

# YOUNG PEOPLE, EDUCATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: EXPLORING PRINCIPLES, PERSPECTIVES, AND PRAXIS

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## CONCEPT STATEMENT

### Background

Almost half of the current global human population of six billion is comprised of young people under the age of 25, with approximately 1.3 billion youth, mostly in developing countries, between the ages of 12 and 25. The even younger generation, children presently below the age of 15, will be almost half again as large, numbering over 1.8 billion (United Nations 2005). Two critical issues arise from this demographic situation. First, there is a potential risk to society if young people's resources of energy, time, and knowledge are misdirected towards vices such as violence, war, terrorism, and drug and alcohol abuse, thereby leading to political, economic, and social instability. Second, there is a powerful opportunity for society if young people can participate positively in all aspects of life such as governance, culture, environment, and commerce to promote sustainable development. In order to do so, young people do need support in terms of appropriate policies, education, information, financial resources, skills, and hope.

Young people have an enormous stake in the present and future state of the planet. For instance, through their lifestyles, they influence commerce and media - and shape the process of production, marketing, and consumption patterns of goods and services (UNEP/UNESCO 2001). Since young people are also tomorrow's workers, entrepreneurs, parents, and political leaders, policy makers know that they will greatly influence the future of their nations and global governance (World Bank 2006).

Agenda 21—the sustainable development blueprint for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century—recognized in Chapter 36 that education, public awareness, and training are critical for sustainable development, and that participation and involvement of young people, alongside other eight major groups<sup>1</sup>, are essential in its implementation (United Nations 1992). However, sustainable development—in its dimensions of environment, society, and economy—remains elusive as the state of planet

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<sup>1</sup> These are: 1) women; 2) indigenous people; 3) nongovernmental organisations; 4) local authorities; 5) workers and trade unions; 6) scientific and technological communities; 7) farmers; and 8) business and industry.

continues to deteriorate with attendant disastrous consequences for human well-being (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment 2005). The United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (UNDESD), 2005-2014, is a vital opportunity to document and explore how to enhance the involvement and participation of young people in sustainable development processes and activities.

### Purpose

The book is expected to serve the following purposes:

showcase theories, principles, and practices of youth, education, and sustainable development in order to create awareness amongst educators, policy makers, nongovernmental professionals, business leaders, politicians, and the general public;

capture and document local and global education initiatives by and for young people that are geared towards promoting the transition to sustainability in different parts of the world. It will include profiles of different models of youth engagement, and

draw the attention of policy makers and educators to the need and importance of youth participation in sustainable development as a contribution to the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, and thereby provide a case for increased attention and resources toward education programmes for young people worldwide.

The title of the book is *Young People, Education, and Sustainable Development: Exploring Principles, Perspectives, and Praxis*. The term “young people” include both youth and children under the age of 30. It recognises the different life stages and definitions of youth and children worldwide. For example, the United Nations defines “youth” as young people between 15 and 24 (United Nations 1996), whereas in some countries the term “youth” can include people into the early thirties. Sustainable development is taken as being constituted of three dimensions of

environment, economy, and society, including culture (United Nations 1992) but with an explicit recognition that the objectives of the three dimensions need to be better integrated through actions to address the balance among them<sup>2</sup>. In addition, the approach of the book recognizes the fact that sustainable development is not viewed from the same lens in western and non-western societies, and could therefore fundamentally differ among the regions because of differences in cultural and socio-economic realities. Education is taken in its broad sense to include all forms of learning, whether formal or non-formal, that are geared towards the promotion of the following sustainable development values: respect for dignity and human rights of all people throughout the world and a commitment to social justice for all; respect for the human rights of future generations and a commitment to intergenerational responsibility; respect and care for the greater community of life in its diversity which involves the protection and restoration of the Earth's ecosystems; and respect for the cultural diversity and a commitment to build locally and globally a culture of tolerance, non-violence, and peace (Earth Charter 2000, UNESCO 2004).

### Target Audience

The book is primarily targeted to policy makers in government and inter-governmental institutions, and educators and researchers in basic and higher education. It also appeals widely to students, youth serving organisations, NGOs, civil society; and young people in general.

### Outline

The book is divided into three main parts: Principles, Perspectives, and Praxis.

Part One: Principles provides a rationale for the book, an historical review, and interpretations. It outlines key principles of major issues on youth and sustainable development, as well as the role of education. For example, the principle of intergenerational equity is explored and elucidated as a strong basis and justification for sustainable development. This section gives the theoretical and conceptual foundation for the book.

Part Two: Perspectives includes contributions from applied research, policy analysis, and reviews on young people, education, and sustainable development. These perspectives arise

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<sup>2</sup> See IUCN Programme 2005-08: [www.iucn.org/programme](http://www.iucn.org/programme)

from five “spaces for engagement”<sup>3</sup>: civil society; educational institutions; the public sector; the corporate sector; and individual action. Authors critique both the strengths and weaknesses of existing models of learning for young people *vis-à-vis* sustainable development and offer new and innovative suggestions across geographic and thematic issues.

Part Three: Praxis contains specific examples of projects, institutions, and processes of education for young people to enhance their participation and involvement in advancing sustainable development. These examples anchor the theory and perspectives articulated in the first two parts of the book. The examples range from global to local initiatives and encompass the three dimensions of sustainable development: environment; economy, and society, including culture.

### Contributors

The contributors are drawn from a wide range of expertise: scholars, practitioners, and researchers in education, youth, and sustainable development; young leaders and students; experts from governments, international institutions such as the United Nations; and practitioners in civil society. In addition, a balance of representation in terms of generations, geographies, and genders are considered.

Similarly, an Editorial Advisory Group of experts has been constituted to consult with the editors on the content of the book. Its membership represents a balance of gender, age, regions of the world and professional experience.

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<sup>3</sup> Refers to avenues, platforms, or channels through which education is undertaken, and enables the participation and involvement of young people

Editors

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