BUILDING AN INCLUSIVE AND CROSS-REGIONAL YOUTH MOVEMENT FOR ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Reflections from African and European youth in Friends of the Earth
This zine is a collection of conversations, learnings and tools gathered from youth in Friends of the Earth in Africa and Europe.

The voices featured are from those who participated in the Africa-Europe youth exchange that took place between 2016 and 2018. It involved fourteen cross-regional exchange trips, two regional youth meetings and three cross-regional gatherings.

The aim of these activities was to enable us to share knowledge and skills around strengthening the youth environmental justice movement. During the gatherings and exchanges there was a particular focus on what it looks like to build an youth movement that is inclusive, and how we can strengthen solidarity across regions.

Throughout the project we were inspired and challenged by one another as we shared stories about struggles for environmental justice our own contexts and reflected on the current and historic relationships between our countries and regions. Through the selection of conversations and reflections featured in this zine we aim to share some of this learning with the rest of the Friends of the Earth federation and beyond.

We have also included some of the tools we used during our workshops to enable us to learn from and with each other, which were inspired by popular education methodologies.

With thanks to all those who made the project happen, from 15 FoE groups across Africa and Europe: Sustainable Development institute/Friends of the Earth Liberia, Friends of the Earth Togo, Centre pour l’Environnement et le Développement Cameroun/Friends of the Earth Cameroon, Justica Ambiental/Friends of the Earth Mozambique, National Association of Professional Environmentalists/Friends of the Earth Uganda, Environmental Rights Action/Friends of the Earth Nigeria, Groundwork/Friends of the Earth South Africa, BUND Jugend/Young Friends of the Earth Germany, Young Friends of the Earth Ireland, Global 2000/Friends of the Earth Austria, Zelena Akcija/Friends of the Earth Croatia, Les Amis de la Terre/Friends of the Earth Belgium (Wallonia & Brussels), Natur og Ungdom/Young Friends of the Earth Norway, Milieudefensie/Friends of the Earth Netherlands, Young Friends of the Earth Africa and Young Friends of the Earth Europe

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“On 9th October 1962, Uganda got independence from the direct rule of the British. What always lingers in peoples’ minds is whether Uganda is independent or not, both politically & economically. For me I think Uganda, like many other countries that were colonised by the European countries, especially those in Africa, is still under the shock & overcoming this may not come in a few decades because the imposed capitalistic system has been deeply entrenched in our day to day life.

The foundations for misrule and exploitation of the people by its leaders being experienced in Uganda today were laid down by the British, who continue to encourage bad leadership. The continued exploitation through marginalisation in world trade of Uganda’s economy & others is a direct output of colonialism. This relates very well to Paulo Freire in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, where he says, when those who have been oppressed take power they emulate the methods of their oppressors.” Peruth
Durban cross-regional youth meeting, April 2017
LEARNING TOOL: MAKING A CROSS-REGIONAL TIMELINE

WHY USE THIS TOOL? This is a tool that can be used to generate knowledge and understanding on the inter-relations between countries and regions, and explore both historical and modern day manifestations of colonialism. In the context of FoEI’s Africa-Europe youth exchange 2016-2018, this exercise was used at our first ever cross regional youth training in Durban, South Africa, to explore the colonial history and modern day connections between the two regions and the seven European and seven African countries taking part. It formed a basis of knowledge and understanding on the historical inequalities still at play between the two regions, and the complexities and sensitivities for cross-regional working in this context.

ROLE OF FACILITATOR The facilitator ensures each participant gets equal time to present their cards and significant moments. They also input content and context and can answer questions of clarification.

1. Each participant is asked in advance (e.g. two weeks before the event by email) to research and prepare five significant moments in the history of their own country, which happened as a result of its relationship with the other continent. Start with an early event – this probably will link to colonisation – and end with a more recent one.

2. The facilitator prepares a long blank timeline for the wall and introduces the session.

3. Everyone is given 5 minutes to put their five significant moments onto cards. When ready, the facilitator invites everyone to place their cards in the appropriate place on the timeline, then asks each person to present their cards and the significant moment they describe. There are different ways of presenting the timeline, for example, you can go chronologically from the earliest to latest dates, or country by country.

