

1st Prize

I promise

by Sofia Aleksandrovna Denisova, aged 11 (Kazakhstan)

My name is Sofia, I am ten. I live in a small city in Kazakhstan. Recently I've learnt about uranium mines located close to our city and their negative impact on our environment and people's health. Many people in our region still die from a lot of diseases and it was the cancer which took my Mummy away from me three years ago. When I lost my Mum, it was such a disaster that I realized: no child in the world should ever feel this pain.

It made me think what I can do to improve our environment. There are lots of reasons why the ecology is so bad today: soil, water and air pollution, deforestation, loss of biodiversity... Is one little girl able to change anything? I am sure I am. My teacher and I have developed the plan how to save our countryside. First we have launched the environmental campaign "The tree of happiness". My classmates picked up dry branches around school and decorated them with candy wraps and colorful flowers made from plastic bottles. Then we located these "trees" everywhere at our school facilities so that the students could understand that they shouldn't throw the litter outside.

The next idea was to make musical instruments out of recyclables such as plastic bottles, cans, ice cream sticks, etc. The idea was so great that a lot of primary school children, their teachers and parents got involved and soon there were enough instruments to organize the "Eco-orchestra". My aunt, a teacher of Music, taught us several songs and our unique band performed in all schools and at the community grounds. The concerts always gathered crowds of people as our message was cleaning and recycling can benefit our community.

Then in May our class and parents had an "eco-quest" in the nearest forest. We gathered all trash and cleaned the forest to make it comfortable for little creatures living there. We were happy doing together really important things.

I dream about clean environment on the Earth. You see, even one little girl can make the difference. I believe my Mom is watching me from above and getting proud of me. When children stick together with their parents and share a dream, they are capable of doing wonders. My dear Mom, I promise, I will do my best to save other Moms and to keep other children happy.

2nd Prize (joint)

Young people can be a force for conservation

by Prisha Odhrani, aged 9 (United Arab Emirates)

The two countries I call home hold many world records: U.A.E. where I live—hosts the tallest building, biggest mall, etc.—and India, my motherland—has the world’s largest youngest population. Sadly, the U.A.E once also broke another record: The world’s largest Ecological Footprint. I believe that if we’ve contributed most to the problem, we should also be most responsible for fixing it. With the backing of the world’s largest youth generation, I have thought of some practical ways in which young people can indeed be a key element in achieving SDG 15.

COMPETITIONS:

A school in Senegal is inspiring, where in addition to teaching subjects like Maths and English, students are learning how to reverse desertification. Sustainability workshops or competitions in schools could be a great way to get young people involved, such as which year group picks the most plastic bags; plants the most trees; or places the most food scraps in the compost heap. These could be as small as within the year group, or interschool, or even at national and international levels! As the head of the aforementioned school says, “I would go as far to say that it is impossible to teach adults, but with children, it can become their reflex.”

LEADING BY EXAMPLE

As Paul Wellstone says, “Never separate the life you live from the words you speak (write),”

I practice sustainability through the simple yet effective 3Rs: (i) Reduce: I lessened my use of plastic and electricity; carpool, walk or cycle, and avoid taking the elevator where possible. I keep my meal choices limited, by being vegetarian and try to eat locally produced food after I read that deforestation and reduced biodiversity are largely caused by cattle grazing for livestock. (ii) Re-use: I have replaced plastic bags with cloth bags, paper tissues with cloth towels, and plastic straws with metal straws (iii) Recycle: I mostly use biodegradable cutlery and paper ware to prevent soil erosion. I also encourage resale and reuse of clothes. Most of our clothes and books are given away to orphanage houses.

TECHNOLOGY

The youth can create shareable campaigns to spread awareness. Technology can also be used to prevent further damage. For example, reading more books and magazines online, sharing Ecards rather than paper cards, can limit deforestation. Furthermore, old cellphones can be used to capture signals of illegal logging and poaching. So also drones can be used to plant seeds. A lot can be done to protect Life on Land. As Steve Jobs once said, “It’s not a faith in technology. It’s faith in people.”

I have faith, especially in the youth to help achieve SDG 15. Do you?

2nd Prize (joint)

Sustainville Podcast

by Zoe Whitaker, aged 10 (United Arab Emirates)

Hi there and welcome back to Sustainews. I'm Zoe Whitaker, coming at you live from Sustainville, a small city just off the Caribbean coast, the most beautiful and sustainable place in the world. I am joined by the Mayor of this wonderful city, 16 year old Sir Wiggins, who had the amazing idea to create this town.

“So Mr Wiggins Sir, how did you turn this Caribbean wasteland into a sustainable community adored and respected by all, and more importantly, how can we help other cities to make peace with Mother Nature?”

“Well, Zoe, this is something that I have thought long and hard about. The world is 45 billion years old, and if we converted that into 24 hours, then humans have only been around for - drum roll please - 3 seconds! And look what we've done in 3 seconds! We started by taking all of the earth's problems into consideration, like land use. Due to the fact that there is limited space on our planet, we decided that we needed to build up, not out.

