



Sustainable Development

Introduction

This paper aims to define the position of MIJARC (the International Movement of Catholic Agricultural and Rural Youth) regarding sustainable development and to be used as a basis for further discussion on the issue.

The end of August 2002 saw the Rio + 10 summit in Johannesburg. This event was meant to refer back to the results of the Rio Summit (1992) and launch strategies to achieve the outcomes of

compromises taken at that time, when an action plan was signed by the heads of state at the first big UN conference on sustainable development. Unfortunately and in spite of many efforts, not much has happened since then. However, the term sustainable development is known and used world-wide and little by little it has become a buzzword. In this sense, we want to make clear from the start that we are not discuss-

ing this issue because it is fashionable. We want to keep the original meaning of the term sustainable development and draw your attention to the concepts that fill it with sense, and to the measures needed to achieve it in the long run. With this paper, we want to present our position to the world, which means to debate with our partners and lobby them.

The reasons for taking part in the present discussions around the topic are multiple. To start with, the World Summit on Sustainable development is thought to be one of the UN processes that are most open to Youth influence and this is one of the reasons why MIJARC has chosen to develop the paper you have in your hands. Furthermore, as a Christian rural movement we believe we have the duty to educate our members and other people, too, in a democratic environment and to provide them with the means to grow and develop their own ideas and actions around an issue that is closely linked to rural development. The fact that we are working for young people and with young



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people, that is we are starting from young people's needs and decisions, makes us believe that they have an extremely important role in the building up of a sustainable society starting from the local level. In this sense, this position paper also seeks to be a tool our members can use internally to start the discussion.

Our Christian foundation is also at the basis of the decision to develop this paper. God created

men and women, who are free to create and develop whilst respecting creation, keeping a sense of justice towards the rest of the humankind and opposing exploitation of other human beings and resources. We also agree with the principles of the Vatican II: peace, justice and the protection of the creation.

In the next pages you will find a theoretical background on sustainable development. It contains

a definition of sustainable development and its implications with the aim of giving meaning to the concepts and terms that will appear throughout the paper. The second part presents our position concerning the points that we consider to be key for the achievement of sustainable development in the long term. It contains our demands as well as our commitment towards sustainable development at different levels.

Historical account and definition of sustainable development

The idea of sustainable development is inclined to diverse interpretations and it is still the object of a great deal of misunderstanding among the general public. The idea has been built around the interdependence between the protection of the environment, economical efficiency and social and political progress.

I. Historical approach

Sustainable development is an answer to the desire to instil a new concept of society which tries to make up for the excesses of a world of development perceptible since the beginning of the 1970s). What was new in the 1980s was the nature of the damage caused to the environment. Until then, what lead to worry was localised damage (a resource that dried up, a limited environmental space that was degraded). One had to deal with punctuated phenomena caused by economic dysfunction. In the middle of the 1980s something else emerged: damage caused to the mechanisms that regulate the planet, which enable it to maintain on its surface the conditions that are favourable for the development of life.

This idea is the result of a long evolution of thought and of the meeting of two tendencies. The first one proclaims the worldwide imbalance of growth between the developed countries and the Southern countries. The second, ecological, introduces a critical view of economic activities in relation to the idea of global progress. The latter tendency is very present in the public opinion.

In 1972, the Club of Rome published the report *The Limits of Growth* that reported a kind of development that exhausts available natural resources and marginalises an important part of the world's population. It attempts to achieve "zero growth" for the industrialised countries. This provoked strong controversies between those trying to go along the path of economic development – the Southern countries – and those who wanted to accentuate the preservation of the environment. A synthesis of the two different tendencies was found in 1972 in the first United Nation's conference on environment which outlines the term coined "eco-development".

The real outcome took place in 1987 with the Brundtland report

Our Common Future that called for the integration of environmental concerns in the process of economic and social development. In this report, sustainability was defined.

Twenty years later, the conference of Rio, called the "Earth summit", took place. Nearly 180 countries adopted a foundation text: *The Rio Declaration on Environment and Development* and also a declaration containing proposals that are not binding, but that are to be taken into account: Agenda 21. The states are invited to provide themselves with a strategy for sustainable development and the local authorities are asked to develop local 'Agendas 21'.

