



## **Youth Responsibilities**

### **Reflection on Action Document**

Pinky Cupino, nov. 2011

#### **I. Introduction**

This Reflection on Action Document was produced through a survey of and discussion among sixteen young people aged fifteen to twenty five years old from thirteen countries covering Asia, Pacific, Europe, Latin America and North America. These young people are individually involved in youth organizations and movements. Their involvements include participation in the UN Youth Declaration, community volunteer projects, environmental education and campaigns, youth organizing, organic gardening, reducing deforestation, conserving biodiversity, sustainable development, government and school youth councils, preventing cruelty to animals, movement to address climate change, developing eco-responsible schools, fair trade, recycling, regional socio-political movements and protests, environmental clean-ups, and intercultural and interfaith dialogue. Also, literature on youth actions and citizenship, and particularly on youth charters has been reviewed.

#### **II. Findings and Conclusions**

##### **A. Public perception on the irresponsibility of the youth**

It is the general perception of adults that young people are not responsible or at the very least, indifferent to what is happening in the world. These people say that young people care only for themselves and that they consumed by their self-interest, are wrapped up in a constricted “youth culture” that is not compatible with adult society, and lack political interest and social responsibility (Community Service and Social Responsibility in Youth). Worse, they are seen as a menace to contemporary society and the present social order. Adolescents are viewed as “amoral, anti-intellectual and dangerous”.

Many blame media and the internet in making young people disinterested in relevant societal affairs and issues. In fact, internet, texting, online gaming, and other media use shape the youth (An Ecological Perspective on the Media and Youth Development, Susan M. McHale, Aryn Dotterer and Ji-Yeon Kim American Behavioral Scientist, 2009). In the US, there are 13 million Facebook young users aged 18 and below (Facebook, 2009)

as cited in Freishtat & Sandlin, 2010). These techno-savvy young people of today are dubbed ‘digital natives’. There are 33 million digital natives in the US aged 10-19 years old, 90% of whom have internet at home while 73% avail of internet in school (Nielsen Company, 2009 as cited in Liang & Duffy, 2010).

## **B. Convention on the rights of a child and youth responsibility**

The UN Convention on the Rights of a Child talks largely about rights that children (a person with age eighteen and below) should enjoy. It calls on the family, guardians, media, educators, the law and governments to assume responsibilities and provide skills and resources to ensure that these rights are realized so that children will develop to their fullest potential.

At the same time, the document also refers to the children’s rights to participation (Article 12). This recognizes that children have capabilities to make decisions, to express opinions, and to participate in actions beneficial to them inside the family, school, community or society as a whole. Children are thus taken as full-pledged persons, with a right to be heard and to act, and thus be agents of change, but also considering a child’s age and level of maturity. Therefore, while all children should have equal rights, their responsibility is proportionate to their level of maturity (not necessarily age).

While this right to participation is seen as a route for children to claim other rights, it is also an important gateway to the exercise of responsibilities. Participation involves the responsibility to respect<sup>1</sup> the views of others, to be tolerant, to respect diversity, to be pro-active, and to practice democracy.

The Convention outlines the values which children should live with, and directs parents and educational institutions to ensure that these values are inculcated on children. The document says that children should grow to imbibe the spirit of understanding, peace, dignity, tolerance, freedom, equality, including gender equality, and solidarity. It directs the education of the child to focus on developing respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, respect for parents, cultural identity, language, universal and national values, develop respect for differences and diversity of different peoples, whether ethno-linguistic, national, or religious, and respect for the environment.

It is very interesting that all these values that children are enjoined to live by are associated with the notions of being a responsible person.

## **C. How young people define responsibility**

It is clear from the discussion with young people aged 15 to 25 that they have very clear although diverse conceptions on responsibility. The major meanings and dimensions they mentioned on the notion of responsibility include:

These are expected by other entities that a young person should engage in, like cleaning the house, going to school or following the command of parents. Although duties and obligations emanate from others, socialization from early childhood or the desire to be accepted and the commitment to be part of a larger entity may make a person internalize these duties and obligations.

- It is accountability, like an oath, which has to be performed to the best of one's ability. Here, responsibility goes beyond being simply a duty or obligation that has to be done, but it is something that should be done in the best possible way because it is something one is sworn to do (not literally but figuratively) and something that one must account for. However, similar to duty and obligation, this notion implies that the accountability emanates from a regulation external to the individual.
- It is a commitment that one needs to do because it is necessary. Responsibility as commitment veers away from responsibility as duty, obligation and accountability because commitment implies that responsibility emanates from an internal decision to do something because of an understanding of the necessity and importance of the action.
- Responsibility is also referred to in terms of its effect. Young people say that responsibility creates a positive effect, which is to contribute to the good functioning of the human society, to make a difference and change things, to do good and right.