4. Gradually, a collective timeline is built connecting all the countries and regions present.

5. Questions and answers can be given at any moment during the activity to go deeper into topics and events.

6. The facilitator can in addition prepare general cards with either pictures and/or text from other important or momentous historical moments that are relevant to the topic. Each participant can be given one or several cards, and can discuss in pairs or alone what it is, where it dates from and what its significance is, to then be added as appropriate to the timeline.

This tool was developed and delivered by Jeanne Prinsloo of the Friends of the Earth South Africa/groundWork “Environmental Justice School” and written up by Sophie Manson, FoE International
“Many environmental movements in the north have separated the struggle for environmental justice from the struggle over land. Decolonising the environment movement requires reconnecting these struggles.” Chihiro

“We have been paying the environmental costs of western industrialisation, so we need justice. If the climate debt is paid, that will provide us with financial means and capacity to make the transition.” Samuel

“The other thing which is also important is the issue of consultation, by this I mean not thinking on behalf of the people, but rather meeting with the people with a listening heart. We can learn from their various struggles or resistance experiences for example - not just bringing new ideas and dropping it on them.” Wale

What does decolonising the environmental movement look like?
Giving ear to each other, taking note of what is vocalized audibly and inaudibly with the intent to understand and then act based on gained knowledge is an important way of showing mutual respect.

This is a key learning for me from this youth exchange between Africa and Europe. It has re-echoed the words: if not clear, ask for clarification, if in doubt, ask a question and if understood, reiterate to be sure you are on the same plate. I have come to see listening as an essential ingredient required to prepare the meal called solidarity, which was pivotal in this project and in our daily works.

In my opinion, all issues befalling us today have arisen because we do not take heed of each other. Our world systems today produce what they want, when they want it and how they want it in the interest of profits without taking into account what is truly needed, how is it needed and what form it is needed by the people for whom they are producing.

This art of listening goes beyond keeping a polite silence during conversations. It involves trying to understand views from the speaker’s standpoint and imaginatively experiencing the spoken and unspoken words of the other and not imposing our pre-conceived opinions.

For decades humans have succeeded in convincing themselves that they are superior to other beings that make up Mother Earth, silencing their voices without taking heed of what they have said and are still saying. This has translated into the present day social systems, where men feel the same way over women, where old folks feel “all knowing” over the younger folks, a system where the young are seen as tools or instruments for actions rather than contributors to causes and where a race feels superior over another because of their privileges or the color of their skin. A system where “developed” nations impose their ideas over indigenous knowledge of “developing” nations in a “feel good” or “we are helping you” mode, without paying attention to the genuine needs of the people.

Not listening to each other, I believe, has resulted in the climate chaos experienced worldwide today. We have been turning a deaf ear to Mother Earth’s viewpoints, her imposed limits and constraints set in place to make our place of abode habitable. Hence the rising sea levels, increased cases of flooding, hurricanes, tsunamis, heatwaves, desertification, to mention a few.

The recent moves by the global north to close her borders to climate refugees from the global south will only get worse until we start listening to each other and Mother Earth.

Our world will get worse until we truly start to listen to each other.

Karl A Menniger said listening is a magnetic and strange thing, a creative force. When we are listened to, it creates us, makes us unfold and expand.
During the cross-regional youth meeting in Amsterdam 2018 we discuss how we can dismantle patriarchy in our organisations...

"The devaluing of the emotional work & unpaid labour that women do.” Kate

"Men dominating positions of decision making.” Anon.

"Cultural norms and values that dictate what men & women’s roles should be.” Precious

"Normalisation of violence against women, including sexual advances at work.” Anon.

"Sometimes systems of oppression like patriarchy can seem overwhelming. But if we can break them down into the different pillars that prop them up, then we can begin to chip away at them.” Jeroen
LEARNING TOOL: PILLARS OF SUPPORT

WHY USE THIS TOOL? Pillars of support is a model that can help us to think about complex systemic oppressions in our movements and society, what sustains them, and how we can dismantle them. It demonstrates both the resilience of these systems, and the power of campaigning, mobilising and organising to pick apart the elements that sustain them, finally overcoming them. It is a dynamic learning tool in which people embody “pillars” propping up a system of oppression and devise strategies to collapse these pillars.

