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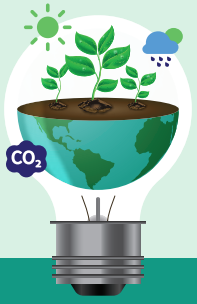
#YouthConnect

Climate stories powered by youth



Foreword

This booklet celebrates the creativity, resilience, and determination of Sri Lanka's Youth Climate Ambassadors. Each story within these pages reflects the power of young people to confront urgent environmental challenges with innovation and compassion — from protecting seagrass meadows and coral reefs, to reimagining farming practices, managing waste sustainably, and addressing psyco-social aspects of sudden climate disasters.

What unites these diverse projects is a shared belief: that youth-led action can spark meaningful change in communities and ecosystems alike. By combining traditional knowledge with modern science, and grassroots engagement with global awareness, these ambassadors show us that climate solutions are not distant ideals but practical steps we can take today.

May this booklet inspire readers to recognise the role of youth as catalysts for climate resilience, and to join hands in building a future where people and planet thrive together.

Lastly, this booklet would not have been possible without the unwavering dedication and commitment of our partners. We deeply thank our university partners, University of Jaffna, University of Ruhuna, University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Open University of Sri Lanka, NSBM Green University and Ocean University of Sri Lanka for their strategic support. We also thank Earthlanka Youth Network, Sevanatha Urban Resource Centre and their mentors for their contribution in guiding the youth climate ambassadors' projects.

This success is testimony to the fact that a multi-stakeholder approach combining academic insight with practical expertise has created lasting change and future innovation in the Sri Lanka context. With whom our British Council's non-formal education (NFE) programme team has worked hands on to bring this fruitful endeavour to fruition. As you take a look and leaf through this inspiring journey, we sincerely hope that nature and youth both inspire.

Contents

Protecting the 'Lungs of the Sea'

Preserving traditional coastal knowledge to protect seagrass in Sri Lanka

Called the 'lungs of the sea'- one square meter can generate up to 10 litres of oxygen each day. However, seagrass meadows are declining around the world. This concerning reality inspired three groups of Youth Climate Ambassadors, who placed seagrass conservation at the heart of their projects.

YCAs implementing **'Green Under Blue'** from the University of Jaffna conducted a baseline mapping of seagrass and seaweed in the Gurunagar area, validating their findings with the local community. Then, they conducted awareness sessions on conservation for 15 fishermen and 40 schoolchildren across two programmes. One school principal was so intrigued that they organised a field visit for their students to observe seagrass first-hand, facilitated by the team.

Villages covered – Gurunagar coastal area

3 Total community awareness sessions conducted

Community survey **1**

58 Total participants

25 Community Participants

Youth participants **33**

> "Participating in YCA was an eye opener, this programme expanded my scope and pushed me to think about my passion."
>
> **Akshaya Sashiraj**

Closer to Colombo, students from the Ocean University of Sri Lanka implemented **'Greener Wave'** to raise awareness about threats to the Negombo Lagoon's seagrass ecosystem, and improve scientific knowledge with an illustrated field guide to Sri Lankan seagrasses. The team conducted studies at laboratory level to explore the conservation and propagation of seagrass, working on implementing a practical prototype related to these findings.

The team facilitated an awareness session for over 200 students, teachers and community members in Negombo; drawing attention to threats facing the seagrass ecosystems in the Negombo Lagoon and highlighting the unique characteristics inherent to meadows in that environment.

> **"Students have been in touch for more information, while the Negombo Municipal Council has also expressed interest in the group's findings."**
>
> **Chamodhya Herath**

Back in the Northern province, the University of Jaffna's **'Beneath the Blue'** examined the correlation between sea cucumber farming and the seagrass population in the Pannai region. Through literature review and community surveys conducted with over 30 farmers, the team assessed the impact of farming on local seagrass meadows.

Then they conducted an awareness for approximately 15 stakeholders, sharing information about how unchecked sea cucumber farming can degrade seagrass meadows. They also hope to integrate these findings into policy drafts within the region.