Today, one cannot say that the governments have tried to implement these plans. And what is worse, one can see that the environment of our planet has degraded in spite of all the summits that have followed. The world-wide summit on sustainable development which took place in Johannesburg at the end of August 2002 had to boost a dynamic process that, since the conference of Rio in 1992, has had big problems translating itself into the political

life at international, national and local levels. One of the challenges was to lobby the authorities to get real and effective political will.

Further on, one can see that the notions of the concept sustainable development have been used and misused by the supporters of productive agriculture as well as the producers of nuclear energy!

We do not want this concept to become jargon for what is “politically” or “technocratically correct”. What we want is for citizens to take, in their everyday lives, their part of the responsibility for the transformation of our way of governance. So, we are interested not only in giving content but also, and especially, sense to the concept of sustainable development.

II. Definition of sustainable development

The concept of development is clearly opposed to the purely economic concept of growth which

describes the increase in exchange of goods in a market in a monetary relationship. Development implies that the aim of each human activity, including the economic activities, has to be to increase the satisfaction of the entire human population’s social needs. So it is necessary to consider the negative aspects of growth. It is necessary to regard those things that cannot be evaluated at all in market-terms or only with great difficulty. It is also necessary to take into consideration the variety of riches, which includes more than goods and services that can be evaluated in market terms (e.g. education, training, culture ...).

The concept of growth is blind to those goods that are used during the production process without any measurable exchange: the appropriation of nature, the perturbations to the biosphere’s balance ... We must consider what we produce, but also what we destroy when we produce,

what we are wasting by consuming. Generally speaking, the concept of development tries to translate an enlarged and more complete vision of the socio-economic process. Development must be achieved not only by an improvement in the standard of living but also by an improvement in the conditions of life.

The term “sustainable” means that development should not create the conditions for its own demise. For example, if we do not take care, we could appropriate resources without worrying about the conditions of their renewal. Human life can be endangered when we intervene in the balance of nature and ecosystems.

There are many different definitions of sustainable development depending on the approaches. We can nevertheless re-use one of the existing definitions, the one of the Brundtland report: “Sustainability is a development that ensures the satisfaction of present needs of the human kind without endangering the capacity of the future generations to satisfy their needs.” The human being is in the centre of this project. This means to tend to a balance of economic development, protection of the environment, satisfaction of all needs in the social domain and the respect for cultural and political expressions.

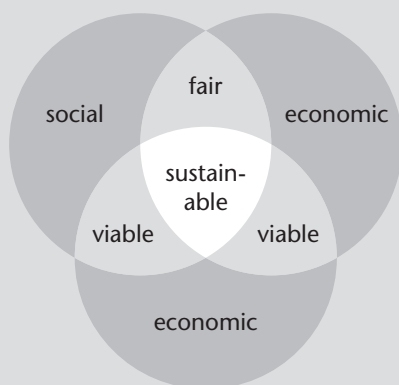
A model of sustainable development has to satisfy the fundamental needs – food, drink water, shelter, hygienic conditions, energy and education, health, participation to decisions – of the dispossessed people and the most deprived populations. also It has to adapt technology and the kinds of life to the potential and the socio-economic and ecological specificity of each territory, and to in-



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ternalise the costs. The challenge is to introduce the principles of humanity, equity and responsibility right into the concept of development. This means that we have to implement a huge cultural shift in our worldview, to situate ourselves within this new worldview, and to make commitments to change.

So, you can often find the following scheme:



The convergence of these three elements is not reached *a priori*. So what it is all about is coherence of human activities, which leads us to the political field.

Going further than the definition, there are a large number of principles:

- The principle of solidarity is defined in a huge number of ways: The solidarity in time leads to consideration of future generations already in our present activities and also to management of non-renewable resources. This approach could affect the technical customs and the rhythm of the political life (e. g. the length of mandates, ...). The solidarity in space calls us to a deep modification of development: the technical and industrial choices must take care of the modification of the development modes of the North and

allow the South to develop at the same time. This solidarity and co-operation is essential on the national level, but also on the regional and local levels as well.

