



Policy Paper on Sustainable Development

Adopted 28-29 April 2006

1. Introduction

1.1 The Aim of the Policy Paper

This document sets out the framework for the policy on sustainable development of the European Youth Forum (YFJ) to guide the work undertaken by the Forum on this issue. The European Youth Forum has worked specifically on sustainable development in the past; and moreover, most of the other work of the YFJ is in many ways also connected to sustainable development and contributes to it. It is thus a logical step to develop a comprehensive policy. This paper will thus start with a short context presentation, following the identification of some of the main areas for youth organisation involvement in sustainable development. Finally, there will be a discussion on actions that could be taken by youth organisations and the European Youth Forum.

1.2 Sustainable Development

Social, economic, environmental and cultural dimensions are interdependent and affect each other. That each of these dimensions must strive towards the same goal is central to the concept of Sustainable Development. As an example, achieving environmental sustainability is not possible without change on the social, economical and cultural levels, and vice versa. Consequently, sustainable development requires that each of these interdependent dimensions be simultaneously accounted for in policy-making. This requires an active change in attitude and behaviour at all levels, from the global to the individual.

1.3 Youth and Sustainable Development

Sustainable development concerns everyone, but the success or failure in achieving it has an even greater impact for young people as it is they that will, in the future, have to deal with the mistakes made today. One of the main challenges of sustainable development is to achieve solidarity between generations, including the generations to come. Commonly, sustainable development is defined as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs”¹. Moreover, youth organisations are central actors in the work for sustainable development. Youth are one of the keys in progressing sustainable development regardless of whether it is at a global, national or local level, and regardless of whether the focus is social, economical, environmental, cultural, or a combination of all these elements.

Sustainable Development has been an important policy issue for twenty years. At the global level, discussion on actions needed has been taken up in two of the largest and highest level meetings in history: the UN Earth Summit in Rio (1992), and the UN World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg (2002)² - and at both of these summits, young people

¹ As defined by the United Nations High Commission on Environment and Development (the “Brundtland Commission”) in 1987.

² For more information see: <http://www.johannesburgsummit.org/>

received special recognition as key actors in the issue. Consequently, youth organisations have also played a major role in the preparation, policy development and implementation of the outcomes from these meetings. Another important global process is that of the Millennium Development Goals, which are a set of monitored goals that were adopted by the UN Millennium Summit 2000 in order to halve poverty by 2015³. In this context, the youth aspect has not been at the fore, however, the Millennium Development Goals should be connected to the World Programme of Action for Youth, which is a powerful global tool to work with youth policy⁴.

2. Sustainable Development Policy

The European Youth Forum recognises sustainable development as a basis for ensuring peace and human rights at all levels. As sustainable development encompasses such a variety of areas and policies, the success in reaching it also depends on many other international institutions and processes - from environmental to economical. Even if it is of global dimensions, the success of sustainable development also relies heavily on the actions taken on the local and national level. In this context, youth organisations have, and can, also play a major role. But there is undeniably also a need for equal and transparent youth structures on the global level.

Poverty eradication

Poverty is more widespread among certain groups, e.g. Youth, women, ethnic minorities and people with disabilities. If youth are not specifically targeted, the vicious cycle of poverty passed on between generations will be harder to break. Moreover, until women and men have equal opportunities, the conditions for sustainable development will be unfulfilled. Youth poverty is not only a matter of resources but also a lack of opportunities. Another cross-cutting issue in this context is environmental sustainability, which is of the utmost importance for reducing poverty; for avoiding armed conflicts; and for preserving economic and cultural wealth. More people are today being displaced due to environmental disasters (both natural and man-made) than by war. Young people are overrepresented as victims of both armed conflicts and environmental disasters.

There are several measurable concrete actions that can be taken relating to poverty eradication. To begin with, an important step in reducing poverty would be that all the Millennium Development Goals should be reached before 2015 and they should be connected to the World Program of Action for Youth. In order to achieve this, EU Member States must radically increase their financial contribution to development and as a minimum fulfil their promises from Agenda 21 in 1992 in devoting 0.7% of their national income

³ The eight main goals are Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; Achieve universal primary education; Promote gender equality and empower women; Reduce child mortality; Improve maternal health; Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; Ensure environmental sustainability; Develop a global partnership for development. For more information see www.millenniumcampaign.org

⁴ For more information see www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/library.htm#resolutions

for aid. Financial support should not be used to pressure countries to reforms that would profit the donor but hurt the recipient. It is also essential that this co-operation is realised in an equal partnership for development, involving all the parties as stakeholders in the process. Finally, market access should be expanded for developing countries and fair trade should be encouraged.

