

## Virtual dialogue “Inspiring the youth to think and take action on climate change”

On February 16, 2016 the UNCC:Learn Regional Hub for Central America facilitated a virtual dialogue between youth groups in Costa Rica, Panama, Guatemala and the Dominican Republic, to know, analyse and document their concerns and proposed solutions to the challenges of climate change. The dialogue was held in the framework of the program “Scaling-up Climate Change Education, Training and Awareness-Raising among SICA member countries” and benefited from the participation of more than thirty young environmental and sustainable development leaders. The general views expressed and specific cases presented by the participants are summarized in this document.

### 1. How does climate change affect me and the youth in my country?

According to the participants the effects of climate change are already visible in their countries’ ecosystems, environmental conditions and resources, especially water and food supplies. New epidemics impact their public health systems and families and national economies suffer from increasing water and energy costs. New rainfall patterns, more frequent droughts and floods, and changes in agricultural growing and harvest periods, along with other manifestations of climate change entail major livelihood changes for all.

### 2. What actions can the youth take to face the challenges posed by climate change?

- **Education**, for understanding the climate change phenomenon, knowing the available means to mitigate it and learn how to adapt to it.
- **Finding institutional spaces for youth within governments**, where they can present their ideas and work in articulation with their national governments in activities that tackle climate change. This is essential to ensure long-term effective results from the activities the youth is currently undertaking and will undertake in the coming years.
- **Establishing information networks for youth action on climate change.** Many young people currently work on sustainability issues in Central American countries. However they do not know of the existence of other groups with similar interests, initiatives and activities in neighbour countries. Establishing interconnections and spaces for collaboration and communication is necessary.
- **Remain working on their initiatives.** Youth groups in the region have already organized projects for 2016. These include awareness-raising campaigns on household waste management and recycling; beach cleaning campaigns and the production of building blocks from the PET bottles recovered from the beaches.

#### EXPERIENCE

Between 2007 and 2012, a group of Ecoclubbers in Panama planted 92,000 seedlings to increase the country’s forest cover. This group has also developed food security projects in schools, cultivating chillies, tomatoes and vegetables. It has worked in the restoration of water sources and has undertaken awareness-raising campaigns on climate change mitigation and adaptation, visiting households and discussing concrete actions.

## EXPERIENCE

In the Dominican Republic, a joint CO21 simulation, which used one of the United Nations model platforms, raised awareness on climate change and sustainable development issues among more than 800 young people. Their ideas were integrated in a contribution to the new binding agreement on climate change, delivered to the French Embassy and subsequently submitted to the true COP21.

In the Dominican Republic, youth groups have received the support of influential institutions such as the Ministry of Environment, to present and explore the implementation of innovative sustainability ideas for adaptation in the agricultural sector.

### 3. How can we share our knowledge, ideas and concerns about climate change?

Using new and traditional communication channels the youth can help educate people about climate change, what it is and what it means for everyone. The region's youth can also promote the empowerment of communities and support them in taking the lead as main mitigation and adaptation actors.

#### Discussion

- In the framework of SICA, a consensus on tackling climate change is necessary. Currently each country addresses this problem differently, according to its own political context, and resources. However, the region's common challenges cannot be ignored as the impacts of climate change on natural resources, livelihoods and health will be shared by and affect all.
- There are initiatives and good practices that benefit young people, mitigate climate change and could be replicated in Central America. For example, the construction of public bicycle lanes implemented in Colombia. Facilitating bicycle transportation in cities and their surrounding areas in Central America could be a major and positive improvement for the life of the young generations now and for their children in the future.
- It is necessary to secure funding to continue and up-scale current climate change-related projects. One good example is Panama's program for improving green areas in schools.
- A virtual platform should be implemented for communication between all young people working in climate change in Central America. This would allow them to share what they are doing in different countries, identify good ideas that can be replicated and above all, learn from the experience of others.

- "Our societies have moved from using what they needed to wasting. We now need to assume the consequences and revert this trend."
- "We are the managers of our common future"