

Special Edition:

The 11th EkoSkola Parliamentary Session



**July 2015
Issue 48**

The 11th session of the EkoSkola Parliament was held on 27th May and was attended by 66 students from 33 different schools and 8 Members of Parliament. During the session students shared their concerns and proposed solutions related to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).



The groundwork ...

Students from 22 schools attended the summit held on 7th May 2015 at the Le Méridien Hotel, St Julians. The discussions were organised into the following five thematic workshops that focused on different MDGs:

- Access to safe drinking water (for Primary schools)
- Access to safe drinking water (for Secondary schools and a Resource Centre)
- Promote gender equality and empower women (for Secondary schools)
- Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger (for Primary schools)
- Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger (for Secondary schools)

The students' deliberations were collated into a declaration that was approved by the attendees and presented at the parliamentary session. This year's event was supported by the Catch the Drop Campaign – HSBC Water Programme.



The Declaration:

Caring for Our Future

The Millennium Development Goals

We EkoSkola students ...

- feel that we are citizens of Malta and the world.
- have a duty to take an interest in what is happening around us.
- feel the need to do our part to improve the quality of life of all human beings.
- feel that we should participate in decisions that determine our future.
- wish that decision-makers take the ideas and suggestions we discussed at the Summit seriously.

About the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, we EkoSkola students ...

- feel that we should fight poverty everywhere, even in our country.
- believe that access to education for everyone (regardless of age, ability and gender) is the key to eradicating poverty.
- feel that it is time to provide incentives to ensure greater access to Fair Trade products and that similar products are not disadvantaged because of their prices.
- believe that there should be an awareness campaign about the production of the things we buy. This helps us to avoid buying products from companies that exploit workers and children.
- feel that everyone should have the opportunity for employment that respects the dignity of the person.
- regret the conflicts between groups and NGOs working against poverty. We feel that they should combine their resources so that the help they offer bears more fruit.
- believe that there should be monitoring to ensure that aid reaches those who really need it and that no one abuses the system.
- feel the need to ensure that the aid is used for long-term projects (e.g. tools, medical

equipment, medicines, food and training).

About the promotion of gender equality and the empowering of women, we EkoSkola students ...

- believe that education is the key to give voice to women and to ensure that they have a healthy and successful life.
- feel that schools, NGOs and other entities should regularly educate on equity issues.
- feel that the Government should increase the support for voluntary groups working with vulnerable persons. This would create opportunities for these people to have shelter and ensure a deeper understanding of their problem, increasing the chance that the problem is truly addressed.
- feel that the laws that ensure equity, give true voice to women and protect them from abuse - especially domestic abuse - must be consolidated.
- believe that serious efforts should be made to ensure the health of mothers and that family responsibilities are equitable.

About accessibility to safe drinking water, we EkoSkola students ...

- feel sad when we hear that 2.2 million people die each year because they lack access to clean water.
- are pleased to see that, over the last years, a lot has been achieved in poor countries in gaining access to clean water.
- suggest research projects aimed at finding cheap technology that purifies water.
- feel that there should be an educational campaign on the media, cinema, homes and shops to inform people about the problem and encourage them to give donations.
- encourage and strengthen fund raising campaigns to build wells and sanitary facilities in poor countries.
- encourage local contractors to build schools in poor countries that are close to wells so that children do not miss school when they go to collect water. This also applies to the construction of sanitary facilities.
- feel that, in Malta, there should be more enforcement of the law that protects water reserves from pesticides, fertilizers and other chemicals.
- believe that, in our country, there is still room for improvement re the storage of rainwater and the re-use and recycling of used / dirty water.

The schools represented during the summit were:

- | | |
|--|---|
| • Archbishop's Seminary | • St Ignatius College, Żebbuġ Primary |
| • Helen Keller Resource Centre | • St Joseph School, Sliema (Junior Section) |
| • Maria Regina College, Mellieħa Primary | • St Joseph School, Sliema (Senior Section) |
| • San Ġorġ Preca College, Floriana Primary School | • St Margaret College, Senglea Primary |
| • San Ġorġ Preca College, Marsa Primary School | • St Michael School, Santa Venera |
| • St Aloysius College, Secondary | • St Monica School, Birkirkara |
| • St Benedict College, Għaxaq Primary | • St Monica School, Gżira |
| • St Benedict College, Kirkop Secondary | • St Patrick's Salesian School, Sliema |
| • St Benedict College, Żurrieq Primary | • St Paul's Missionary College (Junior School), Rabat |
| • St Francis Secondary School, Sliema | • St Theresa College, Birkirkara Primary |
| • St Ignatius College, Secondary School (Handaq Girls) | • St Thomas More College, Middle School, Tarxien |

The parliamentary session ...

