

1<sup>st</sup> Prize / Grand Prize Winner

**How Can Young People be Better Supported to Thrive in Green Jobs?**

By Alexander Kameoka, aged 15 (Japan)

We live in a society where climate change is one of, if not the existential threat to society. Young people have shown to be very worried about climate change, yet simultaneously feel pessimistic about their ability to fight it (Nature.com, 2021). In addition, political divisions, like in the U.S where I grew up, both stopped any form of meaningful climate action and politicized the topic to the point that fighting climate change was a “democrat vs republican” fight, rather than “humanity vs extinction”. Among Gen Z respondents, 67% responded that climate change should be top priority for humans, however that number almost cuts in half when it comes to a personal concern (Pewresearch.com 2021). Therefore, societies must inspire and encourage young people to fight against climate change, and getting them familiarized and excited about green jobs is a top priority.

According to a study conducted by Young International, there are three main barriers to young people entering a “green economy”: Lack of capital (38%), lack of skills (32%), and a lack of knowledge of green jobs (29%). Therefore, a solution must center around removing these barriers.

A key reason as to why young people feel unprepared to enter a green job is a lack of education and a lack of skills. Changing young peoples’ mindsets about green jobs is the key to tackle this lack of knowledge. Green jobs should not and are not limited to high tech fields. Not everyone can become a scientist that creates a technology-based solution to climate change, but everyone can be taught to approach their job with a sustainability mindset. For example, an engineer can be taught to use sustainable materials, students who wish to enter an administrative role can learn how to simultaneously reduce carbon emissions and increase efficiency. Even an artist can be taught how to use sustainable materials to express their art and spread awareness of climate change. Encouraging students to be creative and persistent in finding sustainable solutions, reducing carbon footprints, and spreading the awareness of combating climate change in whatever they choose to pursue as careers can help them turn every job into a greener job.

Furthermore, schools and communities should introduce students to green jobs early in the education process. For example, a local competition on green entrepreneurship could be a fun and interactive way to explore what needs and gaps are present in their communities. Involving the community to work with, evaluate, and support students can help students discover possibilities in green jobs that they may have never thought of. Then, schools can provide students with extracurricular activities and personal projects to further develop their interest and skills. In addition, competition winners can be connected to real entrepreneurs to gain capital and mentoring to realize their ideas.

Concerted programs like this involving students, schools, businesses, and communities can make a real difference in helping students realize that green jobs are everywhere, discover the skill gaps they have for future careers, and develop necessary networks to help realize their dreams in the future.

Lastly, young people enjoy connecting with each other. Connecting current and former students from different communities and countries to share ideas about green jobs and their experiences can help inspire young people from each other and foster a sense of community and comradery.

Young people are ready to take on the challenge of fighting climate change through green jobs, but we need guidance, inspiration, and education to realize the true potential of green jobs.

2<sup>nd</sup> Prize

**From Fortress to Field and Beyond**

By Dhruv Bhatt, aged 17 (India)

Deserted hamlets, locked houses, and no people. Abandoned temples, mossy wells and dry village streams. Sounds like a post-apocalypse movie? But in the almost 1800 ‘ghost villages’ of Uttarakhand, a mountainous state in India, it is a painful reality.

The lack of jobs, sustainable rural economies, and infrastructure forces youth to leave the rural areas of my state in search of better opportunities elsewhere. I had known about this since 2017, but in 2020 when my father lost his job, I experienced financial anxiety first-hand. It was now that I grew determined to find a culture-conscious, profitable, yet sustainable solution to this grave socioeconomic issue.

However, there was a terrible catch. Neither my parents nor I had any experience setting up a community-centred organisation, let alone a profitable one! Climate education and entrepreneurship were not part of my school curricula. So, I desperately skimmed through online articles hoping to come across a research paper to fuel my “big green idea”, but to no avail. And that is when it hit me:

Where better to seek evidence-based, action-oriented information than universities, the intellectual powerhouses of sustainable economies?

