



Youth Nature Futures

for Southern Africa



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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YOUTH



NATURE



FUTURES



(Re)imagining youth visions of nature-futures in southern Africa

1. Introduction

Over the last few years, the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) has published landmark assessments reviewing the state of the world's ecosystems. Amidst troubling reports on the health of our life-supporting ecosystems, these assessments also suggest various methods to build better futures for both people and the planet. But what do these "nature-futures" look like? Visions for nature-futures inspired by the lives and perspectives of young people, particularly those from the Global South, have not yet been adequately explored.

To capture visions of nature-futures as imagined by youth from the Global South, the **Centre for Sustainability Transitions (CST)**, based at Stellenbosch University in South Africa, facilitated a series of online events in 2021 with youth organizations and networks operating in southern Africa. These events introduced the IPBES assessments to a variety of youth groups in the region, while providing space for young people to share their stories of environmental change and its impact on their lives. Participants were led through "futuring" exercises to stimulate discussion on what sustainable and just futures would look like to them.

In addition, a competition was launched to promote the development of artworks and other creative outputs that represent youth nature-futures for southern Africa. In total, sixteen projects were funded to create art that links young people to environmental change and exhibits their hopes and dreams for the future. Projects showcased a variety of artistic expressions, such as murals, poems, songs, dance, creative signage, and recipe collections.

The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES)

Nature's innumerable contributions to the lives of people underpin almost every aspect of human development and well-being, and are key to the achievement of many of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Ecosystems and their associated biodiversity produce food and clean water, regulate climate, and are a source of cultural and spiritual significance, among other important benefits. However, ecosystems across the globe are being depleted and degraded faster today than at any other point in human history.

IPBES is an independent intergovernmental body established with the goal of strengthening collaboration between science and decision-making to achieve the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and ecosystems, as well as long-term human well-being and sustainable development. IPBES harnesses the best expertise from across all scientific disciplines and knowledge communities, including indigenous and local knowledge, to provide policy-relevant recommendations for government, the private sector and civil society. IPBES is committed to building capacity to empower younger generations to become future change agents, stewards and leaders for a more just and sustainable world for all.

Futuring

towards better futures for people and planet



Futuring is a process of thinking systematically and creatively about the future. The goal of futuring is not to predict or forecast the future, but rather to explore options, anticipate the unexpected, and identify pathways towards desirable futures. Futuring processes can draw upon a range of expertise and experience, incorporating scientific, indigenous, local, and practical knowledge, as well as artistic methods to imagine different potential futures, and collectively propose pathways to navigate toward them.

At the Centre for Sustainability Transitions (CST), our approach to futuring builds on the understanding that relationships between people and nature are complex and intertwined, and that there is a deep co-dependence between social and ecological systems. This integrated social-ecological systems perspective underpins the work that the CST does to explore, understand, anticipate, and help achieve transformations toward better futures for people and the planet.

At the CST, we specifically aim to challenge conventional thinking around the future of southern Africa. The unprecedented scale, speed, and interconnectedness of social and environmental change during the Anthropocene poses unique challenges for our region. Southern Africa is often characterized in terms of high levels of poverty and socio-economic inequality, as well as environmental degradation. However, this pessimistic narrative need not be the only story we tell about the region. Many successful initiatives and groundswell projects already show us glimpses of better futures, which can form the foundation of more positive, brighter visions for southern Africa.

Since 2016, the CST has been engaged in futuring initiatives that aim to foster our collective ability to move towards more positive trajectories for social-ecological systems at local, regional and global scales. This framing, and its ambition to challenge long-held assumptions through creative and participatory practices, tools and methods, underpins the futuring work led by the CST.

One such method for thinking systematically about more desirable futures is the “Three Horizons (3H) Framework”. 3H is a collaborative approach developed for groups to think about transformative change and alternative futures, including “nature-futures” that represent positive visions for both people and the environment. Through the 3H method, participants unpack their diverse aspirations about what nature-futures should look like (Horizon 3), identify dominant structures in the present that are blocking change (Horizon 1), and explore opportunities that should be leveraged to unblock change and achieve the desired nature-futures (Horizon 2). This method encourages systems thinking (i.e., making connections across multiple sectors of society), and crystallizes pathways towards a common goal.

In the Youth Nature Futures project, the 3H method was used to explore visions of positive nature-futures with youth groups from across southern Africa. Through this process, we gathered insights into youth perspectives on desirable futures for the region, as well as the key challenges and opportunities that lie on the path to achieving those futures.

Meet the Youth Groups

The series of online events organized by the CST began with two workshops where representatives from youth groups and youth networks came together to explore the impacts of environmental change in their lives and envision more positive nature-futures. These workshops were attended by 80 participants representing 18 youth organizations from eight southern African countries. In their everyday work and activism, these groups are addressing diverse dimensions of environmental and social challenges.

