

EcoYOU – Clean and green Minds for Environmentally Friendly Behaviour
***A1.18 Developing a Joint Study that includes a Blue-Map used to raise awareness on
environmental protection for youth in BSB regions***

Focus Group Results - NALAG

As part of the joint event held in Georgia from 2–6 June 2025, two Focus Group Meetings were conducted, bringing together a total of 29 participants. The first focus group consisted of young people from Gori Municipality public schools (grades 7–11), while the second involved stakeholders representing local governmental agencies, public schools and youth workers. These discussions provided valuable insights from both youth and institutional perspectives on environmental challenges and opportunities for action in the region.

Focus Group meeting I – Young people

1. What do you think are the most pressing environmental issues today?

Answer: Participants highlighted a range of environmental issues, with stray dogs in Gori frequently mentioned as a visible and immediate problem. Others pointed to pollution, particularly plastic waste in rivers, illegal dumping, and improper waste management. Some also mentioned poor infrastructure, lack of green spaces, and air pollution caused by vehicle emissions.

2. What motivates you to participate in environmental activities or campaigns?

Answer: Most participants expressed a sense of civic responsibility, noting that their motivation comes from both the current state of the environment and a moral obligation to preserve nature for future generations. Some referenced cultural values passed down from ancestors who protected the environment, while others emphasized personal responsibility—“you shouldn’t need motivation; you should do it for yourself.” There was also concern about visible damage, such as plastics in waterways harming fish and ultimately human health.

3. How do you prefer to learn about environmental topics?

Answer: A wide variety of learning channels were identified, including family members, teachers, and social media (particularly trusted, well-known pages). Participants also mentioned NGOs such as CENN, Youth Bank, and Biliki as valuable sources of information, along with non-formal education activities like clean-up campaigns and tree planting. School subjects (biology, geography), encyclopedias, magazines, and science channels like National Geographic and Discovery were also noted, as well as school-led “environmental days” with field visits to observe local biodiversity.

4. What about experiential learning appeals to you? Can you think of an example where it worked for you?

Answer: Participants shared positive experiences with hands-on learning, such as CENN-led ideathons and environmental trainings. These activities allowed them to see real-world problems and develop practical solutions, which they found more impactful than classroom learning.

5. How about gamification? Would that make environmental topics more fun and relatable?

Answer: The group agreed that gamified approaches—such as creating board games, designing models of the Earth, and hosting friendly competitions—make environmental topics more engaging. They recalled successful examples from school projects where games and creative activities improved participation and understanding.

6. Can you describe a specific event, game, or experience that helped you understand environmental issues?

Answer: Many participants referred to community clean-up events, tree-planting campaigns, greenhouse projects, and school-based activities like poster-making and debates. Watching animated

films about environmental issues and discussing them afterward was also mentioned as an effective tool for raising awareness among younger students.

7. How do you feel about using technology (apps, virtual reality, etc.) to teach environmental protection?

Answer: Participants saw potential in digital tools but noted challenges related to access and infrastructure, especially in rural areas. While advanced technologies like virtual reality sound exciting, practical digital solutions—like mobile apps or interactive online platforms—are considered more realistic and easier to implement.

8. What environmental topics are you most interested in learning more about?

Answer: Areas of interest include planting and maintaining green areas, protecting animals from extinction, reducing air pollution and vehicle emissions, and understanding global Sustainable Development Goals (with SDG 7 on clean energy, SDG 14 on life below water, and SDG 3 on health and well-being frequently mentioned).

9. Are there particular topics or issues you think are most urgent for your community?

Answer: Urgent issues identified include river water pollution caused by human activity, inadequate infrastructure for waste management, low public awareness about environmental protection, and the stray dog population. Participants stressed that these issues require immediate action at both community and local government levels.

10. How do you feel about the media's coverage of environmental issues? Does it inspire you to take action?

Answer: Opinions were mixed. Some participants felt there is limited coverage and a lack of in-depth analysis in Georgian-language media, leading to gaps in public understanding. Others pointed out disinformation issues and insufficient attention to local environmental challenges. On a positive note, emerging eco-podcasts, small but dedicated YouTube channels, and social media campaigns were seen as promising and inspiring for future engagement.

11. What kind of support or resources would help you overcome those barriers?

Answer: Participants requested more experienced trainers and facilitators, regular discussion meetings and exhibitions, increased opportunities for youth to attend environmental trainings, and a revival of public lecture formats (like those previously held at Gori University). They also recommended monthly community gatherings to plan environmental actions and develop practical projects.