> **"We were able to understand the depth of the study only after stepping into the field. This programme provided a valuable opportunity for us to explore the balance between sustaining local livelihoods and protecting the ecosystem."**
>
> **Sindoory Sivanesan**

City covered – Negombo Lagoon area

4 Total community awareness sessions conducted

Exhibition **1**

200 Total participants

50 Community Participants

Youth participants **150**

Disaster Relief with a Human Touch

‘Resurge-Healing Communities’ develops a guide for volunteers providing disaster relief

When the cyclonic storm Ditwah struck in late 2025 many Sri Lankans rallied to help those in need, reflecting the strong culture of solidarity and collective responsibility embedded in the Sri Lankan identity.

However, without proper knowledge and training, well-intentioned volunteer efforts can unintentionally cause harm or overlook critical psychosocial and safeguarding considerations. Recognising this, a team of Youth Climate Ambassadors from the University of Sri Jayewardenepura in Colombo conceptualised **‘Resurge- Healing Communities’** even before Ditwah struck.

These YCAs believed that disaster relief would be more effective if delivered with sensitivity and contextual understanding; promoting safe, ethical, and psychologically informed engagement.

> **“We felt that it was important for youth volunteers like us to have the proper knowledge and training when engaging in disaster relief work. Otherwise, well-meaning efforts can unintentionally cause harm, or volunteers may not know how to handle the various challenges that come up when working with affected communities,”**
>
> **Sachini Wickramasinghe**

The tools and skills they gained during the YCA workshops played a significant role in project design and implementation.

With support from the British Council, the team organised a multi-disciplinary consultation with 21 experts from social work, climate resilience, mental health, youth volunteerism, child protection, and sustainability in December 2025 to validate the findings of their desk research and to inform the development of a Volunteer Guide and training module aimed at preparing volunteers for disaster response and preparedness. Using an inclusive approach, they also considered the gendered impact of natural disasters and appropriate response mechanisms in the guide.

Following this, the team delivered a training for 20 students at their university on disaster context, volunteer roles, safeguarding and psychological first aid; thereby establishing a trained pool of university volunteers for future disaster preparedness, response, and recovery initiatives in Sri Lanka.

The team will soon launch an electronic version of the Volunteer Guide, which can be used by youth volunteers across Sri Lanka who intend to engage in disaster preparedness and response activities.

University of Sri Jayewardenepura

1 Community awareness workshop

7 Consultation sessions

41 Total participants

21 Consultation Experts

20 Youth participants

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Sowing the Seeds of Certainty

YCAs help farming communities to better predict changing weather patterns

Sri Lanka's agricultural heritage dates back two millennia, with farming as the backbone of communities across the country. Today, approximately 26% of the population remains engaged in this sector. However climate change is severely disrupting crop production, bewildering farming communities that have relied on predictable rainfall for generations. In response, two YCA teams have stepped forward from Colombo and Jaffna. Their projects take a proactive approach with evidence-based solutions for farming communities trying to manage unpredictable conditions.

> "A friend told us about an elder in his village who could predict changes in the weather by observing environment factors such as like animal behaviour. That made us think. What if we could create a dataset that would help farmers to combine this kind of traditional knowledge with modern forecasting, which would also complement their instinct-based approach?"
>
> **Dumindu Shan**

Villages covered – 2
Yaggapitiya and Alakoladeniya in Kurunegala

1 Total community awareness sessions conducted

Community survey **1**

31 Farmers — Total participants

28 Community Participants

Youth participants **03**

The group's project is called **'The Green Bridge'**, and it was implemented in the Yaggapitiya GN Division in Kurunegala. Discussions with 31 farmers revealed that unpredictable weather had indeed impacted their crop yields. Their survey also revealed that farmers in this area were not well versed on traditional knowledge, due to the relative urbanisation of the chosen region.

The team put on their research hats, and are currently developing a dataset (with planned awareness sessions) for use by the farmers. They have also published a magazine with articles capturing various facets of their research.

In Jaffna, Jayavarthini Tharmapratheebasarma's group implemented **'Climate Diary for Sustainable Agriculture'**, a project that analysed 20 years of climate data and enhanced the knowledge and capacity of farmers and students on climate-resilient agricultural practices.

