

THE ROLE OF YOUTH AND DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION IN SAVING OUR PLANET



A Reflective Article prepared for the Tomorrow Foundation

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ABOUT AUTHOR



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Nadia is a proud Sustainable Development Goal Goal Keeper and a Youth Advocate. She has empowered young people with SDG literacy, entrepreneurship, and digital skills through her skills training efforts across 12 African countries. Nadia has represented young people on major platforms, including being the youth representative for UNESCO's 39th General Conference in Paris and a youth delegate at the 10th UNESCO Youth Forum and the Young African Think'rs Convention at the African Union. She serves as an Advisory Member for Mckingtorch Africa - a social enterprise in the

environmental sustainability and sanitation space. She is an active Board Member of Eco-Cura, a social enterprise that focuses on producing alternatives to single-use plastics. Since 2016, she has worked in various capacities with United Youth Initiative Africa (UYIA) to help amplify their community projects in sustainable development. She has contributed to key projects that target the needs of communities. A recent project was Ghana's 1st Local Conference of Youth in Climate Change where she served as the Communications Lead. Nadia believes the world would be a better place if young people were allowed to lead.

INTRODUCTION

Climate change conversations have been on the rise these past few months. I recall my mother asking me what the fuss about climate change is for it to be all over the news and I didn't think I had a tangible way of describing it in one of our local languages in Ghana - 'Ga' so I simply used a scenario of the changes in our weather patterns and how Accra has been hotter than usual.

[The United Nations](#) (UN) refers to climate change as long-term shifts in temperatures and weather patterns. Temperature rise is only the beginning of the story. The Earth is about 1.1°C warmer than it was in the late 1800s. The last decade (2011-2020) was the warmest on record. All these changes in our climate can be attributed to human activities. Human activities have been the main driver of climate change - burning fossil fuels like coal, oil, and gas.

But the question remains the same. How can we avert all these happenings? To save our planet, we need to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in the atmosphere to achieve the net-zero goal by 2030. The clock is ticking!

I reflect on how young people including myself are actively and collectively working towards this goal and how digital transformation can also be a lever of change in saving our planet in this paper.

YOUTH PARTICIPATION AND INCLUSION

Every aspect of our lives as young people is affected by climate change - our health, our way of life, food, housing, safety, and work. Women, young people, people living in small island nations, and other developing countries are already more vulnerable to climate impacts. According to [UNESCO](#), women are affected more severely by climate change and its impacts on agriculture, natural disasters, and climate change-induced migrations because of social roles, discrimination, and poverty. These findings are harsh and true thus the need for youth inclusion and participation in climate mitigation and adaptation.

The youth feel infantilized as far as climate negotiations or discussions go. As far back as the signing of major agreements including the signing of the Kyoto Protocol in 1997, the Doha Amendment in 2012, and even when, parties adopted the Paris Agreement in 2015, young people have not been given seats at the table to act as partners or collaborators hence the establishment of Pre-Conference Of Party (COP) activities and Conference of Youth (COY) on Climate Change.

In 2005, young people formally gathered for the first time in Montreal ahead of COP11 to make our voices heard at the first Conference of Youth. Since 2015, COYs have also been decentralized. Around the world, Local COYs had been happening every year and are known as LCOYs. LCOYs were designed to increase youth participation in developing the global youth statement to be presented at COP. LCOY and COY are both organized by the official Youth Constituency to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) known as YOUNGO. COY is a youth precursor event to the Conference of Parties (COP) which is hosted annually.

Children and adolescents are among the most vulnerable to climate change, especially those in the Global South, which includes Ghana. As such, for the very first time in 2021, Ghana held its first LCOY which was led by youth, and for the youth to develop Ghana's National Youth Statement. Being the Communications Lead for this conference, my goal was to ensure young people in Ghana didn't feel left out in contributing to this youth statement. We reached more than 200,000 Ghanaians online and offline and developed the [youth statement](#) which includes expectations of Ghanaian youths for policymakers to mainstream inputs as equal stakeholders, as

part of strengthening youth participation in political and development processes. We further launched [Ghana's Youth Climate Council \(YCC\)](#) to serve as a hub to share resources and expertise and provide financial, technical, and knowledge resources to youth-led organizations, individuals, and civil society in climate. YCC aims to contribute to building a unified and collaborative movement in Ghana that delivers a high positive impact for the collective across Africa and the Global South.

