ITU Podcast Series: Technology for Good
Episode 13: Youth - changing the world through technology

Opening soundbites:

Young people today make up the largest generation that our world has. But, most importantly, they are also the most interconnected one. And where connectivity is available and affordable, young people are enthusiastic adopters of technology and they are active users of the Internet.

Jayathma Wickramanayake, United Nations Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth and member of the Generation Connect Visionaries Board

Young people need to be meaningfully included, engaged in these discussions. It's one thing to say, oh yes, young people will deal with the ramifications, but young people need to be present, need to be partnered and be not just seen as beneficiaries but actors of change who have ideas of how to find these solutions.

Kirsty Rancier - Young UN AI focal point and United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime in the Strategic Planning and Inter-Agency Affairs Unit.

Young people will inherit a world that's been dramatically reshaped by today's technological advances, and some of them are already playing their own active role in defining the evolution of digital platforms and services that are reshaping the world of their elders

Doreen Bogdan-Martin, Director, Telecommunication Development Bureau, ITU

I'm Max Jacobson-Gonzalez from ITU - the United Nations specialized agency for Information and Communication Technologies. Welcome to Technology for Good, a monthly podcast series exploring how technological innovations are contributing to the health and welfare of the planet and all its citizens.

Youth around the world are taking an unprecedented role in conversations around politics and the environment. Despite many being below voting age these young

people are finding new ways to get their voices heard. This is in no small part to their aptitude and engagement with information communication technologies.

Malala Yousafzai, Pakistani activist and blogger on female education rights, Greta Thunberg, leader of the school climate strike, Emma Gonzalez, one of the leaders of the Parkland Never Again movement against gun use in the United States of America - these names represent just the tip of the iceberg of a growing number of youth activists and youth-led organizations that are affecting cultural and political norms with their messages.

Generation Connect, is a new initiative of ITU's own Youth Strategy which aims to engage global youth, empower, and encourage youth participation as equal partners alongside the leaders of today's digital change. ITU wishes to work for and with youth. If you are a member of the global youth population, or if you are interested in supporting these efforts, you can get in touch at https://www.itu.int/generationconnect

VO:
Here's Doreen Bogdan-Martin, ITU's Development Bureau Director to tells us more about how the ITU is engaging young people and connecting them with decision makers in the information technology space.

Doreen Bogdan-Martin, Director, Telecommunication Development Bureau, ITU

Engaging in a dialogue of equals is going to help each generation understand the challenges that the other faces and what each needs from tomorrow's technologies so that we can ensure that digital remains a positive and catalytic force in building the world that we want. ITU's Generation Connect initiative is all about encouraging the participation of young people as partners and advisers to the leaders driving today's digital transformation. The journey so far has been inspiring. Young people from all around the world have shown us just how much motivated they are to get involved. Their unique insights, skills, regional perspectives will ensure that the Generation Connect Youth Summit that we will hold next year, ahead of our World Telecommunications Development Conference, will generate bold and meaningful outcomes that can feed directly into our WTDC agenda and

discussions. Our path towards WTDC, involving and empowering young people, is absolutely critical.

In this episode we are going to hearing from members of ITU's Generation Connect as well as a range of collaborators and innovators, some young and some young at heart.

Let's hear from Rosie McDonald from the Environment and Emergency Telecommunications Division of ITU.

Rosie McDonald - Environment and Emergency Telecommunications Division, ITU

I'm part of the ITU Youth Task Force. We work with the Generation Connect Initiative, which gives people a voice and opportunity to be engaged, to empower, and to help advance the various development agenda for future generations. And through the Generation Connect initiative there's been various youth groups set up over the past few months, and these are bringing together a diverse range of young people and they basically discuss lots of different topics and feed into the regional discussions, and often that includes environment as well. Keep an eye on that for the next year on the Generation Connect website.

