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** The views and opinions expressed do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations.

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This paper has been prepared by young people and youth organizations from around the world, who volunteered to participate in the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Youth Caucus in order to submit a well-written and thoroughly researched position paper to the Commission on Sustainable Development.

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Rio Earth Summit made monumental progress in the acknowledgement of young people as part of the global equation for sustainable development. While in 1992, young people accounted for approximately 30% of the world's population, today they account for 50% of the world's population. Many years and resolutions after the adoption of Agenda 21 in 1992, real change in the inclusion of young people's participation in the decisions that affect their communities and their lives is something young people continue to hope for.

2. Today's young people have inherited a world they did not contribute in shaping:

- More than 1 billion people living on less than 1\$ a day – 238 million of them are young people;
- 8,000 people dying every day from AIDS;
- 2,4 billion people lacking access to clean water.

3. The environment is no exception, with young people not allowed to voice their concerns and speak up for themselves and future generations.

4. All over the world, at any given time, there are scores of young people responding to the development challenges of their communities. In spite of their lack of recognition, their message remain the same: Youth want to be involved, and the social, environmental and political imperative of young people's participation will need to be acted on by serious development actors nationally and globally.

5. The reasons for ignoring young people in the global efforts for a sustainable and just world seem irrelevant when: Youth-run programmes have longer-term sustainability by including the next generation; greater inclusion and participation allow for stake and ownership, preventing disengagement and ensuring a safer, more equitable future for all.

6. The opportunity presents itself yet again, at the Commission on Sustainable Development, at its sixteenth meeting. While we battle the scourges of global poverty, climate change and deadly pandemics, let us not forget the role that young people have to play – and have been playing – towards building our collective future.

7. As youth, we have inherited not just the misfortune of a warming planet we did not contribute in shaping, but also the wisdom of societies that have lived in harmony. In preparation for the review year at the sixteenth session, we voice our concerns with the desire to be heard, but we are also ready to hear the stories others are waiting to tell.

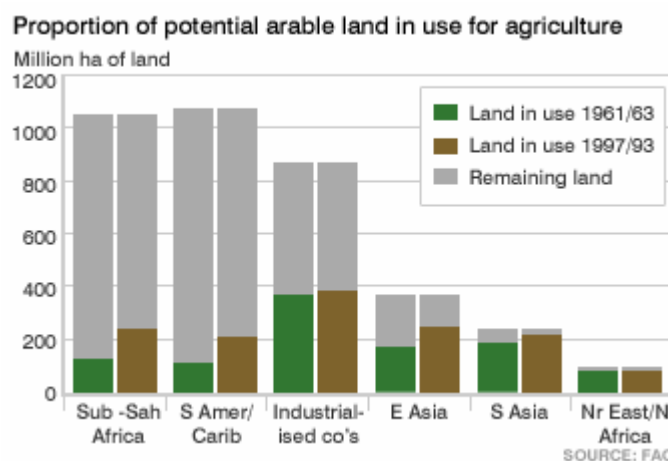
II. AFRICA

A. Agriculture

8. FAO (2003) estimates that more than 70% of total Sub-Saharan Africa population lives in rural areas and largely depends on agriculture for its livelihood. In countries such as in Sub-Saharan Africa the agricultural sector employs 65 percent of the labor force, among which a high percentage of women, children and youth. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the sector employs 58,8% of the total labor force in the rural areas (CEPAL, 2005). Despite that, a mere 4 percent of official development assistance goes to agriculture the most important source of employment in most countries of the region. The youth constitute, on average, one-third of the economically active population of sub-Saharan Africa. Improving labour productivity will depend to a large degree upon an efficient integration of rural youth into agriculture and other rural-based industries.

9. The situation described above points to the urgent need for Africa to develop its agricultural sector. Figure 3 shows that Africa and Latin America are the only continents that still have large amounts of unexploited land. There is also a huge

Figure 3. Potential Available Land for Agriculture.
Source: FAO: BBC News



opportunity to increase agricultural yields without having to increase land acreage. Africa's fertiliser usage is extremely minimal when compared to other continents. Abundant water resources are another asset that is heavily underutilised in Africa. Less than 5% of Sub-Saharan African agriculture is irrigated. Irrigation and increase in fertiliser uptake can greatly improve grain production, increase food security as well as rural incomes.

