

THE MASS MEDIA AND NONGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS IN EDUCATION

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Summary

In education in general, and in lifelong learning for sustainable development in particular, there remain tasks to be undertaken and principles to be stated, while the goals of cooperation between the mass media and nongovernmental organizations have not been fulfilled. The following are considered the current missions in education:

- Encouraging all sections of society, including industry, the mass media, universities, governments, and nongovernment public organizations to educate professionals in the rational use of the environment.
- Supplying local authorities with qualified technical professionals to solve problems they are facing, especially those connected with protection of the environment.
- Collaborating with the mass media, with theater companies, and representatives of entertainment and the advertising industry to increase the participation of the general population in discussions of environmental problems.
- Employing the experience and understanding of environmental problems of smaller nations or nationality groups living within the territory of a larger country in the system of lifelong education.

These missions coincide with the principal goals of the new journalism, which are information, knowledge, approach, habits, the ability to evaluate the situation, and participation.

Thus, journalism is also assuming the tasks of informing the population, including representatives of nongovernmental organizations, about pernicious influences on the environment and involving the mass media in educating experts in nature protection, despite each of these goals having its own specific features. The higher the people's level of knowledge and education, throughout the world, the better will be the quality of the global environment.

1. Introduction

As we enter the twenty-first century, humankind is making considerable progress in all spheres of life. Especially impressive are achievements in technology and information. The new century will no doubt usher in a new era, that of the information society. At the same time, this enormous technological development poses a growing threat to the global environment.

With this in view, our priority now should be to develop all possible means of protecting the global environment. It is also necessary to pay special attention to the education of the whole population, children as well as adults, drawing on lifelong learning systems and emphasizing education in environmental security. This pressing problem must be solved both by government and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), with the help of traditional and modern mass media.

2. Education for Sustainable Development

2.1. Only through Joint Efforts

It is only through the joint efforts of the mass media and NGOs that the problem of educating people in sustainable development can be solved. The mass media still remain the principal channel for solving environmental problems. Especially when the environment is under threat, society does its best in terms of information and communication, irrespective of financial problems.

It must be also understood that society today is no longer a mere mass of people. Many individuals belong to NGOs, which express their interests, views, and ideas. This has been proved by environmental journalism, which came into being through these joint efforts. Despite initial problems, thanks to the support of NGOs it has grown into an independent branch of journalism. It has also contributed to recent revisions of the function of the mass media. Indeed, nowadays, as well as informing people, the mass media should educate people with reliable facts presented by NGOs. Thus, the idea of lifelong environmental education has been brought to the fore without adverse effects on other forms of education.

2.1.1. In Search of Points of Contact

Before world problems in politics, the economy, culture, or the environment that face humankind as we enter the twenty-first century can be addressed, it is necessary to bring a certain message home to people. Research shows that the mass media are a powerful channel for informing large audiences and drawing attention to current problems.

Each with its own approach, the mass media single out individual and group needs within a given society and establish cooperation among nations, or nationalities. The press, radio, and television, together with computers, provide a true reflection of the present state of the planet but are at the same time a bridge to the future. This combination makes it possible for the present generation to feel continuity with the past. The mass media is one of the most successful means of starting up a dialogue with each generation as it replaces earlier ones. The mass media is the only reliable means of communication with the public at large, which is now represented in the world community in the more structured form of NGOs.

The mass media admit they are unable to resolve the problem alone, without the support of the broad mass of people. At the same time, the population, whose interests are most clearly reflected by NGOs, has influenced the mass media in such a way that not only have topical articles and reports on vital issues been published but also independent publications have come into being that report on pressing problems that should be solved as soon as possible.

Thus, communication is now a major factor in the world community and a focus for all kinds of cooperation, from the individual to the global. Public opinion polls carried out at different times and with various groups have proved that more and more people realize that progress in the mass media is aimed at changing the biosphere for the benefit of and in accordance with the wishes of the people.

The rapid deterioration of both the natural and the artificial environment has made the development of international information and communication networks a high-priority for government and NGOs. This task has become even more urgent at the beginning of a new century that requires the world community to solve the problem of sustainable development.

Consequently, when solving a new problem the world community uses current and relevant human knowledge. The mass media play a key role in this process, since with

its help the broad mass of the people has been made aware of new problems. In their turn, people have united in NGOs that have become expert in assessing the importance of problems people encounter at a given moment.

2.1.2. Expanding the Range of Action

The role of public opinion has increased considerably in recent years because scientific discoveries have not only brought satisfaction to people but have also disturbed them. Nuclear fission has proved to have peaceful as well as military uses. Accidents in nuclear power plants—for example, in the Chernobyl plant (Ukraine)—continue to take people's lives. Cloning, the making of “copies” of sheep, calves, wolves, other animals, and eventually people, may be considered both an outstanding human achievement and a great danger to civilization.

