

# Major Group for Children and Youth



## Contribution to the Outcome Document of Rio+20

This is the contribution of the Major Group for Children and Youth, incorporating the perspectives of young people from all regions. It specifies our goals and priorities for concrete action and change.

The world faces significant challenges that can only be tackled by global cooperation. Rio+20 offers a unique opportunity to make a new programmes for genuinely sustainable development globally, nationally and locally. Our hope for Rio+20 is that there is significant participation by heads of state in the negotiations to ensure commitments are taken more seriously, and that governments are held accountable for agreements that are not implemented. Finally, we call for the adoption of a UN General Assembly resolution to strengthen the agreements reached at Rio +20.

## 1. OBJECTIVES

### A. RENEWED POLITICAL COMMITMENT

We call for:

- A holistic commitment to mainstreaming and implementing Agenda 21 and the Rio declaration, while taking it further by including new and emerging issues. All relevant international organisations and national legislatures, with the involvement of civil society, should adopt formal mechanisms to ensure that economic and sustainable development discussions are not held in isolation. These mechanisms should have the authority to act as a check-and-balance on the formulation and implementation of policy.
- Implementation of all agreed upon commitments from the previous CSD cycles by member states, including incorporating them into their National Sustainable Development Strategies. This can be supported by incorporation into the programmes of international financial economic institutions, namely the IMF and the World Bank Group, as well as the WTO. International institutions can take the lead in ensuring that policy recommendations are followed through.
- Securing of resources for development and implementation of Action Plans. There is a need for thorough and transparent evaluation of budgets, governance of the allocation of funds, donor coordination, collaboration between existing initiatives and use of funds. We call for the establishment of a dedicated instrument for financing and implementing Sustainable Development outside of the World Bank Group, which implements decisions in general, and specific decisions on sustainable development as decided by various forums ranging from the UN-CSD, the UNFCCC, the CBD, the CCD, UNEP, etc., or in terms of transitioning to the Green Economy (in the context of Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication), or within specific sectors (e.g. energy, agriculture). This instrument should be governed with a fair geographic representation, which reflects both funding partners and recipients, next to the full inclusion of non-state actors in its governance.

- Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with sufficient ambition to meet environmental and social challenges. As the UN General Assembly office, under the guidance of the UN Secretary General, is currently considering the post-Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) framework, the process leading towards the adoption of the SDGs must be streamlined with this follow-up of the MDGs. In his recent report, the UN Secretary General indeed named Rio+20 as an important international event that could contribute to the post-2015 framework. This new SDGs framework should consider in particular the links between poverty, gender inequality, climate change, biological diversity, human rights, ending violence and inequity. Finally, a strong implementation framework and related institutional elements should be developed in order to guarantee the review of the implementation and the compliance of each state.

## **B. PROGRESS AND IMPLEMENTATION GAPS**

We call for:

- Dynamic policies that take into account the diverse economic, environmental and social contexts in which they operate in different member states. This must be captured in the introduction, implementation, monitoring and evaluation stages of the policy design. Adverse impacts of "one-size-fits-all" policies such as structural adjustment must also be addressed.
- The adoption of a 10 Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production by 2013 and ensuring its integration into policies and law by 2015.
- Member states should establish evaluation and monitoring mechanisms that will obtain specific feedback and data to determine the effectiveness of policy implementation pertaining to the agreements made at the Sustainable Development Summits, addressing and correcting implementation gaps and providing accountability for both member states and civil society. This should include an integrated regional reporting system between economic, social, environmental and other aspects of Sustainable Development that has clear indicators, and milestones to monitor implementation and to build accountability and ownership of the solutions.
- Addressing the impact of armed conflict on local communities and the environment, with special consideration for related conditions that pose severe threats to children and youth, such as: disruption of basic services, endemic disease, intolerance, terrorism, and environmental hazards and degradation (e.g., landmines and medical waste). Additionally, strengthen international, national, and local partnerships to engage local stakeholders in support of environmental assessments and integrated financial mechanisms; and post-conflict reconstruction, capacity building, victim assistance, and risk education.

