

Youth are not the future. They are the now

By [Amy Pieterse](#), issued by [Ginkgo Agency](#)

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It is the youth that are steering us forward with unwavering conviction. They are not willing to wait for change. They're leading in the present.



In 2019, Greta Thunberg sat before an audience of global leaders at the United Nations summit on climate action, fury in her eyes. “I shouldn’t be up here,” she [admonished](#). “I should be back in school, on the other side of the ocean. Yet you all come to us young people for hope? How dare you.”

Youth are angry, rightly so. And it’s that anger that is driving change. Look around. The Arab Spring. Fees Must Fall. Extinction Rebellion. Black Lives Matter. From Tunisia to South Africa to China and the United States, young people are fighting for democracy, education, the planet and their lives.

To suggest that youth are unaware, ignorant or naive would be remiss. They are direct stakeholders in what happens in their communities and their countries. They are the generation that will be impacted by environmental policies, political choices and violent reactions of elder decision-makers of the present. They are not protected from issues by virtue of being young. In many cases, their voices should be heard before anyone else’s.

Consistently, young people are proving to be change makers and innovators. In the face of fluctuating circumstances, they show what it means to take charge. Youth aren’t afraid of progress. The only thing that’s frightening is inaction. As Professor Alcinda Honwana, an expert on youth and social movements, [writes](#): “Contemporary youth activism and its uncompromising refusal of current political cultures, underscores the potential for redrawing and redesigning the bounds of political imagination.”

Unlike adults who may be softened into a lull of comfortability and self-interest, youth are igniting transformation. They are proactive, single-minded, and instilled with something many of us lose so easily – belief. It’s time we started seeing the world from the youth’s eyes, as one fraught with problems but ripe for positive change.

To create the future, acknowledge the present

Youth are not minds to be moulded. They are already in possession of thoughts, beliefs, opinions and ideas. Unencumbered by the weight of conflicting perspectives, young people can look at the challenges plaguing society and say: this affects me, it affects other people. Something must be done, and now. With a sophisticated use of technology and social media, youth are sharing information and resources with one another and mobilising to action.

One needs only to look at the mass protests against racism and police brutality across the United States to recognise the power of youth. Young organisers from Black Lives Matter like [Nupol Kiazolu](#), who has protested racial injustice since the age of 13, are at the frontlines of demonstrations. Another protestor, 18-year-old Rashaad Dinkins, said to the [New York Times](#): "I felt like I had no excuse but to be a part of it. I have nephews. I have the next generation that's looking up to me as a role model." Phones in hand, they have captured and shared the very violence they are resisting. It's fuel to the fire, as well as a stark message to their nation and the world: you can no longer look away.

It's not only the collective action of youth that's highly effective, but their individual creativity. [Feroza Aziz](#)'s make-up tutorial on TikTok went viral for its astute inventiveness. At first, it appears to be a how-to on eyelash curling, before Aziz launches into a searing denouncement of the detainment of Muslims in China. Watched millions of times, Aziz demonstrated the potency a single young voice can have in confronting tremendous social issues.

Our willingness to feign ignorance or disregard another's struggle is actively challenged by youth. At nine years old, [Joshua Roos](#) witnessed people scratching through rubbish bins in search of food. Determined to help, he started a soup kitchen. Roos has fed over 3,000 people since 2018. After observing a pervasive problem, he found a solution in the moment. Why wait for adults to do something when there are people in desperate need? Rather than depend on the methods of others, youth are innovating for progress.

[Vanessa Nakate](#) has spurred a movement of climate activism across Africa almost single-handedly. Since protesting by herself in areas of Kampala, she's become a leading figure of environmental justice. She established the Rise Up Movement across 10 countries and has spoken at Davos. Nakate is bringing attention to some of the most vulnerable regions such as the Congo Basin, and placing the focus on Africa. It is, and will be, disproportionately impacted by the effects of the climate crisis.

From racial inequality to global warming, youth aren't just fighting for the future, but the present. In 1976, the students of Soweto stood up and proclaimed: enough. Today, young people across the world are continuing that legacy. Time waits for no one, and youth certainly aren't holding out for change. They're creating it. Older generations might look down upon their efforts and scoff. Yet these young people, these resolute leaders, are amounting to more than many of us can ever claim. They are building and transforming right now. May they never lose their fervour.

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