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Role of Young People in the Fight Against Climate Change



Thales Dantas Oct 2, 2018 · 6 min read

“If we let them, young people will be the world’s most powerful solution.” — Denise Dunning



According to UN reports, there are 3.5 billion people under 30 living on the planet, that makes half of the population. 1.8 billion people are adolescents or early adults, ranging from the age of 15 to 24. Half of all youth reside in the developing countries. Our world has never seen so many young people. Following the international saying, “**children are the future**”, then, **youth is the present**. Apart from being the

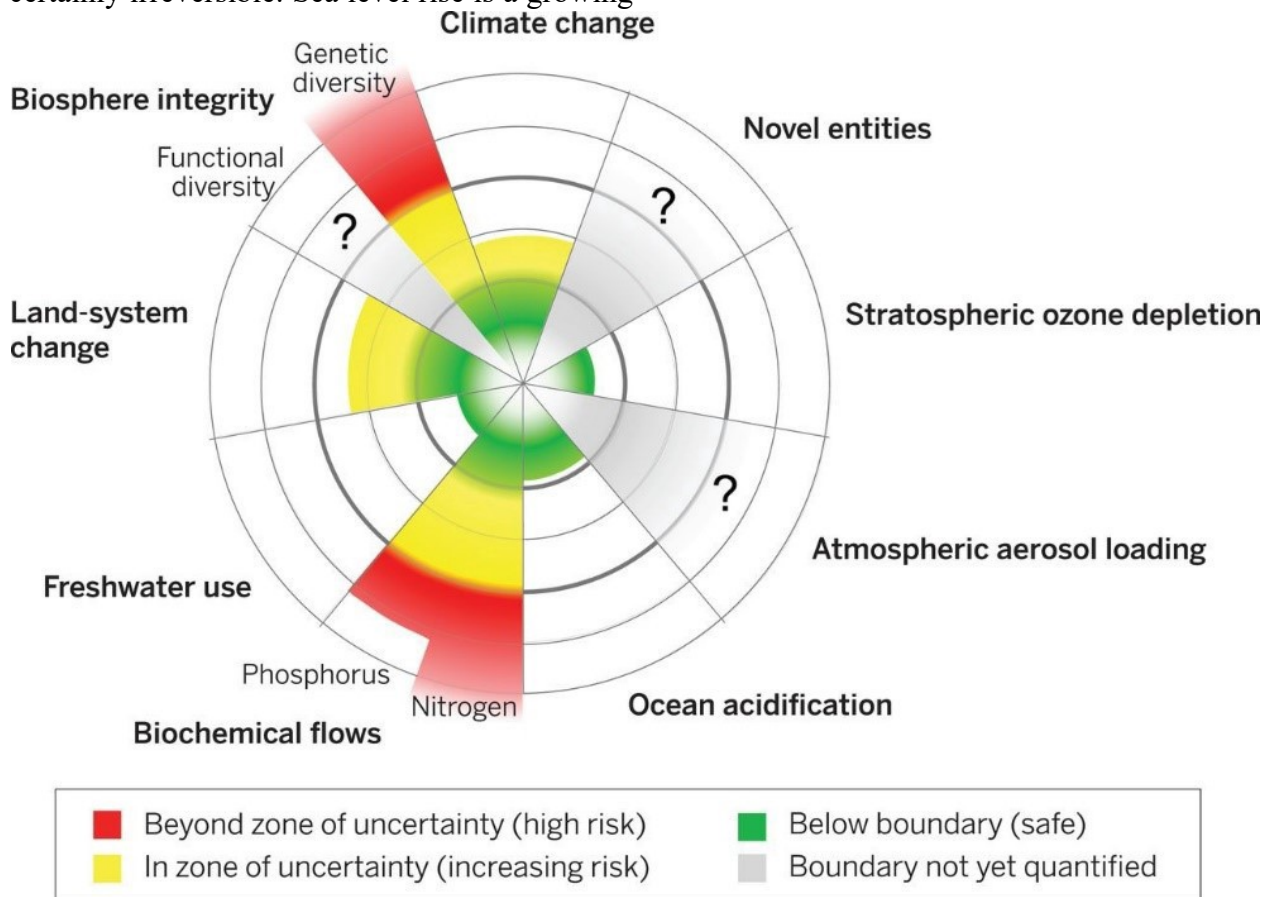
most well-educated generation in all history, with the highest numbers when it comes to literacy, entrepreneurship, social engagement, etc., young people, regardless of their nationality, face one common problem: **Climate Change**.

As stated by the [Stockholm Resilience Center \(SRC\)](#), a Swedish research center focused in socio-environmental resilience, climate change along with other major problems account for the

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9 Planetary Boundaries — a group of quantitative planetary boundaries within which humanity can continue to develop and thrive for generations to come. Crossing these boundaries increases the risk of generating large-scale abrupt or irreversible environmental changes. The bad news is: we are crossing the threshold faster than what we thought. Recent evidence published by the SRC show that we have reached a point at which the loss of summer polar sea-ice is almost certainly irreversible. Sea level rise is a growing

concern, especially for small islands nations, like Fiji, Maldives, or Tuvalu. The latest [IPCC](#) reports indicate that we are not on track to reach the 2°C goal agreed upon the Paris Agreement. Youth is and will be directly affected by all the changes that happen in the environment. That makes it the perfect group to take the lead towards developing solutions to tackle Climate Change.



