



youth environment living labs

Empowering Young People to Learn,
Lead and Advocate for Environment and
Climate Action in Malaysia
Case Study



PROGRAMME OBJECTIVE

The Youth Environmental Living Labs (“YELL”) programme aims to empower adolescents and youth in Malaysia to:

- Become environmental leaders;
- Advocate for local and global issues of concern;
- Lead and collaborate on environmental action-learning projects;
- Foster a growing youth-led environmental movement in Malaysia through sharing stories, experiences and opportunities.

COUNTRY CONTEXT

The UNDP-UNICEF Change for Climate Report (2020) suggests that youth in Malaysia (which account for 43% of the country’s population)¹ are eager to act on climate and environmental issues. They are worried about the issue, with 92% recognizing climate change as a crisis, and nine in 10 having personally experienced environment and climate-related effects.

However, young people in Malaysia face barriers to taking action. Some of these include the costliness of a climate-friendly lifestyle and a lack of information and knowledge on how to tackle the climate crisis in their own communities. In addition, most of the information around climate change focused on the impact in the Global North, and there were few local narratives and resources to galvanize Malaysian youth to understand how climate change is impacting their own country.

⁽¹⁾UNDP, UNICEF & EcoKnights (2020). Change for Climate: Findings from the National Youth Climate Change Survey Malaysia. <https://www.undp.org/malaysia/publications/change-climate>

UNDP-UNICEF MALAYSIA'S APPROACH

UNDP and UNICEF Malaysia, recognizing the shared objective of empowering adolescents and youth with climate awareness and tools for action, joined hands to pilot the YELL programme in 2021. YELL provides young people by:



CONNECTING

youth environmental movers and advocates across the nation and region, tapping into national and subnational networks.



ADVOCATING

jointly with young people on issues of concern, including climate and environmental futures and SDG localization.



RUNNING

action-learning community environmental projects in collaboration with youth organizations, institutions of learning, and other partners.



DOCUMENTING

learnings, wins and losses, successes and failures, to inform, inspire and strengthen a growing youth movement.

TAKING A CROSS-SECTORAL APPROACH TO ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE ACTION

The YELL team continues to work with the Adolescent Development and Participation (ADAP) team to define approaches and best practices for adolescent and youth engagement. This has involved bringing together different sections in UNICEF – not only ADAP and Climate, but also Education (identifying possible entry points for formal integration within the curriculum), and Innovation (spotlighting innovative solutions by young people within the YELL Resource Hub).

YOUNG PEOPLE AT THE CENTER OF PROGRAMME DESIGN

Throughout 2021, UNDP and UNICEF initiated various engagement sessions with youth and key stakeholders to co-design and operationalize YELL in 2022 (dubbed YELL Phase 2). This involved focus group sessions on the YELL's key pillars and activities as well as engagement with potential partners.

YELL PROGRAMME IMPACT 2021 - 2022

Since its inception, UNDP and UNICEF have developed tools, challenges, and partnerships to promote environmental action for and with young people.



YELL YOUTH STARTER KIT

A core component of YELL is to develop resources to help youth to get started in their climate and environmental journey. This includes developing toolkits that are based on local stories, incorporate local languages and highlight youth-led content. The downloadable [Youth Starter Kit](#) provides ideas and inspiration for young people just starting out on their environmental journeys to take action, no matter who or where they are. It covers topics such as what is YELL, anecdotes of young leaders' journeys, a Q&A section to answer common questions about youth climate leadership, and a list of organisations in Malaysia that young people can join.

#BUMIBELIA STORIES COMPETITION

The #BumiBelia Stories Competition encouraged youth aged 13-25 years to discover and tell stories to inspire action within the local and cultural context of Malaysia. These Stories explore memories of the past, celebrate today's local environmental heroes in the local communities, and elaborate their visions for the future. Two such stories are featured below and more can be found on YELL's website.



Life Lessons from Mother Earth

Mother Nature is experienced differently through the eyes of different generations. From connecting with the environment through a festival, to learning a life lesson from a childhood prank, these are elder stories told by two generations to Kaveeshaswary Thamilarasu, a teenager. Hear how her Patti, Perumai Manikam, and her Appa, Thamilarasu Arumugam, learned how to live, learn, and co-exist peacefully with Mother Earth.



Heroes of My Art

Art has always been an integral part of the Malaysian society. Unfortunately, art supplies are also a cause of environmental pollution. This includes plastic and harmful chemicals such as cadmium. However, this does not mean that there are no alternatives. Ilya Maisarah binti Thariq tells the stories of how Aida Azni, a local painter, creates watercolours using natural ingredients. Bidah, a neighbour, uses plants when cooking to colour her food, which demonstrates culinary art.

