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**YOUTH AND THE ENVIRONMENT ENGAGING YOUTH  
IN ACHIEVING MDGS  
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## **YOUTH AND THE ENVIRONMENT ENGAGING YOUTH IN ACHIEVING MDG 7**

**IYAD ABUMOGHLI**

### **Introduction**

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It is worldwide known that the environment knows no borders. Although this statement was initially intended to show the internationally shared responsibility for protecting the global environment and sustainable use of environmental resources beyond national boundaries, however it also means that the environment does not differentiate between men and women, rich and poor, or young and adults. We all impact and are impacted by the same environment we live in. But it seems, according to facts, figures and experiences, that some of us are paying the price for the exclusivity in decision making concerning the use of natural resources. Young men and women, deprived from the right to participate in decision making, have been suffering from the adverse consequences of the over-exploitation of natural resources. Deterioration of water quality leading to water-borne diseases, lack of access to clean sources of energy leading to indoor air pollution, and use of toxic pesticides leading to higher incidents of cancer and other chronic diseases are just a few examples.

Young people ages 15 to 24 are 1.2 billion of the world's population. This percentage is much higher in some nations and reaches up to 70% due to many reasons including natural population growth rate, conflicts and wars, low level of life expectancy and others. Eighty six percent (86%) of youth live in developing countries with 10% and 20% are illiterate boys and girls, respectively and 40% of the global unemployment is among youth.

The basic principle of sustainable development calls for the sustainable use of environmental resources to provide the same opportunities our generation has had to future generations. However, the young generation of our time is currently suffering from unsustainable practices of production and consumption of environmental resources. It is a basic human right to provide the youth with a healthy and sustainable environment where their aspirations are cherished and their opportunities are respected. Youth are not a passive sector of the population, but rather very important for development effectiveness as contributors and participants in the decision-making system or as a major target group in strategic planning processes to achieve the MDGs.

Principle 21 of the 1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development states "the creativity, ideals and courage of the youth of the world should be mobilized to forge a global partnership in order to achieve sustainable development and ensure a better future for all". Furthermore, the 2002 Johannesburg Plan for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 called for encouraging local Agenda 21s by involving, in addition to national legislative assemblies, other actors such as youth and indigenous people and their communities. This plan of implementation stressed on the empowerment and the full and equal participation of women in all spheres of society, including participation in the decision-making process.

At the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development, youth organizations took bold actions with the help of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and issued the "Youth Declaration". The declaration affirmed the role and rights of youth in issues concerning sustainable development and the protection of the environment at the local, national and international levels. Globally ever since, young people have been vocal in expressing their concerns through advocacy and public awareness campaigns as well as by being active participants in national and international fora.

## **Making the Case:**

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Globally, youth constitute around 20% of the population with regional variations reaching up to 70% and depending on the age definition of youth. However, it is argued that despite the fact that youth represent a major part of the population, young people are at no state to make informed decisions or be involved in decision making. Adults, who have the experience, are more capable of considering issues related to youth. But in fact, youth can play a major role in advancing development if effectively engaged in the consultation, decision-making and implementation of not only youth specific strategies, but also other strategies affecting their lives and livelihoods. Many of the youth around the world are already making contributions to achieving the MDGs. However, governments and development organizations still stand short in addressing the role of youth and involving them in development effectiveness.

Many international conventions and agreements have recognized the right and role youth can play in advancing development and achieving the Millennium Development Goals. In relation to MDG 7, Agenda 21 on sustainable development asked governments to "support the promotion and creation of mechanisms to involve youth representation in all United Nations processes". In the outcome of the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI), youth were mentioned in relation to poverty reduction, consumption and life style, education and the implementation of sustainable development programs. Paragraph 153 of JPOI commits governments to: "Promote and support youth participation in programs and activities relating to sustainable development through, for example, supporting local youth councils or their equivalent, and by encouraging their establishment where they do not exist."

At the World Conference on Women in 1995, governments agreed in the Beijing Platform for Action that "Special measures must be taken to ensure that young women have the skills necessary for active and effective participation in all levels of social, cultural, political and economic leadership. It will be critical for the international community to demonstrate a new commitment to the future - a commitment to inspiring a new generation of women and men to work together for a more just society. This new generation of leaders must accept and promote a world in which every child is free from injustice, oppression and inequality and free to develop her/his own potential. The principle of equality of women and men must therefore be integral to the socialization process."

The Arab Human Development Report 2004 calls for the participation of youth in the decision making system in relation to education, employment and personal freedom. However, most Arab countries have ratified less than seven of the 15 major international legal instruments adopted by intergovernmental bodies of the United Nations system relating to the human rights of youth. Three countries in the region have not ratified any of the 15 conventions<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> UNDP 2004. Arab Human Development Report  
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Youth at the age between 15 and 24 still have between 45-55 years to live on this earth based on an average life expectancy of 70 years. This is a life time that they will have to live bearing the consequences of environmental degradation which has been caused by the older generation. When Agenda 21 talks about future generations, we should remember that this also means our sons and daughters and not only our grandchildren. The detrimental impacts of any environmental pollution will be observed by us on our own children. The continuing deterioration of the global environment resulting from unsustainable patterns of consumption and production will negatively impact the young generation of today and deprive them from the opportunities that the older generation has had leading to creating more challenges for them to clean up the mess of today.