In addition, ITU has a youth strategy which has three areas of action: empower, engage and participate. So, through the engage group we're working on a research agenda with universities, working with young people, and currently there's an ongoing project with a group of four Master's Students in Environment Track. We're doing a project on how technology can address climate change in the context of developing countries. ITU participated in the earth school program last year, which was a great initiative during covid to really engage a much younger audience and to have various quests related to the environment. We often do various Tiktok challenges as well, so there are so many ways technology can help.

VO:
ITU is not alone in launching and supporting youth-centred initiatives. The World Economic Forum has also been very conscious of the importance of giving young

people a platform to air the and the Uplink Initiative that was created just a year ago is bringing more young voices to the tables where key decisions are made. John Dutton, is the Head of UpLink and Member of the Executive Committee for the World Economic Forum, the international organisation committed to improving the state of the world through bringing together business, academia, politics and leaders of society.

John Dutton, Head of Uplink, and Member of the Executive Committee for the WEF.

It's been just over 15 years that we've had the form of Young Global Leaders, the Global Shapers was created 10 years ago, and young people have really been at the heart of how the forum is looking to engage on a variety of issues. But I think we've seen more than anything that the environment is the top issue for young people. For three straight years, our Global Shapers annual survey showed that that was the number one global issue that everybody cared about. And now we're looking to take it to the next level by seeing how we can take action.

From the young global leaders and the Global Shapers I'd say about 75 percent of their projects have a nature, environment, focus. And with the Uplinked Initiative, which was launched a year ago, we now have a way in which they can bring those projects to life. And the effort has really been to be able to accelerate any ideas or solutions from people anywhere in the world who would like to make a difference with the SDGs And we've done that by making possible innovation challenges around different thematic areas. One of our latest challenges, that is up, it's all about young people: it's the Generation Generation Restoration Youth Challenge. We're excited about this platform because it is really about how do we open up the platform. It is free. Anybody anywhere can access it. And you don't have to be a member of the forum, but it's just a publicly available platform. We organise it around our innovation challenges. We have a number of open innovation challenges at the moment, about 11 of them in total right now. And I think one of the things we're so excited about is the ability for people to come on and share their ideas. This youth challenge was launched in the week of Earth Day and already in less than three days, we have already received 15 different solutions showing that young people around the world are ready to take action. We have about a thousand solutions on the platform. One hundred of them have been named uplink innovators, and amongst them are so many young people who are making a big difference.

VO:

Reaching out to youth via technology can happen in many places, but as Jayathma Wickramanayake, United Nations Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth and member of the Generation Connect Visionaries Board, points out, many young people are still not online and will not make it online without the concerted effort of multiple stakeholders.

Jayathma Wickramanayake, United Nations Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth and member of the Generation Connect Visionaries Board:

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented us all with a new reality of online work and learning. But there are still 2.2 billion children and young people aged 25 years or less who do not have an Internet connection at home, many of them being young women and girls. It is part of rights of all young people to be included and meaningfully engaged in the process shaping the world's digital agenda. But without having the resources to get connected, young people will not be able to take part in discussions around digital development, developing digital solutions, pursuing opportunities online, and expanding their knowledge and skills. Investing in resources and infrastructure to provide better Internet access, exploring low-tech solutions, such as social media platforms to host dialogues with young people, and engaging grassroots youth to be able to expand outreach to young people who are often marginalized and left behind, are some of the initial actions that the world can take to make sure young people can be meaningfully included in dialogues to achieve universal connectivity. This support can't be achieved without having a multistakeholder collaboration that involves the United Nations, policymakers, industry leaders, civil society, grassroots networks, and young people themselves, working together to realize this ambition.

VO:

For those youth already online and with access to technologies such as gaming, some innovators in the field are creating ways to harness the power of numbers online and the overwhelming trend that motivates, inspires and worries young people today: the environment, climate change and the future of our planet. Here's Deborah Mensah-Bonsu the founder of DMB crew and Games for Good, which

focuses on helping studios and industry harness games for social impact, to hear her take on how the technology of gaming can connect to environmental change.