The group from the University of Jaffna first conducted a community mapping in Irupalai South. They spoke to a few persons from farming communities and schools to collect qualitative data. Utilising this information and their own research, complemented by guidance from seniors, the group conducted two awareness workshops; one for 28 students and another for 27 farmers in the area.

Villages covered – 1
Irupalai South and North in Jaffna

2 Total community awareness sessions conducted

Community survey **1**

55 Total participants

27 Community Participants

Youth participants **28**

> **"I gained confidence from implementing the YCA project. I have more courage. I know that if I start something, I can see it all the way through to the end, and that I have the ability to lead others to do something good."**
>
> **Jayavarthini Tharmapratheebasarma**

Taking Stock at Calido Beach

YCAs establish an updated baseline for biodiversity at Kalutara Calido Beach

In Kalutara, the Calido Beach is a small ribbon of land separating the Kalu Ganga estuary from the ocean that is notable for its geomorphological setting. The beach has experienced severe and rapidly evolving coastal erosion, driven by an interplay of natural dynamics and anthropogenic influences, within the broader context of increasing climate-related pressures.

Although the beach is considered ecologically important, there is no recent baseline documentation of its biodiversity or ecosystem condition. With this in mind, a team of five Youth Climate Ambassadors from the University of Sri Jayawardenepura set out to conduct a rapid ecosystem assessment of the beach. Their project is called **'Waves of Change'**.

For group leader Sandasi Gunaratne, the YCA programme's focus on addressing climate change through youth action was a perfect match with her own interests in biodiversity.

> **"Implementing the YCA project was a good opportunity to expand on our knowledge while also raising awareness among the community. This is an area that I was already interested in. Getting the chance to conduct the assessment and interact with the community, working with local authorities too, has given me an idea of what my career could be."**
>
> **Sandasi Gunaratne**

To establish an updated baseline for the Calido coastal area, the team first conducted an ecological survey covering flora, fauna and habitat types, visualised shoreline conditions over the years utilising GIS, and conducted approximately 25 socio-economic interviews with fishermen, residents and local stakeholders. These findings will be published in a technical report.

Next, they plan to raise community awareness and initiate a citizen science approach to support long-term environmental monitoring and responsible stewardship. For this they are targeting 30 youth, to reflect YCA's own focus on youth acting proactively to conserve their environment.

City covered – Kalutara (Calido coastal area)

1 Total community awareness sessions conducted

1 Community survey

2 No of Schools

80 Community Participants

25 Youth participants

30 School Children

25 Community Participants

Protecting the Reef Beyond the Beach

YCA project focuses on reef protection in the Deep South of Sri Lanka

For the group implementing **'Reef Resilience'**, the cause is personal. Himaya Waduge (26) and her teammates are students of Fisheries and Marine Science at the Ocean University Regional Centre in Tangalle. The Paraviwella coral reef in Tangalle, where their project was implemented, is where students from her department go to observe sea life. They knew that the coral reef was degrading over time, and one reason in particular stood out- visitors who come to the beach to bathe and have fun, unaware of the reef's steady but hidden presence.

> **"When we were encouraged to choose a project for YCA, we saw it as an opportunity to learn more about the reef so we could help to protect it. People don't visit intending to harm, so we knew building awareness about this sensitive coral reef would encourage positive action. We were very happy with their engagement. In the Q&A after the session, the students got almost every question right, which was a very positive sign for us"**
>
> **Himaya Waduge**

With guidance from their mentor, the team engaged in discussions with community, speaking to fishermen, shop owners, and local and foreign visitors in the area. Then, they snorkelled around and took underwater photographs to identify marine life in the reef which is known as Benthic survey in scientific terms. With this information they confirmed the level of degradation in the reef.

Awareness was most critical. The team selected 30 students from two schools in the area, and with support from 25 undergraduates from Ocean University conducted a programme covering the mangrove and coral reef ecosystems and climate change, emphasising actions that youth can take to responsibly protect their reef.

The project's final phase is the installation of a large notice board near the entrance to the beach leading to the reef. This board will carry information intended to inform visitors of the presence of the reef, its importance, and their responsibility to protect it by taking small steps that could make a difference. This way, visitors to Paraviwella will know how they too can help to protect a precious ecosystem.

