

Community Visioning and Sustainability ✓

Policy Recommendations for Families and Communities

Draft
for
Suggestions
and
Comments

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Abstract

A community vision is a cooperative expression of a shared world view. Sustainability is referred to as "meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs." Sustainability is currently acquiring the status of a world view that "acknowledges the interrelationships between human economic, social, and political activities with the natural ecosystem." Community visioning and sustainability are introduced here in relation to the family, which is described as "the ideal setting for the transmission of values from one generation to the next."

The purpose of this paper is to begin an ongoing discussion of why families would want to become involved in their community's visioning process. References are made to the recent use of ecological and societal indicators to measure quality of life and progress towards sustainability, and implications of trends associated with two specific indicators-- World Population and Energy Consumption-- are discussed. Specifically, this paper suggests that there are serious implications relating to youth at risk, accelerating demands on Earth's resource systems, inequalities and malnutrition, increasing substitutes for intimate family functions, mobility, the progression from pluralism to skepticism, the emphasis on self-fulfillment through material consumption, and the mass quantity of phony advertising-- the consequences of which have not been sufficiently evaluated by American families

This paper also includes a brief historical overview of sustainability, and a brief survey of national, state, and local sustainability initiatives, particularly as they related to community visioning. In conclusion, elements of family impact assessment are included in a specific policy recommendation statement titled "Community Visioning and Sustainability Resolution Act of 1994." The specific policy recommendations made here are drawn from common themes represented by the initiatives surveyed here, initiatives that include: the Brundtland Commission; the Earth Summit; HCR100-- "Many Neighbors, One Earth"; the President's Council on Sustainable Development; Birginia HJR 653; Olympia Sustainable Community Roundtable; National Sustainability Communications Network; Community Education; CSRI Conferences; Chattanooga Visioning; Intentional Communities; and local currency systems-- and the recommendations are directed to the President's Council on Sustainable Development, State and Local Governments, Sustainability Organizations and Projects throughout the country, and all Community Education State Associations. The recommendations made here can be summed up by referring to one recommendation in particular:

"a request that all families and all other members of every community in the United States participate in the community service of revising their community vision annually, and the community service of incorporating and maintaining practices of sustainability in everyday family life."

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I. Introduction: Definitions and Linkages

In 1987, the United Nations Commission on Environment and Development published the results of 4 years of extensive research and international hearings in a report titled "Our Common Future." By then, consensus among international leaders had become sufficient for the authors (here referred to as the Bruntland Commission) to begin that report by stating "the evidence that nature cannot indefinitely sustain accelerating human demands is too compelling to ignore. The relationship between human activity and the earth's resource base has reached a turning point." (WCED, 1987)

The focus of the Bruntland Commission's report was on developing economic strategies that did not result in environmental degradation. In the report, the author's referred to such strategies as "sustainable development," which they defined as "development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs." (WCED, 1987) Specifically, the Bruntland Commission made three broad policy recommendations:

- 1) that the needs of the future must not be sacrificed to the demands of the present
- 2) that humanity's economic future is linked to the integrity of natural systems
- 3) that protecting the environment is impossible unless we improve the economic prospects of the Earth's poorest peoples

"Communities and regions around the world are now using environmental and societal indicators, defining goals, and setting quantitative targets to assess their quality of life and monitor progress towards ecological and societal sustainability." (Corson, 1994) (I have included a sample list of indicators as "Appendix A.") Urban areas in the United States that are now using such indicators include: Berkeley, CA; Los Angeles, CA; Seattle, WA; Olympia, WA; Chicago, IL; Cambridge, MA; Greenville, SC; Jacksonville, FL; and Sarasota, FL. Two states-- Oregon and Minnesota-- have also developed a system of evaluating quality of life by monitoring specific indicators. A close examination

of these projects involving quality of life and sustainability indicators will illustrate that the concept of "sustainability", more than simply receiving wider use, is adopting the status of a world view-- or, in other words, a "shared model people carry in their minds for perceiving, interpreting, and adapting to their environment." (Spindler, 1977)

Sustainability as a world view has profound implications for families worldwide. A community vision is a cooperative expression of a shared world view. And families can be recognized as "the ideal setting for the transmission of values from one generation to the next." (NGO Committee, 1991) For a community vision to exist that "meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs," it is essential and critical for families in the community to understand why they would want to be involved in their community's visioning process, and for the families to actively participate in working towards realizing the vision they help to create.