Planetary Boundaries ([Steffen et al., 2015](#))

Why youth engagement is crucial in the fight against Climate Change?

Youth is Everywhere. Accounting for half of the world's population, youth is deeply rooted inside any system, local or global. From the labor force to high-risk investment markets, youth is there. Young man and woman are everyday

trying to build their lives and a better future, for themselves and their kind. More than ever, that goal passes through finding solutions to tackle climate change, and the fact that youth is in every sector of society, gives us an opportunity to bring that topic to all corners.

Youth is Connected. The [International Telecommunications Union \(ITU\)](#) estimates that

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young people worldwide are nearly two times more networked than the global population as a whole. Problems exist everywhere but they are only risen to the status of being an issue when they receive attention, and we've all seen the power of hashtags in raising a problematic situation into a genuine issue. The hashtags [#metoo](#), [#blacklivesmatters](#), and recently [#elenao](#) in Brazil are some examples. The sole fact that young people from Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Yemen, Syria and Bahrain got together to fight oppressive regimes and low standards of living through social media mobilization, giving birth to the Arab Spring, is reason enough to believe in the power of young engaged people connected through digital platforms. Social media can be an important tool in empowering youth, giving momentum to a cause and letting decision makers know that what's going on is unacceptable. Bringing that activism to the environmental causes and making it appellative to everyone is a major step in spreading actions and solutions against climate change.



Protesters take photos and videos with cell

*phones during Arab Spring protests in Egypt.
(Ramy Raoof via [Wikimedia Commons](#))*

Youth is Innovative. Young people tend to be the most idealistic and innovative group of all. We've all heard stories about young people taking the forefront in solving complex problems. [Burundi 3.0](#) — a Burundian mobile phone service that makes it easier for young people to find work by providing daily job alerts, [Pluvi.On](#) — a Brazilian startup focused in monitoring climate data to predict and minimize catastrophic weather events through low cost meteorological stations, and [4Ocean](#) — an Australian NGO created by two surfers with the goal to clean the ocean and coastlines of all waste, are a few solution-driven organizations created by young minds. That engagement might be related to the almost intrinsic characteristic of young people to question the *status quo* and think in the opposite direction of older generation, already used to *business as usual*. Transformative thinking, that is the way to go when it comes to climate change, and youth can deliver that.

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A singular objective: The Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals

THE GLOBAL GOALS For Sustainable Development



The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (via [Global Goals](#))

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are 17 ambitious objectives focusing on people, planet and prosperity. It took 3 years to design the 17 goals, 169 targets, and 232 measurable indicators. Governments, businesses, communities, universities, NGOs and youth from all over the world participated in the negotiations, with more than seven million people voting in 84 national surveys. On 25 September 2015, after many years of discussion and consultation, all 193 countries finally agreed and signed the SDGs and make the commitment to achieve them by 2030. Achieving the SDG's brings us not only closer to tackling climate change, but also co-creating a more peaceful and socially responsible world. **Getting the SDG's out of the paper requires the involvement of people from all countries, races and social classes.** Youth is the only player well equipped enough to flow the information to all levels of

society, educate people in the topic, and develop solutions, and scale it up. If you are young and want to help creating a better future, choose a SDG and fight for it.

I am young. How can I help?

Speak up. Share the numbers. Spread the science. The speech about Climate Change and environmental impacts have to reach all corners of society. Bring those topics to your conversations with friends, family, coworkers, partners, etc. Someone is using a plastic straw? Explain to them why they shouldn't. You are close contact with kids? Teach them about the relation between deforestation, soil erosion and water scarcity. Going on a hike? Make sure to drop on or two lines about how that environment might change in 50 years. You are not a nerd or a show-off if you do so. (Relevant) Information has to go around, now more than ever.

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Join a movement. There are many groups, local, regional and global, made by engaged young people. Global Shapers, Sustainable Development Solutions Network — Youth Program (SDSN-Youth), Young Leaders of the Americas Initiative (YLAI), The Change Generation, Youth Hub Africa. Those are all organizations directed to bring together young leaders and like-minded individuals fighting to develop innovative solutions. There are many more like those. Find yourself one, and bring action to the climate change speech.

Change your lifestyle. Climate Change will affect us all, so is just rational that with all have to change our mindset, and more than that, our way of living. We produce too much and we consume too much. The problem is: there are 7 billion people living in the planet. Every small change, when scaled up to global levels, do

represent relevant improvements. Small actions like offering rides when traveling to other cities (depending on how safe it is!), going veggie/vegan for a couple days per week, or refusing single-used plastics, when multiplied for the millions of people that have information enough to understand why they are doing that, do represent environmental gains in the fight against climate change. Act Local, Think Global — this famous cliché should be the mantra of everyone from the latest generation on.

Climate change is real and happening. The solutions won't come only from conference rooms full with scientists, big corporations and government officials. Everyone has a role to play in the fight against climate change. Youth is idealistic, innovative, connected and everywhere.

We need to be the solution.

Special thanks to Paul Tucker.