

# Open Letter on the Canadian Youth Perspectives on the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework

On Behalf Of: The Canadian Youth Biodiversity Network (CYBN)

As Canadian youth, we would like to propose the following recommendations to be reflected in Canada's position in the decision-making of the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework to ensure the inclusion of Canadian youth voices.

## **Key Messages and Recommendations for the Global Biodiversity Framework:**

- 1.) Provide equal opportunities for all youth to actively influence, participate, and learn under the Post-2020 Frameworks, and other environmental policy processes.
- 2.) Recognize the right to a clean, safe, healthy, biodiverse, and resilient ecosystem for current and future generations with full and effective participation and engagement of a diverse range of stakeholders including Indigenous and immigrant communities, women, and youth.
- 3.) Promote rights based-approaches where the rights of nature and human rights are integrated into law and policy while recognizing the correlation between the health of nature and human well-being.
- 4.) Advocate for the incorporation of education that is transformative, and covers biodiversity, sustainability, and heritage education in all relevant academic and non-academic curricula at both local and national levels.

Detailed summary of points presented above:

### **1.) Intersectional & Intergenerational Equity**

Youth, regardless of their background, should be given the ability to make meaningful contributions in all stages of environmental policy and decision-making processes. Youth voices should be taken into consideration during these processes, especially in the context of decision-making that directly affects this generation and future generations. To ensure full and effective participation, the allocation of resources to younger generations and marginalized groups is encouraged. The opportunities to participate in such processes should be properly promoted to effectively be received by youth. Active participation should be encouraged in the decision-making process from the local to federal level. Canadian youth should continue to be given an active role in collaboration with the Canadian government in frameworks including, but not limited to, the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), United Nations Framework

Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and other relevant international and national agreements.

## **2.) Human Rights**

Acknowledging that the health of our ecosystem is of, and will continue to be, of the utmost importance for all generations, diverse stakeholders should be included and engaged during the decision-making process, where their voices are equally heard, and recommendations are fairly considered. To achieve this, we need to ensure that laws, policies, and institutions take into account Indigenous and immigrant communities, and young people. Additionally, gender inequality remains an issue in Canada, where resources, opportunities, and benefits should be equitably and fairly distributed amongst all, regardless of gender. Lastly, we, as Canadian youth, continue to advocate for the full implementation of the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, as well as continue active reconciliation efforts.

## **3.) Rights of Nature**

Global movements to create a ‘Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Nature’ are gaining traction and attention by the United Nations. This movement aims to grant nature the same rights as humans and corporations. The endowment of such rights is vital in sustaining a healthy and resilient environment for youth and future generations. Notwithstanding, we must ensure the protection of the intrinsic role Indigenous peoples have as initial stewards of the land including their rights and livelihoods. By granting nature such rights, Canada can hold offenders and polluters accountable to the public. Furthermore, by implementing the rights of nature, we are directly promoting our physical and mental well-being. A clean, intact and biodiverse environment allows for various ecosystem services (with an estimated value of billions of dollars) which include enhancing air, water and soil quality, and directly translating into positive effects on the physical health of Canadians. Moreover, with cases of mental health issues on the rise in youth, it is paramount that preservation and access to healthy ecosystems is advocated for and ensured as exposure and interactions with nature has been shown to improve mental health. In an increasingly complex and urbanized nation, we urge the preservation of nature for the benefit of all lives.

## **4.) Transformative Education**

As youth, we would like to see a more mainstream approach to education where respect for and understanding of nature is promoted. Additionally, we advocate for the mainstreaming of biodiversity and stewardship education in prevalent areas such as the business sector. This enhances our ability to dispel the dualistic myth of separateness between humanity and nature;

instead, we learn that we are part of ecosystems and hence rely on them for our wellbeing. Additionally, this education provides insights into problem-solving techniques relevant to all aspects of life. Finally, it allows us to understand our humanity and hence a more significant sense that we belong to something bigger than ourselves. Nature education will also aid in the empowerment of youth to take positive action. Furthermore, as youth, we advocate for Indigenous knowledge to be integrated into formal curricula, including the recognition of past and present contribution to our society. Overall, our hope is that schooling will leave more room for learning on the land programs in a post-pandemic world as nature is best understood through one's own experience.

As Canadian youth, we urge the Canadian government to continue acknowledging and empowering our voices in these agreements, as the health of our planet is a pillar to our future and the well-being of preceding generations.