It is also critical that for families to understand the community visioning process itself. As a cooperative expression of a shared world view, the community visioning involves as many community members as possible in the continuing process of identifying needs, setting goals, and actively participating in community projects designed to realize the goals. Ideally, a community visioning process will result in creating a sustainable community. Included here is a description of the community visioning process as an example of creating sustainable community:

"Every individual and organization public and private is encouraged to participate: public officials, educators, environmentalists, civic activists, youth, members of the business community, social service providers, architects, planners, health care professionals, teachers, students, and many others. In the process they educate themselves about the assets, needs, strengths, and weaknesses of the community. They articulate their aspirations, categorize and prioritize ideas, develop a consensus, and explore ways to implement goals. Indicators of sustainability are adapted to measure progress and to provide feedback for continual adjustment." (CONCERN, Inc., 1994)

As this example illustrates, the community visioning process focuses on establishing what the communities goals are, how they are going to reach the goals, and how they are going to measure their progress. Two of the most basic indicators of progress towards sustainability are Total World Population and Energy Consumption. Much of the work of sustainability initiatives in the years to come will revolve around bringing these two indicators in line with what Earth's Natural Resource Systems can sustain. In the first section of this paper, I will discuss implications of trends in Total World Population and Energy Consumption for families, here in the US and worldwide.

Sometimes, however, statistics about larger trends are complex, and it is difficult to understand how they relate to everyday family life. So in this introduction, I also cite evidence relating to youth at risk from the following reports. From a study done by the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development in 1990, it was estimated 50% of American adolescent youth are vulnerable to high-risk behavior-- including premature sexual activity, juvenile delinquency, crime, violence, and alcohol and drug abuse. Another report on the need for youth service projects, cited the following evidence:

- 1) a high school dropout rate that persistently stays around 25%
- 2) the highest rate of teenage drug and alcohol abuse among Western nations
- 3) the highest rate of out-of-wedlock births to teenagers in any developed country
(Lewis, 1988)

As commentary, Anne E. Lewis, the author of the report on youth service, suggests: "The real problem is the weakening of institutions and influences that can make broad and deep connections between youth and their community."

The above evidence suggests there are serious problems being experienced by families in the U.S. It is this kind of evidence that contributes to the formation of indicators that propose to measure quality of life and progress towards sustainability. One

indicator used by Sustainable Seattle's project is "% of youth involved in community service." Their report suggests that: "A sustainable society will have well-organized systems for involving youth in communities in many different ways." (Sustainable Seattle, 1993)

My discussion of Total World Population and Energy Consumption will not emphasize technical statistics, but will instead attempt to outline some of the impacts that trends in these areas have had on everyday family life. In this way, I believe the reader will be more prepared to appreciate the second half of this paper, which highlights historical and current initiatives associated with community visioning and sustainability.. Following my survey of such initiatives I will provide a summary, which will include specific policy recommendations relating to community visioning and sustainability that would enhance a variety of family functions in the present context--and therefore improve the likelihood of a good life for families in the future.

The purpose of this paper is to begin an ongoing discussion of why families would want to be involved in their community's visioning process. From such ongoing discussions, I imagine that new family policies will emerge-- from within families as well as from within institutions-- that will consciously contribute to local community visions. My personal hope is that by approaching the process of community visioning in this way, families will discover an increased capacity to contribute to and benefit from the common good-- and that healthier families in sustainable communities will remind us all about how much we really do prefer to be cooperating rather than competing with each other to achieve a larger common goal.

II. Implications of Total World Population for Families

My discussion will begin by looking at Total World Population, and briefly assessing the impact of world population growth on everyday family life. First, let's consider the overall trend:

In 1830, the world population was 1 billion.

In the 1860's Louis Pasteur developed the germ theory of disease.

In 1925, the world population reached 2 billion.

In 1959, the world population reached 3 billion.

In 1974, the world population reached 4 billion.

In 1987, the world population reached 5 billion.