City – Tangalle (Pareiwella coastal area)

2 Total community awareness sessions conducted

1 Community and Stakeholder Survey

1 Benthic Survey

75 Total participants

30 School Children

25 Youth participants

20 Community Participants

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Planting for Pollinators

YCAs bring pollinator-attracting plants to their campuses

In two universities, separated by a few hundred kilometres, small plots of land were filled with plants and lovingly nurtured to attract pollinators. Considered essential for ecological survival, pollinators facilitate food production and sustain ecosystems. Our YCAs- passionate about biodiversity- were keen to foster an environment for pollinators to thrive within their own campuses.

In Colombo, a group of students from the Open University of Sri Lanka spearheaded **'Pollinators'** to address one type of pollen-carrying species- butterflies. The university is located in a highly urbanised area, and the group wanted to see more butterflies thriving there. Following research on the types of host and nectar plants that attract butterflies, they planted 40+ pollinator-attracting flowers and shrubs.

40+

No. of pollinator attracting flowers and shrubs planted

> **"We have already identified three types of butterflies, alongside bees, in the garden, indicating that the project's actions are already helping create a pollinator-friendly habitat."**
>
> **Yashodha Upasena**

Butterfly species observed so far **3**

- Common Jezbel (Delias eucharis),
- Common Crow (Euploea core),
- Grass Yellow Butterfly (Eurema hecabe)

10 Youth

Total participants directly engaged

Other university community members **18**

To ensure sustainability, the group has looped in support from the university's landscape division, and created a Facebook page to raise awareness about the garden. Leveraging the networking skills they improved through YCA, they plan to link with the university's Natural Science Department to help research butterflies.

The University of Ruhuna's **'Bloom for Bees'** was inspired by challenges faced by farmers in Kamburupitiya in the Southern Province.

In recent years these farmers have observed a gradual decline in honey production, driven partly by a shortage of flowering plants that bees depend on for nectar and pollen. Dinura Lihinikaduwage and his teammates turned to a senior faculty member specialising on the subject for guidance, and planted 42 species of native flowering plants in a plot of land (alongside a bee colony) within the university to create a continuous source of nectar.

They also established a 'Bee Circle' in university to ensure sustainability. The group conducted an awareness session for 54 students and 24 farmers- and say that the latter helped them to merge their theoretical knowledge with the farmers' practical experience, creating a valuable pool of knowledge.

Ultimately, knowledge sharing is critical for the sustenance of any climate project, emphasises Dinura.

42 No. of pollinator attracting flowers and shrubs planted

No. of bee boxes / pots established: **20**

54 Youth — No. of awareness sessions held so far

Other community members **24** Farmers

> **"I gained practical experience through this project, and had the chance to share my own knowledge with others. Knowledge should not belong to one person but to society, and I count myself lucky to have been a part of that sharing."**
>
> **Dinura Lihinikaduwage**

Capturing the Human-Elephant Conflict

A short documentary explores how climate change drives the human-elephant conflict

In Sri Lanka, the human-elephant conflict is grave with over 3400 elephant deaths and 1100 human fatalities reported over the last decade. With forest cover shrinking, and migratory corridors occupied, elephants are forced into villages and farmland in search of food and water- leading to dangerous conflict with rural communities engaged in small scale farming for their survival.

A group of nature lovers from NSBM Green University chose this pressing problem as their YCA project, producing a short documentary that explains how climate change has driven wild elephants into villages while crop failures drive farmers into forests. By exposing this vicious cycle, they hope to establish climate change as a key driver of the human-elephant conflict in order to drive behaviour change.

The team chose the medium of film to help concerned citizens to understand the complexity of the conflict, while promoting traditional coexistence practices and climate action as pathways to restore the human-elephant balance.

> **"In cities we have a very limited understanding of what drives this conflict. The way villagers who experience the issue look at elephants is very different"**
>
> **Dulieke Himashan**

Elephants tend to enter human-occupied areas at night, and villagers often wake up to the terrifying sound of an elephant rooting around in their house, often knocking down walls in the way. These elephants have no other choice- increasing urbanisation and cultivation have shrunk their dwellings and with it, food sources.