With my parent’s support, I contacted a local agricultural university and set up a meeting with mentors from the Food Technology Department. Working closely with professors who had explored the various intersections of mass migration, I brainstormed marketable, scalable solutions that could fit the needs of an agrarian society and prevent the loss of our traditional ways.

Our ‘research’ culminated in a small, green business that rejuvenates traditional water mills in rural areas and employs villagers to operate and package flour. Through effective collaboration, we reintroduce local cereals in urban markets and provide an alternative to electric mills. In 2022, our efforts were recognised by the government, and we won the SDG Goalkeeper Award for SDG 7!

I can only imagine the untapped potential of several other universities that ‘guard’ climate solutions in inaccessible libraries. At a panel on Green Jobs, organised by UNICEF India, Dr Indu Murthy\* also talked about her journey from “the fortress (lecture halls) to the field and beyond”. She argued that educators in the green space must reimagine their role in climate action, from simply being on the sidelines to actively mentoring youth. I cannot agree more!

Be it career-oriented education, diploma/vocational training for professionals or incubation centres powered by university professors, an institution’s technological support and accreditation are crucial in empowering youth in the green economy.

On the other side of the spectrum, we youths should also re-evaluate our position. Are we ready to become the conduits of knowledge in our communities? What does climate capacity-building mean for us? Does it involve career counselling? Are we learning enough to join the green workforce someday? Do we know what to learn and where?

In the vast green job market that includes sectors from health to business and even agriculture, awareness of one’s interests, needs, talents, and skills is essential. The answers to these questions are also critical for governments to better education systems, especially in climate-vulnerable regions like Uttarakhand, where the effects of climate change are apparent and the need of the hour is thought-provoking, solution-focused climate education.

As a soon-to-be college student, I write this essay with a tinge of hope. I am mindful that my impact is still tiny, but it gives me hope to pursue further education in sustainability. It gives me hope to preserve my cultural heritage. It gives me hope to advocate for a collaborative green future where economic growth is not seen in opposition to sustainable development.

\* She is the Sector Head (Climate, Environment, and Sustainability) at the Center for Study of Sciences, Technology and Policy (CSTEP), India.

3<sup>rd</sup> Prize

**How can young people be better supported to thrive in green jobs?**

By Azat Syzdykov Samatovich, aged 17 (Kazakhstan)

In the current climate of economic uncertainty, it is essential that the younger generation have a strong voice in the decision-making process. As a sector that has been consistently identified as one of the most important to future growth, green jobs are an exciting prospect for young people looking to embark on their careers. However, with this comes to an increased responsibility for employers and society at large to support these young people through their transition into adulthood.

There are several ways that young people can be better supported to thrive in green jobs:

**Education:** One of the most important ways to support millennials in green jobs is through education and training programs that teach the skills and knowledge needed for these roles. This could include formal education programs, such as degrees in environmental science or sustainable business, as well as on-the-job training and more general education in entrepreneurship, project management, and other areas that will be useful in a green career.

**Internships:** Hands-on experience is an essential component of any career, and this is especially true in green jobs. Internships and apprenticeships can provide youngsters with the opportunity to gain practical experience, a set of skills and build their professional networks, which can be valuable stepping stones to full-time employment.

**Mentorship:** Young people starting in green jobs may face challenges and obstacles that more experienced colleagues do not. To support their success, it can be helpful to provide mentorship and support from more experienced professionals in the green job sector. This could include guidance on career development, help to navigate the job market, and support in finding and securing job opportunities. Therefore, it will result in a better understanding of career development, networking, and obtaining vital skills like problem-solving, self-management, and critical thinking.

**Networking and job fairs:** Building a professional network and connecting with potential employers is key to success in any career. Green job fairs and networking events can provide millennials with the opportunity to meet with employers, learn about job openings, and make connections that can lead to future employment.

**Policies:** Governments and businesses can create policies and incentives that support the growth of green jobs and make them more attractive to the younger generation. Ultimately, it is essential for youth to have access to job opportunities in the green sector. This can be achieved through the creation of policies that support the growth of renewable energy and sustainability industries, such as the implementation of green infrastructure projects and incentives for businesses to adopt sustainable practices.

