



***Climate Change: An Intergenerational Approach  
for Young and Old to Navigate an Uncertain Future***

**CONCEPT NOTE**

August 2018

**A Global Challenge for the Human Family**

There may be no greater threat facing today's children, youth, and future generations than climate change (UNICEF 2015). Across the globe, the risks and impacts of climate change, and associated natural disasters, continue to grow while the need for collective action becomes all the more urgent. We are already seeing evidence that worsening natural challenges, such as droughts and floods, and increasing vector born diseases, will lead to secondary "knock on" human challenges, such as widespread migration and civil and political conflict. It is being suggested that human beings have entered the *anthropocene*, an epoch that began when human activities started to have a significant global impact on Earth's geology and ecosystems. At a time when the human family has begun to pose a terminal threat to its own and only home, the global biosphere, our central challenge is to mobilise our own humanity to uncover the best of our collective wisdom and resilience.

*To address these highly complex, multi-systemic challenges and re-imagine possible solutions, we need flexible, wise perspectives, creative approaches, and innovative, collaborative mindsets.*

Today, when most of the debate on climate change solutions is being led by technocratic experts, two great and untapped sources of creative change are the youngest and oldest human generations. Young people, aged 10 – 24, represent 25% percent of the world's population (Population Reference Bureau, 2013), the largest cohort of young people in our collective history. This generation represents an underdeveloped resource to address these global challenges and build more resilient futures (UN, 2015). Furthermore, youth are less habitual problem-solvers, more willing to take risks, early adopters of technology and innovation, and have a creative, vibrant energy that can be harnessed for social change.

In many traditional societies, elders are seen as the social bedrock of age-old wisdom that is drawn upon in restoring human systems of relations with the natural world. In these societies elders are the first to be consulted in times of natural and social stress. This is a very different social norm from that found in most industrial societies, where the elderly are typically assigned to the margins of social discourse on issues like climate innovation.

In the context of solutions to climate change, elders would include not only Indigenous elders with traditional expertise on social and environmental issues, but also elders from



the scientific community and social opinion leaders. It is noteworthy that one of the most prominent of all climate scientists, James Hansen, has long been articulate and active in putting the interests of children right at the front of his publications and advocacy activities, and is in the act of co-authoring with his teen-age granddaughter a book on what the young can do to combat the ravages of climate change.

Even in some industrial societies today there is a trend back toward “conscious eldering”, in which mature adults are encouraged to assume life roles and objectives embracing the good of the community, especially through concerns for the young and social justice. Canada’s own scientist-environmentalist David Suzuki not only represents himself as an elder in his books and speeches, but also encourages seniors everywhere to take on the role of elders in their own societies. There is evidence that this idea is succeeding. An example in practice is the Conscious Elders Network in the U.S., an organization of activist grandparents that, among its various activities, has a project (Elder Climate Action) dedicated to defending children in the face of climate change at both local and national levels. The concept of “elderling” is ripe for fuller transmission from its traditional cultural roots into modern societies, and the issue of climate change and its related threats to the young, in the face of neglect and obstruction by short-sighted adults defending special interests, may be a natural opportunity to expand it.

A natural tie among old and young, starting with the common affection between grandparents and grandchildren, is almost universal. It supports the prospects of open communication among them. In some societies, it is usual for children to take delicate issues with their parents to grandparents or other elders, who then represent the children back to their parents, advocating for the children without exposing them to recriminations.

There is considerable field experience in utilizing this link in community development projects for the protection and well-being of children. For example, bringing young and old together has resulted in innovation to find solutions to intractable problems such as the HIV/AIDS pandemic through programs such as the Stephen Lewis Foundation’s Grandmothers campaign. Another is IICRD’s work in reducing community violence that partners Indigenous elders and youth in leading communities in peaceful solutions. To address the current realities of climate change, and the uncertain future that awaits our and future generations, meaningful and creative processes are needed to harness the innovation of youth with the wisdom of their elders. This offers a path to “learn our way back” to rediscover our human strengths in co-existing with complex natural ecosystems. It is also a path to give renewed voice and social space to the fresh perspective and original ideas of the young as they survey the challenges before them. IICRD proposes that this intergenerational openness is a highly creative dynamic that can both protect young people and prepare them for the mounting challenges of climate change.

## **Innovation**



The International Institute for Child Rights and Development (IICRD), affiliated with Royal Roads University, will host the launch of an intergenerational process of local and global dialogue to find solutions to climate change tentatively entitled, **Climate Change: An Intergenerational Approach for Young and Old to Navigate an Uncertain Future**.

This process will bring together representatives from groups of **young people** working on climate change solutions and **elder adult allies** including Indigenous elders, leaders from the fields of human rights, child protection and development, sustainable development, disaster risk reduction and scientists working on climate change and its related fields.

