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YOUNG AFRICANS: AGENTS OF CHANGE IN IMPLEMENTING THE KUNMING-MONTREAL GLOBAL BIODIVERSITY FRAMEWORK



Plastic collection campaign
 ©KYBN Africa

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By spearheading biodiversity conservation, African youth influence policy, drive grassroots projects and seek crucial support. Their commitment fuels a transformative movement for a sustainable future.



“AFRICA BOASTS OVER 25% OF THE WORLD’S BIODIVERSITY AND THUS BEARS PROFOUND RESPONSIBILITY FOR SAFEGUARDING THIS INVALUABLE HERITAGE. WHO IS TASKED WITH PROTECTING THIS BIODIVERSITY? THE ANSWER IS CLEAR: ALL OF US. YET, IT’S ESPECIALLY YOUTH WHO MUST TAKE ON THIS MANTLE, AS NEARLY 70% OF AFRICA’S POPULATION IS UNDER AGE 35. WE RECOGNISE YOUTH AS PIVOTAL CHANGE AGENTS AND LEADERS IN ACHIEVING THE 2063 AGENDA OF THE AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION AND THE 2050 VISION OF THE CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY.”

- Kaddu Sebunya, CEO African Wildlife Foundation

With young people under the age of 35 making up over 70% of the continent’s population, African youth are emerging as a dynamic force advocating for biodiversity conservation and leading the implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF). Their increasing involvement underscores their transformative and innovative capabilities and their capacity to act as agents of change in environmental advocacy and action. Initiatives led by national chapters of the Global Youth Biodiversity Network (GYBN) Africa have profoundly influenced youth engagement in policy advocacy and have driven tangible change at the grassroots level.

GYBN Africa and the Moroccan Youth Biodiversity Network (MYBN) – with support from the Post 2020 Biodiversity Framework-EU support project, the African Wildlife Foundation (AWF) and the Moroccan Ministry of Energy Transition and Sustainable Development (MTEDD) – organised the 2nd African Youth Summit on Biodiversity (AYSB¹) in Rabat, Morocco. This second summit, entitled ‘From Awareness to Action: Empowering African Youth for Biodiversity Conservation’, was held from 19 to 21 September 2023, almost one year after the Framework’s adoption.

More than 200 youth from 35 African countries participated in person or online. The goal of this summit was to empower and engage African young people in implementing tangible projects to preserve nature and reverse biodiversity loss.



Youth4Biodiversity Campaign
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1. AFRICAN YOUTH CONTRIBUTION IN BUILDING THE KMGBF

From 2019, GYBN Africa, through its national chapters, actively rallied to contribute towards shaping the KMGBF. It did so up to its finalisation and adoption on 19 December 2022 in Montreal, Canada, during the second part of the 15th meeting of the Conference of Parties (COP) of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD²).

Global Youth - a voice that matters

In 2020, GYBN launched a worldwide flagship campaign on Rallying Youth Voices for Biodiversity³ ('Youth4Biodiversity'), under which GYBN Africa chapters conducted consultative and capacity-building workshops as well as training sessions to collect the opinions, perspectives, expertise and experiences of young people, to ensure they are well represented and included in the post 2020 GBF's goals and targets. This global campaign reached more than one million youth, with the largest number of youth coming from Africa via social platforms and local mobilisation by GYBN national chapters.

In Africa, it stimulated massive mobilisation of young individuals and youth-led organisations and initiatives from all backgrounds, including academic institutions and local and indigenous youth. Young people were reached through 20 African national GYBN chapters⁴.

One of the top examples of youth mobilisation and contribution in the lead-up to the adoption of the KMGBF is the South African Youth Biodiversity Network (SAYBN). In 2020, SAYBN held the first African Youth Biodiversity Forum⁵ with support from the Post 2020 Biodiversity Framework-EU support project; the Vhembe Biosphere Reserve; the South African Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries (DEFF); and UNESCO. The Forum brought together 43 young people representing 19 African countries and deliberated on the Zero Draft of the Post 2020 GBF ahead of the second Open Ended Working group meeting (OEWG) in Italy. The SAYBN also hosted six provincial youth-consultation meetings across South Africa, bringing together a diverse group of young South Africans to share their views on the GBF. Other GYBN Africa chapters, such as GYBN Uganda, Zimbabwe, Cameroon, DR and Kenya also mobilised youth within their respective countries. The contributions from these consultations and the Forum influenced a position paper that was included in the GYBN position paper on the GBF and was also shared with a diverse group of stakeholders, including South Africa's CBD National Focal Point.