1. As a group, choose the kind of systemic oppression in your organisation, movement or wider society that you want to focus on. For example, you could use this tool to explore racism, neo-colonialism, patriarchy, heteronormativity, class oppression or ableism.

2. Invite the group to think about and share any “pillars” they know of that ensure this form of oppression is maintained. These might include cultural, institutional, ideological or economic pillars.

3. Collect as many suggestions of pillars as possible from the group. When there are no more suggestions, invite the group to vote on the pillars they want to investigate most. Choose between 3-6 pillars depending on the size of your group.

4. Invite participants to nominate themselves to represent each of the pillars— one person per pillar. Ask these human pillars to discuss in a small group how they would reinforce or maintain their strength if their pillar of support for the systemic oppression was threatened.

5. Invite the rest of the group to break into small groups, and allocate each group one pillar of support to consider. Ask them to come up with as many strategies as possible that they might use to dismantle that pillar.

6. Now, invite the human pillars to stand with a mattress on their heads, spread out equally so the mattress is balanced in the air like the roof of a building. The goal of these pillars is to keep the mattress (representing the systemic oppression) in the air.

7. Invite the group to take on each pillar one at a time, naming the strategies they would try to use to dismantle this pillar.

8. Invite the person who is the pillar to respond with their own strategies for reinforcing their oppression.

9. Continue with each pillar until the pillar feels like the strategies are effective enough that it is defeated. Then address the next pillar until it is defeated, and the next, until the pillars are no longer able to hold up the mattress, and the structure collapses.

10. Debrief the activity as a group, talking through the different pillars of support one at a time. Question to ask could include: How did it feel being a pillar/arguing with the pillar? Which pillar was easiest to dismantle, and which was the most difficult? What strategies do you think were most effective? Which of these do you think you would try first if you were to take on this system of oppression in real life?

Written up from an activity facilitated by LABO
Dismantling the pillars of support for patriarchy during the cross-regional youth meeting in Amsterdam 2018
Precious Naturinda from NAPE discusses how addressing patriarchy is essential if we are to build an inclusive, intersectional movement.

Photos: Alba Rosa van der Velden
Young FoE Africa is formed in January 2017 at the African launch meeting of the Africa-Europe youth exchange in Liberia.
HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THE SITUATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN YOUR COUNTRY, AND THEIR PLACE IN THE ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE MOVEMENT?

Young people in rural Liberia are marginalized and mostly termed rebellious by the elders and authorities, especially in final decisions around their land and natural resources. Cultural practices have also excluded both women and youths and pushed them to the back in processes for environmental justice in their communities.

Notwithstanding this, many young people in rural communities are now actively participating in environmental justice movements without fear due to the gradual understanding of the importance of resisting the status quo and power-plays of politicians and multi national companies. Youth of central Monrovia and Montserrat are more forceful, open and are boldly questioning the status quo and organizing resistance, including street protests in the capital to ensure their voices are heard by government.

Power-play (politics) is playing key role in silencing the environmental justice movement in Liberia but to no avail. Many young, strong activists/environmentalists that are known for fighting for policy change, change of practices to protect human rights, curb deforestation and gross rights violations, and demand a change to the status quo are given lucrative positions in the government that change their focus or approach to the movement. This very well known strategy to some extent slows the progress for environmental justice in some aspects, but overall there are strong environmental justice movements across the country.

WHEN AND HOW DID YFOE AFRICA COME TO EXIST? WHAT WAS THE NEED YOU IDENTIFIED?

The resolution to formally establish and launch YFOEA was reached at the January 2017 launch and preparatory events of the Africa Erasmus+ project in Monrovia, Liberia.

The group further resolved to work on the developed campaign themes of FOEI and FOEA, but will use varying activities to achieve the set outcomes /goals. The vision of the group is a ‘shared vision’ of FOEI and FOEA. YFOEA envisions ‘Raising the next generation young informed leaders living in solidarity and equity in an African society of independent people’.