YELL NETWORK RESOURCE HUB (yell.my)

The YELL Network Resource Hub on Environmental Action [mapped a vast network](#) of youth leaders, organizations and innovations. This strengthens the movement and not only acts to inspire young people, but also provides a platform to enable them to take action. The network and website also serve as a hub to collate external resources for young people to access on green careers, green skills, innovation approaches, mentorship, behavioral change and others.

YELL CHANGEMAKERS BOOTCAMPS

A series of changemakers bootcamps were held in partnership with Impact Malaysia (IM), an initiative by the Ministry of Youth and Sports in Malaysia. These camps raised awareness around participation in politics and built youth's capacity to create solutions for environmental issues. YELL led the environment track with 130 youth. The tracks resulted in the ideation of 18 environmental themed projects and the most innovative ideas were invited to be incubated by Impact Malaysia and its partner.

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**MALAYSIAN YOUTH
ENVIRONMENTAL LEADERS**

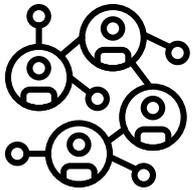


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**LOCAL ENVIRONMENTAL
ORGANISATIONS**



**MAPPING
A NETWORK
OF PARTNERS**



39

**YOUTH-LED
ENTERPRISES**



11

**ACADEMIC
INSTITUTIONS**



16

**GOVERNMENT
ENTITIES**



AN INTER-AGENCY, YOUTH-LED PROGRAMME: WHAT WORKS?

1. UNDP and UNICEF's collaboration connected young people's rights to a healthy environment with Malaysia's own development plans. Collaboration between the two entities resulted in bringing the economic development angle in conjunction with the youth rights perspective, leveraging the strengths and networks of each agency. The collaboration between UNDP and UNICEF also widened the network of potential partners further, allowing each agency to multiply its reach.
2. Letting young people take the lead. UNDP and UNICEF took a back seat, allowing young people to showcase their own ideas and meaningfully participate at local and national levels. Youth were able to utilise their own connections to build the YELL network and empower their peers to focus on their own issues of concern via the YELL platform. UNDP and UNICEF seek to facilitate connections between the YELL network with key decision-makers to give them platforms to raise their voices and make policy recommendations.
3. A focus on local narratives and reaching out to more vulnerable groups. Spotlighting local youth leaders, stories and solutions in order to ensure that they had meaning to the young people involved in the programme. Recognizing that young people from marginalized backgrounds typically are not engaged or have access to environment and climate incubation programmes, YELL took additional time and steps to connect to UNDP and UNICEF's network of NGOs and CSOs to ensure the programme was relevant and accessible to all.
4. Promoting learning-by-doing. YELL brings together awareness, resources and action by encouraging young people to take the first steps in exploring environmental community initiatives. In Phase 2, YELL is looking to pilot Green Apprenticeships as a means to building up 'green' skills and jobs/careers.



CHALLENGES

1. Working across Ministries. To date, YELL is supported by the Ministry of Environment and Water Malaysia (Kementerian Alam Sekitar dan Air, or Kasa), and the Ministry of Youth and Sports (Kementerian Belia dan Sukan, or KBS) and is seeking to identify a path to scale through the government. Partners need to continuously explore clarity on structure, roles and partnership modalities, particularly where multiple UN agencies and government ministries are collaborating. Further, government buy-in should go beyond providing 'access' to young people (eg. Schools). Working across ministries typically requires more time and patience!

2. Building meaningful partnerships with youth, donors, and ecosystem organisations requires reaching beyond typical partners and taking time to map out and meet new actors who are leading in this space. Donors must align their objectives to YELL's - ensuring that they are not trying to influence YELL's agenda. Additionally, bringing young people into the programme design and providing an ongoing space for engagement is key to making the programme work. Working with youth led organizations can also be a challenge for UN procurement and partnership modalities, leading to programme delays. Long-term partnerships can be difficult to maintain since leadership in youth networks changes often by nature.

3. Participation and representation – Partners need to recognize that ensuring diverse participation and representation of young people from marginalized backgrounds may require additional time, new partners, and new methods of outreach. For example, to reach youth from non-urban, non English-speaking communities, and certain marginalised communities materials need to be translated, available in print and disseminated through trusted local partners. Digital first may be convenient, but it is not always accessible. YELL has done well to continuously engage these communities so far, but requires more resource investment to maintain this.

What Comes Next?

2022 has been focused on operationalising YELL programmes and the first Exploration (seed-funding) programme will kick-off in Q4 of 2022, with project results expected in Q1 2023. A pilot of the Conservocation (internship) programme is expected to begin in Q1 2023, while the YELL Network Resource Hub will continue to be updated to be responsive of current local developments.