10. Climate change threatens the success of the agricultural sector and others that rely on ecosystems' capacity to support livelihoods. Most climate change models predict increasing temperatures, decreasing rainfall, and increasing rainfall variability (more erratic and extreme, like the recent flooding that devastated crops in several African nations). Climate change affects agricultural productivity, access to and availability of water, disease prevalence, and rural-urban migration as farms fail and workers seek employment in urban areas. Anticipated regional effects of global climate change, coupled with many of the issues highlighted below, render farm communities and the agriculture sector extremely vulnerable.

11. As we can see, agriculture has a pivotal role to play in many regions of the world and there are many problems plaguing this sector, especially in developing countries, because of the lack of planning and public policies. Some of these problems we have identified below:

- a. Injustice and inequity, which exacerbates widespread poverty and hunger;

- b. Farming has been devalued by manufacturing and a rapidly expanding urban population;
- c. Due to urbanization less importance has been given to agriculture and rural communities, which is reflected in the very low public spending for farming, that at times reaches only 4 percent of total government spending;
- d. Production of ethanol, biofuels and products for exportation may threaten national food security in some countries by prioritizing trade inflows over domestic food needs;
- e. Devastation of forests, monoculture, loss of biodiversity, soil deterioration, shrinking sources of water, excessive use of agrochemicals lead to unsustainable use of natural resources;
- f. Low salaries and lack of benefices for rural workers technological training and assistance and education;
- g. Damage to natural resources, poor information, lack of education and infrastructure often result in food insecurity, premature deaths and mass migration to urban areas in search of a better life.

B. HIV/AIDS

12. The scourge of HIV/AIDS is now becoming a global phenomenon; however Africa has been the most affected continent. The pandemic is reducing productivity, weakening the population's ability to respond and recover from natural shocks, and ultimately killing off the most productive demographic group of the population- '*sowing the seeds of future famines*'¹. HIV/AIDS has a severe impact on human capital, especially the youth in sub-Saharan Africa. **Half of all new infections are in youth ages 15–24.** Nearly 2.5 million youth were infected with HIV in 2001. In Tanzania, the HIV/AIDS epidemic is forcing more and more children and juveniles aged 10-19 into the labour force as the number of adults aged 20 to 35 fell ill or died². The chance to earn income is extremely important to an infected youth facing economic problems, or to a youth supporting a family when parents have fallen sick or died from HIV/AIDS. Only 10% of HIV/AIDS infected people in Africa are able to access Retroviral (ARVs) drugs³. It is also estimated that Sub-Saharan Africa will lose 26% of its agricultural labour force to HIV/AIDS by 2020. The UN further estimates for highly affected countries like Botswana show that HIV/AIDS will actually change the demographic structure of these countries⁴. The most productive age will be reduced and the very old and young will be left responsible for driving economic growth.

13. Current challenges for the fight against HIV/AIDS:

- a. Lack of HIV/AIDS education among African populations, particularly youth under 30 who constitute 50% of new HIV infections;;
- b. Stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS interferes with information-seeking and treatment seeking behaviour;
- c. Lack of access to affordable/free anti-retroviral medication (ARVs) for HIV+ individuals, due to various factors including trade related intellectual property rights (TRIPS), lack of investment in public subsidies for ARVs for HIV+ individuals.

C. Education

14. According to UNESCO (2001) just less than 60% of the African population is literate. Yet education is crucial in development. It enables the population to make good use of agricultural extension information, read and adopt new farm technologies, how to prevent themselves from HIV/AIDS. An educated mother will be in a better position to understand the importance of nutrition for her child. Educating the youth safeguard their future as they are better equipped to engage in economic activities and in gainful employment, while simultaneously reducing crime rates and other non-productive behaviours.