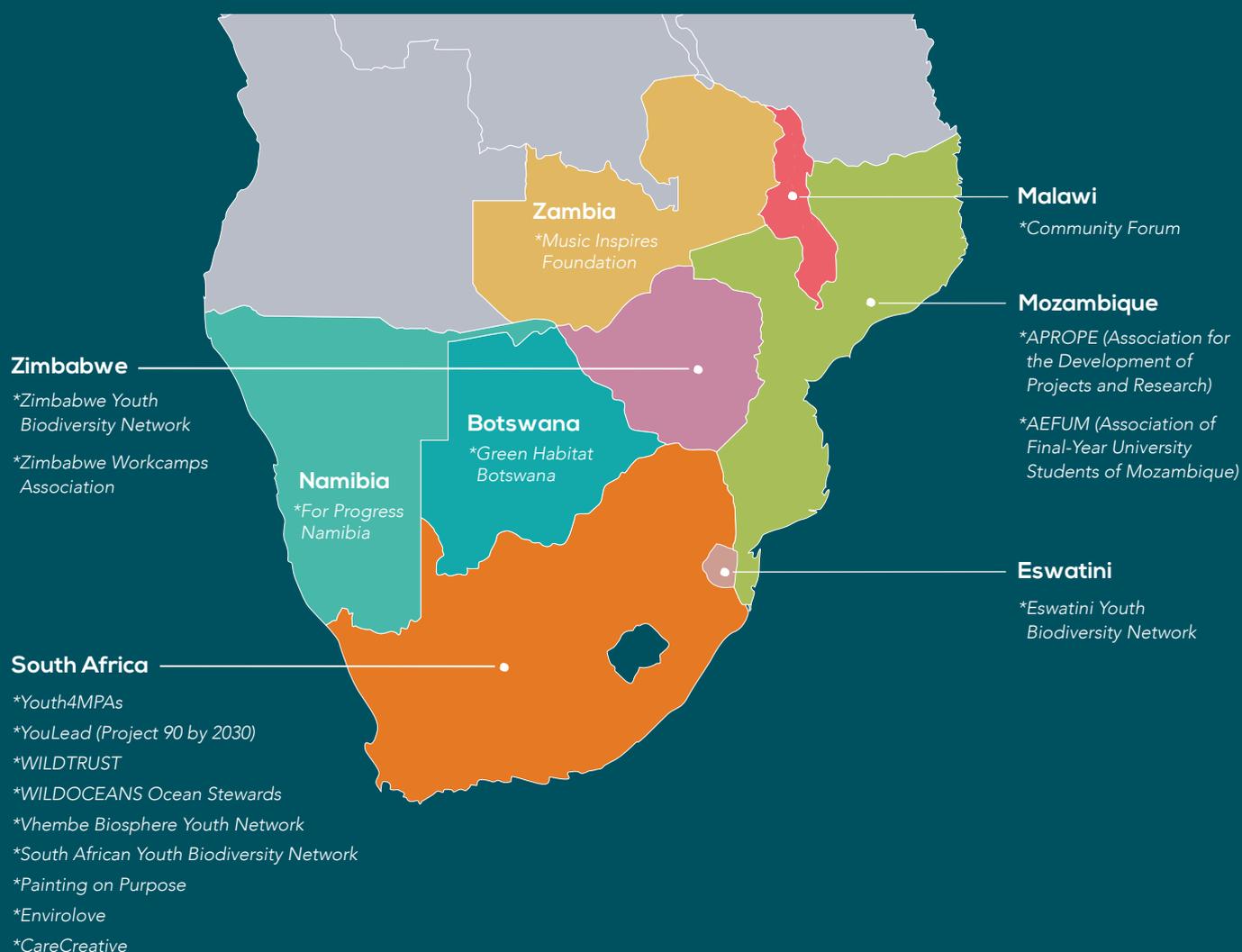


Figure 1: Participating youth organizations and the southern African countries in which they are based.

Following the online workshops, youth groups were given the opportunity to submit proposals for art projects that explore their relationship with nature-futures. Sixteen projects were awarded funding, which the youth groups used to complete their art projects over the next five weeks. The completed artworks were first shared with participating youth groups in an online webinar and then presented to the broader public in an official CST webinar. A recording of this CST webinar can be viewed at the Southern African Resilience Hub (<https://reshuafira.org/cst-webinars/>). In the following pages, we introduce the youth groups, and showcase some of the artworks they produced. For more information on the creative outputs, please visit <https://youthnaturefutures.org/art-showcase/>



Zimbabwe Youth Biodiversity Network



The Zimbabwe Youth Biodiversity Network (ZYBN) envisions a world in which people understand, value, and conserve the diversity of life on Earth. ZYBN connects, empowers and supports youth across Zimbabwe to take action on biodiversity loss and related issues. By organizing workshops to build and mobilize youth capacity, ZBYN creates spaces for group learning and growth. ZBYN also focuses on advocating for the participation of young people in biodiversity policy and management processes.

Nature First

This project was developed by the ZYBN in partnership with the Artzi Trust, a youth-led organization that promotes artistic talent in Zimbabwe. The project encouraged young Zimbabweans to think about human impacts on the environment, and what actions can be taken to lessen those impacts. Young artists were engaged to explore their feelings about the future, and to connect their daily lives and communities to nature through art with a positive, hopeful message. A focus was placed on infusing indigenous and local knowledge into creative expressions.

Zimbabwe Workcamps Association

The Zimbabwe Workcamps Association (ZWA) is a youth volunteer organization founded in October 1993. It is a non-sectarian voluntary organization and membership is open to anyone above the age of sixteen irrespective of nationality, religion, race, political view or educational qualification. ZWA aims to promote education and community development by encouraging local communities to engage in self-help projects using scarce resources to raise their socio-economic standards of living.

Sustainable Food Production

ZWA started a centre for learning about sustainable farming techniques and how to enhance food value chains to empower farmers in the low-rainfall Chaseyama region of Zimbabwe. The art project on sustainable food production aims to raise awareness about the importance of caring for nature as it forms the basis of everything needed to survive and thrive. This message was spread through poetry and communal practice of sustainable farming principles.

Dear Mother-Nature

by Jefferson Mwaruta

O' mother nature
 For how long shall you groan?
 The very life you support;
 Is the very life you should dread
 The very mouths you feed;
 Are the ones that bite your hand!

O' dear earth;
 How much more can you take.
 You choke on the smoke we produce;
 Yet the industries don't even notice.
 You die because of the trees we chop,
 For how long shall we go on though.

I hear tales of back then; how you used to be.
 When the forests where dense thickets full of life,
 Now there are just shells of what they used to be.

If really this is the future;
 Then where are we headed?
 This wasteland we are creating;
 Is it our intention?

How I long for the garden of Eden once more!
 How I wish to see you flourish like before.





South African Youth Biodiversity Network

The South African Youth Biodiversity Network (SAYBN) is a national chapter of the Global Youth Biodiversity Network and a registered NPO in South Africa. It aims to (1) strengthen the contribution of South African Youth in the Convention on Biological Diversity, (2) manage an online platform where South African youth can find opportunities related to biodiversity, and (3) contribute to the implementation of the South African National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan by participating in grass-root conservation projects.

Trash into Treasure

SAYBN has a history of engaging in initiatives that focus on waste management and recycling, and this art project was envisioned as another opportunity to showcase the endless creative possibilities embodied in recyclable items. Youth from Midrand in South Africa created a variety of crafts from both glass and plastic bottles collected from businesses and households in the local area, turning ordinary household objects into art. Many of the re-imagined treasures were donated to a local pre-school, as well as to the participating households in the community.