A study conducted by UNFPA<sup>2</sup> in the Arab region has concluded that the environment is one of the top priority concerns young people have identified. The youth are particularly vulnerable to environmental risks associated with air pollution, for example, especially indoor air pollution caused by the burning of solid waste or fossil fuel for heating and cooking. Young people in many areas are deprived of their right for education because they are forced to leave school to help their families in collecting fuel for cooking, water for drinking or even help in farming. Young people will be exposed longer to toxic chemicals or any sort of radiation as they have more years to live after our generation.

However, it is not only pollution that concerns the youth, but also the depletion of environmental resources such as safe drinking water, biodiversity and sources of energy. Current unsustainable and excessive use of natural resources will deprive the young generation from the opportunities to sustainably use these environmental resources in a different way than the one our generation has. Environmental protection, promotion and development are among the issues considered by young people to be of major significance to the future wellbeing of society.

The health of young people is influenced by the state of the environment. Water and air quality, use of pesticides, burning of fuel wood, land degradation and draughts, solid waste, industrial and clinical waste, and housing are among the many issues having health impacts on people in general but youth in particular.

Access to clean water is essential to prevent water-borne diseases such as Anemia, Cholera, Diarrhea, Giardiasis, Hepatitis, Lead poisoning, Malaria, Polio, and Typhoid. In many developing countries, water is consumed directly from water streams or rivers without proper treatment. Agricultural runoff, domestic and industrial wastewater dumped into water streams is the cause for many youth deaths in countries where monitoring and law enforcement is weak. Access to water and sources of energy also have a direct impact on young females in some communities of developing countries. Usually, young girls are requested by their families to drop education to help collect water for the household or fuel wood for cooking and heating. The unavailability of these resources has deprived these young females from their rights for education, their future opportunities to improve their living conditions and understand threats of polluted environment to their health. Access to water is explicitly protected under the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)<sup>3</sup> and the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child. There are many dimensions of the right to clean water essential for the development of young people, from food security and nutrition to sanitation and health to housing.

Cooking and heating using traditional sources of energy such as fuel wood, cattle dung or Kerosene based heaters are major causes for indoor air pollution leading to serious health

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<sup>2</sup> UNFPA (2006). Moving Young. State of World Population. Youth Supplement

<sup>3</sup> AAAS. Science and Human Rights Programme.

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problems for the youth. Poor indoor air quality can cause or contribute to the development of chronic respiratory diseases such as asthma and hypersensitivity pneumonitis. In addition, it can cause headaches, dry eyes, nasal congestion, nausea and fatigue. While bad housing conditions in slum areas can be a good environment for biological pollutants, including molds, bacteria, viruses, pollen, dust and mites. Animal dander promotes poor indoor air quality and may be a major cause of days lost from work and school.

## **Opportunities**

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A number of youth organizations and youth clubs at the global, regional and national levels have adopted sustainable development as one of the main areas of concern. In the Arab States region, for example, there are around 30 youth NGOs dealing with youth issues in general, but have also adopted sustainable development as one of its major activities. However, there are dozens of environmental NGOs in the Arab region mainly run by young men and women. Some of these NGOs deal with issues on specific fields ranging from biodiversity to protected areas or water conservation. Other NGOs tackle broader national environmental and sustainable development issues through public awareness and advocacy activities.

Youth, in general, are more attentive to their social responsibilities through their activities, by either targeting their own generation or the general public at large. Working with local communities, endogenous groups and through school clubs, youth have reached the most vulnerable sectors of the society to achieve their stated goals.

School and science clubs run by youth usually have a direct impact on the behavior of young men and women. But this behavior change has in fact had a tripling effect on their families, neighborhood and local community. The behavioral change, if coupled with political action, awareness campaigns and advocacy, could cause a change in the way of life. This is especially true if this behavior can be related to social or religious values. For example, water conservation in the Arab states is mentioned in the Holy Quran, thus schools have used this religious value in instituting water conservation in the behaviors of youth and their families. Other global examples include recycling of paper, cans, plastic and glass.

International organizations in recent years, have stressed the need to engage NGOs in programmes and projects' implementation. This has resulted in building the capacity of NGOs to develop, implement and monitor environmental projects. The knowledge and experience generated through projects' implementation have been passed to other peers and the local communities. Resources mobilized for projects have contributed to creating income generating opportunities for the entire community as most of these projects were for piloting conservation actions. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) assists the Commonwealth of Independent States as part of its capacity development activities on training young environmental leaders. Likewise, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has established a Youth Advisory Council and has initiated a number of programmes to involve youth in international fora such as sponsoring the youth dialogue during 2002 WSSD.

National governments, in many cases, have effectively established youth specific national strategies. However, these strategies often consider youth as target groups and address their issues from the perspectives of filling their time with useful activities. Rarely, these strategies included youth in the decision making systems of these strategies or other strategies addressing youth. The role of youth can be institutionalized in policy-making through advisory bodies such as youth councils. Some countries, like Jordan for example,

have established high level youth councils, but others have created special government ministries for youth.

A report, written by youth, "The Millennium Development Goals: Challenges and Opportunities for Implementation" indicates that investing in youth will provide the longest and most effective dividend towards meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by building the social capital needed to foster pragmatic development. The report argues that without the involvement of young people, representing almost 20% of the world's population, the full achievement of the MDGs will remain elusive and their long-term sustainability will be compromised.

