

Full Summary of IFUW online discussion
Women: Building Sustainable Futures,
for us and the generations to come
10 November – 8 December 2008

Welcome at the end of the IFUW discussion: '*Women: Building Sustainable Futures, for us and the generations to come*'.

First of all, thanks for your contributions. You showed a lot of concern and involvement on sustainability and it was a nice job to moderate and summarize the discussion. I hope the discussion will encourage us all to bring a sustainable future a little less far away, directly or indirectly.

In the first week of the discussion we defined sustainable futures.

Your contributions showed that sustainability is more than just an ecological issue. A balanced social and economic development features sustainability also. The ecological, social and economic interests are also linked together. To say it simply, to preserve mankind, we have to preserve earth (and vice versa...?!).

And as many of you said (in your own words) , this balance is not only important for today, but also for tomorrow. In fact, today we have to care about tomorrow.

You're contributions showed furthermore that you not only care about the (lack of) sustainability in your own lives or country, but also (or especially) in the lives or countries of poor or otherwise vulnerable people (because of war, for instance).

From literature also some definitions of sustainability can be derived. A rather famous one comes from the Brundtland report 'Our common Future' (1987); one of you mentioned it already.

Brundtland concludes in this report:

"Sustainable development is a development that meets the needs of the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

And it is build on the - balanced - components: environmental protection, social equity and economic growth. "

Especially firms summarize (the goal of) sustainability by the statement of "**a good balance between the 3 p's: people, planet and profit**".

This discussion fits also well to the IFUW Programme for action for the Triennium 2007-2010, called: 'Women: Agents for Change Building Sustainable Futures'. In line with the definition in the Brundtland report, the IFUW tells in her programme for action, that sustainability is built on a good balance between economic development, social justice and human rights and the protection of and respect for the environment.

Most of you stated also that sustainability is foremost a matter of principles. Principles that are more or less the same for all people and all countries. But the specifics can be different. (And to understand each other specific situation better, it was a good suggestion that we all mention the country or region we are coming from).

In the second week we discussed about the barriers to sustainable futures.

The questions were:

1. What is your greatest concern about sustainability? Why?
2. What or who are the barriers for a sustainable future?
3. Do the barriers for a sustainable future differ between countries, societies, men, women, children or elderly or

Your contributions showed great concern about the future.

Most of your concerns are related to the problem that mankind showed (the last centuries) that it cannot (take) care about earth and people outside their own 'tribe'. Because of consumerism and political, social or religious beliefs and (short term) interests.

This leads to ecological, economic and social disasters and not to a sustainable balance between people, planet and profit at all. We just take too much from mother Earth (and each other). Instead of sharing and caring for what is given to us all, the richest take as much as they can get, no matter what is left for other people or next generations. Women are in this situation quite vulnerable.

Globally spoken, most barriers for a sustainable future seems to be equal (as human behavior is nearly everywhere more or less the same).

But, there are differences in the specifics of the greatest concerns and barriers for a sustainable future, due to differences in wealth, ecological situation, politics, democracy, social and religious beliefs and habits.

This discussion is about sustainable futures for us and generations to come. But, taking your contributions to this discussion into account, the question is 'are there generations to come...?!'

This brought us to the questions of the third week. Time to find some driving forces for a more sustainable future.

Barriers for a sustainable future are to overcome. What do we need to reach a sustainable future? What are the driving forces for sustainable futures? What helps us (most) to reach a sustainable future? Are the driving forces different for different countries, societies etc.? What can education do for a sustainable future?

Discussion questions for week 3:

1. What are driving forces for a sustainable future? Why?
2. Do the driving forces for a sustainable future differ between countries, societies, men, women, children or elderly or
3. Is education a driving force for a sustainable future? Why? How?

From your contributions I extracted that it is very important to understand the barriers for a sustainable future and to be aware of the consequences of our actions and our beliefs. For instance it's important to understand the link between marketing, consumerism, overpopulation and the way people (we!) respond to that.