It is the cause and effect of change, meaning one changes things because one feels responsible and when the change is effected, another level of responsibility is called for. It is also the extent to which one is ready to work for a cause. Therefore, responsibility here is referred to as value-laden. Responsibility should be for the good of society. In the same vein, the responsibility to be a look-out for a crime is not responsibility because it does not redound to the good of society.

- It goes hand-in-hand with action. To create a positive effect, there must be an activity. It means standing up for one's actions. It is understanding that all our actions have consequences, therefore a responsible action must have a beneficial consequence.
- Responsibility may be a reflection of one's inner being. Being responsible shows that one is trustworthy, honest and genuine because responsibility is an act that fosters the creation of avenues to understand the inner side of a person or organization. The notion that responsibility creates a positive effect shows what the outcome of responsibility is. The backward linkage is that the exercise of responsibility is a mirror of one's internal psych and one's personality. Being responsible is the product of a peaceful and dignified heart.

- It reflects motives and beliefs on what one thinks is right based on one's upbringing and experience, and what one knows is morally correct; a moral obligation. The novel idea here is that responsibility is a product of how one was brought up, the influence of parents, school and community, life experiences and what one knows as ethical behavior. Responsibility then is an ethical concept.

- It is looking inward towards oneself before directing this outward; the ability to fix one's own mistakes and take care of his or her needs. In a micro level, responsibility requires practicing this on a personal level. One cannot ask other people to account for their actions without being responsible him/herself.

One example is that some young participants in the International Children and Youth Conference for the Environment (2010) stopped smoking after the event. It is a big advance in terms of personal health.

- Finally, responsibility has to be assumed according to one's age, personal experience, level and customs, one's capacity of action and influence in the society. This validates a key concept in the discussion on the Charter of Universal Responsibilities – that responsibility is proportionate to one's capability and one's position in society.

#### **D. Youth in relation to society**

The young people do not see themselves as powerless in society. They admit that they have limited power but they know that one day, they will be very influential in running the community and the wider society, and in affecting the environment. They are proud of their ability to be educated, to be driven by passion, with immense energy. They think of themselves as an unstoppable force. They say they can make a difference and engage in actions that manifests responsibilities and change the world for the better.

The youth claim that they are the true movers of society, not only in the present but also historically. They say that young people lead society in creating the major cultural or political revolutions. They are the bearers of new ideas and ideals that are contemporary in a specific historical setting, and thus inspire the population to transform itself.

The youth of today have an added advantage. The young use modern technologies and information that is available real-time to the world's youth worldwide. Digital media provides a social networking and social action instrument not available to previous generations, which can be optimized by digital natives, who are the youth, to influence how other youth think and act, and even to influence different sectors of the population.

with society, life and the world, creating strength. Organizations want to know what young people want because they are the most active part of society and commerce. Youth groups use media, the written word, social means to have social impact.

The youth are optimized by wider organizations and these organizations are likewise optimized by the youth to apply some ideas and actions.”

It is with confidence that the youth say they believe they can change the world, which is their main source of energy. They say the youth is a change agent and is an integral part of the social process. Structures should tap the resources of young people to enhance their participation in society and to utilize their enormous creative energy.

There is one young person, Kiridwen Olds of New Zealand who is of the opinion that the youth and adults should not be seen as separated. Adults have been young people once and the youth are all going to be adults. Therefore, they have a convergence of interests. Separating the two, it is said, is a formula for discrimination.

Sofia Blanco of Costa Rica say that there are two kinds of young people – those who care for the future and those who do not have enough education or opportunity to learn about responsibility. It is interesting and sensitive that she did not say that the other half of the youth does not care for the future. Rather, she said that they did not have enough education or opportunity, which is indicative of the role of parents, educators, media and government in the education and provision of opportunities to inform and involve young people.

Further, some young people criticize their peers as apathetic, lazy, and lethargic, blaming computers, internet and media as the reasons why young people cannot devote their time to the community.

Kate Radley of New Zealand admits that “young people may be self-centered, blinded by their image and burdened by the stresses of growing up. Often it is hard to be responsible but at the end of the day, if you have a voice, speak up. Being a young person should not be an excuse to delay our responsibilities as we are not only the present but also the future”.