- We can also add the principle of transversality. As one can easily see, the idea needs a complex rather than a linear treatment. We are confronted with a strong systemic approach of inter-relationship (meaning that we have to go in a transversal and not in a sectorial way). This is an indispensable element because it allows us to:

- Stand up for a global representation
- Create networks for a better understanding
- Situate ourselves for a better capacity for action

Sustainable development forces us to confront and sometimes also synthesise approaches, cultures, and disciplines. This demand for transversality turns the traditional approaches upside down. It requires also going further than a simple juxtaposition of actions. There is a need to define the transversality between them. This leads to the very idea of planning, which translates into strategy, meaning a chain of actions, political aims.

- It is necessary to make use of the principle of caution: while the present state of knowledge does not allow us to foresee all future incidences, it is necessary to take preventative and cautionary measures. The idea behind this is not to deal with a problem, but to get to a radical approach on things. On the other hand, it is necessary to come to a conception of “the



polluter pays" (and not to do the contrary by granting oneself the right to pollute).

- The principle of participation. Sustainable development will not be able to be imposed because of its deep inner logical system: integrate the diversified fields of human activity to one perspective that is the same for everybody – this supposes the support of a bigger number of citizens. To achieve sustainable development, politics must be able to act for the future of society. Behind the organisation of the public discussion (information, awareness raising, training and democratic discussions), it is the importance of citizens' inclusion in the political decision process that is at stake. In the context of renewing the regional level's authority, the sustainable approach aims to integrate this new fact. A real participation needs to grant real influence on the challenges concerning the life of every citizen. So, what should be put into practise is a democracy that is based on the practise of co-decision and the democratic evaluation of public politics.

- All this brings us to a principle of strong political responsibility (especially in the North) situated on an individual and also collective level. Thinking in terms of sustainable development forces us to transfer the economic yoke to come back to a supremacy of the political sector which implies the supremacy of the *polis*, of a governing community working for the common good. Sustainable development requires an inner change within ourselves, within society and within the

institutions, in which people are immersed. It is necessary to foresee actions aimed at all these dimensions. To be responsible means to keep in mind the question of values, too. This is exactly what makes sense in our lives, what matters, what we are based on, the reason why we live. Every choice we take supposes in one moment or another that we have to engage ourselves to define what we consider to be the most important.

III. A tool to establish the basics of sustainable development: the agenda 21

Promoting the aims of sustainable development supposes a vision for the future, but also practise and experimentation. Agenda 21 or Action 21 is one of the complementary proposals to the general declaration of the Rio summit. It is an action programme in the form of recommendations made for the states, the institutions, the local collectivities, the civil society, eco-

nomic and social actors that has to find its implementation at all levels (especially in the shape of local Agendas 21).

The principal aims are to satisfy the fundamental needs, to improve the living standard of all people, to find a better system to manage the eco-systems. The motivation for the creation of a local Agenda 21 is its capacity to construct a coherent response to the essential local concerns. The principles are the following:

- Organisation and spatial management,
- Eco-Management of the natural resources
- Socio-economic development, its consequences on employment, inequality issues, standard of life
- Energy issues
- Waste
- Mobility, accessibility to equipment
- Integration of the local community in global concerns (greenhouse effect, ...)

Four components can be specified for the elaboration of an Agenda 21:



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The local Agendas 21 suppose the consideration of short-term aspects and long-term visions at the same time (from 10 to 15 years), and the association of the local with the global approach. By associating economic and environmental concerns in its reflections and decisions, the Agenda 21 allows the relevant and the local actors to widen their own thinking and action boundaries. Behind these, one can find strong motivations of collective mobilisation and of participation for the future of a region.

We can find some nuances to our propositions. In the first place, the initiative of a Local Agendas 21 are suffering from insufficient engagement by the States, which means very little financial engagement. Even if there is no lack of information concerning sustainable development, there is a certain partitioning of policies and the administration that we can observe at all levels of the territory, which damage the implementation of a global and integrated strategy. One observes that the implementation of local Agendas 21 is difficult outside of big urban concentrations. In rural areas, there is still a lot to do.