Every year approximately 90 million people are added to the world's total population. (Wright, 1992)

"United Nations projections estimate that by 2025, 2/3 of over 8 billion people will live in cities." (Boyden, 1993)

Most of us are aware that the speed of world population growth is one of the critical issues of our times. Before the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 1992, the director of the U.N. Population Fund, Nafis Sadik, summed up the population issue this way: "Unless you really deal with population, you can forget about environment and development." (Associated Press, 1992)

Education on the issue of slowing world population growth has resulted in changes in both developed countries and in developing countries. In developed countries, such as the U.S., specific factors often associated with industrialized nations such as 1) greater educational and employment opportunities, especially for women, and 2) a government administered social security net for elderly family members has resulted both in less of a

desire to have children, and less of a need to have children. These changes, in turn, have had a significant impact on the composition of the American family.

- 1) In 1955, 60% of households in the U.S. consisted of a traditional family
 - Working father and housewife mother
 - Two or more school-age children
- In 1992, 6% of U.S. households consisted of a traditional family.
(Hodgkinson, 1989)

These statistics will suffice to suggest that as nations adapt to the necessity of zero population growth, new definitions of what composes a "family" will emerge. Even so, the general definition of "family" offered earlier-- "the ideal setting for the transmission of values from one generation to the next"-- will, I believe, still be valid. In my mind, the importance of the health and welfare of families suggests that in the future local communities will need some established but fluid definition of "family", to be able to stay focused on just what the community hopes to support and enhance.

Education is also resulting in reduced population growth in developing countries, but because of a variety of factors most developing countries still have populations that are growing rapidly. In fact, "since 1950, 85% of the total population increase has been in the Third World." (Repetto, 1991) Conditions in the developing countries are often characterized by lack of educational opportunities and lack of basic health care-- and an almost complete absence of government administered social security net for elder family members. As a result, "12% of the total world population suffers from some form of malnutrition that decreases resistance to disease," (Foster, 1992) and "40,000 children die each day from malnutrition and malnutrition related diseases." (Moore, 1994).

"In much of the world, the harshest threats to family life stem, at root, from inequalities in the global economic order. These inequalities are a major cause of the environmental damage, political instability enforced migration, and armed conflict that affect so many families in developing countries today." (Boyden, 1993) These inequalities can, in a limited way, be represented by the following evidence: "the poorest 1/5 of the world's population earn 2% of the wealth, and the richest 1/5 earn 68%." (Boyden, 1993)

Often, the international response to such inequality on one hand, and such an alarming rate of population growth in developing countries on the other hand, is to recommend that the developing countries make their political environment "conducive to economic development." But, as the Bruntland Commission has stated: "The evidence that nature cannot sustain accelerating human demands is too compelling to ignore." In this way, the international stage associated with Total Population Growth is charged with complex and conflicting motives and consequences. Such complexity should not, however, deter anyone from concluding here that there are issues relating to Total World Population that have serious implications for families worldwide, now and for many years to come. Eventually, the human family is going to arrive at some sort of common agreement about the issue of world population growth. To do so will require a level of cooperation on an international scale, that most of us have rarely seen even at the level of local communities.

III. Implications of Energy Consumption for Families

Another indicator related to quality of life and sustainability that has serious implications for families worldwide is Energy Consumption. In this paper, I will use this phrase "Energy Consumption" as a main heading for a variety of "patterns in material consumption." When considering Energy Consumption, it is important to recognize that during the 20th Century cultural changes have been taking place at a speed unprecedented in the history of humankind. And one of these cultural changes has been that an astounding variety of material goods have been made available to an equally astounding number of people.

We are now just beginning to realize that, although this increase in our "standard of living" has had many positive consequences, there are also many negative consequences which have not yet been fully accounted for. Some of these negative consequences can be best understood in the context of everyday family life.

First, let's consider the speed at which cultural changes have been taking place by looking at three significant examples.

- 1) Around 1870, the use of electricity became widespread.
Since 1870, people in the U.S. have experienced the introduction of the electric stove, the electric vacuum cleaner, the washing machine, the refrigerators, the spin drier, the dishwasher, the microwave oven,-- and oil, gas, and electric heat
- 2) In 1885, Daimler and Benz invented the gasoline motor.
In 1988, there was approximately 540 million registered cars, trucks, and buses in the world. 34% of these vehicles are registered in the U.S. Over 40 million vehicles are added to the world total every year.

- 3) In 1945, 5,000 U.S. homes had TV.
In 1955, 67% of all U.S. homes had TV.
In 1960, 86% of all U.S. homes had TV
In 1965, 95% of all U.S. homes had a TV set. The average U.S. home had the TV on for over 6 hours a day. The average 16 year old had seen 86,000 commercials.