Therefore, while the youth have the potential to be agents of transformation through responsible actions and values, there is a sector of the youth population who are not yet informed nor interested in taking part in such activities.

However, the potential cannot be denied, especially with the advent of information technology.

#### **E. Motivation of young people to exercise of responsibility**

If young people claim that they can change the world or at least make a difference in their own schools or

- Personal morals imbibed from family and school allow young people to act towards making the community a better place.
- The exposure as a child to people who are poor and to other people who are more privileged made young people sensitive to inequality and thus, want to make the world a fair and equal place for everyone. They desire to live in a more equal and more informed society, that respects the freedom of all peoples.
- University life influenced young people to act because they see and emulate peers who were fighting, mobilizing and organizing networks for causes.
- The young have developed unconditional love for nature and are thus committed to protect the environment.
- Personal experience has shown young people that achievement is possible, and from this experience, young people want to pave the way for other young people to realize that they can do something for others, too.
- Sometimes, a role model from childhood days influences how young people think and act. One young person said that a teacher in elementary school who was engaged in the school and the community and who organized a lot of activities that this she participated inspired her to grow up as a responsible young person who is active in school and community affairs.
- Exposure to things that need attention like poverty, child labor, lack of environmental awareness, and animal cruelty caught the sensitivity of one young person, and this exposure led her to engage in work to address these issues.
- Another said that she learned from school and daily life that participation is needed to make a change.
- The upbringing by parents was mentioned by three young people as a factor in making them responsible citizens. Their parents educated them to appreciate nature and respect social rules, human rights, liberty, equality and solidarity.
- Another mentioned that his motivation to act started with exposure to culture and fair trade issues and attending a youth conference on sustainable development.
- Reading stories about different peoples and also of social issues was also mentioned as a factor in

- Another reason stated is a little vague: “I simply discovered how much I like fighting for a better world.”
- One response is very much culturally rooted: “My sense of belonging to my country, our history, culture, heritage, and people, and a conviction that a lot of things must change for the better.”
- The *realization* that pollution causes an increasing danger to the environment prompted another young person to act towards environmental protection. This again emphasizes the importance of information and education, which is the prerequisite for realization and action.
- Another pinpointed the role of both parents and education who instilled a strong sense of social responsibility.
- One young person said that coming from socio-economically disadvantaged family and living in a community that discriminated against his race made him understood that he had to do something positive to overcome the socio-economic disadvantage and to counter racism through dialogue and peaceful action.
- A Maori young person explained that it is innate in her culture to care for the environment. She was also educated to understand that people are naturally responsible for their actions. In this way, she developed a passion for people and the environment.
- The strength of collective actions can be a motivation to act in a different way and to become aware, to have the feeling of being part of a “community” (local and global community). In a big sense, the International Conference of Children and Youth for the Environment (2010) created a sense of “collective destiny” of a “global community” that was very strong for the delegates.
- A young person was motivated by seeing at the result of negative or irresponsible behavior. She said: “seeing that people do not care about social problems motivate me to act.”

To synthesize, young people act because of what they know and learned from family, teachers and peers, and direct and indirect exposure to what is happening in the community and society, and the interactions of these systems. Family, school, peers and media are the important influences in children and youth.

## **F. How young people exercise responsibility**

Young people do not only have diverse views on the notion of responsibility, they also exercise responsibility in various ways.

and society, and for the conservation and management of resources. She also participates in voluntary activity to benefit community, larger society and the environment.

Natia Gagadze of Georgia asserts that young people have to protect and save the environment for this and for future generations as they feel responsible for the areas they live in.

Alexandre Mauras of France states that young people “should be involved in contributing respectfully to the rules and social laws in order to support and evolve social systems with dynamism and durability”. He talks about involvement and contribution to existing rules and laws with the clincher that these should lead to the evolution of dynamic social systems and not simply to accept and conform to the existing rules. Amulya supports this view when she says that young people should balance the need to understand the norms of society and act accordingly vis-à-vis going against it (norms) while working for the better.

Rinaldi Ridwan of Indonesia thinks that young people should be agents of change offering new ideas to solve specific social problems. It is important that he said to solve problems, which emphasizes that young people should not only mouth the problems and blame other sectors but should be involved in formulating ideas and to act towards effecting change. This is shared by Marie-Eve Paquin of Canada, saying that “the youth should be proactive and make concrete actions on political, environmental and social issues; the youth can have more impact because our ideas and energy are refreshing.”