An effective way of targeting poverty is to target youth, thereby combating poverty at the beginning of a person's life. Therefore, resources and policies should be directed towards education as well as to creating employment and decent work conditions. In this context child labour should be abandoned. Micro credit schemes are another measure to reduce poverty among young people. Large parts of the youth population in developing countries live in rural areas and depend on agriculture. In order not to make their situation more difficult, agricultural subsidies, which can create overproduction that is dumped in developing countries, have to be reformed. More data is needed on youth poverty in order to monitor and combat it effectively.

Poverty must also be considered relative to its social context. It is hence important to tackle poverty in the context of different social groups in different countries or specific regions within them. Unsustainable practices in developed countries are a root cause of a kind of poverty which, although quite different from poverty in developing countries, is still poverty that needs to be dealt with.

International Debt Relief

Many poorer countries have such high debt burdens that repayment will have to continue for several generations, even if the original loans may have been squandered through corruption. Even in countries where the situation is not so extreme, there is a problem of the young generation having to pay of the debts built up by the older generations. Moreover, the richer part of the world has an ecological debt towards the poorer part, as western countries are using the ecological space of new generations and developing countries. To begin with the debt problem should be solved by cancelling in full the un-payable and illegitimate debts of the world's poorest countries, by fair and transparent means. It should not be done by depriving poorer countries of new aid. Finally, international institutions whose policies affect poverty eradication must be more transparent, have a more equal representation of developing countries and work within the framework of sustainable development. Large infrastructure projects funded by international development banks should, for example, adhere to strict sustainability guidelines.

Changing Consumption and Production Patterns

Current consumption and production patterns in large parts of Europe are unsustainably using up the world's resources and needs to be radically reversed. This is an issue that youth groups have been highlighting at UN World Summits on Sustainable Development, for example. Being responsible for a disproportionately large amount of unsustainable consumption and production, the EU has a particular duty to take measures concerning this;

subsidies for production processes that pollute have to be removed and economic incentives for green production should be introduced and promoted. Moreover, the polluter should pay for the environmental, social and economic costs of pollution and this should be included in the price of the products. Agriculture should also be within the limits of sustainable development and agricultural policies should aim for food security. Moreover, awareness raising on consumption patterns needs to be carried out, particularly through non-formal education in which youth organisations are the main actors and experts.

Energy and Climate Change

Climate change is one of the largest ever threats to humankind and it is the clearest example of where younger and coming generations' needs are compromised by older and current generations' lifestyles. Moreover, climate change may impact developing countries harder than developed countries although it is the latter that has caused more of it. As young people make up a larger share of the population in developing countries, the importance of this issue for youth is clear. It is thus natural that youth take an active role in advocating for measures to diminish green-house gas emissions, both in Europe and globally.

Youth organisations are important in pressuring national governments as well as the EU to develop better environmental policies. A first step is for the EU and other European countries to fulfil all their commitments under the Kyoto-protocols. The costs of climate change should be included in the price of unsustainable energy sources. Alternative energy sources must be promoted. They have a huge potential and many opportunities exist for alternatives to take a larger share of the energy production. Development of alternatives to fossil fuels should not result in unsustainable agricultural practices or deforestation in the South. As climate change is also a question of lifestyles, it has to be combated through awareness-raising both in and outside schools. In this regard, youth organisations are key actors as main providers of non-formal education. The cost of combating climate change today is huge. In relation to the cost the young people will have to pay in the future if not enough is done, the cost today is however very small.

Biodiversity and Natural Resources

Natural resources should be managed so that future generations' needs are not compromised. For example, deforestation must be halted and biodiversity must be preserved. Involvement of local communities and youth is crucial for a sustainable conservation of biodiversity. Indigenous knowledge and languages should be preserved for coming generations and intellectual property rights' frameworks need to be reviewed so that they do not threaten biodiversity, food sovereignty, or the fight against diseases.

Water

Water is not an ordinary commodity. Therefore we need a rights-based approach to it and the WTO General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) should not hamper access to water. Clean drinking water should be a right for everyone while water use for agriculture could be controlled in order for

it to not be over-used. The need to preserve water resources from for example large-scale hydropower development is also of importance and the participation of youth in water-management should be acknowledged.