To understand the situation, the group conducted field visits in the North Central province. They visited two wildlife sanctuaries and interviewed various stakeholders including wildlife officers, conservation researchers, veterinarians, affected families, and village administrators. They also analysed information on forest loss, abandoned chena cultivation and post-war impacts.

The result is a documentary with a runtime of approximately 23 minutes, which was screened to an audience of about 100 persons at a British Council showcasing event. With the feedback, the team plan to trim the documentary further and screen it at their university.

Their hope is that the published video on YouTube will reach more people, so that the reasons for this conflict are explored with more nuance. This, they say, might lead to designing solutions that address the root cause of the human-elephant conflict rather than its symptoms.

1 No. of screenings so far

No. of community reached so far **100** university students

Getting a Grip on Waste Management

Engaging communities in waste management solutions

Meaningful change usually starts at the grassroots level. Three groups of Youth Climate Ambassadors from the NSBM Green University in Colombo started with a focus on community, and their efforts spanning a short period has set the stage for long-term action by concerned individuals.

> **"Although I'm a project management student, I understood the true meaning of implementing a project through YCA. We faced some challenges, but we were able to manage them and achieve something positive as a result of our training"**
>
> **Azra Akmal**

says Azra Akmal of her group's experience implementing **'Green Guardians'**, a project that reached 62 students at the Raththanapitiya Ananda College.

The school that Azra's group had planned a four-day comprehensive awareness programme for unexpectedly closed when Ditwah struck. To stay within the YCA implementation period, the group quickly changed plans, and had soon modified their programme for the new school's requirements. They raised awareness about environmental conservation, sustainability and waste management through activities and quizzes, then donated essential materials to that school's Environmental Pioneers Club.

Pramodi De Silva, another project management student, echoes the same sentiment about her group's project **'Pure Flow'** implemented in partnership with the MAS Foundation.

Pure Flow was conducted as a case-study to assess upstream disposal patterns to address waste management challenges linked to the Dematagoda and Serpentine Canals in Colombo.

"Working with industry was really amazing, and we gained valuable experience,"

Pramodi De Silva

Pramodi reflected on her experience. The project engaged community (reaching approximately 70 people) and proposed interventions that would reduce the burden on Ocean Strainers set up by MAS Foundation to arrest the migration of waste into the sea.

A third group from the NSBM Green University conceptualized '**Sort Smart, Live Green**' implemented at the Pitipana Uththararamaya Temple. As a gathering space for Dhamma school students, families and community members, the temple was an effective conduit for the group's mission to address waste disposal.

The group estimates that they reached 300 persons with their interactive awareness sessions on climate change and waste management. They also introduced a simple waste segregation system at the temple, with a focus on composting, and established a small organic garden utilising natural compost.

Liresha Sritharan is a Pharmaceuticals student who was inspired by her YCA experience.

"This was my first time engaging in a sustainability project. After this, I am keen to work in a company that has a focus on sustainability when I graduate."

Liresha Sritharan

From Waste to Worth

Youth Climate Ambassadors turn university canteen waste into productive resources

Two groups of Youth Climate Ambassadors noticed that their faculty canteens were generating large amounts of food waste- and recognised an opportunity for circularity. Using their YCA projects, they transformed this food waste into a valuable resource for their university and surrounding communities.

At the Open University, **'Bio Bloom'** converted food waste into bio gas for canteen use.

> **"Our university already had a biogas system that was built six years ago and had fallen into disuse. Through the skills we gained in the YCA programme, we engaged key stakeholders within the university and worked together to restore and operationalise the system."**
>
> **Shashika Premachandra**

explains Shashika Premachandra, a student of Civil Engineering. The group tapped into their YCA network, with a mentor connecting them to an industry expert who inspected the system and identified points of leakage, and advised the team on moving forward. Once the issues were identified, the system was repaired.