**Government support:** Governments can also play a role in supporting young people in green jobs by providing funding for education and training programs, creating incentives for businesses to hire young people, and

promoting policies that support the growth of the green economy. Certainly, many social groups of youth may struggle to afford the education and training required to enter green jobs or to cover the costs of living while they are starting their careers. Financial support, such as scholarships, grants, and loan forgiveness programs, can help to remove these barriers and make green careers more accessible.

Public awareness: Raising public awareness about the importance of green jobs and the role that adolescents can play in creating a more sustainable future can help to create a supportive environment for young people entering these fields. Engaging young people in discussions and decision-making processes related to the environment can also help to build their confidence and leadership skills.

Overall, supporting youth to thrive in green jobs requires a combination of education and training, hands-on experience, mentorship and support, networking opportunities, and government support. By investing in the next generation of green professionals, we can ensure that we have a skilled and dedicated workforce ready to take on the challenges of building a more sustainable future.

#### 4<sup>th</sup> Prize

##### **Entrepreneurship goes Green for Young People**

By Matthew Yik Yu Wong, aged 14 (Hong Kong)

Young people are at the forefront of the climate emergency. They are the last generation to see the full effects of climate change, if we do nothing to stop the potential extinction of humanity.

Entrepreneurship is one of the most desired careers among today's youth. A survey in America by Junior Achievement USA showed that 60% of teenagers are considering entrepreneurship and young entrepreneurs are already seeking to make an impact by helping the green transition [1]. For example, In Kuwait, Fatemah Alzelzela a young entrepreneur and influencer has founded a Non-profit organisation to recycle trash whilst utilizing social media to educate her followers about recycling [2]. Helping entrepreneurship will ensure today's youth thrive in green economy and contribute to the green transition.

Young entrepreneurs face many hurdles in getting their ideas and business up and running. They face difficulty in securing start-up capital. Their young age means a lack of experience and business skills. Current government policy, meanwhile, does not provide much encouragement or incentive for young entrepreneurs seeking to develop green solutions.

It would be impossible for young entrepreneurs to succeed without money. So organizations from the government to banks should consider giving low-interest or even no-interest loans for young entrepreneurs with promising ideas to create a business that will contribute to the green transition. Many banks such as HSBC currently already provide "sustainable financing" to provide loans for new green solutions.

These organisations may also set up "angel financing". Angel financing means a person or a group of people invest in a business (typically a new firm in need of money) in return for shares in the hope of a handsome return in the future. Not only does provide opportunities for the youth to pitch in, but the organisations can also get a good return on their investment. This will be similar to what venture capital do.

For skill-building, we can organise career days and workshops where students can explore different fields of work and talk to people currently working in those sectors. This will give students key skills and advice allowing them to perform better in the future. Whilst career days, talks and workshops are already happening, we should encourage schools to set up dedicated green job workshops and talks so that students will be more attracted to pursuing a career in the green economy.

To support young aspiring entrepreneurs, we may create a mentorship programme where they can be paired up with successful green entrepreneurs. Young people can learn how to tackle the peculiar challenges of running a green company and be guided to achieve their goal of creating a successful business.

As for policy, Government should consider organizing trade fairs or events where young entrepreneurs can promote their solutions and products to potential customers. These fairs and events could become a “pairing-up” event between buyers and sellers. The government can promote the fairs to business chambers, foreign trade delegations, etc. to help market the young entrepreneurs’ green solutions to potential buyers.

The Government can also organise programmes like the X prize which reward innovators with cash and other material prizes to challenge entrepreneurs to create a solution for an environmental issue. The winner or winners can obtain a substantial cash/prize, thus creating significant motivation for entrepreneurs to contribute to the green transition.

To conclude, investment, provision of start-up capital, skills-development from an early age, trade fairs and prizes/awards for green entrepreneurship are essential to ensure that young entrepreneurs can thrive in creating and running their own green businesses whilst making an important contribution to the green transition and the future of humanity.

