

Youth and Children Major Group Opening Statement

Commission on Sustainable Development Intergovernmental Preparatory Meeting
Monday 28 February 2005

Delivered by Matthew Carroll (Woodcraft Folk, UK) on behalf of the CSD Youth Caucus.

Thank you Mr. Chairperson,

The Youth and Children Major Group would like to take this opportunity to highlight essential policies and actions that we believe must feature in the outcome of this year's discussions on water, sanitation and human settlement in the context of sustainable development. Our priorities within each thematic area relate to the issues of education, community participation and enhancement of existing knowledge and resources.

Over the last 10 months, the Youth Caucus has continued its commitment to the implementation of the water, sanitation and human settlement targets, the implementation of the WSSD and the Millenium Development Goals. The Youth Caucus have had the following developments both locally and internationally:

1. The Youth Caucus partnership with the WASH campaign that took place in Senegal last year, linked the WASH Campaign and their national and regional focal points to youth organizations working actively at the grass roots level.
2. The Youth Caucus held an on-line consultation and contributed to the UN Habitat Youth Stragety Process, providing the youth view and concerns in this process.
3. Also, the Youth Caucus, in cooperation with other youth organisation, are writing a report on Youth and the Millenium Development Goals through a participatory process composed of international youth experts on the issues and targets of the MDGs, from around the world

Based on our discussions ten months ago at CSD-12 and our experiences as those directly affected by and involved in the implementation of policies and practices for Sustainable Development, youth and children identify a number of challenges that need to be central considerations for effective policy development:

1. There continues to exist a significant gap in the ability of local youth and community based groups to access funding and technical support. The resources available to youth groups working on these vital issues continue to be scarce at best, and significant effort needs to be put into ensuring that resources and support reach the community-led groups working at the grass-roots level.
2. The current implementation framework focuses resources on expensive, large, highly technical water and sanitation projects rather than low-cost, locally applicable, affordable and available technologies and community management approaches. The key to sustainable development is community empowerment.
3. A lack of integration and involvement of all stake-holders at all levels to address the three thematic areas continues to be a problem, in particular an institutionalised reluctance to the empowerment of children and youth and their initiatives.

4. Finally, Youth continue to see a failure to acknowledge and respect adequate, affordable water, housing and sanitation as fundamental to human rights. We can't stress this enough, and we need you – representatives of governments – to hear us on this point.

But as youth, we're not just here to complain, although I will admit we're good at it. When addressing policy we first turn our attention to the Millennium Development Goals and the targets set at the World Summit on Sustainable Development. The young people of today are not naïve. We are aware that the international community is far from achieving the sustainable development objectives it has set for itself in regards to water, sanitation and human settlements. However, we still believe these objectives are achievable. Therefore, we set forth the following actions, which, if implemented will bring these objectives closer to reality:

(Wake up everyone, this is the bit where the youth want you to listen!)

1. When we're trying to make the goals on water, sanitation and human settlements a reality, we need to adopt a truly participatory approach involving all stakeholders and ensuring good communication and coordination among all actors at all levels. This gets talked about a lot, but we haven't seen it happen yet. In such an approach, the differing interests, responsibilities, and unique capacities of various groups, including children and youth, women and community groups need to be utilised and respected.
2. Implementation and improvement of basic education for all is essential. We need an emphasis on embracing, strengthening and funding peer-to-peer education, transfer of knowledge about indigenous sustainable practices – from which we can all learn so much – and informal, and non-formal, educational structures. Let's use the decade of education for sustainable development as an opportunity to build quality and critical thinking, life skills, water use, hygiene and sanitation into curricula, facilitating a change in the mindset of young people and their communities around the world. That's one way we can change things for the better.
3. Finally we need to see a provision of technical, financial and political support to youth and children for the projects that we have pioneered (indeed there are many) in order to address sustainable development priorities. This support must come in conjunction with mentoring and advisory assistance to build the capacity of young people to effectively manage resources and projects and demonstrate the commitment of government and donors to constructively support grassroots initiatives.

Young people around the world are an amazing and energetic resource we can mobilise to help make the targets on water, sanitation and human settlements a reality. Be we can't do it alone. Every year we send our representatives here to New York, and every year we go away wishing more progress could have been made. Let's work together this week, and in April, to make this year an exception. We need to take bold, often difficult steps to move forward. We need specific targets, specific timetables, and most vitally, we need a rights-based approach.

Young people are here, and will be ready to work with you – members of governments and major groups – in order to make these vital targets a reality.

I thank you Mr Chairperson.