Project 90 by 2030 – YouLead Initiative



Project 90 by 2030 is an environmental social justice organisation based in Cape Town, South Africa. It works primarily on climate change, energy poverty, and the social injustices that intersect them. Their youth programme – the You Lead Initiative – aims to strengthen the leadership capacity of young leaders and decision-makers of the future.

Creating Our Future Together

This project sought to build awareness about climate change injustices through “activism” in Cape Town, South Africa. Through a mix of dance, poetry, and music, the project created opportunities for people to discuss climate realities and actions to achieve a better world. The central idea behind this project is to show that there are other ways of raising awareness beyond webinars and workshops. The project brought together YouLead participants to imagine a better future, and develop messages, songs, and art for the next climate march.



PAINTING ON PURPOSE



Painting on Purpose

Art is a unique, universal language that bridges all social barriers and has the power and potential to shift perceptions, facilitate conversations, unite people around a common cause and, most importantly, inspire action that creates lasting change. This revelation sparked the mission of Painting on Purpose, a crew of human-driven reformers who passionately pioneer innovative, informative, and creative solutions to the world's challenges. These come to life as sustainable and inclusive art projects in communities in need across the globe.

Painting Puntaz

This project reimagined and reinvigorated a local community center in the Puntaz community of Durban, South Africa. Painting on Purpose, in partnership with community creatives led by local artist, Snqobile 'Derek' Masondo, took on the challenge of renovating the building, and installing an art room and herb garden. This project is built on the premise that the beauty of art and nature have an important and impactful role to play in inspiring change and shifting perceptions of one's environment. The project hopes to act as a beacon of light and beauty with art and nature combined. The goal was to set up a space, accessible to all, that enables individuals to learn skills and explore art as a viable career.

Music Inspires Foundation

The Music Inspires Foundation was conceived under the premise that science and data can be presented in a simple and engaging way to young people. Founded in Zambia by singer / songwriter and Queen's Young Leaders award recipient, Joseph Pupe, the Music Inspires Foundation uses creative and cultural approaches to engage and expose diverse audiences to climate change issues. The Music Inspires Foundation is conscious of the power of young people to create sustainable change and solutions at local level, and uses low cost communication mediums such as music, performance, and radio to amplify voices of the youth.

Umodzi Pamodzi (One Together) Music

Stories connect us to the planet and to each other, and it is critical to elevate local voices representing diverse perspectives to accelerate global action towards more sustainable futures. Music storytelling provides an avenue for that. Young people are best poised to tell stories that drive local-led solutions to current conservation challenges. Engaging and amplifying new voices will help to ensure the continued efforts around environmental conservation and sustainability at this very critical moment in history.

Building on this understanding, Joseph Pupe from the Music Inspires Foundation created a song called "We Have The Power", which captures the energy of young people shaping their own, more sustainable futures.

Listen to their song at <https://youthnaturefutures.org/art-showcase/>





Eswatini Youth Biodiversity Network



The Eswatini Youth Biodiversity Network (EYBN) is a national chapter under the Global Youth Biodiversity Network (GYBN). GYBN is a network of individuals and youth organizations from around the world with the goal of preventing biodiversity loss, and is part of international youth participation in the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). EYBN aims to represent the voice of Eswatini youth on conservation issues, raise awareness among young people about the value of biodiversity, promote indigenous knowledge, and empower young people to take leadership roles in biodiversity conservation initiatives.

Traditional Food Goes Digital

EYBN initiated this project that uses digital media and contemporary art to conserve traditional knowledge around food. Through digital platforms and radio interviews, EYBN encouraged the sharing of local and indigenous recipes and childhood memories by fellow Emaswati on their Facebook page. Additional information was collected at local restaurants, cultural sites, and museums. EYBN recognizes that food is an art form that connects us to heritage, indigenous knowledge, and environmental change. Celebrating indigenous knowledge can help us build a healthy, sustainable, and culturally seasoned future.

Envirolove

Envirolove aims to empower youth from under-resourced communities in Stellenbosch to become active citizens, and address social, environmental, and economic issues through practical and innovative local solutions.

Guiding the Way

This project was spearheaded by Envirolove and the CLAY Foundation with the goal of (re)imagining Youth Nature Futures by empowering local youth in the Idas Valley region, South Africa, to take ownership of their natural community spaces and assets. Thirty participants from a local youth community organization designed and installed creative route markers along five trails within the Idas Valley nature area. The aim was to raise awareness about the value of natural spaces among the local youth and create a safe space for all Idas Valley residents and tourists to enjoy what nature has to offer.





"Even African doctors, they are there because of you
 Roots, leaves and your barks, it produce herbals
 You are a source of foreign currency
 The green pigments that you are, it beautifies the World
 You are a controller of abusive wind and floods
 The construction works, depends on you
 Indeed, you build the World
 It's a pillar of the World"

- excerpt from "It's a Pillar of the World" by Clement Phiri

Community Forum

The Community Forum (COFO) is a local non-profit organization that promotes household level permaculture, agroecology systems, improved opportunities for women and girls, education, arts and sports, food security, health and nutrition, as well as HIV/AIDS care and prevention in Chikwawa district, Malawi, through demonstration, education, outreach and advocacy. Established in 2018, COFO's mission is to challenge socio-economic inequalities and assist vulnerable populations toward self-reliance. The vision of COFO is to build a community where all citizens have the opportunity for a high quality of life, including high standards of education, gender equality, health, and entrepreneurship.

Artists Create Together (ACT!)

Organized by COFO in the Chikwawa district, this project provided a platform for local artists to explore environmental protection and the consequences of climate change. A key environmental issues facing this area of Malawi is deforestation, which has been linked to increased flooding. Through this project, more than forty young people were engaged in learning about the consequences of deforestation and climate change. Participants created drawings and poems, and plans are being made to expand the project to address deforestation in other districts across Malawi.

CareCreative

CareCreative seeks to convene creative, diverse and participatory spaces for active citizenry in public places, underpinned by an ethic of care for both people and planet.

Over the last decade, CareCreative has been engaged in organizing street festivals, live painting, HipHop, conscious event management, and community activation. CareCreative works through a variety of processes and uses creativity and art-making to facilitate conversations around the environment, education, social inclusion, youth, women, indigenous culture, and community collaboration.



