**GYEM- Ghana Youth Environmental Movement**

**Mission and Purpose**

Established in 2014, the Ghana Youth Environmental Movement (GYEM), is a youth-led environmental advocacy group aimed at mobilising young people to solve environmental problems in Ghana as well as campaign for policies that protect the environment and organize against climate change.[[1]](#footnote-1) They do this through organising training programs, community outreach, and mobilizing for protests among youth aged 15 to 35. GYEM seeks environmental sustainability which involves clean air and water, sustainable food and energy and protected lands and oceans for posterity.[[2]](#footnote-2) They believe young people are well-skilled for environmental campaigning because they are most vulnerable to environmental damage and climate change.

**Origins and Development**

The groundwork for GYEM’s formation began in the year 2010 with their first campaign in 2012. This group was started by a group of young activists led by Gideon Commey, a young activist who had embarked on environmental sanitation campaigns at the University of Ghana Campus and the Accra community. Upon seeing the eroded shores of Keta, Ghana, as a result of rising sea levels in the area, he decided to take action on climate and environmental policy in Ghana.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Gideon Commey, along with Newton Abubakar Zico, Abdulai Abubakr, and Mariama Sawodogo Kareem established the Ghana Youth Environmental Movement in Madina, Accra.[[4]](#footnote-4) Meetings were first held in pubs and bars. However, these venues became too expensive to continue holding meetings, leading them to gather in the homes of founding members with family support until they secured an office space in 2018.[[5]](#footnote-5) By 2012 they had a first official meeting to adopt a framework and constitution, then came up with the name Ghana Youth Environmental Movement (GYEM). The organisation grew by drawing from online networks from previous non-environmental activist projects the founding members had engaged in such as “Share-your-lunch Ghana”.[[6]](#footnote-6)

On November 7, 2012, they engaged in their first non-violent campaign where they “gatecrashed” the inauguration of the National Environmental Policy on November 7, 2012, to express their exasperation with the “conferences, summits, the teas and committees that were lacking in commensurate action”[[7]](#footnote-7) With placards, masks and t-shirts with the inscription “IMPLEMENT THE POLICY”, they attracted attention from the government officials and other dignitaries at the event.

**Organizational Structure, Membership, and Funding**

GYEM is comprised of a 7-member board of advisors, an 8-member management team and a steering group with members representing the Ahafo, Ashanti, Bono, North East, Oti, Bono East, Central, Eastern, Greater Accra, Volta, Western, Western North. Northern, Savannah, Upper East and Upper West regions of Ghana.[[8]](#footnote-8) Membership of GYEM is completely voluntary, however, they target both rural and urban youth from the ages of 15-35 across the country. The group currently has over 500 registered members across Ghana.[[9]](#footnote-9)

Projects are mainly funded through grants from partnering organisations such as the International Secretariat for Water (ISW) and the Science Action in Schools for Sustainable Development (SAS4SD). Membership dues also support in the running of the organisation.

**Specializations, Methods, Tools**

GYEM uses non-violent campaigns to petition government to take favorable environmental policy. Some of these non-violent campaigns take the form of direct action, where they occupy buildings such as the ministry of energy, environmental protection agency and the like, press conferences, and walks through the city with banners and placards. Their main goal is environmental advocacy, which also includes social media activism.

Their projects are also facilitated through partnerships with environmental groups such as A Rocha Ghana, Hipsters of Nature, Green Africa Youth Organisation, Institute for Sustainable Energy and Environmental Solutions, Let’s do it Ghana and Mother of all Nations Foundation. They connect with these groups through social media and other informal networks. This coalition building is facilitated by joint meetings followed by what they describe as an organic way of working together because of their common mission.

**Major Projects and Events**

GYEM has carried out several non-violent protests based on national and global environmental issues; some initiated by the group and others in support of other groups that they partner with.

In 2016, they embarked on a “No Coal Campaign” in which they occupied buildings in at the Ministry of Energy and the Environmental Protection Agency in Ghana to protest a deal between the Government of Ghana and the Shenzhen Energy Group to establish a 700MW supercritical coal fired power plant, at Ekumfi Aboano in the Central region of Ghana, sourcing coal from South Africa. This campaign was carried out to prevent coal, a harmful fossil fuel, from being introduced into Ghana’s energy mix.