D. Focus Areas

15. Sustainable economic development in Africa can only be achieved through:

- a. Higher investment in primary and secondary education especially for girls to safeguard their future and ensure that they adequately equipped to make economic contributions in the future;
- b. A holistic approach in agricultural investment that links development strategies with climate change adaptation and includes components such as new farm technologies suitable for Africa, improved irrigation and natural resource management, infrastructure and market intermediaries that work for poor farmers in the context of a changing climate;
- c. Combating the HIV/AIDS pandemic by increasing access to health care and awareness education, including providing support to effective peer-led models of HIV education programmes, campaigns aimed at addressing stigma associated with HIV/AIDS, and provision of comprehensive scientific and evidence-based full and accurate information and services on sexual and reproductive health and rights;
- d. Stronger governance from African governments and greater investment from developed countries, in addressing Africa's development and the Millennium Development Goals.

III. AGRICULTURE and LAND

16. There is a need for the recognition of agriculture as a key component in ensuring global food security in international planning and policy-making arenas. The processes of globalisation and ‘modernisation’ have seen mass migration to urban centres which has led to unsustainable living conditions for millions concentrated in informal settlements. At the same time, agriculture and rural development have been largely overlooked as a sector for economic growth. Given the interlinkages between agricultural systems and food security, poverty, health, environmental sustainability and biodiversity, and employment, the conditions and policies affecting this sector are a *fundamental* concern in national development strategy planning.

17. A core element of strategy for sustainable development is the reform of agricultural policies and processes: Food production and agriculture is the world’s single largest source of employment; nearly 70% of the poor in developing countries live in rural areas and depend on agriculture for their livelihoods. Although farming has been devalued by manufacturing and a rapidly expanding urban population, agriculture still represents the fundamental basis of economic and community life for most of the world’s inhabitants. Underlying ethical concepts of equity and justice have an important role in agriculture, whereby a focus on production must not neglect access to food, information and to the means of production.

18. Despite this pivotal role, poverty is often concentrated in rural/agricultural areas. Damage to natural resources, poor information and infrastructure often result in food insecurity, premature deaths and mass migration to urban areas in search of a better life. The farmer must be accorded his or her rightful place in the processes of development and civilization building: as the villages are reconstructed, the cities will follow.

19. Many problems emerge from the neglect of the agricultural sector; many solutions lie in reinvigorating this core human activity.

Emerging issues facing the agricultural sector and land include:

- a. Their inherent injustice and **inequity** which affects rural communities and exacerbates widespread poverty and hunger;
- b. The inherent **unsustainability** of existing farming practices, as driven by economic forces, leading to soil deterioration, decreased productivity, diminishing water sources, disposal of re-usable organic waste, biodiversity and bioenergy as well as increasingly adverse effects of climate change. Sustainable systems of agriculture are key to sustain the planet's ecological and climatic balance;
- c. There is a need to use a more **holistic**, systems view of Agriculture: Agriculture also includes aquaculture, fishery, management of resources, and pastoralism. The

recognition of pastoralism as a viable and necessary form of agriculture may better inform the development and implementation of agriculture interventions and policies;

- d. Financing towards small scale, rural farming is an imperative as a model of decentralization to bring about greater rural access to food sources, the preservation of traditional knowledge and seeds, encouraging high productivity in low productivity areas, and generally increased participation of small producers and improving food security. Such financing also supports human working conditions on farms such that labour is not exploited by the force of low profit margins;
- e. The urbanisation process has seen a trend in decreasing investment in agriculture and rural communities, as reflected in low public spending for farming, that at times reaches only 4 percent of total government spending, and which continues to be taxed at relatively high levels. The lack of technological training and assistance and education is a notable obstacle in moving towards more effective and higher-yielding farming methods;
- f. Access to education and participation of women and youth is essential in this undertaking, since they are most often the main agents of sustainable development and change at the grassroots and the first ones affected by agricultural policies and plans;

- g. The increased use of genetically modified seeds may have serious and adverse impacts on land biodiversity and future capacity of the land to generate food crops;

- h. The need for farmers' control of, and access to, the land which they cultivate, so as to bring about a motivated participation which supports more ecologically sustainable farming practice as well as greater long term economic gains to lift farmers out of poverty.

