

**“INTERNET DISCUSSION BETWEEN VOICES OF YOUTH,
HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS AND UNICEF MALAWI”
22TH MAY 2009**

Introduction



The moderated Internet discussion was conducted as part of the ongoing participation of young people in preparation for the upcoming Young Africa Summit in Uganda 2010.

The Young Africa Forum is organized as part of the African Union Summit and provides an opportunity for young people to raise issues of concern and their aspirations with their political leaders.

The theme is sustainable agricultural development. UNICEF and all other UN agencies have been invited to support countries to mobilize young people to participate in the YAF. UNICEF Malawi is therefore organizing a series of discussions on the MDGs to ensure that young people bring their views and issues to the attention of their leaders.

Our guest speaker was Ms. Kerry Constabile, Specialist, Environment and Young People in the Adolescent Development and Participation Unit in the Gender Rights and Civic Engagement Section. Prior to joining UNICEF, Kerry has focused on climate change policy, natural resource management and environmental education in the private and public sectors. She began her career with the ecological science division of UNESCO, and has since worked with the Earth Day Network, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in Mozambique, UNDP Energy and Environment Division.

Who were the participating young people in this moderated discussion?

3 high schools that offer basic skills in computers were identified to participate in the internet discussion. School heads were asked to identify three high-performing students who also demonstrate an interest and understanding of topics relating to the MDGs.


Participating students and schools:

- 1. Lilongwe Girls' Secondary School:** Bertha, Thandie, and Jane.
- 2. Chipasula Secondary School:** Lesson, and Veronica.
- 3. Chinsapo Secondary School:** Edward, Nellie, and Joseph.

Vanessa, a student with high proficiency in computer skills was invited to assist in case there would be a problem with students using Skype or the internet.

UNICEF and MDG 7


The discussion began with Maria Cristina Gallegos asking students if they had ever heard of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The students' knowledge about the MDGs was minimal. A few indicated that they had heard about the MDGs, but did not know specifics.

 **Maria Cristina Gallegos:** “My name is Maria Cristina Gallegos and I am the Voices of Youth Coordinator. Voices of Youth is UNICEF's website for young people. It allows them to express themselves, interact and take actions on issues of their interest.”

The agenda for today will be as follows:


- MDGs General overview.
- MDG Goal 7.
- Introduction to Climate change expert: Kerry Constable.
- Discussion.

 **Grace:** “Yes.”


 **Maria Cristina Gallegos:** “I would like to know from the young people if they are aware of the MDGs and take this occasion to introduce themselves. I would like to know your names, ages and gender.”


“Voices of Youth is interested in sharing information about the MDGs and has created a module for it. If interested you can visit the following link:
http://www.unicef.org/voy/explore/mdg/explore_mdg.php”

 **Grace:** “They know very little about MDG's. Names. Thandie, Sera, Nellie, Edward, Joseph, Bertha, Jane, Lesson, Veronica, Vennessa. Age range 14 to 17”

 **Maria Cristina Gallegos:** Great! Nice to meet you, and thank you for joining today's discussion. The Millennium Development Goals are a list of 8 goals for all countries to achieve by 2015:

- * Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- * Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education
- * Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women
- * Goal 4: Reduce child mortality
- * Goal 5: Improve maternal health
- * Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
- * Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability
- * Goal 8: Develop a Global Partnership for Development”

 **Grace:** “Great. They hear about these issues through the media. Some of these are being addressed by our governments. Go ahead.”

 **Maria Cristina Gallegos:** “I would be interested to know from each one, what have they heard. Please say your name when writing your opinion, so I


know who is saying what.”


The discussion started with the students listing down the causes of environmental degradation.

Maria Cristina Gallegos: “Before starting that discussion, I would like to introduce you to our climate change expert, Kerry Constabile. She has worked with FAO in Mozambique, and ecological science Division of UNESCO. She is very interested in what all of you have to say about MDG goal 7.”


 **Grace:** “Welcome Kerry.”


 **Kerry Constabile:** “Thank you, Grace.”


 **Edward:** “Cutting down of trees is causing soil erosion.”


 **Nellie:** “A lot of plastic paper being dumped everywhere making our environment ugly.”

 **Sera:** “Air pollution.”


 **Bertha:** “A lot people are encroaching on game reserves, killing animals and cultivating.”


 **Lesson:** “Disposal of waste substances contaminating drinking water leading to diseases such as cholera.”

 **Joseph:** “A lot of overgrazing and overstocking is degrading the land.”


 **Veronica:** “Deforestation is contributing to global warming.”


 **Thandie:** “Heavy use of fertilizers is polluting our rivers and lakes.”

 **Jane:** “Over-fishing in our lakes is contributing to the loss of fish species’ and food.”

 **Joseph:** “Throwing of thrash into rivers and lakes is killing fish.”


 **Maria Cristina Gallegos:** “Thank you all for your comments.”


 **Sera:** “A lot of people are draining wet lands, killing animals and birds.”


 **Kerry Constabile:** “Thank you everyone for your comments. It's wonderful to hear from you. It sounds as if you have a great background on environmental issues, fisheries, agriculture and pollution.”