It was also stated that it is our (instant or short term) need (and greed) what is the problem. We are overusing the resources on and of earth and mankind and the rich are using so much that more or less nothing is left for the poor or generations to come. We have to have more focus on the long term needs. So, solidarity is important. Solidarity between people from different countries (rich and poor) and between mankind and earth. For this we need vision and good leadership.

Peace is an important condition for a sustainable future, some of you showed.

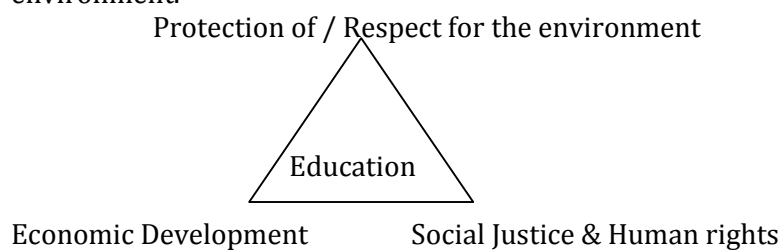
Although the specific driving forces for sustainability differ between countries, societies and groups in societies because of differences in circumstances, politics, beliefs etc. the underlying driving forces are for all the same, I concluded from your contributions.

Some of you called education indeed a 'driving force' others found it more an important 'vehicle' for a sustainable future. But all of you stated that education is very important to reach a more sustainable living on earth (although education is not the only way to reach a sustainable future).

Children are the future, so it is necessary that they learn from the very beginning the importance of sustainability. But we have to realize that formal education at school is not the only way to 'educate' people. People also learn informally in their families, neighborhoods, via the media etc.

Furthermore the situation on sustainability is so urgent, that we cannot wait until the children are responsible adults. So – in the mean time – we have to 'educate' the (present) adults on sustainability as well, especially the politicians and other decision makers like national, regional and local governments and the media (and they all have a responsibility and task to 'educate' the others on sustainability in return).

The role of education on sustainability can be put as follows in the scheme below. As defined in the IFUW Programme for Action for the Triennium 2007-2010 and in line of the definition of the commission lead by Brundtland sustainability is built on a good balance between economic development, social justice and human rights and the protection of and respect for the environment.



Education helps us to reach such a balance. Education can lead to:

- Awareness.
- Understanding and analyzing the problems or situation.
- Find solutions.
- Dissemination of knowledge and experiences.
- Co-operation.
- Moral inspiration and responsibility.
- Practices (about what you know and preach).

Especially IFUW can play a part in the education aspect as a driver or vehicle for sustainability.

This lead us to the questions of the fourth and last week on promoting and practicing sustainable futures.

It's nice to know how we can reach sustainable futures? But what will we in fact do for a sustainable future? What do we do ourselves? What can others do for a sustainable future? And how do we promote sustainable futures? Can the IFUW and/or the NFA's also promote sustainable futures? And if so, how?

Discussion questions for week 4:

1. What will you do yourself for a sustainable future?
2. What have others to do for a sustainable future?
3. What can the IFUW or your NFA do for a sustainable future?

Your answers on the first question showed not only involvement and honesty to the theme, but also a practical mind. And all of you showed that you try to oversee the impact of your lifestyle. One of you said it quite nice. Referring to Gandhiji she said: *'Be the change you want to see in the world'*, and she added that she practices the R's: Reduce, Re-use, Recycle and Refuse.