## **Policy Options**

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The energy, enthusiasm and creativity of the youth coupled with the availability of advanced technologies and communication means empowers the young men and women of today with the capabilities to be engaged in solving environmental problems. Sharing of information, application of advanced technologies in agriculture, running recycling programmes and implementing water harvesting techniques are among some examples of the practical ways that the youth have recently been engaged with. Environmental awareness is one of the areas that youth have been successfully implementing not only to call for the protection of the environment, but also to make their voices heard by their governments and the international community.

If it is globally accepted that young people of the age of 18 can vote to elect their president, local government representatives or parliament members, then there should be a global acceptance of the capabilities and knowledge that youth can bring when deciding what's best for their future. In some countries, the official age of marriage goes as low as 14 years<sup>4</sup>. This means that these governments trust that young men and women at this age can make decisions that affect their future and can create a family which is the central pillar in any society.

Young people, as introduced earlier in the paper, constitute almost one fifth of the global population. Thus this substantial sector of the society should not be kept passive to receive decisions or be a problem to be addressed. This group of young men and women should be part of the solution in any strategy that addresses them or can be affected by or affect them. A central basic principle of good governance is the participatory approach in decision-making by which all sectors of the society are involved and consulted. Participation gives people a stake in the decision and confidence that this decision will preserve their personal and property rights.

As indicated earlier, Principle 21 of the 1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development and the 1997 Johannesburg Plan for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 called for the involvement of youth in issues related to sustainable development in terms of participating in global, regional and local actions. This paper will try to put forward some recommendations for how young men and women can be included in the decision making systems, in which areas, ways of inclusion and potential impacts with some demonstrated success stories.

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<sup>4</sup> The author of this paper doesn't necessarily approve of this age for marriage nor promotes it as an acceptable social behaviour.

## Knowledge Management and Communication

Knowledge, sharing of information, education, research and communication are important tools to engage youth in protecting the environment and contributing to decisions concerning sustainable consumption and production. The following are some recommended actions to be considered.

- Mainstream sustainable environment education into school and college curricula. The UN General Assembly announced 2005-2014 as the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development. Training of teachers is also important for these programmes to be effective. Ministries of education and other educational national committees and institutions should conduct a comprehensive assessment of current curricula for integration of sustainable development concepts, problems and activities. This should not only be limited to scientific or social text books, but all other subjects such as arts, math, languages, etc.
- Informal education is also an important area where youth could learn better about environmental pollution and how to contribute to reduce it. After school activities in schools and science clubs and other programmes initiated by some schools such as sports, music and other activities should be expanded to include environmental activities and sustainable development.
- Governments, youth organizations and NGOs should collaborate in developing awareness programmes targeting sustainable production and consumption behaviors towards sustainable lifestyle as well as the MDGs in general and MDG 7 in particular.
- Consumer protection agencies, departments and NGOs should promote environmental friendly products to instill sustainable consumption and force manufacturers to produce environmental friendly products.
- Increase production and encourage widespread dissemination of informational material illustrating the global dimensions of environmental protection, its origins and the interrelated effects of environmental degradation.
- Statistical departments should adopt gender disaggregated and youth specific indicators in relation to environment and encourage youth to participate in gathering environmental data and in understanding ecological systems.
- Encourage youth-to-youth training and education in schools and youth clubs. Build and support global networks amongst youth organizations promoting sustainable development.
- Initiate young women into trainers' programmes in participation and leadership to enable young women to help their communities by raising awareness about the essential role girls can play in environmental protection and impacts women have on the lifestyle of their families.
- Universities and research institutions should establish research and development programmes targeting environmental issues and provide funding for students to conduct graduation research on sustainable development issues at the local and national level.

- NGOs, research institutions should collaborate with international organizations to create communities of practice around pertinent environmental issues to discuss ways and means to tackle them.
- Encourage study tours between educational organizations to protected areas and environmentally sustainable projects.
- The media, including radio, TV and printed journals, newspapers and magazines should dedicate large spaces to show case good environmental practices, educate youth on environmental health impacts and their roles, rights and responsibilities.
- Youth constitute the majority of those having access to computers and internet. Blogs are the best places for youth to exchange their views, creativity and concerns about environmental issues. States and NGOs should encourage environmental blogs with careful monitoring and better information sharing.

### **Social Responsibility and Good Citizenship**

Social responsibility means that an entity whether it is state, government, corporation, organization or individual has a responsibility to the society. This responsibility can be "negative," in that it is a responsibility to refrain from acting, or it can be "positive," meaning a responsibility to act. Youth should be encouraged to know about their social responsibility towards their society and what the society should offer them. The encouragement of good citizenship would allow youth to positively act on issues concerning their wellbeing and healthy lifestyles. Some recommendations are as follows:

- Initiate programmes to promote youth participation in tree planting, forestry, combating desertification, water harvesting, recycling, waste reduction, eco-tourism and other sound environmental practices. The participation of young people and their organizations in such programmes can provide good leadership training and encourage awareness and action.
- Replicate the World Bank's Youth and Governance Program concerning anticorruption to include environmental corruption. Youth must be trained in whistle-blowing strategies to alert local authorities and national governments of existing or potential environmental hazards.
- Prioritize support for local projects that improve water availability and build capacity at the community level. Develop partnerships in areas without access to safe water to train youth to lead community-based water supply projects.
- Pay particular attention to more gender sensitive strategies as the costs of inadequate access to water and basic sanitation are higher than the cost of investment to make these resources available. This is particularly true for girls and young women. Lack of adequate access to water affects their privacy, dignity, health and hygiene and represents an economic burden for the country as a whole. The time and energy of young women and girls devoted to carrying water long distances translates into lost opportunities for education or paid work.
- Through poverty reduction strategies and action plans, government should integrate and budget for community-driven projects for and run by youth in urban and rural areas. Youth-led entrepreneurial initiatives should be encouraged and fostered especially in slum urban areas.