Sea Level Rise Mural

CareCreative, in partnership with local environmental activists, led the creation of a sea level rise mural on the walls of a law enforcement building in Fish Hoek, Cape Town, South Africa. The mural depicts the local beach-mountain scape with two projected future sea level lines. The project focused on giving a voice to the youth, who will be most affected by climate change in the future. The mural was launched on Earth Day, 23 April 2021, in a community celebration filled with dance, plays, poems, and a climate pledge.



Photographs by Margaret Stone & Liezl Hoffman



Associação para o Desenvolvimento de Projectos e Pesquisas (APROPE)

APROPE (Association for the Development of Projects and Research) is a national Mozambican association of young people driven by the dream of living in a more participatory society. Youth within APROPE seek to improve their living conditions through research and social intervention projects, particularly in the areas of education, health, and the environment. APROPE works in collaboration with governmental and non-governmental institutions, both nationally and internationally.



Natureza – Green Spaces

This art project aimed to transform urban spaces by restoring a degraded plot in Maputo, Mozambique. Waste found in the plot was collected and recycled, and then local vegetation was re-planted. This greening process was accompanied by the composition of a song with an educational message about the responsibility of young people to protect and restore green spaces. APROPE's vision for nature-futures in Mozambique includes green and sustainably used urban spaces decorated with beautiful recycled objects.

Associação dos Estudantes Finalistas Universitários de Moçambique (AEFUM)

AEFUM (Association of Final-Year University Students of Mozambique) is a non-profit organization founded in 2006 by students from various higher education institutions in Mozambique. AEFUM currently has more than 7000 members, and advocates for professional integration of final-year and postgraduate students, especially women. AEFUM implements a variety of projects, such as holiday programmes, psychosocial support for orphaned and vulnerable children, HIV/AIDS training, community excursions, and environmental protection initiatives.

The AEFUM collective developed five different art projects, which are individually described below.



Associação dos Estudantes Finalistas
Universitários de Moçambique

 aefuminfo

Recycle for Colouring

This project showcased creative ways in which young people can take positive action for the environment, while also contributing to their livelihoods and the local economy. Youths in Maputo were taught about recycling and how to use recyclable materials in their art, providing them with skills to support their creative pursuits.





Awareness through Rap Music

This project promotes environmental awareness through the medium of rap. Music has great power to influence people's minds, and rap music in particular has the potential to speak to youth, which constitutes the majority of the Mozambican population. The artist, André Cardoso, known as MC Chamboco, is from Maputo and has a long history of using rap in pro-youth activism. The songs focus on protecting mangrove habitat along the Mozambican coast, which represents a critical ecosystem under threat from urban expansion, pollution and other human activities.

Listen to their song at <https://youthnaturefutures.org/art-showcase/>

Clean and Sustainable Neighbourhoods

By collecting discarded plastic bottles and transforming them into art such as vases and chairs, this project aimed to reduce plastic pollution in Maputo neighbourhoods. This initiative encouraged care for the environment among young people, while also teaching them valuable entrepreneurship skills.



Creative Sustainable Art “Trash to Luxury”

Old tires disposed of in the landscape take a long time to deteriorate and pollute the area in which they are dumped. The Trash to Luxury project collected old tires in the Maputo area and transformed them into decorative objects, such as tables and chairs. A key aim was empowering women in communities to learn new skills, thereby encouraging female entrepreneurship.



Ecological Art in Mossuril Schools

Art can be an impactful tool in ecological education. Students of two secondary schools in the Mossuril District in northern Mozambique were encouraged to share their experiences through drawing and writing poetry. Mossuril District faces high levels of deforestation, which threatens not only the environment, but also the heritage, tourism potential, and local weather conditions. The art project aimed to make young people aware of these environmental issues and encourage them to become active in protecting their natural heritage.

 aefuminfo

ESCOLA SECUNDÁRIA DE CHOCAS-MAR



Several other youth groups and networks participated in the workshops but did not create artworks. These groups are presented below.

Youth4MPAs

Youth4MPAs is a South African youth-led movement with the vision of generating youth voices that educate and create awareness about ocean health, protection, and sustainability, while building youth capacity and relationships with global citizens.

The Youth4MPAs vision is a sustainable future through the connection of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). Currently, with a network of over 270 active members from various communities and backgrounds, they are advocating for increased ocean protection and promotion of MPAs in South Africa, and beyond. Youth4MPAs aims to grow their youth network across Africa, generating meaningful conversations about youth involvement in key decisions about the future of our ocean.



@Youth4MPAs



WILDTRUST

The WILDTRUST mission is to create opportunities to empower and restore socio-ecological resilience and the balance between humankind and nature, for a just and healthy planet. The WILDTRUST pursues the realization of its vision of a thriving and resilient world through two core programmes, WILDLANDS and WILDOCEANS, which underwrite the sustainable development of the blue and green economy. The WILDTRUST works at the interface between environmental sustainability and human wellbeing to improve community livelihoods and restore the ecosystems that support them. The work of the WILDTRUST encourages youth employment, upskilling, and community empowerment to deliver a sustained and improved environmental outcome.





WILDOCEANS Ocean Stewards



Through its Ocean Stewards initiative, WILDOCEANS aims to nurture a new generation of young minds that heed the call of the ocean and pursue career paths in marine science and management by providing them with a formative experiential journey into marine conservation. Students participate in various experiential learning platforms, including research cruises aboard the R.V. Angra Pequena and R.V. Phakisa and science communication training. The programme also offers ongoing mentorship and support for future study opportunities. The Ocean Stewards initiative is supported by Grindrod Bank and the Blue Fund, and is implemented in partnership with the African Coelacanth Ecosystem Programme (ACEP).

 <https://wildtrust.co.za/wildoceans/>

Vhembe Biosphere Youth Network



 <https://www.vhembebiosphere.org/>

The Vhembe Biosphere Reserve is one of the largest UNESCO biosphere reserves in South Africa. The Vhembe Biosphere Youth Network (VBYN) focuses on creating opportunities for young people in the Green Economy. VBYN promotes environmental conservation and restoration, as well as climate activism. The network advocates for youth capacity building and women empowerment, and has a track record of successful collaborations with other youth networks such as the South African Youth Biodiversity Network.