Youth participation at local levels is always not enough hence my team and I joining youth delegates from all over the world in Glasgow at the [16th UN Climate Change Conference of Youth \(COY16\)](#) to present Ghana's National Youth Statement and develop the [Global Youth Statement](#). Youth demands in Ghana's youth statement that stood out for me were demands around Green Jobs, and Gender And Climate Change. Young people in Ghana demanded the following among others:

- Green job opportunities should be made accessible to people in rural communities.
- Organizations should make green jobs opportunities available for the youth.
- Women should be given the agency through health care, education, and inclusive governance to help societies adapt more quickly and easily to the impacts of climate change.
- Women groups should have representation in all national climate change dialog policy designs.

With support from the [Tomorrow Foundation](#), I was part of the 47,479 youth who contributed to and signed the Global Youth Statement to demand change from global leaders.

The [Global Youth Statement](#) has inputs from individuals, environmental organizations, and educational institutions to highlight the most indispensable action points to tackle the ongoing climate crisis. In 15 thematic areas, young people urged world leaders at [COP26](#) to once and for all provide the necessary policy framework to win our fight for 1.5°C.

A few days after my COY16 experience; meeting and connecting with young climate advocates from different countries, learning and taking part in capability building activities to gain more knowledge in climate advocacy, together with my team Isaac Aboah, Margaret Impraim, and Nana Akua Busia, with the continued support from Tomorrow Foundation, we represented the voices of Ghanaian youth

at 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) in Glasgow from 31 October – 12 November 2021 as part of Ghana's Official Party as youth delegates. Our sole aim of advocacy was to call for collaboration between governments, businesses, civil societies, and most importantly the youth to accelerate action to tackle the climate crisis. The COP26 summit brought parties together to accelerate action towards the goals of the Paris Agreement and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

In light of this, to maximize my participation at COP26 as a first-timer, I participated in various capability-building events, youth-led side-events and high-level meetings, and bilateral engagements. I will be unable, to sum up my COP experience even if I had to tell a series of stories but let me start by sharing my high moments from the summit.

My passion for youth activism stems from a place where I believe young people are capable of a lot more than we are attributed to. If given the right attention, resources, tools, and mandate, the world and our planet will be a sustainable place with youth as actors of change than mere beneficiaries. I say this because my first week of COP26, was filled with youthful exuberance, action, and determination. I had the opportunity to be a member of the official Youth Constituency to the UNFCCC - YOUNGO, where young people received pre-COP guidance.

Coming to COP26 as a youth advocate with interests in technology, gender and climate change, and sustainable development, I joined a series of events with these as their fundamental session themes. Wednesday, 3rd November 2021, on capacity building day, I took part in the 3rd Capacity-building Hub which was a one-day long capacity-building day organized by non-state actors led by the International Centre for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD) and overseen by a Planning Committee whose members include PCCB members, academics, UN staff, negotiators, development practitioners, and researchers. The Capacity-building Day in the 3rd Capacity-building Hub is a platform that brings together different stakeholders, and sheds light on innovative solutions, inclusive processes, effective actions, and potential pathways for higher ambitions, in the implementation of the Paris Agreement. The overarching objective of the Capacity-building day is to provide an opportunity for diverse communities of practice across regions to learn from successes, share knowledge and best practices, network with one another and enhance the global state of knowledge on capacity-building for climate change. Through this session with the help of [Digital Storytellers](#), I was inspired by their

showcase of youth climate stories around the world and I learned more on how to tell powerful stories for climate action digitally which I intend to explore to amplify the works of youth climate activists and NGO's in Ghana and Africa. Digital Storytellers believes in the power of storytelling to change the world.