Case Study: Targeting Increases in Girls Attendance in School

‘Animatrice’ in Mali and Niger

In pastoralist communities in north-eastern Mali and western Niger, Oxfam GB is working with school and community *animatrice*, or ‘female mobilisers’, in order to encourage higher rates of attendance and participation by pastoralist girls in formal schooling. Girls’ participation is hindered by a range of issues, including early marriage, their excessive workloads, popular beliefs that women are inferior to men and less intellectually able, and widespread poverty. The *animatrice* help to tackle some of these issues by working with parents and teachers (mostly male) to change negative attitudes towards girls and schooling, and to reinforce the right to an education. By working in the school and with the teachers, they have helped to make the school environment more friendly to girls, and the walk to school safer.

By linking closely with parents and mobile households, the *animatrice* have helped fathers and mothers to understand the benefits of schooling for their daughters. As relatively well-educated local women in paid employment, the *animatrice* serve as positive examples for local girls. They have also encouraged the participation of women in parents’ associations and women’s groups, where women from otherwise scattered households welcome the opportunity to come together to exchange views and to learn basic literacy.

Case Study: Encouraging Youth to Enter Agriculture in USA

The Nebraska Agricultural Youth Institute (NAYI) and Iowa Agricultural Youth Institute (IAYI) have been running for 36 and 27 years, respectively. Their goal is to educate and enlighten high school students on the importance of agriculture to their states and their nation. They are both four day retreats where students can discuss and learn about agricultural career options and important issues surrounding agriculture. They focus on:

- career development: delegates get acquainted to the many possibilities of careers in agriculture;
- leadership: farm management training and group activities;
- education: specific seminars from farm safety to family farm relations;
- socializing and networking: visiting government agriculture offices, round table discussions with prominent figure, dances, banquets, and awards.

Case Study: Sistema de Aprendizaje Tutorial (SAT) - System for Tutorial Learning (Colombia)

The System has developed a methodology which makes it possible for any individual—youth or adult—from the most remote rural region to have access to a secondary-level education par excellence. The creative manner in which the benefits of learning are shared is complemented by a content which, also in an imaginative manner, organizes the relevant knowledge—much of which is generated through the actions carried out by FUNDAEC in the varied areas of rural development

SAT is an innovative approach, using a curriculum adapted for country life and delivered via NGOs, provides new opportunities for 15,000 in rural Colombia. What has made the method so successful is not only that the curriculum is uniquely formulated for rural students - although that weighs large in its effectiveness. It's also the manner of its presentation. Using a series of highly interactive workbooks, specially trained tutors present the curriculum. The tutors themselves often come from rural areas and they make themselves available on a flexible schedule to meet the needs of rural students.

Taken all together, the program represents an entirely new approach to rural education - and to addressing the problems of rural life in Colombia.

Rather than dividing subjects up into traditional categories, like biology, mathematics and social studies, the SAT curriculum takes an integrated approach that combines all three subjects in, say, a discussion of how insect populations reproduce (biology) exponentially (math) given the right conditions (social studies and ecology). The result is an integrated curriculum that makes sense to campesinos raised in rural areas - and still covers the same subjects without losing any rigor.

In addition, the curriculum contains a strong measure of moral education. The curriculum is organized around the all-important concept of service to the community, for example. It also emphasizes the importance of basic moral values like honesty, trustworthiness and trusteeship, as well as basic ecological principles. In its totality, the result is a curriculum that stimulates people to action.

IV. DROUGHT and DESERTIFICATION

20. About 3,6 billion of the world's 5.2 billion hectares of useful dryland for agriculture has suffered erosion and soil degradation. In more than 100 countries, 1 billion of the 6 billion world's population is affected by drought and desertification, forcing people to leave their farms for jobs in the cities.

21. Desertification is devouring more than 20,000 square miles of land worldwide every year, and affects 74% of the land in North America and more than 2.4 million acres of land (73% of its drylands) in Africa.

22. Climatic changes can trigger drought and desertification processes, but human activities frequently are the proximate cause. Over cultivation exhausts the soil. Deforestation removes trees that hold the soil to the land. Overgrazing of livestock strips the land of grasses. According to a UN study, about 30% of earth's land - including the 70% of dryland - is affected by drought. Every day, about 33,000 people starve to death⁵.