THE NEEDS WE IDENTIFIED WERE:

a.) Defining “youth” from YFOEA perspective is very crucial for proactive, effective, unsanctioned youth involvement in the global call for youth based engagement to contribute to the needed changes in the world.

b.) Focusing on varying types of youth engagement (or lack of) in respective countries as a way to begin breaking the barriers to youth and women's participation in decision making within the African context.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR YOU PERSONALLY TO BE A PART OF YFOE AFRICA?

It means the world to me!!! Being a part of this wonderfully young and brewing movement that has enormous potential and so many talented, passionate, intelligent young environmentalists that are resolved to ‘stand in solidarity’, ‘wake up to dooms day together’, ‘fearlessly face doom together’ and together ride the long, bumpy and sometimes treacherous road to achieving environmental justice is inspiring and humbling all at once!
potential and so many talented, passionate, intelligent young environmentalists that are resolved to 'stand in solidarity', 'wake up to dooms day together', 'fearlessly face doom together' and together ride the long, bumpy and sometimes treacherous road to achieving environmental justice is inspiring and humbling all at once!

Imagine one morning you wake up and discover that your home has been sold to a foreign company without your knowledge or consent. Not only that, but the land around your house and town - land that your parents have farmed and hunted on since they were kids, land that you'd farmed and hunted on your whole life, land with all your sacred sites and ancestral graves, your heritage and future, your forest with all its beautiful and important species - was also gone and conceded to agricultural concessions by the government without discussing it with you or your neighbours. You're told that you'll get light compensation, although it won't be nearly enough to replace your source of livelihoods or to prepare you for the future, less in value to what the land is worth. With all the good laws on the books supposedly protecting you as a Liberian, when you try to protest, the response is quick, firm and brutal: you don't really have a say, the decision has been made.

This is essentially just the tip of the iceberg for customary communities and young customary environmentalists in Liberia. YFOEA to me and the other advocates / environmentalists in rural Liberia is like a thin strip of light lining a very dark sky. No matter how dark the sky or how thin the light, the light always gives comfort, strength and inspiration. Having a youth environmental movement in Africa and coming from a country with about 65% youthful population, solidarity building with other young think tanks and environmentalists is key to gaining environmental justice, especially in this dark era in my country.

WHAT IS YOUR DREAM FOR YFOEA? WHAT DO YOU HOPE IT COULD ACHIEVE?

My one everyday dream for YFOEA is that the strengths, passion, potentials, intelligence and love for the world that is the center of this movement extends across Africa, breaking barriers that hinder youth participation in the fight for environmental and social justice, developing creative, innovative ideas that will make successful the fight for environmental and social justice and springing forth a strong youth think-tank that becomes a formidable force in the environmental justice movement - the power of the mind is immeasurable.
REFLECTIONS FROM DURBAN, SOUTH AFRICA:
TONJE SÆTHER

Much can be said about my trip to South Africa, it will be almost a bit difficult to sum it all up in one
single text. Almost impossible, but this is an attempt.

When I think back, it’s not the cool monkeys who ate garbage and play fought, that the hotel obviously thought
that vegetarians exclusively eat pasta or the long flight I remember best.

What I remember best is all the astonishing people I met and the disappointing consequences a total lack
environmental justice results in. All I learned, things I may have already known but did not fully comprehend
and the close ties we made. These are points I take with me in my role in organization.
As a Norwegian, I’m used to focusing on climate justice. We want climate justice. I did not really think so
much what climate justice is. If you had asked me before the seminar, I’d thought about the oil workers who
should focus on green solutions, that bunad-dressed (ref: national folk costume) ladies are fined because
they demonstrated against giant electrical wires in Norwegian nature, while in Bergen, men with their big cars
can paralyze a whole city without consequences because they do not want to pay a toll fee and maybe that not
everyone recycles is not fair for the climate.

Recycling is important and everything helps is still my motto.