Before this session, I joined the Youth of UNESCO Climate Action Network (YoU-CAN) side event co-organized at the Moroccan Pavilion, alongside the [African Youth Climate Hub](#) to discuss how to build the capacity of youth to nurture their innovative minds to address climate change and promote sustainable development through climate education. I had the opportunity to connect with the (YoU-CAN) Focal Point [Manon Frezouls](#) where I shared my interests in climate change education and highlighted the work that the Tomorrow Foundation is doing in nurturing youth leaders and climate champions. The African Youth Climate Hub, also demonstrated how they are using their online portal to foster and nurture African youth leadership for the Climate. I was introduced to this platform for the first time at COP26 and I intend to develop projects, share my commitment and join millions of youth taking action in mitigating climate issues. This goes a long way to highlight the fact that young people are not only protesting with their voices on the streets and online but are proposing solutions, developing and creating prototypes, creating networks of climate activists to help us reach our climate ambitions.

One of my go-to pavilions was the SDG Pavilion. The pavilion brought together experts and policymakers leading the implementation of climate action and the Sustainable Development Goals around the world in a series of discussions on how to accelerate action across both the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement. On one of my occasional visits, I met with Nathalia Lawen, Ocean and Climate Youth Ambassador from Seychelles. She shared her inspiring story on an eighteen-day voyage representing Seychelles on the United Nation's (UN) Ocean and Climate Youth Ambassador Programme (OCYAP) for 18 - 35-year-olds, on the Japanese Peace Boat. She recounted "I've learned a lot, be it ocean protection or climate change and also a bit on the culture of the different nationalities on board and of the countries we visited. It was a great experience for me meeting so many energetic people fighting for the conservation of the environment. It's a voyage I will never forget." Her story resonated with me and I realized that we can only rise to the challenges of the climate crisis by working together irrespective of our differences, religion, beliefs, or race.

THE ROLE OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY & TRANSFORMATION

With increasing pressure on the world's resources and an urgent need to cut emissions, digital transformation can help set the world's economy on a sustainable footing. For a moment, allow me to shift the focus from youth involvement and participation and highlight how technology and digital transformation have a role to play in climate change.

The use of emerging technologies like cloud data, Artificial Intelligence, machine learning, and blockchain can be energy-intensive. If left unchecked the global ICT energy emissions would grow by 15% by 2040. Digital technology is a 'Twin Transformer' of Business. It is allowing us to achieve new levels of resilience, agility, and affordability and to reinvent products, services, and customer experience. At the same time, technology will play a pivotal role in driving forward the sustainability agenda.

Being a digital enthusiast, I joined Accenture's side event on 'Achieving a Sustainable Future through Technology.' The session explored how green cloud infrastructure, equipment and operations, and green software could help organizations deliver more sustainable products and services while also radically reducing their technology footprints. The panel of speakers for this session was power-packed. They had speakers from Microsoft, Green Software Foundation and Times Radio, Accenture, etc. The phenomenon of green software (software that serves as climate solution) was very new to me. We use software every day at home and even in our place of work. With this session, I understood software can be designed, developed, and deployed in ways where it didn't have to consume energy or create emissions.

More on technology and sustainability, I co-designed and moderated a session at the Ghana Pavilion on "Building Tomorrow's Cities: Sustainable Mobility And Intelligent Transportation." This workshop had objectives to explore the innovations in mobility to plan for the future of sustainable and equitable transportation and the role of public-private collaborations. Together with Isaac Aboah (Ghana) and Vedant Kulkarni (India) as panel speakers, I steered conversations on:

- What role does urban planning play for smarter mobility in developing countries.

- How to unlock mobility innovation and technology funding for cities by governments to accelerate the growth of sustainable transport.
- How young people could implement climate actions, including policy design and technical assistance in sustainable mobility initiatives.

