

Jane Goodall, United Kingdom and Robert R. Sassor, USA. A thematic essay which speaks to Principle 2 on caring for the community of life with understanding, compassion, and love

Our World's Youth: Taking Compassionate Action for a Better Tomorrow



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Jane Goodall's landmark study of chimpanzees became the foundation of future primatological research and redefined the relationship between humans and animals. *The Chimpanzees of Gombe: Patterns of Behavior* is the definitive scientific work on chimpanzees and is the culmination of her scientific career. In 1977, Goodall established the Jane Goodall Institute, which establishes innovative, community-centered conservation and development programs in Africa, and the Roots & Shoots education program that has 6,000 groups in more than 87 countries. Dr. Goodall travels an average 300 days per year, speaking about the threats facing chimpanzees, other environmental crises, and her reasons for hope that humankind will solve the problems it has imposed on Earth. Goodall's scores of honors include the Medal of Tanzania, the National Geographic Society's Hubbard Medal, Japan's Kyoto Prize, and the Gandhi/King Award for Nonviolence. In 2004, at a ceremony at Buckingham Palace, Prince Charles invested Dr. Goodall as a Dame of the British Empire, the female equivalent of knighthood.



Robert Sassor is an active advocate for social, economic and environmental justice. As a student at Willamette University, Rob began a chapter of Roots & Shoots to introduce service-learning and environmental education programs to the University and local community. He co-founded the Roots & Shoots College Leadership Council and has remained active in the program on the local and national levels. He is the Special Projects Coordinator at the Jane Goodall Institute in Arlington, Virginia. He intends to dedicate his career to bringing forth change in the lives of the world's poorest, and to committing himself to helping realize the vision of a world free from poverty.

I have three grandchildren. When I see how we have damaged this planet since I was their age, I feel deep shame. Our society has become one that makes decisions based on how they will effect the next shareholders' meeting and neglects to address how those decisions will effect the next generation. Whereas, traditionally, many indigenous people made major decisions based on how they would effect their tribes seven generations in the future.

The dangerous consequences of this shortsightedness are only just beginning to play out as our streams, oceans, land, and air become polluted; our food grown with poisonous chemicals; habitats destroyed; species wiped out; and our world's precious resources – trees, land, water, and oil – consumed at reckless rates.

The goal of Roots & Shoots – the Jane Goodall Institute's global program for youth – is to implement positive change through "knowledge, compassion, and action." Roots & Shoots groups, many of whom incorporate the Earth Charter into their activities and classroom curricula, therefore understand the power of the Earth Charter's call to "care for the community of life with understanding, compassion, and love." These words from Principle 2 are compelling – and ones we all must live by if this amazing world of ours is to be saved.

In keeping with the Earth Charter's mission, Roots & Shoots groups are working to improve things for the environment, animals, and their own communities through acts of compassion and understanding. The projects are designed and implemented by the students and reflect the diversity and imagination of our world's youth. In Africa, for example, many groups maintain tree nurseries and distribute seedlings to schools that are otherwise surrounded by sun-baked, packed earth. As the trees grow, it is possible for grasses to survive in the shade below them. School yards are greening, as I write; the soil erosion that once threatened the classrooms is being controlled, and some students grow indigenous fruit trees that help provide much needed fresh food for the pupils.

There are so many projects and so many students who are making them happen. Kids are composting with worms, caring for

local parks and highways, and mulching Christmas trees. They are campaigning, always without violence, against the use of synthetic chemicals in food; the feeding of growth hormones and antibiotics, as prophylaxis, to livestock *and the barbaric conditions in which they are typically raised*; the use of pesticides, herbicides, and chemical fertilizers on golf courses, parks, and neighborhood lawns; the use of Styrofoam in school lunch boxes – and everywhere else.

Roots & Shoots students are also promoting the use of renewable resources. A group in Tanzania introduced rice husks as a substitute to precious firewood used in a local brick making business. After less than a year, about seventy percent of the community had switched to rice husks as well, thereby slowing deforestation in the region.

Countless animals and their environments are benefiting from the efforts of children around the world. Students are studying a variety of creatures, from house sparrows to salamanders. They research endangered species and help organizations that are trying to protect them. Students in Salem, Oregon, raise money so that shepherds in the Himalayas can build strong fences around their sheep at night, preventing the endangered Snow Leopards from preying on their livestock and, if caught, getting killed.

Other kids are working to save a variety of insect, such as the Monarch butterfly, threatened along its migratory route by deforestation and the use of pesticides, and the California Cavity Bee, endangered by the introduction of exotic species. There are Roots & Shoots groups that are devoting a great deal of passion to helping to protect sea turtles in India, Israel, America, and Costa Rica; the highly endangered Vancouver Island marmot in Canada, and the Channel Island fox in California. In Beijing, several groups are working to raise awareness about the Yangtse River dolphin. And so many more.

During my travels, I also meet Roots & Shoots students around the world who understand the importance of building bridges between communities. In the Middle East, 350 Roots & Shoots students from Israel and Palestine gathered to hold a parade for peace. In war-torn Kosovo, students flew giant, hand-made doves of peace along the bridge connecting Serbia and Albania. The energy and enthusiasm of these students are my hope for the future. Their efforts are making this a more peaceful world for us all.

The world's youth are embracing the challenges of the Earth Charter. Students are working every day to make this a more peaceful and sustainable world, and recognize the need to supplement their curriculum with service learning programs that reflect the goals that Roots & Shoots and the Earth Charter share. These students see beyond the boundaries of their local community and – through recycling programs, city clean-ups, book drives, and hands-on youth education programs – are

playing a critical role in shaping the sustainable practices in their hometowns and beyond.

It is time for us to heed their call. The future of our planet depends not only on the vision of our youth but on the collective actions of all of us to make that vision a reality. Our youth are aware of the challenges that our world is facing and are providing the informed and compassionate leadership it will take to overcome them. Let us follow their lead and do what we can to make this world a better place for all living things. ●