Most of you gave examples of these R's in your (daily) life to reduce your ecological foot-print. For instance:

- Reduce consumption and save (fossil) energy and other precious resources: ask yourself whether you really need something before buying anything and if so, buy local and fresh products, avoid the use of disposable cups, plates, glasses etc. and use energy-efficient lamps and equipment (or reduce the use of those lamps and equipment at all), save water and paper, travel by bus, metro, bike or walk or car pool. When it is cold, wear warm sweaters! And make more use of sunlight in the daytime (so start earlier and go earlier to bed) or dry your clothes with the warmth of the sun.
- Re-use things like wrapping paper, envelopes and invitation cards.
- Recycle what cannot be used again. So segregate garbage at home (paper, glass), convert bio-degradable waste into manure by composting and recycle equipment (bring them for instance to the second hand shops).
- Refuse to accept plastic packaging and polythene bags and carry your own cloth or jute bag.

Using these 4 R's is not only good for the environment, but also for your wallet / budget and health.

Furthermore, a lot of you answered that you not only try to lead a sustainable life yourself, but that you also try to generate awareness and enthusiasm for a sustainable human and respectful life style and sustainable investments among your colleagues, students, neighbors, friends, (grand)children and other members of the family. A lot of times with success! One of you had a nice motto for the life style she practices and promotes: *'waste not and want not'*.

Some of you devote (also) time to advocate and lobby for sustainability to politicians and decision-makers or raise money for it or sponsors it. Politicians need this pressure to do the right thing considering sustainability (they say themselves...). So make yourself heard!

One of you answered that she assists individual women to claim their rights and to empower them; also in line with the issue of sustainability.

It was also stated that a sustainable future calls for responsibility in all sectors of our livelihoods and a recognition that all sectors are interconnected and intertwined. It's very important that we not only put our energy in helping people or earth after an (ecological) diasaster, but keep our focus on the 'root causes'.

But although it's nice that we put so much effort in practicing and promoting sustainability ourselves, we cannot do this alone. Therefore, what have others to do for a sustainable future (the second question of the fourth week of the discussion)? According to your answers others can do a lot!

You proposed for instance (in short):

- Leaders in industry, politics and public life have to take care for a steady state economy, so not perpetual growth which sets targets we can't reach without plundering the world's resources.
- We need a change in mindset and attitude. Each one of us has to adopt a sustainable lifestyle, so leave the throw away culture.

- Politicians and decision-makers must enforce to built the environmental costs into the prices of products.
- Provide people with simple and practical solutions, which they can easily apply within their own lives.
- Practice what you preach; hopefully others would follow. Show results and that might work. Or in Urdu "I was walking alone towards my destination, people came with me and it became a caravan".
- Sustainability should be mainstreamed in policies and projects.
- A more innovative approach through formal and informal education to ensure good governance and the participation of all.
- Education which help the poor (women), which are the managers of the natural resources at the local community and household.
- Poor economies can adopt responsible approaches in their development efforts, using the information on the mistakes made by the more 'developed' countries.
- Scientists / experts can use their knowledge to come up with (real) green and other sustainable technology and research things that will promote sustainability.
- Stimulate Biomimicry: innovation inspired by nature. Integrating nature's innovations into the planning and designing of buildings, communities and cities worldwide.
- Educate fishermen to fish sustainable, educate children and the community to protect the environment, protect terrestrial land.
- Ask for change and make public bodies accountable for what they are doing to bring about change in our name.
- Those countries, states, communities and people who are "consumerist" can start to re-think about using less and more economically to reduce their ecological footprint. This is URGENT and IMPORTANT because we do not have 3-4 earth's with resources to fulfill our unlimited wants.
- Those in highly polluted countries, esp. women can choose to raise only one or two children to consciously reduce population growth.
- Education as a requirement for a continuous process to be more self aware at all times.
- Regulate the market for a better balance between demand and supply.
- Educate people for sustainable or ecological consumption is to educate about demand to influence supply. So go beyond protection, and give the consumer his/her place so that he/she is no longer a prisoner or a hostage.
- Attain an urgent ecological revolution which involves growing awareness and a new balance in market habits, which have been dominated so far by supply. The focus on demand has multiple consequences for consumers and therefore for society at the following levels:
 - Budget
 - Health (nutrition, living environment, leisure, sport...)
 - Waste and the problem of recycling
 - Lifestyle
 - Choice of profession (the importance of an ecological approach in all subjects and training levels)
 - Education
 - Leisure
- Political ecology implies raising awareness, which can be achieved through education, a tool allowing future citizens to be active, participate and take responsibility for their acts. This education should be part of civic education which is provided for both at European level and at national level. It needs to be taught and to be debated; debate being the core of democracy and it should begin in primary school.
- Carry out a international campaign by targeting three or four major points related to raising awareness of political ecology through education. Education has an impact at every age, in the short, medium and long-term. The other points which affect our fellow citizens are health, consumption and as far as urgent solutions are concerned, fiscal measures and ecological innovation.
- Work together with other international groups.