Our position

1. Political willingness

The first point we want to focus on regarding sustainable development is the need for a radical change of perception on the issue. At present, it is easy to see that we have gone too far: the climatic change, the reduced water resources, the growth of hunger and poverty to name but a few, show that our societies and economies are growing at the expense of the

In addition to this, it is often remarkable that Agendas 21 get just as far as the management of activities and the improvement of the every day life without giving radical thought to the different issues.

Local participation can be problematic and it can flow in different directions:

- Giving the illusion of being an actor if the process is not prepared in the right way
- Reinforcing egoism (e.g. “we must deal with our waste – but not here”)
- Developing incoherence because of the fact that there is no vision wider than that of the municipality
- Dealing with the urgent concerns becomes sometimes an excuse to avoid dealing with real problems in a sustainable way.

As a conclusion, it must be confirmed that there are no “key solutions” for Agendas 21. They will be what the actors want them to be. But in any case, they are a good way to educate the citizenship towards development.

available resources, the protection of the environment and the increase of inequalities and exclusion. The fact that the present system is unable to give answers to the present situation clearly hints at the need to give things a new start by developing a social project and acting in accordance with it. That means defining a common goal to be achieved in the long-



term, counting on the participation of all actors: from the political bodies to civil society. This demands strong political will coming from all actors and a change of mentality at all levels.

An alternative model to neoliberalism does not entail taking a single approach. There are various alternatives for the different countries and regions present in

a unique world-wide economic system. We need to stop cultural standardisation; cultural diversity is a source of global sustainability.

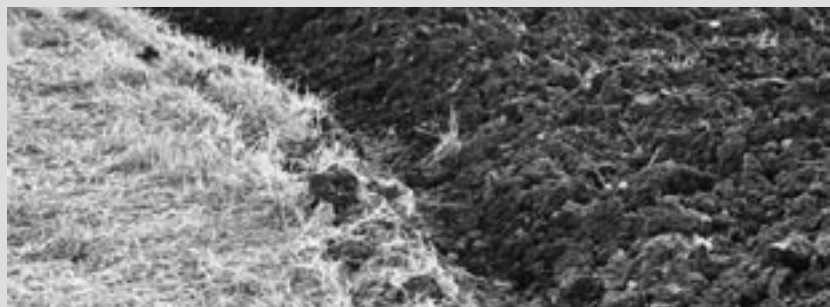
The definition of a social project requires the participation of the population; both civil society and politicians need to commit themselves further on the issue and work together, in understanding and respect for each other's functions and authority. In order to define a social project, the population should first be informed of the reasons why they are being consulted so that they feel empowered to take part in the design and implementation of the project. They should also learn how far they can go into the decision-making process and how much they can influence it. The project to develop must be a long-term one as the idea of sustainable development involves the choice for a long-term perspective. This means maintaining the defined project and working for it even if governments and key actors change, which involves a long-term commitment.

To do so, we need to provide a better knowledge of the already-existing structures and recognise the civil society representatives (trade unions, youth structures, and other types of organisations, which are structured and function in a democratic way) so that a wider involvement and a wider recognition is reached. For instance, Agenda 21 is a good example of participation towards sustainable development in that it relies on the implication of all citizens in the design and implementation of programs, no matter how small the communities are. At a higher level, we have seen the work done by the preparation group for the Johannesburg summit, a process

meant to be bottom-up, which surely has a possibility of going further after the actual event takes place. At the European level, we can also refer to the White Paper on European Governance, which underlines the need to bring Europe closer to its citizens by actively involving them.

The recognition of civil society organisations implies both being given the floor along all the steps related to the project but also taking it and contributing qualitatively to development. As a Christian rural youth organisation we have a role to play and we must be ready to use the opportunities provided to us or create our own space to make our contributions to sustainable development. We have a lot to say concerning rural development and due to our nature, we must be ready to make the link from the local to the international dimension. This implies starting from the local level and building up, so that we can reach a global perspective. MIJARC stands for the idea of acting locally and thinking globally, so that our actions, which are rooted in the local communities, can have effects in a global context. Moreover it is in our hands to help rural youth gain the new mentality we have previously referred to through training and education for our members, who can have an influence in the creation of sustainable development projects in their local communities.

