

**61st GEF Council Meeting  
GEF CSO Consultations on Youth-led Advocacy and Solutions  
to the Planet’s Environmental Crisis  
December 3, 2021 | VIA Zoom  
7:00 – 10:30 a.m. EST (UTC-4)**

*Prepared by the GEF Secretariat in collaboration and consultation with the GEF CSO Network, the GEF Indigenous Peoples Advisory Group (IPAG), the GEF Small Grants Program (SGP) and youth representatives and groups*

## Introduction

Empowered civil society groups play critical roles influencing and setting national and global agendas and delivering on environmental outcomes. They innovate local actions and solutions and bring citizens' voices to elevate local priorities and needs in national and global strategies and debates. Local actions conceived and executed by civil society organizations (CSOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs) are critical to conserving and restoring the environment and enhancing well-being and livelihoods at the community level and beyond.

The GEF Council approved an Updated Vision to Enhance Civil Society Engagement with the GEF, at its 53rd meeting, stressed, among other things, the importance of enhancing engagement of civil society during GEF Council meetings. Since then, the Council has invited CSOs and the GEF Secretariat to facilitate GEF CSO Consultation on relevant topics prior to GEF Council meetings.

In line with the updated Vision to Enhance Civil Society Engagement, adjacent to the GEF 61<sup>st</sup> Council meeting in December 2021, a GEF Consultations with Civil Society is scheduled for Friday December 3rd from 7:00 to 10:30 a.m. EST (GMT-4). The topic for this GEF CSO consultation is on **Youth-led advocacy and solutions to the planet's environmental crisis**. This topic was proposed in consultation with the GEF CSO Network and IPAG and supported by the GEF Council that recognized the important role that youth play advocating and delivering on environmental sustainability worldwide.

This GEF CSO Consultation has been designed to put spotlight on youth innovations and solutions to deliver on local sustainable development and environmental goals and commitments and to gather perspectives and insights from diverse youth and youth-led civil society and indigenous peoples and local community organizations on their priorities and interests. The consultation with youth comes at pivotal time as the GEF Partnership is refining measures to advance more inclusive approaches to ensure that all actors - government, private sector, and civil society – are mobilized and engaged in transforming social and economic systems for a sustainable future – and to help deliver on GEF's ambition in GEF-8 and beyond, contributing to a green and blue recovery and a healthier, more productive, and resilient planet.

The organization of this consultation is the results of a collaborative process among the GEF Secretariat, the GEF CSO Network, the GEF Indigenous Peoples Advisory Group (IPAG) and the GEF Small Grants Programme (SGP) with engagement and support from youth groups.

## Background

Today, there are 1.2 billion young people aged 15 to 24 years, accounting for around 16% of the global population. Many young people around the world confront great challenges and risks which disproportionately affect young women and girls, such as poor access to education, to water, healthcare, or work, as well as conflict and forced migration.

Rural youth, particularly in developing countries, are also suffering the effects of climate change, floods, and other natural disasters. As stated by the UN Youth Strategy 2030 *“the way in which the shifting demographics in the world are leveraged, and how young people navigate their transition into adulthood, are critical for the progress of humankind and the health of the planet<sup>1</sup>.”* The UN Youth Strategy further concludes that *“Connected to each other like never before, young people want to and already contribute to the resilience of their communities, proposing innovative solutions, driving social progress, and inspiring political change, in urban as well as rural contexts. Young people constitute a tremendous and essential asset worth investing in, opening the door to an unparalleled multiplier effect”.*

Understanding that the current state of the environment puts their future at stake, youth are increasingly leveraging the power of their collective voice to advocate, lobby and lead campaigns towards adopting environmentally friendly practices and policies. The global movements against climate change led by young activists in many countries around the world, for example, has been well publicized, covered by the media and highlighting the powerful voice of youth for change. In addition, there are many more, and lesser-known efforts pioneered by young local leaders and indigenous youth advocates at the national and local levels that are determined to mobilize and spearheading positive changes in their own communities and countries. Together, these youth efforts ranging from local initiatives to international campaigns continue to adopt both conventional and unconventional methods to contribute to environmental sustainability and advocating with governments, the private sector, and the public for urgent needs and solutions to the environmental crisis.

