Leadership and Sharing with #YALILearns

Participants in a YALI Learns event on leadership training and land law in Mampong, Kumasi, Ghana (Courtesy of Oxford Bonsu)

Communities thrive on sharing and learning. #YALILearns is a Networkwide initiative that offers you the opportunity to build networks in your community with events organized by you or your fellow Network members and tailored to the topics that will make positive change where you live.

In Ghana, Oxford Bonsu, an active YALI Network member, used the YALI Network Online Course "Community Organizing for Action" as the basis for an event that brought together 45 chiefs of the Ashanti region to discuss laws of land use in their region and to explore ways their lands could be used as equity for business investment.

"I was humbled," Bonsu wrote on the YALI Network Face2Face page, "when one of the chiefs present pronounced the workshop unprecedented in the history of the traditional council."

Event organizer Joyce Ikpaahindi (left) with 2015 YALI Fellows Fatu Ogwuche and Benjamin Dankaka.(Courtesy Joyce Ikpaahindi)

Joyce Ikpaahindi, a YALI Network member in Nigeria, saw the need to develop in her community a stronger sense of how to engage effectively in public service to bring about change. She designed an event around the YALI Network Online Course "Strengthening Public Sector Service."

"To set up my event," Ikpaahindi said, "I first needed to find a suitable space to accommodate 21 people. My department at the Federal Ministry of Works was willing to provide the space and equipment needed to host the event."

Ikpaahindi also enlisted the support of two 2015 Mandela Washington Fellows, Fatu Ogwuche and Benjamin Dankaka, who shared their experiences on the Fellowship program and also their leadership experience in the Nigerian public sector. "Real-life examples and experiences shared by the Fellows proved to be quite popular with the participants," she said. "A good #YALILearns event should be as practical, engaging and hands-on as possible."

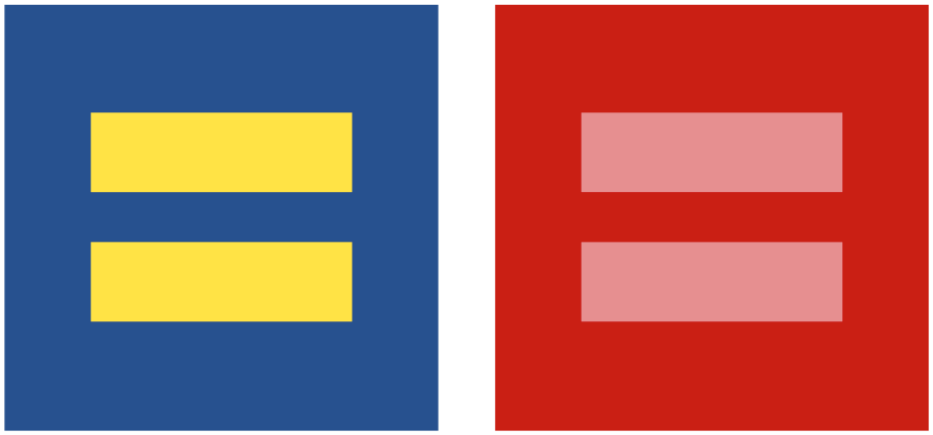
Both Ikpaahindi and Bonsu created their events by combining a relevant YALI Network Online Course with additional discussions and presentations from community leaders. The particulars of the program are up to you, since you know your community best — as long as you bring people together, share ideas and take away a resolve to create positive change.

If you want to hold a #YALILearns event of your own, look at the #YALILearns page to learn more about how to facilitate your event and choose a topic that will most benefit your audience. A local partner such as a university or civic group can be useful in finding a venue for your event and helping you get the word out.

During your event, make sure to take pictures, and then let us know how it went at the #YALILearns feedback page so that we can share your success with the Network.

Amplifying Your Campaign Online

Throughout the day of March 26, 2013, the marketing team at Human Rights Campaign (HRC) saw some startling numbers: a 600 percent increase in Web traffic, with 700,000 unique visitors in a 12-hour period, 86 percent of whom were new to the site. On Facebook, millions of users — including members of Congress and celebrities — had changed their profile images to a special red version of the HRC logo in what Facebook would later call the most successful viral campaign in their history.



HRC is the largest organization in the U.S. working toward LGBT equality, and March 26 was the day the U.S. Supreme Court heard arguments in the case that would make same-sex marriage legal throughout the country.

The campaign HRC mounted in the lead-up to that day is a case study in how to amplify a message and make a big impact. Maureen McCarty is the deputy director of marketing for HRC and was one of the people who designed the campaign. Here's what McCarty says a campaign must be to achieve success:

Opportunistic

"We really emphasize, as a marketing team, rapid response," McCarty said. "During the marriage-equality movement, HRC was frequently first out the door alerting members and supporters about important breaking news and positioning ourselves as thought leaders." Being opportunistic, she said, means tracking your field closely and being prepared to respond immediately when news breaks.