After auditing food waste at the canteen- an estimated 20 kilos every day- the team restored the bio gas system by introducing new bacteria via cow dung. Following a two-week period for gas generation, they began feeding the system with food waste. This system is now connected to the canteen where it powers about 2-3 hours of cooking each day. The team has developed a manual for the system, and plans to launch a poster campaign to inform students about the initiative.

Meanwhile, YCAs at the University of Ruhuna took a different approach to their project **'Fly2Feed'** by introducing black soldier flies in a controlled setting to convert food waste into high-protein poultry feed. After estimating that their canteen generates around 22.6 kg of organic waste per day, the team explored ways to redirect this waste into a productive resource. A senior professor introduced them to the idea of using black soldier flies for this purpose, explains Himashi Kulathunga.

Black soldier fly larvae can rapidly breakdown organic biowaste, and mature larvae are rich in protein and essential nutrients, making them a sustainable feed ingredient. Following a successful pilot, the group plans to introduce the concept to farmers for their use by raising awareness.

> **"We hope that this project encourages more people to see waste as a resource. Getting the chance to practically apply our knowledge through YCA was an amazing opportunity."**
>
> **Himashi Kulathunga**

Her experience with YCA highlighted the importance of adapting quickly, and seeing new opportunities in unusual places. A student at the Faculty of Agriculture, Himashi adds, "Getting the chance to practically apply our knowledge through YCA was an amazing opportunity."

Sowing the Seeds of Change

Two groups of YCAs test solutions to make farming more climate-friendly

Paddy is the protagonist of Sri Lanka's agricultural heritage story. For over two thousand years, this crop has sustained the nation. Yet it comes at a cost. As a water intensive crop that is widely treated with chemical fertiliser in modern farming, paddy cultivation has a significant carbon footprint. Reducing the climate impact of farming was the focus of two projects implemented by Youth Climate Ambassadors from the University of Ruhuna and the Open University of Sri Lanka.

A team representing the University of Ruhuna implemented '**Eco Azolla**' to test the efficacy of affordable, eco-friendly alternatives to chemical nitrogen fertilisers.

> **"We know urea and other nitrogen-based fertilisers are very energy intensive with a significant carbon footprint. Based on existing research, we wanted to see how azolla could be used to produce an affordable and eco-friendly alternative."**
>
> **Nipun Dhananjaya**

explains Nipun Dhananjaya. "Based on existing research, we wanted to see how azolla could be used to produce an affordable and eco-friendly alternative."

The team started small, cultivating azolla in a pond on their campus using a simple float design. They are currently testing different combinations of dried azolla- alongside dried cow dung, ash from cinnamon wood and rice husk bio charcoal- to develop a viable fertiliser in pellet form suitable for overall soil health and crop production.

Meanwhile, Youth Climate Ambassadors from the Open University spearheaded **'Water-Wise Rice'** to assess the performance of rice grown under reduced-water conditions in comparison to conventional flooded cultivation. Their objective is to minimise water wastage and methane production while promoting climate-resilient rice cultivation.

The group, to be efficient, built on an existing research project at university that had been paused due to funding constraints. Cultivation beds had already been prepared to test how rice performs under varying water levels and farming conditions. With a new budget from YCA, the students repaired the weather station and installed an automated circuit irrigation system to commence the experiment.

The team is currently observing the performance of the rice in different conditions (flooded vs reduced water levels).

"It's too early to arrive at a conclusion. We also want to see if reduced water levels can work in the field and publish our results in a research paper. Hopefully, the findings can help our farmers to minimise water waste and environmental harm."

Medhawa Niranjan

Restoring Nature in the City

Youth tackle pollution and urban heat through ecosystem restoration

When Dishara Nethmini's team visited Crow Island Beach Park, she was struck by the unpleasant smell that permeated the area. Her group agreed that this was a problem they could tackle through their YCA project- giving rise to **'Back to Breath'.**

Crow Island- located in Colombo 15- is the only coastal wetland in the Colombo district. Heavy pollution has degraded its ecosystem with debris trapped in mangroves, floating garbage in its waterways, and a sulphurous odour that makes it difficult to enjoy the park's rich birdlife, flora and fauna.