To develop political will, we need to first reflect in order to set the basis of a project, which will need evaluation and renewal on an on-going basis. This project should leave the doors open to the creation of spaces where more and more actors can become involved. But before starting with it, there's a need to raise awareness on this new perspective to allow society to discover there is a possibility to do something and stop seeing political concerns as too far away and completely divorced from their own everyday reality. An element that can surely contribute to the motivation and involvement of the population is the promotion of transparency at all levels. For instance, if we take the European Union, the WTO, etc, we feel them to be too complicated to even attempt to understand and too removed from everyday concerns. At the end, we come to think that the way they are ruled is not transparent enough for the grassroots to understand or try to do something about it. To us, transparency means informing people clearly about what is being done while taking into account the needs of the population in the definition of policies and initiatives. Furthermore, it would be desirable to identify mechanisms of evaluation and follow-up to measure the impact of economic, social, and agricultural policies and of local policies on sustainable development.



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2. Economy

In the previous point, we have already referred to the fact that existing policies are not transparent enough. If we take economic policies, it is easy to realise that they are detached from environmental preservation and the struggle against exclusion and poverty. In a word, these policies are based on growth (which implies quantity) rather than development (which implies quality and equity). Speaking about growth implies placing human beings at the service of economic interests that rely on the indiscriminate exploitation of

and individualism are ruling over social justice day after day. The fact that big international institutions, which are influenced by big companies, are defining policies that do not take into account the needs of the population exacts a high cost for the most disadvantaged sectors of the population. The new social project we have referred to previously stands for the promotion of a social and solidarity-based economy. Such economic principles are linked to the idea of sustainable development, in that it relies on the creation of

to these services so as to satisfy their basic needs (water, food sovereignty, health, education ...). The World Social Forum in Porto Alegre is a potential process for the further definition of concepts that make another world possible.

In MIJARC, we have the opportunity to promote the principles of co-operation and solidarity through exchanges and long-term partnerships. These enable us to build a common approach both in Europe and in co-operation with the South, such as fair trade projects with our partners in other countries.

We also take a stand in the fight against poverty. For instance, we demand that the reconfirmed Rio agreement that industrialised countries should give 0.7% of their gross national product in support of development has to be fulfilled. The UN conference conclusion to increase the development budget to 0.33% is not sufficient. Concrete plans to increase the budget for development work are necessary. Along the same lines we also stand for the cancellation of the external debt, even if that is not sufficient, as it does not change the type of relationships imposed by the North to the South, and which in our eyes is more than an economic matter. This also has to do with a resource and a human debt as we have exploited both for our own sake, forgetting about the detrimental effects such actions would have. The North has dispossessed the South of its human resources through slavery and of its natural resources by taking and using them as raw materials for their own interests through the centuries.



resources, while the idea of development involves placing them at the centre of a process aimed at providing an answer to their fundamental needs and ensuring their well-being.

Sadly enough, we are witnesses to the way economic policies are moving further away from human rights. The recent Conference on AIDS that took place in Barcelona in June stressed the fact that medical treatment is unavailable because of economic reasons. We can also refer to the disappearance of local micro-economies that prevent rural communities from developing autonomously. They are all examples of how competence

partnerships, in solidarity and co-operation with those who are near as well as those who live further away from us.

We demand the subordination of the WTO rules to the principles of the UN regarding the protection of ecosystems, the fundamental rights of employment as defined by the ILO and the commitments taken in multilateral agreements concerning the environment. The WTO's Multilateral Agreement on Trade and Services must be questioned, prevented from pushing the privatisation of essential services, and forced to guarantee that the most vulnerable sections of the population will have access

3. Spatial development

It is not possible to disconnect the use of the land (natural, agricultural and rural, or urban spaces), the distribution of activities (housing, trade, production, etc.) and infrastructures. In a globalising context, local development gains more and more importance. The implementation of local Agenda 21 procedures in all regions should enable the mobilisation of all actors towards the strategic objectives of sustainable development. Such projects must be based on the valuation of all the patrimonial assets and the resources of each state. The use of sustainable development indicators adapted to each context should enable the measurement of the evolution of each community. If the question of local development is not enriched by the concept of sustainable development, it may end up by being simply understood as a methodology. Moreover, it is not just a matter of establishing links between the local and the global level; sustainable development also consists in ensuring territorial solidarity between nearby spaces (city and village, neighbouring regions, countries ...)