The GEF has a long history of promoting meaningful stakeholder consultation and engagement in its operations as well as in its project and programs: from the formulation of strategies, policies and guidelines to consultations and direct participation in project identification, design, execution and monitoring and evaluation. The GEF has increasingly strengthened the engagement of civil society, including indigenous peoples and local communities (IPLC), women and youth through the Country Support Program (CSP), the civil society forums at the GEF Assemblies, the biannual GEF Council meetings and the Pre-Council Consultations with civil society and IPLC. The GEF Secretariat has made some initial efforts to include youth organizations in these activities and events. During the GEF-6 and GEF-7 Expanded Constituency Workshops (ECWs) facilitated by the CSP, the GEF Secretariat conducted dedicated sessions to address engagement with civil society and IPLCs and engaged all participants (OFPs, CSOs, Agencies and others) in a dialogue to identify challenges and opportunities of stakeholder engagement in the GEF at the country, regional and global levels. During these ECWs, participants acknowledged the need for a more active engagement of the Youth and for the GEF to provide more opportunities to engage young people and youth-led organizations as agents of change in achieving the GEF’s strategy and mission.

Youth and youth groups are also increasingly engaged in GEF projects and programs. For example, youth is a priority target group of the GEF Small Grants Programme, a corporate program of GEF that financially and technically supports civil society and community-based organizations on global environmental issues while addressing livelihood improvement. About 40 percent of the SGP projects have active participation of youth. In addition, over 73 percent of the SGP National Steering Committee has appointed a Youth Focal Point among their members to ensure the interest and needs of the youth are reflected in SGP

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/18-00080\\_UN-Youth-Strategy\\_Web.pdf](https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/18-00080_UN-Youth-Strategy_Web.pdf)

portfolio. During 2020-2021, 350 projects were completed with youth participation or leadership. SGP also successfully convened a Youth Climate Action Video Competition in partnership with UNFCCC, CBD and UNCCD and launched the winners at their Conferences of the Parties to further promote youth engagement in the cause.

The GEF partnership recognize that any efforts to constructively supporting youth participation and engagement will require a longer term inclusive and long-term approach and strategy. The GEF understands that this first CSO consultation with Youth is just one first step to help inform this longer-term process and to distill some initial ideas and recommendations towards a more intentional and effective approach for the GEF partnership to engage and support youth and youth-led civil society and indigenous peoples and local community organizations moving forward.

## Consultation Objectives

The main purpose with this GEF CSO Consultation with youth is to initiate a constructive dialogue between the GEF Secretariat, Council Members and youth and youth-led civil society organizations. Providing a platform for the GEF partnership to listen and engage youth leaders active at the local, country, and global levels, it is expected that this dialogue will help generate inspiration and innovative ideas for the GEF to advance a more intentional and effective approach to engaging and supporting the inclusion of youth innovators and advocates as key stakeholders to help achieve the GEF's ambitious strategy for GEF-8 and beyond.

The GEF Secretariat, the GEF CSO Network, Indigenous Peoples Advisory Group (IPAG) and the GEF Small Grants Programme have work closely together to identify and invite young male and female advocates, leaders, and innovators active at different levels and environmental sectors to participate in this consultation.<sup>2</sup> Youth and youth groups have also been engaged early in the planning of the consultation to allow them opportunity to influence and inform the organization and format.

The key objectives of this GEF CSO Consultation with Youth are to:

- (1) Spotlight the important role and function of youth and youth-led civil society organizations (from the local to global levels) influencing, advocating, and delivering on local, national, and global sustainable development and environmental goals and commitments.
- (2)

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<sup>2</sup> The selection of participating youth and youth organization has taken into consideration: (1) balance of local, regional and global level representation; (2) gender parity; and (3) inclusion of different environmental sectors (e.g., climate change, biodiversity loss, chemical pollution etc.). Efforts have been made to engage youth leaders and caucuses related to the Conventions that the GEF serves, including the UNCCD Global Youth Caucus, Global Youth Biodiversity Network, Youth for Climate as well as a balance of young activists, indigenous youth representatives and youth-led groups (CSOs and CBOs, women and IPLC groups).