The group (made up of students of Coastal and Marine Resource Management at Ocean University) approached the issue from a few angles. Key was the design of an innovative 3D model that visualises a pollution control system for the waterways at Crow Island. The idea was proposed by the group's leader Zimash Ahamed, and developed with guidance from their faculty and mentors.

> **"Canal Revive' is a new ecosystem engineering model for wetland conservation. We believe this is a first-of-its-kind, unique initiative that can be used as an integration model for filtration and restoration of wetlands in Crow Island."**
>
> **Zimash Ahamed**

The model was designed following a detailed biological survey and complemented by a community awareness session to mark World Wetland Day attended by **participants**. The group also planted 40 plants to aid mangrove restoration. They are now refining the pollution control model, and hope to collaborate with local authorities to install the system.

According to Dishara, teamwork was critical to identifying innovative solutions.

> "What we learnt from YCA about being open to differences in perspective, and finding ways to work together, was very useful in practice for our team,"
>
> **Dishara Nethmini**

In the South, YCAs from the University of Ruhuna launched **'Urban Thuru Viyana'**, a project to establish a dense mini-forest aimed at creating a cooling effect in an urbanised environment.

Using a plot of land provided by the university, these students of Green Technology first consulted faculty experts and visited a similar project implemented by impact entrepreneur Hasanka Padukka. After preparing the site, they selected native plants representing different forest layers and carried out dense planting of saplings using Miyawaki spacing techniques- a method known for rapidly creating forest cover on degraded, barren or underutilised land.

While results will take time to emerge, the team is encouraged by their efforts to tackle rapid warming in urban areas.

> "By improving the air quality and reducing local temperature, we might also be able to improve biodiversity in this area—proof that even small local actions can lead to big environmental results."
>
> **Rivindu Gunathilaka**

City – Mattakuliya (Crow Island Wetlands)

1 Total community awareness sessions

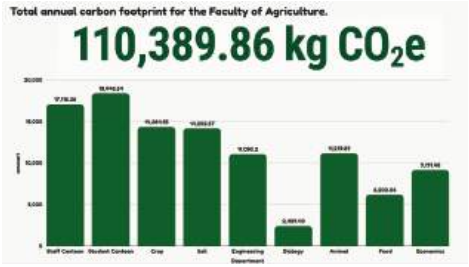
Total participants **88**

28 Community Participants

Youth participants **60**

Tracking Footprints to Move Forward

YCAs Lead Carbon Footprint Reduction Initiatives in their Universities



Could you guess your carbon footprint? If you're a student of the Ocean University or the University of Ruhuna, you might have a better idea than most. Over the last three months, two groups of Youth Climate Ambassadors embarked on ambitious projects to calculate the carbon footprint within their universities.

Six empowered YCAs implemented their project 'Carbon Compass' at the University of Ruhuna. With permission and support from the university, they calculated an annual carbon footprint of **110389.86 kg CO2 per year** for their faculty and identified key emission sources.

Calculating a carbon footprint at this scale is not simple. Luckily, the group was able to put their newfound networking skills to use.

> **"We benefited greatly from our mentors and drew on the University's faculty and the British Council's network for technical guidance, helping us understand and calculate our carbon footprint, an important first step in taking meaningful climate action."**
>
> **Nayomi Dilrukshi**

To address the emissions, the group has proposed developing a 'Lovers' Park'- a green space filled with plants that can purify the air while also serving as a recreational area for students.

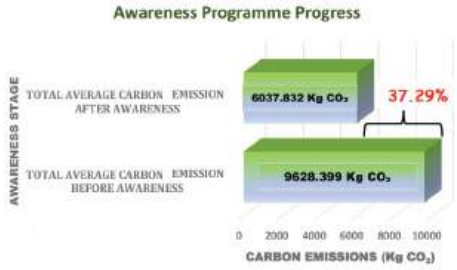
In Colombo, a group from the Ocean University drilled further to focus on the students themselves. The 'Greening Your Footprint' group asked one big question- could they change the habits of their fellow students as a result of all they learnt through YCA?

First, they collected data over one week from **80 first-year students** about their current lifestyles to identify major emission sources. Then, they conducted an awareness raising session to help these students adapt more sustainable lifestyle practices in future.

