

Sustainable agenda for future youth

Sustainable Development Goals Unit, Wawasan (Vision) Brunei Office, Prime Minister's Office; Green Brunei; and MY Action for SDG

Delivered at the United Nations Summit for the Adoption of the Post-2015 Development Agenda, New York, the message from His Majesty the Sultan and Yang Di-Pertuan of Brunei Darussalam was that “the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are people-centred, inclusive and comprehensive. They focus on people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership. To implement them, we have to enhance our individual and collective actions. Furthermore, we have to work in partnership through capacity building, learning from each other's experiences, and sharing best practices.”

This message remains pertinent to today's global conditions and endures as a strategic steer in driving national efforts to achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, complementing Brunei's aspiration of realising its national

vision, Wawasan Brunei 2035. Brunei's expectation for the future is that, by 2035, people will have progressed in their education, have become highly skilled and accomplished, will enjoy a high quality of life, and that the economy will have grown to become dynamic and sustainable.

The overarching ambition for the SDGs in Brunei Darussalam has been communicated through the Prime Minister's office, specifically the Special National Coordination Committee on SDGs (SNCC). The SNCC functions as the national coordination centre for the implementation of SDGs in the country, with ongoing efforts to ensure that the SDG ecosystem supports progress and ensures the participation of all stakeholders, individuals and institutions.

In 2023, the SNCC led the preparations for Brunei Darussalam's submission of its second Voluntary National Review (VNR) which was successfully presented at the 2023



Image: Government of Brunei Darussalam

His Majesty Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkhiah Mu'izzadin Waddaulah ibni Al-Marhum Sultan Haji Omar 'Ali Saifuddien Sa'adul Khairi Waddien, Sultan and Yang Di-Pertuan of Brunei Darussalam with the award winners of BIBD Sustainability Youth Leadership Award



Image: Government of Brunei Darussalam

Minister at the Prime Minister's Office and Minister of Finance and Economy II, Honourable Dato Seri Setia Dr Haji Mohd Amin Liew bin Abdullah, presented the Second Voluntary National Review 2023 of Brunei Darussalam at the 2023 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development on 18 July 2023

High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development on 18 July 2023 in New York. Building on the country's first VNR of 2020, the second presented a more comprehensive and in-depth view of the efforts towards progress, achievements and challenges. One of several improvements was the meaningful inclusion of youth in the VNR process, thus upholding the principle of leaving no one behind.

Engagement and participation of youth in the SDGs

Brunei Darussalam has a close-knit society and the principle of leaving no one behind is culturally embedded and woven by the national philosophy of the Melayu Islam Beraja (Malay Islamic Monarchy). Partnership has always been seen as a solution to intensify more comprehensive actions towards SDG achievement. This was the drive for the strategic approach adopted by the SNCC through an SDG partner initiative with the vision of creating an extensive network of SDG advocates and supporters from all stakeholders, youth in particular.

Investing in future SDG partners is also an approach pursued by the SNCC, particularly by engaging youth. The role of youths as agents of change in sustainable development is well-established and universally recognized. And, over the years, the country has witnessed a rise of youth-led movements within the government, NGOs and businesses that are anchored by values of sustainability and inclusivity. They have their own inspiring stories demonstrating their confidence, devotion and resilience in driving the sustainable agenda.

Promoting youth SDG action

Experiences shared by the two prominent SDG advocates that the participation of youth in achieving the SDGs needs to be activated, nurtured and empowered. Recognizing this, the Prime Minister's office organized an inaugural SDG youth dialogue initiative with cooperation from the SNCCC, the Ministry of Youth, Culture and Sport and Bank Islam Brunei Darussalam (BIBD). Youth-led programmes and activities were run by the youth-led NGOs, namely the Brunei Youth Council, Green Brunei, and My Action for SDGs with the support of the United Nations resident coordinator office for Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia and Singapore and UNESCAP.

The dialogue was aimed at fostering the development and empowerment of future sustainability leaders and serves as a testament to Brunei Darussalam's commitment to harness the potential of its youth by nurturing a generation of visionary and innovative change agents who will shape a more sustainable future for all.