These consultations resulted in policy recommendation booklets, which were presented to various parties and major groups to lobby for support during discussions on the framework. They had impact in attracting attention and support by the end of the 4th OEWG.

Young Africans mobilised for KMGBF adoption

Working alongside other partners such as the CBD Alliance, youth voices became louder during the 4th OEWG held in Nairobi, Kenya, as part of the 'Lift the Brackets' campaign⁶, which urged parties to come up with concrete decisions and reduce heavy brackets⁷ in the draft GBF. GYBN gathered their priorities and recommendations, which were then crafted into a policy booklet and shared with CBD Focal Points of various countries.

GYBN also took the initiative of reaching out and working with their specific country focal points to acquire deeper understanding about their country priorities, encouraging them to promote and support the integration and inclusion of youth and of their main concerns into the Post 2020 Global Biodiversity Framework negotiations.

Additionally, GYBN brought together over 100 youth from around the globe to participate at the COP15, including 35 from GYBN chapters in Africa.

2. AFRICAN YOUTH-LED BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION PROJECTS AND INITIATIVES

African youth are involved in the conservation of their continent's biodiversity through a variety of actions including awareness raising, training, scientific research and concrete actions in the field.

Youth-led cross-border cooperation

One example is the Greater Virunga Transboundary Landscape (GVL)⁸, a six-month campaign called 'The GVL We Want', designed by YOUTH4GVL, a GVL youth constituency. The campaign was launched to create a forum where young generations who live near the GVL and other environmental activists can share their views and recommendations for improvement of conservation of the landscape's biodiversity and of the sustainable development or livelihoods of the community living near the landscape.

Its added value resided in the coordination between youth of three border countries – the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Rwanda and Uganda – and the opportunity given to direct beneficiaries to make their voice heard and connect with different stakeholders.

Youth-led science-policy interface initiative

In North Africa, the Moroccan Youth Biodiversity Network (MYBN) is showing its in-depth commitment to scientific research in the field of biodiversity. The network has organised a series of activities throughout universities, including conferences involving researchers – both students and professors – from institutions such as the Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdelhah University in Fes and Mohammed V University in Rabat.

The objective of these activities is to strengthen the role of youth in achieving the KMGBF's targets, with a particular emphasis on integrating youth perspectives into the broader context of sustainable development. MYBN is preparing to present these comprehensive recommendations to the MTEDD in Morocco, especially in relation with the National Biodiversity Strategic Action Plans (NBSAP), underscoring the network's integral involvement in the process.

MYBN took an active role in the 'Eco-Chill Series' a collaborative initiative with students from Mohammed V University in Rabat. The primary objective was to unravel the complexities of COPs on biodiversity, with a specific emphasis on providing clarity to students from diverse backgrounds. Participants in the 'Eco-Chill Series' were effectively able to connect, fostering a rich and inclusive learning experience. The Eco-Chill Series proved to be a transformative experience

1 African Youth Summit on Biodiversity (AYSB)

2 COP15

3 Rallying Youth Voices for Biodiversity

4 From Kenya, Uganda, Morocco, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Rwanda, Nigeria, Tanzania, Cameroon, Benin, DR-Congo, Ghana, Burundi, Madagascar, Senegal, Zambia, Niger, Eswatini and Namibia

5 African Youth Biodiversity Forum – Vhembe Biosphere Reserve - POST2020 (4post2020bd.net)

6. Lift the Brackets'

7 Text within brackets is usually a proposed change to the original text. Brackets are removed once the parties have reached an agreement on the proposed change.

8. Greater Virunga Transboundary Landscape (GVL)



Child learning about mangrove restoration ©KYBN Africa

for participants, offering valuable insights into the dynamics of COPs and fostering their engagement with firsthand understanding of the challenges and opportunities inherent in the global governance of biodiversity.