Green Habitat Botswana

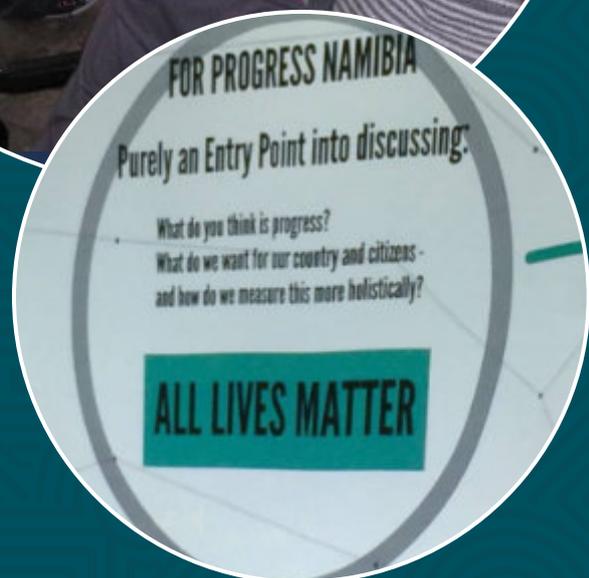
The Green Habitat Botswana Society was formed in 2017 by a group of keen young people passionate about biodiversity conservation. The group began with the implementation of activities including litter picking, environmental awareness campaigns, and tree planting. The NGO now aims to expand their environmental education and biodiversity conservation efforts nationally. Green Habitat Botswana seeks to actively contribute to the social and economic development of the communities in which they operate and to build a sustainable society while being responsive to changing social realities.



 @greenhabitatbotswana/

For Progress Namibia

The For Progress Namibia Project was initially established to pioneer new indicators for measuring progress in Namibia. However, the project committee decided to take a multi-tiered approach to encourage Namibia onto a sustainable development path through environmental, social, and economic transformation. New indicators are developed for measuring Progress in Namibia with new discussion platforms around what matters to people in society. The use of GDP as the primary measure of progress has been proven to undermine the well-being of people in society. Perception indicators were developed and tested for measuring progress through surveys along with income areas in Namibia. The results are presented to the community through dialogue and engagement. The project is implementing an action plan and strategy based on a new narrative of what progress and good life would mean to the residents.



Motherland.

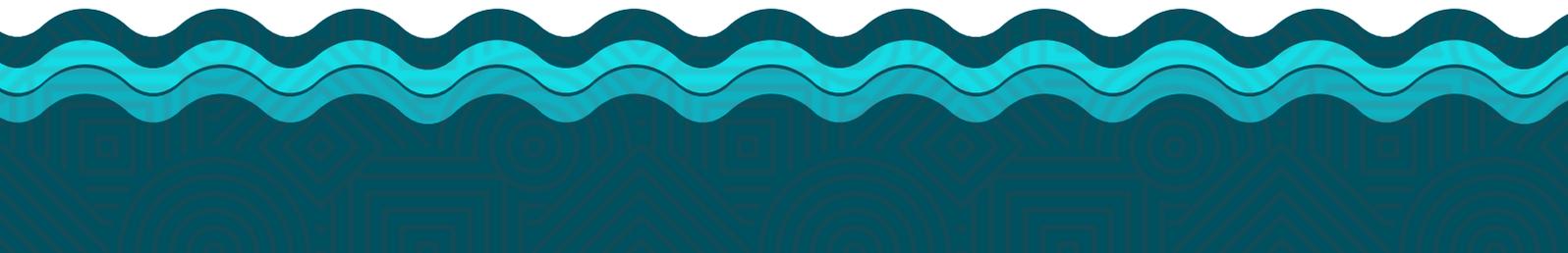
Nametso Dorothy Phonchi-Tshekiso

Our geography is made of up of brown cities and distant green villages
 Near by is a city We all desire;
 Her golden skylines reflecting in crimson hues,
 uncanvassed to heal her land and
 deliver promises to her unborn generations.
 An Africa driven by bloodlines of juvenile delicate spirits,
 Wind whirled by the desire for documented human stories.
 We have longed for her before.

Sang in hymns and marched for her golden horizons
 We are called to follow the smoke of her greenhouse gases emissioned far in the distant cityscape.
 The encoupling of blooming flowers and indigenous shrubs on the side walks of her villages; a navigation
 for silent dreamers.
 Green waters on each side of the rustic tall bridges; a beautiful chaos making the future a dancing hub of
 unique harmony.
 The geography of wastes piled on kerb stones swaying in cold breeze, a reminder to passerby's to always
 carry their litter home.

We are called.
 We are purposed.
 To build a legacy we have long desired,
 brick by brick.
 To fit our dreams into a world that knows us name for name,
 yet forgets to call us to tables of conversation.
 We are puzzle pieces in a earth that heals herself like the medicine woman,
 With burning torches on one hand, water on the other
 We are a series of ideas headed for change.
 In this space that yearns for our creativity

Our inviting green and blue geographies extend over political borders,
 We are bold, strongest in our bloodlines,
 we hold atlases of our home in the palm of our hands with the desire to one day Invite global leaders to
 travel in thought of us and in remembrance of home. Motherland is harmony,
 Motherland is a pollution free city, calling explorers and guests
 back into her warmest embrace.
 Motherland.



Insights from Workshop 1:

Impacts of environmental change on young people's lives

The first of two online workshops provided an overview of the IPBES assessments, explored the impacts of environmental change on the lives of young people in southern Africa, and connected youth groups in the region. Participants were prompted to think about what nature means to them. The resulting word cloud of responses shows that nature relates to diverse meanings, including life, beauty, diversity, and freedom.



"What does nature mean to you?" The larger the word in the word cloud, the more often it was mentioned in participants' responses.

