



GREEN IDEAS

Youth-led Climate Initiatives within the African YMCA

 **YMCA**
AFRICA ALLIANCE

 **KEUM**
YWCA-YMCA
OF SWEDEN

 **YMCA**
MADAGASCAR

 **YMCA**
GHANA

WHY GREEN IDEAS?

Vision 2030

In July 2022 the YMCA made history when YMCAs across the globe voted to adopt YMCA 2030 - the first-ever shared strategy and plan.

Vision 2030 serves as a roadmap for every YMCA's strategic goals. Closely aligned to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, Vision 2030 empowers communities and young people worldwide to build a just, sustainable, equitable, and inclusive world. The vision is based upon four pillars:



**Community
Wellbeing**



**Meaningful
Work**



**Sustainable
Planet**



**Just
World**

The urgent need for action to manage and counteract climate change and reach climate justice is integrated through the third pillar 'Sustainable planet'.

The three goals within the Sustainable Planet-pillar is:

- Internal YMCA transformation to become climate neutral
- Community Empowerment
- Global Advocacy

Context

Despite being the continent which contributes the least amount to climate change, many countries in Africa is unproportionally affected by its effects. Due to a lack of resources, which in many ways is a result from poor economic conditions, many communities lack the abilities to adapt and deal with the consequences of climate change.

Above this, research has showed that more than 50 percent of young people experience negative emotions, such as powerlessness, anxiety or guilt, when thinking about climate change. This is closely linked to the feeling of hopelessness and hindrance of actual climate action at a individual level.

African Alliance of YMCA

The Africa Alliance of YMCAs (AAYMCAs) is the umbrella organization of all YMCAs in Africa, bringing together 17 YMCA National Movements in Africa and a few Movements in formation. The guiding philosophy of the YMCA, Subject to Citizen (S2C), is a transformational youth model that moulds subjects of repressive systems into productive citizens.

The Green Ideas project

The Green Ideas pilot-project emerged as a response to this context and in alignment with Vision 2030, the African Agenda 2063, and the UN Agenda 2030. The project aimed at empowering young people on issues connected to climate change as well as promoting youth-led climate initiatives.

THE APPROACH

The multifaced character of climate change issues in the African region calls for adaptable strategies that build resilience and knowledge and calls for action.

Based upon the urgent need for climate action, and in alignment with the Sustainable Planet pillar of YMCA's Vision 2030, the African Alliance of YMCA, with funding from the YWCA-YMCA of Sweden, collaborated with YMCA Ghana and YMCA Madagascar to implement the pilot project *Green Ideas*.

The pilot-project was based on three main components: the recruitment of young people as Green Ambassadors, the ambassadors completed a masterclass led by an expert, and designing and implementing youth-led pilot initiatives aimed at mitigate the effects of climate change. Hence, the project put young people's commitment and initiative at the center to develop policies and frameworks for working with climate and environmental issues.

Human Design Thinking

The AAYMCA developed the Inspiration, Ideation, and Implementation (3Is) Workshop as a comprehensive framework for implementing a range of social projects among its members. This approach requires active participation from a range of stakeholders, including duty bearers, youth, YMCA staff, and partner organizations, to collaboratively address challenges.

The 3Is model was utilized for the Green Ideas project, where it was tested on initiatives focusing on environmental concerns and climate change.



Implementation of youth-led initiatives

The project had a threefold ambition: to empower young people, strengthen the capacity of national and local YMCAs, and, through these efforts, mitigate the effects of climate change.



Recruitment of Green Ambassadors

Through a recruitment process, led by regional and national coordinators, a total of 40 young people was recruited as Green Ambassadors in Ghana and Madagascar. Only a few of the young leaders had previous experience in environmental work.



Expert masterclass and mentorship

The Green Ambassadors completed a five-day scientific-based masterclass held by an expert. The masterclass, and guidance of the expert, intended to equip the young ambassadors with the knowledge and experience to be able to design their own initiatives, aimed at mitigate the effect of climate change, in their local communities.

**Vision 2030:
Sustainable Planet-pillar**

Green Ideas

Recruitment of Green
Ambassadors

Scientific-based Masterclass

Human Design Thinking
(3i-model)

**A new generation of
Climate Ambassadors**

Community Empowerment

Global Solutions

Figure: the outlay of the Green Ideas project, its connections to YMCA Vision 2030 and the Sustainable Planet-pillar.

TURNING IDEAS INTO ACTION

1. Foster a new generation of Climate Ambassadors

Based on the newly acquired skills and knowledges from the masterclass, 40 Green Ambassadors, with support from the AAYMCA and the expert, multiple youth-led environmental projects was developed. Through a validated learning process the Green Ambassadors had a chance to initiate, investigate and modify their initiatives.

“The thing that differentiate the Green Ideas project from other previous environmental initiatives, is the scientific-based approach and involvement of a climate expert along with the fact that we continue to put young people at the driver seat”, says the Programmes executive officer of YMCA Madagascar.