Deborah Mensah-Bonsu - founder of DMB crew and Games for Good

I used to work for Xbox first for a couple of years before moving into the mobile space in gaming, and I also did a lot of work with education and mentoring and youth when I was at space8. We set up a mentoring program called Space8 Versity, where we partnered with some London universities to talk about different disciplines and games. And then last year in the summer, I decided to start my own company just to focus on how we could use games for social impact. Now I consult for a few different gaming studios on how they can either better their cultures, the cultures within their studios, or how they can also reach their players through their games. And I consult for something called Playing for the Planet, which is basically a marriage of the video games, industry and environmental experts. And one of the initiatives that's come out of Playing for the Planet is called the Green Game Jam, which we ran for the first time last year with 11 different mobile game studios and reached more than one hundred million players.
And this year we're running it again and we've got three times the amount of teams. And really the goal of the jam is to empower players to change their world through the games that they know and love.

So, if any of you play games, and I'm sure that you do, a lot of time game jams are about prototyping new ideas within a really short amount of time. And then sometimes those games get made. A lot of the time the games don't get made. And we know that climate change is the real crisis, and we wanted to do something where we could empower people now and get them to act now. The reason that we do this when we think that it's impactful is because we have the most valuable things that anybody can have with our players, which is their time and their trust. And when you have both of those things, you can really just affect a lot of change. I mean, a lot of responsibility comes with that as well, because, like I said, these are two most valuable things I think that anybody has. But yeah, if we can channel those things, then we can really use them to make a difference. And so if we care for our players, then they can in turn, care for our planet.

VO:

Delving deeper into youth, innovation and the environment is Elliot David, of Carbonbase, a climate change startup that helps individuals and companies calculate and then reduce or offset their carbon footprint.

Elliot David - Business Development and Partnerships at Carbonbase

ICTs are inherently enabling technologies, right, they allow pre-existing systems and technologies to do better work, to be more efficient or to have greater scale. And so in the climate space, I've been very interested in using ICTs to basically expand the systems we have when it comes to carbon management and deploy it at greater scale. And so for the last nine months or so, I've been working with carbonemys, which is a climate change fintech platform that rewards individuals and businesses for fighting climate change by helping them save money and reducing their environmental footprint, whether it be through emissions, waste, et cetera, things like that.

On an individual level, the way it does this is it helps people to eliminate their carbon footprint and then rewards them with discounts to eco friendly goods and services. So kind of a double edged sword, basically, if you eliminate your carbon footprint, and then it helps people to go further by changing lifestyle through these positive incentives. And the reason why this is really significant is because often technological, often climate change solutions are focused on either environment or technology.

But, and this is my personal opinion, I don't think climate change is an environmental problem. And I don't think it's a technological problem either. I think it's a people problem. Recently, Satya Tripathi, who I believe, is the former head of the U.N. Environment Program, he recently said that the pension funds of countries around the world have something like 45 trillion dollars under-management, and we all know that the investments necessary to stave off the worst effects of climate change are, you know, maybe 10, 20 trillion dollars. So we have to ask ourselves, you know, we know this is a planetary survival issue and we have the means to do it. Why haven't we done it yet? And the answer to that is: climate change, environmental degradation are inherently people problems. So another thing that Carbonbase does is we work with companies because they have an outsized environmental footprint. And through ICTs and other enabling technologies like block chain data analytics, we essentially help them to manage and reduce eliminate their carbon footprints in a way that saves them, saves them money, helps them reduce their operating costs, things like that. So we've taken this view that if you can incentivize people to climate

action, whether it be youth, older people or generations, that's how you can enact this really landscape-scale change.

VO:

The environment may be one of the greatest concerns of global youth, but it is not the only concern. Ethics, related to technology, and how we will integrate systems of AI with the human world in a way that protects both humans, peace, and the natural environment, are key issues that groups like the UNESCO and the Young UN are working on. Let's listen to Kirsty Rancier, who is the AI focal point for the Inter-Agency Working Group on AI at the United Nations and also the focal point on youth of IANYD, the UN Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development. UNODC was the IANYD co-chair in 2020 and ITU is the current co-chair of IANYD.