Do you ask me today what climate justice is, I think about Peruth, from our partner country Uganda, who could
tell stories about entire villages that are thrown out of their homes and farms because a multinational company
has found oil or coal in the area. Without being heard or compensated, a whole village loses everything they
love and are made into refugees. The despair these people may feel I can not even imagine. It’s so far from
my reality and everyday. I will not be able to comprehend these horrors. This is environmental crime and
environmental injustice of the worst kind...

When one sees and experiences environmental behavior so close, one must nevertheless consider it , even if you
have lived a protected life in Norway.

One of the evenings we had an excursion, it was for a neighborhood meeting. A factory near this neighborhood
had been exposed to fire. We were told that it was not the first time this district was exposed to similar
fires. For several years they have asked the authorities for a plan of evacuation, which is not available even
after decades of questions and pressure to make one. These people had to live with the imminent danger these
plants made.

I was a little impressed at this meeting when all three men from the authorities had appeared this evening. Not
quite so impressed after they had opened their mouths.
The fire chief had prepared his input on the matter at hand by printing several sheets of chemicals and
substances that had not flared up. Needless to say, he was stopped eventually when he wanted to read each
single substance and what amount was saved from the flames. Some of the last thing he said before he sat down
again haunted me. He served everyone at this meeting the following claim: The phosphorus burned so fast that it
again haunted me. He served everyone at this meeting the following claim: The phosphorus burned so fast that it entered the sky and clouds so quickly that it would not come back down. It burned too fast. We will probably laugh at that statement; we know both that phosphorus can be very harmful and fatal in large amounts. The use of phosphorus bombs directed against humans is prohibited precisely because of the harmful effects phosphorus causes. We also know that evaporator comes down again no matter how fast or slow the process goes. We know it’s not true because we’ve learned this at school, but it’s not the case for most of the victims of such environmental crime. They do not know what phosphorus is and what effects it may have. So when they are told from the authorities that this is true, I myself would believe in them with the same background. It’s part of the sad reality for these folks. These people are victims, you can imagine the protests if a coal power plant had started business in your neighborhood without a filtration system. Actually with or without a filtration system. It would not have happened.

To better explain what I learned about exploitation of locals, nature and environmental justice in Africa, I can take you to Norway. I was really surprised when I realized that something of the same thing happening in developing countries happens in Norway. We like to stamp ourselves as a fair and green state. Although I could draw the parallels from such multinational companies to little Norway who dubs themselves as one of the world’s richest and most democratic countries.

FØRDEFJORDEN

All Norwegian nature conservationists know Førdefjorden, most Norwegians have heard of this fjord in recent years. The main points and similarities are a foreign company capturing interest in natural resources. They bring their own workers from their native country, which in turn leads to positions all being filled. It does not create new jobs for the community that might be promised or just assumed to be created. Business such as fishing, agriculture and tourism are being destroyed.

Those who understand this, of course, say no, those who say yes think they get jobs and life gets so much better when this company comes to the neighborhood. This is something that never happens in reality and it’s too late to complain when the fjord is filled and all living life is gone. Thus they have this ugly beast in the garden so to speak. A factory, coal power plant or a mining company that dumps all its waste in the sea. This damages the industry as well as everything there, giving fewer sources of income to the local community and damaging the natural resources they already have. This is what happens in developing countries, and obviously industrialized countries like Norway.

It may be worth mentioning that much of the environmental crime in other countries directly affects the health and living standards of people in the immediate area. Another impressionable memory is from a documentary about a family who lived at a coal power plant in South Africa. The mother had over time developed asthma as a result of air pollution. In the absence of knowledge, she was now worried that her four year old daughter had inherited this disease from the mother.

One of the days we were on a Toxic Tour, where we ourselves could experience these factories. We were informed about it, but I was anyhow shocked when we stood by an oil refinery. We also stood right next to the garden of a family. These factories were next densely populated aeries. We could see smoke coming out of the pipes at the factory. This smoke spread over houses like a kind of sick gray cloud falling over ceilings. This was poisonous smoke, this was a neighborhood where children lived.

