

# UN ECOSOC Youth Forum Side Event Highlights Youth-Driven 'AI + ESG' Action

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NEW YORK, NY, UNITED STATES, April 22, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- A side event titled “AI and Digital Innovation: Driving Youth-Led ESG Actions” was successfully held as an officially recognized side event of the 2025 ECOSOC Youth Forum. Hosted under the auspices of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), the side event brought together young leaders, scholars, and technologists from around the world to explore the intersection of artificial intelligence (AI) and ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance).

The event was co-hosted by the United Nations University Institute in Macau, the Youth Environmental Friendly Action Committee of the All-China Environment Federation, and the Grouphorse ESG Industrial College at Tianjin Foreign Studies University. Discussions took place in a hybrid format at a UN system meeting venue in New York, bringing together participants from the United States, China, Singapore, and beyond.

In the opening remarks, Dr. Min Yang, a researcher at UNU Macau, emphasized that “the convergence of AI and ESG is reshaping the global landscape of sustainable development and creating inclusive innovation platforms for youth.” Xing Tang, Co-Chair of the Grouphorse ESG Industrial College and Chairman of Grouphorse Group—a UN-contracted service provider—presented the vision of China’s first dedicated ESG college and called for empowering youth through interdisciplinary learning. “AI is not just a tool for ESG implementation,” he said, “but a bridge that transforms digital capability into sustainable action.”

The event was moderated by Lingxin Guo, a graduate student at Columbia University’s School of International and Public Affairs.

## AI and ESG: Global Youth Showcase Innovation

A series of keynote speakers explored cutting-edge applications of AI in the domains of climate action, social responsibility, and ethical governance.

Zhou Yu, Associate Professor at Columbia University, shared her team’s latest research on generative dialogue systems and their potential to enhance public engagement around sustainability. Shangxuan Zhang, Adjunct Professor at Columbia’s Data Science Institute and founder of the New York City Data Science Academy, discussed the practical challenges and opportunities facing AI entrepreneurs. She emphasized the need to align technical innovation with long-term ESG goals.

Dr. Jiaxin Qing, Assistant Professor at the School of Public Health, University of California, Berkeley, highlighted AI's interdisciplinary applications in healthcare and social inclusion. Postdoctoral Fellow Zijiao Chen of Stanford University called for fairness and accessibility in AI-driven education, employment, and entrepreneurship, advocating for digital justice as a core principle in sustainable development.

#### Youth Roundtable: From Storytelling to Systems Change

The youth roundtable gathered young changemakers from diverse disciplines who shared their experiences in leveraging AI to promote ESG goals.

Filmmaker, director, and Morningside Studio founder Bohan Zhang introduced his work using AI-assisted production tools to support culturally inclusive storytelling and raise awareness on ESG themes. International transactions attorney Tianpu Zhang from Becker Glynn LLP proposed viewing AI as a new terrain for global governance and encouraged youth to help shape emerging ethical frameworks.

Ziji Shi, a Ph.D. candidate at the National University of Singapore, presented research on reducing the environmental footprint of AI model training, underscoring the importance of “green AI.” Changsheng Jiang, AI Analyst at the UNDCO Joint SDG Fund, discussed how AI is being used to assess gender equity, monitor emissions, and simulate ecosystems—calling for transparency, fairness, and accountability in youth-led AI development.

Wanting Yu, a student from ShangHai StarRiver Bilingual School, introduced a project exploring the integration of art therapy and AI to support youth mental health. She advocated for bridging emotional care with algorithmic tools to create inclusive and accessible psychological services for children.

Xinyu Li, a graduating 2D animation major from the School of Visual Arts in New York, discussed the ethical responsibilities of digital creators. Her remarks called attention to the environmental costs, data justice, and governance implications of AI, and urged artists to become “visually responsible storytellers.”

Rachael Xu, Five Music Rights Champion with the UNESCO International Music Council and a youth accordionist, shared how AI and digital tools are empowering inclusive music creation and safeguarding artists' rights in the digital economy.

ApplyIT founder Nakshatra Kothapalli, a student at Dulles High School in the U.S., showcased her work to bridge the digital divide by teaching coding and podcasting to under-resourced youth and developing websites for immigrant-owned small businesses—promoting inclusive and sustainable community development.

#### Toward a Youth-Led “AI + Sustainability” Platform

In her closing address, Yujie Chen, a board member of the Grouphorse ESG Industrial College at Tianjin Foreign Studies University and a UN instruction design, called on youth to shape the next generation of ESG leadership. "As educators and innovators, we must integrate AI and ESG to equip young people with the tools and mindset to lead in an era of complexity and climate risk," she said.

Xing Tang added during the welcome dinner, "AI should not only be viewed as a technical utility—it must serve as a justice engine that empowers youth to advance environmental equity, social inclusion, and transparent governance." He reaffirmed the College's commitment to building a long-term platform for youth action at the intersection of AI and sustainability.

The side event concluded with a strong call for collective action and inclusive governance in the digital age. Participants emphasized the vital role of youth leadership in achieving the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. As a living model of tech-driven, youth-led collaboration, the event showcased how innovations grounded in environmental responsibility, social equity, and transparent governance—core ESG principles—can accelerate sustainable progress both within and beyond the UN system.

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