Vedant Kulkari, a member of YOUNGO and climate activist, on the panel was of the view that the mobility needs of people with disabilities must be factored into transport and city planning policies. He also indicated that these should be factored right from ideation stages, design stages through to the budget phase. He further went on to explain that a transport system that is well designed for people with disabilities is well designed for all users.

Isaac Aboah, a Ghanaian youth entrepreneur also highlighted the work he has been doing at Curve, his startup, and their vision to transform public transportation in Africa. He touched on how car ownership is still out of reach for the greater majority of Africans. He tackled clear opportunities that exist to transition the new crop car owners into e-mobility alternatives, away from ICE vehicles.

As the moderator for this session, the conversation was geared towards exploring the intersections of efficient, clean, and inclusive transport systems in two countries in the Global South, India, and Ghana. As youth activists, we collectively encouraged cities and governments to build capacity that enabled youth to participate in policy and partner with youth innovators who are daring to change the status quo.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Amidst my learning phase and action phase from COP26, there were moments for me that were profound- youth activities across the Blue Zone and protests around the COP26 venue. World leaders came in and out of COP26 but these words from Barrack Obama were striking. He emphasized that time is running out for climate action and stated that "young people must stay angry." I believe that the truth is we are angry, we are holding our leaders accountable and we are taking action.

My first week of COP26, was a learning curve but also packed with me taking radical actions. I actively engaged and contributed to youth-led and youth-focused sessions and week two was no different. Together with my team, I co-developed two workshops. The first was centered on 'The Youth and Sustainable Development in Africa.' This workshop focused on the sustainable development issues facing the youth in rural communities and how interventions in Africa seek to solve those problems. As I moderated this session, one thing was repetitive in the discussions: if given the platform, young people have a lot to offer and bring to the "table." I had the opportunity to host Abraham Bugre (Green Africa Youth Organization), Margaret Bondziedu Impraim (United Youth Initiative Africa), and Carla Melaco (United Kingdom). In the conversations, we noted key challenges that affected African youth organizations from realizing some of their set out goals. Some of them included but were not limited to the access to capacity building, skills gap, access to funding and grants, systematic bureaucracy in securing partnerships or collaborations from reputable agencies to expand projects locally and regionally. We recommended that the government focus more on skills hubs, requirements needed for partnerships must be flexible for youth startups or initiatives. We also recommended intergenerational exchanges and mentorship to promote experiential learning to close the widening skills gap. We described what our ideal sustainable Africa would look like in the next years to come and this was an Africa with youth at the center of leadership.

Talking about youth leadership, on youth day at COP26, as I rushed between different pavilions in the Blue Zone to listen to inspiring climate stories by youth around the world, I had the honor of meeting Dr. Akinwumi Adesinahe, President of the African Development Bank Group. He had just finished speaking at the AU Pavilion and introduced the Africa Climate Youth Council. In a brief interaction with him on his thoughts on youth inclusion which had been raised in a series of

negotiations at COP26, he rather preferred youth as partners and collaborators in climate issues because the youth are the future. This was refreshing and resounding - there is hope for the future.

Also on youth day, at the World Health Organization (WHO) pavilion, I attended an interactive workshop "Climate change and health under the SDGs" where we imagined, drew, and discussed our visions for a better and safer world - ones in which we had tackled together social, ecological and economic crises and implemented youth demands. My world looked more green, with lots of biodiversity, advanced digital transformation, affordable and accessible internet for all, youth in green jobs, and circular economy. Coming back home after COP26, I envision developing a strategy and collaborating with youth leaders to make my world a reality.

THE RESOLUTIONS AND THE GLASGOW PACT

Wrapping up with COP activities in the final weeks making sure I had fully immersed myself with some of the “diplomatic” proceedings, I had the opportunity to be in a bilateral meeting with the Executive Vice-President of the European Commission, Frans Timmermans, with youth from European Union Youth Forum and YOUNGO. Out of a number of things, he mentioned that the European Union (EU) will represent youth in their delegations and decision-making when he was asked how the EU intends to engage more youth at policymaking levels. We have had more of such political answers and I think now what the world needs in terms of youth engagement should be action and African leaders should be the ones to embrace and champion this. I say this with reference to a quote from Kofi Annan - “Young people should be at the forefront of global change and innovation. Empowered, they can be key agents for development and peace.”

