

The International Federation of Medical Students' Associations (IFMSA) and MedSin UK, 15th August 2010

IFMSA & MedSin views on the review of Article 6 and the New Delhi Work Programme

In its conclusion on Article 6, the Subsidiary Body on Implementation invited parties and observers to make submissions to the Secretariat, by 16th August 2010, on ways to strengthen the implementation of the amended Delhi New Work Programme (aDNWP) and the effective implementation of Article 6 of the convention. The IFMSA and MedSin welcome this opportunity to share their position relating to the important agenda of education and awareness raising in climate change.

The IFMSA is a federation of medical student associations in 89 different countries on six continents representing more than 1.2 million medical students worldwide, whilst MedSin is a UK-based student network which aims to raise awareness of global health issues, promote health, and tackle health inequality.

Article 6 and the Ammended New Delhi Work Programme (aNDWP) are important components of the UNFCCC framework. This is because it is the extent of the public's will for change - as much as our capacity and technology - that will determine the success of international efforts to move into a low-carbon future. Without improved education to strengthen awareness and tackle skepticism regarding climate science, and the skills to implement practical solutions, this is unlikely to be achieved.

As outcomes of the aNDWP review process, we call for the following:

1. Recognition, support and funding for the ongoing work of the health profession and medical students.

Increasing numbers of healthcare professionals are recognising that they have an important role in climate change adaptation as well as mitigation. Considering the vast increase in global burden of disease that a 2°C rise in average global temperatures is likely to cause, the international health community has been slow to raise its voice and call for urgent action in reduction of emissions. The same can be said in the relative silence in calling for a fair international treaty which provides adequate adaptation efforts for inhabitants of the country's most affected by climate change. In the past, we have seen that when the health community mobilises, we get results, this is slowly becoming a reality amongst the health profession.

In the UK, several bodies are attempting to highlight the impacts of climate change on health. The Sustainable Development Unit of the National Health Service (NHS) is working to improve awareness amongst the medical community and contribute to mitigation by reducing the NHS' carbon footprint. Whilst this work is mainly at a policy and administrative level, other bodies and

individuals are working to improve sustainability at a grass roots level. Central to the success of both approaches is the support of colleagues and patients. This support is gained through which is being achieved through articles, interactive workshops, poster campaigns have helped in making the first stages of this change possible. This kind of work is being undertaken by medical students and healthcare professions in an increasing number of countries around the world.

At the international level, we have trained students from all around the world in 'Climate Change, Health and Campaigning' workshops, attended the COP/CMP, as well as a number of the Bonn Intercessional. We have been advocating for the engagement of the health profession, and been in close communication with partner organisations such as the WHO and the World Medical Association. Over the past years, Climate Change and Health has become a movement central to the IFMSAs activities.

Students have achieved a great deal with limited support or monetary reimbursement for basic expenses such as travel costs or venue hire. Were the youth provided with adequate support, we would have the potential to significantly up-scale our operations, leading to positive, measurable societal change. This need not be primarily financial; initial training and access to educational resources are equally important and valuable. Currently, formal training structures and resources allocated to climate and sustainability education are scarce. This is something governments must address, if the full potential of education is to be realised.

2. The provision of non-formal education on the topic of climate change and health

The IFMSA, Medsin-UK and public health educators around the world are working to address the lack of global health content in the medical curricula. Global health and environmental issues are rapidly growing in importance within the international community. It is our belief that this is necessary, and should emphasise humans' dependence on ecosystems and climatic conditions for health and prosperity. It should aim to achieve recognition that health and societal function are inextricable linked, and that this in turn relies on the earth's eco-systems.

Climate change education in medicine must be taught in the context of the major other international health challenges, such as the need for improved child and maternal health services and family planning facilities across the globe. Through our joint project: Healthy Planet International, the IFMSA and Medsin-UK has helped educate young people through peer-education training, providing the the building blocks of better understanding. We also develop support networks which help students work towards more sustainable practice in their local hospital trusts, train other students, and integrate climate and health education into their medical curricula.

This is a useful example of how education need not refer only to the formal structures which occur

within schools and universities, but can be effective through newer, innovative channels and

teaching approaches too. Formal education systems are valuable and a comprehensive education strategy should embed climate change and sustainable development into a wide range of subjects from primary school age onwards. However, supporting students who wish to bring sustainability

onto the political agenda both enables them to make a positive contribution to their local communities and helps them to develop useful skills for the future.

3. Extending climate awareness to all disciplines of education

Sustainability is a useful lens through which we can evaluate systems or organisations at a micro and macro level. Given our realisation that society consumes increasingly ecologically unsustainable levels of fossil fuels, we must consider what might have been done differently over the past two centuries if we had had the benefit of hindsight.

We would like to emphasise the devastating changes which have been made to the planet, in an exceedingly short geological timeframe. Understanding these facts better prepares us for making the necessary changes to our future, as we begin to understand how we arrived at this cross-roads of development. This understanding can be used as a platform to transition to lifestyles and economies which reflect the real constraints of our planet, such that the wellbeing of others is not compromised.

For this to be realised, the implications of climate change and how we should respond to its threats, we must take a truly multi-disciplinary approach to our education, mitigation and adaptation efforts. If young people are well equipped to help avoid and respond to climate change, we will be best prepared to make decisive, timely changes, which will help to secure a safer future. The training of specialists in environmental science and sustainability is vital, however we also require broad public understanding of the need to adapt and mitigate. Students can be important agents in achieving this. Doctors, teachers, lawyers, economists, civil servants and politicians have important roles to play in moving towards a more sustainable society, and raising awareness of the importance of change.

Conclusion

Climate Change is widely recognised as the biggest global health threat of the 21st century, and the world in which today's children are growing up in is changing. It is only fair that children and young people, who hold the biggest stake in our shared future, are empowered to take positive action, through practical steps in the realm of public education. We believe that by providing young people with a valuable role in climate education Article 6 of the Convention will begin to play a more important role within the framework. Youth empowerment and education is a key part of the fight against climate change.

For more information about the IFMSA please visit www.ifmsa.org; for more information about Medsin-UK please visit www.medsin.org

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