

Statement by Children & Youth (5 May 2006)

Youth advocate industrial development that ensures the safety of human health and the ecological integrity of our planet.

Industrial Development often contributes to environmental problems, but industries that are aware of their social and environmental responsibility can also be part of the solution.

Small-scale and youth led initiatives, financially supported through micro credit schemes, play a vital role in poverty eradication.

Sustainable Production

Young people around the world are organizing campaigns, projects and businesses in their countries to ensure sustainable production of goods. In Nigeria, there is a small hydro power plant which educates young technicians to establish and maintain hydro power plants. In the Kibera slum of, young people have initiated an income generating project that assembles simple and affordable solar panels.

Young peoples' immediate and long-term health is threatened by certain types of industrial development as a result of unsafe working conditions. Rapid industrial development in developing countries has allowed inadequate labor regulations to go unremedied in informal sectors. This leads to the exploitation and mistreatment of youth. For example, the textile industry and certain agricultural sectors (especially cocoa, cotton, and coffee) exploit young workers. Free the Children, a for-youth, by-youth organization, has been created to address these issues.

Sustainable Consumption

Besides developing sustainable industries through sustainable production, youth can play an important role in awareness-raising of different subjects, such as organic and fairly traded products. Particularly in developed countries, there is a growing youth market for sustainably-produced goods. However, these products are almost always more expensive, and therefore less accessible to young people and to the general population.

It is difficult for youth to take part in industrial development or influence industries directly. As a result, some young people feel that the most effective way to influence unsustainable industries is to refuse to purchase their products. Because youth are the most influential consumer group, North American and European students have run successful boycott campaigns.

Room to Grow

Youth experience obstacles and constraints when they try to advance the implementation of industrial development. The role of young people as innovators and entrepreneurs is often overlooked.

- Young people experience difficulty securing credit, materials, resources, and micro-finance.

- There is a lack of government funded youth employment strategies.
- In many parts of the world, there is a lack of training for business, education and mentorship opportunities, skills and training apprenticeships, internships as well as co-op work placements. These could be supported at low cost by youth-run sustainable businesses and social enterprises. In particular, governments have a special role to play as incubators of youth run-businesses.

In a few years, today's young people will be the leaders in the area of industrial development. However, youth do not intend to wait for the aforementioned obstacles and constraints to be meaningfully addressed – we commit to act now and play a larger role in making industry more sustainable.