Outcomes

→ Hundreds of young people and local residents gained increased knowledge

After participating in educational initiatives and hands-on projects, hundreds of young people and local residents have gained new knowledge about climate effects, plastic waste reduction, urban farming, and environmental impact.

→ Green ambassadors attest that they were empowered

Several of the Green Ambassadors attest that they were empowered by the knowledge, experience and mandate they acquired during the project, and how this in turn helped them pave the way to initiate climate-focused solutions in their communities.

“So, when I got introduced to the project I was really, really happy to be a part of it. At last, I would be able to help the community to solve problems with improper use and disposal of plastic”

Green Ambassador, Ghana

2. Inspire Community Engagement

By utilizing the Human Design Thinking 3i-model, the youth-led initiatives were formed to meet the needs and requirements of its beneficiaries in the local communities.

"It's quite a new approach when you use Human Design Thinking with on environmental issues. But I think it's innovative. Since environmental issues are due to human activities, you have to put the human in the center and try to search for the solutions around that", says Minosoa Malarimisa, expert on Human Design Thinking in Madagascar.

During the masterclass the Green Ambassadors got to experience the effects of climate change first-hand which gave a lot of input into the various initiatives. Navigating through the communities, meeting with the beneficiaries, and develop a understanding for the various climate-related challenges was central to the project-idea.

"In a way the legitimacy of your program or project comes from the acceptability of it by the community", says the project leader at YMCA Ghana.

Outcomes

→ Clean-up events fostered intentional use of plastic

The Green Ambassadors identified how the irregular use and recycling of plastic had a disproportionate negative effect on the women selling goods on the local markets. In an effort to making sure that no one is left behind, the Green Ambassadors made both hands-on clean-up events and efforts to encourage the community to be intentional in their use of plastic.

"The people in my community are happy because they learned that after they have used the plastic they won't just get rid of it, but rather use it again. And through that, they are saving money", says a Green Ambassador from Ghana.

→ School initiated a reforestation initiative

Due to the educational initiatives, multiple beneficiaries have reported increased environmental knowledge and respect. Inspired by the Green Ambassadors, a school initiated reforestation near Lake Tatamarina in Madagascar.

"It goes beyond our expectation, students respect the environment even if they are outside the school, and they apply it at home. We want to educate as many people as possible to respect the environment, to adopt the systems given to us by the Green Ambassadors and to continue to protect the environment by all means", says a school director in Betafo, Madagascar.

→ Bridged knowledge gap among local population

The initiatives facilitated community empowerment by conducting knowledge-sharing in both countries. In this capacity, the green ambassadors effectively bridged the gap between complex scientific knowledge and the practical needs and capabilities of the local population.

3. Local Solutions to Global Challenges

The Human Design Thinking (3i-model) is constructed in a way that allows the user to adapt, scale and re-do it in a way that, to the best of its abilities, meet the needs and requirements of its beneficiaries. In this case the Green Ambassadors stood for the creative solutions with the guidance of the climate expert who mentored them through the technical know-hows of battling climate change effects.

"The Green Ambassadors were encouraged to find a particular issue, a particular challenge and then use the process of inspiration, ideation and implementation in bringing out solutions to the particular problems", project leader YMCA Ghana.

The model itself is designed to meet the specific need of local communities. However, the solutions initiated by the ambassadors could be scaled up or reused and adapted in other contexts to meet the needs and fulfill the rights of communities and people on a global scale. To advocate and raise awareness among decision-makers and duty-bearers is therefore considered an important aspect of the sustainability of the initiatives.

Outcomes

The youth-led initiatives were designed with great awareness to and respect for the different local contexts. Initiatives such as Urban Smart farming, Clean-up initiatives and extra curricular activities made an effort to make a difference in the local communities - but also possess the power to be scaled, adapted and used on a global scale.

➔ Urban Smart farming led to increased food security

In Ghana, a team of Green Ambassadors launched an Urban Smart farming project that repurposed abandoned rooftops to enhance local food security and resilience. This innovative initiative has transformed the community's approach to agriculture, making it easier for individuals to cultivate their own crops.

➔ Extra Curricular activities with creative plastic recycling

Plastic recycling initiatives in Ghana, where a creative approach was adopted to reuse and reduce disposable plastics, was initiated and is now running as an extra curricular activity in a local school.

"Not only has the initiative made our school environment very clean, but thanks to the Green Ideas project our students got to transfer this idea into a creative learning when it comes to garment-making", principal of Takoradi YMCA Vocational Training Centre in Ghana.

➔ Additional sanitation duties

The clean-up campaigns in Madagascar have sparked awareness among residents and local authorities alike. In Antsirabi, the municipality has taken on additional sanitation duties, including more frequent waste collection in areas where the green ambassadors initiated clean-up efforts.

