

## International Council of Adult Education Synthesis Paper for Discussion and Advocacy

### Lifelong Learning for Sustainability in a Climate Changing World (\*)

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This paper is about education in a climate-changing world. However, although new learning for a better world is the central theme, it is important to clarify both the current state of global affairs and the underlying causes that have led us here. Accordingly, this paper will consider the ICAE members' contributions on the nature of the climate crisis; poverty, inequality and gender discrimination; the opportunity for 2012 to be about broader system change rather than a narrow discussion of climate change responses; the role of capital, markets, technology and the prospect of a Green Economy. Finally it will conclude with six suggestions on the ICAE's future directions.

#### **Climate and Ecosystem Crises**

Dangerous, human induced climate change is a real phenomenon and is accompanied by a myriad of other drastic ecological issues that threaten the health of the planetary ecosystem. These include examples such as desertification, deforestation, loss of biodiversity, toxification of the oceans, depletion of marine life and a spiraling water and food crisis. When taken collectively they can be characterised as a potentially catastrophic collapse of the ecosystems that have sustained and supported the life of many species on the planet, including human civilisation.

#### **Poverty, Inequality and Development**

The most dramatic impacts of climate change will likely affect the poorest and most vulnerable groups of people. Past decades have seen an increasing inequality in income and consumption between (and within) countries, which can be characterised as the disparity between the Global North and South. The current techno-economic model of development is neither sustainable nor desirable for the future. The ICAE therefore continues to call for the realisation of a new development paradigm that balances the economic, environmental, social and cultural dimensions of community life. Importantly, in addition to increasing development opportunities and support for the Global South, such a framework will also necessitate changes in the production and consumption patterns in the Global North.

#### **Gender and Climate Change**

The effects of climate change are not gender neutral. In the Global South, from disaster-related mortality rates to food security, water collection and informal health care, women will suffer the effects of climate change disproportionately to men. Less time and energy will be available to engage in community activities, decision-making roles, income-generation or to dedicate to the health and education of their children. There is a grave concern that climate change will exacerbate such disadvantages and impede women's movement into leadership and decision making roles.

However women should not be seen as passive victims, but leaders in the orchestration of the kind of holistic changes necessary to address the underlying causes of climate change and environmental destruction. In many cases women's participation in leadership and decision-making roles is constrained by social and cultural factors that do not serve the collective community interests. The ecological crises are therefore an opportunity for transformation in the participation of women and the integration of gender inclusive perspectives in public discourse and policy development.

## **The 2012 Opportunity: System Change not Climate Change**

Climate change is but one symptom of multiple crises, including economic and political, that can be collectively characterised as a civilisational crisis. They require the emergence of new systemic architecture in various fields of human activity including governance, economics, social organisation and cultural worldviews. The transformational possibilities of education will play a fundamental role in the evolution of these domains. The new system must place social and environmental sustainability at the centre of collective aspirations and will require changes in our mindset, behaviours and ingrained gender relations. This emergent system will also require new methodologies of communication, organisation and governance.

### **New Learning for a New World**

As educators, it is our responsibility to develop pedagogy that nourishes the new system through the skills and values it imparts; education that values dialogue, participation and learning through practice. In developing such pedagogy we can draw on many rich and diverse learning traditions from around the world. This kind of pedagogy we support is likely to be taking place when men and women share the sphere of the production and reproduction of life; communities start to develop cooperative systems; families modify their eating habits; boys and girls learn to organize their lives from the perspective of a sustainable future; academics and traditional peoples exchange knowledge and learning; individuals and communities practice a solidarity economy; new conceptual approaches demystify conservative global and political systems; modern sciences and technologies are reviewed according to their sustainability; laws are elaborated by local citizens that consider themselves as a part of the community of life and seek to use local resources and solutions for local problems; peace agreements multiply as part of living well; territorial and environmental management is participatory and transcends geopolitical delimitations.

Learning is a developmental process that can continue over the lifecycle, and accordingly sustainability cannot be approached as a separate subject but must be incorporated into life long learning practices. In addition to good institutional practice, such learning must also take place away from the formal schooling system, in the home, the workplace and other community settings.

### **Capital, Markets, Technology, Sustainable Development and the Green Economy.**

The 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro introduced the language of sustainable development into the mainstream lexicon. However despite some notable examples of good practice, the past two decades have seen an overall worsening of the ecological situation. The ICAE thus looks towards the more recent language of the Green Economy with cautious optimism. Optimism at the prospect of the recognition that the global economic system needs a whole-scale greening, and that social and ecological wellbeing needs to be woven into the fabric of everyday economic activity. Caution at the prospect of another buzz word being filtered through the marketing channels of business as usual and that the 'innovative' market mechanisms and technological fixes will ultimately continue the same unsustainable and unjust practices.

A genuine Green Economy would require open access to knowledge-intensive technologies geared towards restoring natural systems; transitions in consumer lifestyles; massive public investment in green technologies; and address the contradictions between many World Trade Organisation policies and Multilateral Environmental Agreements. We must also recognise that discussion of a new civilisational paradigm can be confronting to many people, and that some of the most powerful industry interests in the world work actively against action, in spite of the overwhelming evidence of the dangers of climate change.

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*(\*) This is the condensed version of a longer paper prepared by independent consultant Julian Waters-Lynch as a summary of the key positions of members of the ICAE based on the Virtual Seminar discussions and the outcomes of the ICAE World Assembly. This paper is meant to be one of ICAE's contribution to the lead up to the 2012 United Nations conference Rio +20.*