Youth-led collaborative restoration efforts in Kenya

The third example concerns the Kenyan Youth Biodiversity Network (KYBN), which has been successfully participating in the restoration of degraded ecosystems and deforested lands in Kenya since 2017. KYBN’s Mangrove restoration project⁹ showcases the application of nature-based solutions to climate change and biodiversity loss. The main restoration site is located in Msambweni, Kwale County, in Kenya’s South Coast region, where KYBN partners with local community groups, such as the Shangani Amani Self Help Group¹⁰, beach management units, and conservation groups¹¹ such as the Africa Climate and Environment Foundation (ACEF) to restore coastal areas for productivity enhancement and disaster risk reduction.

KYBN has planted more than 15,000 mangroves in various locations along the Kenyan Coast and targets to grow 100,000 mangroves by 2027, as a way to support implementation of KMGBF Target 2¹², enhance nature’s contribution to climate change mitigation, and help achieve global sustainable development goals. KYBN has also been actively engaged in restoration of terrestrial ecosystems in Kenya, particularly urban green spaces and watershed areas. They have partnered with local banks, other youth groups, local businesses, and county governments to grow trees in urban landscapes in Nairobi¹³ and in water catchment areas in Nandi County and the Mau Complex. Through annual events such as the Biodiversity Festival¹⁴, KYBN seeks to restore such landscapes and create the much-needed momentum and awareness on the need to conserve fragile ecosystems in Kenya.

Supporting youth participation in the NBSAP alignment process

The adoption of the KMGBF further calls for the domestication of its goals and seeks to foster reflection on the national context through the NBSAPs. GYBN Africa chapters are actively engaging with their specific focal points and relevant authorities in their countries in the review and revision of NBSAPs.

For example, GYBN Uganda participated in the first meeting, where the outcomes of COP15 and way forward were shared, and then in a three-day residential NBSAP Alignment workshop and the launch of a roadmap for the implementation of the KMGBF, all coordinated by the National Environmental Management Authority.

Another example is the KYBN, which has been involved in several meetings with the Kenya CBD Focal Ministry, including the high-level breakfast on COP15 outcomes and roadmap for implementation, the Post COP15 meeting on the review of the NBSAP and its alignment to the KMGBF, and the NBSAP national targets review workshop.

Moreover, the DRC GYBN Chapter held a three-day Youth Action Summit to empower youth on the KMGBF, mobilise implementation partners and rally ambitious commitments in support of young people’s conservation actions to help halt the loss of biodiversity in DRC.

The three GYBN Africa Chapters of Uganda, Rwanda and DRC came together to form the Greater Virunga Youth Constituency, under which the Virunga Youth Action Summit was held in July this year to mobilise youth, empower them on the KMGBF and NBSAPs, and influence youth-led actions to help mobilise resources and implement the KMGBF along with collective efforts.

We cannot overstate the importance of supporting youth engagement in the development, review process and alignment of their respective countries’ NBSAP and in the domestication of the GBF. While countries are in the process of aligning their NBSAPs to the KMGBF, it is essential that young people be part of co-designing and reviewing the NBSAPs. In addition, it is imperative that countries review their national priorities in terms of consulting young people on the NBSAPs to ensure greater intergenerationality of the NBSAPs.

“AFRICAN YOUTH HAVE SHOWN THAT THEY KNOW HOW TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE KMGBF IMPLEMENTATION. BY IMPROVING THEIR SKILLS IN DESIGNING PROGRAMMES AND PROJECTS, THEY CAN BOOST THEIR ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT, ATTRACT FUNDING AND MORE OPPORTUNITIES, AND REALISE THEIR AMAZING INITIATIVES.”

- Hugo Rivera, Team Leader, Post 2020 Biodiversity Framework EU Support

3. BARRIERS TO UPSCALING YOUTH-LED ENGAGEMENT IN POLICY AND IMPLEMENTATION

While African youth consistently display remarkable dedication and innovation in biodiversity conservation, they face significant barriers in accessing the essential resources required to scale up their initiatives.

Navigating the administrative processes involved in applying for funding presents a complex challenge for youth-led organisations. These bureaucratic systems, while well-intentioned, can be intimidating for those with limited prior experience in fundraising and proposal writing. Completing a comprehensive grant application often demands detailed project proposals, budgets and supporting documentation, for which most youth-led organisations lack expertise. This complexity can deter youth-led organisations that lack extensive administrative experience.