Education for Sustainable Development

Education is a foundation for sustainable development. Education is a right for every child and young person. It should be free and of equal access for all.

Learning about sustainable development needs to be introduced into all levels of education and all fields of studies. Education for Sustainable Development seeks to balance the principles of sustainable development in education. It should be reached through formal and non-formal education, as an important tool for addressing anything from rural development, HIV/AIDS, the environment, human rights, equality, and the involvement of youth in society. Of importance in this context are also Human Rights, Development Education and Global Education. Being experts on how to reach young people as well as experts on formal and non-formal education, youth organisations have to play a crucial role in this. On the formal level, the right of education for all should not be constrained by trade agreements or debt reduction requirements.

Health and HIV/AIDS

A sustainable economy is impossible without a healthy population and achieving this is often easier if one takes environmental conditions into account. An example of this is that pollution must be reduced. It is important as children and youth are more sensitive to pollution and as a large portion of young people live in city slums, where they are subjected to much air pollution, unsafe water and poor sanitation. More actions need to be taken to achieve significant improvements in the lives of the world's slum dwellers.

One of the main obstacles to poverty reduction is HIV/AIDS with 40 million people currently living with the virus. We have already lost 20 million people, and there are 15 million orphans whose parents have passed away from AIDS. The pandemic has so far hit sub-Saharan Africa most severely, but HIV/AIDS is rapidly increasing in Eastern Europe as well. Young people, particularly girls and young women, are amongst the age group where the infection rate is the highest. In order to fight the pandemic, all young people should have the right to basic health services. HIV/AIDS must be prevented through campaigns encouraging responsible sexual behaviour and condom use. All young people, both those in school and out of school, must be reached, hence youth organisations are key partners in combating the pandemic, together with comprehensive sexuality education in schools as well as access to sexual and reproductive health services. Furthermore, gender equality is crucial in fighting HIV/AIDS.

Mainstreaming Sustainable Development

Sustainable Development is the overall goal of policy-making. As different policy areas are increasingly interdependent, they need to be coherent with

sustainable development. Coherence is of the utmost importance in a global world where interdependence is growing between countries. Youth and gender issues should not be dealt with separately, but must always be mainstreamed into areas such as international development policies and sustainable development policies. Moreover, peace and Human Rights have to be seen as conditions for sustainable development.

The Sustainable Development policy must be the framework in which the Lisbon strategy can be carried out, and not the other way around. The EU policies on trade, agriculture, and fisheries must be coherent with sustainable development. The WTO has to review its agreements from a sustainable development perspective and the World Bank has to ensure that it only finances projects that are in line with sustainable development. The role of business in achieving sustainable development is important, which is why corporate accountability should be implemented.

3. Promotion of Sustainable Development

As Sustainable Development is of the utmost importance for youth, youth organisations have a major role to play both concerning awareness raising and advocacy. The role of the European Youth Forum is to ensure appropriate youth participation in important decision-making processes, enhance awareness raising, and support Member Organisations working, or interested in working, on the area, as well as highlighting the role of young people and the contributions they can make to sustainable development. Of particular importance for the European Youth Forum is to make sure that former commitments and promises are not forgotten. This is important relating to both European institutions as well as when working on the global level. The fundamental part of sustainable development work relating to youth is, however, what the Member Organisations do. Apart from enabling the engagement of youth organisations in international processes, the YFJ should encourage Member Organisations to take actions nationally to ensure the implementation of policies. More specifically, actions need to be taken on the following areas by the European Youth Forum:

• Support for Member Organisations to engage in Sustainable Development

- The YFJ should disseminate information on good and possible ways for Member Organisations to work on the issue, both in relation to advocacy work and awareness raising. Good practice should be exchanged Member Organisations. The YFJ should also explore the possibilities of doing so through trainings.
- The YFJ should keep track of the issues in which youth organisation could have a role in advocating for and spread information on processes of interest for Member Organisations' advocacy work, both on the European and global level.
- The YFJ should support Member Organisations to lobby their own governments for the implementation of Agenda 21 and the

Johannesburg Plan of Implementation adopted at the World Summit on Sustainable Development, at all levels.

- The YFJ should support coordination among member organisations working in the field of sustainable development.