Jose Ricardo Rocha of Portugal say that “young people should do their best to create more diverse communities, more equal societies and a better environment for our species and for all others with which we share this planet”. Here, he is acknowledging that humanity should not only be concerned with the sustainability of itself but also of other species in this planet because our specie thrives in interaction and interdependency with other species.

The challenge of the youth, according to Ariadna Pomar Leon of Spain is to “create new realities so that we can be visible as a collective group and make our voices heard”.

Therefore, the youth are already doing things for the community, community and society but there is still that big challenge of changing present conditions and make the world a better place for all peoples, and especially the youth.

The young people engaged in this Reflection on Action program are very much engaged individuals. They represent the pro-active portion of the youth population. Kate Radley of New Zealand was involved in the UN Youth Declaration. Amulya Kulkarni of India, Marie-Eve Paquin of Canada, Natia Gagadze of Georgia, Ariadna Pomar Leon of Spain and Alexandre Mauras of France were involved in the Let's Take Care of the Planet youth process that culminated in the International Conference of Children and Youth in Brazil in June 2010



Portugal is a conservation biologist involved in biodiversity programs in Madagascar and the Brazilian Amazon. He is likewise a member of the Portuguese League of Nature Conservation, the Portuguese Society for the Study of Birds, ALDEIA, which seeks to contribute to sustainable development based on nature conservation and the traditions of the rural world, Portuguese Herpetological Society.

Morgan Watkins of New Zealand is a member of the Wellington Youth Council and the Youth Advisory Group to the Ministry of Youth Development. Marie-Eve Paquin of Canada coordinates a youth committee on the Brundtland Green Schools and is an active member of the university student council and her basic contribution is adding an environmental policy to their council charter. Jayvee Reyes of the Philippines is a university leader involved in community and school-to-school volunteer work in and outside the university.

Amulya Kulkarni works with the orphanage and is an animal activist. She is coordinator of the Indian Youth Climate Network in Mysore, India. Rinaldi Ridwan of Indonesia is a journalist from the Women Journal Foundation. Alexandre Mauras of France is involved in a school administrative process to develop an eco-responsible school, is a participant of the reforestation project and lives a lifestyle that is organic, supportive of fair trade and conscious to reduce carbon footprint. Sofia Blanco of Costa Rica is part of a social network as well as a writer involved a greener world, protection of natural resources, alternative energy and climate change.

Plamen Simeonov Georgiev of Bulgaria participates in national and regional socio-political organizations as organizer, activist and writer. Issues he engages in are centered in defense of the rights of peoples. Natia Gagadze of Georgia is engaged in tree planting and water testing. Naomi Coalala of Fiji is an environmental campaigner. Kiridwen Olds of New Zealand is involved with Response Trust, a group engaged in the promotion and practice of responsibility in New Zealand and the Pacific.

Mohamad Assoum of Australia is involved in many Muslim and Australian organizations as a youth mentor under Mission of Hope. He is a former president of the University of Sydney Cumberland Muslim Society, a national representative to the One Young World Inaugural International Summit in London in 2010, a peace and interfaith activist and an honorary member of the Justice and Arts Network. Currently, he is in Indonesia studying the impact of aid organizations, government, NGOs and the private sector in child mortality and maternal deaths.

It is clear that young people practice responsibilities not only towards self and family but young as they are, they are already engaged in responsibilities that affect community, schools, the world society and the environment.

## **G. Obstacles that young people face**

- Young people's obligations in domestic duties are hindrances to doing more work for the community and the environment. This is especially true of girls and young women.
- The need to engage in paid employment is another obstacle. However, this obstacle is not only felt by young people but also by adults. The situation would be easier if young people are engaged in work that is directly connected with their advocacies. But this is not always possible.
- There is a dearth of physical spaces for young people to meet. Adults have greater resources and having physical spaces are less of a problem. In this light, universities, private organizations and government should be conscious to provide such spaces.
- Some young people who have so much energy to do so many things at the same time complain of lack of time to do all the things needed to be done and to multi-task. Perhaps they see social problems as too large a task and they want to do so many things. But time is a limited resource and something to contend with.
- Another obstacle of youth leaders is the apathy of other young people who think the community and world's problems are not their problem.
- Youth leaders and activities find that getting access to policy makers and funds to carry out new projects is a problem. This may be related to their limited network, as they are very young. However, their aggressiveness can sometimes overcome this problem of a limited network.
- Amulya Kulkarni of India says that being a girl adds to the woes. India still does not assure a protected environment for a girl/woman to stand up for a cause and fight for it. Perhaps this is a problem not only in India but in other conservative societies.
- Another concern raised is the attitude of giving back to the society and being responsible for our surroundings is of least importance to traditional social structures. Therefore, engaging in such activities does not sit well with the "bosses"; these activities are seen more as hindrances to meet the corporate target and thus are looked down on; these are considered more of a baggage than a gain by certain corporations.
- The school personnel and board are often not enthusiastic to support youth actions. In paper or in words, the school may say they support youth actions but in reality, there is little time and maybe no credit nor support given to such activities. In France, there is a very good curriculum on Education for Sustainable Development but the schools do not take the students into account; there is no intelligent governance.
- One young person shows responsibility by eating healthy. However, he complains that the price of eating healthy is an obstacle because it costs more.
- Another obstacle emanating from adults is that some adults are wary of young people who care about the world. They see them as a nuisance and a waste of time many times when the young volunteer in activities or applies to be a member of organizations.
- Mohamad Assoum of Australia laments that social and religious confines as well as stereotyping and racism from the wider community is an obstacle to youth action on the part of those discriminated

