

# **Education for sustainable development and global citizenship**

## **The Finnish Folk High School Association 2004**

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#### **Introduction**

As with national citizenship, proper education is the key to both sustainable development and the creation of positive global citizenship. Sustainable development aims at meeting the needs of today's generations while taking into consideration the rights and needs of future generations. Sustainable development should also include acknowledgement and respect for the positive heritage and legacy of past generations. In order to link the present with the past and future, we need education for sustainable development. In the present global era of interconnections and networks, educating for global citizenship is a natural response to the increasing demand for global consciousness, intercultural understanding and crosscultural competence. Designing and implementing present and future education programmes in the global context does give education a better meaning and concrete framework. Thus, education for life, sustainable development and global citizenship are three interdependent contributors towards the creation of a true global community.

If it can be assumed that all human beings have a right to freedom and equality regardless of where they are born, then global citizenship must be built on the principle of equal rights, opportunities and responsibilities of all citizens without discrimination. The principle of equality is the surest way to develop the sense of individual, local, national and global "belonging. In other words, people need to feel and believe that membership in a global community serves their interests and reflects their various identities and cultures, and future aspirations.

#### **The problem with the present globalisation**

In theory there is general support for both education for sustainable development and global citizenship. This can be seen in various international declarations and documents of the United Nations. The same can also be said about globalisation. As such, the problem is not about globalisation, but what kind of globalisation. For many people around the world, the present globalisation is no more than the globalisation of the interests of powerful countries and their companies.

Therefore, it is easy to confuse the concept of sustainable development of people with sustaining welfare of the big multinational companies. This makes the development and implementation of education for sustainable development and global citizenship a difficult task.

The question is how to educate people in global citizenship and sustainable development in the context of the contemporary politico-economic global system.

#### **The paradox of the present global structure**

While we talk about global village and the international community, the present global system does not represent or serve the interests of the majority of the people of the globe. The consequence of this system can be seen in the fact that:

- Less than 20% of the world population (mostly in the west) controls over 80% of the world's resources while the same minority contributes over 80% of global pollution
- The elite of the 20% control the three most powerful global institutions (WTO, WB, and IMF) that set the agenda for global trade, development and finance, respectively.
- While some 800-1000 million people suffer from acute lack of food, sanitation, and access to basic health care, energy and clean water, people in the USA alone spend 75-100 billion dollars per year to deal with affluenza (sedentary illnesses and obesity) problems. This amount is about double the amount needed to meet the Millennium Goals set by the UN to half the number of starving people, provide access to clean water, health care and energy by 2015.
- Even though, there is enough money and resources, the political vision and leadership is lacking. According to the conclusions of the May 2004 Global Conscience Conference in Copenhagen, a 0.1% tax on international money transactions would provide 241 billion dollars annually.
- If we look at the cost of the war against Iraq, the US has already spent over 100 billion dollars. This amount does not include the killing of 10-13,000 Iraqi civilian lives, and the destruction of property, infrastructure, environment, and cultural heritage.

As educators, it is important to provide the necessary space and opportunities for students to be made aware of this dimension of globalisation and development. This can be done by presenting and analysing the existing global politico-economic structure and how it affects different communities in different countries. What are the links between acute poverty in some parts of the world and too much riches in other parts? The problems of refugees, asylum seekers and global terrorism can be related to perceived global injustice and inequality. These are relevant education topics for both sustainable development and global citizenship.

### **Neither fair nor free**

The architect of the present global system likes to preach open markets and free trade. However, the hard truth is that there is neither free nor fair trade. While the rich north has turned the world into an open market, it does not allow free or fair trade with the south. The north spends 356 billion dollars annually in subsidies for its already rich farmers. On this, it is worth noting that the number of active farmers in the US and the EU are 2% and 4% of the population respectively. In addition to the one billion dollar per day subsidy, the north has erected a wall of trade barriers against agricultural products from the south. In order to make agricultural products cheaper, the north also gives export subsidies for shipping products to the south. Transport tax deduction is another way of making it possible for northern farm products to be dumped in the south.

In teaching about global citizenship and sustainable development, the unfair trade can be related to development aid and corruption, as two important dimensions of globalisation. In any unfair relationship, corruption can hardly be avoided. In terms of environment, unfair trade pushes poor farmers in the south into cocaine cultivation and deforestation, over mining and overgrazing in order to meet the increasing demand for cheaper products. Unfair trade also keeps countries in the south indebted. In the classroom, students can be assigned projects to follow the trails of coffee, tea and coca cola. It would, for instance, be interesting to reflect on and investigate the link between our cell phones and the bloody conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo. BBC reporter, Helen Vesperini, writes that "It is a far cry from the drama of the "No blood on my cell phone" campaign

that a group of NGOs and religious communities have launched in Europe to lobby for an embargo on so called "blood tantalum", the colombo-tantalite ore that comes from the war zones in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo. Tantalum is essential in the manufacture of electrical components known as pinhead capacitors. These regulate voltage and store energy in mobile phones, tens of millions of which have been sold in the past few years". According to the same report, 80% of the tantalum reserve is found in the Congo (BBC World, 1 August, 2001).

## **Population**

It is common to blame lack of development on overpopulation in the majority (third) world. As educators, we could help our students find out the impact of the 1, 2 billion Chinese on the environment compared to, for example, the 300 million Americans. If we assume that the average person in the north consumes the resources of more than 10 people in the south, then maybe we could multiply 300 million by 10 = 3 billion. If we take into consideration the damage caused by overproduction and over consumption in the US and the EU, it is easy to understand that the problem is not lack of food or overpopulation, but lack of distribution. If we reduced the over production in the north and increased incentives to produce more in the south, a better balance would be the result. At the same time, this would reduce the pressure on the environment and global conflicts. As educators who believe in the value of global citizenship and sustainable development, we need to make it possible for our students to understand that people in other parts of the world deserve the same right to life, livelihood, freedom, security and proper education.