## **Economic Development**

Youth has a major role to play in economic development where the youth population represents as high as 20% of the global population and 40% of unemployment is among the youth. Cooperation between governments, private sector, the civil society and youth should provide important opportunities for young people to be involved in environmentally friendly businesses which will lead to environmental protection and pollution reduction. The following are some recommended actions:

- Governments should provide grants of land to youth and youth organizations, supported by financial and technical assistance and training. These grants should lead to activities to combat desertification, encourage organic farming, use of advanced agricultural technologies, efficiency in irrigation, minimization of the use of pesticides and enhance food production and security.
- Rural development banks and other commercial banks should provide incentive loans for entrepreneurial youth implementing agri-based micro-endeavors and other environmentally friendly and green projects.
- NGOs should promote young farmers cooperatives and provide marketing assistance to young farmers and producers.
- Governments should include young people in the implementation of new projects identified in national development and poverty reduction plans and strategies, as well as support existing youth-led development initiatives.
- Development policies must prioritize the growth of rural areas, which have high percentages of unemployed youth and little public infrastructure, by engaging young people in creating necessary services and infrastructure.
- Provide incentives such as grants or micro-finance for youth to work for safe and clean water and renewable energy in their community.
- UNDP should include in the criteria for funding from the MDG Achievement Fund special clauses to provide access to financing opportunities and encourage young people to carry out MDG-related projects or become entrepreneurs.
- Governments and youth-based NGOs should encourage eco-tourism projects run by youth entrepreneurs. Such projects would not only contribute to preserving the environment, but would also provide income generation activities leading to improving the livelihoods of youth and their families. For example, eco-tourism can serve local communities well through simultaneous protection of the natural environment and revenue generation through tourism. Young people can be active community leaders under such initiatives by working as tour guides to showcase and protect their local environment.

## Representation

Whatever the specific cause is, most would agree that slow democratization is a hindrance to youth well-being and advancement<sup>5</sup>. The Arab Human Development Report 2004 argues that governments should provide young people with political space in the public arena, especially on issues of education, employment and personal freedom. Agenda 21 called for the involvement, in addition to national legislative assemblies, other actors such as youth and indigenous people and their communities. The plan of implementation stressed on the empowerment and the full and equal participation of women in all spheres of society, including participation in the decision-making process. Some of the recommendations to enhance and encourage youth representation in decision making and implementation of sustainable development and environment projects, programmes and discussions are:

- Specifically for the Arab States, Arab countries should ratify the 15 major international legal instruments adopted by intergovernmental bodies of the United Nations system relating to the human rights of youth. Most Arab countries have ratified less than seven of the conventions, and three countries have not ratified any of the 15 conventions.
- Adopt in any national youth strategy a decision for the inclusion of youth of both genders representatives in decision-making processes, committees and national assemblies.
- Establish National Youth Councils and within it establish environment and sustainable development committees with wide participation of young men and women. The national youth councils should review all government policies with relevance to the youth and ensure that youth issues have been addressed and youth involved in their implementation.
- Ministries of environment to strengthen its relationship with youth-led organizations and create a youth advisory committee as stipulated in Agenda 21 to provide youth perspectives on national, local and regional strategies.
- Encourage strong participation of youth in schools and universities' youth movements and give them the proper space and speech freedom to express their environmental concerns and present their innovative ideas.
- Governments should establish National Councils for Sustainable Development at the highest political levels and should include in its membership youth representatives with equal voting and decision-making rights. Such councils should be able to review Poverty Reduction and sustainable development Strategies and include youth perspectives and promote their involvement in their implementation.
- Encourage young women's civic participation through holding conferences for young women to address issues of concern relating to the impact of environmental degradation on their health, their right for access to safe water and sanitation and their right to participate in decision-making concerning other sustainable development issues.
- Ensure young people have the opportunity to contribute to their own curriculum through the creation of student school councils.

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<sup>5</sup> UNDP 2005 MDG Progress Report for the Arab states  
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- Encourage the participation of youth in regional and international conferences on environment and sustainable development as well as in international networks.
- Governments should encourage and facilitate the involvement of youth in Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEA) processes.
- Governments should work with UNDP country offices to develop youth-based and sustainable development-based National Human Development Reports (NHDR) addressing youth issues. Youth should be involved in the design and inscription of these reports and the implementation of their recommendations.
- Encourage youth and facilitate their participation in the youth advisory boards established by UN organizations. Some of the UN organizations have youth advisory boards, or other means for youth engagement such as: United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP), United Nations Programme for Human Settlements (UN HABITAT), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations Development Program (UNDP), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), UN Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention (UNDCP), UN Space Program (UNISPACE), as well as through agencies for children, like the United Nations Fund for Children (UNICEF) and the Office of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict.