## **C. NEW AND EMERGING CHALLENGES**

Policies designed to tackle short-term economic crises must not reinforce and prolong unsustainable practices of consumption and production. The current economic crisis can be an opportunity to reflect on systemic ecological, economic and social problems, to pre-empt new and emerging challenges and develop long-term strategies to prevent future climate, energy, food and water crises.

It is important that economic, social and human rights institutions are strengthened and that the environment perspective is integrated into their work. In addition, at the UN level, interagency and inter program networks should be established in order to facilitate communication and coordination among different UN actors in order to have an integrated approach and effective international governance on Sustainable Development. Though the goals of economic and social development and environmental sustainability can be in conflict at times, there is a need for them to co-exist to secure a sustainable future. This should lead to:

- Redefined enforcement of sustainable development agreements
- The coordination of multilateral economic, human rights and environmental agreements
- Access to justice
- Donor coordination for efficient and appropriate use of funds
- More effective monitoring and evaluation of implementation gaps, assessment of progress and evaluation of emerging challenges.

Radical changes in the geopolitical world amplify the challenge of providing water, energy and food to a growing population, particularly in developing countries, where children and youth are the most affected by precarious living conditions. Given that the previous Earth Summit successfully elevated the status of sustainable development goals, global leaders must incorporate the water, food and energy security nexus into Rio+20 discussions, so that its importance as a sustainability concept is also validated. This is essential to promote and deliver comprehensive frameworks at a local and regional level that account for the intricacies of an interconnected world.

## 2. GREEN ECONOMY IN THE CONTEXT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND POVERTY ERADICATION

We consider a Green Economy to be egalitarian, low-resource economic and social systems that cultivate societal and cultural wellbeing and thriving and resilient natural ecosystems. A Green Economy fully integrates key principles of the Rio Declaration: intergenerational and international equity, and pays special attention to the inclusion of youth and children as the building blocks of a sustainable future. The transition to the Green Economy will require an improved notion of wellbeing, measured with indicators beyond just GDP, that fully take into account the limits of our common planetary and social boundaries.

We call for:

- **Youth unemployment to be reduced through the creation of green jobs with a living wage and the stronger consideration of the impact of employment policy on youth.** Governments should promote young people's role in the workforce by providing them with the appropriate skills and knowledge to improve their employability. Possible initiatives could include locally appropriate job-training in the context of sustainable development, start-up capital for young entrepreneurs and apprenticeship programmes.
- **Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) must equip the next generation of youth with skills, training and capacity to help create the Green Economy.** ESD should be structurally-integrated into the national sub-national curricula and made accessible to all, taking into account local communities' needs. Priority should be given specifically to drastic improvements in teacher training for ESD and recognition and support for alternative forms of education, non-formal learning, online resources and peer education.
- **The creation of a "Global Technology Sharing Facility",** which would enhance sharing, enable prior assessments and provide monitoring-of technology on the global scale. Alternatives to market-based intellectual property rights have to be developed and new digital information infrastructures could foster the rapid circulation of knowledge and technologies worldwide, based on the notions of fair access and mutual benefit sharing. We must also protect and nurture traditional, local and Indigenous knowledge and recognise their value as alternative technologies. Public and private stakeholders must collaborate internationally and strive to incorporate cradle to cradle design into new and existing technological and product lifecycles.

- **An integrated approach to the conservation of species and ecosystems**, particularly threatened species and ecosystems. Compliance with international conventions, and agreed international standards for the recording of natural resources and periodic assessment by independent authorities, in collaboration with all stakeholders. These efforts are crucial to ensuring that consumption of natural resources is below regeneration rates. Natural resource impact labelling should be mandatory for every industrial product.
- **Strong legislative and executive actions by governments to promote the sustainable development of our Blue Economy**, avoid depletion of finite water resources and achieve long term food security for fisheries-dependent communities. Actions should include the establishment of a global network of marine protected areas and “no-take zones”, including a moratorium on mineral exploration in the Arctic and proper mechanisms for conflict resolution over aquatic resources, with special emphasis on water. Conflict over future water availability and allocation decisions, under likely global pressures like climate change, must be recognised and addresses as a serious global threat to long-term peace and security.
- **A ‘low-carbon’ future that promotes renewable energy and energy efficiency**. Specific, measurable, attainable, results-oriented and time bound (SMART) targets should be devised for the development, accessibility and efficient use of clean energy, and demand reduction and energy conservation. This should involve unprecedented funding and technical support for the development of low carbon, renewable infrastructure.
- **An urgent start to the transition towards a green, fair and people-centered agriculture** that promotes a sustainable food system producing sufficient, healthy and balanced food for all and maintaining and/or enhancing ecosystems, biodiversity and natural resources. Investments in rural areas should be increased to assure decent incomes and living conditions while creating job opportunities for rural communities, especially including youth. Governments must protect the rights of those working and subsisting off the land and aim towards collective, decentralised ownership for sustainable, resilient and productive ecosystem management. Traditional farming and indigenous knowledge, past and present, offer a wealth of potential solutions and should be recognised as such. It is our hope that an outcome of Rio +20 might be a revitalisation of vital knowledge sharing mechanisms in agriculture.
- **Strengthening the capacity of national healthcare systems with an emphasis on universal and comprehensive Primary Health Care**. This should include universal access to family planning services for women and girls, because this already proves to be an in-demand, cost effective method of increasing communities’ resilience to climate change impacts, whilst meeting the health and development needs of people around the world. Women and girls should receive education and easy access to comprehensive health services and supplies.
- **The integration of sustainability into all tourism-policies and management practices** through the creation of a ‘Green Economy Roadmap’ aiming at the active participation of local populations in developing sustainable tourism. Development institutions should work collaboratively with the tourism industry to foster increased potential for local hiring and sourcing and significant opportunities in tourism oriented toward local culture and the natural environment.
- **The promotion of holistic and long-term sustainable city planning** based on master planning that takes in account population growth, natural resource utilisation, ecosystem preservation, public space accessibility, building design, efficient transport and waste management. Sustainable architecture should strive to improve living conditions, reduce vulnerability and diminish exposure to hazardous-materials. This could be made possible through financial incentives and mandatory technical standards for new developments.
- **The removal of harmful subsidies that result in unsustainable practices and threaten development**. These include agriculture, fossil fuel and fishery subsidies. If such vast sums of money were being directed toward sustainable development, we would be great strides further

#### **A. BALANCED PARTICIPATION OF ALL STAKEHOLDERS**

- **Ombudspersons for Future Generations**

Rio+20 should secure collective commitment for the establishment, at the national level, of Ombudspersons for Future Generations. These independent institutions, working from the heart of government, should be mandated to provide an assessment of the long-term impacts of public policies and legislative proposals. They should also respond to citizen petition, investigating claims of environmental crimes and offences and engaging in either conciliation or litigation.

Furthermore, we call for the establishment of an independent Office of the UN High Commissioner for Future Generations. Similar to the national level Ombudspersons, the High Commissioner would seek and analyse system faults on the global level, i.e. situations where even the normal, regular flow of activities results in significant jeopardy of the interests of future generations. This office would have both an agenda-setting and advisory role with regard to the long-term environmental and social coherence and impacts of UN agencies, policies and programmes and other multilateral treaties. It would function in close cooperation with civil society. This office would also support the capacity of developing countries to establish effective mechanisms of intergenerational accountability and provide a forum for the exchange of best practices in relation to the establishment of national Ombudspersons for Future Generations.

- **Participation of stakeholders**

We call on governments to seize the opportunity offered by the Rio+20 process in order to re-engineer participation within Sustainable Development and to elevate this as a cross-cutting issue in the whole SD-governance.

- Government needs in Rio to either adopt one global or several regional conventions based on principle 10 of the Rio 1992 Declaration and including a compliance mechanism, on the model of the Aarhus Convention.
- At the international level, civil society participation should be evaluated and elevated at all relevant political forums, including financial institutions. Such participation should include the representation of a minimum of 2 non-voting representatives of civil society in the respective bureau.
- All states should urgently implement the Agenda 21 recommendation of establishing national sustainable development councils. Where such Councils already exist, they should be strengthened and provided with adequate resources, political leverage and support by exchanging best-practices. These councils should by default try to mirror all Agenda 21 Major Groups.

#### **B. ENSURING PROGRESS TOWARDS GLOBAL SUSTAINABILITY**

While key legal principles have already been recognised at Stockholm and Rio Conferences, compliance with these principles has been critically lacking, thus requiring the urgent establishment of new accountability mechanisms.

- **World Environmental Court**

We call for the establishment of a World Environmental Court to take decisions related to the non-respect of national obligations under international environmental law. This court will provide a forum for individuals and communities to hold states party to international environmental agreements legally accountable for their commitments. Procedures for

individuals and communities to file a complaint to the Court should be based on those of existing Human Rights courts such as the European Court of Human Rights.

- **Creating a new momentum for the implementation of the precautionary principle**

Rio+20 presents a unique opportunity to develop institutional arrangements necessary for the full and effective implementation of the precautionary principle. We call for the legal recognition of the fact that industrial production and commercialisation of new substances and technologies should not be authorised in the presence of a reasonable doubt regarding their potential to harm our environment or the natural capital left to our children. In the case of practices and activities creating short-term risks for ecosystems and communities, a proper insurance mechanism should obligate those taking the risks to be in the capacity to fully repair any damages intentionally or accidentally resulting from their actions.

### **C. ENSURING KNOWLEDGE-BASED DECISION MAKING**

- **Intergovernmental Panel on Sustainable Development (IPSD)**

Given the growing fragmentation of knowledge, we call for the establishment of an Intergovernmental Panel on Sustainable Development that functions as an umbrella organization which should design a sustainable development research agenda for the 21st century that reviews relevant scientific knowledge (including not only natural sciences but also social sciences such as economics). Scientific evidence should contribute to knowledge-based policy making and policy monitoring. The Panel should also be mandated to provide an assessment of ecological boundaries.

### **D. CREATING A SET OF GLOBAL INSTITUTIONS FOR SUSTAINABILITY**

#### **Delivering political coordination and momentum**

- **UN Council on Sustainable Development**

We call for the immediate establishment of a Council on Sustainable Development as a subsidiary to the UN General Assembly, with the authority to adopt legally binding decisions. This Council would seek integration of all composing elements of Sustainable Development, at a higher political level than is currently the case within the existing UN bodies dealing with the matter. It should also be mandated to coordinate the work on Sustainable Development of both the Bretton Woods and UN institutions in a coherent manner. Finally, this institution should enshrine Civil Society participation within its design, upgrading the existing CSD practices amongst others, including representatives of Major Groups within its governance (Bureau).

- **Stewardship for Global Commons**

We also call for the immediate establishment of a transparent and participatory trusteeship for the transitional governance of the global commons until they are adequately governed by legally binding rules, based on a sense of shared responsibility and the principles of subsidiarity and intergenerational equity. This process should lead by 2015 to the establishment of a permanent, legally-binding Global Commons Trust that cooperatively and responsibly develops, manages, maintains and equitably shares in the usage and benefits coming from resources that are held in common by the community at large. Whilst sympathetic to the vulnerable, there must be a local-global framework and participatory processes to address the issue of free riders.

## Ensuring implementation

- **Upgrade UNEP into a new UN Environmental Organisation with status as a specialised UN agency with the capacity to deliver**

We call for an upgrade of both mandate and status of the current UNEP in order to enable this organisation to supervise all environmental sustainability initiatives within the UN. This new, specialised agency will provide an accountability mechanism for policy makers and national ministries and should coordinate all UN programs, agencies and affiliates who are working on initiatives related to or having an impact on environmental sustainability. The international community must ensure that it possesses the adequate means to successfully implement its mission.

The long-term review process for the improvement of Sustainable Development Governance at the UN level should assess the pros and cons of other institutional frameworks, such as the creation of an all-encompassing World Organisation for Sustainable Development.