How can Nature help us achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals in my community?

Nature plays a vital role in addressing the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UN, 2023), offering useful ways for achieving global ideals at a local level, in specific in my hometown Reading. Sir David Attenborough notes that "[Nature] provides us food, water, and air" (WWF, 2021), drawing the bottom line on the critical power dynamics between people and Nature. This essay explores how Nature can be used in the Reading community to contribute to the success of various SDGs. Because of Reading's community size, access to technology and climate change awareness (Reading Borough Council, 2023), many strategies can be implemented with great success; with the additional advantage of the quality of education including environmental science graduates from Reading University or the close-by world-renowned universities like Oxford, Cambridge, Imperial among others.

Firstly, Nature's ability to renew itself allows local regions to take steps towards goals such as No Hunger (SDG 2), Clean Water and Sanitation (SDG 6), Sustainable Cities and Communities (SDG 11), Climate Action (SDG 13), Life Below Water (SDG 14), and Life on Land (SDG 15) (UN, 2023). By recycling biodegradable materials, through a variety of natural processes like the formation of compost, and influencing soil health (pH, water availability and, concentration of nutrients), Nature increases agricultural production by unimaginable amounts, reducing humans' usage of artificial chemicals like fertilisers and pesticides. With ample farmland, green spaces, and sufficient water supplies, the Reading community can easily kickstart these practices to facilitate sustainability. Through intricate planning, a suitable level of funding, and access to green technology (with top-of-the-line machinery), the community can use Nature's power to address essential SDGs.

Secondly, Nature is a powerful ally in the continuous and ongoing war against climate change. Carbon absorption, primarily done via trees, directly contributes to achieving Good Health and Well-being (SDG 3), Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure (SDG 9), and Reduced Inequalities (SDG 10), (UN, 2023). A single tree can absorb 50 pounds of CO_2 per year (WEF, 2021), emphasising the absolute importance of

afforestation in combating emissions. This research represents the small but powerful change that can be made by planting just one tree, and the even greater effect of planting 1000s of them. In my town Reading, a city with a population of 174,200, (ONS, 2022) planting just 20 trees annually per person would significantly decrease the percentage of CO_2 in the air and would improve air quality. This simple yet strong solution is concordant with multiple SDGs and highlights the great potential for individual and collective action. The addition of the extra green spaces helps to provide the community of Reading with many places to relax and take a walk or jog which reduces stress and improves our mental and physical health.

Additionally, the benefits of green spaces go beyond carbon absorption. Green spaces as a result of increased tree cover contribute to better air quality, enhance overall well-being, and stimulate innovation. The Reading community, with its size and commitment, can turn planting trees into a collaborative effort that transforms the ecosystem and encourages a healthier and more equitable environment.

In conclusion, Nature provides many avenues for communities like Reading to contribute to the UN SDGs. From soil regeneration and cleaner water to carbon absorption through tree planting, these strategies offer multiple ways to address global challenges at the local level. By applying new technologies in harmony with Nature and using them to improve communities, Reading can inspire other communities to follow suit and take steps towards achieving the UN SDGs.

References

ONS, 2022. How the population changed in Reading: Census 2021. 28 Jun. Available from https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censuspopulationchange/E06000038/ (accessed on 20 Dec 2023).

Reading Borough Council, 2023. Climate change. Updated 15 Nov. Available from https://www.reading.gov.uk/climate-and-pollution/climate-change/ (accessed on 17 Dec 2023).

UN, 2023. Global Sustainable Development Report 2023: Times of crisis, times of change science for accelerating transformations to sustainable development. Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Available from https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/2023-09/FINAL%20GSDR%202023-Digital%20-110923_1.pdf (accessed on 22 Dec 2023).

WEF, 2021. How would planting 8 billion trees every year for 20 years affect Earth's climate? World Economic Forum. 25 Aug. Available from https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2021/08/planting-trees-combat-climate-change/ (accessed on 30 Dec 2023).

WWF, 2021. 10 best nature quotes from Sir David Attenborough. 18 Nov. Available from https://wwf.org.au/blogs/10-best-nature-quotes-from-sir-david-attenborough/ (accessed on 15 Dec 2023).

Word count

596 words

Author

Adi Ashok, Reading School, Year 11