## **Voluntarism**

Policymakers at the national, local and regional levels can enhance youth-based environmental voluntarism. National governments are requested to develop the capacity of youth to turn good citizenship and willingness to contribute to the well-being of the society into action. The financial and environmental return on investment in capacity-building can be enormous. Mobilizing youth groups to clean up urban areas, for example, requires some coordination efforts from the local authorities and provision of some snacks during the campaign. However, this little investment would result in cleaning up these areas which would have needed weeks and salaries paid to workers who are better needed for maintenance rather than mass cleaning. Governmental policies should be extended to include incentive-based environmental policies encouraging youth-based activities. These policies should facilitate public-private-civil society partnerships on recycling and reuse activities, for example. Youth-based voluntary activities not only get the work of environmental protection and restoration done, they extend governance over this important area to a much wider sphere. The following are some recommended policy actions:

- Governments should invest in enhancing the role and develop the capacity of the youth in environmental voluntarism.
- Governments should encourage and facilitate public-private partnerships involving the youth in changing their lifestyles by promoting sustainable development and consumption practices such as recycling and reuse.
- Local governments and community-based organizations should integrate voluntary activities in their development strategies and projects involving young men and women.
- Governments consistent with their rural development schemes and with the assistance of international organizations, as appropriate, are encouraged to work

with volunteer youth organizations on projects which enhance and maintain the rural and urban environments. Cooperation between urban and rural youth in food production and distribution.

- Research and educational institutions should promote internship programmes and conduct research and development activities promoting the role of young men and women in community and voluntary work to tackle environmental issues.

## **Good Examples and Practices**

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### **Yemen-UNFPA: The National Strategy for Integrating Youth into Development**

The Ministry of Youth and Sports cooperated with UNFPA in developing and implementing a National Strategy for integrating youth into development. Yemen builds on the belief in the role that should be given to youth in the process of development through their full involvement and participation in comprehensive and sustainable development. The demographic, social and economic future of Yemen due to the fact that youth represent one third of the Yemeni society, and that they will be responsible during the next two decades in determining the demographic characteristics of Yemen. Therefore investing in youth through their full integration in development represents the best investment that will yield a better future and quality of life. Some recommended policies in relation to environment include:

- 1- Build capacity of government and local leaders regarding their role in educating adolescents and young people on reproductive and sexual health as the safeguard and preservation of the environment.
- 2- Promote deeper awareness among young people of both sexes from an early stage on sustainable development and healthy life styles in support of development particularly regarding protection of health, public safety, the environment, and provide support to activities aiming the promotion of these principles and their implementation..
- 3- Educate young people regarding their responsibility in protecting the environment, and encourage them to participate actively in combating all forms of pollution, and to plant trees and the rational use of water and natural resources including encouraging others to protect and preserve nature.
- 4- Intensify public sanitation and clean environment campaigns in public educational institutions, youth clubs and centers, and encourage young people to join them and participate in the protection and preservation of nature.

### **Morocco - Rural Energy Houses Create Sustainable Local Business and Rural Energy Services**

Many rural communities in Morocco lack access to the national grid system, which provides essential energy services for cooking, heating and education. Unemployment is another problem in rural Morocco, which is one of the reasons for the levels of poverty in these areas. The Energy Houses project, initiated in 1997, was designed to provide energy services in rural areas that lack grid-based power. Each 'energy house' is a micro-enterprise established to provide rural populations - specifically the rural poor - with adapted local energy services, information, awareness and technical assistance. Each 'energy house' receives grant contributions from UNDP from a total contribution of US\$ 200,000 out of the total programme budget of US\$ 1.5 million. Supported by national ministries and agencies,

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local communities, renewable energy companies, and national banks, the programme provides young entrepreneurs with technical training and financial backing to develop the energy houses that market renewable energy products, such as photovoltaic systems, solar water heaters and improved stoves, install and maintain the equipment, charge batteries and distribute gas. The programme also builds awareness about the relationship between renewable energy and natural resource protection through demonstration activities promoting an integrated approach to sustainable development. The initial phase of the programme led to the creation of 150 energy houses, which were fully operational by 2004. The programme has helped to create rural business and sustainable employment opportunities, as well as providing essential energy services to poor rural communities.

### **Jordan – National Environmental Education, Awareness and Communication Strategy**

Within the Arab States region, Jordan may claim to have one of the most advanced environmental education systems to date. The Jordanian Government published a comprehensive "National Strategy for Environmental Education, Awareness and Communication" that was prepared as part of the work on preparing an Agenda 21 (1997-2000). The Strategy includes a section and annexes on "The Environmental School" which depicts in detail a strategy of interdisciplinary teaching and learning. Led by the Government and supported by NGOs, the concept of sustainable development has been integrated into school and universities curricula - a revision of all school and college text books was conducted and a number of education specialists designed new curricula integrating sustainable development concepts into mathematics, earth sciences, geography, civics, languages and vocational studies.

### **Egypt - Make use of waste: Young people launch the 'Culture, Clean and Development Campaign' to encourage recycling of waste**

Late December, 2006, a group of youth representing different NGOs such as Rotaract, Leo, and Resala, launched a mega-campaign under the title "Culture, Clean and Development Campaign" to spread awareness of cleaning and recycling within the community. The campaign took part at Alexandria, Assiut, American University of Cairo, Gezira Sporting Club, Heliopolis and New Maadi. The idea of the campaign was to make use of waste, rather than dumping it. The campaign was aimed at fostering the behavior of recycling among people and promoting environmental activities and anti-pollution acts, in cooperation with orphans, disabled children as well as homeless children. The main aim is to learn how to reuse waste and in the process help needy people.