Planned

"When we launched our Equality Act," McCarty said, "about two months in advance we started with an extensive editorial calendar that outlined day by day the digital content that we were rolling out to get our audience excited around a particular hashtag and around the launch." McCarty points out that being opportunistic and being well-planned have to work in tandem. "Planning helps us to get ahead of the story, but we also have to adjust to where our audience is. As much as we emphasize an editorial calendar, we need to be flexible if there's news that day."

Innovative

Online, innovation means finding ways to reach people where they're meeting. "HRC is on nearly every social media platform that's out there," said McCarty. "We make sure we're at the forefront of

the digital frontier and that we're putting out content on these platforms that is tailored to their audience and is really responding to what that audience is looking for."

Authentic

Authenticity means having a recognizable and credible voice. "A key to our strategy is bringing in influencers and validators to speak on behalf of our cause and to help reach out to an even broader network of people."

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10 ways YALI Network members can help address climate change

This is a guest blog post by Kate Berrisford, Founder & Managing Director, Green Africa Directory – Africa's sustainability network. Visit www.greenafricadirectory.org to learn more.

Climate change affects us all and will continue to do so unless we collectively take actions now to reduce emissions. We are at a pivotal moment in time, where our actions now will have long-lasting impacts. We may also be the last generation that can stop climate change — this provides us with a huge opportunity to transition and transform our world to be more sustainable, resilient, equitable and livable.

While the business sector and government have important roles to play in accelerating action to prevent climate change, there are also many actions we can take on an individual level. Below is a list of 10 ways we can help address climate change. These relate to the sustainable consumption of resources — that is, finding ways of consuming more efficiently and in a less resource-intensive way.

10 things we can do to address climate change:

Green your transport: Consider using the most sustainable forms of transport available, including nonmotorized transport such as walking or cycling; public transport such as trains and buses; and carpooling, ride sharing or car share schemes.

Use sustainable energy: Using sustainable energy in your home helps prevent carbon emissions and has various co-benefits, like saving money. Renewable, clean and efficient energy sources for the home include solar cookers, solar water heaters, solar lights, biogas and clean cookstoves. Be energy-efficient through your choice of home appliances and use of energy.

Support sustainable agriculture and diets: Sustainable agriculture can help mitigate climate change and build food security. Support sustainably produced food (e.g., organic) and consider growing your own food or joining a community food garden. A major contributor to climate change is

the meat industry — cut down on meat or eliminate it from your diet to help prevent climate change.

Raise your voice and awareness: Get to know more about how climate change may affect you (including your health, livelihood and children), expand your knowledge by taking the "Understanding Climate Change" course, and then start conversations with others about climate change to help raise awareness and inspire action. Join local climate-change groups, attend climate events and talks, and engage your local political leaders to take bold, ambitious action on climate change.

Build green: There are many innovative, affordable and sustainable building techniques available across Africa. These include using sandbags, eco-bricks, hemp and straw bale. Retrofit your home to be more sustainable — My Green Home in South Africa is a practical example of how to do this on a household level.

Plant trees and protect biodiversity: Trees and forests provide carbon sinks and help mitigate climate change, while protecting biodiversity helps sustain vital ecosystem services (which include regulating climate). Plant trees, join or support tree-planting initiatives and events, donate a tree and support local nature-conservation initiatives.

Save water: Help conserve water in your home through using low-flow shower heads and waterless, low-flush or dual-flush toilets; have shorter showers; ensure your garden is water-wise and indigenous; collect and use rainwater; consider grey water recycling; and repair leaky taps.

Protect oceans and coasts: Oceans help reduce climate change by storing large amounts of carbon dioxide, and coastal ecosystems can help minimize the impacts of climate change. Protect healthy oceans by keeping them clean, taking part in beach cleanups and supporting sustainably sourced seafood.

Collaborate and share: There are many ways people collaborate that create opportunities to meet basic needs, while being resource-efficient and cutting down on GHG emissions. Some examples of the new collaborative or sharing economy include co-working, bike sharing, carpooling, crowdfunding and garden sharing.

Support climate innovation: Innovative technologies that will help us mitigate and adapt to climate change are becoming ever important in helping to accelerate climate action. Give your support to climate entrepreneurs and inventors to develop innovative technologies and ideas.

To protect the planet, we can all do our part

Students pick up non-biodegradable

plastics from the Saint Monica University Campus, Cameroon. (Photo courtesy Gabila Franklin Neba.)

Did you know small changes in your daily routines can make a huge difference to your health, the health of your neighbors and the future of the planet? Choose from among these simple steps and start today.

Join #YALIGoesGreen this month. Learn how to get involved at yali.state.gov/climate.

When you run errands or travel ...

• Walk or ride a bike.
• Take public transportation.
• Organize errands into one trip.
• When driving, accelerate gradually and drive at lower speeds.
• Drive less, particularly on days with unhealthy air.