Kirsty Rancier - Young UN AI focal point and United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime in the Strategic Planning and Inter-Agency Affairs Unit.

I am representing Young UN today as one of the representatives for the Interagency Working Group on AI. I also work in the UN system for the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime as one of the youth focal points there. So I'm kind of at this nexus of youth and AI. For those who are unfamiliar with Young UN and our work, we're a network of over 2000 individuals from different UN stations and we're also made up of people who are young and those who are more young at heart. But all of us have innovative ideas on the UN system and see that there is a genuine need for change. And if we do want to make these changes, we need to make sure that the UN is able to effectively meet the challenges of the 21st century.

There is a concern across the system about the negative ramifications that could happen from AI but it also recognizes that there are some positives. And we're seeing that we're able to make advances with covid-19, with the Sustainable Development Goals or the SDGs. But we also believe and found that young people think that there are a number of ethical implications to AI that have been insufficiently addressed in the UN system, and especially when it comes to disrespect, discrimination, the lawless behaviour of major tech companies in some cases, and also the ability to have fully autonomous weapons. And so

these are some of the larger issues at hand that need to be addressed and need to have some sort of framework to go off of.

As a young representative of Young UN, we also want to recognise that young people need to be meaningfully included, engaged in these discussions. It's one thing to say, oh yes, young people will deal with the ramifications, but young people need to be present, need to be partnered and be not just seen as beneficiaries, but actors of change who have ideas of how to find solutions. I think as UN as a whole, we're coming up with more and more ideas of how to engage with young people, include diverse youth perspectives beyond privileged youth, I use that in quotation marks, to harness the incredible talent that we have.

There are many young people today who aren't able to access digital spaces, online spaces and online opportunities because of limited Internet access. And this was also noted at the ECOSOC Youth Forum when there was essentially a session on inclusive peace, highlighting 10 and 16, where one of the key recommendations from that stated that young people are adversely affected by the growing uncertainty and increasing risk regarding inclusive digital spaces. So this is something that young people have stated and are recognising that we need to change and there needs to be more steps not only within the UN system, but governments, private sectors, people who are making policies around this to make sure that there are these inclusive safe spaces. We need to make sure that when we're considering AI that no one is left behind and that there are important and positive environmental impacts and that those environmental impacts are considered.

VO:
For our final speakers we continue with Generation Connect, the ITU initiative that is bringing youth and decision makers to the same table, ensuring that youth have a real say in what is happening behind the scenes as regulations are set and rules of play are made on the global ICT stage. First we hear from Daniel Kalemi, who is a member of Generation Connect Europe, one of the six ITU regional youth groups, about how not all activism is created equal.

Daniel Kalemi, Generation Connect Europe

People, and especially youth, are now starting to engage in the process, but unfortunately that's really not enough. What I tried and what I definitely saw with Generation Connect was that that kind of engagement was a more engaging activism of youth. And what I've been doing in the past with, let's say, capacity building programs, while youth is able to learn more about the process, is more of a passive, let's say, activism, because you just kind of stay on your bubble and having conversations with other youth. But that just stays there. It stays on those tables and it doesn't go out of there. And I think this is a huge problem because just starting to build up ideologies are not going to engage and pushing forward those ideas, it's not enough. And I think the this experimentation with Generation Connect was definitely an eye opening experience and a step forward to the right direction, because not only you learn more about the process, not only is more engaging, more active, but you actually get to seat to the table and get a discussion with regulators squaring the field and they have the ability to learn more about your concerns and your needs.

VO:
Part of Generation Connect's programme is bringing young people to the table with regulators of ICT from around the world. One of those regulators is Helena Fernandez, from the National Institute of Communication in Mozambique. Here are her thoughts on the participation of youth in the decision-making processes of ICT regulators.