### **Lebanon - Making the Difference**

When a fire broke out around a small village called Ramlieh in central Lebanon, destroying most of the surrounding forest, few would have imagined that the devastation it caused would plant the seeds of development and conservation. Instead of accepting it as fate, young Lebanese decided to do something about it. It started with a 5-member action group to plant trees to restore the destroyed forest. One of the group members borrowed some land from a relative which they transformed it into a nursery and grew 10,000 saplings. Soon their project spread from a village scheme to become a full-scale national youth action group. The Association for Forest Development and Conservation (AFDC) was born and these young people began work on projects extending far beyond Ramlieh. Since the fire, a decade ago, they have planted 250,000 trees throughout Lebanon, and the original nursery

has been extended to include a centre for eco-tourism and environmental meetings. AFDC collaborated with the Al Shouf Cedar Reserve to conserve cedars - the scented trees that are the country's emblem which once covered Mount Lebanon and beyond, but are now scarce. Ten years ago the reserve had a few ancient trees - and the 50,000 goats grazing the area ate new saplings, giving them almost no chance to grow. The group of young people worked with the herders to persuade them to keep their goats away. In exchange, AFDC buys local jam, honey and other organic food, sells it, and gives the income to the villagers. The reserve now has at least 250 plant species, and about 100 species of migratory birds visiting the area. Every year more than 20,000 people visit the reserve to see what can be achieved by the belief and determination of a few young people.

### **Voice of Arab Youth (VOAY) - Middle East and North Africa**

Established by the Academy for Educational Development (AED), Voice of Arab Youth (VOAY) aims to give young Arabs the chance to document their experiences working on community development projects in the Middle East and North Africa. Selected participants receive training and funding to support projects to be carried out in their home countries. VOAY is designed to enable 18-25 year-old Arab leaders to implement community growth initiatives with self-designed projects in the fields of education, income generation, and/or job creation. VOAY draws on young Arabs' optimism, creativity, and energy - qualities that make them a strong mobilizing force in community development. The hope is that, in the process of serving their neighbors, participants will develop greater ties to their country of origin (and greater commitment to that country's growth) while improving their own career opportunities.

Specifically, VOAY selects entrepreneurial youth from Arab countries based on the project proposals they have designed to serve the pressing needs of their communities. VOAY trains these leaders to master skills to mobilize their communities in an effort to effectively implement their projects - for example, the Jubilee School in Jordan served as a training site for a 6-week programme. Fifty youth (ages 18-25) from all over the Arab world learnt how to create projects in the fields of micro-enterprise and small business, fundraising, managing local organizations, protecting the environment, mapping community resources, and expanding health services. Youth-led activities are implemented in collaboration with family, community leaders, local government authorities, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector.

VOAY provides seed money to assist in the start-up of projects while offering ongoing training and technical support. In addition, in an effort to encourage participants to document their experiences, organizers have designed a media competition to honor the best stories and photos from participants. The winner of the competition will be rewarded with additional funds for his or her project. Organizers also hope to have documentary filmmakers film the project for later broadcast on television stations around the world.

### **4th Global Environmental Youth Convention kicks, Dubai**

The fourth Global Environmental Youth Convention (GEYC 2006) was held at the Etisalat Academy in Dubai in late 2006. The convention was a global gathering of more than 600 students, and their teachers and mentors from over 40 countries of the world. The convention was attended mainly by students in the age group of 15-18 years who deliberate on global environmental issues with multi-faceted perspectives and methods. The GEYC Dubai 2006 was organized by Dubai Municipality in co-operation with the International Institute for Industrial Environmental Economics (IIIEE) at Lund University, Sweden and the

Euro-Arab Cooperation Centre with the theme, Peace and Sustainable Development. Some 120 projects done by the youth were showcased at the convention. The programmes in the convention included project workshops, learning and interactive workshops for students and teachers, study visits, field works and special stage events, in addition to distribution of awards to best conducted projects, most active teams in Young Masters Programme, best presented project and ultimate online learner. The convention was the best opportunity to learn about the cultural and social differences between people of various nationalities, and provided the right platform to transcend the borders between participants.

### **Jordan – Integrating Sustainable Development and Environmental Protection in the Objectives and Activities of Women NGOs.**

The Arab Women Organization of Jordan (AWO) with 5 branches and 250 active members has integrated sustainable development and environmental protection as part of its mission and vision for the young women of Jordan. Among the objectives of AWO are: 1) Increasing youth participation in environmental protection activities; 2) Raising young women's awareness on gender related issues, and on their economic and political rights; 3) Providing training courses and supportive services for youth to integrate them in the development process; and 4) Improving the living situation of young women in underprivileged urban and rural areas, and in refugee camps through income generating projects. Twenty five percent of AWO are young women where they represent 28% and 14% of the board members for the age groups under 35 and 28, respectively. AWO partners with the Higher Council of Youth, other local environmental NGOs, Committee for Women in the General Union of Voluntary Societies (GUVS), and the Federation of Jordanian Women Organizations. AWO has also established strategic partnerships with regional and international organizations such as the Arab Network for NGOs and IUCN. Some of AWO's activities in the environment area include Waste management, appropriate technology, and solar energy for rural areas. However, the organization implements these environmental activities in tandem with its work on promoting equal opportunities for young women, leadership development, good governance, and good citizenship and election campaigns.