One of the last sessions I was pleased to be part of was “Protecting Climate Resolutions: A Call To Action For Youth Capacity Building.” In this session, hosted at the EY Pavilion, in my capacity as a youth speaker, I discussed how we could move climate change resolutions and negotiations from diplomatic conversations to result-oriented ambitions spearheaded by the youth. The reality of climate action is that it takes time. As far back as the Kyoto Protocols and Doha Amendments, major climate resolutions, all well-intended, are yet to be implemented. However, climate exacerbation is not waiting for us. So the onus lies on young people to demand their place on climate resolutions, negotiations, and actions. I also emphasized how we could mainstream climate education through social media. The panel which featured an intergenerational balance of climate leaders was moderated by Isaac Aboah with John Kiolo (Chairman, Kenya Climate Working group), Dr. James Sankale (Chief Officer, County Government of Kajiado), Nana Akua Busia (Youth & Policy Advocate) and Prosper Tornyi (Skills Hub Manager, Youth Opportunity & transformation in Africa). We unanimously agreed that the youth can and must be robed into the climate decision and negotiations for them to get the necessary experience and expertise. We also explored approaches to youth capacity building at the grass-root levels, and building expertise of young people in specialties like Climate Finance, sanctioning climate injustice, and encouraging youth leadership across the climate landscape.

After twelve days of intense COP26 activities, with young people demonstrating how capable we are and demanding climate justice, the world leaders also concluded with a global agreement to accelerate action on climate this decade. Nearly 200 countries agreeing to the [Glasgow Climate Pact](#) to keep 1.5C alive and finalize the outstanding elements of the Paris Agreement. The Glasgow Climate Pact will speed up the pace of climate action. All countries agreed to revisit and strengthen their current emissions targets to 2030, known as Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), in 2022. This will be combined with a yearly political roundtable to consider a global progress report and a Leaders summit in 2023. Does it end here really?

Many have expressed their disappointment about the Glasgow Climate Pact. According to [Democracy Now](#), "activists say the final language of the agreement is too weak to meaningfully reduce emissions and limit global heating to 1.5C, which scientists say is needed in order to avoid the most catastrophic consequences of the climate crisis. "There has been no real progress," says Mitzi Jonelle Tan, a youth climate justice activist from the Philippines. "

Accountability now lies on all of us. We all need to be involved to save our planet. Young people have a huge role to play in this and as a strong believer that digital transformation is also a way to win this battle against climate change, one of my pledges for what would be next after my COP26 experience would be to initiate a youth catalyst group that would serve as a focal point to monitor efforts of youth appreciation in achieving climate ambitions and ensuring the Glasgow Climate Pact reaches its full potential. I also pledge to promote climate education making use of digital tools no matter how little in my community and across the continent. Finally, I commit to working hand in hand with youth leaders or activists, and organizations to take on initiatives that would make our planet sustainable and better for all of us.

Tomorrow Foundation is grooming the next crop of young leaders with partnerships and collaborations. With their support, I was able to experience my first COP and participate meaningfully and wholesomely. As I reflect back, I would like to thank them for their continued partnership and commitment to supporting youth leaders to make Africa economically independent and resilient.

Reference Text and Further Reading:

United Nations:

[What Is Climate Change?](#)

[For a livable climate: Net-zero commitments must be backed by credible action,](#)

Source: UNFCCC NDC synthesis report update (4 Nov 2021)

Youth Climate Action:

[Climate Change Adaptation](#) (2021)

[Climate Change Mitigation](#) (2021)

[Capacity Building](#) (2021)

Conference of Youth:

[Global Youth Statement](#) (November 2021)

LCOY Ghana:

[National Youth Climate Statement](#) (October 2021)

COP26:

[Cop26 Keeps 1.5c Alive And Finalises Paris Agreement](#) (2021)