What perhaps gave the most impression was “Cancer Valley.” Here there were two oil refineries. We stood at a distance, in the back we had a view of a beautiful beach and green habitation, in front of us was another
One would think that the reason is quite clear, we have two major oil refineries that pollute and we have many other factories in the area. The plants are fifty years old or older. The record is over 100 different chemicals in the air. Several of these have a direct connection with asthma, respiratory problems and cancer. The factories themselves mention this as a handy mishap and that these are pure coincidences. There is no correlation between their emissions and the major health issues of residents nearby. These companies earn staggering amounts every day and it is clear who pays the price.

So what do you do? What can you do?

Even I was not aware of the extent of these offenses. I did not know that it was so bad.

Never would I have guessed that. The smell I smelled when I visited these areas is something I hope I will never smell again. Chemicals and rotten eggs. I was almost worried about my health after just a few minuscule hours, how about those who have to live there? Those who have no other place to go?

It is easy to feel powerless. What can you do in our home country when this happens on the other side of the globe? I'm glad I was far from alone when I learned about this, then I'd been filled with a powerlessness I've never experienced. Fortunately, I was not alone and afterwards we could talk about what we had seen and experienced.

If climate justice is something you or your local group want to look into, your first bid is to get informed. I thought I had an pretty decent understanding of the subject, I studied this topic at university and thought I had an overview of what was happening. I was totally shocked at how ignorant I really am still. You never get finished learning, just finished. One does not go above all, the world is bigger than one believes and it is environmental justice and. Find an issue that engages, whether it's coal-fired power plant, “land grabbing” or the biology behind these gray poison carpets.

In my local group, we have focused on locals affected by natural disasters. We have shared knowledge we have worked here and there, from a debate, an article, a lecture etc. We have invited a film screening and talked about what we have watched in the film. We have prepared questions to initiate a debate as we learned quite quickly that it was tricky without some leading questions.

That you and your local team have knowledge does not, unfortunately, stop emissions. The truth is that it is difficult to directly influence. That is probably not what you want to hear, but you should not give up hope completely. As I say, everything helps.

Be informed about which companies are ethical, restrict consumption. Repair instead of buying new. If we are making the right choices, we will together make a big difference. These companies understand how the economy works, they would love to have your money. If you want ethically and environmentally-friendly products, they are willing to give you this if they trade with them.

Another thing that will help is to support those who work in these areas. Maybe the local group or you as a private person can send them a letter or e-mail. Think how cool to know that you have people in a country far away cheering on you and supporting you in the hard fight you're fighting.

So even if you cannot make a big difference alone we are strong together!
Tonje Sæther from Natur og Ungdom/Young Friends of the Earth Norway reflects on her trip to Durban, South Africa for the first Africa-Europe cross-regional youth event in April 2017.
“Sometimes what gets in the way of RADICAL actions and doing what needs to be done in solidarity with others is the fear of losing our reputation with businesses, funders or government... But only an ice cream seller can make everyone happy. We need to stand and do the needful regardless of the risks.” Wale

“I visited Liberia during our Africa launch meeting for the exchange project - the palm oil plantations are huge. A village in the middle of the palm oil plantations used to own the land, but it was taken away from them. FoE Liberia had managed to get them legal documents that meant they couldn’t be relocated.” Niven

“What we can do in the Netherlands, is actually to go and fight them right here where they are headquartered, in the Hague. There are three Dutch banks that invest a lot of money in dirty palm oil plantations.” Joris

During the cross-regional meeting in Amsterdam we discuss what makes cross-regional solidarity meaningful...
Youth from Young FoE Africa and Young FoE Europe join with Milieudefensie/Friends of the Earth Netherlands to take action outside a branch of ING bank in Amsterdam. The bank has investments in palm oil plantations across Africa and the world, including Nigeria, Liberia and Uganda.
LEARNING TOOLS: PROBLEM TREES

WHY USE THIS TOOL? This tool enables a group to explore social problems by identifying their symptoms and root causes. Once the problem has been analysed and its root causes mapped, the group can start to identify solutions that will address the systemic causes of the challenges we face.

1. Invite the group to identify the problem they want to investigate. In the case of our meeting, the following problems were identified: Organising spaces that aren’t inclusive, visas being denied for African youth to come to Europe, youth work being under resourced, and challenges in doing meaningful cross-regional solidarity.