## **H. On assuming co-responsibilities with other groups**

Young people raised the following thoughts on issues and possibilities on how to assume co-responsibilities with other groups.

- Local government and celebrities should spend more time in the community and be involved in youth organizations, to help put some credibility and value into youth projects. This is premised on the thinking of some young people that other sectors should lend their name and personality to put a stamp on activities of the youth. At the same time, it asks more than putting a stamp but on spending time with the youth, hearing their voices, and being involved in their actions. It is not merely form but content that is important.
- Young people and other socio-professional groups should “build together”. The responsibilities “we assume are ours because we are able to assume them, we have this capacity. The challenge is to create together new responsibilities, commitments, actions with the other sectors”. Co-responsibility means building together in a spirit of sharing and equality, and with respect for the other players.
- Half of the youth’s problem is lack of resources and a platform to have their voices heard. These are things that other sectors like government and corporations can provide. Perhaps, government and corporations can provide these to jumpstart a youth activity and from these, the youth have to build their own resources and let their voices speak.
- It is also suggested that individuals with resources who do not have enough time can allot resources to support youth initiatives. This is one way of putting one’s resources to good work if one does not have time to optimize these resources.
- Young people need to network and tap community and social resources. They have to match needs and resources in the community towards creating sustainable societies. For example, an organic school cafeteria can buy products from local producers, or a gardener can gather compostable waste in school to feed the farm. Resources by themselves are not enough; it has to be matched with complementary resources and those who need them to be useful and productive.
- Different social actors can support the youth. Environmental organizations could educate young people. Universities should involve students to undertake eco-friendly activities. Ministries of government should call young people to unite and help to defend our natural resources.
- The media, which plays a great part in molding a person’s values and actions, should encourage the youth to partake in volunteer activities and in helping society. The media should not be an instrument to promote violent behavior, sexist values or computer games/computer addiction.

In fact, most of the young people involved in this Reflection on Action program are involved in interdisciplinary and multi-sectoral organizations, movements and programs that realize the concept of co-

## **I. Youth and Digital Media**

Digital media take up much time in the daily activities of today's youth. Educators and adults should realize that we now live in a digital world and that digital media is something we have to contend with, especially in relation to young people.

Tynes (2007) posits that online discussion groups actually have educational values like learning critical thinking, reasoning skills, spatial visualization skills, and social skills. Digital fluency opens opportunities for experiential learning, meaning making, creativity, taking initiative and collaborative pathways. However, media is also perceived to have a lack of ability to inculcate affirmative skills and values and may be building behaviors that are violent, hazardous and anti-social (Brown et al, 2002).

Digital spaces also provide young people with a platform for self-expression and identity formation (Freishtat & Sandlin, 2010), expressing different and shifting identities (Hsi, 2007), engaged in an "ongoing construction" of themselves as they relate to cultural signifiers, merchandize and information available in the web in a form of "public pedagogy" within the digital world. Traditional identity indicators like age, race, gender, socio-economic status are overtaken by other forms of self-representations.

Digital media allows young people to use the web to developing social relations, communicate with each other, engage in dialogue and cross-cultural and inter-racial exchange, or build support groups on issues that they refuse to share or inquire from adults (Tynes, 2007).

Liang, et al (2010) puts forward the theory that digital media can be used as a tool for positive youth development by being involved in a group and participating in helping practices within. These practices can develop in young people the five C's – competence, confidence, connection, character and caring. For example, the website Generation Pulse challenges young people to explore, share and act. The website is visually appealing and it provides information for the youth to know world issues, share stories and opportunities to share their time, energy and capacities. This form of institutional relatedness can develop a feeling-for-others, life meaning, authentic happiness, enablement and respect for diversity, as suggested by relational-cultural theorists.