The session started the Opening Prayer recited by Nathan Balzan and Janica Koustas from St Benedict College, Safi Primary. The Hon. Mr Speaker, Dr Anġlu Farrugia, then welcomed all those present as the generation of our country's leaders in the new eco-friendly Parliamentary Building. He said that he admired the students for choosing to discuss the MDGs and highlighted the need *"to move on from goals to action by promoting peace and working against corruption"*. Prof Paul Pace, the National EkoSkola Co-ordinator, thanked the attendees for their commitment and explained how the students prepared for the session during the Summit.

Two students from De la Salle College, Junior School: Julian Zarb and Miguel Gatt read the EkoSkola Parliament Motion and, with Mr Speaker's permission, tabled a copy of all the student interventions.

The students' declaration of the EkoSkola 4th Young People's Environmental Summit was then read by the following students: Mariah Cuschieri and Dinah Lee Attard (St Benedict College, Ħal Għaxaq Primary); Lara Marie Kitney and Nikki Bonett (St Joseph Senior School, Sliema); Josephine Vella and Elisa Battistino (St Ignatius College, Secondary School, Ħandaq); Maria Aquilina and Francesca Xuereb Saliba (St Francis Secondary School, Sliema); Paula Piscopo and Elisa Debono (St Thomas More College, Middle School, Tarxien) and Aleysia Saliba and Daniel Aquilina (St Ignatius College, Żebbuġ Primary).

Two members of parliament then replied to the issues raised in the declaration. In his reply, the Hon. Ryan Callus, Opposition spokesperson for the Environment, he recalled how, when he was doing voluntary work in Kenya, he came across a child who did not have access to safe drinking water. This made him think of how much we should appreciate what we have and of the responsibility we have towards the needy. *"You were chosen to come here for a reason. Now you need to continue spreading this commitment"*.

Hon. Leo Brincat, Minister for Sustainable Development, the Environment and Climate Change, remarked that he really looks forward to attending this session. He pointed out that irrespective of all the information available, some still are not aware of what sustainable development entails and consequently efforts to implement sustainable development are not always successful. *"We need to put into practice what we believe in and use the SDGs to promote sustainable lifestyles and usher in an era of sustainable development"*.

In their presentation, Ruslana Deguara and Thea Vella (St Clare College, San Ġwann Primary B) highlighted the social commitment of the EkoSkola programme by reporting on the Community Audit carried out by students at the St Vincent de Paul residence. They also highlighted the students' engagement in the development of a Botanical Garden in the residence that was inaugurated as part of the European Day for Solidarity between Generations celebrations. In his intervention, the Hon. Anton Refalo, Minister for Gozo, stressed that achieving sustainable development should be the ultimate target of every government. He feels that Gozo's alluring characteristic is dependent on the state of its environment. *"At Eco-Gozo we work hand in hand with EkoSkola because we believe that education can help us achieve a better quality of life – a sustainable way of living"*.

The next student presentation was from Samuel Camilleri and Anthea Xiberras from Gozo College, Rabat Primary. They explained how they converted their school yard into an educational area by reusing waste. Following a research project they conducted at school they appealed to the MPs to actively stop using balloon releases as part of the celebrations they organise.

Hon. George Pullicino, Opposition spokesperson for Education, focused his contribution on the importance of water for drinking and sanitation. Although a lot has been achieved, there are still a very large number of people who do not have access to these basic human needs (rights). *"Even these realities are very far away from our reality, we still need to be committed towards the quality of life of these fellow humans"*.

The Hon. Chris Agius, Parliamentary Secretary for Research, Innovation, Youth and Sport remembered that when he was a child, students were not given the opportunity to voice their



opinion at Parliament. *"This opportunity brings along with it responsibility and commitment, that you seem quite aware of – judging from the work that you're doing".*

The final student presentation was from Emma Penza and Jade Stivala of St Ignatius College, Luqa Primary School. They reported about a project they conducted in their school and the surrounding community on the conservation of paper.

Quoting from Calvin Coolidge "I sometimes wish that people would put a little more emphasis upon the observance of the law than they do upon its enforcement", the Hon. Marthese Portelli, Opposition spokesperson for Energy and Transport, highlighted the students commitment. *"In your suggestions you have gone beyond your own personal needs. We need to show our commitment by implementing your suggestions".*

The final intervention was from the Hon. George Vella, Minister of Foreign Affairs. He remarked that he heard what the students are arguing and suggesting in international conferences, yet their input is more genuine as there are no hidden agendas. We are lucky to live in Malta when considering our comforts, but there are others who are suffering. Malta is helping out through missionary work and awareness raising in schools. With regards the launch of the SDGs *"you need to seriously consider promoting their implementation as they will be dictating the future you will be living in 2050. You are the change agents that renew our collective environmental conscience"*.