Joint 5<sup>th</sup> Prize

**How can young people be better supported to thrive in green jobs?**

By Noreen Rae Lagrana, aged 15 (Philippines)

Imagine you are served a ticket for over-speeding, though you do not know how to drive, you do not own a vehicle and you are not even someone in the passengers’ seat – you are just an innocent bystander. Moreover, this is no ordinary penalty or fine. It’s one you pay all your life or possibly with your life. How would it make you feel...anxious, befuddled, angry?

This, and many more, are the kinds of climate injustices faced by people around the world. Communities living in some of the least developed parts of the world are also the most vulnerable to Climate Change. Being poor, their contribution to Green House Gas emissions is miniscule, just as is their share in unprecedented growth in incomes and wealth that the world has experienced in recent decades. Yet, they are worst affected by modern economic growth that has plundered the planet and the natural ecosystem.

Worst of all, they are also most powerless in influencing the global policies.

For instance, in Bangladesh, which is also called the Ground Zero for Climate Change, millions of people are suffering the consequences of the climate related disaster. Each day they are losing their homes, their livelihoods and their families. Education of their children takes a backseat as they struggle to stay afloat and their health services too are adversely impacted. Severe floods, cyclonic storms, eroding river banks and disappearing villages are continuously pushing these communities into deeper and more cruel poverty and inequality. Yet, they remain powerless and hopeless to change any of the factors that bring them misery and deprivation owing to climate disaster.

This Must Change.

The communities suffering from these disasters cannot keep waiting till 2050 for tall commitments that are in real time basis nothing but empty, hollow promises. The world needs to act now! The inequality suffered by millions in our communities in coastal areas suffering the rising sea levels in the world must be addressed and help must reach them for mitigation and management of the awaiting disaster.

I urge the world leaders to pay heed to the signs today and go beyond the symbolic promises and assurances. I offer a 3C approach.

**Co-create-** Top industrial and scientific corporations of the world must invest in the future by hand holding and providing grants, financial and technical assistance to the communities that are under constant threat. Their monetary help will go a long way in helping build sustainable alternatives for the world. They must also incentivize their teams of engineers and scientists to find alternate solutions that are viable in these areas that are sinking each day.

**Collaborate-** Come together to help in every way possible, begin by collaboration with the local communities. Local knowledge and traditional practices handed down over generations like the floating farms of Bangladesh have helped mitigate the climate disaster successfully in some places and needs to be replicated. Involving local people in designing a sustainable solution has other benefits of raising awareness and participation of the youth of these areas who can then come up with innovative solutions to manage the crisis. Inequality has left many such people from participating in an affair that impacts them directly.

**Compassion-** Inequality of resources, wealth and income generating processes in the world in the past century has fuelled the climate crisis further. Everybody talks of making a change and yet we do not see anyone invested truly and thoroughly in this noble cause. The future generations need you to take charge now and make that sacrifice for those who are likely to vanish in the climate black hole if global actions are delayed or denied. Let us pull them back into the world. If we come together, we can.

Joint 5<sup>th</sup> Prize

**How can young people be better supported to thrive in green jobs?**

By Michelle Madugba, aged 15 (Nigeria)

Why should I stop my present job just because it isn't a green job? How on earth would I be able to pay the bills? – Thoughts of a vast majority of the working population.

We live in a world where hustling, competition, and hard work are needed to survive. To avoid drowning in a pool of one's economic problems, one has to labour and find a means of livelihood. It is common knowledge that the earth is in danger of threats emerging from anthropogenic climate change. Consequently, it is essential to have jobs that will not just sustain us economically but also fit into the requirements of a pollution-free environment.

As a toddler, I had a huge fascination with cooking. I had no idea it involved practice, patience, and training. After several failed attempts to cook with sand, water, and my play dough all mixed together I decided to ask for help. With a few tips from my mom and a little help from here and there, I eventually got it. In a similar fashion, if training programs that focus on green jobs and its sustenance are readily provided to the youths and access to the best professionals established, there is bound to be soar in their comprehensive efficiency and effectiveness level.