Canadian Youth Biodiversity Network

<http://www.cybn.ca>

# Supporting Documents:

## GYBN Manifesto

### **1. Transformative change: Application of Intergenerational Equity in implementing the CBD as a key driver of transformative change.**

Intergenerational equity is a principle that states that all generations hold the natural environment of our planet in common with other species, people, and with past, present and future generations [1]. The principle articulates a concept of fairness among generations in the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. It is the foundation behind the concept of sustainable development [2], is protected by the constitutions of 74% of the world's nations [3], represents a widely recognized principle of international environmental law providing for the preservation of natural resources and the environment for the benefit of future generations [4] and is reflected within the UN system through numerous multilateral agreements, reports, and declarations [5-9] including the 1992 Rio Declaration on the Environment and Development [10]. Furthermore, this principle also finds deep roots in the religious, cultural, and legal tradition of the world [11].

However, despite its general recognition, there has been insufficient application and enforcement of these commitments [12]. If enforced, intergenerational equity could be a strong pillar toward achieving a sustainable future [3]. The following outlines ways in which this principle can be reflected concretely towards such a transition:

- Fully reflecting in laws, policies, and institutions the right of present and future generations to a clean, safe, sustainable and fair environment with healthy and resilient ecosystems [13]
- Ensuring the inclusive, gender-responsive, full, and effective participation of a diverse range of stakeholders including indigenous peoples, women and girls, and youth, and drawing from a broad range of knowledge systems including natural and social sciences, humanities, indigenous and local knowledge, and practical knowledge in decision-making processes [14,15]
- Ensuring the gender-responsive, full and effective participation of younger generations in policy development and decision-making processes [16,17] through the establishment of appropriate mechanisms and the allocation of adequate resources for this purpose at local, national and international levels
- Wide application of the precautionary principle by all actors and sectors in cases where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage to biodiversity [18] and incorporating a gender-responsive intergenerational equity in Environmental Impact Assessment procedures [19]
- Reforming education so as to facilitate a shift/unleashing of existing widely held values on biological and cultural diversity, sustainability, and heritage, from a gender perspective, [20] by integrating such values into school curricula at all levels and in higher education programmes, and promoting them in higher education

- Legally recognizing the collective rights to lands and waters, territories, and resources of indigenous peoples and local communities, necessary to preserving their biocultural legacy and to transmitting it to future generations [21-23]
- Legally recognizing the Rights of Nature [24]

Sources:

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- [7] UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, 1771 UNTS 107, 16 June 1992, (Article 3.1)
- [8] UNECE, *Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making, and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters*, adopted in June 1998. 2161 UNTS 447, (“Aarhus Convention”), article 1.
- [9] UNESCO, *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage*, adopted in November 1972, 1037 UNTS 151; 11 ILM 1358 (1972), article 4.
- [10] Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, 3 to 14 June 1992 (A/CONF.151/26/Rev. 1 (Vol. I), A/CONF.151/26/Rev. 1 (Vol. II), A/CONF.151/26/Rev. 1 (Vol. III)), (“Rio Declaration”) principle 3.
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## **2. This is the open letter of the UNEP-UNDP Youth Manifesto GYBN has led together with other youth constituencies:**

### **Preamble**

Today, in 2020, we face a crisis with no precedents. As the world faces a pandemic which is but one symptom of the chronic biodiversity and climate crises that have been pushed to the side for too long, it has become very clear that we can no longer continue as we have been. We must urgently take concerted, courageous, and truly transformative actions towards repairing the fabric of life on Earth and our relationship with it.

We, youth from different causes, social backgrounds, ethnicities, geographies, and cultures, from local, regional to global levels, have united as one #ForNature.

As COVID-19 continues to strike our health, our livelihoods and our future, we are reaching the very same conclusion: we must no longer settle for short-term, quick-fixes and shallow solutions to deep societal struggles. Those in power must immediately mobilise efforts and resources to transform unjust and unsustainable systems.

### **We demand that our leaders and decision-makers RECOGNIZE that:**

- Nature is our home and the very basis of our survival and well-being. It has not only provided us air, food, and water but also comfort, culture, health, safety, and inspiration. Biodiversity is the very essence of our life support system that connects us and keeps us all alive.
- The recent IPBES Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services exposed, clearer than ever before, the relationship of the ecological and climate crisis with the underlying

inequality and asymmetries that shape our economy and society. We must recreate economic models to ensure a mutually enriching relationship between humanity and the whole of Nature.

- There is a need for the intersectional pursuit of justice: The world's biggest problems stem from systemic inequalities with historical roots that continue to the present. These can only be solved through the unwavering pursuit of social justice. While pandemics, natural hazards, and environmental degradation can affect anyone indiscriminately, they do not affect everyone equally. These cause enormous setbacks, deepening pre-existing inequalities and exposing vulnerabilities in social, political and economic systems. The dramatic erosion of Human Rights during crises calls for a course correction in global politics
- Intergenerational inequalities continue: Our generation is starting to and will in the future face the biggest impacts of the current biodiversity crisis. Despite this, we remain marginalized, unrecognized, and underrepresented in decision-making spaces and lack support and resources to work on appropriate solutions.
- Indigenous Peoples and local communities around the world have stewarded nature for generations—they are at the forefront in caring for and defending biodiversity. Their rights to land, territories and resources and to self-determination must be uncompromisingly upheld.

