

Dumisani Nyoni, Zimbabwe and Ismail Serageldin, Egypt. A project descriptive essay on equitable employment for the future as it relates to Principle 10

Youth Employment: A Global Priority for Sustainability, Peace, and Prosperity



Dumisani Nyoni is driven by a passion for poverty eradication and the realization that the causes of poverty are multi-dimensional. He believes the Earth

Charter offers a framework which helps to heal the wounds that current systems and patterns of human life are creating. In 2000, Dumisani launched the Earth Charter Youth Initiative from the Secretariat of the Earth Charter Initiative in San Jose, Costa Rica. Through hosting workshops and giving speeches, presentations, seminars, and writing, Dumisani has incorporated the Earth Charter as a tool used in connecting and inspiring youth around the world. Following the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States, Dumisani and friends coordinated a youth dialogue in Boston using the Earth Charter as a reflection piece to bridge divides and create constructive responses to the shocks of these events. He helped to incorporate the Earth Charter in the Youth Employment Summit Campaign during his tenure as its Youth Coordinator.



Ismail Serageldin is Director of the Library of Alexandria and chairs the Board of Directors for each of its affiliated research institutes and museums. He is also

Distinguished Professor at Wageningen University in The Netherlands. He serves as Chair and Member of a number of advisory committees for academic, research, scientific and international institutions and civil society efforts which includes the Intitut d'Egypte

(Egyptian Academy of Science), TWAS (Third World Academy of Sciences), the Indian National Academy of Agricultural Sciences, and the European Academy of Sciences and Arts. Dr. Serageldin has also served in a number of capacities at the World Bank, including as Vice President for Environmentally and Socially Sustainable Development (1992-1998), and for Special Programs (1998-2000). He has published over fifty books and monographs and over two hundred papers on a variety of topics including biotechnology, rural development, sustainability, and the value of science to society.

A young man in the crowded neighborhood of Cairo, Egypt, or in the seemingly empty streets of Bulawayo in Zimbabwe asks the same question every day, "Where can I find a job, or any means that will enable me to make a living, gain some respect, and contribute to the well-being of my family?" The inability to afford electricity for domestic use, the proper medical attention, or decent meals on a regular basis stirs up an intense frustration within him. That frustration turns to an anger that somehow must be expressed and released. Where does he direct it? What does this mean for those around him in his community? What does this mean for a planet where billions of other youth in thousands of cities and settlements share that reality?

According to UN statistics, there are presently over three billion people on the

planet living on less than \$2 USD per day, and poverty continues to escalate. In many countries, especially in the developing world, half of those people are under the age of twenty-four. In almost all countries, improvements in living standards have been minimal and reflect no substantial change in the lives of the vast majority. In at least twenty countries, conditions are worsening considerably. The number of young people globally is the largest that the planet has ever had.

At present, more than fifty percent of the population is under the age of twenty-five, or just over three billion individuals are youth or children. Young people alone, between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four, exceed 1.3 billion! This means that approximately one person in five is between the age of fifteen and twenty-four years, or seventeen percent of the world's population can be considered to be "youth." The implications for instability represented by this overall scenario are alarming and likely to continue.

The on-going challenge is that of meeting the needs of people around the world, ensuring economic development and rights to livelihoods, and at the same time, safe-guarding the planet from over consumption and the sheer depletion of its resources. A fundamental question that must be answered asks, "How we can eradicate poverty and its associated ills and at the same time protect the ability of future generations to have productive and sustainable livelihoods?"

A shift is required in the way in which livelihoods are generated—and a change in economic organizations is needed. In the vision of the Earth Charter, humanity is challenged to “ensure that economic activities and institutions at all levels promote human development in an equitable and sustainable manner” (Principle 10). As stewards of our Earth’s natural resources, and as a community that recognizes the interdependence of living organisms and believes in the equality of people everywhere, we have a responsibility to design institutions that will realize such equality and sustainability.

Unrestrained economic growth alone will not solve the deep and complex problems caused by poverty and unemployment. Our whole approach to the challenge of sustainable development and wealth creation must change. People need to be at the center of the strategies, policies, and initiatives that are developed. Opportunities need to be created for people to generate healthy incomes and to build safe communities. Furthermore, the definition of resources used in this struggle must be expanded. Youth must be recognized as key players in this effort—their numbers alone justify this, as does their productive potential. When more than fifty percent of the world’s brainpower, energy, and labor force is left untapped to solve the problems we are faced with, is that not the greatest loss we can ever suffer?

The Earth Charter calls for all peoples to “honor and support the young people of our communities, enabling them to fulfill their essential role in creating sustainable societies” (Principle 12.c). Young people have a greater stake in seeing the establishment of a more sustainable path to the future. As a generation, youth will be around longer and will have to deal with the consequences of today’s actions and decisions for a long, long time to come. It is in their interests as a collective to address these complex issues, to reverse the impacts of poverty, and to build a more

sustainable society. Therefore, creating employment opportunities for youth through job creation programs, or the promotion of entrepreneurship models, is essential and urgent in giving young people the direct capacity to make a meaningful contribution to the state of the world.

We know that it is possible to create livelihood opportunities that do not harm the environment or rely on the perpetuation of the current unequal relationship that humanity has with the planet. Opportunities abound to use natural resources to build sustainable enterprises, meeting the livelihood needs of millions and addressing key development challenges such as providing safe, renewable energy, ensuring clean water, and combating hunger.

In September 2000, the Earth Charter Initiative connected with the Youth Employment Summit Campaign, a project of the Boston-based Education Development Center. Together, a project was developed with the support of the Global Environment Facility and the World Bank focusing on the “promotion of youth-led enterprises in off-grid renewable energy.” The collaboration was inspired by Principles 10 and 12.c of the Earth Charter. Through collaboration with the Earth Charter Initiative, and in launching the multi-year project focusing on creating sustainable livelihoods, the YES Campaign shifted the emphasis of employment creation for youth to include environmental sustainability as a core piece of the framework through which the vision of the global campaign can be executed.

An online database of effective practices in renewable energy has been launched (www.yesweb.org/gkr/), with several publications and newsletters highlighting the importance and offering practical advice and research on generating jobs and promoting entrepreneurial opportunities that also take care of the planet we live on. Most excitingly, five entrepreneurs from Ghana, Malawi,

India, Peru, and Georgia were supported in launching renewable energy enterprises of their own, demonstrating that young people can indeed succeed in addressing economic needs and building sustainable communities.

The Earth Charter is a tool that helps to define important conversations around the globe—challenging the planet now. It enables creative, practical solutions to emerge while at the same time keeping a focus on the essence of sustainable development. The experience of the linkages between the Earth Charter and the YES Campaign tells an important story of the power of connecting the core issues of sustainable community development and economic empowerment, coupled with the energy and passion of the younger generation.

At the center of the spirit of the Earth Charter is the need to establish a global ethic that promotes respect and care for the community of life, ecological integrity, social and economic justice, democracy, non-violence, and peace. A world plagued by poverty, and where over half of its citizens are without opportunities to meet their needs, cannot ever see these principles become common practice. There is a direct linkage between the overall vision of the Earth Charter and the ability for people to make a living. Otherwise, why should anyone bother to willfully protect, defend, or contribute to any system which does not offer them a chance at a healthy life?

We cannot disconnect the security and prosperity of nations across the globe from the crushing challenges that are born out of the depths of poverty and failure to meet the most basic of needs. The future of the planet and of humankind rests on our ability to overcome these daunting challenges. If the future is now, and youth are the future, then now is the time to make youth employment a global priority. ●