### **Arab Office for Youth and Environment (AOYE)**

Since its inception in 1978, the Arab Office for Youth and Environment (AOYE) has focused on mobilizing the community to adopt new environmental patterns of life; increasing environmental awareness among students and youth in different areas; preparing and implementing programs and projects that aim at sustainable development; and developing partnerships with different organizations that are concerned with the environment and sustainable development, locally, nationally, regionally and internationally. AOYE also hosts the Arab Network for Environment and Development (RAED) which is a network of NGOs working on environment and sustainable development issues in the region. RAED is accredited to be the voice of the League of the Arab States on environmental issues from the perspective of the NGOs.

### **UNEP-TUNZA**

The UNEP TUNZA Advisory Council aims to increase youth participation in UNEP through developing environmental policy, advising UNEP on ways to involve youth in UNEP's areas of concentration, and advising UNEP on the development of regional initiatives and the UNEP Children and Youth Program. International youth participation is just one way for young people to contribute to sustainable development policy and programme formulation, it also

provides an essential coordination mechanism so that programs like UNEP's Advisory Council can develop and operate programs for youth engagement on the regional level. In January 2005, UNESCO organized a Youth Forum parallel to the 'International Meeting to Review the Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing.

### **Other Global Good Examples**

**Bangladesh** - In Bangladesh UNDP is working on several projects designed to provide environmental education and raise awareness of environmental issues, under a very successful programme, the 1998-2006 Sustainable Environment Management Programme (SEMP), in cooperation with the Ministry of Environment and Forests. For example, in terms of education, UNDP is implementing a US\$0.89 million project entitled, 'Environmental Education at the Non-Formal Level', which has contributed to the capacity development of teachers and other workers in the non-formal education sector in developing the curriculum for non formal education incorporating environmental issues and concerns. The results obtained so far shown sustainability, with a pool of trained teachers and workers in the informal education sector.

### **Youth for a Sustainable Future:**

Youth for a Sustainable Future (YSF) is an innovative event designed by young people for young people, envisioning to empower youths living in the South Pacific to take positive actions to achieve the Millennium Development Goals set out by the United Nations.

**Cape Verde** - To fight growing concerns of land desertification, the Environmental Youth Project is a response from UNDP, together with the UN Convention to Combat Desertification and UN Volunteers. The project also addresses concerns of both growing youth unemployment and the environmental degradation evident in urban and rural areas. The project encourages the participation of young people in local environmental awareness projects, and employs them in activities to promote sustainable land use and recovery.

**Gabon** - A rural exodus, an influx of immigrants and 50% of the population aged under 18 has put increased pressures on the environmental health of the capital Libreville. Commercial, industrial and household activities unleash 800 tonnes of refuse each day, further worsening the degradation of the urban environment. With over half the total population of Gabon residing in the city, it is critical to address this environmental challenge. In agreement with the Governor of Libreville, UNDP financially assisted a 2-year pilot sanitation project in the neglected districts of Akébé Plaine, Belle-vue II, Atong Abé and Plein Ciel. The project focuses on improving the environment and reducing poverty among young people by creating long-term information, communication and education programme, an intensive youth employment scheme, and building the community's capacity to manage waste. Technical and logistical assistance is being provided through the Regional Centre for Potable Water and Sanitation, a resource centre designed specifically for capacity building in water and sanitation projects in Africa, and the Gabon Association for Household Recycling.

**Gambia** - In industrialized nations as in transition economies, young people must be embraced and given key roles in growing, sustaining or revitalizing an economy. The high rate of youth unemployment in the Gambia provided the nation a unique opportunity to harness the energy and enthusiasm of its young people to assist in advancing environmental initiatives. The National Environmental Youth Corps is a 5-year project which began in February 2002 and addresses environmental concerns and promotes general public awareness of environmental issues. It is anticipated that 2,000 young people will be trained and equipped in environmental management techniques under the project. Other beneficiaries include selected villages that will profit from the availability of locally-produced



goods and increased income-generation and expenditure. During the course of implementation, the project's main goal is to transfer knowledge and ownership. By involving local communities, NGOs and the Government, benefits become intertwined and reinforcing; the greater the number of participants, the greater the success of the project. The project has so far recorded many benefits. To date, over 21 km of firebreaks have been established to reduce damage from bush fires; over 300 cashew seedlings, 60 banana plants and 50 Gmelina seedlings have been transported; 2 hectares of vegetable gardens have been established and over 4 hectares have been prepared for orchard development; 8 wells have been rehabilitated for horticultural activities; and 60 beehives have been distributed. By preserving their cultural way of life, the venture provides employment and income for the local populace and has managed to keep family members together who would otherwise have had to migrate in search for better economic opportunities.