12. Do you think environmental education is accessible enough for everyone? If not, what needs to change?

Answer: While schools have capable and committed teachers, most participants felt that environmental education is not engaging enough or equally accessible to all. They emphasized the need for more interactive programs, increased technical capacity (e.g., access to digital resources), and additional extracurricular activities to make learning about environmental protection more appealing.

13. What role do social media and online platforms play in your environmental engagement?

Answer: Social media plays a significant role in sharing information about protected areas (e.g., Tana and Tedzmi reserves), campaigns, and environmental solutions. Participants shared examples of discovering environmental events, creative workshops, and even family picnics through social media. However, they also noted challenges like internet access limitations, repetitive discussions on the same topics, and information fatigue. Despite these challenges, social media remains a key tool for mobilization and spreading awareness, especially when used creatively (e.g., online debates, presentations, poster campaigns).

Interactive session

Participants suggested community-driven and systemic solutions:

- **Infrastructure:** Improve waste management systems, create more public green spaces, and invest in infrastructure that supports clean rivers and safer streets (e.g., controlling stray dogs humanely).
- **Awareness and education:** Develop targeted campaigns for schools and villages, emphasizing why small actions matter (e.g., litter prevention, eco-friendly habits). Participants requested a monthly community day dedicated to environmental education, including exhibitions, discussions, and knowledge-sharing events.
- **Youth and family engagement:** Encourage family-based environmental responsibility, such as rotating clean-up responsibilities among household members, and creating intergenerational projects where children and parents work together (e.g., tree planting, waste segregation).
- **Technology and media:** Use social media and accessible apps to share stories, events, and educational material. Participants recommended engaging local influencers and producing short Georgian-language videos that make environmental topics relatable.
- **Volunteerism and leadership:** Several participants committed personally to acting as role models: avoiding environmentally harmful behaviors, advocating for greener village initiatives, and organizing greening campaigns. A specific idea mentioned was to make key roads, such as the Bakuriani road, more attractive and tourist-friendly through beautification projects.
- **Policy support:** Some suggested stronger involvement from local authorities, including structured environmental programs led by village heads or municipalities, with youth actively involved in planning and monitoring progress.

Focus Group meeting II – Stakeholders (teachers , trainers, parents)

1. What do you think are the most pressing environmental issues today?

Participants strongly emphasized the harmful impact of pollution on public health, particularly air and water contamination, which they linked to increased risks of respiratory diseases and cancer. Several participants raised waste mismanagement as an equally urgent problem, noting the lack of recycling facilities and improper waste collection in some areas. Others expressed concern over biodiversity loss, especially in and around protected areas where human activity is increasing. A few participants highlighted how political and social challenges divert attention from environmental priorities, making it harder to implement sustainable solutions.

2. What motivates you to participate in environmental activities or campaigns?

Many participants said they are motivated by a desire to protect their own health and that of their families, particularly from pollution-related risks. Others spoke of a sense of responsibility toward future generations, feeling that it is their duty to leave behind a healthier and safer environment. Some participants described civic engagement and community pride as key motivators, emphasizing that visible environmental problems like roadside litter inspire them to act. A smaller group mentioned that witnessing the positive impact of environmental initiatives in their community gave them a strong incentive to participate regularly.

3. How do you prefer to learn about environmental topics?

The discussion showed diverse learning preferences. Many participants rely on digital and social media platforms such as trusted Facebook pages, YouTube channels, and eco-focused blogs for fast and visual content. Others mentioned that they value information from public lectures, professional workshops, and community events. Documentaries and magazines like National Geographic and Discovery Channel were seen as helpful for understanding global issues, while some said family discussions and peer-to-peer learning in their neighborhoods were equally important. Several participants stressed that hands-on activities such as clean-up campaigns or community-led site visits provided valuable real-world learning experiences.

4 & 5. What about experiential learning appeals to you? Can you think of an example where it worked for you? How about gamification? Would that make environmental topics more fun and relatable?

Participants appreciated experiential learning because it creates a stronger personal connection to environmental issues. Many mentioned examples such as tree-planting initiatives, visits to protected areas led by rangers, and community clean-up actions that allowed them to see immediate results of their engagement. Gamification approaches were considered potentially effective for adult audiences as well, especially when linked to community challenges, digital apps, or reward-based programs that encourage eco-friendly behavior. Several participants suggested adopting approaches already tested in corporate training, where interactive tasks and competitions increased participation and motivation.