But can we tell others what to do? One of you said: 'This is for others to decide. Every life is different and we make our contribution as we can from our particular niche.'. That's true. The only point is that, although we express it in different ways, we all take our responsibility for a sustainable future, for us and the generations to come.

Last but not least, what can the IFUW or your NFA do for a sustainable future?

Your suggestions on this last question were as follows (in short):

- Raise the issue of sustainability during (inter)national, regional or local meetings with members.
- IFUW can draw attention to the subject when working on advocacy at UN organizations. Our delegation can put forward our views in the UN.
- Nfa's can do the same within their own countries and lobby for it with other (national) organizations such as umbrella organizations.
- IFUW and its affiliates can hold discussions like this and take up awareness programmes for other women in their countries, states and areas to promote "a sustainable future - the need of the hour".
- Make friends to find out the common interests in terms of education and work together... such as through music, art, study or research and teaching...
- Make greater use of our IFUW connections to share and stimulate best practices in all of these areas. Perhaps discussions like this one are a start. IFUW can provide a platform for sharing and stimulating sustainable practices.
- A discussion forum for generating awareness about the issues faced by the society.
- The IFUW or NFA's need to liaise with other groups working on sustainability, both nationally and internationally; co-operate on presentations, send representatives to meetings; in other words, make these other organizations part of our agenda on sustainability.
- Promote education and discussions on sustainability; it helps to raise the profile of the issues.
- Find new ways to reach people on the subject of sustainability. The best approaches are practical, with a little fun in it, and those showing how we can join with others to make a difference; positive feedback goes a long way.
- Education and discussions on sustainability give rise to more consciousness on the issues involved and recognition of the fact that general issue may be the same, differences in what needs to be done where, is important.
- Get more women involved in raising these issues with governments - local, state and federal as well as UN's various bodies.
- IFUW should continue advocating for women's education and women's participation in leadership.
- IFUW should encourage research and innovation by women (in developing countries) that promote good governance, peace, good policy on environmental stewardship and poverty alleviation in general.
- The conference to be held at Mexico can focus on this theme to have more discussion on this very urgent issue. At this conference (or via a digital) forum, linked to the website of IFUW, we can also share our successes (and failures) on practicing and promoting sustainability.
- Make more use of the knowledge, power and strength of the individual members of IFUW.

Reading all your suggestions on practicing and promoting a sustainable life style I was touched by your involvement and practical perspective.

It was also nice to see that you all realize that it is not only others that have to change for a sustainable future, but that you have to make the first step yourself. And that is not always easy. Furthermore you showed that this issue is a worldwide issue, that needs a worldwide approach.

Maybe it's good that we as (higher educated) WOMEN of the WORLD tell the LEADERS of the WORLD that they have to take their FULL RESPONSIBILITY for a Sustainable Future, for us and the generations to come.

(For instance, between 1-12 December the United Nations Climate Change Conference is taking place in Poland as a preparation of the Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen December 2009).

Last but not least I want to give all participants of the discussion a small (digital) gift. A picture of a sunflower to encourage you to practice and promote sustainable lives, for us and the generations to come.



Thanks for your contribution to the discussion.

To all of you, a happy, peaceful and sustainable New Year!

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