We looked at the way we produce, consume and dispose of our products and food, which in the US accounts for 42% of greenhouse gas emissions. To reduce this, 90% of the food we consume in Sustainville is grown and produced locally. We have also created opportunities to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through material and land management practices.

We have created our own Visa system: It's called the “Green Card”: To keep your visa to live here, every citizen must complete 7 hours of environmental work a week. This community work could be as simple as growing vegetables in your garden, on your balcony or the roof of your building. We also gather as a community to clean the beaches and plant new trees. In Sustainville, you are legally bound to recycle plastic bags and straws are banned, and banks charge if you demand a balance slip from the ATM machine. As part of our mission to make the world a sustainable and healthy place, environmental studies are compulsory in our schools curriculum.

We are the next generation, Generation Z! Z is the last letter of the alphabet, and if we don't get our acts together and stop using single use plastics, then we may be the last generation on this earth – it's up to us to make the changes.

3rd Prize

Young people are key to achieving SDG #15

by Triztine Lee Arellano, aged 11 (Philippines)

In the Philippines, a Bahay-Kubo is where people rest and harvest vegetables and fruits in their garden. Near the Bahay-Kubo, lies a water pump or well. Some have small poultry house and pigpens. In that small resting house, it can be self-sufficient enough to provide basic foods and needs for a person to survive without compromising other nearby areas to provide their own.

The same with the practices and what I see in my school. In school, we have our own mini soya, corn, beans, and papaya plantations. We also take care of farm animals like chicken, cows and pigs. Our lights and water comes from solar panels and self-powered water pumping station. To the recycled bottles, we plant our own vegetables and ornamental plants. Twice a year, we do tree planting to the most devastated mountainside in Pantabangan, Nueva Ecija. But one of our memorable memory is when we rescued two owlets from a forest fire. Through the joint effort of our school, we took care of the rescued owlets.

The School Principal, Teachers and staffs, all of them taught us to conserve and learn to use efficiently what we have bought in stores. Through integrating these practices in our classrooms, I've learned that it's important to maximize what I have in order to save money and lessen our wastes. Simple actions, yet when taken collectively, it can make a huge impact in the society.

These and more are just our simple contribution to reduce wasting our foods, garbage and carbon footprints. With all of these laborious tasks to save our Mother Earth, the country and international bodies starts to recognize our humble gestures. The school won prestigious international award like the SEAMEO Southeast Asia. Nationally, we won the Search for Eco-Friendly and Sustainable School in 2017 and 2018.

However, none of these would be possible if the community does not work as one. If not, the school would be like a deserted place. Students would simply come and go without enthusiasm in learning and appreciating the environment. Because, if we want to conserve and improve the life on land and attain the fifteenth Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations, we must start from the very roots; the young generation.

Like our school, if we could educate children to practice and influence other towards sustainable and efficient use of land; like Bahay-kubo, we could secure a sustainable future.

4th Prize (joint)

Young People Can Help Save the Planet

by Alexander Taylor, aged 10 (United Arab Emirates)

Can you imagine what life would be like without clean drinking water, or with air filled with methane gas? We would find ourselves in a world of terror! Sick children, hurt animals, and an earth devoid of green. Unfortunately, this is exactly what will happen if we do not control the amount of pollution and plastic that is being let into the world. Sadly, things have already started to happen. A recent example is that on November 21, 2018, a whale washed up on a beach in Indonesia with over 115 drinking cups, 25 plastic bags, 2 flip-flops and a bag containing 1000 plastic strings in his stomach. Now you can see how critical it is for us to stop pollution completely.

One way young people can help to protect our environment is to use more of our modern day technology to research our land based resources. Another option is for us to use social media for better and more eco minded reasons. We can also develop clubs to increase environmental awareness. As a child I am truly fascinated by the wonders of the natural world, I also think children are very persuasive. We as children can help our parents to understand the natural world and how we have to preserve it. At home, I convinced my grandmother to read a book about animals to increase her knowledge of animals. I also remind my parents every night to turn off the lights outside. Littering is another problem in our world, and in this regard, children can help by reducing the amount of plastic used daily. We can reuse our non bio-degradable material (for example using plastic bottle as a pencil pot), and recycle our materials and make them into something else. If we do not curb our littering, we may end up with more famines, drought, and flooding. In my home country, there was a huge flood because the drains were clogged with plastic bags and bottles. Though no lives were lost in the process, lots of money had to be spent by the government to help people to repair their homes. As you can see, young people can play an important role in protecting our environment, but young people can't do it alone. If families and nations all come together to protect our world and everything in it, we can create something amazing.

4th Prize (joint)

Preserving Life on Land

by Alize Zobairi, aged 10 (United Arab Emirates)

For millennia our diverse, mind boggling ecosystem has provided the needs of all living organisms on Earth. Earth has given us life, a habitat and sustenance, but what have we given it back? Time has come to feed forward in order to live a balanced and enjoyable life. A flourishing ecology is one of the many goals governments are building steps for in the future and citizens, environmentalists and businessmen all need to take action. Here is my three-pronged strategy for preserving life on land.