When you are at home ...

What we do at home makes a big impact on air quality. Consuming less energy helps reduce air pollution, as does choosing sustainable, recyclable products. Limit use of chemicals that contribute to smog.
Did you know that detergents, cleaning compounds, glues, polishes and even cosmetics, perfume and deodorants contribute to smog? Such items contain volatile chemicals that evaporate readily. When the sun shines, they combine with other pollutants to form ozone, a primary component of smog that is bad for our health.
• Turn the lights off when you leave a room.
• Replace energy-hungry incandescent lights with energy-saving CFLs or LEDs.
• If alternative energy sources such as solar or wind are available, use them.
• Recycle paper, plastic and organic materials.
• Use nonpolluting stoves. Avoid using kerosene to cook, heat or provide light.
• Choose products made from recycled materials or sustainable sources such as bamboo, hemp and coconut fiber.
• Use durable, reusable shopping bags, not disposable plastic bags.
• Paint with a brush instead of a sprayer.
• Store all solvents in airtight containers.
• Eliminate use of toxic chemicals at home; opt for natural substitutes.
• Plant a tree to help purify the air.

When you are at work ...

• Use natural light during the day.
• Work from home if possible.
• If you work in an office, start a recycling program. Print and photocopy on both sides of paper, and only print when necessary.
• Turn off office equipment (i.e., computers, printers and fax machines) after hours.

When you are in your community …

- Support efforts to “green” the neighborhood.
- Start an environmental program yourself.
- Let your elected representatives know you support action for cleaner air.

Adapted from the California Air Resources Board’s “Simple Solutions to Help Reduce Air Pollution.”

Can we stop climate change? The Paris summit may be the key.

It may sound like the latest film noir movie, but it has nothing to do with a police whodunnit. In America, people often informally use the word “cop” to refer to a police officer. But in this case, COP21 is shorthand for the 21st Conference of Parties (COP) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).
To put it simply, COP21 is an upcoming summit that brings countries together to solve the problems of global warming and climate change.

It all began at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, where the UNFCCC was formed to find ways to “stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere” at low levels to stop further environmental damage. Scientists had found that these emissions from transportation and industry precipitated more rapid climate change — not a good thing.

I love Paris in the winter

COP21 will meet in Paris from November 30 to December 11. It's going to be big. To date, there are 196 parties to the convention, most of whom will attend. There are also nonmember attendees — observer states and nongovernmental organizations. The parties hope to draft a new international agreement, or protocol, on the climate.

To date, at least 150 countries have submitted goals for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and achieving a low-carbon future through cleaner, more sustainable practices. These goals, called Intended Nationally Determined Contributions, will figure in the the discussions among the parties on how to halt the progress of global warming and climate change. Forty-nine African nations have submitted their goals. Ethiopia, for instance, plans to reduce its emissions by 64 percent below projected business-as-usual emissions by 2030.

Climate change is happening faster because of us

Scientists agree that human activity is largely responsible for the rapid increase in global warming in the past 40 years. There is strong evidence supporting the seriousness of climate change. Drastic changes in weather patterns are occurring: more violent storms, hotter summers and colder winters. If the world continues to warm, sea levels will rise, harming communities located along coastlines. That and drought could create new migration patterns and harm agriculture. Crop yields in some places have diminished in recent years because of exposure to ozone. And warming oceans will affect marine life worldwide in ways that will harm fisheries upon which people depend for food.

Droughts are expected to increase in central and southern Africa, along with unprecedented

extremes of heat. Studies predict increased annual precipitation in the Horn of Africa and parts of East Africa that will increase the risk of flooding.

It will not be just a gab fest

COP21 will be about cleaner air, healthier people, stronger economies and keeping island nations from disappearing under the sea. The goal: act now to keep global warming below 2 degrees Celsius. To accomplish that, significant reductions in greenhouse gas emissions worldwide will have to be made over the next few decades. (Carbon dioxide emissions have reached the highest levels this year, according to NASA, the U.S. space agency.)

So what can I do if I'm not in Paris?

- Learn as much as you can about the effects of climate change. NASA's Vital Signs of the Planet website is a great place to start.
- Improve your understanding of the negotiations, and get to know the two diplomats (Daniel Reifsnyder of the U.S. and Ahmed Djoghlaf of Algeria) at the center of the agreement.
- Stay tuned to the U.S. Center at COP21 for live webcasts during the two weeks of the conference.
- Publish your climate solution on the Climate Solutions Hub.
- Follow @FactsOnClimate and @US_Center on Twitter, and use hashtags#ActOnClimate and #AskUSCenter to tweet your views.
- Contact your government officials and urge them to take action now!
- Take the YALI Network Online Course "Understanding Climate Change."
- Facilitate or participate in a YALI Learns event on climate change.