

4. Substantive issues: (b) Access to information;

Dear Chairman, thank you for giving me the floor.

Dear participants, I want to raise my voice on behalf of the youth.

To guarantee the participation of young people in decision-making regarding environmental issues, youth should have the right to obtain information on environmental matters. They must have the necessary information in both the language and through sources accessible to them. In this age of information overload, it is especially difficult for young people to find the needed information and distinguish between accurate information and misinformation.

The government of Armenia makes efforts and implements various initiatives in the direction of transparency and good governance, but they are not youth-centered and do not take into account the special needs of young people like me.

Let me highlight a few priority needs that we have identified:

****Lack of sufficient information about available environmental programs and initiatives, or their inconsistency with actual needs:****

Our survey conducted among schoolchildren (aged 14-18) revealed that most are either misinformed or entirely uninformed about their role in decision-making.

Seventy-five percent of the teenagers surveyed attributed their lack of involvement to the difficulties for finding opportunities to engage with. Twenty percent of the teens cited a lack of motivation, which is closely related to the absence of information. For example, there are no dedicated platforms that provide comprehensive information on youth environmental rights and events at the national level. And the left part cited not having enough time or interest. This highlights a broader issue: for many young people, being involved is seen as an additional "hobby" rather than a responsibility.

For example, in the Kurtan settlement, young people aged 14-20 initiated a struggle to save the river flowing through their village. They organized a petition and forced the community authorities to reject the project of building a hydroelectric power station above the settlement, for which most of the water had to be taken in a pipe. This project has been rejected. However, the lack of needed information, especially information about their rights, was highlighted by the activists as the most significant obstacle.

****Need for a targeted Systematic Approach:****

The authorized body for youth policy has launched an official youth information website, which currently lacks a dedicated subsection on environmental issues. The site addresses environmental topics only in the context of specific events related to environmental protection. Meanwhile, specialized websites such as Ecolur and Econews do not create content specifically aimed at youth. Consequently, important Armenian news is not interpreted from a youth perspective, does not reflect the interests of young people, and fails to highlight risks that may impact them..

Armenia's youth strategy draft doesn't emphasize transparency and access to environmental information relevant to the needs of this group of beneficiaries. The draft Law on Youth is also under public discussion at the moment.

We have developed a suggestion to the Government to include provisions in the draft of the strategy, which will serve as a basis for appropriate changes in the legislation.

****Conclusion:****

Young people are ready to take the initiative and take actions for a better environment, but their rights are not guaranteed. We see the solution to this problem in initiating changes to the educational system and making laws more child-centered. Establishing youth-concentrated environmental platforms will increase the awareness and involvement of school-aged children by clearly defining their roles and activity limits.
