

European Development Days 2021: “The Green Deal for a Sustainable Future”

The challenges of biodiversity loss, climate change and environmental degradation were at the centre of this year’s European Development Days (EDD) that took place on the 15th and 16th June 2021. Under the motto “The Green Deal for a sustainable Future”, nearly 100 events were held on 17 thematic blocks: rural transformation and food systems; sustainable blue economy; water and sanitation; green and circular economy; pollution and

chemicals; green finance; green economy-related education and training; sustainable urbanisation; sustainable energy; climate change – natural resources, food and mobility; forest and landscape management; wildlife, security and development; seascapes and coastal areas; transboundary watersheds; Indigenous peoples and local communities, research, data and new technologies; protected area management and species conservation. What was new about this

14th edition of the event was not only that it was fully digital. This year, the opening ceremony, otherwise addressed by heads of state from all over the world, was handled entirely by 17 young people who participated – each with a focus on one of the topics dealt with – in the EDD Young Leaders Programme. Here and in the subsequent discussion rounds, they shared their expertise, ideas and ambitions for a sustainable future.

Putting farmers and local communities at the core of food systems

Biodiversity loss, overuse of freshwater systems, soil degradation – Nachilala Nkombo, Zambia Country Director of WWF, took the effects of our current food systems as an opportunity to call for a radical change in agricultural production. The government’s current agricultural policy in her country was export-oriented, focused on monoculture (maize), and encouraged the use of artificial fertilisers – i.e. the exact opposite of sustainability, Nkombo explained. In order to achieve food security for the population while conserving the natural resources, in future, food systems ought to be in the hands of local communities; farmers should have a certain level of control of input use; in addition, they ought to be enabled to benefit from local knowledge and have more than one income stream.

Hindou Oumarou Ibrahim, founder and President of the Association for Indigenous Women and Peoples of Chad (AFPAT), explained how such a system could work in practice. In her country, conflict over access to fertile land is one of the biggest obstacles to sustainable land use. Land tenure was not clearly defined, and land grabbing was assuming drastic dimensions, both internally (by political elites) and externally (by big companies), Ibrahim reported. For example, this had become apparent at Lake Chad, where



“We are the land experts and engineers. It is time for Northern countries to learn from us”, Hindou Oumarou Ibrahim said in her video message.

Photo: European Commission

fences were cutting off the migratory routes for transhumant shepherds and their herds. One of the activities AFPAT is involved in to mitigate resource-based conflicts is participatory land mapping. In addition, the organisation is lobbying local authorities to ensure that each woman is given a piece of land. The women have to manage this land according to agroecological principles, e.g. by planting trees and cultivating seasonal crops beneath them. Thus income for women, resilience to

climate change, access to land and ecosystem restoration are combined. Charles Goerens, Member of the Committee on Development of the European Parliament, supported Ibrahim’s call for considering the rights of the communities more strongly. Goerens reminded the meeting that community rights over land were hundreds of years old. It was up to national governments to become active here and, for example, prevent foreign land grabs.

Empowering women, keeping young people in rural areas

Sherine Omondi, EDD Young Leader Rural Transformation and Food Systems, is programme coordinator at K-Sammit. The Kenyan community-based organisation trains farmers on the importance of sustainable agriculture and in this context shows them the advantages of crop rotation. It also helps them to obtain rural credit and to develop small rural

markets. In order to empower women, K-Sammit distributes millet seed among women and encourages them to talk to their husbands who own the land. “Young people in the community tend to sell their land, which they have inherited, to make fast money. We attempt to maintain the land in a profitable condition so that the young people can keep and manage

it,” Omondi said. One achievement of K-Sammit was the development of an app providing young people with access to training via extension offices, without their having to have studied or received vocational education. In this manner, they learnt what to plant how and when, and how to tackle climate change, the EDD Young Leader explained.

