



GATHERING VOICES OF THE YOUTH

Transformative Storytelling Contest

Meet the winners



About

Stories and art have the potential to create meaningful connections and provide insights and inspirations about living in harmony with nature and the communities around us. Stories can engage us in a felt experience moving beyond abstract concepts of climate change and transformation helping us relate to current issues in a deep, personal way. Stories and art can stimulate surprise, wonder, courage and hope – ingredients we desperately need to adequately respond to the challenges of today.

The **Gathering Voices of the Youth: Transformative Storytelling Contest** is an NBRACER initiative that aims to understand and give a voice to the values and perceptions of young people to support more inclusive and collaborative approaches to current social-ecological challenges.

Young people between 18 and 29 years old were invited to share a transformative story of how we can live and thrive together with Nature. They submitted a personal story supported by a photo or handmade art about being climate resilient, using solutions that work with nature, or finding ways of restoring relationships with nature.





Iván López Rojo, Spain

Between Pavement and Water

I come from Fuenlabrada, a name that once meant "fountain among fields", though the fields are now industrial parks, and the fountains run dry behind fences.

Growing up here, nature was an echo: a dusty median with stubborn weeds, the skeletal remains of a stream buried under concrete, the smell of burnt diesel when the wind blew from the east. My generation didn't inherit a forest, we inherited infrastructure.

But something changed in the lockdown. When the world fell silent, I started walking. Not far, just beyond the commuter belt, past the warehouses, I found a path along the Arroyo Culebro. It was half-forgotten: trash scattered, graffiti scrawled, but the reeds were pushing through. There were birds -yes, real ones- and even, once, a fox.

That river, if you can call it that, became a ritual. I returned week after week. I brought gloves. Then a bag. Then friends. We cleared plastic, trimmed invasive plants, built a compost plot with the neighbourhood youth club. The local paper didn't write about us. No politician came. But the path grew clearer.

To reconnect with nature here isn't romantic. It's not trees and poetry. It's slow, stubborn work, an act of care against entropy. Resistance with a broomstick.

I don't believe in utopias, -or, perhaps, yes, depending of the day to be honest-. But I do believe a broken stream can become a living corridor again. Not because we demand it, but because we attend to it; daily, humbly.

They say resilience is bouncing back. I think it's remembering who we were before we forgot. And I reckon Fuenlabrada, in its most unreachable depth, remembers.

Biography

I strive to build bridges between institutions, civil society, and citizens to foster sustainable, democratic, and inclusive policymaking. Through my work with the European Climate Pact and Europa Sostenible, I seek to contribute to initiatives that not only address today's challenges but also strengthen trust and connections across borders and communities. My aspiration is to remain curious, ethically grounded, and continually learning from people and institutions dedicated to shaping a better Europe.





Maryam Nama Hussaini, Afghanistan

Forbidden Life, Free Hope

I opened my eyes to a land where being a girl was a sin; Where girls were deprived of breathing, learning, laughing, and living.

But I decided to be the sound of silence.

When they said "girls no longer have the right to education", I silently held the pen and taught it to girls of the same age in our home.

When the doors were closed to art, I kept a secret drawing alive among the girls.

When we were allowed to go to the park and see the meadow, I planted flowers in our yard, wrote a tree, and built my green place with the color of hope.

They wanted to shave the mountains, uproot the fruitful trees, but I stood like a "desert tulip" that grows even in the heart of the rock. Every time they cut my branches, I sprouted again, because I believe that hope is power.

I am a girl who rose from the dark heart to become a light.

I wish to be an ambassador of peace one day, to save the nature of my country, and in a world that wants to extinguish us, I say loudly: We are still here, and we are still moving forward.

Biography

I deeply care about restoring balance between humans and nature because our future depends on learning to live with nature. I want to be a leader and inspiration for the younger generation, encouraging boldness in developing innovative and practical solutions to environmental and social challenges. My goal is to build connections beyond borders and cultures, creating a bridge for peaceful coexistence between humans and nature, shaping a bright and hopeful future for all.





