

# USE A CLUB

By Yvonne Maingey

I became involved in environmental activities when I was 11 and there was an uproar in my country, Kenya, because hundreds of acres of forest were being destroyed for development. This stirred something inside me, and my parents encouraged me to start an environment club at my primary school. Over 45 children signed up. We organized clean-ups within the school grounds and surrounding areas, raised money to buy dustbins for the school, made posters and held exciting awareness-raising activities to encourage environmentally friendly behaviour. The club's success led to us being invited to attend conferences and workshops at UNEP in Nairobi, where we shared its achievements with other Kenyan children.

At one conference I was noticed by a television station and invited to host a children's programme that included environmental tips and features, culturally influenced stories, young achievers and educational pieces. I have attended several international environmental conferences, met many influential and motivational people and most recently been elected to the UNEP Tunza Advisory Council as Advisor for Africa. As such, I have set up a regional network, participated in the Africa Environmental Outlook for Youth project and collaborated with the UNEP Regional Office for Africa to set up a youth page on its newsletter and website.

Poverty is one of Africa's biggest problems. More than three out of every five of its people live on less than a dollar a day - and lack food, shelter, education and other basic requirements. Each day HIV/AIDS orphans more than 400 children. The environment does not rate as a top priority as people feel that they must first deal with these much bigger problems. But poverty and environment are interlinked, and both must be taken into consideration to achieve development.

We have an amazing range of wildlife, beautiful beaches and wonderful scenery. Tourists pay large amounts of money every year to come and enjoy the African environment. However, if we don't protect what we are so blessed with, tourists will no longer visit and we will lose a large source of income and foreign exchange. The water we drink and the food we eat come from the environment. If we want to alleviate poverty we must start protecting it - this in itself is development!

Young people can truly make a difference by highlighting these important links. Educating one another and sharing information and experiences are some of our most effective tools. The Millennium

Development Goals are a huge step forward and - though they are mainly a set of guidelines for governments - we must be involved in advocating and, where possible, implementing them.

By the year 2015, we will be the decision makers. By being involved in the process now, we give ourselves a much better chance of seeing the goals become realities. Mahatma Gandhi once said that we must be the change we want to see, which means we need to set the examples and start the processes towards action now.

Let's make our voices heard. We should know the MDGs by heart and challenge governments on how they are implementing them. More than half of the world's population is made up of young people so we are the major stakeholders, and **MUST** be involved.



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