The understanding on the effect of media on youth should take culture in context. In an individualistic society, digital communications may be a way to open social ties, because as it is, social ties are limited that alienation seems prevalent. But in a collectivist society where social ties seem to be stronger, too much engagement in the digital world may constrict traditional modes of communications and being together

The challenge for educators and concerned citizens involved in youth development are: how can we optimize the opportunities for holistic learning, growth and development within the digital world and how can we prevent, soften or avoid the pitfalls and dangers of digitization?

In fact, young people have already taken the web by storm, so to speak. A number of websites are made by and for young people, in an effort to make the young aware of the global problems and to initiate action. The website of Generation Pulse has as its banners: "If you could explore the world, what would you see? If you could share your life, what would you say? If you could make the world better, how would you act? Explore, Share and Act!" It discusses different issues affecting young people, gives a platform to share thoughts and reflections, and presents different ways to act, whether it be an action that can be done in 15 minutes or taking action to help the people in Haiti. The Voice of Youth enjoins young people to read the issues, interact with the members through a discussion group and sign up to share their own stories. The site talks about global issues as seen in local communities like hunger, state of impermanence, universal education, HIV/AIDS, environmental destruction, and many others.

## **J. Building Youth Citizenship through Environmental Action**

After the CONFINT in Brasilia in June 2010 and inasmuch as many young people in this Reflection on Action program are involved in environmental actions and programs, it is worthwhile to look at a study on "Developing Citizens and Communities through Youth Environmental Action (Schusler, T. M., Krasny, M.E., Peters, S.J., & Decker, D.J., 2009). It is an attempt to learn from the experiences of environmental action practitioners by abstracting practices and analyzing and interpreting these into 'transferable and adaptable patterns' for both practitioners and planners.

The research cited literature that differentiated between the moralistic and the democratic paradigms in environmental education. The moralistic paradigm is aimed to change behavior while the democratic paradigm involves reflection, participation and action by young people.

The paradox is that young people are made to feel that it is their moral obligation to care for the environment and so they get fed up doing their duties to turn off the lights or recycle, for example because these are standards imposed by society.

The democratic paradigm entails environmental action, which is different from simply environmental behavior and activity. The latter are not intentional and do not address the root causes of the problem. Environmental action is deliberate, participatory, and with clear objectives. It involves assessment of the problem, visioning and planning, implementation and evaluation, then visioning again, in an iterative process. The action may directly impact on the environment or influence other people to be involved in environmental actions. In the US, five kinds of environmental actions have been recognized: 1) physical environmental improvements, 2) education, 3) inquiry, 4) public issue analysis and policy advocacy, and

While environmental actions may target a direct impact on the environment, it also has an educational aim of strengthening the capacities of young people to be involved as citizens in a democracy. Most of the time, youth environmental action practitioners give primary importance to promoting positive youth development over environmental outcome. Perhaps there is a need to find a balance to both goals.

At any rate, young people develop as active citizens and/or change agents as a result of their involvement with an environmental action program. At the same time, such a program undertaken by youth people results in positive transformation of the environment and society. In the long term, youth involvement and social and environmental positive changes shall redound to a healthy democracy and a sustainable society. Environmental action and citizenship-building can go hand-in-hand. An environmental action program may hit two goals: environmental and social change, and youth development.

The best example is the Children and Youth International Conference for the Environment that saw 500 young people from 50 countries converge in Brasilia, Brazil last June 2010. These children produced a Charter explaining their responsibilities to the environment. The Earth Charter also mobilized young people worldwide, and there is an Earth Charter Youth Initiative promoting actions towards sustainable societies.

#### **K. Youth Charters**

A number of charters and declarations have been produced by children and youth worldwide. The Charter of Children and Youth Responsibilities on the Environment (2010) was made by 500 children and youth from 50 countries in Brasilia, Brazil. This is a bottoms-up declaration because the children and youth delegates were selected through a school-based, provincial and/or national conference that discussed environmental issues. The delegations were elected by the conference. Thus, this process traversed environmental issues and democratic practices.

In 2009, a Declaration on Climate Change: Our Challenge produced by 750 children and youth from 106 countries in South Korea. In 2008, a simple declaration by 750 children and youth from 105 countries who met in Norway was made on Biodiversity, Energy, Water and Sustainable Production and Consumption. These two declarations were supported by the United Nations Environmental Program.