23. Given this scenario, and considering some factors like rising temperatures, growing population, migration patterns and so on, it is imperative to rethink current policies to enhance general understanding and propose actions to counterbalance the effects of such scourges which are often referred to as 'the greatest challenges of our time'. According to the UN CCD⁶, there is a strong need for an engaged dialogue at different levels – and possibly, involving different stakeholders – to combat droughts and desertification, and to create trans-national policies and increased cooperation. As the UN CCD also points out that, at the moment, 'there is a

multiplicity of development and environmental frameworks, each with their own orbit and little interaction’, this may de facto mine the prospective outcomes in the long run, and the easiness of living in the short one.

24. As the ones bearing the brunt, for the most part, are impoverished communities, they need to be taken into consideration when it comes to land management and issues, as this do not necessarily happens in developing countries, where most of the land is in fact owned by the state. The majority of world’s population lives in rural areas (approximately 70%), and as a matter of fact, they are the ones most affected by drought and desertification in general.

25. **As a matter of fact, the followings should be taken into consideration while trying to curb the effects of drought and desertification:**

- a. Engagement of Local Communities – apart from taking productivity and natural resources into consideration, policies aiming at effectively combating droughts and desertification locally should also consider **the needs of current and future generations**, if a real change is to be sought. As many communities face such issues daily, living off the land and cattle (pastoralism), the same can be included in managing lands and resources locally. Also, communities should be empowered to take charge of their future and that of the lands they use, and governments should consider Societal and Economic aspects while drafting policies (for example, pastoralism is an important feature of sub-Saharan economy, and

including pastoralists communities in strategies to curb droughts is an effective way of managing drylands);

- b. Environmental Migration and scale of desertification – as approximately 30% of the earth’s land is affected by droughts and desertification and the trend will not reverse due to increase in temperatures, decrease in rainfalls and a general exploitation of drylands, it is expected that more and **more people will be forced to migrate** to more fertile lands or to places where water abounds. According to many researches on the issue, water – or rather the lack thereof – will be a major force behind migrations in years to come, thus affecting areas that will become overpopulated and may risk facing the same situation of the areas people migrated from;
- c. Local Actions and trans-national/regional cooperation – local actions are the first main steps in combating drought and desertification, and as stated above, should include the main stakeholders – communities experiencing it – to be effective. However, as desertification affects many countries at different latitudes and continents, **many governments decided to draft a common action plan with countries of the same continent**: for example, in Latin America, where desertification affects about 75% of all the drylands, governments have drafted common plans focusing on legislative and institutional frameworks simultaneously addressing environmental degradation, poverty and social inequality at multiple levels. It is also important to note the ongoing relationship between countries

belonging to different regions or continents (South-South cooperation) when it comes to development issues and natural resources management (Latin America/Africa or China/Africa cooperation, for example);

- d. Biodiversity Loss – droughts are in general considered the forerunners of desertification, and as there are very few ways to counterbalance these (including reforestation, rainwater harvesting and, in some cases, desalination) an early response is the best way to curb their devastating effects. Climate change, droughts and desertification are inextricably linked to the loss of biodiversity as **the increase the in the overall temperatures has a major impact on soil and cultivations**. Soil conservation and adequate land management and natural resources programs are therefore of paramount importance to ensure food security and overall well-being (not to mention the continuity of local traditions);
- e. Other major Development Issues – other issues that should be taken into consideration include the overexploitation of drylands and natural resources by governments and corporations, food security, the societal and economic impact of droughts and desertification and the use of GMOs as a panacea to counterbalance the effects of droughts on local populations and famine.

V. RURAL DEVELOPMENT

26. The imperative of Rural Development is underscored by its potential to address major concerns of the world's poor people, alongside strengthening of North-South development cooperation. In essence, a core goal of rural development is poverty reduction or eradication. At the same time, as stated in Agenda21 and the Rio Declaration, rural poverty is a multi-dimensional problem with intersecting factors such as: low incomes, inequalities in access to productive assets, low health education and nutritional status, natural resources degradation, vulnerability to risk, and a lack of political power to address the problem.