#### **Youth's DEMANDS for our world leaders and decision makers**

- **Declare a Planetary Emergency:** Address the severity of the ecological crisis, the necessity to act now, and urge all people to recognize that the biodiversity and climate crisis are two sides of the same crisis. A crisis that has its origin in our mainstream values and priorities that shapes a system that pushes for unlimited and unequitable extraction, production, consumption and disposal and completely undermines the capacity of our planet to support all of us.
- **Change in values, priorities and behaviors:** We call for a real transformative change - we call on the whole of society to realign our priorities, values, behaviors and actions. We urge all governments, the private sector, the finance sector, civil society, academia and all other people in a position of power to reinvent our systems, share the benefits of our fabric of life, equitably, and sustainably.
- **Effective and appropriate biodiversity conservation, restoration and sustainable use strategies:** We must implement policies on the conservation, restoration, and sustainable management of ecosystems, landscapes, and seascapes, including nature in cities, through locally adapted, resource-efficient, and just systemic interventions. These must be based on the precautionary principle and follow a global mitigation hierarchy for nature conservation. In this context we are urging governments to fully utilise the opportunity presented by the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021-2030) to prevent, halt and reverse the degradation of our ecosystems and the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework in order to build a clear pathway to achieve a world in harmony with nature.
- **Bold, ambitious and binding environmental global goals:** Preventing and reducing pollution, including marine and plastic pollution, reversing forest loss, ensuring water security, halting and

preventing the loss of biodiversity, restoring damaged ecosystems, reaching land degradation neutrality, are all necessary to combat the environmental crisis and reduce disaster risk.

- **Rights based approaches:** Human Rights are not separated from Nature Rights and the urgency of the climate and biodiversity crises requires a just response centered on human rights, equity, and justice. To succeed, global agreements must defend human rights, protect environmental defenders, recognize nature's intrinsic value, and hold governments and corporations accountable for activities that degrade natural systems or infringe on peoples' rights to a safe and healthy environment.
- **Improve participation in environmental governance mechanisms**  
We must adopt participatory, bottom-up, and inclusive approaches to ensure the voices, wisdom, and experience of Indigenous peoples and local communities, women, and youth are genuinely included. We must designate spaces for their political participation and support their initiatives via inclusive financial schemes. Also, those on the frontlines who are most vulnerable to environmental disasters should receive support to become more resilient by addressing issues of poverty, inequality, racial/gender discrimination, justice, and human rights
- **Transformative education:** As youth, we believe that a crucial way to achieve Transformative Change is through integrating Transformative Education on biodiversity, climate change, sustainability and cultural heritage in school curricula at all levels and promoting it in informal education; as well as by fostering intergenerational learning and interdisciplinary collaboration and exchange.
- **Intergenerational Equity:** Beyond the need to achieve equity within generations, actions on sustainability must be based on the principle of Intergenerational Equity, reflecting justice between generations. We must respect future generations' right to a safe, clean, and healthy environment, the same right that we are all entitled to today.  
There is a need to move beyond a tokenistic view of participation toward taking more proactive steps in ensuring all generations are meaningfully and equally engaged in policy development and formulation so that intersectional and intergenerational equity can be achieved.
- **Gender-responsiveness:** Gender inequalities need to be addressed and eradicated, by fully recognizing women and girls' contributions and roles in nature conservation and sustainable use; as well as guaranteeing women and girls rights to land, to health, to a life free of violence, and to full and effective participation in decision-making processes.
- **Responsible Private Sector involvement**  
The private sector must take responsibility for the power they concentrate and for their actions that impact the environment and our society. They must reform their activities to end destructive practices on all levels and processes, from extraction to disposal, as well as increase financial support to initiatives promoting sustainable lifestyles and the safeguarding of climate and biodiversity.
- **Means of implementation and enabling conditions:** New global commitments cannot be achieved without strong and long-term political will, strict compliance mechanisms and appropriate means of implementation in place such as targeted capacity-building on all levels,

resource mobilization, strategic divestment, elimination of perverse subsidies and a complete reform of subsidies harmful to both climate and biodiversity.

We urge governments to strengthen institutions, to increase efforts to fight corruption and to step up contributions to multilateral financial mechanisms, most importantly the Green Climate Fund, the Adaptation Fund, and the Global Environmental Facility, among others, and to also significantly increase domestic resources.

- **Reform the System of Environmental Governance:** Lead an inclusive and just way forward to Stockholm+50 where gaps in the environmental governance are being addressed, where a system which is more inclusive by design is built and where we move beyond silo-ed approaches in tackling this planetary crisis.