- (3) Facilitate a constructive dialogue between youth/youth-led civil society organizations and GEF Secretariat, Council, GEF Partners and exchange information on priorities, limitations and opportunities for greater youth engagement and participation in GEF Projects, programs and strategy moving forward.
- (4) Distill ideas and recommendations to better engage and support youth and youth-led civil society organizations (from the local to global levels) to help achieve common interest, goals, and agendas.

The consultation will include simultaneous translations in French and Spanish and opportunities for participants to engage via the chat which the GEF Secretariat will help to moderate.

## Tentative Agenda

GEF CSO Consultations on Youth-led Advocacy and Solutions to the planet's environmental crisis		
7:00 – 7:30		
7:00-7:05	Introduction of Agenda	Master of Ceremonies, Gabriella Richardson Temm and Susan Waithaka, GEF Secretariat
7:05-7:15	Welcoming remarks	Chair, GEF CSO Network: Sano Akhteruzzaman
7:20-7:40	Opening Remarks	GEF CEO and Chairperson: Carlos Manuel Rodríguez GEF Council Member: David Olarte, Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development of Colombia
7:40-7:50	Keynote speaker	Elizabeth Wathuti, Green Generation Initiative, Kenya
7:50- 8:00	Book Launch/Video screening	Pradeep Kurukulasuriya, Director - Nature, Climate and Energy, Executive Coordination, UNDP
8:00 -10:15 Youth Dialogue and discussions		
8:00–9.00 Session 1: Youth innovations and environmental solutions around the world		
<p><b>Moderator:</b> Maria Lechner, Co-Chair the GEF CSO Network, Founder and Director General, Fundación ECOS, Uruguay</p> <p><b>Discussants:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Alba Yacabalqueij, SGP Fellow, Guatemala</li> <li>Barsha Lekhi, SGP IP Fellow, Nepal</li> <li>Chibez Ezekiel, Exec. Coordinator, Strategic Youth Network for Development (SYND), Ghana</li> <li>Maribel Santez Aguilar, Young Tseltal, Mexico</li> <li>Errachid Montassir, Project Manager of the High Atlas Foundation, Morocco</li> </ul> <p>Panel Discussion and Q&amp;A session facilitated by Moderator (15 min)</p>		
Coffee Break		
9.05– 10:15 Session 2. Discussion with youth advocates and leaders across around the world		
<p><b>Moderator:</b> Isha Sharma</p> <p><b>Discussants:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Kiefer Jackson, Caribbean Youth Environment Network, Guyana</li> <li>Derrick Mugisha, Biodiversity Hub International, Regional Director Africa, Uganda</li> <li>Johnny Dabrowski, Co-founder of the Szkola Net 0 (Net Zero School), Poland</li> <li>Desmond Alugnoa, Co-Founder of the Green Africa Youth Organization (GAYO), Ghana</li> </ul> <p>Panel Discussion and Q&amp;A session facilitated by Moderator (15 min)</p>		
10:15 -10.30 Concluding Discussion: Facilitated by the CSO Network, Malintle Kheleli (TBC)		
	Reflections and wrap-up	<p>GEF STAP: Prof Saleem Ali</p> <p>GEF Council: Hieu Tom Bui, Global Affairs, Canada</p> <p>GEF Secretariat, Françoise Clottes, Director, Policy and Operations</p>

## Annex 1 Bios

### Keynote speaker

*Elizabeth Wathuti*



**Elizabeth Wathuti** is an environmentalist and climate activist from Kenya. She is the founder of Green Generation Initiative that nurtures young people to love nature and be environmentally conscious. She is also the Head of Campaigns at Wangari Maathai Foundation and the Coordinator of Daima, a coalition of Civic actors who have come together to advocate for urban green spaces protection. Elizabeth has been serving as the Global South Youth Co -chair for the COP26 Civil society and Youth Advisory Council. Wathuti earned her Bachelor’s degree in Environmental Studies and Community Development from Kenyatta University.