Goals of the intergenerational dialogue will include:

- Understand how young people are increasingly affected by the risks impacts of climate change and related environmental degradation and disasters
- Identify creative, innovative, and evidence-informed prototypes/solutions
  - Build on existing Old/Young alliances and cultivate new ones, using educational, legal, advocacy, and other approaches to be taken from field experience, such as by IICRD (e.g. YouLead) and David Suzuki Foundation (e.g. Indigenous Elder/Youth programs) in Canada, as well as others from around the world
- Align these efforts with both traditional Indigenous and scientific social and ecological understanding and practice
- Map promising practices
- Find strategic entry points to inform the global human rights, sustainable development, child protection/human development, disaster risk reduction and climate change agendas
- Explore emergent, solution oriented adaptive systems interventions
- Pose emerging questions warranting future research and creative exploration.

## Approach

The thrust of the Intergenerational process is knowledge to action. Hence, while there will be a place for traditional academic research to better understand the impact of climate change and intergenerational partnerships, the primary focus will be on sharing knowledge through non-academic means, such as traditional Indigenous Education processes (as deemed appropriate by Indigenous elders and youth), and Social Lab Innovation format. Deep learning techniques will be engaged, such as Art of Hosting Meaningful Conversations, creative story-telling, art, video, and theatre. Other experiential learning activities will also be explored and applied as participants find useful.

## Purpose and Points of Departure



The central concern and purpose of the intergenerational conversation will be to prepare and support children and youth to confront climate change, opening space for their voices and participation. It is about putting the long-term interests of young people over the short-term interests of adults.

Social justice will be a priority objective, since the most vulnerable people in the world are the youngest and most affected and those who have least contributed to the problem. This means paying special attention to racial, ethnic, and other vulnerable groups who have been largely ignored and sidelined and bringing their interests to the fore.

The discussion will encompass three different kinds of regional environments and the people who inhabit and affect them. These three environments interact to the extent that no one can be considered in isolation, so the emphasis will be on the interplay between them.

- “Wilderness” areas, in which much nature is relatively undisturbed. Many Indigenous groups live in such areas.
- Agricultural rural areas, in which much of the population lives from farming and produces foodstuffs for urban populations.
- Urban areas, which is where most of the world population lives and where the climate change problem is mostly generated and suffered.

The process products will emphasize solutions, including changes in values, strategies, and practice required to achieve sustainability.

### **Key Themes: The Three Essentials of Life**

- **Water** is already widely recognized as an existing problem of climate change that is going to rapidly worsen, with enormously disruptive consequences.
- **Food** harvesting, production, nutritional quality, security and fairness of distribution is already known to be affected by climate change. This will be an increasing area of concern that involves everything from soil care, to farming patterns, to food waste and distribution.
- **Air** quality. Air pollution, which both affects and is affected by climate change, is now one of the biggest causes of early death in the world and is rapidly worsening. Meeting climate change goals and maintaining basic public health depends to a great extent on controlling air pollutants.

### **Two Participant Gatherings: Global Climate Action Summit, San Francisco, September 11-14, and Pender Island, British Columbia, October 12-16, 2018**

A first participant gathering of selected elders and youth is needed to help conceptualize and plan the process. The gathering is planned for **September 11, 2018 as an Affiliated Event at the Global Climate Action Summit, San Francisco, California** (<http://globalclimateactionsummit.org/events/children-and-youth-in-climate-change-an->



[intergenerational-perspective/](#)). A second, follow up gathering is planned for **October 12-16 on Pender Island, British Columbia, Canada**. California and British Columbia are especially auspicious places from which to launch a global intergenerational conversation on climate change. They have a long tradition and established ethos of activism in protecting nature and the environment, including beginning and being shaped and influenced by First Nations. They also have the capacity to cause a highly appropriate fusion of local and internationally respected vision and leadership.

These three messages—**respect for the interrelationship of all nature, top priority for children, and making space for the young and old to help lead**—convey three essential values underpinning an intergenerational conversation on climate change. California and British Columbia provide strong tradition and renowned leadership in each of these areas. They are a natural expression of the State and Province’s culture, and they are now in a position to help change the world toward sustainable long-term values and relationships. This leadership should be represented in the two initial gatherings.

### **Creative Action**

Outputs from the event will include:

- Mapping of promising practices across strategic areas such as: Climate Justice, Climate Education, Food security, Indigenous Partnerships
- Strategic policy briefs, starting with policy recommendations for California and USA, and British Columbia and Canada
- Interdisciplinary academic papers
- Accredited capacity building opportunities for youth leaders
- Strengthened inter-sectoral networks for “bottom up” community lead, intergenerational change

### **Preliminary Partners**

- International Institute for Child Rights and Development (IICRD), Canada
- David Suzuki Foundation
- Raffi Cavoukian and the Centre for Child Honouring
- Elders Advisory Group on Climate Change
- Right to Play International
- Our Children’s Trust, Youth-led climate justice initiative, USA
- Global Child Forum (Hosted by the King and Queen of Sweden)
- Resilience by Design, School of Humanitarian Studies, Royal Roads University
- Ryerson University, School of, Child and Youth Care, Canada
- Chiang Mai University, Mekong Social Research Centre, Thailand
- University of California at Davis, Faculty of Human Ecology, USA
- African Child Policy Forum, Ethiopia
- Shaking The Movers Youth, Landon Pearson Centre, Carleton University
- Climate System Emergency Institute, BC, Canada

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- GreenHeart Education, BC, Canada

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