies and economies of their countries” (Ildikó Almási (Alma), Hungary)

→ **More local level involvement necessary**

Governance for sustainable development and a green economy doesn’t only happen top-down on the global level, on the nation state level or in supranational institutions (EU), but also - and equally important - bottom up, on the regional and local level.

Local communities, municipalities and even small villages can contribute to the transition to a green economy by adopting strategies made on the international level, by directly subsidizing green entrepreneurship and by providing education and information to local citizens. Local communities are directly in touch with the citizens, and therefore better able to recognize their needs than rather detached international bodies; also civil society participation and especially participation of young people is often easier on the local level, e.g. through local environmental and social initiatives and organizations.

At the same time, stronger global and national institutional and policy frameworks are needed, which allow bottom-up initiatives to thrive.

“Bottom up initiatives are extremely powerful, and we need a framework from the top down, which allows these bottom-up initiatives to flourish” (Michaela Hogeboom, Netherlands)

→ **Role of the United Nations in promoting and supporting Youth organizations**

Although there are various youth organizations giving young people the opportunity to take part in the UN activities (TUNZA, UNESCO World Youth Forum, WHO CEHAPE etc.), these are often too fragmented and little coordination exists.

In order to create more synergies, avoid duplicate efforts and to ease information exchange, suggestions were made to give Youth a credible institutional presence at the United Nations.

“Young people should be given more opportunities, as interns, in large projects with governments, international organisations” (Ildikó Almási (Alma), Hungary)

→ **Promoting connections among youth organizations**

Another suggestion promoted the idea of a data-base to inform on, connect and promote existing youth platforms and organizations, for example by providing information on possibilities to volunteer, on upcoming events, congresses and youth representative who will be present there.

→ **Education across all societal levels and fields**

To establish a mindset that is perceptive to a sustainable lifestyle, education starting as early as possible is necessary. When starting to raise awareness at young age, the possibility to adopt a sustainable lifestyle and behavior is more likely.

Not only the ‘traditional’ educational establishments like kindergartens, schools and universities should be held responsible, also others have contribute to educational efforts, such as youth organizations (peer-to-peer education and information sharing), the media’s responsibility to educate, training at the workplace etc.

Positive results can be for example that education goes both ways; also children learning on sustainable living etc. can pass on that knowledge to their parents.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

Greening Business:

- It is crucial that companies review their products and its supply chain as a whole in order to identify and eradicate harmful practices and products. They should not just do marginal improvements, that is “green washing”.

Greener consumption:

- It should be promoted that consumers consume green products, and consume less. Cheaper products can often be less good from a sustainable development perspective.

Youth and green jobs:

- The “green” sectors have a huge potential to provide opportunities for young people, governments should empower youth to start their own green businesses.

Institutional framework for sustainable development:

- Institutional framework for a green economy has to have sufficient capacity to monitor and assess technological innovations and to facilitate action on the local level

Youth participation:

- Youth participation is necessary and should be strengthened at all levels in line with multilevel governance at local, regional, international levels.

Education on sustainable development:

- Education on sustainable development should start as early as possible as an integral part of raising awareness on sustainability and should not only be provided by traditional learning institutions

Individual responsibility:

- On the individual level, not only consuming better and greener, but also less is important, each person has a responsibility to contribute to a sustainable society

Media:

- The media has to live up to its responsibility as being profoundly influential in shaping behavior and consumption patterns



