

Preface

The present book, “Children and Sustainable Development. Ecological Education in a Globalized World,” represents the fruit of a series of presentations and discussions drawn from the Pontifical Academy of Sciences’ workshop “Children and Sustainable Development: A Challenge for Education,” held at the Vatican in November 2015. This conference was directly inspired by the previous workshop, “Sustainable Humanity, Sustainable Nature: Our Responsibility,” at which leading scientists gathered at the Pontifical Academy in April 2014 to reflect on the projected impact on society posed by climate change and social justice.

This latest volume testifies to the long-standing interest of the Pontifical Academy in areas pertaining to education, especially in topics involving science, as expressed in the previous notable workshops “The Challenges for Science: Education in the 21st Century” (2001); “Globalisation and Education” (2005); and “Bread and Brain: Education and Poverty” (2013).

“Children and Sustainable Development” was attended by participants from many different nations, covering a great variety of disciplines—drawn from across the natural as well as the social sciences—boasting rich expertise in educational research.

The workshop included a number of testimonies, dealing with bottom-up practical activities in both developing and developed countries, many of which were directly related to science education, climate change, and the environment.

The theme and the timing of this workshop were motivated by the conjunction, in 2015, of three exceptional events, namely:

- the United Nation’s proclamation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG#4 on universal education and SDG#10 on reduced inequalities (September 2015);
- the Conference of Parties on Climate Change (COP21 December 2015), concluded by the signing of the Paris Agreement;
- most significantly, Pope Francis’s Encyclical Letter “Laudato Si’ On care for our common home,” which makes a plea for an “ecological education and spirituality” (May 2015).

The workshop underlined that having an adequate education for the next generation would be a decisive factor in the success of these three sources of inspiration given to humanity. To explore these themes in more detail, a broad spectrum of perspectives was presented, covering topics extending from scientific analysis of global warming and its environmental impact, to experimental research on cognitive learning and child development, teaching practices, pilot projects, and large-scale innovative implementation in education.

Participants considered the most diverse cultural, social, and economical environments, paying special attention to the poor and to child empowerment—a relatively new idea indeed! In this respect, a key relevant contribution was the testimony of young students themselves, drawn from several countries, who gave vivid accounts of their own life experiences in different educational environments (Part IV).

This present tome is organized over five parts and thirty-two chapters, containing contributions written by the speakers on the basis of their presentations at the workshop:

Part I—Environment, Climate and Education

Part II—How Could Education Evolve in a Diversity of Contexts?

Part III—Children, Students and Teachers

Part IV—The Voice of Children and Teenagers on Sustainability and Climate Change

Part V—Values and Perspectives.

The recommendations adopted by the participants and presented in Chap. 31 result from the extensive roundtable discussions held at the end of the workshop. We sincerely hope that the ideas presented—and the network of actors who met during the workshop—will contribute, at the global as well as local levels, to motivate educators, scientists, and policy makers to innovate and to act.

We are most grateful to His Holiness Pope Francis for his encouragements to hold this workshop hosted by the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, and to His Eminence Cardinal Peter Appiah Turkson, President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, who closed the workshop with an inspiring plea for action and solidarity for the sake of the common good of our endangered planet.

We acknowledge the generous support of Mrs. Courtney Sale Ross, Honorary President of the workshop. We would like to close in thanking all of the authors for their contributions, and to everyone at Springer for their dedication and support in publishing this book.

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