What can young people do to address the problems noted?


Then a question was asked about youth involvement in addressing the mentioned causes of environmental degradation to achieve environmental sustainability

 **Kerry Constabile:** “Thank you everyone. I would like to continue to discuss how to address all of the issues that you mentioned. How have you become involved in solving these issues? And, how would you like to become involved in the future?”

 **Grace.** “They are now discussing how to address the issues presented.”

 **Grace:** “They said they wanted to recycle paper, plant trees, using alternative sources of energy apart from charcoal. They promise not to be littering and reuse plastics, treating sewages and making organic manure as Malawi is agriculture based.”


 **Kerry Constabile:** “These are wonderful actions. Please say the name of each person and their personal opinions on how to become involved.”

 **Joseph:** “Mobilizing the community to take action.”

 **Edward:** “To tell people to plant more trees.”

 **Nellie:** “Sensitization of the community through groups and clubs.”

 **Nellie:** “Recycling of paper.”


 **Edward:** “Planting trees.”


 **Lesson:** “Alternative sources of energy.”

 **Kerry Constabile:** “Thank you all for these valuable ideas.”


Moving Forward


Since it was getting dark, it was agreed that the discussion on environment and climate change would be continued via email, and that Kerry Constabile would engage with the young people and talk with them about their participation in environmental actions. It was also agreed that students will be invited again in the near future for another internet discussion.


 **Grace:** “Maria Cristina. The children say they have enjoyed the session with you.”

 **Maria Cristina:** “Dear Grace, Kerry would like to send them a video on Climate change.”

Grace: Ok. We are going to send you some of their email addresses. This is Nellie’s email. Some of them will create their addresses and Ken Warren will contact you.


 **Kerry Constable:** “That would be great. I would love to be able to continue this discussion and learn from them about their environmental concerns, especially given how important Malawi is for agricultural and climate change issues.”

 **Grace:** “That's wonderful. We will be waiting for that. Thanks so much for giving the children your time to discuss these very important issues on environment. Thank you Maria Cristina and Kerry.”


 **Kerry Constable:** “This has already been incredibly informative for us. Thank you Grace and Ken. Thank you so much all of you for giving us your time and ideas. I really look forward to keeping in touch. I will send you all questions about your environmental concerns and ideas. My direct email too is kconstable@unicef.org. Please email me any time.”


How is the Government revising the loss of environment resources?


Kerry Constable continued the discussion on environmental sustainability with the students from the Chipasula Secondary School on e-mail form. The students discussed the role of their government and what it is doing to prevent the loss of natural resources.

 **Bertha, Lesson and Jane:** “We want to share with you how our country is reversing loss of environment resources. As a country Malawi, we have;

- (1) Tree planting day declared by the government. This has been done to:
 - (a) Reduce desertification
 - (b) Replace lost forest to ensure availability of trees
 - (c) To reduce global warming since trees reduce other harmful gases e.g carbon dioxide.
- (2) Inhibition of disposal of wastes in water and on land. This is achieved by telling people about the dangers of accumulation of wastes in our waters.
- (3) Introduction of close season of fishing in our lake, the government has introduced Fish farming where by farmers do participate hence ensure the availability of fish:
 - (a) Gives time for fish to breed.
 - (b) Help to reduce depletion of fish species.

 **Bertha, Lesson and Jane:** “We as students we are taking part in the conservation of soil by planting vegetative cover at our school to reduce run-off hence reducing soil erosion.”

 **Bertha, Lesson and Jane:** “We are happy to communicate with you. We are looking forward to hear from you.”

 **Kerry Constable:** “Thank you so much for your email. It's wonderful to hear from all of you, and I'm happy to learn about the government projects and goals that you mentioned. They are all very important initiatives.

What aspects of the environment and climate change are most important to you? I would love to hear more about your ideas, and look forward to communicating with you.”



Maria Cristina Gallegos: “This discussion will be uploaded on the Speak Africa platform, as well as on Voices of Youth. Thank you for your interest in this discussion.

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This summary was prepared by Mr. Christopher Chitsulo (a computer teacher from Chinsapo secondary school.), Kerry Constable(Environment Expert) and Maria Cristina Gallegos(Voices of Youth Coordinator).

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Since 1995, VOY has focused on exploring the educational and community building potential of the Internet, and facilitating the active and substantive participation of young people on child rights and development related issues. Through web boards, interactive quizzes, youth leadership profiles, live chats and more, Voices of Youth provides thousands of young people from over 180 countries with an opportunity to self-inform, engage in lively debate, and partner—with their peers and decision makers—to create a world fit for children.