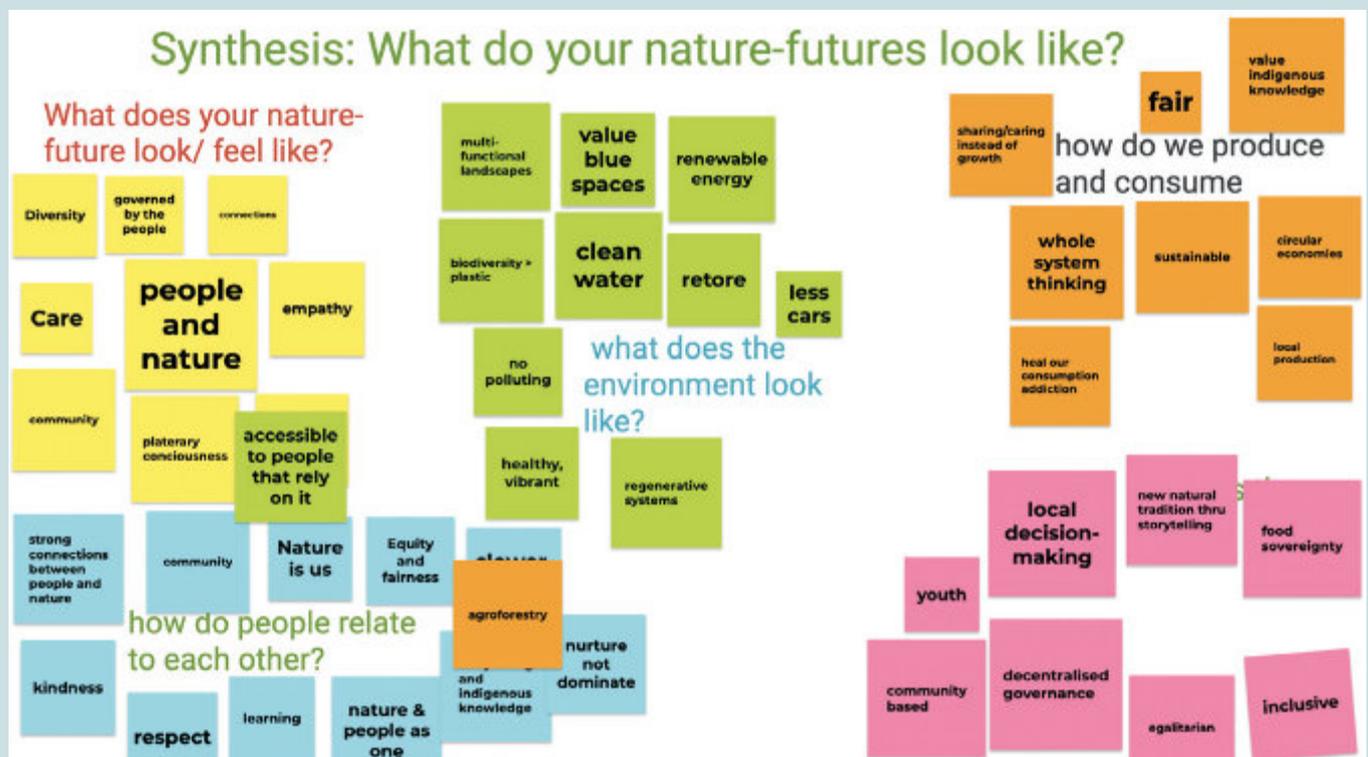
When participants were asked to reflect on their thoughts and feelings after hearing about IPBES and its key findings, responses highlighted the usefulness of the assessments in synthesizing information about environmental change in the African context. IPBES assessments underscore the realities of environmental degradation and rapid rates of change, but also present policy opportunities and response options – information that mobilizes youth groups to act. The need to balance sustainable development and environmental protection, and collectively devise solutions towards sustainability was expressed. Collaboration with researchers and decision-makers involved in these assessments holds potential for engaging and empowering the next generation to advocate for and forge better human-nature relations.

Despite the expressed potential of IPBES to advocate for change, concerns about the overwhelming amount of information, bleak messages of environmental degradation, and lack of resonance of the assessment outcomes with young people were raised. Participants reflected on the need for IPBES findings to be communicated in ways that link more clearly with people's lived experiences, especially for youth living in the Global South.

Exploring the impact of environmental change in the lives of southern Africa's youth

Participants' experiences of environmental change included a rising number of invasive species, species extinction, industry-driven environmental pollution, and conflicting uses of land due to differing views on "development". Participants also mentioned loss of attachment to cultural and spiritual aspects of land- and seascapes, as well as neglect of co-learning and social spaces in nature. These trends also resulted in a lack of environmental awareness in some participants' communities.

Impacts of climate change and extreme weather events were noted to have been devastating (e.g., Cyclone Idai in 2019). However, some changes in climate and associated hazards (e.g., alternating droughts and floods), have led to the adoption of successful adaptation initiatives, such as the development of permaculture projects, which provide food security and support local livelihoods. Participants mentioned other opportunities for positive change, including the regulation of single-use plastic (especially plastic bags), which has lessened pollution in urban areas. Similarly, indigenous seed collection projects have been initiated to promote the role of local traditional knowledge in climate change adaptation.



Digital sticky-notes capturing participants' reflections on their imagined nature-futures

Even though science provides useful tools for understanding change and possible solutions to social-ecological challenges, it can be exclusionary in its language and communication. Participants noted that scientific findings are not often translated into languages other than English, and remain difficult to understand, which not only disconnects scientific messages from reality, but also reinforces the idea that non-scientific audiences are somehow less knowledgeable. Invaluable indigenous knowledge is often not accommodated or valued in science-driven processes and assessments.

Against this backdrop of experiences and challenges of environmental change, participants proposed the following actions:

- i) **Better and more diverse communication of science**, for instance capturing stories and information through film and video and sharing these media on accessible platforms, and the translation of English articles and reports into local languages;
- ii) **Actively exploring existing opportunities and linking interventions** that address environmental challenges, particularly pro-active mitigation and adaptation measures, as well as practical, groundswell initiatives;
- iii) **Building capacity and engagement** by creating platforms for youth to take part in decision-making and campaigning, and designing programmes to equip young people with the skills and knowledge to participate in policy processes, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity or climate change negotiations;
- iv) **Engaging youth as stewards of the environment** and recognizing their important roles and responsibilities in communities, as well as learning from organizations that already work with young people as community researchers who can engage with their peers around environmental issues;
- v) **Linking opportunities in environmental research and society** to build interconnected ecological and social resilience - for instance, enabling work at the interface of ecological resilience and livelihood development by growing and promoting youth employment services, and offering mentoring opportunities for youth to learn how to work in environmental sectors.