Win-win solutions for farmers, entrepreneurs, consumers and the planet

Maryam Abeiderrahmane is Administrator of Tiviski Dairy in Mauritania. Tivisky was founded in 1987 and is Africa's first camel milk dairy. It sources all of its milk from semi-nomadic subsistence herders, enabling them to earn income from their livestock. However, establishing this value chain was not easy, as Abeiderrahmane reported. The herders had to be persuaded to deliver their milk in sufficient quantities, and above all on time, to the collecting points, the consumers had to be convinced that local products were at least of the same quality or even better than imported products, and last but not least, the merchants had to be persuaded to also accept slender profit margins. By now, the availability of fresh camel milk and other milk products has replaced imported milk powder from Europe. "For such a value chain to work, everyone has to benefit from it – the herders, the milkers, the milk transporters and the shops," the entrepreneur said. For the pastoralists, participating in the chain above all paid its way through a healthy herd and more resilience in difficult years.

David Watson Mwabila, EDD Young Leader Climate change: natural resources, food and mobility, is managing director and co-founder of Fourth Line Limited. The idea behind this Zambian social enterprise is to enable smallholder farmers to produce high value honey destined for global markets, thus enhancing livelihood improvement for communities across Africa while saving the forest. For him, in addition to entrepreneurial and innovative skills, the biggest challenge for youth and women on the way to becoming an agripreneur is access to finance. For example, he and his colleagues had



Jutta Urpilainen, EU Commissioner for International Partnerships. The EU is to dedicate ten per cent of its budget to biodiversity objectives.

Photo: European Commission

worked on their project for more than a year before support came from the Bill&Melinda Gates foundation. "Start where you are, don't wait until the conditions are perfect," was his message to young entrepreneurs.

Eight priorities for the EU and its partners

In the closing ceremony of the EDD, a high-level group of 13 international scientists and practitioners proposed eight recommendations on how the EU and its partners can address the biodiversity and climate crises, whilst ensuring green growth for people around the world:

- protecting 30 per cent of land and sea areas, and reducing tropical deforestation and degradation by 75 per cent by 2025 and nearly 100 per cent by 2030;
- restoring 300 million hectares by 2030, generating an estimated 8 trillion euros in ecosystem services and removing up to 26 gigatons of greenhouse gases from the atmosphere;
- continuing to help smallholder farmers and fishers in Africa and around the world improve the productivity, sustainability and resilience of food systems, supporting efforts towards implementing agro-ecological and regenerative agriculture approaches on 30 per cent to 50 per cent of agricultural lands;
- supporting a strong enforcement of regulations on wildlife crime and monitoring of wildlife;
- supporting substantial programmes to fill the implementation knowledge gap along with a specific attention to interactions between biodiversity and health (One Health), in particular around pandemics and nutrition issues;
- ensuring that all actions to restore and conserve biodiversity closely involve indigenous peoples and local communities, who already manage 35 per cent

- of remaining intact forests, often highly effectively;
- supporting EU partners to implement biodiversity-relevant multilateral environmental agreements and improving coherence of biodiversity-related policies at national level;
- promoting green investments for biodiversity. The high-level group encourages the EU to integrate biodiversity in its wider efforts to set up a financial system that supports global sustainable growth.

The recommendations are to feed into the ongoing negotiations for a future global biodiversity framework to be adopted at the 15th Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (COP15), to take place in Kunming, China in October of this year.

For a systematic transformation of all economic sectors

So is everything on track regarding biodiversity? Not at all, says Christian Schwarzer, Founding Member of the Global Youth Biodiversity Network. His organisation, representing around 600 youth organisations from all over the world, has already participated in six rounds of negotiations on the CBD. "I'm so tired of hearing that we failed once again the targets that we have all agreed on,"

Schwarzer complains, noting that what is lacking is policy coherence, clear actionable ideas, access of youth, grassroots organisations and indigenous communities to funding mechanisms and legally binding definitions of what nature-based solutions really are – so that they can really achieve results in linking combating global warming and biodiversity conservation. Schwarzer maintains that a systematic trans-

formation of the entire economic sector, in which gender and intergenerational equality is immanent, is needed. "I want you to fight for biodiversity as if the life of your beloved family were at stake!" he called on the conference participants.