The SDG youth dialogue initiative brought together young people aged 15 to 25 to debate the importance of youth in achieving the SDGs and aimed to identify specific opportunities to move young people closer to supporting the SDGs

Perspectives and experience from Green Brunei

Green Brunei's humble beginnings began when a group of friends came together with one goal in mind; to educate and raise awareness of environmental issues and introduce sustainable practices in Brunei Darussalam. The group of friends initially began with organizing educational workshops, which eventually evolved to include tree-planting events and beach clean ups that are still being run to this day. Officially established in August 2012, Green Brunei is among one of the longest running social enterprises in Brunei Darussalam.

The SDGs play a vital role in shaping a sustainable future. It's important to recognize their interconnectedness; progress in one SDG influences others. As such, there is a need for active participation from all layers of society, as the future of the Earth is secured by collective endeavour. For this reason, Green Brunei aims to serve as a focal point between key stakeholders – government, private sector, educational institutions and the general public— in order to facilitate this collaboration.

Green Brunei's primary objectives align closely with SDG 13 (Climate Action), especially within Brunei's context. Its activities not only address climate change's impact on the environment, but also work to prevent it through education and awareness. These efforts support national policies such as the Brunei Vision 2035 (Wawasan Brunei 2035) and the Brunei Darussalam National Climate Change Policy (BNCCP).

As of August 2023, Green Brunei has successfully organized over 300 activities in line with the SDGs. For SDG 14 (Life Below Water) and SDG 15 (Life on Land), the beach and river clean-ups have collectively removed over 20,000 kg of waste. Additionally, recycling initiatives have processed approximately 180,000 kg of discarded trash that would have otherwise ended up in landfills. Furthermore, Green Brunei, often in collaboration with governmental and private entities, has planted a total of 13,490 trees across Brunei Darussalam through its flagship tree-planting events.

Additionally, Green Brunei organizes various community development programmes aimed at enhancing the confidence and skills of the community, with particular focus on youth empowerment. These initiatives include up-skilling programmes and educational tours, which also provide the opportunity to educate and raise awareness about environmental preservation. These endeavours specifically align with SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequality) and more. Over the years, Green Brunei has successfully engaged with approximately 27,000 individuals from diverse backgrounds as participants or volunteers during its events.

by promoting inclusiveness and meaningful youth engagement in SDG implementation, monitoring and review as well as identifying solutions and creating avenues for learning and collaboration, including partnership building. Participants recognized their role in addressing critical issues and identified matters of particular concern to them, namely environmental sustainability, social inclusion, economic growth and quality education. The programme offered a space to talk about their concerns and invited them to develop long-term, inclusive and creative solutions. At the end of the programme, the input and findings led to the development of the SDG Youth Statement.

SDG youth statement

The SDG youth statement was presented to the chair of the SNCCC and, on a separate occasion at the Prime Minister’s Office, to the Minister and Second Minister of Defence as a pledge from youth to play an active part in SDG progress in Brunei. The statement presented young people’s understanding of the SDGs as well as their sense of urgency to address barriers to youth development which primarily focused on issues related to deepening poverty, widening inequality, climate change, rising unemployment and mental health. Answering the call to accelerate SDG implementation, the youth group recognized potential methods of tackling those issues and pledged to make more contributions to the sustainable agenda through various means including volunteerism.

The key message from the statement is youth’s readiness to play an active role as future SDG partners. Young people are not only beneficiaries of SDG achievement but also contributors to transforming greater SDG actions in their own way. With further support, the Brunei Darussalam youth will be empowered with more partnerships to accelerate efforts towards the 2030 Agenda. The SDGs can only be truly achieved when all stakeholders are engaged and the youth recognized as an invaluable resource to ensure a meaningful society-wide effort.