2. Select one problem, or break into small groups, with each group working on a different problem, and ask the group to draw a tree on a large piece of paper with its trunk, roots and leaves. Ask the group to write on the trunk the problem they have identified.

3. On the roots of the tree, invite the group to write as many causes of the problem as they can identify. When they have done this, encourage them to trace the roots back even further, asking what some of the causes of these root causes might be. You might encourage the group to think of different kinds of root causes - for example institutional, economic, social or cultural.

4. Next, ask the group to think about the ways in which this problem is manifested in society, or its symptoms, and write these as the leaves of the tree.

5. Once the tree is complete, you can ask the group to create a solution tree with the aim of identifying some of the ways of overcoming the problem. In the solution tree the trunk will be the ideal situation, the roots will be the different approaches and strategies you can try to tackle the root causes, and the branches will be the fruits or results you would see if you address the problem. It is important to identify these fruits - often it is knowing these that drives us forward and gives us the motivation to keep campaigning.
“During this project we’ve come across the challenge of getting visas to bring people to meetings in Europe. The process was not only traumatizing for African activists, but they could not participate fully in the meetings. If we are to build an intersectional & inclusive movement for all people, we need freedom of movement for all people.” Maraśka

“While the European visa system makes it hard for the African activists to attend meetings in Europe, young people are experiencing additional discrimination because of their lack of savings or low incomes.” Fiona

“We need to take account of these challenges when we plan international exchanges – one solution would be to hold more meetings in Africa. I would also like for people to write to the European embassies to let them know that we are not going to Europe to stay but to attend meetings.” Sampson
EXTRACTS FROM AN OPEN LETTER TO MEMBERS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION, 
WRITTEN BY YOUNG FRIENDS OF THE EARTH AFRICA 
AND YOUNG FRIENDS OF THE EARTH EUROPE FOLLOWING 
THE DENIAL OF SCHENGEN VISAS TO FOUR AFRICAN PARTICIPANTS 
IN A CROSS-REGIONAL MEETING IN BRUSSELS, JULY 2017.

There is a huge global inequality when it comes to freedom of movement. “Fortress Europe” functions as a safe haven for those who have been accepted, but shuns and casts out others. Often it is institutional flaws that lead to these barriers, such as the ones experienced by members of Young Friends of the Earth Africa who were invited to a meeting in Brussels in July 2017. The seven participants from African organisations applied for visas, yet only 3 out of 7 were issued.

Unsurprisingly, Europeans had little trouble getting visas to travel to Africa for the previous meeting in South Africa. The difference between Europeans and Africans obtaining visas is shocking and unsettling...

Sadly, the denials of visas for our meeting is not an isolated case. Non-European movements and peoples are banished to the sidelines of climate action development and decision making. Solutions to the climate crisis are often devised by countries in the Global North, who have the historic and contemporary responsibility for causing the climate crisis, and imposed upon the Global South, who are the most vulnerable to its impacts. This is neither fair, nor is it working. It is time that Europe starts listening to the communities in the Global South who live on the frontlines of climate change. It is time to stop imposing market based solutions (such as REDD) that enable corporations and governments of the Global North to continue polluting. It is time that Europe takes responsibility for the disasters that climate change is causing in the Global South, such as the mudslide and heavy flooding in Sierra Leone in August 2017, the hurricane that killed over 800 people in Haiti in October 2016, recent devastations provoked by Irma in the Caribbean and the many other disasters caused by extreme weather and exacerbated by historic, global inequality. It is time Europe acknowledges the outflow of people who are displaced by this climate violence, rather than justifying inaction with narratives that treat people as other and absolves responsibility. It is time that we start breaking down the walls of this fortress.