**Current Projects**

They are currently also starting a new project called the “Single Use Plastics Campaign” geared at pushing the government to rid Ghana of single plastic use.

They are currently supporting A Rocha Ghana’s “Save Atewa Campaign” aimed at stopping the Ghanaian government from mining bauxite in the rich Atewa forest in the Eastern Region of Ghana.

Besides these non-violent campaigns, GYEM also organises training for young people in Environmental Advocacy through their year-long Ghana Youth Environmental Programme and their Green Schools Project in partnership with swiss universities Science Action in Schools for Sustainable Development (SAS4SD) Consortia for Education and Research. Their annual flagship program “Powershift” brings together young people across Ghana to discuss an environmental issue in Ghana and possible responses to it. [[10]](#footnote-10)

GYEM also engages in community outreach projects, such as the “Kyensu” (an Akan Word for “Share water”) where they built a water kiosk in Treba- a peri-urban community in the Greater Accra region with perpetual water shortage to satisfy this need.[[11]](#footnote-11)

**Analysis and Lessons Learned**

GYEM has a strong skill for partnership formation. Most of their projects are carried out with support from other renowned non-profit organisations that. Their activism is also very wide-ranging considering that they do not only “hit-the- streets” to advocate for better environmental policies from government, but also take the initiative to solve environmental problems through projects like “Kyensu” and the Green Schools project.

The presence of a steering committee across all the regions in Ghana presents them the opportunity to influence a wider audience in fairly rural parts of Ghana. However, the voluntary nature of the group makes it difficult to have strong branches outside Ghana’s capital, Accra. 500 members is a large number, but it appears hard for the leadership of GYEM to determine what percentage of this membership is active in pursuing their mission***.***

**Publications**

GYEM’s publications can be found on their [website](https://gyemgh.org/blog/)

* GYEM partners SAS4SD in a 2-year ‘Green Clubs in Schools Project: <https://gyemgh.org/blog/gyem-partners-sas4sd-in-a-2-year-green-clubs-in-schools-project.html>

## The 2020 Goldman Environmental Prize for Africa: Setting the Record Straight – Facts about Ghana’s Coal Campaign (2013-2016) & Problems Arising from the Current Narrative: <https://gyemgh.org/blog/the-2020-goldman-environmental-prize-for-africa-setting-the-record-straight-facts-about-ghanas-coal-campaign-2013-2016-problems-arising-from-the-current-narrative.html>

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**See Also**

Ghanaian Youth Keen on Saving the Environment**:** https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gTQuXd3f8Lc

GYEM TV Environmental Channel: <https://www.youtube.com/user/GYEMGH>

**References**

“Share-Your-Lunch Ghana | Facebook.” Accessed May 18, 2021. https://www.facebook.com/Share-Your-Lunch-Ghana-145731245515690/.

Asamoah-Gyadu, Griselda. “On the Frontlines: Ghana Youth Environmental Movement in Climate Action.” Medium, November 20, 2020. https://medium.com/ecothusiasm/on-the-frontlines-ghana-youth-environmental-movement-in-climate-action-5887abfeea1b.

“GYEM Ghana.” Accessed May 17, 2021. https://gyemgh.org/.

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Commey, Gideon. "Making a Change, a Comprehensive Guide for Leaders. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform. 2017

**External Links**

<https://gyemgh.org/>

<https://civicus.org/index.php/media-resources/news/interviews/4313-ghana-work-in-the-little-corner-of-your-community-has-a-potential-to-cause-change-at-the-top>

<https://www.ecowatch.com/youth-climate-activists-2646450215.html>

**Notes**

1. “GYEM Ghana.” [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. “Ibid” [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Asamoah-Gyadu, “On the Frontlines.” [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Commey Gideon, *Making a Change, a Comprehensive Guide for Leaders* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform), 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. “(2) Share-Your-Lunch Ghana | Facebook.” [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. “ Commey Gideon, *Making a Change, a Comprehensive Guide for Leaders* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform), 2017. Ghana.” [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. “GYEM Ghana.” [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. “GYEM Ghana” [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. “GYEM Ghana.” [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. “GYEM Launches Water Project for Low-Income Communities in Accra.” [↑](#footnote-ref-11)