In addition, the genuine scientific explosion that occurred in the twentieth century has led to an increase in the number of people involved in scientific activities who often lack appropriate qualifications. A considerable section of human knowledge is now to be found at the interface between scientific fields that require a high degree of training and a corresponding level of proficiency.

Thus, it is impossible to ensure social stability without the active participation of various strata of society in elaborating policy and exercising control over realizing it. One way of bolstering the democratic system is to increase the role of the main social strata in the social and economic transformation for sustainable development. Great emphasis must be placed on the involvement of women in all such social activities. Although the educational level of women is on average higher than that of men, their role in decision making has been limited by social and economic conditions as well as by behavior stereotypes.

Young people occupy a special place in the realization of sustainable development. Long-range programs should guarantee young people a safe future. That is why young people should have the opportunity to participate in decision making. It is also important to pay close attention to improving the education of young people, including environmental education.

The further development of various forms of local administration has great potential for sustainable development. The participation of businesspeople in this process is essential in order to boost sustainable development. It is therefore necessary to create the conditions for effectively employing the most valuable and outstanding achievements in the preservation of the environment. It is all the more important for countries such as Russia, which is undergoing economic reconstruction, and the creation of new property relationships as well as socially oriented financial and economic policies.

All of these elements of society proclaim their social activity with the help of NGOs. The social changes that took place in Russia and Eastern Europe in the 1980s and 1990s and influenced the whole world led the public to understand that the democratic system requires NGOs actively to participate in devising policies and making decisions to insure sustainable development.

2.1.3. The United Nations As a Facilitator for Mass Media and Nongovernmental Organization Collaboration

It is the United Nations Organization (U.N.) that most effectively expresses the interests of the international community. The U.N. Charter begins: “ We, members of the United Nations . . .” It is an exceptionally clear expression of the idea that the U.N. not only belongs to states but is a part of the common heritage of humankind. It has been designed for all people. It is a unique institution that helps all of us to concentrate our efforts in building a better world to live in. It expresses our beliefs and hopes for a better future.

The U.N. is presently at a difficult point in its history. The former world order, based on principles of the U.N. Charter, has ceased to be. Many of the activities of this organization are outdated. Only one thing is beyond any question: mobilizing support for social initiatives. The U.N. considers it a direct responsibility to work with NGOs. The U.N. expects that collaboration with these organizations will help it to find ways to reinvent itself. In so doing, it seeks to avoid the fate of its predecessor, the League of Nations, founded in 1919 after World War I. That organization collapsed soon after the beginning of World War II, faced with misunderstanding of its role on the part of some states.

In order not to repeat former blunders and taking into consideration present-day complexities, the U.N. makes its work with the most general public and above all with NGOs the cornerstone of its activities. An NGO is a voluntary, noncommercial union of citizens organized on the local, regional, national, or international level. Thus, professional associations, funds, trade unions, business associations, youth groups, and cooperative organizations may all be considered NGOs. They have been created with the aim of solving certain problems, for instance, in the area of human rights or health protection. They could also represent environment protection groups, research institutions for international problems, as well as parliamentary associations. The U.N. contributes to constant cooperation between the mass media and NGOs. NGOs that are interested in spreading information about their activities supply the mass media with relevant material. In turn, the mass media, through radio or television programs, newspapers or magazines, inform the public about the activities of NGOs. Thus, spreading information on NGOs involves:

- popularization all over the world and in each particular country and region of NGO activities in preserving and promoting peace and security, in economic and social development, in human rights, humanitarian problems, and international law;
- contributions to NGO activities connected with memorable events announced by the U.N. General Assembly and commemorating international years declared for specific topics in order to raise public awareness about problems facing the world.

It must be emphasized that U.N.’s focus on NGOs makes information on their activities all the more crucial for the mass media on all levels—from municipal to government level. It is no longer a local event but an international one. The importance of working with NGOs was recognized as far back as 1946, when a special Department of Public Information (DPI) was created. In its Resolution No. 3(1), the General Assembly

obliged the DPI and its branches “to actively contribute to and assist information agencies of different countries, as well as educational and other government and NGOs interested in spreading information.” In this connection the mass media consider it not only their professional duty but also an honorable mission to disseminate this information. In their turn, NGOs consider it their obligation to present complete and reliable information about their activities, all the more so since NGOs have become aware of their prominence in and responsibility for world events.

2.2. Nongovernmental Organizations a Phenomenon of Modern Life

“We are living at a time when the states have lost their monopoly as dominating and unique forces in international relations. Their active participants are now NGOs, private companies, the mass media, universities, intellectuals, cultural workers, as well as all men and women who consider themselves a part of the great human family,” asserted Kofi Annan, General Secretary of the U.N., in Messina, Italy, in April 1997.