Some youth declarations are specifically addressed to international bodies.

In 2008, 100 young people world met in Japan so that their voices will be heard by the G8. They made a Statement on Climate Change and a Statement on Sustainable Development demanding these states to act responsibly to address the problems related to climate change, healthcare, education, human rights, food and good governance in donation.

In 2005, a Youth Accord on Biodiversity was formulated in Mexico by seventy five high school students

decisions because “only humans destroy the earth” and that it is imperative for all to work together to save the planet.

In 2002, a gathering of young people worldwide met in The Hague, The Netherlands to make a document on conserving biodiversity and the forests, the exercise of responsibility towards genetic resources, and ensuring the participation of children and as well as the underrepresented indigenous peoples and women, in decision-making.

The declaration was addressed to the Meeting of the Conference of Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity.

The Pacific region produced two statements by young people that cover comprehensive issues. In 2006, 1000 young people from 25 countries and territories in the Pacific articulated a Pacific Youth Charter covering the issues of good governance, active citizenship, education, social and professional integration, sustainable development, cultural diversity, health, equality, and peace. In New Zealand, a Youth Declaration 2011: Have your say! was expressed by young people across Aotearoa, an initiative of UN Youth-New Zealand. The declaration included components on child and gender, economic development and globalization, education, environment, foreign affairs, health, justice, leadership and governance, Maori and Pacific Island Affairs, New Zealand identity, social development and substance abuse.

The children and youth are calling on and are demanding other sectors to hear their voices and articulations, a right supported by the UN Convention on the Rights of a Child, which puts child participation as a core principle. However, expressing their sentiments, needs, concerns and proposals are likewise an act of exercising their responsibilities to themselves, the community, global society and the planet. It is not possible to claim rights without being responsible in nurturing these rights to enjoy and develop their full potential.

#### **L. Youth and the Charter of Universal Responsibilities**

The International Charter of Children and Youth for the Environment (Brazil, 2010) was framed on the Charter of Human Responsibilities (Lille, 2001). Other youth charters particularized in specific cultures and societies were created in Chile, Brazil, Philippines, India, USA, etc. Conversely, when presented with this Charter of Human Responsibilities, participants to this Reflection on Action process said its principles resonated with what they are already doing.

Morgan Watkins of New Zealand said “The ripples we create in the global pond are just too large to avoid our accountability”. Sofia Blanco Solis of Costa Rica said: “It is the change I want to see in the world”, referring to the principal on lasting peace based on freedom, justice and reconciliation, and respectful of human dignity and human rights. Marie-Eve Paquin of Canada says that the Charter embodies her belief, and because it is so, one can see it in her actions

the last few weeks. This needs to be spread and put pressure on people who choose to ignore the cautions and are thoughtless. This will influence their day-to-day decisions, and encourage individuals to get active”. Mohamad Assoum of Australia mentioned that he relates to all the principles and try to incorporate these in his activities to ensure equality and freedoms. Kiridwen Olds expressed that if people subscribe to the Charter, “the world will be a better place”.

Naomi Coalala of Fiji articulated that the roots of human responsibility can be seen in the principles on making sure that human rights are affirmed and on every person’s dignity involves contributing to the freedom and dignity of others. Alexandre Mauras of France say that “every principle makes me think about a concrete example showing that, whatever culture we belong to, they are good to apply in our everyday life”. For Mohamad Assoum and Rinaldi Ridwan, both Moslems, the principle on respect for diversity in a multicultural community is very important.

Thus, a Charter on Universal Responsibilities of the youth can be both a pretext and a post-text, to contextualize responsibilities in the sector and in particular cultures, or to evaluate responsibilities already being exercised.

### **M. Youth and Life Purpose**

It is not surprising that young people are engaged in activities that are relevant to society and the environment. Research bears out that young adolescents do have life meaning and purpose in life (Yeager & Bundick, 2009; Hilla, Burrowb, O’Dellb and Thorntonac, 2010; Bronk, Finch and Taliba, 2010; Bronk and Finch, 2010). This protects their psychological health (Brassai and Steger, 2011) and is linked to happiness (Magen, 1996). One type of life meaning is derived from having a purpose in life, which involves having a goal outside of and bigger than the self (Bronk and Finch, 2010) and involves participation with the world outside of the self (Damon, Menon and Bronk, 2003). Further, there is also a relation between adolescents’ happiness and engagement to the world and persons outside of themselves (Magen, 1996). Thus, young people who are engaged in activities for the good of the community, society and environment live meaningful and purposeful lives, and this has the potential to give them happiness.