- **UN**

- The European Youth Forum should promote the recognition of youth as key actors in achieving the Millennium Development Goals and that these are linked to the World Programme of Action for Youth.⁵
- The YFJ should cooperate with the Millennium Campaign as a way of advocating for the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals.⁶ This cooperation is done within the framework of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Millennium Campaign and the YFJ.
- The YFJ should take part in the UNESCO initiated 'Decade on Education for Sustainable Development' and advocate for education on sustainable development to become part of educational programs and curricula in coordination with its member organisations working in the field of formal education.
- The European Youth Forum should continue to be involved in the Commission for Sustainable Development (CSD) and support Member Organisations involvement also.⁷
- The European Youth Forum should promote Sustainable Development in its interaction with other UN agencies.

- **The World Bank**

- The YFJ should promote non-formal education as a concept that the World Bank should invest in. Non-formal education should be seen as complementary to formal education in WB programmes.
- The YFJ should advocate for youth participation in Poverty Reduction Strategies in line with the outcome of the Youth Development and Peace conference, 2004.⁸
- The YFJ should advocate on the Millennium Development Goals and the World Program of Action for Youth towards the World Bank.
- The YFJ should advocate for the establishment of advisory structures of youth organisations' representatives focused on sustainable development.

5 The World Programme of Action for Youth, WPAY, is the only global action programme on youth policy adopted on a high level. The WPAY and MDG are in many senses covering the same areas.

6 The Millennium Campaign is a UN initiative to encourage citizens around the world in their efforts to hold governments to account for the promises they made in the Millennium Development Goals.

7 The "Youth Caucus" in the CSD is one of the most advanced involvements of Youth into the UN system. The Commission for Sustainable Development also gets a higher and higher profile for each year due to that it partly deals with the Millennium Development Goals.

8 For more information see <http://wbln0018.worldbank.org/EURVP/web.nsf/Pages/YDP2004-Home>

- **Council of Europe**

- The YFJ should advocate for the positions of the European Youth Forum on sustainable development to be considered by the Council of Europe and the North South Centre (for example in our position as member of the executive committee of the latter).
- The YFJ should lobby the Council of Europe to follow up the "Europe, Youth and Globalisation Event".
- The YFJ should promote Education for Sustainable Development within the CoE.
- The YFJ should advocate for the Council of Europe to take actions on its non-formal education programmes to promote sustainable development.

- **EU**

- The YFJ should lobby the EU for the implementation of Agenda 21 and the plans of implementation adopted at the Rio and Johannesburg World Summits on Sustainable Development as well as at other international processes.⁹
- The YFJ should follow up the EU sustainable development policy, development policy and Millennium Development Goals commitments.
- The Youth Forum should take an active part in relevant networks pushing for sustainable development and enhanced development cooperation by the EU.
- The European Youth Forum should highlight examples of youth led development cooperation as well as propagate for more support to such.
- The YFJ should lobby the EU to take into account the social, political, cultural and environmental dimensions of sustainable development in youth policy.
- The YFJ should promote Education as a right for all and Education for Sustainable Development and should lobby for the inclusion of Education for Sustainable Development in the Youth Program.
- The YFJ should advocate a sustainable development approach to the youth pact.

- **Internally**

- Sustainable Development should be integrated within the other working areas of the European Youth Forum.
- Achieving sustainable development cannot only be done by actions from international institutions. It is also absolutely crucial that individuals take actions themselves and evaluate how their lifestyles should change. Likewise, the European Youth Forum will not only advocate sustainable development, it will also have to analyse its work from a sustainable development perspective through for example an environmental plan. Following this, the YFJ will

⁹For more information, see

<http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/documents/agenda21/english/agenda21toc.htm> , or
<http://www.johannesburgsummit.org>

continually strive to improve its internal processes to make them more sustainable. The Member Organisations of the Youth Forum should also be encouraged to do so.

4. Conclusions

Today, there are almost three billion people in the world under the age of 25. More than half a billion of them live on less than two dollars a day and more than 100 million school-aged children are not in school. Although we know that environmental sustainability is absolutely indispensable, it is threatened and the human contribution to climate change is not being adequately dealt with. At the same time we know that there are more means than ever to change all this. No generation before has had the possibility of putting an end to extreme poverty. Nor has any generation had so much information on the environmental challenges facing us as we have. That is also why youth are the key to achieving sustainable development.