

MOTION 1:

School strikes are the only effective way for young people to have a voice on Climate Change

'You are never too small to make a difference!'

Greta Thunberg

For over 40 years, Concern Debates has seen the youth movement for climate action grow from strength to strength. In 2018, a new powerful youth movement came onto the scene; 15-year-old Greta Thunberg sat outside the Swedish Parliament every day for three weeks asking politicians for radical reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. She was tired of society's unwillingness to see the climate crisis for what it is: a crisis.

Six years on, #FridaysForFuture is a global youth-led climate strike movement reaching 14 million people in 7,500 cities, across the globe. Concern Debates first started debating about climate strikes in 2021 and since then, the conversation has continued about the effectiveness of this campaign.

School strikes offer insight into how young people respond to environmental concerns as an active demographic with a limited scope of power. The worldwide phenomenon has captured attention from media, politicians, and educators, increasing the momentum of climate conversations at a local, national and international level.

For young people who are unable to vote, striking from school is a way to protest political leaders' inaction on the crises they are taught about in the classroom, but is it the only effective way for students to make their voices heard? Perhaps embracing sustainability in daily life would create a culture of personal responsibility and set a positive example for others to follow. Should we look beyond high-profile strikes to address the climate crisis?

It is also important to consider that not all youth can join school strikes. In 2023, 250 million children were out of school, with many needing to work to support their families. For these young people, taking a day off to protest is impossible. Is there a question around the inclusivity of this movement and which youth voices it does *not* represent? For the most environmentally vulnerable, pressing issues like accessing clean water, the rising cost of living, and surviving conflict take priority. If protests are the only way for young people to have a voice, does this movement risk excluding those most impacted?

Debate it!



MOTION 2:

Feeding the world is increasingly beyond humanity's reach

The debate over humanity's ability to provide enough food for the global population gained global attention in the 1980s, highlighted by Band Aid's "Feed the World" musical campaign. For Concern Debates, this motion first took to the stage in 1988 and again in 1994 and 1995. Now it's your chance to weigh in: what's the issue, has anything changed, and why are we still asking this question?

It could be said that deep-rooted inequalities combined with environmental and economic pressures are making it harder than ever to feed the global population. Climate change is one of the biggest threats, with rising temperatures and extreme weather making farming less reliable year on year. Meanwhile, population growth is outpacing food production in many parts of the world. These problems are worsened by issues like water scarcity, degraded farmland, and unsustainable agricultural practices. Many believe that without a radical change in how food is produced and distributed, feeding the world is an impossible task.

However, whilst the challenge is vast and complex, it might be argued that humanity has all the tools and resources necessary to overcome it. Technological advances in agriculture, such as genetically modified crops and more sustainable farming methods can boost food production while maintaining nutritional quality.

This debate encourages you to think about how global systems of power, wealth, and environmental change interact, and whether humanity is capable of fixing these problems to feed a growing population.

Is feeding the world increasingly beyond humanity's reach?

Debate it!



MOTION 3:

Big Business is indifferent to the Sustainable Development Goals

Last year's debates programme introduced this topic at a pivotal moment when the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have only a few years left to achieve their targets; 2030 is less than six years away!

The SDGs are a call for system change at every level to achieve a better future for people, planet and prosperity. They encompass almost every aspect of human and planetary wellbeing and, if met by their target date in 2030, will provide a stable and prosperous life for all people everywhere, ensuring the health of the planet for generations to come.

Shortly after the 2015 launch of the SDGs, the then UN Secretary General, Ban Ki Moon, said "Our planet and its people are suffering too much. This year has to be the moment for turning global promises into reality. Governments must take the lead with decisive steps. At the same time, businesses can provide essential solutions and resources that put our world on a more sustainable path"

The sunny optimism that greeted the SDGs in 2015 is gone. Back then, many corporations demonstrated support for the agenda as crucial partners in achieving the vision of sustainable development on a global scale. Companies swiftly adopted the goals and incorporated them into their communications and sustainability reports.

But businesses have largely fallen short of taking any new concrete actions to achieve the ambitious targets. Their underwhelming engagement looks more like SDG washing, akin to the greenwashing companies commit when they market as "green" products that are only marginally more environmentally friendly than their counterparts. Companies that SDG-wash claim to contribute to societal-level sustainability goals but lack proper evidence and actions to support the claim.

However, a quick internet search of 'the SDGs and Business' returns thousands of examples of Big Companies taking the SDGs seriously through investments, strategies and concrete actions.

So, is it correct to say that Big Business is indifferent to the Sustainable Development Goals? Or is there more to the story?

Debate it!