(all of the above from Trager, 1992)

Let me repeat: during the 20th Century cultural changes have been taking place at a speed unprecedented in the history of humankind. And some of these changes have had negative side effects that deserve to be brought up in a discussion of why families would want to participate in their community's visioning process. I hope this discussion will illustrate to families the importance of "acknowledging the interrelationship of human economic, social, and political activities with the natural ecosystem" (Olympia, 1993)-- and thus begin to suggest the potential benefits of adopting the sustainability as a world view when considering their community's vision.

First, we need to acknowledge that the family in highly industrialized countries has "progressively ceased to function as a unit of production, and has instead become primarily a unit of consumption." (Berger, 1968) This development has had two related consequences:

- 1) "The declining importance of home production of most goods and services, far from strengthening the family, seems to be leading to further reductions in its most intimate and most central functions. It is not unusual today for men and women to purchase child care services from institutions or other individuals, seek advice about education, health, and careers from professionals, depend on the workplace for emotional support and assistance with smoking and drinking problems, and delegate care of dying relatives to hospital and nursing home personnel." (Fuchs, 1983)
- 2) "It is even possible that (because of unforeseen costs associated with our "rising standard of living") there is today more economic pressure on the family than there was when it was still geared to production." (Berger, 1968)

Second, the mobility provided by the advent of trains, automobiles, buses, and airplanes has resulted in a condition of constant change at all levels of human interaction, resulting in a serious challenge to the prospects of community cohesion.

Third, that due to the chaotic mass of information provided by TV, newspapers, books, computer networks, radios, and just about everything else, we must everyday sort through a profusion of inconsistent signals. "From the conflict of subcultures, confusion of styles, rapidity of changes, diversity of viewpoints, shifting of positions, and difficulty of sorting out poses, a person in modern society has a hard time being certain of anything." (Berger, 1968) This uniquely modern profusion of pluralism has, in its turn, resulted in a noticeable increase in secularism-- or non-religious interpretations of the world-- by the very fact that the coexistence of such a profusion of beliefs and values has the cumulative effect of weakening the plausibility of any one of them. (Berger, 1968) In this context, the progression from pluralism to skepticism can be seen as one of the principle causes for the crises of religion in modern society. (Berger, 1968)

Fourth, and finally, the rapid cultural changes in the 20th Century have also resulted in an unprecedented quantity of mass media advertising. One consequence of this is the emphasis on self fulfillment that has dominated consumer behavior, especially since the advent of TV. Self fulfillment does not necessarily have to be problematic, but when self fulfillment becomes as strongly associated with material consumption as it has in many industrialized countries-- the possibility exists that people will become dependent, for a sense of self-fulfillment, on a resource base that cannot withstand the accelerating pressure. In his book "Earth in the Balance," Vice President Al Gore has commented on this possibility, and it is worth quoting him at length on the subject.

"We are used to thinking of addiction in terms of drugs or alcohol. But new studies of addiction have deepened our understanding of the problem, and

now we know that people can become addicted to many different patterns of behavior-- such as gambling compulsively or working obsessively or even watching TV constantly-- that distract them from having to experience directly whatever they are trying to avoid. Anyone who is unusually fearful of something-- intimacy, failure, loneliness-- is potentially vulnerable to addiction because psychic pain causes a feverish hunger for distraction.

"One of the most effective strategies for ignoring psychic pain is to distract oneself from it, to do something so pleasurable or intense or otherwise absorbing that the pain is forgotten. As a temporary strategy, this kind of distraction isn't necessarily destructive, but dependence on it over the long term becomes dangerous, and finally some sort of addiction. Indeed, it can be argued that every addiction is caused by an intense and continuing need for distraction from psychic pain.

"I believe that our civilization is, in effect, addicted to the consumption of the Earth itself... the froth and frenzy of industrial civilization mask our deep oneliness for that communion with the world that can lift our spirits, and fill our senses with the richness and immediacy of life itself.