**Lesotho** - With 80% of Lesotho's population living in rural areas, people's livelihoods are dependent to a large degree upon the quality and the sustainability of the country's natural resources. Lesotho's economic boom leading up to 1998 was followed by unsustainable land management practices and rapid environmental degradation. Recognizing this threat, Lesotho's National Environment Secretariat adopted a youth-oriented approach to combating degradation, while simultaneously promoting income-generating activities. The Government established the National Environment Youth Corps Project (NEYC) to provide employment opportunities for Lesotho's young people. The NEYC programme raised awareness about land degradation, and taught young people how to rehabilitate degraded lands through soil conservation methods and tree planting. The programme also addressed poverty alleviation by engaging young people in income-generating activities, such as produce and sale of tree seedlings, recycling, carpentry, stone cutting, and sculpture. As a result of this training, participants in the NEYC, renamed "Environmental Management for Poverty Reduction" in 1999 to better reflect the goals of the organization, successfully established tree nurseries at the community level, and seedlings were produced for sale to farmers in the surrounding and urban areas. In addition, the young people supported the community by constructing environmentally-sound drainage systems, and maintained secondary and tertiary public and individual roads.

**Zambia** - To promote the adoption of sustainable land management practices in Zambia, and improve rural livelihoods, a project to provide training, production, research and development of sustainable agricultural practices at the Kasama Youth Training Centre was established. The project worked to adapt Benin's "Songhai Centre Model" to the Zambian context. The model emphasizes use of local resources, hybridization of traditional and modern agricultural practices, encourages individual and communal initiatives. The adaptation of the Songhai experience from Benin to Zambia is an excellent example of South-South cooperation.

**Bhutan** - Bhutan has one of the highest per capita domestic fuel wood consumption in the world, particularly in rural areas. The people of the Trashigang district are among the most devout Buddhists in Bhutan, with religious institutions the largest consumers of fuel wood after rural households, due to the religious festivals and rites that provide food and beverages for monks, devotees and lay people. Trashigang is however one of the districts with the most severe fuel wood shortages, which is threatening the sustainability of the forests and the religious events. Fuel wood collection distances have also increased over the years, making this task one of the most arduous activities for rural women. The project installed shielded metal cooking stoves with hot water jackets, two each in ten religious institutions. The Bhutan Youth Development Agency (BYDA) was the main project proponent and actor, with the Trashigang District administration providing logistical support. As a result of the project, fuel wood consumption dropped to at least a half, saving roughly 220-280 tonnes of fuel wood a year. The improved stoves also contributed to increased

cleanliness of community kitchens, reducing cooking time and lowering smoke-related health risks to kitchen users. By selecting religious institutions, the stoves were given great exposure and generated a widespread public response. The Trashigang District has consequently embarked on a project to install similar stoves in some 14 additional religious institutions. BYDA's involvement of young people in implementing the activities helped ensure the project's success and created a precedent for youth development-environmental conservation linkages.

**Moldavia** - Youth poverty and exclusion in Moldova is widespread and increasing, leading to risky behaviors, such as violence and crime, and alcoholism and drug abuse. Moldova is therefore working to improve the living conditions, the quality of its urban environment and investment in human capital. Youth and family centers play a significant part in this process by providing safe places for constructive free-time activities, such as sports, and provide quality information, internet access and computer skills. The urban environmental improvement project, established the first Family Centre in the Sculeni district of Chisinau, comprising a modern sports centre with golf and basketball fields targeting school children and students, as well as families. The Family Centre project is one of over ten partnerships created and supported by UNDP in the framework of the "Mesmerizing Moldova" project, which is working to strengthen the country's capacity to incorporate sustainable development principles of human settlements into the national policy and strategies towards reducing poverty in urban areas. Such partnerships aim at contributing to sustainable urban development by applying an integrated approach towards issues such as environmental rehabilitation of urban areas, job creation and improved access to services and a healthy life. The project has been successful due to its collaborative nature. The support of the business community and Chisinau City, which set apart an area of land, was essential for the success of the project. Due to the relative ease of replication of this project, similar centers were opened in other major cities in Moldavia.

**Swaziland** - The National Environmental Education Programme (NEEP), managed by the Swaziland National Trust Commission (SNTC) – a government unit under the Ministry of Tourism, Environment and Communication – supports public awareness activities on environmental issues in Swaziland, in order to promote the understanding, acceptance, application and evaluation of environmental conservation principles and practices by the people of Swaziland, for a better quality of life. Programme activities include the periodic publication of pamphlets and brochures for public circulation, and a twice-weekly radio broadcast on environmental issues and concerns, which is broadcast given in the local language, Siswati, to ensure broad coverage. NEEP is also a key player in ensuring that UN Environment Days are covered by the media each year to further raise public awareness. The initiative has been very successful in broadening the awareness and understanding of the general public – and young people particular – on environmental issues. This is evident from the growing number of school environmental clubs in the country and bodes well for sustainable development in Swaziland.

**Senegal** - Near Dakar, in a sprawling peri-urban hinterland called Yeumbeul, with a population of 120,000, stagnant pools of discarded household wastewater provide breeding-grounds for mosquitoes. As a result, malaria sufferers, mainly children, account for over 80% of all medical consultations. UNDP's LIFE programme has been working in one neighborhood, Houdalaye, which today is the cleanest in all Yeumbeul. The lanes are dry, there are fewer mosquitoes and incidents of malaria are declining. 40% of the families in Houdalaye now have drainage tanks underneath their homes for the disposal of wastewater. Those without tanks who continue to throw water out of their houses have learnt to sweep it away with a broom to keep the ground dry. 300 unemployed young people were trained as informal public health workers, 102 of them women. As a result of all these activities,

people's behavior has changed. Today, people in Houdalaye are constantly receiving visitors from other places who come to learn from their experience.

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