**Session 1: Youth Innovators**

**Moderator: Maria Leichner,**



Maria Leichner is, Founder and President of Fundación Ecos, a non-profit educational and research center created to promote sustainable development since 1994. Inside Fundación ECOS, Leichner created "The Trade, Investment and Environment Program" to stimulate Civil Society towards a sustainable development implementation to make a solid contribution within the region. Maria Leichner's work focuses on increasing public awareness of civil society participation in trade, investment and environment negotiations, through research, communication, information dissemination and dialogue.

**Discussants:**

**Alba Yacabalquiej Salanic.** Alba is 25 years old, born in the village of Xecam in the municipality of Cantel, Guatemala. She studied International Relations and Political Science at the Rafael Landívar University. During her university training, she engaged in Enactus Landívar, Xecam Cantel Women's Committee, Xecam Community Mayor's Office, Xecam COCODE, Cantel COMUDE, Indigenous Electoral Observer, among others. In 2020, she received the National Initiative of Scholarship for Indigenous Peoples of the PPD Guatemala project to help contribute to the empowerment of indigenous women and youth in the western part of the country. In 2021, she was awarded the Young Leadership award in the environment category at the national level, by the National Youth Council -CONJUVE- and the organization Desafío Joven. She was a panelist in the Youth Forum of the ECOSOC- publicizing the challenges that indigenous peoples and young people face in the face of climate change. Mayan K'iche continues to advocate for the participation and empowerment of indigenous women and youth to face the effects of climate change and to contribute to the sustainable development of communities.





**Errachid Montassir** is a Volunteer Coordinator and Project Manager, with experiences engaging students of more than 300 schools in environmental educational and planting activities across many regions of Morocco. He succeeded in supporting local communities in planting more than 58,570 fruit trees which contribute to reducing the effects of climate change and raising awareness of young students and teachers about climate action. High Atlas Foundation is recently involved in developing a new project aiming at monitoring carbon credit to offset the trees HAF planted since 2014 in 24 provinces of Morocco. The sale of these credits will enable reinvestment in expanding and new organic fruit tree nurseries in Morocco.



**Ms. Barsha Lekhi** is an environmental activist holding a Masters' degree in Environmental Science from Jawaharlal Nehru University, India, and is the awardee of the Silver Jubilee Scholarship. Barsha is passionate about research and advocacy for environment protection as well as the rights of indigenous peoples and women. In the year 2016, she won the title of Miss Nepal International 2016, the first-ever beauty-pageant winner from the Tharu community and represented Nepal in Miss International held in Japan where she won Missology's People's Choice Award. The same year, she was nominated as a Goodwill Ambassador for the Clean Up Nepal Campaign. She is currently working as a National Indigenous Peoples Fellow in UNDP-GEF- Small Grants Programme. She is also appointed as Advisor in Earth Day Network, Nepal.

**Ezekiel Chibeze**



**Chibeze Ezekiel** coordinates the Strategic Youth Network for Development (SYND), a youth-led NGO that promotes youth inclusion in the governance of the Natural Resources & Environmental (NRE) sector. He serves on the board of 350.org, a member of the International Experts of the Environment of Peace 2022 (EP2022) project and a Climate Reality Leader. He chairs the Youth in Natural Resources and Environmental Governance (Youth-NREG) Platform and is the 2020 Goldman Environmental Prize Recipient for Africa for successfully

leading a grassroots movement to stop the construction of a coal-fired plant in Ghana. As a strong climate activist, he holds the conviction that young people must be at the heart of climate solutions in that young people have a pivotal role to play in winning the fight against climate change.



**Maribel Sántiz Aguilar**, is an 18-year-old girl who belongs to the Chilolja community, in the Municipality of San Juan Cancuc, she speaks the original Tseltal language.

She learned textile art from her grandmother and is currently an artisan who promotes cultural value through the canvases she produces on the backstrap loom. She is an outstanding student of the Language and Culture degree at the Intercultural University of Chiapas, as well as an active promoter of the recovery of ancestral knowledge in relation to the care of Mother Earth.