The withholding of visas for people from the Global South is especially relevant when we consider that the next two international UN climate talks (COP 23 and 24) will be held in Europe, and that many of the major decisions around global climate action were made in Paris in 2015. COP 23 in November 2017 is presided by Fiji, an island nation extremely vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, but is going to be held in Bonn, Germany. By holding these events in Europe and restricting movement of people from outside and inside Europe, this puts up barriers to the people whose voices are so crucial to hear on these issues. If EU countries restrict the allocation of visas for participants from the Global South to COP 23, this will undermine the value of having the talks presided by a nation like Fiji. Current EU border control policies exacerbate the power asymmetries between the Global North and Global South, stifle the processes of international solidarity and therefore obstruct structural change. The many deportations from Western European countries and push-backs of refugees in South-East Europe make us wonder whether the EU is systematically discouraging people from coming into Europe. We strongly believe that there is no “refugee crisis”, as the mainstream media and politicians are claiming, but that we are undergoing a crisis of humanity and a crisis of EU values. This kind of narrative only strengthens “fortress Europe”, spreads xenophobia and makes it very difficult for people from Africa to get visas to participate in crucial conversations in which we so desperately need to hear their voices. We will continue the fight to make our movement and these systems more inclusive and equitable. There will be no climate justice without freedom of movement for all!

Yours Sincerely, Young Friends of the Earth Africa and Young Friends of the Earth Europe
DEFINE YOUTH/ YOUTH WORKERS.

A youth or youth worker is a person who is working in the realm of assisting the young to gain more power in society. To give them more self-belief and an enduring quality of always maintaining an optimism in society because the older you get, the more jaded you become. Youth are always willing to take a risk.

HOW DO YOU SEE THE ROLE OF YOUTH IN EJ ACTIVISM?

Always questioning what the present thinking is, always pushing the older people in power to think more youth-like with optimism. However, it is difficult for the older generations to be optimistic because of the neoliberal politics they have had to deal with. It is important that we get youth to question the comfort zones that the older activists get stuck into.

Many of the young people I encounter in Africa don't have the deeper sense of the political powers in Africa. Our groundwork Environmental Justice School is a platform that gives young people a deeper understanding of power. Their role has to be the understanding of power and being able to question that.

Some youth play on the edge of technology in today's society and organising is faster at one level. The way things are organised is not the same as in the past which was much slower but dedicated. Many of Africa's youth may come from poverty but due to education are able to move away from poverty. Vast majority of youth in Africa are poor and do not have access to technology, we must be careful not to create a class issues within another issue. We need to organise.

AS THE DIRECTOR OF FOE SA, HOW DO YOU THINK YOUTH SHOULD BE ENGAGED WITH?

There is a risk to take that enables youth to engage in governance structures. This is sometimes difficult in Africa because the ideas of the organisations are shaped over time by the leaders in the organisation, you think of FoE Nigeria, Mozambique, South Africa, Uganda, Ghana where the leadership has been consistent for decades. It is a risk we have to take and one which can be done simply by employing young people and giving them responsibility without burning them out.

HOW DO YOU SEE INTERGENERATIONAL LEARNING IN PRACTICE?

Our Environmental Justice School is a space for intergenerational learning, how youth use technology and they see campaigning as they work in spaces with older folk. We need to reflect more on that and try and shape the youth to think more critically. It is not only how youth can teach us how to move things forward but keep a counter balance and that it is about meeting and talking and engaging and debating and having a balance between optimism and energy and depth and consistence. How does one build and environmental justice movement? It's about taking the creativity and blending it with the face to face movement building - which is slow and respectful of all.

In Europe in the 60s and 70s there was a global resistance agenda by those in their early to mid 20s. It was a big resistance to nuclear, the cold war among other issues. The children of these activists became mainstream but then their children are the youth of today and they are questioning things. They have the politics of their grandparents.

ON THE SOLIDARITY BETWEEN YOUTH IN EUROPE & AFRICA:

The European youth movement is actively finding ways to work and assist others in the federation which is great. Africa does not have to follow the European method but it’s good they are open to assisting. Youth today see it differently and we have to commend them for that. Across the federation, having a parallel youth movement is important. If there is a BGM every two years, it would be good for youth to have their own spaces and joint spaces within the BGM and through this, build the sustainability of the movement. If the federation wants to understand how to work with youth, they can set up a youth working group - of youth and the older folk - and think about how to strengthen youth globally or they can include youth in the campaigning. But first I would start with a small working group of people.
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