Mike Tembo, Kenya

Planting hope without soil

Farming in my community is not easy. It involves using soil, large pieces of land, a lot of sweat and not forgetting depending on climate and weather. The weather is changing. The soil is tired. Water is scarce. Many young people have given up on agriculture.

But I chose a different path. Thanks to the Leave No Youth Behind project by SOS Children's Village, I was given a chance to learn hydroponic farming, a smart way to grow food without soil. Through training at Miramar International College, I learned how plants can grow in water, using nutrients where by soil is not necessarily a medium for crop growing, even in small spaces if land something can be grown.

When I came back home, I didn't have much. But I had an idea and hope. I collected used disposable cans, cleaned them, and turned them into planting stations. Slowly, green life began to grow. I didn't just recycle waste, I recycled possibilities.

Today, I'm also proud to be part of the SOS hydroponic greenhouse team, where we grow fresh red capsicums. I work side by side with other youth, using nature based solutions that save water, reduce chemicals, and build a better future.

My photo shows more than just vegetables in cans or capsicums in a greenhouse. It shows a journey from nothing to something. From waste to growth. From doubt to belief.

Hydroponics taught me that soil is not the only foundation a farmer needs. With knowledge, support, and creativity, we can grow anywhere and bloom in the face of climate change since there is no wastage of water.

Now, I teach others what I've learned. I tell them, "You don't need land. You need vision." Because even without soil, you can still plant hope and harvest a future.



Biography

I am deeply committed to protecting the environment and empowering young people through smart, sustainable solutions such as hydroponics. I believe we can grow food, address climate change, and cultivate hope even without soil or large amounts of land. I want to be part of a generation that creates change through creativity and innovation. My aspiration is to become a leader in sustainable farming and help communities to grow food using methods like hydroponics. I want to teach others, especially youth, that they can farm in new ways that protect nature, save water, and bring hope.

My dream is to start a hydroponics project that creates jobs, feeds people, and fights climate change.





Nayama Elsa Christy, Germany

The Rose that Stayed

When I was five, my parents taught me not to litter. They said nature gives without asking and that I should do my part to protect her. It was simple advice, but it stuck. That was the beginning of my journey. A journey of learning to respect and care for the world around me, no matter how small it may seem.

When I was sixteen, the floods came. Crushing waves swallowed villages in my state: Kerala, India. I watched helplessly, as thousands lost everything. Their homes, their memories, their lives. Yet, no one spoke of it outside our region. The world had bigger things to worry about: scandals, celebrities, who divorced whom. Our grief went unnoticed outside our country. Our stories untold.

At eighteen, the floods returned. This time, it was me calling my parents twelve times a day. Just to hear their voices. Just to make sure the water hadn't taken them too. I carried the fear around like a shadow. I'd close my eyes, but my mind would replay worst-case scenarios.

Through all this, there was one thing that didn't leave. A rose plant. It stood alone in front of our house, a quiet witness to everything. Year after year, flood after flood, it always came back. Its yellow petals glowed like tiny suns, not the blinding kind you squint at, but the kind that whisper: "I'm still here."

In that rose, I saw nature's quiet resilience. Not dramatic. Not headline-worthy. But powerful.

Now, I carry this memory with me like a seed in my pocket. Letting it take root in how I live, how I connect, how I care. Not because it will stop the floods, but because it reminds me and maybe others too, that nature doesn't give up. And neither should we.

Biography

I care deeply about respect and inclusion. Through my volunteer work with differently abled people, I came to understand the importance of building a world where slowing down, making space for others, and leading with care form the foundation rather than the afterthought. I am currently studying to become a sustainability consultant and am serving as the UNESCO Chair student representative. My goal is to support organizations in meeting their climate commitments in ways that honor people and places, especially those too often overlooked. My friends like to call me a "Swiss Army knife", able to be part listener, part problem-solver, and part cheerleader. This mix allows me to stay grounded in moments of chaos while helping others find their footing, even when everything feels upside down.





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