A range of multifaceted challenges hinder the full potential of youth-led initiatives, including the following:

1. Governance and institutional structures: Youth-led initiatives frequently encounter a significant hurdle in the form of governance structures and institutional frameworks. Many youth organisations lack the legal registration or formal governance mechanisms that donors often demand. This situation limits their eligibility for certain funding opportunities, despite the impactful nature of their projects. Instruments at the subnational level, including subnational government



2nd AYSB, Rabat 2023
©GYBN Africa

2. Administrative expertise (governance and legal registration): Meeting the governance and legal registration requirements set by donors often necessitates administrative expertise, which includes knowledge of legal compliance and operational oversight. Unfortunately, many youth-led organisations lack the expertise and resources required to meet them. Absence of legal registration, institutional structures, and operational guidelines often results from resource constraints and the limited capacity of youth-led organisations. Establishing an efficient administrative process can be complex, time-consuming and costly, especially for youth-led organisations with limited access to legal advice, capacity building and support. These barriers can be particularly challenging for initiatives operating in remote or marginalised areas, where access to legal and administrative support is limited.

3. Accountability and reporting: Many grants and funding applications come with stringent compliance and reporting requirements that demand a level of accountability that youth-led organisations, especially those in the early stages of their initiatives, may struggle to meet. Such accountability includes meticulous financial management and record-keeping, regular reporting, and compliance with specific regulations. Youth-led organisations often lack the knowledge and resources to fully comply with these requirements. Effective financial management is essential for the success of a project, and a lack of such skills can lead to resource misallocation and difficulties in accountable reporting to donors.

4. Grant proposal writing: Crafting compelling and adequate grant proposals is a fundamental requirement for accessing funding. While youth-led initiatives are often skilled in articulating their projects verbally, many may lack the necessary skills to present their projects persuasively in writing, thereby hindering their ability to secure grants. These challenges underscore the need for additional support and capacity building to enhance youth-led organisations' administrative and proposal-writing capabilities.

“ENGAGEMENT OF YOUTH IN PROTECTING AND SUSTAINING AFRICA'S BIODIVERSITY IS THE KEY TO OUR FUTURE, AS THEY WILL BECOME THE DECISION MAKERS AND LEADERS OF TOMORROW. IT IS GREAT TO SEE SUCH WIDE INVOLVEMENT AND ENERGY CALLING FOR SECURING THEIR FUTURE AND THOSE OF FUTURE GENERATIONS.”

- David Obura, Founding Director CORDIO & IPBES Chair

4. SUPPORTING YOUTH-LED ACTIONS: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRIVATE & PUBLIC DONORS AND SUPPORTERS

As youth strive to propel the KMGBF forward and sustain and enhance youth-led initiatives, decision makers and private and public donors are pivotal in creating a nurturing environment that empowers and supports these youth-led initiatives. Concrete support, such as access to financial resources, mentorship, capacity building, training and networks, is indispensable for their success.

The AYSB and the Post-2020 Youth Consultations serve as an example of what youth can achieve when provided with both financial and technical support from private and public donors.

These challenges underscore the pressing need to address the gaps and foster an enabling environment for youth-led initiatives to flourish. Private and public donors can play a pivotal role in empowering African youth to drive biodiversity conservation and become the primary implementers of the KMGBF.

To that effect, identified capacity-building gaps can be addressed, including training in project management and grant-proposal writing. While youth-led organisations and initiatives are passionate and innovative in their conservation efforts, they often lack the expertise required for effective project management, from planning to implementation and evaluation.

Inadequate project management skills can lead to inefficiencies, project delays and an inability to meet donor reporting requirements. It's crucial to provide mentorship, capacity building and guidance to help young conservationists formalise their initiatives, particularly in remote or marginalised regions. Donors and organisations can contribute significantly by supporting the legal registration and institutional development of youth-led projects, thereby ensuring they can access funding and operate more efficiently.

African youth have continuously demonstrated their unwavering commitment to fully engage in the conservation and restoration of biodiversity and call upon all stakeholders to work with them towards securing a sustainable and thriving future for Africa, where biodiversity flourishes and generations to come can enjoy the beauty and abundance of our continent's natural wonders.

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ACTIONS.

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& PEOPLE.

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