



Acting Locally & In Solidarity with Others

Shreya K.C.

Nepal

When Shreya K.C. went to her first class at Tribhuvan University in Lalitpur, Nepal, she was in for a surprise. Since she was a new student, she first met with her advisor to choose her academic track: her options were “E,” “C,” and “B.” “That’s easy,” Shreya thought. “I’ll pick E, for English.”

However, when she arrived in class, she discovered that her professor didn’t talk about William Shakespeare, or Charles Dickens. Instead, he started talking about the effects of global warming. He talked about environmental problems, and the serious effects the climate crisis was having on people all around the globe. And he challenged the students to think about their responsibility as environmentalists.

As it turns out, “E” actually stood for the environmental science track of her program.

“When I got back home that night, I was eager to learn more,” Shreya says. “I wanted to learn about the people who are being forced to migrate from Nepal’s higher mountain regions due to climate change: that really frightened me.”

Before Shreya had come to university, she’d heard about global warming, and about issues like greenhouse gases and acid rain. But she had never really understood how serious the situation really was; or how it was affecting people in her own country.

“At first, I just felt like there was nothing I could do,” Shreya says. “And I was just afraid: I thought, we only have a few years left to live on this planet.”

But she decided that instead of giving in to her fear, she would dig down and educate herself about the negative impacts of climate change.

For Shreya, the fight against global warming is a fight for the survival of her own community. In Nepal, climate change has led to erratic and often drastic fluctuations in weather patterns. Scientists have warned that one third of the Himalayan glaciers could melt by the end of the century, filling glacier lakes below the mountains. These lakes would then overflow, causing more flash floods and mudslides, which have already displaced thousands of people. “None of the communities in Nepal are safe,” says Shreya. “All of them are vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.”

The poverty level is comparatively high in Nepal. And while most people have noticed a change in the weather patterns, few know about the underlying causes. “Most of the people here don’t know about these things,” Shreya says. “They don’t know about the climate crisis, and they don’t know what we should be doing to protect the environment.”

Shreya started searching for solutions, and stories about people who were standing up and fighting for the future of our planet. “I studied what we can do as individuals, and especially how we, as young people, can lead,” she says. “This really inspired me.”

Then she learned about the 6th National Youth Conference on Climate Change, organized by Nepalese Youth for Climate Action (NYCA), together with the United Nation Development Program (UNDP). She promptly filled out the application form and sent it in. The following week she heard that she’d been rejected. But Shreya isn’t one to give up

easily. “Not a problem,” she thought, and she gave the conference organizers a call. She let them know that if someone dropped out, she would love to attend. Much to her delight, on the very same day, another participant decided not to come, and Shreya was officially invited to attend the conference.

“I met all sorts of people there. It gave me hope that yes, we *can* do something, even though climate change is a global problem,” she says. “If we act locally, and if we act in solidarity with others in our own communities, then of course we can do something!”

Inspired by the young people at the conference, Shreya started volunteering with NYCA. At the same time, she found a position teaching environmental science in a local school. For her, this was a perfect opportunity to engage young people in the issues that were close to her heart. “I helped the children develop a better appreciation for nature, how to understand the importance of preserving a balance,” she says. “We talked about caring for our resources—water, air, and life; and of course we talked about global warming and the climate crisis.”

For Shreya, the best way to learn is by doing. So she set up a club at her school, where children could engage in all kinds of hands-on activities. They planted trees, and learned how to properly separate waste. “We discovered together that each of our actions matters, whether it is small or large, whether it has a big impact or not,” Shreya says. “It was truly inspiring.”

For the first project she organized with NYCA, Shreya wanted to help the environment while educating her fellow citizens about the importance of environmental protection. She brought together 60 people, and they traveled together down a road that was particularly littered. For the next three weeks, they picked up trash and talked with the people who lived along the street. They also reached out to the local shop owners and talked with them about environmentally harmful practices, like burning trash out in the open. “We just connected with the people and explained how a clean community is the foundation for good health—and a good economy,” she says. “That was our big first event; that’s how it all started.”

For Shreya, it was a very rewarding experience. Some days after the clean-up campaign, she and two friends were walking through that same area. One of her friends, who hadn’t participated in the event, was surprised. “This place was so dirty before! Now it’s so nice!” her friend said. “The city must have done something here.”

“I was so happy inside,” Shreya says. “Because it wasn’t the city; it was us!” Her friend was impressed. “If there is another event in the next weeks, make sure to invite me as well!” she said.

Shreya continued her work with the NYCA, organizing events, educational talks, and mobilizing students for climate strikes. They even wrote a letter to the Nepalese prime minister, asking him to rethink his energy policy. “We organize awareness campaigns and conferences, and we advocate for environmental policies,” she says. “We meet with those who are responsible, and we try to push them to take climate-friendly decisions.”

Then, in September 2019, Shreya was very interested to learn about Youth Climate Scholarships. This organization funds young climate leaders from around the world to be representatives at climate conferences. They want young people to be able to provide their input into discussions about the National Determined Contributions (NDCs), the commitments that countries agreed to under the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement. Shreya was eager to go to the COP25 conference in Madrid, where this would be discussed. Unfortunately, there was a problem.

“The deadline had already passed,” Shreya says. But again, she wasn’t going to give up easily. “I just filled out the form anyway and sent it off.”

Two weeks later she got an email: she had been selected, along with a handful of other young climate activists, from more than 20,000 applicants! She was so excited that she would be able to travel to Madrid to represent Nepalese youth there.

“When I arrived there, it was amazing,” she says. “But it was also very complicated at first. Since we had been sponsored, we had a specific schedule to follow, with all the important meetings we were to attend.”

But Shreya hadn't traveled all the way to Madrid to just sit in conferences and listen to others speak. "One of my friends from Poland and I were asked to give the youth statement at the final plenary session," she says. "At first I was so nervous, because there were leaders there from all over the world, and also from my country."

The closing session of COP25 had been postponed again and again, and Shreya had been sitting there waiting for her turn, all through the night. But there was no going back now. "It was clear to us that this was the platform where global leaders would finally hear us, the youth," she says.

And what did she say when her time to speak finally came? "We want more ambitious actions," she, and the other youth leaders demanded. "There's more we can do at our homes, at local levels through awareness campaigns and inspiring people for change."

"We wanted them to really hear that the COP25 outcomes were just not satisfactory to us," she says now, remembering.

After her speech, Shreya gave interviews and talked to other COP25 representatives. "They came up to us and told us that they appreciated us speaking up and telling the truth," she says. "Many of the people who work for governments and NGOs know that something is wrong, but they cannot speak out because they are scared that they might lose their jobs, or their funding."

For Shreya, this just goes to show why youth need to be on the frontlines of the fight against climate change. "As young people today, we are the most important generation that will ever live on earth," she says. "But we need to recognize our responsibility, and we need to acknowledge our power to *do something*."

As people alive today, we must consider future generations:

a clean environment is a human right like any other.

It is therefore part of our responsibility toward others to ensure that the world we pass on is as healthy,

if not healthier, than we found it.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama

Call to Action: Invite your friends to join you in organizing a clean-up campaign in your community! Visit NYCA: <https://www.nyca.net.np/> Follow Shreya on Twitter <https://twitter.com/KCShreya1?s=20> and read her blog <https://kcshreya.wordpress.com/>

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