The concern and work for spatial development could be a major

contribution of rural areas towards arresting the growing imbalance. The fact that a huge proportion of the population is concentrated in reduced urban areas should not mean that the rest are forgotten and that political efforts should not concentrate there as well. We would not like to see rural areas as a place where poverty concentrates little by little: there is a need for fairer distribution of resources. The population living in poverty, especially women and children, must be provided with – for survival needs – resources such as water, land, education and health care. The right to food sovereignty has to be guaranteed. The socio-economic sustainability of millions of disadvantaged human beings across the planet requires autonomous local development, i.e. development for and with the local populations of the South.

As an example of growing disadvantage, we would like to draw attention to the privatisation of public services. This privatisation be paid for by those who live in the most isolated areas, who will see more and more services withdrawn, and who will therefore feel forced to look for services in other regions. This search will increase

regional competition and diminish solidarity, or in the worst cases will force the population to migrate to bigger concentrations where those services are available. It would be more appropriate to find all services nearby. Like this, the population would feel encouraged to stay and develop their communities instead of migrating to urban areas or the Northern countries.

In Southern countries there is also a trend towards migration to either bigger concentrations in their own countries or even to the North. We must not forget the fact that about 800 million people in the world are living in poverty and hunger and that the majority of them live in rural areas. We believe that everyone (and especially women and children, who are those most affected by poverty) has the right to access to the basic services: health, education, employment, nutrition, etc. If we do not contribute to the creation of the conditions for local populations to stay and develop their own communities, we will only contribute to a loss of resources at all levels: educated people migrating, young people moving to urban concentrations, restricted access to the land, etc ...

4. Agriculture

In the present system, we see how some countries believe they have the right and the role to feed the whole world – which leads to a political position that promotes the non-stop exploitation of the land and resources, and a solid exports policy. This has completely negative consequences both for the North and the South. While in the former many farmers have

to stop their activity because they cannot fulfil the expectations and produce the required quantities to have access to subsidies or enter the competitive market, the latter cannot develop because of lack of resources and competition with the deflated prices of subsidised imported products or those produced by intensive agricultural methods. Moreover, farm subsidies

tend to account for quantity rather than quality, which leads to a concentration of land in the hands of a few, preventing the establishment of small producers. Moreover, the subsidies tend to finance a certain kind of production, which has led to specialisation in single crops that threaten both the autonomous development of local communities and the preservation

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of the environment and existing resources. To go a step further in this direction, it is also necessary that national governments put an end to export subsidies to guarantee the right to food sovereignty.

We believe in the right of all communities to feed themselves and to define their own food policies. That is the principle of food sovereignty. What stands behind this idea is the right to self-sufficiency and autonomy, the preservation of the environment, and the ability to subsist out of the existing resources without exploiting them further than required. To fulfil this demand, it is necessary to work on the reform of the WTO in order to ensure the conditions for equal participation for Northern and Southern countries. To illustrate this issue we would like to refer to the problem of water shortage, which has turned into an issue that demands further reflection and co-operation. To finish this point, it is worth insisting on the need to develop a new system with a long-term perspective which enables quality production and alternative choices for production methods which preserve the environment and keep a role for producers as actors in local development.

5. Energy

In the previous chapter we referred to the non-stop exploitation of land and natural resources for agriculture. Furthermore, we want to refer to energy consumption, which also follows the same tendency. In this sense, we need to react in two parallel ways. First of all, we need to reduce consumption to stop the growing pollution in different areas: we need transport policies to regulate the expansion of the different means

of transport in accordance with land settlement and use as well as the promotion of more ecological alternatives. The same principle can apply to industry settlement, which is growing outside the cities and consequently affecting the rural world, in the sense that many pieces of land are being sacrificed for the sake of an on-going growth of industrial capacity.

Finally, there should be stricter regulations on waste of

resources by industry and more campaigns to raise awareness about the need to save energy in private homes. In this sense, there is a need to find better ways to manage waste and its destruction or recycling, giving consideration to the whole population. We also demand the ratification and implementation of multilateral agreements concerning the protection of the environment (biodiversity, climate,



waste, depopulation ...) and support for the legislative and judicial frameworks regarding the responsibilities of companies and public institutions to implement these measures.