"The engines of distraction are gradually destroying the inner ecology of the human experience." (Gore, 1992)

It is worth noting here that in the last 35 years, developments in family systems theory have led to the concept of the "dysfunctional family." "According to this theory, unwritten rules governing how to raise children and purporting to determine what it means to be a human being are passed down from one generation of a family to the next." (Gore, 1992) In other words, "in our families, we adapt to the needs of our family systems. We take on the role necessitated by the dynamics of the system." (Bradshaw, 1988) The range and depth of problems nowadays that can be associated with "dysfunctional families" can be estimated by the growing number of books in the subject area, such as

- 1) "Homecoming: Reclaiming and Championing Your Inner Child" (Bradshaw, 1990)
- 2) "Codependent's Guide to the Twelve Steps" (Beattie, 1990)

(both of which have been #1 on the New York Times Bestseller List) and also by the proliferation of local self help groups formed that have identified themselves with "dysfunctional family" problems. [At the Unity Club in Falls Church, VA, there are 36

meetings scheduled each week that are directly related to recovery from self-destructive behavior patterns learned in a "dysfunctional family setting." (Unity Club, 1994)]

An example of a local self-help group associated with "dysfunctional families" is "Adult Children Anonymous" (ACA). ACA group meetings use the same 12 step recovery format as Alcoholics Anonymous, only ACA incorporates a family systems perspective, and is thus: "Adult Children of Dysfunctional Families." Some brief excerpts from an ACA Beginner's Information Booklet will illustrate some of the consequences that can result from a family pattern of addiction and denial:

"We welcome you to Adult Children Anonymous. Many of us first came to ACA distressed and in some stage of unresolved grief. In ACA we work through our own stages of grief and feel the feelings and emotions that we never allowed ourselves to express in our own families. Many of us find that much of what we have needed was to have our reality validated that there really was a problem-- that it wasn't just our imagination!

"In ACA we learn to give up self destructive behavior. We go through the process of self-discovery, realizing that we don't have to keep doing what we did as children to survive. In order to free ourselves from the pain of our past, we need to go through an identification process and come out of our confusion, dropping layers of denial and our extreme need for control at whatever level is comfortable for us. We do this by sharing 'what happened' and 'what's happening now' in a safe and loving family environment. By seeing that we are recreating in the present what happened to us as children, we can begin to break the cycle."

(ACA, 1991)

I hope that the above comments contribute to a deeper appreciation for the range of consequences that can result from experiences that take place in the "family": "the ideal setting for the transmission of values from one generation to the next." If we, as a collective whole, are to create communities that "meet the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs" we are going to need to be aware of the relationship between the inner consequences of our family experiences, and the outer consequences that occur in the external world.

From here it is appropriate to rejoin the above discussion associated with rapid cultural changes and the unprecedented quantity of mass media advertising in the 20th Century, for there is one more consequence of the sheer quantity of advertising that deserves to be commented on here. This paper also does acknowledge an impact on everyday family life from the fact that throughout the history of mass media advertising (from "The Greatest Show on Earth" to "The Symbol of Worldwide Acceptance" to "The Heartbeat of America") "there has been a lot of phony advertising that the employees themselves have read, and have said to themselves: 'This is absolute rubbish!'" (Kanter and Mirvis, 1992) In the book, "The Cynical Americans" (by the authors just cited), the authors conclude that "the tendency to behave cynically is being reinforced by a social environment that seems to have abandoned idealism and increasingly celebrates the virtue of being 'realistic' in an impersonal, acquisitive, tough-guy world. In citizen and country alike, there seems to be a loss of faith in people and in the very concept of community." (Kanter and Mirvis, 1992)

This discussion may be summed up by comparing the concept of "slogan" with the concept "mahavakya", a word used in the tradition of Hindu religion. "Slogan" means: a relatively pithy phrase or sentence used repeatedly in ads by manufacturers and service organizations for the purpose of influencing the buying behavior of consumers."

"Mahavakya" means: a divine axiom that rings through the sacred texts... a profound spiritual truth expressed cryptically, but sweetly." Which concept are you most familiar with? How do you think this affected the family you grew up in?

