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UNESCO ESD YOUTH CONFERENCE

7 November 2014 • Okayama, Japan

YOUTH STATEMENT

This Youth Statement was adopted at the UNESCO ESD Youth Conference held in Okayama, Japan, on 7 November 2014, to provide a vision, commitment, and recommendations from youth for advancing ESD beyond 2014 in line with the Global Action Programme on ESD. It represents the voices of 50 ESD youth leaders in the conference, who in turn represent thousands of young people around the globe, and also includes contributions from over a hundred youth who participated in pre-conference online discussions.

Vision for a Sustainable Future

We invite you to take a moment as you read this statement to hold in your heart your loved ones: your children, their children and those that will follow. Imagine – as we have – how the decisions that we make today will impact each and every one of them. Reflect – as we have – on the importance and value of this youth statement to their lives, as well as to ours.

Our statement captures the voices and visions of thousands of youth from around the world who are strongly represented and have widely contributed to this global call – from the experiences of an environmental educator in Madagascar, to the creative approaches of a biomimic in Bahrain; from empowering indigenous youth in Thailand to innovating with gaming platforms in Moldova. Our journeys are different, yet our destination is the same. We come from different backgrounds – a rich diversity of race, colour, religion and belief – yet our vision is one. Our voices are united.

Together, we stand for a sustainable, resilient and equitable society in which every person in every corner of the world has the opportunity to thrive. We strongly believe that Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is fundamental to achieving this vision. ESD provides the empowering mechanism through which we can transform the critical sustainability challenges that we face into opportunities. It must be the essence of education. Without ESD we cannot move forward.

Young people play a vital role in advancing the ESD agenda. The implications of our collective decisions and actions will shape our reality and our future. We are committed to lead, yet we cannot do this alone, and neither can you. **Together, we must empower and mobilize youth around the globe!** This document presents our strategic recommendations to achieve this, building on the UNESCO Global Action Programme on Education for Sustainable Development.

We urgently call for a multi-stakeholder commitment to and collaboration on these recommendations. We acknowledge and celebrate the existing efforts of the frontrunners who have led us this far. For many of us, the journey has already begun. For those just starting, we invite you to come with us.

Recommendations

1. **POLICY ADVANCEMENT**

- a) **Ensure the active involvement of youth in policy planning, implementation and evaluation.** Youth should be recognized as a key stakeholder at all levels, domains and stages of educational governance. Through this, youth will be able to shape policies to strengthen ESD.
- b) **Ensure that policies drive ESD with the urgency it requires and in a holistic, just and gender responsive way.** Policies should address the multiple dimensions of sustainable development and drive immediate action to realize sustainable development in the here and now.
- c) **All relevant stakeholders should allocate resources to empower youth as change agents for ESD.** Governments, civil society organizations, youth councils, communities and businesses should allocate financial, technical and human resources to enable the implementation of ESD policies and the recommendations of this declaration.

2. WHOLE-INSTITUTION APPROACHES

- a) **Educational institutions and governments should provide the institutional support, resources and legitimacy for youth-led change processes towards sustainability.** This requires a combination of bottom-up initiatives and top-down steering. Mechanisms should include dedicated funding, institutional integration, working space, mandates, recognition, and training for youth-led sustainability initiatives.
- b) **Enhance collective action among sustainability initiatives.** Educational institutions should support the joint efforts of pupils, students, staff and the local community. This requires the development of common visions and identities, places of encounter, projects and programmes which are shared among all stakeholders.
- c) **Recognize youth as equal partners to accelerate the operational transformation of educational institutions towards sustainability.** Educational institutions should practice what they teach, by generating positive environmental impacts. In collaboration with staff, youth should become change agents and decision-makers in environmental management, including issues of energy, food, water, waste, buildings and biodiversity on campus.

3. EDUCATORS AND TRAINERS

- a) **Recognize that all citizens have the potential and responsibility to act as facilitators for ESD.** To educate billions of people on sustainability challenges and opportunities, the mobilization of educators and trainers needs to reach beyond those in traditional educational institutions. Youth, professionals, practitioners and citizens across all levels and sectors need to be mobilized as ESD educators and trainers.
- b) **Build capacities of youth as trainers and peer-to-peer educators for ESD.** Youth should be empowered to educate a critical mass of peers, parents, friends and communities on ESD. This requires special support and attention from professional trainers and educational institutions.
- c) **Enhance the capacity of existing educators and trainers to empower youth to engage on ESD issues.** Teachers, educators and trainers need to learn about the new methods, technologies and approaches of ESD-based education. This requires supportive mechanisms such as online trainings and forums, toolkits, funds, peer-to-peer learning and support networks.

4. INNOVATIVE LEARNING FOR YOUTH

- a) **Educational institutions and governments should encourage and support youth and educators to experiment with innovative learning approaches.** ESD is different from traditional education. It thus requires experimentation with alternative technologies as well as creative and experiential methods to break through conventional mindsets and find the best ways to educate youth.
- b) **Monitor and evaluate these learning approaches to determine their effectiveness and efficiency in promoting ESD.** Educational institutions, governments and educators need to develop indicators, frameworks and processes to evaluate the diversity of experiments with ESD in order to identify what works in different institutional and geographic settings.
- c) **Scale the impact of successful learning approaches to different geographic and institutional contexts.** Successful learning approaches need to be de-contextualised and codified, in order to be then replicated across geographic locations, increased in scale and integrated into mainstream

policies. Dedicated funding, recognition, high-level backing and leadership are key to realizing all three of the above recommendations.

