

# The Present Fight for a Brighter Future: Youth and Innovation in the Climate Crisis

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"Never have we so hurt and mistreated our common home as we have in the last two hundred years". I think this is one of the main motivations behind *Laudato Si* and the reason why we are gathering today. Regardless of our individual beliefs, we can agree that humankind has sinned for centuries against nature and against itself due to greed and selfishness. The consequences of such sins are materialising right now. The rise of the global temperature, the beginning of the 6th mass extinction, the melting of the poles, droughts, floods, hurricanes, wildfires, just to name a few of the signs that we have no other choice but to change in order to survive.

The magnitude of the climate crisis we are living in today makes it the biggest challenge humanity has ever faced. And while it is true that our shortcomings have caused it, I wholeheartedly believe we can find the needed solutions in the creativity, bravery and generosity of people. The clearest example today is the remarkable strength of the message that the generation just after mine is giving. Millions of courageous youngsters, lead by heroic teens inspired by Greta Thunberg, are taking the streets almost on a daily basis in order to tell us that it is imperative to take action right now, in order for there to be a future for which it is worth having an education.

*Laudato Si* and the climate activism of Generation Z are unmissable calls for immediate action. So the question is not whether or not we listen to these calls, but how do we answer them?

There is a part of older youth, we millennials, that are lucky enough to already be qualified professionals while retaining the energy and idealism that comes with a young age. It is we who are engineering the change needed to move forward. This privileged youth has the resources to work for solutions that express the new values the world needs: solidarity before nationalism, human dignity before capitalism, the good of the world before the good of the individual. This is what I have the fortune of experiencing every day in my job.

I work at a London-based, global company called BBOXX. Our mission is to unlock human potential through access to clean, reliable and affordable energy.

BBOXX is a next generation utility company that has installed more than 150,000 solar home systems, and has brought clean, reliable and affordable electricity to nearly 1 million people, with substantial operations in countries including, Rwanda, Kenya, Togo, the DRC and Pakistan. This is possible through the application of Internet of Things devices to remotely collect data that allows engineers and technicians to act whenever customers need support. With electricity as an entry point, BBOXX aims to satisfy many other needs that are required for human development, such as water, finance, white goods and safe cooking, through Pulse, our cloud based management platform,

which allows suppliers to reach customers in a way that has never before been possible in these areas.

Our work has tangible contributions to six UN Sustainable Development Goals, including SDG 7, affordable and clean energy, SDG 1, poverty alleviation, and naturally, SDG 13, Climate Action, thanks to the thousands of offset tonnes of carbon emissions that have come from the transition to clean energies in the impacted regions. BBOXX is being recognised across the energy industry, having recently won the Zayed Sustainability Prize in the Energy category.

These results have been possible thanks to the talent and hard work of the many engineers, business experts, technicians and academics I have the luck to work with. Moreover, our work is scaling rapidly thanks to strategic partnerships with investors, governments, telecommunication firms and major energy companies, giving us hope on the future of our growth, reach and global impact.

For instance, in January, BBOXX landed a USD 31 million deal with Africa Infrastructure Investment Managers (AIIM). It will allow BBOXX to install two million solar systems by 2022, bringing clean electricity to 10 million people in these African countries.

Another great example of a key partnership is the Government of Togo. From March, BBOXX customers in the country started receiving a subsidy to spend on solar energy – in what is the first government subsidy for the purpose of solar energy payments in Africa.

As a Data Scientist, I work with the Data Insights team. Our objective is to impact behaviour in our staff and customers in order to maximise the reach of our products and to ensure that we are a data driven organisation. This is crucial because, in the face of the current climate crisis and the many challenges that are derived from it, companies and governments cannot afford to make decisions based on anything other than the truth. Appropriate data management, analytics and responsible artificial intelligence are tools that ought to be used for these purposes.

However great and hopeful these results are, the work of BBOXX alone is not enough for what the world needs right now. The amount of energy the world consumes is 7 to 8 orders of magnitude higher than the amount of energy BBOXX produces, and the carbon emissions that need to be offset are about a million times bigger than the amount that we have managed to eliminate in our 9 years of operation.

This is the greatest challenge humanity has ever faced, and the youth simply cannot do it alone. We need our global leaders and authorities to do three key things.

- 1) To invest in us. The money of the world has to go to the technology and products we are developing to solve these issues, and in the jobs that will help us build a future.

2) To make policies for us. Togo is an example of how governments should be directing energy consumption within their populations. There is no reason why oil and gas should still be subsidised when we all know that we ought to cut emissions and keep fossil fuels underground if we are to have a chance in this climate crisis. National and international policies cannot keep making the rich richer while the world and the people it hosts is in danger. The Green New Deal in the USA and all similar policies in leading nations have to be supported and put into action as soon as possible.

3) Finally, we need you to listen to us. The youth cannot be punished for putting the world and its future before the material interest of a broken system.

You have heard loud and clear the message of the teens of the world. Now, on behalf of millennials I say:

You told us to get educated before we could speak up, so we went and got degrees from the institutions you created. You told us to get jobs before demanding things from those in charge, so we went and created business and innovative products like the world has never seen before. You told us to grow up before thinking of changing the world, and we have grown indeed, but we, all of us, have already run out of time to keep waiting.

I hope you have found something of value within this intervention. But ultimately, that is not important. What matters is the work each of us gets to do outside of these walls to ensure all of us have a future to look forward to. So let us get to work.