Helena Fernandez - Director of Administration and Finance - National Institute of Communication, Mozambique

In my opinion, participation of youth in regulation process is still weak, but it's seen as a strong opportunity that should be explored. For us as has regulators ICTs improve economic growth, sustainable development, increased human resource development of opportunity. So, I believe that because young people are the ones who use ICT the most, some answers for better regulation of ICT can be found on from them. They are the group that will create a better future and wealth of nations through access to broadband.
In Mozambique for a long time, the regulation process was based on public consultations with all stakeholders. With the technological evolution we make available on our website for anyone to access and participate. In public consultation should be redirected to youth in universities, schools and listen to their feedback. By the end of the 2020, the Regulator

to Universal Access Fund implemented around 89 digital parts of the country in Mozambique anyone who walks in the park can have access to free internet. All the parks are a result of the digital inclusion process, such as the for Mozambique and rural connectivity projects.

Mozambique has also been participating since 2017 in ITU telecom worlds. Such participation has always involved leading startups of young innovators and entrepreneurs, and we are also continuing towards digital inclusion through funding implementation of ICTs in education by equipping primary schools and secondary schools where children in their young age can all be introduced to digital environments.

VO:

Whether young or young at heart, our speakers today all agree that youth are the key to sustainable change on our planet. It is after all, theirs to inherit. Young people today have the greatest vested interest in ensuring the protection of and continuation of a healthy planet and society. For some final words let's hear again, first from Elliot David, who, as well as working with Carbonbase as we heard earlier, is also the Executive Organizer of the Greenlight Climate Festival, a virtual conference held in March and April of this year, and which was the first carbon-neutral event in City University of New York's history and the largest climate conference on record.

Elliot David - Business Development and Partnerships at Carbonbase

We recognize that it's often the case that the communities most affected by climate change are the ones that are maybe disenfranchised from the solutions. And so recently we organized the Green Light Climate Festival. It's a virtual climate conference where underserved students from around the world can sign and access this virtual space and learn about different companies and organizations that are fighting climate change whether it be through circular economy, energy, you name it, it's there. And we had some really fantastic speakers as well. And those speaker sessions are recorded and will be available to youth and students around the world. We believe that every single one of us has a role to play and there's an incentive. There's a carrot for all of us. There's a way that all of us can be empowered to create the necessary climate action that's needed in the next seven or so years before the worst effects of climate change become irreversible.

VO:

VO:

Helena Fernandez, from the National Institute of Communication in Mozambique, again.

Helena Fernandez - National Institute of Communication, Mozambique

In my view, this generation have challenges such as less income, digital literacy, access to broadband and not being part of the decision making process, even being the ones who use more advanced who more sensitive to the needs around them. I see that we have to invest in digital literacy that will help you to unlock their potential so that they can bridge the digital divide. And in my opinion, the future has to involve the young people in the process of creating new regulation because they use ICT intensively and they rely on technology for their education and skills, they need to create a better future for the world.

VO: And finally, here's Doreen Bogdan-Martin, Director of ITU's Telecommunication Development Bureau.

Doreen Bogdan-Martin, Director, Telecommunication Development Bureau, ITU:

Today's adult generation increasingly understands that we need to involve young people in everything that we do if we want to do it well. And nowhere, of course, is this more true than in the digital sphere where young digital natives have the power to innovate for change on a truly unprecedented level. And this is no longer a one-way communication from the old generation to the younger. As the United Nations Secretary-General said, It's time to treat young people as true partners in our efforts to build a better world.

VO:
We'd love to hear from you about the subjects you would like us to explore, and what you think about the discussions on each topic we cover. So, write to us at podcasts@itu.int and visit our website at www.itu.int

We look forward to continuing to explore the technology that plays an intrinsic part of our everyday lives and discovering which technological developments can be utilised for good on the road to connectivity for all.

If you've enjoyed listening to this programme, please don't forget to subscribe to ITU podcasts. You can find us on Soundcloud, Spotify, Apple Podcasts, and more, as we try to dig ever deeper into how technology can truly serve the greater good for all the residents of our planet.

For Technology for Good and ITU, I'm Max Jacobson-Gonzalez.

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