She is a Municipal Councilor, promoting different actions to make women's rights a reality, building a new generational identity and a new territory, with equity and gender equality. She is a member of a women's soccer team, an activity with which she promotes the occupation of public spaces by young women.

She is part of the indigenous faculty of the School of Liderazgos Enrañables, in collaboration with a feminist organization, promoting the emerging leaderships of other young women, who constitute the generational replacement for the good life, freedom and autonomy of women

## Session 2: Youth Panelist and advocates

**Moderator: Isha Sharma.**



Isha works at the World Bank Group's Independent Evaluation Group and the IFC Climate Business team. Isha has worked in the public, private and non-profit sectors for climate resilience, economic development, and youth empowerment across six geographies. Passionate about youth leadership and sustainability advocacy, Isha served on the Steering Committee and as the Master of Ceremonies for the World Bank Youth Summit 2021. She has spoken in a number of global forums such as the Davos Dialogue on Net Zero transition in MENA, the AIESEC Global Youth Speak, Meridian International Summit and Virtual Educa's Future of Citizenship Forum. Outside of the World Bank, Isha is a World Economic Forum Global Shaper and United Nations Sustainable Development Fellow. Isha founded the Art of Living Fellowship Program for youth in 2017 and previously served as one of the youngest board members at the London School of Economics and Political Science in her role as Member of Council and Charity Trustee. An avid mental health advocate, Isha has taught mindfulness workshops to more than 5000 individuals to date across China, India, Turkey, US, UK, and UAE, including at the World Bank, UN Women, and the United Nations Development Program.

**Discussants:**



**Ms. Kiefer Jackson**

Kiefer Jackson, 28, is the Chief of Staff for the Partnership Initiative for Sustainable Land Management and is academically trained as a legal professional with her Masters of Law (LL.M) in Corporate and Commercial Law from the University of the West Indies (Cave Hill) (2017) and her undergraduate degree in Law (LL.B) from the University of Guyana (2015). Ms. Jackson has been working within the development sector for the last six years through the Caribbean Youth Environment Network, where she currently serves as the National Coordinator for the Caribbean Youth Environment Network in Guyana and Secretary for the Organization's Regional Steering Committee.

Throughout her time with the organization, she has, among other things, been the first Sustainable Development Goals Campus Coordinator for the United Nations Sustainable Solution Network Youth and led the #KnowYourGoals campaign on the University of the West Indies Cave Hill; delivered the civil society organizations (CSOs) statement at the seventeenth session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, and was a panelist in United Nations Environment Programme Regional Forum of Civil Society and Major Groups.

Kiefer continues to advocate with the CYEN and will be part of major climate justice project within the region in the coming year.

**Derrick Mugisha, Founder and CEO, Biodiversity Hub International**



Environmental Scientist, recipient of the TOP 100 Young Conservationist in Africa Award, has supported Youth Participation at the Global Youth Biodiversity Network with the Convention of Biological Diversity (UN CBD)

### **Johnny Dabrowski**



Johnny Dabrowski aims to ensure that climate education is part of the school curriculum not just in his country, but also in other European ones. He is a co-founder of the Climate Education Team of Fridays for Future (FFF). Started in 2021, the Team presently comprises members from across Europe. Under his leadership, the Team has published Climate Education Demands and forwarded these to ministers of education in 15 European countries. Johnny has personally met the minister of education in Poland. He is a student representative in his High

School.

This year, he organized a virtual Earth Day where several environmental experts addressed the students on issues related to climate change and water. Johnny is also the co-founder of the Szkola Net 0 (Net Zero School). It is a hands-on guidebook for students to learn how to make their schools net zero. This means that the school must match its energy requirements with what it produces.

### **Desmond Alugnoa**



Desmond Aignoa is the Co-Founder of the Green Africa Youth Organization (GAYO) and the Coordinator for the Africa Member Support Program under the Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives (GAIA). He is a youth leader with focus on Community Empowerment and Rural Innovation.

Desmond's work focuses on building movements to provide youth and gender-based leadership and support frontline communities to adapt to climate change. His work is dedicated to building capacities of vulnerable groups and providing solutions to pressing environmental issues through youth empowerment and public education.