



Resolution for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development 2012

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Introduction

The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, known as “Rio+20” (as it comes 20 years after the 1992 “Earth Summit”), will be profoundly significant for young people. During this conference world leaders are expected to renew their political commitment to sustainable development, assess the progress made to date in sustainable development policies and make profound, binding decisions to address new and emerging challenges that threaten the progress and development of young people and future generations. The conference will aim to overcome the often disconnected policy on equally important dimensions of sustainable development: social, environmental and economic sustainability. A coherent and interlinked strategy is needed in order to make real progress.

Current and previous generations have put our future at risk. Concerted and cross-cutting action is required in the name of inter-generational solidarity, the future prosperity and health of humankind, and the preservation of our bases of living. With this in mind, this resolution will closely analyse the two core themes of the conference: the green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication, and the institutional framework for sustainable development. It will evaluate them from a youth perspective, and emphasise the need to actively involve youth in the development, adoption, implementation and evaluation of policies at all levels. It will also propose a number of actions that need to be taken to safeguard the economic, social and environmental future of everyone, including the young people of today.

The Green Economy in the Context of Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication

The importance of the Rio+20 Conference in pushing forward the sustainable development agenda and addressing the shortcomings of the past 20 years is difficult to overstate, this is despite young people calling to be seen as a resource in Johannesburg in 2002. In the light of the failure of multiple recent summits and major conferences dealing with sustainable development issues and bearing in mind that – despite the urgency – a “green revolution” on a global level seems unlikely to be achieved in just one three-day summit, ambitious binding agreements must be made in Rio to ensure that young people and future generations will be able to live in stable environments in years to come.

While it is understandable that a large focus is placed on the environmental and economic aspects of the green economy, only an integrated approach which values human dignity and development, in particular social-economic relations in society, will provide global sustainable development.

A “green” rhetoric and minor financial adjustments to facilitate a moderate increase of investment in renewable energy and technologies that may slow climate change are not enough. The environmental, legal, structural and economic measures decided upon in 2012 must be governed with regard for young and future generations around the globe, rather than aiming to placate the demands of the time in the most moderate way.

The recent global economic crisis has yet again discredited unsustainable economic practices that have little regard for future consequences. Employment opportunities need to be developed in new sustainable industries and technologies. In recent years some work has been done to invest in green entrepreneurship and encourage the adoption of sustainable consumption and production patterns. In this regard the work of young people and other actors in changing traditional business paradigms from a simple focus on economic capital to a focus on social and environmental capital should be embraced.¹

There must also be a new educational focus on sustainable development, recognising the need to instill the sense of common responsibility for our future, enabling change in consumer patterns, and thus production patterns, and develop international solidarity. Through education for sustainable development, young people in particular can reflect on their role and responsibilities in a global society and on the contribution they can make to social, environmental and economic justice.² Making this a reality presents a number of economic and political challenges that will require significant institutional restructuring and adequate resources, but it is clear that only major action will be enough to address global economic, environmental and social challenges, such as the increasing social and health impacts of climate change.

Green industries provide an opportunity for job creation and economic growth for both developed and developing countries. In Europe alone, by increasing investment from 18% to 22% of GDP towards green industries, in particular the reorientation of the energy grid towards renewables, a construction boom could be generated that would increase economic growth rates by up to 0.6% a year and create a further 6 million jobs.³ The move from fossil and other finite energy resources to clean renewables also has huge potential benefits for developing countries. However, it is important to stress that not all forms of renewable energy production are sustainable, especially when related to deforestation, the loss of biodiversity impacts on food production and security and social exploitation. The European Youth Forum therefore calls for a change in perspectives and major global economic restructuring to accelerate the just transition to sustainable and green industries. To do this, governments must continue to develop and adapt the current financing mechanisms to allow for further research, development, technological cooperation and adaptation. Hence, young people must be active parts in the transition process towards a green economy. These industries must take better advantages of young people's creativity and seek to harness this innovation of a new generation that is more dedicated to attaining sustainable development. There must also be greater exchange and openness with regards to research, policies and practices on sustainable development issues, particularly between industrialised, emerging and developing countries.

