

Youth at the Forefront: Building Green, Circular and Just Futures

26 June 2025

Join the discussions at
thegreenforum.org.

OVERVIEW

This second webinar in the [Green Growth Knowledge Partnership series on Circular Economy and Social Inclusion](#), co-organized with the Green Jobs for Youth Pact, explored the vital role of young people in driving inclusive circular economy transitions. With speakers from the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), Children and Youth Major Group to UNEP and inspiring youth-led initiatives from Nigeria and Bangladesh, the event highlighted the challenges, opportunities, and transformative power of youth leadership in promoting green jobs, equitable access to green skills, and innovative solutions. Moderated by UNEP's Marianna Osipova, the [Youth at the Forefront: Building Green, Circular and Just Futures](#) session also served as an opportunity for youth leaders to share their initiatives.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **Structural inequities and the growing green skills gap require holistic policy responses.** While there is an economic opportunity to invest in green skills for youth, the widening green skills gap is becoming a barrier to industry transformation toward circularity. Moreover, transitioning to circular economies risks exacerbating existing social inequalities if not properly managed. During this discussion, Tomas Declercq of UNEP highlighted that although the circular economy can generate net job gains, it also involves industry-specific trade-offs (geographical, temporal, and across value chain stages), as well as unequal distributional impacts across education levels, income, age and gender. These dynamics call for country-level targeted investments that can maximize job opportunities, address trade-offs, and ensure an inclusive transition where no worker is left behind. A just transition must therefore include holistic policies for skilling, reskilling, upskilling, social protection, and inclusive value chains to avoid leaving behind women, low-skilled workers, and marginalized youth.
- **Youth are at the forefront of green innovation.** Youth-led initiatives are making tangible impacts in addressing environmental challenges through technology and education. Dr. Irene Udebuana, founder of Kids In LET, shared how her organization empowers children in rural Nigeria with STEM and leadership skills to tackle plastic pollution. Her workshops equip youth to build solar lamps from recycled materials, simultaneously addressing plastic waste and energy poverty. Dr. Udebuana emphasized that investing in climate education and circular economy practices in underserved communities is critical to creating grassroots change and environmental consciousness.

- **Solutions should be tailored to address local climate challenges.** Young entrepreneurs are designing innovative, context-specific responses to climate and economic vulnerabilities. Rashed Jaowad Khan, global awardee of UNICEF's GenU *imaGen Ventures* programme, presented URBOR, a climate-smart farming solution that combats soil salinity through green remediation and vertical farming. Built with bamboo for climate resilience, URBOR enables increased agricultural productivity while conserving water. The project has already shown a 25% increase in crop yield and 70% irrigation savings, demonstrating the scalability of youth-led green solutions.
- **Youth inclusion is a must, not an option.** Young people must be involved not just as beneficiaries but as co-creators of policy and practice. Koeun Lee, a thematic facilitator of the Green Economy and Resources Working Group of the Children and Youth Major Group (CYMG) to UNEP, underscored the importance of mainstreaming youth perspectives in environmental decision-making through formal mechanisms like the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA). Youth bring long-term thinking, lived experience, and diverse solutions critical to shaping inclusive transitions.

Social inclusion in circular economy transitions requires systemic collaboration and investment in youth. As Fabienne Pierre, GGKP Coordinator, mentioned in the closing remarks of the session: it is our collective responsibility to create the space for youth to lead and innovate—not just for a sustainable future, but a sustainable present.

Access the full recording [here](#). Keep the conversation going and connect with like-minded peers—join the Green Forum's [Gender and Social Inclusion](#) discussion group.

Useful Resources

- [Children and Group Major Group to UNEP](#)
- [Global Guidance Document on Greening Education for Youth](#)
- [Green Jobs for Youth Pact website](#)
- [Green Skills and Green Jobs Youth Consultation Report](#)
- [ILO Green Jobs and Just Transition](#)
- [LinkedIn Green Skills Report](#)
- [Measuring and Modeling Circular Jobs for a Just Transition](#)