In a study on Filipino freshman university students aged 16-18 years, 11% said that serving others give them life meaning (Cupino, Fagela, Paguio, Resurreccion, 2010). In another study of high school students aged 12-16 years, 25% of them said they want to serve others/the community/the environment. The finding that high school students think of others is consistent with prior research showing 30% of adolescents wanting a career that would open opportunities for them to serve others and the world outside of themselves (Yeager and Bundick, 2009).

### **N. Crossroads/Dilemma**

The following dilemmas face young people in the practice of responsibility:



2. Another dilemma is finding the necessary resources to carry out responsible actions, projects and programs. It is difficult to access funds, especially those without any conditions set to the funding.
3. Youth leaders problematize how to educate, organize and engage other young people in the community and society given the frustration, ignorance and apathy of many young people, particularly when other adults in the community has disregard for their responsibilities.
4. Prioritization of work and time limitation can be a dilemma for leaders who want to do so much because there is much to be done. When there is limited human resource to accomplish the work, the capacity of leaders to multi-task amidst the gigantic challenges that organizations face is a problem.
5. In traditional societies, there is the gender dilemma. Should girls engage in social action rather than focus on domestic matters?
6. In multicultural societies, there is a social dilemma of respect for diversity and respect for human dignity, both on the part of the discriminated against and presumably on the part of those who discriminate, as more people are educated on respect while social practice does not (largely or in pockets) reflect the value of respect.

### **III. Proposals**

1. Governments, educators, civil society, parents, and media should work together to uphold the right and responsibility of children and young people to participate in discussions and actions that affect their lives and their future.
2. Children and youth can only meaningfully participate in discussions and actions, and thus be active citizens of the community and society, if they have enough information and education what is happening in society, the issues and ongoing debates and research, if they are empowered and given a platform for democratic participation. They must be aware that claiming rights and exercising responsibilities are necessarily complementary. This may be started at a young age, but the content and strategy for presentation must be developmentally appropriate.
  - Citizenship education should target all children and young people and not only “the best and the brightest”, or those already involved.
  - Produce a well-done promotional video to encourage youth responsibility that can be displayed in schools and the internet.
  - Use innovative approaches to share knowledge and inspiring stories of people who have actually contributed to improve their communities (either at the local or at the global levels). An example given is [www.ted.com](http://www.ted.com), which publishes inspiring and innovative ideas. It is important to show young people positive projects and actions that work to inspire them and strengthen their resolve.
  - Schools and universities must integrate a citizenship and environmental program in the curriculum and encourage young people to participate in different aspects of the university and society.
  - The particular conditions of different sectors of the youth population must be taken into account

- A study on the link between economic status and responsibility can be interesting because of the observation that the rich feel less responsible because they have the economic means to have what they want while people with less opportunities feel the importance of responsibility and social equity.
3. As more young people are engaged in community life through discussions and actions, more and more young people will be attracted to participate because if done collectively, especially with peers, young people will not feel isolated and alone in addressing social issues. Engagement is based on values and beliefs but it grows with social meetings and with the feeling of being a part of the changes.
  4. Providing physical spaces for the youth so to meet because being young, they have limited resources that would allow them freedom to meet, discuss, and plan.
  5. Encourage government to support the International Children's Charter that was the result of the CONFINT by publishing it as part of the students' textbook.
  6. Every school, company, professional structure, and community could write its own charter of human responsibility towards the environment and towards others, following the scheme "responsibilities-actions". Every place governed by regulations should have its charter towards the environment. Practicing responsibility should become a reflex, and people should be accountable for their actions.
  7. Government, corporations and international agencies must open their human, material and financial resources to young people so that they can be more aware and be more responsible.
  8. Traditional and digital media should help shape youth and other responsibilities. Media can be a powerful tool to shape youth responsibility, instead of promoting negative messages like celebrating vices (as in advertising cigarettes), gender insensitivity or outright sexism, or disseminating violent games that not only send subliminal messages that violence is acceptable but also hinders focus, attention and concentration.
  9. Youth and adult social, political and economic leaders should lead by example to show the way towards responsibility.
  10. There already exist diverse youth organizations, actions and programs in the community and school level, national, regional and global levels, or in the cyber community that addresses specific or comprehensive youth issues and concerns.
  11. Such diversity and decentralization is important as these give rise to initiative, creativity and constructions. However, networking and cooperation, and sharing at different levels (community, city, provincial, national, regional, global, subsectoral) would further fuel the energy of the youth and allow their impact to be felt greater by other sectors and by society as a whole.

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