Sustainable resources for All

A key concern of young people is the management of natural resources as current

¹ European Youth Forum, *Position Paper on Youth Entrepreneurship* (November 2011)

² European Youth Forum, *Policy Paper on Global Education* (Adopted 3 May 2008, Castelldefels)

³ Jaeger, C., Paroussos, L., Mangalaagiu, D., Kupers, R., Mandel, A., Tabara, J., (2011) *A New Growth Path for Europe*, German Federal Ministry of the Environment (Potsdam)

patterns of consumption are jeopardising young people's future, with both the rate of consumption and the distribution of remaining resources giving cause for consternation. Natural resources must be managed in a way that does not compromise future generations' needs. A new framework of sustainable consumption and production patterns needs to be established to ensure equality in access to, and consumption of, resources. The continued depletion of the planet's marine and land-based ecosystems is unacceptable and directly challenges the development and security of current and future generations. For example, although the rate of deforestation has slowed over the last 10 years, each year an area roughly the size of Costa Rica continues to be destroyed.⁴ Similarly, due to a lack of regulation around 85 percent of fish stocks are exploited or in danger of extinction.⁵

Governments and multilateral negotiations should focus their discussions on the green economy, and more specifically on greening growth through absolute decoupling of economic growth from negative environmental and social consequences. We need to consider whether growth, and the present way we measure it through GDP, can continue to be the driver of international development, seeing that it leads to devastating environmental changes and global social injustice. Hence, we need to question the consumer lifestyle ideology and start by moving towards sustainable development to ensure the rights and well-being of young and future generations. To address these issues a simultaneous approach is required, involving local communities and youth at grassroots level, enabling them to be actively engaged in sustainable resource management; at the same time the role of international institutions in regulating the consumption of natural resources must be strengthened, also by involving all stakeholders, including youth, in a meaningful way.⁶

The Right to a Future

One of the core principles of a green economy must be the need to improve social wellbeing through simultaneously achieving greater economic stability and ensuring the fulfillment of human rights, thus improving the living conditions of millions of young people globally. Poverty eradication remains a core issue with regards to social wellbeing. The Millennium Development Goals are far from being achieved with around 900 million people still living in extreme poverty, a significant amount of which are children and young people.⁷ Economic measures to tackle poverty must shift from simply generating capital that may trickle down to the poorest of society to furthering human development, closing the gap of inequality and creating decent jobs for all. Sustainable development requires stability. When assuring peace and security, youth plays a key role. Youth comprise the group largely affected by conflict, but also a force for preventing conflict and building peace.

This can only be achieved by the full inclusion of every member of society, therefore the

⁴ Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, *Global Forest Resources Assessment* (Rome, 2010)

⁵ Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, *The State of World Fisheries and Agriculture* (Rome, 2010)

⁶ European Youth Forum, *Policy Paper on Sustainable Development* (Brussels, 2006)

⁷ UNDP, *Poverty Thematic Trust Fund Annual Report* (2010, New York)

eradication of any sort of discrimination and strengthening the access to fundamental youth, children and human rights is an inevitable part of sustainable development.

Climate change in itself is increasingly affecting human wellbeing globally. The warming of the earth's climate threatens to increase heat related mortality, malnutrition and starvation from destroyed crops. It will also rapidly increase desertification, destabilising food security and commodity prices and increasing the scarcity of resources. As a result there will most likely be a large increase in the number of environmental migrants as people try to escape the day to day realities of climate change⁸ Without ambitious agreement on prevention, adaption and mitigation measures, environmental and economic migration risk leading to social conflicts, civil unrest and have a high potential to destabilise already fragile states. This can be prevented by developing coherent and comprehensive strategies implemented at all levels and including all relevant stakeholders. Only with a radical paradigm shift in terms of the international economy to sustainable development and assisting affected countries in dealing with climate change and poverty, as well as an investment in green technologies and education on the impacts of climate change, can these issues be addressed. Young people and youth organisations, as those who are most affected by these issues and the most vulnerable demographic in terms of poverty and health inequalities, must be given a core role in the decision making processes at all levels and throughout all stages.

Institutional framework for sustainable development

In terms of the institutional framework, the integral nature of the three interdependent and mutually reinforcing pillars of sustainable development are crucial. These encompass economic development, social development, and environmental protection. International efforts to achieve sustainable development must be evidence-based and target-oriented. The Rio+20 conference should work to start a process towards new development targets to complement and support the Millennium Development Goals after their target year of 2015. A key reason that progress since the Earth Summit in 1992 has been haphazard is that international institutions have lacked the necessary powers to enforce sustainable production, encourage sustainable lifestyles, reduce social and economic inequalities, encourage the necessary investment in green industries and build up infrastructure that can deal with the effects of climate change. A fully-fledged and appropriately funded International Sustainable Development Organisation with universal membership and a strong mandate is required in order to ensure that environmental issues are addressed in a holistic way, integrating and strengthening the work done separately by the UN, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the Commission for Sustainable Development (CSD) and ensure that the balance between economic, social and environmental interests is brought to a functional level. Regardless of the final format of such a body, it needs to be ensured that its work contributes to the well-being of everyone. Such an organisation must be truly global in its character, involving also the weakest and most vulnerable stakeholders including an intergenerational approach with a focus on youth participation.