> **"After participating in YCA we felt more confident in communicating in a public setting, and I think this made our awareness session much more effective. We definitely hope to see these good habits continue. Sustainability matters a lot in climate initiatives- that's something we learnt through YCA."**
>
> **Rashmi Pabasara**

The team concluded their project with a happy result. When they conducted their endline survey after the awareness programme, they found a remarkable change; the students reported about 37% overall reduction in emissions over the week.

To foster continuity, these young changemakers have developed an e-book filled with practical tips in Sinhala and English to serve as a guide. Rashmi explains that this final flourish was a no-brainer. "We definitely hope to see these good habits continue. Sustainability matters a lot in climate initiatives- that's something we learnt through YCA."



City – Mattakuliya (Ocean University of (Sri Lanka)

4 Total awareness sessions

(Face to face and online)

80 Total Youth participants

Reconnecting Youth with Climate-Smart Agriculture

‘Smart Hands on Soil’ teach schoolchildren how to set up their own gardens for food

In the Northern Province of Sri Lanka, the effects of climate change are increasingly evident in agriculture and fisheries livelihoods. Observing this, a group of Youth Climate Ambassadors from the University of Jaffna designed their project, **‘Smart Hands on Soil’**, with a focus on agriculture. Their initiative aimed to reconnect young people- who are becoming incr easingly distant from nature- with sustainable smart agricultural practices.

Even though climate change is visibly affecting rainfall patterns, soil health and crop productivity, the team observed that youth and their households had limited awareness about adapting to these changes. They thought that change could start small to help these youth to reconnect with their agricultural roots; for instance, with improved gardening techniques that could contribute to addressing food insecurity.

The ‘Smart Hands on Soil’ team comprise of nine students from the Faculty of Science at the University of Jaffna. To implement the project, they approached J/Araly Saraswathy Mahavidyalayam in Araly, Jaffna. The team’s goal was to guide schoolchildren to adapt to the effects of climate change by using simple, low-cost techniques to develop their own home or school gardens.

Their programme was attended by 78 students aged 15-16 from the school. First, the group focused on developing student mindset. “We thought this was critical to achieving a meaningful outcome, because we ourselves went through this mindset transformation at the YCA workshops,” explains group leader Nithusha Vijayakumar (24).

Next, they introduced the topic of climate change to their young audience, covering important concepts as well as adaptation and mitigation measures. This was followed by a practical session on establishing a climate-smart garden. Participants were introduced to techniques such as seed trays, upcycled containers, and water efficient methods, while also receiving guidance on making climate-smart crop choices for their gardens.

Of the 78 students trained, 35 students went on to organize themselves into groups to establish a school garden, and set up their own home gardens. Together, they have planted over 50 plants so far, with the YCA team receiving regular updates via Whatsapp. Some students have started to set up climate-smart gardens in their own homes.

Nithusha says that her team is heartened by the progress.

> **"We were able to positively influence the mindset of school students, many of whom believed that farming was not a respectable or worthwhile profession. Through our engagement, we helped them understand the importance of farming and increased their enthusiasm and interest in agriculture,"**
>
> **Nithusha Vijayakumar**

Reflecting on her YCA experience, she added, "As a leader, I was able to manage my team in a way that I felt proud of, while also maintaining good communication among team members. This project helped us to reflect about our own capacities and what we can do for the community."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bassadors

Inspiring Next Steps

The stories in this booklet remind us that climate action is not confined to policy halls or global conferences. Tt is alive in classrooms, communities, and coastlines across Sri Lanka. The Youth Climate Ambassadors have shown that with creativity, courage, and collaboration, young people can design solutions that protect ecosystems, strengthen resilience, and inspire collective responsibility.

Their projects, from safeguarding seagrass and coral reefs, to rethinking agriculture, managing waste, and addressing human-wildlife conflict; demonstrate that every effort, no matter how local, contributes to a global movement for sustainability.

As this chapter closes, the message is clear. Youth are not just the leaders of tomorrow, they are the changemakers of today. May these stories encourage us all to act with the same urgency and imagination, ensuring a future where communities and nature thrive together.

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