6 & 7. Can you describe a specific event, game, or experience that helped you understand environmental issues? How do you feel about using technology (e.g., apps or virtual reality) to teach environmental protection?

Participants shared diverse experiences, including hands-on clean-up campaigns, ranger-led tours of protected areas, and public awareness events focused on waste sorting and recycling. Some had engaged in citizen science activities, such as wildlife observation or water quality testing, which left a strong impression. There was openness to using technology tools like mobile apps, online platforms, or even virtual reality to supplement environmental awareness, but many emphasized that real-world activities felt more practical and impactful in their communities.

8 & 9. What environmental topics are you most interested in learning more about? Are there particular topics or issues you think are most urgent for your community?

The group expressed strong interest in alternative energy solutions, emphasizing the need to understand how solar and wind energy could be adopted locally, as well as how government subsidies might encourage uptake. Waste management and recycling were identified as urgent issues, with participants suggesting improvements in battery disposal, composting, and eco-friendly product use. There was also curiosity about biodiversity and local ecosystems, as well as how climate change is likely to affect their immediate environment. Awareness-raising and public behavior change were mentioned repeatedly as essential steps for tackling these issues.

10. How do you feel about the media's coverage of environmental issues? Does it inspire you to take action?

Participants agreed that while environmental topics are occasionally covered, the media often lacks local context and practical advice. Some participants appreciated the growing presence of eco-podcasts and YouTube creators focused on environmental issues, even though their audiences are still relatively small. Others found that much of the coverage is too global or abstract, like stories about melting ice in Greenland, without analysis of what these changes mean locally. Despite this, there was optimism that environmental issues are becoming more visible and may gain mainstream attention in the near future.

11. What kind of support or resources would help you overcome those barriers?

The participants highlighted a need for public events, workshops, and accessible community-based programs that provide practical environmental knowledge. Many called for financial and technical support for environmental initiatives, including better access to recycling machines and specialized equipment. Several participants emphasized the importance of trained facilitators and experts to support local initiatives and keep community members engaged. Others suggested the need for regular, accessible information updates tailored to their specific region, so environmental engagement can be sustained beyond one-off events.

12. Do you think environmental education is accessible enough for everyone? If not, what needs to change?

The consensus was that environmental education is not equally accessible, especially in rural or remote areas with fewer resources. Participants noted the need to improve technical capabilities in community centers and adult learning spaces, such as multimedia tools and demonstration equipment. They also expressed interest in making environmental learning more interactive and practical, with a focus on real-life problem-solving and behavior change. Expanding community-driven opportunities, like workshops, public seminars, and outdoor environmental events, was seen as an important way to reach more diverse audiences.

13. What role does social media and online platforms play in your environmental engagement?

Participants agreed that social media is a key information channel for environmental issues, helping to share updates about community clean-ups, recycling programs, and educational content. However, some were concerned about contradictory or superficial information, which can confuse people or discourage action. A few participants admitted that personal economic and social challenges sometimes reduce their engagement with environmental content online. Others shared positive examples, such as local recycling initiatives and Georgian-language environmental documentaries and reports that make complex issues more understandable and relatable.

Interactive session insights – solutions and personal roles

Proposed solutions:

Participants prioritized behavior change and public awareness campaigns, emphasizing practical steps such as reducing single-use plastics, promoting eco-products, and adopting environmentally friendly habits in households and workplaces. Many highlighted the need for investment in recycling infrastructure, including accessible composting programs and proper disposal systems for hazardous waste like batteries. Local government involvement was considered essential, particularly in allocating funds for environmental campaigns, waste management projects, and the development of protected area management plans. Some participants suggested financial incentives and community engagement programs, such as reward systems for responsible waste disposal or eco-friendly practices in businesses and neighborhoods, drawing inspiration from successful models abroad. The group also discussed the importance of strategic planning and training programs for implementing local waste management and renewable energy initiatives effectively.

Personal roles identified:

Participants acknowledged the importance of individual responsibility, committing to avoid environmentally harmful behaviors and adopt greener practices such as waste separation, reducing plastic use, and supporting local eco-products. Several emphasized their readiness to participate in or organize community clean-up events, tree planting initiatives, and public discussions on environmental policies. Some expressed interest in policy engagement, such as advocating for eco-friendly infrastructure planning and participating in public consultations on environmental strategies. A few participants also noted that they could leverage their professional skills and social networks to raise awareness, support environmental campaigns, and mentor others on adopting sustainable lifestyles.