"Today we see the weakening and collapse in communities of obligations and commitment, and of coherent belief systems. We see a loss of a sense of identity and belonging, of opportunity for allegiance, for being needed and responding to need-- and a corresponding rise in feelings of alienation, impotence, and anomie." (Gardner, 1991) In

a book titled "Man and His Symbols" author Carl Jung notes that "anthropologists have often described what happens to a primitive society when its spiritual values are exposed to the impact of modern civilization. It's people lose the meaning of their lives, their social organization disintegrates, and they themselves morally decay." (Jung, 1984)

I have offered the previous discussions on Total World Population and Energy Consumption as an attempt to begin an ongoing discussion of why families would want to participate in their community's visioning process. During the 20th Century, cultural change has taken place at a speed unprecedented in the history of humankind. The above discussion suggests that there are serious implications relating to accelerating demands on Earth's resource systems, inequalities and malnutrition, increasing substitutes for intimate family functions, mobility, the progression from pluralism to skepticism, the emphasis on self fulfillment through material consumption, and the mass quantity of phony advertising--the consequences of which have not been sufficiently evaluated by American families. For a community vision to exist that "meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs," it is essential and critical that the families in the community understand why they would want to be involved in their community's visioning process. I hope the above discussion has been sufficient to suggest that further ongoing discussions would be useful.

IV. Recent and Current Sustainability Initiatives

A. Brief Historical Overview of Sustainability

In the next section of this paper, I will review some recent and current initiatives associated with sustainability that suggest concrete and practical ways for families to become involved in their community visioning process. I will begin with a brief historical overview of sustainability, which is relevant here to indicate the time frame and intensity involved in the development of "sustainability" as a world view.

1962-- Rachel Carson's book titled "Silent Spring" on the dangers of pesticides in general and DDT in particular is regarded by many as the beginning of the modern environmental movement.

1970-- The First Earth Day in the United States. Earth Day has been celebrated ever since in the United States, usually on April 24.

1972-- The UN convenes the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment. Participants there recognized the alarming rate of environmental destruction, and consequently formed the UN Environmental Protection Commission (UNEP).

1970's--1980's-- A number of independent scientists, activists, and policymakers were working on responses to the linked problems concerning issues of environment and development. (Sustainable Seattle, 1993) Some people's response was to simply "go back to the land." [As a brief commentary on that response, included here is a representative "Countryside Contact Notice" from "Countryside Magazine's" bulletin board section: "We're experienced homesteaders working to simplify the lifestyle. We've been developing our land to serve as a **homestead education center** for food and energy self-sufficiency. We've also worked with social technologies refined through the communities movement. We've made space for those that wish to work with us in apprenticeship. D.C. Elk, WA" (Countryside, 1994) More on the communities movement later in the paper.) Other efforts in the 70's and 80's involved establishing conceptual linkages between environment and development for educational and discussion purposes. Many policies and projects now in place can be traced back to ideas expressed in books, published articles, newsletters, and conference handouts during the 70's and 80's. Still others were involved in planning problems such as urban sprawl. Efforts by state and local governments to contain "urban sprawl" resulted in the concept of "growth management."

In general, by the mid-1980's, the concept of "sustainability" was beginning to gain international status as "the goal of integrating environmental and development concerns."

1983-- The UN establishes the Bruntland Commission to investigate the growing impact of human activities on the natural resource base. The Bruntland Commission, mentioned earlier, used an **open, participatory, and visible approach to consider the broadest range of views and advice**, and set an international standard for the process of forming recommendations. "The final recommendations of the commission, compiled in the report titled 'Our Common Future', included policy alternatives, as well as institutional and organizational structures to manage these changes.

1987-- The Bruntland Commission's report "Our Common Future" is published. "Our Common Future" has become the most widely used planning document for sustainable development initiatives worldwide." (Scruggs, 1993)

1992-- As a continuation of the 1972 UN Stockholm conference, a UN resolution was passed to convene a UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in June 1992. The primary outcome of that conference-- popularly know as the "Earth Summit"-- was Agenda 21, a product of lengthy negotiations among government representatives, relevant UN agencies, non-governmental organizations, and expert consultants. (Scruggs, 1993)

"Underlying Agenda 21 is the notion that humanity has reached a defining moment in its history. We can continue our present policies which serve to deepen the economic division with and between countries; which increase poverty, hunger, sickness, and illiteracy worldwide; and which are causing the continued deterioration of the ecosystem on which we depend for life on Earth.

Or we can change course." (CPMD, 1992)

"No nation can achieve this on its own," states Mr. Maurice Strong, Secretary General of the Conference. **"Together we can-- in a global partnership for sustainable development."** (CPMD, 1992)

B. Current Sustainability Initiatives in the United States

As a continuation of these historical developments, my discussion now turns to current initiatives. I hope that this brief survey of current sustainability initiatives will suggest how wide the range of opportunities is for families who wish to become involved in community visioning and sustainability.