

Youth Earth Plan

Version 0.5



A mutually enhancing relationship
between humans and Earth.



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Youth Earth Plan Executive Summary Version 0.5

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We, the youth of today, will soon inherit this planet Earth from our parents and grandparents. We know the Earth we hope to inherit, and have fears about the Earth we seem destined to inherit.¹

To understand the challenges that await us, Our Task (OT) * has spent two years collecting and analyzing some of the most respected and globally-focused future studies and outlook reports for the world's social, economic, resource, and ecological systems. These studies were published by United Nations (UN) agencies, the World Bank (WB), and other respected organizations.²

These studies present a sobering picture of our inheritance. If policies and trends do not change, the world, by the middle of the 21st century, will have over 2 billion more people, with a growing proportion of them living in slum settlements. While poverty is projected to decrease somewhat (assuming rapid economic growth), the resulting demand for energy, food, and other commodities would lead to a peak (and decline) in world oil production, damaging erosion and other land degradation, commercial extinction of most wild fisheries, large increases in the areas of water stress, and large losses of tropical forests. The present trends puts us on a course for global climate disruption, with hundreds of millions of people displaced from flooded coastal areas, threatened by more frequent droughts and floods, and affected by reduced water for drinking and irrigation. Continued emissions of carbon dioxide will hasten the acidification of the oceans, leading

* Our Task is an international network of young adults aged about 15 to 25. OT has members in 15 countries. For further information, see www.OurTask.org.

to the loss of coral reefs and thousands of other species by 2100. The number of diseases and the ease with which they spread is also expected to increase. Overall, the conditions will be conducive to large-scale economic disruption, continued inequities, and increased violence. The prospects become even more troubling when the studies' many unrealistically optimistic assumptions and self-contradictions are taken into account.

The issues of poverty, climate, energy, food, and security are all interlinked in ways that are not adequately addressed by the separate and individual outlook studies. In reality, the current course of our development is the increase in problems in all areas simultaneously. The neglected feedbacks among the problems caused by traditional economic growth are exacerbating food, energy, extinction, problems, climactic disaster, and violence. Human demands on Earth already exceed what Earth can continue to provide, and attempting to address poverty and inequity through traditional economic growth will increase human demands on Earth still further. Already, environmental consequences of growth have brought hardship, suffering, destitution, and even death to millions of people, especially children and women, around the world. Put simply, poverty and injustice must be addressed, but they cannot be successfully addressed by attempting to “grow” the poor to the levels of waste and overconsumption of the rich. Other means must be found to address poverty and injustice.

We know what we need to do. We need to drastically reduce poverty and inequalities globally while simultaneously minimizing our demands on the planet (including on the climatic system), stabilizing our population, and ensuring human rights and security without violence. And we know we need to act with the speed demanded of the global crisis we all face together.

Our fundamental problem is that we are not acting in spite of knowing what we must do. Our culture is not demanding that we act on these planet-level problems quickly and effectively. Our culture has not even sounded an adequate alarm. Our largest, most respected institutions—our international, governmental, spiritual, corporate, educational, scientific, media, and civil institutions—have not even provided an adequate criticism of what we are doing or offered an effective action plan.[†] Instead, these institutions are simply allowing us all to drift along toward ecological disaster and social disorder of planetary proportions. We face a cultural disorder.

The root cause of our situation seems to lie in our cultural values and assumptions and in the aspirations and actions they inspire. Currently much of our global culture sees Earth as a limitless resource for human exploitation, rather than as a system and community of life for which we humans have responsibility to maintain and preserve. Following this exploitation paradigm, we measure progress in terms of Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

[†] The recent *Growth Report* by the prestigious Commission on Growth and Development illustrates this point. Parts 1, 2, and 3 of the Growth Report celebrate and promote traditional economic growth, while part 4 euphemistically describes adverse consequences of growth (including rising food and fuel prices, global warming, inequality, protectionism, global impacts China, India and other rapidly growing economies, and implications of everyone attempting “export led growth”) as “New Global Trends”. See: http://www.growthcommission.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=96&Itemid=169.

While our population growth increases the number of people needing resources, many costs, such as the depletion of a country's natural capital, are written off as "externalities" and left off the national accounts. With this system, we deplete the very resources on which we rely. Under the influence of this exploitation paradigm, we seem to think growth takes priority over sustainable living. Successful change, we believe, must start with a reconsideration of these and related cultural systems and assumptions.

So, Our Task is not making recommendations aimed directly at poverty, climate, energy, food, or security. Instead, Our Task is focusing on how our paradigm of planetary exploitation is supported and sustained by our international, governmental, spiritual, corporate, educational, scientific, media, and civil culture-shaping institutions. We are addressing requests for change to each of our culture-shaping institutions. Through these institutional changes we hope it will be possible to redirect our entire global cultural system away from unsustainable exploitation of Earth and toward a sustainable future.

While we our hope that institutions will act on our suggestions, we recognize that our recommendations are not complete and need input from people more experienced with the individual institutions of the global culture system. We do believe, however, that changes in the values and assumptions of our current global cultural establishments are necessary and urgently needed

Our desire is to begin an intergenerational dialog on how together we can reorganize human affairs to achieve and maintain a mutually enhancing relationship between humans and Earth. Our generation deserves a voice in decisions being made concerning our future. This is our primary request to our parents' and grandparents' generations.

¹ See http://www.ourtask.org/youth_earth_vision.asp.

² See list at http://www.ourtask.org/Youth_Earth_Plan/OutlookSources.pdf.