Insights from Workshop 2:

Nature-futures for southern Africa

The second online workshop introduced the youth organizations to different approaches for thinking about the future. During this workshop, participants were encouraged to surface their existing ideas about the future and explore pathways towards achieving more sustainable and equitable nature-futures for southern Africa.

How do nature-futures look and feel, and what values are important?

Emerging themes of imagined nature-futures emphasized interconnectedness between people, as well as between people and nature. Participants envisioned a future where people possess a deeper understanding of nature and its values, and express care through the protection and nurturing of ecosystems and other species. A desired future was also imagined as a community-driven world where change-making occurs locally in response to local environmental challenges. This, together with meaningful youth engagement in environmental issues, was seen as a pathway towards fostering sustainable ecosystems, resilient communities, and stronger environmental policies.

How do people relate and connect to each other in our nature-futures?

Good relationships were identified as important. These were described as people relating to each other with care, respect, kindness, and harmony, while appreciating diversity in how people relate to nature, and ensuring equity in access to nature. A world was imagined where people connect through storytelling, learn from indigenous knowledge, and shift their minds to place nature at the centre of their lives.

How do we produce and consume in our nature-futures?

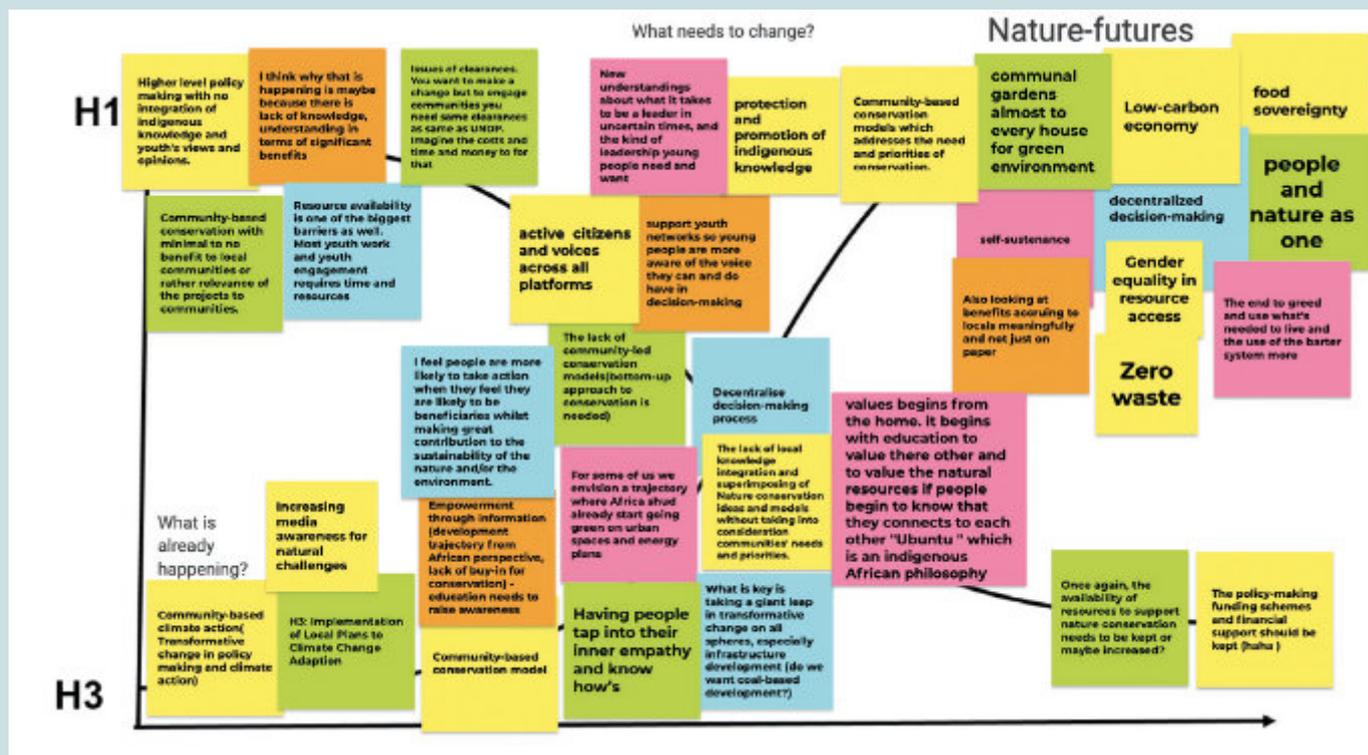
Participants envisaged producing and consuming less, and only what is needed. Communities that produce their own food and are less reliant on global value chains were part of this vision. A sustainable environment would be characterized by lower exploitation of natural resources, more renewable energy use, no pollution, more green spaces in cities, as well as healthy and regenerative environments. Another key factor was the integration of indigenous knowledge into modern ways of protecting and enhancing the environment.

Who has the power and voice to make decisions in our nature-futures?

Community-based governance, especially for natural resources, and decentralized decision-making emerged as important factors in the imagined nature-futures. These would allow decisions to be made locally and inclusively in response to local challenges. The vision is for decision making to prioritize nature conservation over economic goals, and to enhance gender equality. Artists and creative storytellers would also be involved to communicate information in more accessible ways.

Three Horizons exercise

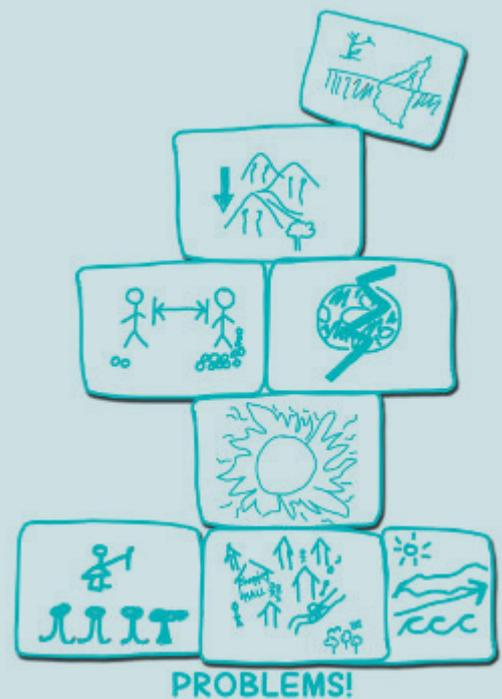
The Three Horizons (3H) method was used to think about how to navigate towards imagined desirable nature-futures. This process includes identifying potential barriers and opportunities for change.