The Hon. Mr Speaker, Dr Anġlu Farrugia concluded the event by thanking the students and proposing the Motion for the approval of the House of Representatives. The Motion was unanimously adopted by all those present.

The event was once again a huge success as widely reported in the local media. It was streamed live on Parliament TV. The EkoSkola Steering Committee would like to thank the Hon. Mr Speaker, Dr Anġlu Farrugia and his Office for granting us permission to use the premises and the participating schools for their collaboration.

Motion about EkoSkola presented to the House of Representatives

Mr President,

On behalf of my friends I would like to thank you for hosting once again for another session of the EkoSkola Parliament. Every time we have been here was a special occasion for us. But this time, this experience is better than usual as we are meeting in the new House of Parliament. Besides being a beautiful sight to behold, apparently someone has made it a point to use environmentally friendly materials. This is something that we talked about during the Parliament session we had in 2011. If you wish, we are ready to carry out an environmental audit of the place as we did at San Anton Palace, a toy factory, the offices of an insurance company and the department of education, a hotel, and the St Vincent de Paul Residence for the Elderly.

That parliament becomes more sustainable was not the first time that we had given good suggestions. In 2008 we suggested the replacement of street lights with LEDs. Almost a year to this day, we suggested the installation of cameras in places prone to illegal dumping of waste. But no one considered our ideas. Years had to go by before they were implemented. Wouldn't it have been better if you had heeded our suggestions? In 2009 we brought to your attention the large amounts of junk mail sent to our homes. Needless to say we were once again ignored. Thank you for praising us for what we are doing. But we would prefer if you paid more attention to what we say.

This year, in preparation for parliament, we chose to discuss the Millennium Development Goals, the MDGs. We have done this, because this year marks the end of this process and the start of another leading to the Sustainable Development Goals, the SDGs. We discussed about the goals to:

- eradicate extreme poverty and hunger;
- promote gender equality and empower women; and
- access to safe drinking water.

We were rather surprised that there are so many people suffering in this day and age. Often this suffering can be avoided by the type of decisions taken. More attention can ensure good quality of life of everyone. We try to achieve this in our school, at home and all around us through EkoSkola. We ask you to appreciate what we are doing by giving us the chance to work with you to improve our lives in our country. Finally, I ask your permission, Mr President, on behalf of my friends, to place on the table of the House a collection of all our presentations, so that you can all get some ideas from what we are proposing.

The schools participating in the parliamentary session were:

- De la Salle College, Junior School
- Dun Manwel Attard Young Adult Education Resource Centre, Wardija
- Gozo College, Ġhajnsielem Primary
- Gozo College, Ġharb Primary
- Gozo College, Rabat Primary
- Gozo College, Boys' Secondary School
- Helen Keller Resource Centre, Qrendi
- Immaculate Conception School, Tarxien
- Mater Boni Consilii, St Joseph School, Paola
- San Ġorġ Preca College, Floriana Primary
- San Ġorġ Preca College, Marsa Primary
- San Ġorġ Preca College, Valletta Primary
- St Aloysius College
- St Benedict College, Ħal Ġhaxaq Primary
- St Benedict College, Safi Primary
- St Benedict College, Mqabba Primary
- St Benedict College, Żurrieq Primary
- St Clare College, San Ġwann Primary B
- St Elias College
- St Francis Primary School, Cospicua
- St Francis Secondary School, Sliema
- St Ignatius College, Secondary School, Ħandaq
- St Ignatius College, Luqa Primary
- St Ignatius College, Siġġiewi Primary
- St Ignatius College, Żebbuġ Primary
- St Joseph School, Blata l-Bajda
- St Joseph Junior School, Sliema
- St Joseph Senior School, Sliema
- St Michael School, St Venera
- St Monica School, Gżira
- St Patricks Salesian School, Sliema
- St Theresa College, Santa Venera Primary
- St Thomas More College, Middle School, Tarxien
- St Thomas More College, Żejtun Primary A



If you would like to contribute to this newsletter please contact Prof Paul Pace, National EkoSkola Co-ordinator, on paul.j.pace@um.edu.mt.

Visit our website on <http://www.ekoskola.org.mt/> or facebook on www.facebook.com/ekoskola.