Lessons learned

GREEN IDEAS AS A MODEL

1. Build Policy from Youth Interest

In our experience, fostering interest and engagement has proven to be more effective than simply launching policy-based projects. By generating interest and increasing participation and ownership, we can enhance the likelihood of successfully implementing and applying policy frameworks.

2. Human Design Thinking as Model for Climate Initiatives

The 3i-model, as a tool to conduct Human Design Thinking-based projects, has proven to be invaluable to mitigate the effects of climate change. The participatory approach opens up for designing dynamic and expedient solutions to climate-related challenges.

3. Include Experts as Mentors

Make a conscious recruitment of experts who will enhance and complement the existing competences among the Green Ambassadors. Design the educational layout together with the experts and make sure to map out how the follow-up will be done to premiere mentorship in a joint learning experience.

4. Focus on Multi-stakeholder Collaborations

To ensure a comprehensive understanding of local needs and challenges, there is a need to include multiple stakeholders. These can be beneficiaries, schools, local authorities, actors from the private sector, NGO:s and other civil society organizations. This paves the way for both future collaborations as well as sustainable, relevant, and feasible solutions to mitigate the effects of climate change.

5. Ensure the Right Conditions for Long-term Projects

Ensure that ample human, financial, and knowledge resources are provided to support the ambassadors and their initiatives, setting them up for both short-term success and long-term sustainability.

GREEN IDEAS: CONDENSED



Recruitment of young people

Previous experience in environmental issues is not necessary, but can serve as a capacity-building effort if other human resources are not available.

“Young people that can actually spread the action into the communities and schools very quickly and were able to bridge the gap that existed between the residents in local communities and the very scientific and technical knowledges on climate change and environmental impact”

Programmes executive officer of YMCA Madagascar



Involvement of expert

The expert will bring knowledge, scientific know-hows into the masterclass and act as a mentor. Depending on the competences among the Green Ambassadors different experts might add value to different groups.

“The experts brought a new perspective and a new way of doing trainings. It was the fact that they came in and provided expertise in terms of defining the context. How does climate change affect the community? How can the community take ownership of it?”

Project Leader AAYMCA



Scientific-based masterclass

A combination of theoretical and practical knowledges and skills equipped the young participants in environmental issues as well as in Human Design Thinking (3i model)

“I learned a lot during the masterclass. About how the climate change is affected by human activity, plastic pollution and ways to mitigate its effects. During the field trips we got to learn and experience these things at a first-hand experience”

Green Ambassador in Ghana



Human Design Thinking (3i)

The successful outcome was attributed to the blend of expert knowledge on climate change and environmental impact, along with the collaborative design approach of initiatives.

“I will benefit from Human Design Thinking. During the project I understood the importance of getting the point of view of stakeholders and those who are going to benefit from the project itself. And, how important it is to know them, to understand what they really need, and to know the context of the project”

Green Ambassador in Madagascar

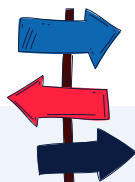


Promoting and creating innovative youth-led initiatives

Ensuring the projects are youth-led is crucial for the young initiators at grassroots-level, enabling them to become productive contributors to society's positive transformation.

"Young people are the ones who are running this country now. Without us there is no country. We are the strength of this country. Hence, the youths are the main caretakers of this country. Our main problem is how to facilitate it, we need the support of our leaders"

Green Ambassador in Ghana



Mentorship

Utilize the practical know-hows and scientific experience that the experts have to foster a mentoring relation between the expert and the young ambassadors.

"When working with experts, these should be people who are on the ground, who understand the context of the issues. They turned their role into some sort of mentorship to guide and encourage the young Green Ambassadors in their own journey to designing and implementing a project"

Project Leader AAYMCA



Community outreach

To ensure actual and relevant positive impact there is a need for networking and outreach to multiple stakeholders in the community. Include actors who you identify as relevant.

"The main thing that is lacking in my local community is public knowledge of climate change. Because, most of the young ones and others, don't know how our [human] activities affect the climate change and environment"

Green Ambassador in Ghana

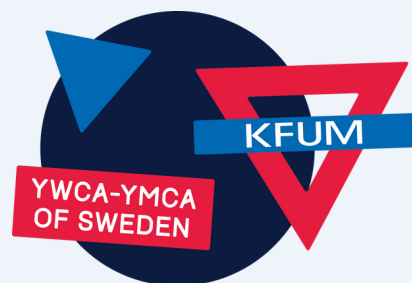


Advocacy

Make sure to advocate for your initiative towards both local and national authorities, and show how you work and how this is feasible to undertake or attempt on a larger scale.

"My recommendation is to consider components of advocacy as well. We planned to do it, but we didn't have enough time to bring it to life. To work with or have a close partnership with the government would make our efforts tangible"

Programmes executive officer of YMCA Madagascar



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