Another very clichéd problem, which quite frankly is one of the greatest challenges faced is the “lack of finances” occasioned by acute poverty, especially in third world countries. Suppose leading corporations and organizations work hand in glove with the government to provide access to finances and monetary support for young people, this would go a long way to help the youths combat this issue and be more productive. In addition, once young people are successfully engaged in a green job; it is essential to provide support to help them excel and cope in their roles. Continuous learning and on-the-job training should be aided by providing access to training conferences, workshops, and other outlets that encourage development and pragmatic approaches to situations.

Have you ever heard of people who get into influential careers and end up regretting this decision their whole life just because they did not like their jobs? In my hometown, a woman who had a successful career as a journalist and had gained quite some fame was secretly battling with severe depression just because she was not living her dream. As a matter of fact, she had to abandon her career and become an author before she was able to regain her joy although this was after so many wasted years. Scenarios like this can be easily avoided by the availability of effective career counselling to the youths. Young people can have the right guidance on career paths and vocations in the green industry and avoid wasting precious time.

Generally speaking, young people are highly susceptible to peer influence. This is because they are at this stage in their lives where they are still learning and developing rapidly. In relation to green jobs, strong friendships and alliances could be formed among young professionals in the green sector and those who are just starting their careers. Social gatherings, networking sessions, meetings, seminars, and many more can serve as avenues to help the participants gain practical skills and exposure in a real-world setting.

Aiding young people to thrive in green jobs is sure to have a positive impact not just momentarily but for decades and centuries to come. Let us start the movement, begin the change and commence the transition. We can influence the unknown if we have future leaders on our side.

Joint 5<sup>th</sup> Prize

**How can young people be better supported to thrive in green jobs?**

By Ke Yue New, aged 16 (Singapore)

A green job? So, you want to work in a non-profit?" A relative of mine once asked me sceptically when I told her I wanted a career where I can improve the environment. I knew what she was implying. To most people, a job in the sustainability sector is as ideal as it is unprofitable.

As a child, I would often be puzzled by news reports on rising sea levels, homeless polar bears and others of the like - if the climate crisis is this close to destroying the planet we call home, why are so few jobs aim at solving this problem, while most of them are steadily contributing to its deterioration? And no matter where I searched online, the only causes I could look forward to joining to change our planet's bleak situation were beach clean-up volunteering groups. A noble initiative of course, but not nearly enough to tackle a monster like climate crisis.

In a global survey conducted by the organisation Plan International, only 29% of young people aged 15 to 30 feel competent in green skills or know of any accessible green job they can apply for. Just like me, so many other youths feel the urgency of a burning planet but have no idea how they can make a large-scale impact through a meaningful career.

The reason? Hardly anything has been done to change our current economy into a green one. Currently, there is no concrete definition of a "green job". While governments have been pouring money into selected initiatives, there is no purposeful, global direction to it.

But change is possible. Green technology should become a development priority, and a concrete roadmap with deliverables needs to be established. Industry experts need to be form panels to study how each industry can be turned green, and identify the specific technologies, methodologies and skillsets required to achieve that. The identified knowledge and skills to enhance sustainability should then be purposefully infused into university courses worldwide so youths can acquire useful skillsets, rather than just a fuzzy idea or slogan.

Besides revamping education and business goals, governments need to show a hard-lined stance toward greenifying the economy by incentivizing companies who have made significant efforts to implement green

initiatives while penalising those who do not. Only then, companies will feel the need to hire green talents, and this will create jobs for the youths who are trained in this area.

Only a paradigm shift in the way we think and treat green jobs will allow youth to be encouraged and supported in their pursuit of green jobs. As what the former US president Franklin Roosevelt said, “We cannot always build the future for our youth, but we can always build our youth for the future.”

Today, it has become a trend for giga-sized companies to talk about building a “Planet B” in space for us to escape to once Earth is destroyed by the climate crisis. But I tend to agree with Dr Neil DeGrasse Tyson more - “If we have the power to turn another planet into Earth, then we have the power to turn Earth back into Earth,” and this should be what every individual, company and government strive to do. So hopefully the next time I look up for green jobs online, I’ll get to see something beyond volunteering groups.