⁸ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *Climate Change 2007: Synthesis Report* (2007, Valencia)

Until such an organisation is established immediate reforms can be taken including the reform of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) which must be strengthened with a clearer mandate and remit. Similarly, despite some good analyses of environmental, social and economic issues over the past 20 years the CSD is no longer effective in its present form. A more powerful structure such as a Sustainable Development Council under the United Nations General Assembly is required in order to give sustainable development the prominence that it deserves.

A key issue with regards to decisions that are made now is that those that will be most affected by future environmental damage and economic and social instability do not have a voice. Political decisions are firmly rooted in short-term thinking and a danger of a new green economy is that it will be “business as usual” with the business sector stretching weak, short-term environmental restrictions to the very limit. For this reason an International Ombudsman for Future Generations must be established to ensure the representation of the interests of future generations with the authority to rule on all areas relating to sustainable development.

The United Nations and its Agencies and Programmes remain the most relevant space to deliberate and decide on issues of global importance such as sustainable development and human rights. Any institutional reform of the UN in this regard must integrate sustainable development throughout its structures, rather than limiting it to the remit of the Economic and Social Council. Sustainable development needs to become one of the core areas of the work for the General Assembly, any attempts to departmentalise the issue should also be avoided. Reform is also required to further integrate the role of young people in UN decision-making processes, ensuring that young people and their representative organisations from across the world have an equal and strong say. Unless young people and their organisations are part of the setup, the implementation of decisions and the necessary changes in the mindset towards a more sustainable future will be difficult to achieve.

Environmental Justice

Since the 1992 Earth Summit countries have adopted carbon trading schemes, essentially charging polluting industries for the carbon they produce. The largest and most ambitious carbon trading scheme is that of the European Union, other schemes also exist in Australia, New Zealand as well as parts of Canada and the United States. The European Youth Forum believes that these schemes must be significantly strengthened and that industries of all sectors should pay the full price for their carbon footprint. A harmonised scheme must be developed and implemented throughout all industrialised, emerging and developing countries to ensure that “environmental dumping”, where developed countries outsource polluting industries to countries with less strict laws, is stopped.

Europe can and must lead the way with regards to concrete action on climate change by reducing carbon emissions by 40% on 1990 levels by 2020, and by 90% by 2050. This is the minimum recommended level as endorsed by leading experts and, in this regard, the

current EU target of 20% is simply not enough.

In order to truly achieve sustainable development long-term Sustainable Development Goals need to be established, building on the model of the Millennium Development Goals, setting a clear roadmap for the future in a way that measures human development that goes beyond simply using Gross Domestic Product and other wealth indicators.

Youth Matters

Unfortunately the role of youth and youth organisations is too frequently overlooked in sustainable development processes. Youth were given “major group” status over 20 years ago, but this needs to be developed into a representative body. Youth organisations are important actors in the development field and are committed to actively contribute to sustainable development by providing development education, breaking down barriers between young people, engaging in dialogue at all levels, ranging from the local to the global level, and changing consumption patterns in younger generations and leading by example in an intergenerational dialogue. The role of youth organisations in sustainable development cannot be overestimated: by providing young people with educational opportunities, youth organisations nurture personal and professional development, thus contributing to intercultural understanding, community development, peace building, active citizenship and democracy. Therefore, sustainable development of today and tomorrow cannot be decided upon without the experience and expertise of youth organisations. Youth organisations that are democratic and youth-led, such as those represented in the membership of the European Youth Forum, are truly representative of the interests of young people and must be given a core role in the Major Group for Children and Youth.

Young people need to be fully recognised as important stakeholders in all levels of decision making processes that affect them, not just because they will have to endure the extreme economic and social consequences of climate change and the depletion of natural resources, but also because they can help find solutions to current problems by contributing a new and fresh perspective. In this regard youth organisations must be given a central role as decision shapers and co-implementers, not only in Rio+20 negotiations but in the entire cycle of managing and governing a sustainable global society for centuries to come.