## **Global governance and accountability**

Another pillar of sustainable development and global citizenship is democratic and accountable global governance. With the increased information flow and global networks, the continuing denial of democracy, corporate corruption and violations of human rights by the supposedly global leaders has caused a crisis of legitimacy. The recent discovery of widespread torture and human rights abuses by US troops in Iraq and Afghanistan has discredited US claims of bringing freedom, liberty and democracy to that country. For most people around the globe this amounts to a serious crisis of leadership. As educators, it is important to help students learn about such global events, their background, impact and the future implications for global peace, and relations between the people in the North and the Middle East. We should try to either take our students on study tours to places where our countries are deeply involved or bring people from those places to tell about their lives. Of course, it is dangerous in those places, but there are ordinary people living there with their and families.

### **As educators, it is important to take the following into consideration:**

It is vital to educate youngsters that they are part of the whole and that the whole has primacy over its constituent parts. What is good for the whole is likely to be good for the parts. As part of this whole, nature does not belong to us, we belong to her. This implies that we should challenge and question the established paradigm that the earth and its nonhuman inhabitants were created to satisfy human wishes. As Ghandi put it, there is enough for every man's need, but not his greed. The world should not be understood as a pyramid where men put themselves on the top and the rest below them.

In order to achieve this, we need also to challenge the entrenched monotheistic/dualistic world view which is at the very foundation of the zero sum approach to interpersonal, intercommunity and international relations. This approach justifies intolerance and conflict. There is no longer any grey or neutral zone. You are either with or against us.

We also need to rethink and question the self righteous concept of humanity as being inherently good. If we reflect on human actions and compare them with the actions of other creatures, we will be more humble and less arrogant. The genocide against indigenous peoples around the globe, slavery, colonialism, Nazism, Apartheid, Pol Pot's Cambodia, South Sudan, Bosnia and Rwanda were all products of human action. None of the people behind those crimes had horns or spiky tails. As educators, we should make it possible for our students to understand that human beings have the potential for good and bad, peaceful and violent actions. Education for sustainable development and global citizenship should be oriented toward the development of the positive and creative potentials of humanity.

### **Cultural diversity and biological diversity**

Perhaps related to the development of the nation state, the drive for cultural and linguistic homogeneity and national uniformity has been the dream of many political leaders. In post independence Africa, many leaders went to the extent of denying the existence of different ethnic and linguistic groups in their countries. They were simply ashamed to admit that their countries were blessed with rich cultural diversity. If we assume that diversity is part of our rich human heritage, then we can see that ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity is as necessary as the biological diversity of the planet. Because of its one-sidedness, many people see globalisation as synonymous with McDonaldisation and Westernisation.

### **More wealth does not always reduce poverty**

When you hear politicians talk about world hunger, conflicts and other tragedies, you get the impression that the problem is lack of wealth, knowledge and means of knowing. However, the hard reality is that massive accumulation of knowledge, advancement in science, wealth and information has not led to better understanding, empathy or world peace. The mainstream is still operating with the concept of "we the good, versus the evil other" and that the former will prevail over the latter.

### **Conclusion**

Education for sustainable development should enable people to gain relevant and sufficient knowledge, understanding, values and skills to become active citizens both at the local and global levels. Sustainable development requires both individual and collective actions, locally and globally. To develop a popular base, it should aim at improving the quality of life of the majority of people of the world, without damaging the planet for the future. This, it involves interdependence, a sense of global citizenship and awareness of the needs and rights of future generations. It is also important to understanding the limits and the value of development democracy and diversity of ideas, economies and cultures. Actions in one part of the world have implications in other parts. Local and national security is linked with global security.

As educators, we must actively implement education for sustainable development and for global citizenship. Even if we cannot design or decide the official curriculum, in many cases we can design activities, simulation games and role plays, organise global action days, show films, listen to music, organise study tours, teacher and student exchanges and "twin" our schools with schools in other

communities and countries. As an example of what educators can do with their limited power and resources, here is one activity that I have used with great success for the last two years.

### **Activities**

**The aim** of this activity is to make students imagine themselves in the shoes of others.

**The way to do it** is to divide the students into small groups and ask each group to imagine that they have been forced by circumstances to leave their home country and go to, for example, to the Middle East. One can choose any other region.

Fortunately, they have managed to get in and have received the necessary legal permits to settle for good in for example Iran, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Afghanistan or....

The question to each group is what will they do to integrate into the new societies?

The groups should think, reflect, discuss, agree and briefly present in writing and orally their strategy to integrate in their new country and culture as best and as fast as possible.

The criteria of their integration will be measured in terms of cultural values and aspects like:

- Language, are they going to keep using and teaching their children their mother tongue or not
- Beliefs, traditions, religion - are they going to adapt and adjust to the local ways of life, like male superiority, circumcision of men and perhaps women?
- Food and drink habits - are they going to give up eating pork and drinking alcohol in public
- Gender relations - are mothers going to accept and educate their children that men are superior to women
- Dress codes - are men and women going to drop their western outfits in favour of local dress styles and dress codes of conduct
- School - are they going to send their kids to public, religious or western expatriate private schools
- Laws – will they try to understand and respect the local laws and rules regarding women's participation in politics, choice of education and job, freedom of movement
- Mutual expectations - what do they expect from the local society and what do they imagine the local society expects from them, as refugees from Finland

What aspects of your culture/values are you willing to:

- Give up for the sake of integration?
- Hold on to despite everything?