5. LOCAL COMMUNITIES

- a) **Respect the voices of youth in community-driven ESD initiatives.** International agencies, governments and civil society organizations should respect the voices of youth when implementing ESD initiatives in communities. This requires that youth are involved in the identification, design and implementation of ESD-related community problems and solutions.
- b) **Support youth-led ESD initiatives in local communities.** ESD forms a strong foundation for the economic growth of local communities and the protection of ecosystems. Realizing this potential requires training, mentoring and sponsorship of youth-led ESD initiatives, supported by educational institutions, companies, civil society organizations and governments.
- c) **Encourage youth to engage with and learn through real-life situations.** Local communities should be positively impacted by ESD and provide a source of learning and inspiration. This requires promoting social service-learning, transdisciplinary education and research, living laboratories, learning centers and online education.

6. SUSTAINABILITY CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

- a) **Enable all youth to understand and critically appreciate the complexities and uncertainties of sustainability challenges and opportunities.** In order to undertake effective action on ESD, young people need to understand the interconnected socio-cultural, economic and technological systems and trends that create persistent sustainability problems.
- b) **Empower youth to develop visions of more sustainable futures.** Through dialogue and facilitated interactions, young learners need to be supported in developing daring, radical and challenging visions of a more sustainable world. Those visions then provide the inspiration and rationales for youth-led sustainability efforts.
- c) **Equip students with the competencies to transform their personal lives, educational institutions, communities and countries.** To realize their sustainability visions, youth need to be equipped with the necessary knowledge, skills and values for transforming themselves and the unsustainable systems in their society. Encouragement, feedback and recognition from educators, peers and educational institutions are necessary to strengthen their confidence and motivation along the journey.

7. WOMEN AND MARGINALIZED GROUPS

- a) **Ensure that educational curricula and policies drive ESD in a way that enhances the equality and equity of socially marginalized groups.** Socially marginalized groups are vulnerable and difficult to reach through ESD activities, as they are discriminated against for reasons of gender, age, ability, colour, religion, income, geographic origin and sexual orientation, among others.
- b) **Recognize the values, experiences and perspectives of youth from marginalized social groups for ESD.** Youth from marginalized social groups can provide unique, relevant and interesting values, experiences and perspectives to the education of mainstream and privileged students. Sharing those requires intercultural, interfaith and intergenerational dialogue to create mutual understanding and acceptance.

- c) **Create safe and accessible learning spaces for youth from marginalized social groups.** Specific conditions need to be put in place for empowering youth from marginalized social groups to participate in ESD activities. This requires, among others, deconstructing stereotypes and providing financial support and facilitated encounters.

8. SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

- a) **Recognize the importance of social entrepreneurship to contribute to the goals of ESD.** Governments and educational institutions should recognize that social entrepreneurship enables young people to learn about ESD in an informal setting, to create jobs, set up their own ESD activities, and have positive impacts on their local communities.
- b) **Create favourable policy and funding conditions for new social start-ups.** In order to realize the potential of social entrepreneurship to contribute to ESD, governments and financial institutions need to provide subsidies, tax allowances, scholarships, guidance and mentoring schemes to support young entrepreneurs.
- c) **Develop the capacity of youth to set up and manage their social enterprises.** Educational institutions, businesses and civil society organizations should foster the entrepreneurial knowledge, awareness and skills of youth. This requires dedicated courses, peer-to-peer coaching, mentoring, start-up funding and office space, among others.

Youth Empowering and Mobilizing Youth

Across the globe, youth are increasingly mobilizing themselves and taking leadership roles to advance their communities and countries towards sustainability. In this process, young people recognize that creating a sustainable future will require a collective vision, commitment and action from youth around the world. Therefore, youth-to-youth empowerment and mobilization present a unique opportunity for harnessing the knowledge, energy and creativity of young people to advance ESD.

Young leaders on ESD can be inspirational role models for encouraging other youth who share similar concerns in their local contexts. This can be achieved through peer mentoring, sharing of knowledge and skills, and fostering open and safe platforms for expression and action in their communities and beyond.

A critical element of successfully mobilizing youth is building trust and reducing conflict. Stimulating international and intercultural dialogue amongst youth fosters friendship, exchanges, understanding and cooperation among cultures, generations and people with different worldviews. Youth recognition of diversity as an opportunity contributes to advancing ESD at local, national and global levels.

Youth-to-youth empowerment initiatives have the potential to be bold and creative in the way they tell stories and mobilize others. It is here that other stakeholders can harness and partner with the creativity, passion and dedication of young people. In this way, youth-to-youth initiatives can continue growing, spreading the message and creating more impact.

We, the youth of the world, commit to taking responsibility for empowering and mobilizing young people. We are dedicated to using this collective driving force to maximize positive impact on our society and environment. With this role as change makers, we are ready to do our part in transforming today's world for a more sustainable future.