27. Recent millennium development indicators have indicated global poverty rates are falling, led by Asia. However, millions more people have become further entrenched in poverty in sub-Saharan Africa, where the poor are getting poorer. Progress has been made in terms of hunger and malnutrition, but slow growth of agricultural output and expanding populations have led to setbacks in some regions. Since 1990, millions more people are chronically hungry in sub-Saharan Africa and in Southern Asia, where half the children under age 5 are malnourished.

28. Further, there is a disjunction between governments' commitments towards sustainable development and the realities of practice on the ground. This presents an increasingly severe depletion of the earth's resources, without corresponding mitigation as well as adaptation efforts for intervention. This impacts most greatly the poor, whose day-to-day subsistence is often directly linked to the natural resources around them.

29. Current education policies may need reviewing, as existing models of teaching curricula, many passed down from colonial masters, are not relevant to the local context of many rural communities. As a result, rural-urban migration, especially among the young, is occurring at an unsustainable rate, which not only saturates city areas and creates slums, but also deprives rural communities of human and intellectual capital with local and/or indigenous knowledge needed to bring about long-term rural development.

30. Furthermore, trade models have an immense potential to bring about equitable development that enables healthy and sustainable growth of rural areas, provide more incentives for rural communities to participate in the development of their local environment, and protect the livelihoods and control of rural trades people and farmers over their land and their lives.

31. These strategies work not only to address problems in rural-urban migration, but work alongside other important strategies such as investing in infrastructure and services in rural communities, which are equally essential for sustainable rural development.

32. In addition, access to safe drinking water has increased, but nearly half the developing world still lacks toilets or other forms of sanitation. 2.6 billion people do not have access to basic sanitation, which continues to impact public health and related costs, human well-being, and broader development in rural areas. National development plans need to integrate strategies to address sanitation; one possible way is to use microcredit models to not only build financial

capital and address youth unemployment, but also the ability of rural communities to lift themselves out of poverty.

33. The need for adaptation becomes increasingly important as climate change poses a new threat to rural development and timely achievement of the MDGs. It is widely accepted that populations in developing countries are among the first to confront the negative effects of warming temperatures, higher sea levels, and erratic rainfall. The most vulnerable groups within these countries, among them the rural poor, women and youth, are least able to adapt. Development will not be sustainable unless it is able to make communities more resilient in the face of a changing climate.

34. As regards to addressing the issue of rural development, Bangladesh provides a case in point: Poverty reduction is the central challenge for Bangladesh. To reduce poverty in the country, it is crucial to develop the rural areas. For this, Bangladesh needs to accelerate the growth of agriculture and non-farm sectors, improve the quality of social services, ensure proper functioning of the rural institutions and expand the rural infrastructure.

35. Despite significant growth potential, several constraints exist, preventing Bangladesh from realizing a sustained and high agricultural growth. In order to efficiently manage the resource base and ensure sustainable exploitation of agronomic potential, the agricultural development strategy should focus on the need to increase agriculture's competitive edge by combining coherent policies, incentives and programs to pursue efficient production practices,

remove supply-side constraints, and provide a supportive macro and trade environment. Additionally, any agricultural development strategy should be closely linked with national measures for adaptation to climate change, including ensuring that investments to improve productivity support adaptation to climate change (among other strategies).

VI. CONCLUSION

36. As Young people we have today a long and uncertain path ahead of us. For our swiftly warming planet and for our own children's children, we have much to fear, at the same time that we have much to hope for. The need to move rapidly towards environmentally and socially sustainable economies, through a just transition, is the challenge of our generation – and time is running out.

37. It is imperative that we participate actively in decision-making processes because of the implication today's decisions on our lives and for our futures. We look forward to continued engagement on issues of agriculture, land, rural development, drought, and desertification before, during and following CSD-16. We wish for our world leaders to live up to the promises that have been made to secure a more just world, and that their actions at the Commission on Sustainable Development may give us hope for a better future.

¹ Quote by James Morris, UN-WFP former Executive Director

² ILO Report on Global Employment Trends 2003

³ United Nations, 2005.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification: An Explanatory Leaflet

⁶ United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification