



The Future We Want

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YOUthBe *The Solution*: Responsible And Ethical Consumerism

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Summary

Rapid changes in technology, changes in media, falling prices, and planned obsolescence have resulted in a fast-growing surplus of electronic waste around the globe. An estimated 40 million tons of E-waste are produced each year. Electrical and electronic equipment - including mobile phones and computers - can contain hazardous substances (e.g. heavy metals such as mercury and lead, and endocrine disrupting substances such as brominated flame retardants). Dealing with E-waste, presents a serious environmental and health challenge for many countries, yet also offers a potentially significant opportunity to create green businesses and green jobs. Young adults, as well as being a large and growing consumer market for electronic and electrical goods, are early adopters and key influencers of new technology. They are well placed as ‘agents of change’ to shift the paradigm to responsible and ethical consumer behaviour through the UNESCO Clubs movement and in collaboration with like-minded youth groups.

“Green economies must include everyone. No society, no man or woman can be left behind. We must all protect the planet for the future we want”. Message from Ms Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO on the occasion of the World Environment Day Green Economy: does it include you? 5 June 2012.

As the 2011 Human Development Report argues, the urgent global challenges of sustainability and equity must be addressed together. If we try to choose between environmental and social concerns, we will address neither.

“Science-based revolutions such as the industrial revolution, the medical revolution, the green revolution, and the transportation revolution brought unprecedented economic progress and welfare to

many, but on the other hand: 1) too many people were left out, and 2) the economic benefits came at huge environmental costs, the scope and impact of which we have hardly begun to understand”^[1].

Ms Pilar Alvarez-Laso, UNESCO’s Assistant Director General for Social and Human Sciences speaking at the UNESCO international workshop titled “A science based approach to realise the future we want for all” that took place from 3 April to 5 April 2013 in Kuala Lumpur noted, “Science is unlikely to give definitive answers to many of the questions that societies will need to answer. In any new contract between science and society, social responsibility is important”. Indeed, it is essential. This requires getting back to the basics of sustainable development, namely needs and limitations.

Shifting the paradigm

All definitions of sustainable development require that we see the world as a system—a system that connects space; and a system that connects time. Sustainability challenges in society are complex and deeply related to people’s perceptions, sense of values, social systems and behaviour, which also interact with government policy and overall world perspectives. As noted in “The Earth Charter and the Green Economy”, a document prepared by ECI Secretariat ^[2] “Apart from a wide range of regulatory and information-based measures, the transition to a green economy requires a strong ethical framework that articulates shared values and principles essential in the outreach to societies, as well as in reaching a political consensus on the costs and benefits of such a shift. This includes changing the current view of the economy as an end in itself, to instead considering it as a sphere of human activity that can help ensure the building of a sustainable, just, bountiful and peaceful world.”

This view was echoed by the more than 500 voices of youth from across the globe who attended the 7th UNESCO Youth Forum: Youth Voice for Change” convened in Paris in 2011. The output of the Youth Forum was a Final Report ^[3]. drafted by youth participants containing key recommendations that were presented to the UNESCO General Conference at its 36th Session. *Recommendation 9* on sustainable development calls on Member States “to provide training and encourage youth-led initiatives promoting green societies, to engage in policy development & strategies on mitigation and adaptation, emphasizing the importance of green jobs, reducing fossil fuels dependency and disaster risk management”.

Youth: Agents of Change

Innovation geared towards sustainable development has the potential to lift economic growth, create green jobs, and boost inclusive social development while at the same time contributing to environmental protection and conservations. As early adopters and key influencers of new technology young adults are well placed as ‘agents of change’. Innovation and mitigation must be offset by restraint.

^[1] http://portal.unesco.org/geography/en/ev.php-URL_ID=16556&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

^[2] www.earthcharterinaction.org

^[3] unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002134/213427e.pdf

According to UNEP, E-waste is the fastest growing waste stream worldwide and its effective management is an important part of the transition towards a low-carbon, resource-efficient Green Economy. Rapid changes in technology, changes in media, falling prices, and planned obsolescence have resulted in a fast-growing surplus of electronic waste around the globe. An estimated 40 million tons of E-waste are produced each year.⁴

Electrical and electronic equipment - including mobile phones and computers - can contain hazardous substances (e.g. heavy metals such as mercury and lead, and endocrine-disrupting substances such as brominated flame-retardants). Dealing with E-waste, presents a serious environmental and health challenge for many countries and for generations to come, yet also offers a potentially significant opportunity to create green businesses and green jobs. Electrical and electronic equipment also contains materials of strategic value such as indium and palladium and precious metals such as gold, copper and silver. These can be recovered and recycled, thereby serving as a valuable source of secondary raw materials, reducing pressure on scarce natural resources, as well as minimizing the overall environmental footprint.

UNESCO Clubs, Centres and Associations

At the international level, the World Federation of UNESCO Clubs, Centres and Associations (WFUCA) is responsible for informing, coordinating and mobilizing its members, with UNESCO's support and cooperation. In the light of civil society's growing role in public policy-making, the Club movement can play a key part in educating citizens, and can contribute to dialogue between cultures and generations for sustainable development.

Social networking tools including mobile phones and computers have become the umbilical cord of youth today to remain connected with peers and society. Youth are not only a large and expanding market for electrical and electronic goods and therefore part of the problem, but could play a key role to promote responsible consumer behaviour and to raise awareness of E-waste through the UNESCO Clubs in partnership with like-minded youth groups and thereby be part of the solution.

YOUth Be the Solution

REDUCE, RECOVER, REUSE, RE-CYCLE

^[4] http://www.unep.org/PDF/PressReleases/E-Waste_publication_screen_FINALVERSION-sml.pdf