

Creating a Sustainable Future: Youth and the Millennium Development Goals

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Abstract

The presentation will be an interactive session that showcases the best practice models for engaging Pacific youth and communities in achieving the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDG). At the UN Millennium Summit in 2000, world leaders from 190 countries committed to goals and targets — reducing poverty, hunger, disease, literacy, child and maternal mortality, environmental degradation, and gender discrimination.

The session will focus on:

- YSF's journey (documentary) — mobilising youth action and how to turn an idea into reality
- youth engagement in the MDG process — processes and outcomes of the Pacific Youth MDGs Summit (PYMDGS), Samoa (May 2005)
- sustainability scenarios — developing solutions through teamwork and innovation.

The session will involve a screening of a short documentary on the journey taken by Youth for a Sustainable Future (YSF) in their efforts to lobby UN bodies to recognise the role and contributions of young people in promoting sustainability in the Pacific. The documentary will also cover best practice models for youth engagement in MDG (e.g. effective relations between youth and government/UN/NGOs, mobilising youth action via information and communication technologies).

This will be followed by a problem-solving exercise in which the conference participants will form into small groups and solve 'sustainability scenarios' (developed from real-life problems related to the MDGs as experienced by young people and communities in the Pacific). This group exercise is intended to encourage creative thinking through collaboration of ideas and consensus building — skills that are essential for fully engaging young people at all levels.

Background on YSF and PYMDGS

The Youth for a Sustainable Future (YSF) Network was formed in August 2003 by a group of three Pacific Islands delegates to the World Youth Congress in Morocco: Sitiveni Tabualailai (age 26) from Fiji, Shasheen Jayaweera (20) and Kate Morioka (23) from Australia.

The goal of the YSF Network is to mobilise young people to achieve the Millennium Development Goals set out by the United Nations at the Millennium Summit in 2000, and convene a Pacific Youth MDG Summit to highlight the contribution made by young people towards the achievement of the MDG and strengthen regional solidarity.

Within one year, the YSF Network grew to form an online group of 30 youth members mainly from the Pacific Islands and from countries as far as Zimbabwe and Argentina. The YSF Network members are all volunteers who have never physically met but shared a strong collective vision for empowering young people to contribute and lead the attainment of the MDG in the Pacific.

Seventeen months after the founding of YSF, and dedicating more than 900 volunteer hours and sending over 200 emails in pursuit of funding and support, the dream of holding a regional MDG youth conference finally came true through support of the United Nations Country Team in Samoa and a funding of US\$80,000 from the United Nations (UN) MDG Trust Fund.

Convened for the first time in the Pacific region, the PYMDGS will bring together 60 young leaders aged between 18 and 29 years from over 15 Pacific Island countries including Tonga, Cook Islands, Niue, Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea, Tokelau, Samoa, Fiji, Australia, and New Zealand.

Unlike other youth summits, PYMDGS is organised by young people for young people. The Summit aims to create a united platform for young people to articulate issues and actions to achieve the MDGs in the region by the year 2015.

In May 2005, YSF transformed into Youth for a Sustainable Future Pacifika, becoming the first online resource network in the Pacific, entirely run and managed by young people. YSF Pacifika now has over 100 members worldwide. Useful information about the MDG, grants and conference opportunities are made available on the YSF Pacifika website, and a fortnightly e-bulletin provides members with up-to-date information on current projects undertaken by the YSF Pacifika members. YSF Pacifika is currently discussing its long-term operation as the premier youth resource network with international aid agencies such as the United Nations Development Programme and the World Bank.

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