“Actions speak louder than words,” Mark Twain wrote in one of his legendary books. Simply spreading the word is not enough; effective action can only happen when we take full RESPONSIBILITY. Countries, as well as individuals, must commit by taking on tree plantation, recycling and minimizing food wastage at a massive scale. In today’s world, these policies are easy to implement. All it takes is an acknowledgement that we live in an interdependent microcosm - everyone’s efforts count.

Once realization occurs, new ideas blossom. CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION are the next building bricks. Perhaps carbon dioxide can be liquefied and restored back into the Earth; maybe inventors can take on the challenge of designing pollination drones to help multiply plant life. Furthermore, proposals are in process for using new, smart materials for roads and bridges to convert kinetic energy into electricity. Creativity and original thinking are talents of the younger generation so governments and businessmen need to tap it and support it.

The third element in this strategy, EDUCATION, is most vital to our success. I believe that curricula around the world must be centered around environmental issues. Traditional school subjects can be addressed even if the learning began in the context of sustainability. For example, tackling deforestation and extreme weather, naturally lends itself to the study of geography; coming to grips with the greenhouse effect and solving harsh problems facing animal life underwater encompasses scientific thinking. Equally, dealing with urban life challenges, fair trade and managing financial resources involves mathematics, business and economics. Education will become increasingly meaningful for the new generation.

All of this link up like a spider’s web. Education gives rise to responsible citizens who then develop ideas with creative and innovative minds. All stakeholders, therefore, need to work as a homogeneous team, and have the right attitudes towards building a sustainable existence for humanity.

5th Prize (joint)

The endangered life on the old Earth

by Mohammad Amin Torkzadeh Mahani, aged 10 (Iran)

As a child, whenever I think about the 4 billion year old Earth, I feel sorry for what we have done to it and its life. So I imagine the time, God created the earth. He determined no countries, and all the earth had the same parents- Adam and Eve. I wish, we all preserved life sustainability as if the whole Earth is our country, I wish people around the world knew ,if the ecosystem is threatened , it will not only affect one area , but also on all the earth. I'm worried about all the green forests of my land, and the animals. Whenever I run fast, I have the image of a beautiful Iranian cheetah running fast. The breed of Iranian cheetahs is in danger, and because they just mate in places with no human, and the hunters hunt them, we feel the danger of their extinction. Unfortunately Orumieh Lake and Zayandehrood's water in my country are dried and the depressed people and even animals' living around this lake are in danger. So I have to do something. I've seen in a documentary that within next few years, there will be a war between countries over the water. I love my land. A few years later, the next generation have to migrate because of the lack of water, and we'll lose our family and identity. If I could do something to save the life on Earth, I would applied all the specialists in the world to get together, with a global peace, to use all of their expertise, and together, save the planet from the destruction of life. I wish, from each country, there was a representative to take care of the sustainability of the life on Earth, as a unique country. They would come together every year and apply decisions. As Young people we know that our children are in danger, more than our parents and us. So we should feel this danger more than others. Our parents had enough resources and a safe life on the Earth. But our children won't even have the first conditions of living on this planet. Therefore, the solution to prevent this catastrophe is teaching children and students in all schools around world and make a global campaign of all the students around the world to protect the life on our lovely planet.

5th Prize (joint)

Thoughts for humans from Max the Rhino

by Solveig Swift, aged 11 (United Kingdom)

Dear Humans,

I am a white rhino, and I think you are doing a terrible job of looking after the world. You're cutting down all of our trees, and by doing that you are killing at least half of the animals living there as well. The other half will probably die of starvation because you have killed their prey. Yes you have people, like Sir David Attenborough, who come and flash nasty lights in our eyes, and then we appear all over your mysterious screens. And you all weep and wail, and say 'I'm never buying anything wooden again!'. Though you do, you silly humans you! You don't even realise it. I mean when was the last time you bought something with wood in it? Sometimes I wish that I could come and cut down your big great lumps of stone, which personally I think (if you want to cut down things) would be a much better compromise. My mum says that it's all a big disaster. Well she did say that... until humans came and shot her! And guess what?! My friend told me you aren't even allowed to – so you're being doubly naughty! Anyway, when was the last time any of your fancy Chinese medicines ever worked?

Now, I know what you should do to fix everything. You need to make an app in which people can monitor: how many plastic bottles they use, how much they throw away, and how many products they buy that are harmful to the rainforest. A bit like a fit bit – a fit bit for the planet. You would get points for doing things like recycling, and you would get reminders on your phone if you are being wasteful. The app would also have characters for all the endangered animals, and if you did something good (e.g. donated money to plant trees), the animals that rely on trees would send you a happy message. Though if you did something harmful (e.g. buy a tiger skin), the tiger character would send you a sad message to remind you that the tiger was alive once, free to roam the African plains.

I hope you listen, otherwise hiring the baboon from down the road to translate my words into 'humanish' would've been a complete waste of time!

Yours, not very happily,

Max the rhino