

**Speaking notes on Youth and Sustainable  
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**I. Brief on what SD encompasses – link to climate change**

- In 1987, the United Nations released the Brundtland Report, which defines sustainable development as *'development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'*.
- The United Nations 2005 World Summit Outcome Document refers to the "interdependent and mutually reinforcing pillars" of sustainable development as economic development, social development, and environmental protection.
- The issue of sustainable development has come to the fore in recent times due to the growing threat of climate change. The escalation of abnormal calamities such as tsunamis and floods and change in weather patterns is raising alarms. In addition, the revelation of unsettling statistics is on the rise. Some include:
  - rise in average global temperature is predicted to be between 1.4 – 5.8 degrees celsius by 2100
  - the more immediate threat of food shortage has led to projections that more than 25 million extra children will be malnourished by 2050 if heavy investment is not made in adaptive measures
  - wheat and rice yields will drop by 30 and 15 per cent respectively between now and 2050; with prices for wheat likely to rise by 194 percent and for rice by 121 percent – and Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia are likely to be hardest-hit

- rising sea levels that will make coastal areas vulnerable to flooding resulting in displaced populations – unfortunately areas most vulnerable to such a threat are countries that are not adequately equipped to deal with such disasters, such as India, Bangladesh and Vietnam.

## **II. What is the role of the youth?**

- According to UN World Youth Report 2007, 18% of the world's population consists of youth (aged between 15 and 24 years)
- According to the World's Youth 2006 Data Sheet, nearly 70% of youth live in less developed countries and this is projected to continue to rise over the next 30 years
- A growing body of scientists, environmental activists and politicians are saying that whatever changes we make to our lifestyles over the next 30 years will be the key to climate change mitigation and adaptation. Since young people are seen as largely mobile and willing to adapt to new situations, there is an increased role for youth in this aspect of bringing about sustainable change.
- Furthermore, since young adults are seen to comprise the largest group of consumers they can lead the movement towards sustainable consumption patterns (as a result of a change in their behaviours and lifestyle choices), which can encourage sustainable production and thus more green businesses.

## **III. Examples of youth initiatives around the world**

- In 2001, around 52,000 youths from 16 European countries bet with the then EU Environment Commissioner Margot Wallstrom at the Climate Summit in The Hague that they would beat the EU target of reducing its CO2 emissions by 8% in eight years – the 'Betties' (as they called themselves) said they would do it in eight months. They won the bet eight months later by reducing their emissions both at their homes and schools. If the Betties had lost they would have had to bike Mrs. Wallstrom in a rickshaw for a week to all her meetings in Brussels. But since they won, Mrs. Wallstrom had to ride her bike

to work for a month. 300 participating schools saved over 4 million kg of CO<sub>2</sub>. A volunteer said, "...we proved that CO<sub>2</sub> emission reducing can be done easily, fast and cheap. All it takes is your own will and creativity." They managed to achieve this target through simple methods: turning down the heating, installing energy-saving light bulbs, repairing leaking water taps, insulating rooms, setting up paper recycling systems etc.

- Earth Charter Youth Initiative is a network of youth organizations and individuals around the world who share a common interest in the principles and values of sustainable development as expressed in the Earth Charter. Recently Earth Charter International granted funding for six projects working towards sustainable development in different countries such as Congo, Peru and Belarus. For example, a project in Togo aims to work towards building youth leadership and participation in the country's decision-making process with respect to ecological, educational, political, health and peace and conflict issues.

These two examples highlight the different approaches between youth in developed countries and developing countries i.e. developing countries have yet to achieve social, economic and political stability and these have to be addressed while taking the environment into consideration – their youth have a bigger challenge ahead of them. Whereas in the developed countries, the youth can afford to worry less about such stability issues and focus on more specific environmental objectives such as reducing carbon emissions.

#### **IV. Issues in developing countries**

1. One of the major contributions to environmental degradation in developing countries is increased economic activity in order to achieve growth. In addition, their inability to employ costly eco-friendly technologies to achieve such growth compounds their environmental problems.
2. Rapid industrialisation, unplanned urbanisation and large shifts in consumption patterns driven by the desire for comfortable lifestyles afforded by rising incomes has led to the gradual depletion of precious natural resources and the generation of environmentally hazardous materials.

3. *Lack of awareness* - Stems from the fact that the education systems do not include environmental education in the curriculum so as to make children and young adults more aware of the need to change their behaviours.
4. *Inequality in education* - a small number of people receive quality education while the majority do not have access to it due to poverty – this is especially the case in India.

## **V. What the youth can do in India?**

1. Cleaning and recycling drives in neighbourhoods – residents will be more active once they see young people working to clean their areas.
2. Encouraging carpooling to college/work, encouraging public transport, walking or cycling.
3. Young students can encourage clean and green initiatives in their respective colleges to pass on the message. For example, in Bangalore colleges are charging a high price for car parking in the college campuses to discourage the use of cars by students, seeing the traffic problem in the city.
4. Organise events in malls or other public areas with fun things such as finding out what an individual's carbon footprint is, informative skits etc. Can use social networking sites to promote such events and the sustainability message.
5. Attend forums and events focussed on environment to learn more about the current environmental state and ways to mitigate climate change effects. These forums can also be used as a platform to voice young people's opinions and concerns on the current state of affairs and suggestions for improvement.
6. Organise competitions for private and govt. schools for kids between 7 and 15 years, so as to inform them in a more engaging way rather than through textbooks. These children are also likely to pass on what they've learnt at school to their families and friends in their neighbourhood.

***"If a man carefully examines his thoughts, he will be surprised to find out how much he lives in the future. His well being is always ahead", Ralf Waldo Emerson***