Image: Government of Brunei Darussalam

The SDG Youth Statement was read out by the SDG Youth Dialogue’s participants

Perspective and experience from MY Actions for SDGs

MY Actions for SDGs has always been about believing in youth’s ability to create positive change in the local community. It began with the realization that, although the SDGs were introduced in 2012, much talk of the sustainability agenda was still missing from public discourse in 2018. As an advocate under the ASEAN MY World 2030 programme, Nurul Hadina Haji Alias (Dina) founded MY Actions For SDGs and was empowered to push the conversation and unify existing efforts that contribute to the SDGs.

Being the only advocate in Brunei Darussalam proved to be a challenge because of the limited manpower and resources. Despite that, Brunei’s unwavering spirit of volunteerism and social values drove the campaign forward. This is one example of collective action in which one individual, when collaborating with like-minded youths, could create meaningful impact to further the agenda. By recruiting a team of passionate youths and a network of youth organizations and strategic partnerships, the SDGs slowly became a point of public discussion.

In just two months, this culminated in the mobilization of 150 youth volunteers who conducted a survey among children, adults and the elderly in Bandar Seri Begawan as to which six of the SDGs are most concerned about. Through highlighting the role of youth during talks and engagements and providing the necessary skills and knowledge to take action through workshops such as Theory of Change, Critical Thinking, and Becoming A Climate Change Citizen, as well as advocacy programmes in schools and leveraging partnerships for the goals, the country has seen a large shift in community norms where the youth has increased belief in its own power to create change towards becoming a more sustainable nation. Not only has the conversation surrounding the SDGs started, it has transformed into action. Today, the growing organization has engaged with more than 1,000 youths locally and will continue to educate, empower and engage with children and young people in order to build a sustainable future.



Image: Government of Brunei Darussalam

A member of the Climate Project, one of the award winners of the BIBD Sustainability Youth Leadership Award



Image: Government of Brunei Darussalam

Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports, Honourable Dato Seri Setia Awang Haji Nazmi bin Haji Mohammad in a group photo with award winners of the BIBD Sustainability Youth Leadership Award and event participants

SDG Sustainability Youth Leadership Award

In support of further developing the country's youth, BIBD announced its support through the BIBD Sustainability Youth Leadership Award, which aims to empower and inspire the next generation to take bold steps towards addressing environmental, social and economic challenges, forging a path towards a more sustainable and resilient society. In August 2023, in conjunction with the 18th National Youth Day Celebration, the BIBD Youth Leadership Award Ceremony was held, where four groups of young people were provided with awards of up to US\$ 2,220 to implement their sustainability projects, facilitating a valuable opportunity to translate the SDG Youth Statement into action. The four winning groups were as follows:

Climate project

This project aims at driving responsible climate action by equipping Bruneians aged 15–40 with a climate change toolkit, engaging with relevant stakeholders to curate the toolkit and educating them with concise and accessible information on issues related to global climate change, equipping them with the necessary tools and skills to act as agents of change.

Project upskilling Tutong

This project focuses on bringing capacity-building workshops to communities in rural Tutong. The workshop will focus on digital literacy, marketing and networking, to provide the communities with marketable skills and make them more employable.

Project Pink Box

The project aims at providing sanitary care products to young girls and women while promoting open discussions on women's health, hygiene and wellness through educational talks and community programmes. Its main goal is to ensure access to vital sanitary care products and necessities to promote sustainable living and raise awareness about health and wellness.

Project Hayaa

This project aims at raising awareness and educating youth, women and individuals concerning social health through workshops. This is to promote social responsibility by encouraging abstinence and spiritual enhancements while respecting religious aspects and Malay Islamic Monarchy¹ values to address issues related to reproductive health.

Conclusion — enabling a sustainable future for youth

The actions described here are just the beginning. There is a deep desire to contribute the work from a whole-of-government to a whole-of-nation approach, as envisioned by His Majesty the Sultan and Yang Di-Pertuan of Brunei Darussalam. Youth has a crucial role to play in the realization of the SDGs, both in contributing to solutions and aspirations and as agents of change. The country's youth has the potential to shape and frame SDG issues that matter most to them and can provide perspectives that are fresh, insightful, and progressive. Brunei Darussalam will continue to explore suitable and practical tools for improvement that strengthen the meaningful inclusion of the country's youth.