Alternative types of energy coming from less polluting sources should enter the scene. So far, we have seen how nuclear energy has been defined by some as sustainable. However, we cannot agree with this idea. If we take the definition of sustainable development, we can easily see that the use of nuclear energy does not fit with that concept and is irresponsible towards coming generations. Nowhere in the world has a safe solution been discovered with regard to the disposal of nuclear waste.

There is a need to extend investigation and experimentation and to finance projects that deal with the possibilities of using wind power, solar power, bio mass technologies, etc in order to achieve a more sustainable and fairer distribution of resources and a reduction of pollution in the long run. As far as agriculture is concerned, farmers could also have a role as partners in the production of regenerative energetic resources (for instance concerning transport or the insulation of housing facilities), thus increasing employment possibilities and economic and regional development. At the same time, such projects require a huge change to find a balance between alternative types of energy and the ones we already know and also a strong

political will to promote them and stop serving the interests of big companies. We must not forget that the use of regenerative sources of energy can contribute successfully to the protection of the climate.

Finally, we stand for a true commitment of national governments towards the Kyoto protocol. We cannot go on with the logic that if a state has enough resources to pay, it can get away from its responsibilities. Dioxide carbon emissions have to be reduced in order to prevent global warming from increasing further. Pollution has to be stopped from growing, which means there has to be a reduction of polluting emissions, but also a search for alternative sources through the implementation of structural changes.

6. Education and participation

A responsible and solidarity-focused world will not be possible if people are not able to analyse the consequences of their actions on the world surrounding them. This must be implemented from childhood through compulsory and free education.

At the beginning of this chapter, stress was put on the need for a change of mentality. To us, this change can mainly be achieved through education. Education should reflect the issues we have raised so far, and the system should also be adapted in order to include new learning curricula that give a prominent place to education on values, including the principles of co-operation, solidarity, and democracy – which are closely linked to the idea of sustainable development.

Education itself is a universal value, and consequently access to it should also be universal. Every



human being should be granted the right to receive quality education and training. With this, we want to draw on the idea of education as an ubiquitous public service, which is deeply connected to the principles of sustainable development. Without education,

it is not possible to allow human beings to develop their own ideas and projects, nor to raise awareness on the need to get involved in the definition of new social goals and long-lasting projects to reach a sustainable future. Special efforts must be made in the coun-

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tries of the South, where we see how young children, especially girls, are denied equal access to education, which poses a threat to their future development.

Moreover, education should be provided on a lifelong basis. As has been alluded to before, education must be a means to allow all human beings to acquire the capacities and skills necessary to understand the world and its mechanisms, to take positions through the formulation of opinions, and to act with long-lasting commitment. We have to learn to understand at all levels, from the local to the global; it is not enough to simply pile up knowledge. In other words, there is a

need to humanise knowledge and develop a pedagogical itinerary that relies on schools being open to the local reality and the world, insofar as it provides the knowledge to understand it and influence it.

As a youth organisation it is our role to contribute to the education of each one of our members and other people living in the communities where we are active. The organisation of seminars and exchanges is one of the best tools we have in order to train and empower multipliers that can go back to their local groups and share their knowledge in order to create projects to improve the local communities.

Conclusion

With this paper we hope to open the debate inside our member movements and also externally, towards our partners and the institutions. As we have said throughout the document, we hope to contribute to the Johannesburg reflections and at the same time develop ideas and projects that contribute to the achievement of a sustainable society with the involvement of all actors. Striving for social justice and the well being of all human beings is a serious matter and efforts need to be made in different directions: political will and education, agriculture and spatial development, and energy and economy are arenas where we would like to contribute and also see true commitment from the institutions.

The emergence of complexity in relation to sustainable development forces us to adapt our culture, our way of thinking about our problems and consequently

our way of responding to them. The choice for sustainable development is a political one, coming from all sectors of society. We are called to take up this choice as individuals and as part of society

as well. Along with NGOs, social movements and civil society organisations, MIJARC wants to contribute to this huge challenge in order to live together with all humankind.



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