Therefore, NGOs are being directed to obtain specific results and are headed by people united by common interests. NGOs are solving a great variety of problems and fulfill a great many humanitarian functions. For instance, they drive home to governments people’s needs and hopes, exercise social control over government agencies, and support active participation of people in political life on the local level. They carry out analysis and expert evaluation of political problems, act as an “early warning,” and help to supervise the fulfillment of international agreements.

NGOs differ in their fabric, methods of work, and financing. In terms of membership and areas of activities they could be subdivided into national and international NGOs. They may be federations, with a number of branches, situated in various regions or countries, having a sophisticated structure, their own channels of communications, well established methods of working and comprising thousands of members. They may embrace groups of experts, associations of outstanding persons, scientific, or research institutions. National NGOs may be incorporated into an international structure or operate on the international level without being linked to international organizations.

Some NGOs deal mainly with information and education. Others are directly concerned with technical projects or delivering aid to refugees, alleviating trouble, or promoting development.

NGOs may be financed through membership dues, payments from branches, voluntary fees, and government grants, or by a combination of any of these methods. They may also receive grants for carrying out certain projects on a special or contract basis from private sources, foreign donation groups, or intergovernmental organizations.

In practice, this means that a particular NGO has an opportunity to adjust its activities to the principal projects of the world community. It can also obtain access to information on the activities of related NGOs and can coordinate its activities with them. This enhances its efforts, or may even result in actual support for its actions.

2.2.1. Who Is Working with Nongovernmental Organizations?

It must be said that NGOs at various levels must make an enormous effort to solve even quite uncomplicated problems in order to attract public attention. This may be why the international community decided to create a number of agencies whose main aim is to support the general public in their initiatives. Some of these were NGOs that were already well known and associated with the DPI, and some were newer organizations. Their ideas might answer the needs of a local community, as well as suggest solutions to global problems.

The agencies included the U.N. Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), World Health Organization (WHO), U.N. Development Programme (UNDP), U.N. Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and U.N. Environment Programme (UNEP).

These see their principal mission as setting the direction of movement. For instance, UNESCO formulated an international program aimed at enhancing cooperation between community and the mass media. The goal of this cooperation, according to this competent organization, is to join together to protect nature and culture. Nobody questions this program today: everybody acknowledges the necessity to protect nature. Nonetheless, at an earlier stage only the task of saving the cultural heritage was highlighted. This heritage has always been protected, and even reconstructed to heal the scars of time and war. Indeed, it was very important, but it was a bit lop-sided.

To UNESCO's credit, this agency realized the narrowness of such an approach and was one of the first, as far back as the 1960s, to attempt to combine these two tasks. For example, at that time UNESCO proclaimed the very important international action known as the "salvation of Nubian memorials," which demonstrated the possibility of such consolidation. Supported by the newly founded International Council for Protection of Memorials and Historic Places, UNESCO drafted the agreement.

Around the same time, a similar idea was developed in the USA. Its aim was to bridge the gap between public movements dealing only with nature or those dealing with culture. This idea was endorsed by the International Union for Protection of Nature and Natural Sources. It decided to create the Fund of International Heritage with the aim of facilitating international cooperation in order to secure for the present and succeeding generations "protection of wonderful natural stretches, landscapes and historical places all over the world."

The combining of all these ideas has resulted in the creation of the Convention for Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage, adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO. NGOs all over the world obtained a program of action in which protection of nature went hand in hand with the protection of culture. In their turn, the mass media received plenty of scope for realizing information and education projects.

In this case, UNESCO and similar organizations whose aim it was to consolidate the efforts of the public represented by NGOs acted as an accelerator of ideas. Their mission is also to promote the conclusion of agreements between interested agencies

and to assist them in finding sources of financing both on the national and international levels. Without such support many public initiatives could never be realized.

The problem of financing the programs applies first of all to environmental organizations that play an important role in the solution of global multinationals. It is precisely these organizations that obtain both moral and financial support from the world community. For example, the International Trustee Fund of Tsyolkovsky Moscow State Aviation Technological University (Russia) adopted and began to realize a social program aimed at solving a wide range of environmental problems. The fund has branches in the USA, Great Britain, France, Australia, the Czech Republic, and Cyprus. The fund also has associative status at the DPI.

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Biographical Sketch

Kokhanova Liudmila Alexandrovna was born on July 16, 1947 in Sevastopol, Crimea, where she completed her education. In 1967, she joined the Faculty of Journalism at M.V. Lomonosov Moscow State University. After graduating she completed postgraduate work with the faculty, being awarded a Doctor of Philology. She has since been made a professor. Her fields of research and scientific activity are journalism, education, including environmental education and the problems of lifetime environmental learning for sustainable development. Professor Kokhanova is very active in practical education and pedagogical work, including lecturing, guiding seminars, studios, and master classes. Her 15 years of work has made the Studio one of the most effective and necessary methods of education in Journalism faculties. Professor Kokhanova has published over 600 items, among them 10 books. She is married and has two daughters.