

Earth Dialogues Barcelona

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**Theme One
“New Sustainability Challenges”
Synthesis of Working Groups I, II, and III**

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1. SUSTAINABILITY CHALLENGES

Governance Reform:

The key governance reform challenge is to develop a system that will stimulate a shift to sustainability. As well, governance systems must encourage political leadership that is authoritative, facilitative, cooperative and which promote mutual understanding. Governance systems must be strengthened to ensure meaningful enforcement of multilateral agreements and to this end, multilateral channels must continue to be enhanced with greater attention directed to empowering the full participation of civil society. It is the responsibility of governments to instigate and ensure a meaningful process of governance reform.

Corporate Accountability:

Meaningful systems of corporate accountability are needed at the global level, particularly in the form of legally binding instruments that will bind transnational corporations, regardless of the location of their headquarters or production activities.

Economic Impacts of Globalisation:

The full economic impacts of globalisation must be better understood and more thoroughly debated within political processes. The potential for forging concrete solutions is systematically undermined by the growing reality that politicians are

steadily losing political control. This is reflected in increasingly lowered corporate taxes, coupled with increasingly lax environmental standards.

Energy:

Time-bound targets are needed for the dismantling of perverse subsidies to the fossil fuel sector. The primary challenge related to energy is the need to promote the development and sustainable use of renewable energy sources, especially in key countries such as China and India. In the North, focus must be directed towards reform of pricing and subsidy systems to ensure that renewables enjoy greater market share.

Water:

Key water challenges include the need to promote more effective conservation and management of water resources as well as the need to ensure fair and equitable access for all. Considerable efforts will be needed to realise the MDG water and sanitation goals.

Military Expenditures:

The issue of military expenditures must be thoroughly re-assessed not only in light of recent world events, but also in terms of the considerable imbalance created in many parts of the world vis-à-vis spending in other sectors, such as health, education and rural development.

Regional integration:

In the Mediterranean region, the challenge of ensuring sustainability through regional economic integration is becoming increasingly critical. The Euro-Med Partnership (launched in 1995 in Barcelona) was grounded in the concept of economic growth and the promotion of the single market, with little consideration for the importance of sustainable development. Regional integration without consideration for sustainability impacts carries considerable risks of total failure.

Tourism:

The tourism industry has considerable impacts in terms of consumption, especially in the Mediterranean, upon which large segments of the economy are dependent. Johannesburg did not deal adequately with the enormous impacts that tourism has on the natural resource base.

Consumption:

Ultimately, sustainable consumption is not a scientific or technical question. It is really first and foremost a question of values. Consumption and production patterns in developed countries will have to change if the needs of growing populations with improved standards of living, particularly in developing countries are to be met. Both under-consumption and over-consumption are unsustainable consumption patterns. The under-consumption plaguing developing countries is the flip side to the excessive, wasteful consumption of affluent countries and populations. Providing

people in the South with a better quality of life would require increased consumption for the poor and different and more sustainable levels of consumption for the rich, while ensuring that production and consumption does not have negative effects on health, natural resources and the environment.

2. ETHICAL DIMENSIONS OF SUSTAINABILITY CHALLENGES

Connectedness:

Connectedness is about the relationship between humans and between humans and their natural environment. The ethical dimension of connectedness calls for the consideration of the realities and impacts of living in increasingly larger social groups, as well as the relationship between humanity and the larger community of life. We must recognise that humanity is part of a greater web of life that must be respected and cared for with compassion.

Subsidiarity:

Among various world scenarios for the 21st century, the only one that makes sense is a transformed world in which social change is truly possible. A key precondition is a governance system that is based on the principle of subsidiarity, in which governance begins at the level of the person and the family and expands from that starting point to the global level. Such a system would promote greater solidarity and plurality of values, while at the same time avoiding the imposition of specific ideals.

Equity:

The principle of equity embraces the imperatives of human rights, social justice and inclusion. All species must enjoy the right to “live in the way they are meant to”.

Participation:

Participation is no longer an option. Sustainable development goals can not be achieved without the full engagement of all key actors. Sustainable development requires social change at all levels with particular focus on the need for the empowerment of local communities.

“Enoughness”:

Gandhi stated that “the Earth has enough for everybody’s needs but not for anybody’s greed”. As the Earth Charter states, when basic human needs have been met, development is about “being more rather than having more”.

Role of the Earth Charter:

The Earth Charter expresses an integrated ethical vision that synthesises all of the key ethical dimensions related to the central sustainability challenges, such as universal responsibility, respect for Earth, interdependence, intrinsic value of all beings, respect for the dignity of human beings, the duty of care, common but differentiated

responsibilities, as well as key values related to human rights, justice and democracy. The Earth Charter challenges us to face the urgency of the global challenges crises and to forge a new form of “human-earth” relationship, which recognises the relationship of humanity with the larger community of life. The Earth Charter is one of the only instruments that speak to the reverence of life in relation to the broader mystery of life, in which humans participate but do not control. It also recognises that a deeper level of conscious transformation is needed if indeed the global sustainability transition is to be achieved.

3. THE SUSTAINABILITY IMPLEMENTATION GAPS

- Lack of political will and leadership
- Limited financial resources
- Under-developed indicators and criteria for sustainable development
- War, violence and conflict
- New health threats
- New power politics that create new forms of conflict
- Dominance of security issues
- Reductionist approaches to policy-making
- Dominant powerful economic interests
- Insufficiently regulated private sector
- Insufficiently empowered social change movements
- Cultural notion of consumerism as a way of life
- The role of media in promoting unsustainable consumption