Three Horizons exercise for Group 2

What is blocking or impeding change?

Dependency on government and international organizations to make change often disempowers communities from taking responsibility and remaining accountable. Often, community involvement is hampered by unnecessary and costly bureaucratic processes, which discourage interest. In some cases, community-based conservation projects are seen to have provided minimal or no benefits to local populations. This is further compounded by high-level policymaking that has no regard for the integration of indigenous knowledge and youth views on pressing environmental issues. Other barriers include poor communication of science and lack of environmental awareness, as well as limited availability of resources and funding to engage the youth in environmental activism.

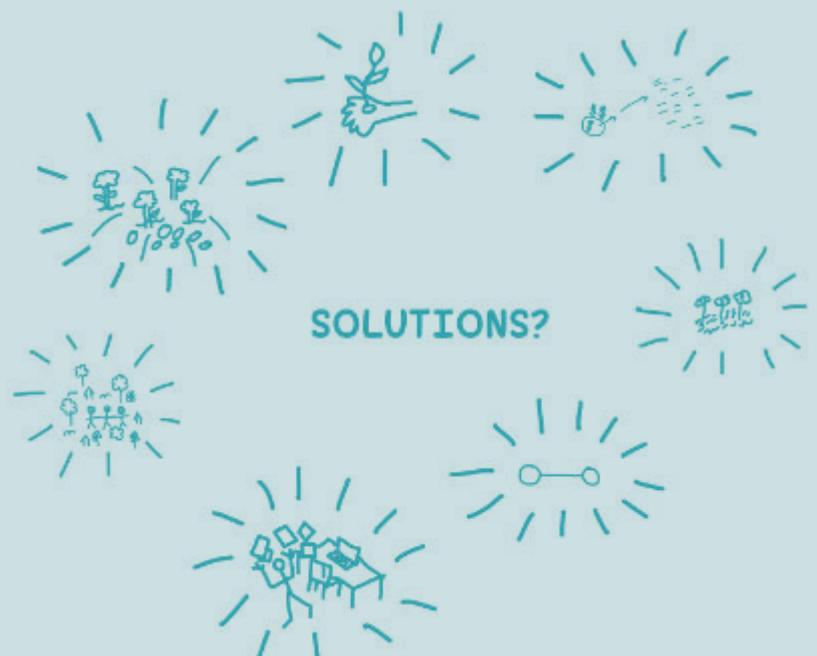


Participants' drawings of challenges that block change

What are opportunities for change?

Moving beyond the status quo requires radical changes in the way science is communicated, revisions to dominant conservation models, as well as individual and collective shifts in perspectives on human-nature values. The youth groups called on science to engage more young creatives to communicate research in fun and relevant ways, which could help raise awareness around environmental issues and mobilize action. It was also noted that indigenous knowledge needs to be recognized, valued, protected, and promoted, particularly in the science landscape. Participants called for change-makers to be more in tune with local realities and requirements. Community-led conservation models, for instance, need to allow communities to take ownership of projects with an understanding of what it takes to navigate through uncertain times. This includes new kinds of leadership, and especially leadership that better resonates with the needs of young people. As the stewards of the planet in decades to come, the youth need to be empowered to fill decision-making spaces and platforms in the change process.

To shift perspectives on human-nature values, participants highlighted the importance of forging relationships between people and nature through experiences and education. They emphasized the need to recognize the environment as fundamental to all human communities and cultures, rather than something to be exploited for financial gain or in the name of "development", which often benefits only a few. Participants also identified introspection and reflexivity as key practices that should be encouraged to deepen the understanding of social-ecological challenges and find innovative solutions.



Participants' drawings of potential solutions to nature-future challenges

Reflections and Conclusions

Fostering opportunities for co-learning and growth

Some participants found the Youth Nature Futures (YNF) project itself to be a step towards fulfilling their desirable futures, and a profound process of personal and collective co-learning. Participants appreciated the opportunity to learn about the IPBES assessments, futuring methods, and the activities of other youth groups in the southern African region. Participants welcomed the chance to share their creative processes, valued the diversity of participants from different parts of the region, and enjoyed the exposure to a variety of artistic styles of expression. Many participants appreciated the feedback they received on their final artworks and creative outputs, and the opportunity for their work to be promoted and shared through the YNF website and CST webinar, and on social media. The awarding of funding and acknowledgement of their work provided motivation to strengthen and amplify their individual and collective action, especially in the face of challenges that include limited resource availability, setbacks in environmental protections, and slow recognition of the rights of women, indigenous peoples, and other marginalized groups.

Amplifying impact

When asked to reflect on the activities participants would like to see going forward, they suggested:

- Resources and support for the continuation of their projects;
- Expansion of the YNF project beyond southern Africa to give more youth from the continent the opportunity to express their nature-futures;
- Processes and opportunities to enhance cross-group and cross-country collaborations;
- The creation of a YNF academy to enable more arts-based activities, enhance science communication, and create youth-led opportunities for inspiring change;
- The mobilisation of more youth from the Global South to get involved in issues of climate and environmental justice, and voice their own unique concerns and perspectives.

Next steps

The CST is committed to continuing youth group engagement across southern Africa and beyond, with the aim of highlighting the unique perspectives of young people in regional and global conversations around transformations toward more positive social-ecological futures. At the same time, we aim to strengthen art-science collaborations in southern Africa, to enhance the communication of scientific messages and encourage broader public engagement on sustainability challenges and opportunities for change. Projects like Youth Nature Futures have the potential to connect youth groups across the world, amplifying their voices, and informing decision-making at multiple levels. The relative ease of communication via social media facilitates collaboration, and the power of these platforms can be harnessed to diversify participation among youth and reach wider audiences. A key takeaway from this project is the abundance of enthusiasm, energy, and drive among young people in southern Africa to build better nature-futures for all. Unlocking this immense potential through continued engagement, support, and recognition of youth voices is a priority for all who care about sustainable and just futures for southern Africa and the world.



For more information on the Youth Nature Futures project
and the Centre for Sustainability Transitions, please visit:

www.youthnaturefutures.org

<http://www0.sun.ac.za/cst/>