

Planetary initiative for the world we choose : I

Project description of a program of worldwide local discussions and activities leading to a Planetary Congress in 1983 ()*

Introduction

The decade of 1980-1990 marks a period of high tension, crucial challenge and undoubted change for humanity. The purpose of the Planetary Initiative for the World We Choose is to help people discover that indeed - the future is in our hands - and that the anxieties and problems of this time of global crisis can be surmounted creatively and constructively through personal involvement.

Cosponsored by a broad coalition of organizations, the proposed Project is an international public education and participation program, designed to help support a peaceful and humane vision of the future and to broaden public involvement in making that vision a reality. By organizing a two year worldwide series of discussions and activities, the Project will provide individuals with a framework for collaboration, consensus-building and positive activity at the community, regional, national, and eventually the continental and global levels. The Project will culminate in a Planetary Congress in June, 1983.

I. World crisis and opportunity

Every possible indicator suggests that our world will be faced with a number of major crises during the next two decades. At the same time, these developments can be regarded as opportunities for significant constructive change in the direction of human affairs, if the response is adequate.

The stakes in this choice are extremely high.

Authorities are quite united concerning the present direction of world trends and concur that the next decades mark a period of great challenge and radical change.

For instance, Maurice Strong, first director of the United Nations Environment Program, has stated:

I am convinced that the 1980's will be the most dangerous decade that the human community has ever faced. Technological change will produce dramatic shifts in patterns of, and opportunities for, unemployment. Competition for resources - notably energy and water - will increase. Turbulence and conflict are likely to escalate. And the risks of war are growing. So are the risks of a world economic collapse.

Many studies, from the original "Limits to Growth" and the "Brandt Commission Report" to the "Global 2000 Report" to the President of the United States - draw similar conclusions. There are involved major adjustments in global economics, ecology, population rates, food production, resource use, disarmament and maintenance of peace if disaster is to be avoided. Because so many problems are becoming acute at the same time, they blend into a - mega crisis - in which no one problem can be dealt with singly. A new approach is needed, which involves a major shift in our ways of seeing and doing things. As the "Global 2000 Report" concludes, "The needed changes go far beyond the capability and responsibility of... any single nation. An era of unprecedented cooperation and commitment is essential -

If such cooperation is to occur, a major shift in values and in perspective is clearly needed. A worldview which considers the needs and well-being of the global community is implied, as well as a recognition of the direct relationship between the individual human being and the good of the whole. Such moments of emergency as now face humanity can be seen as opportunities for positive change and growth. In the effort to avert disaster, the human will and the human response is the unknown factor. People can come to see that the world is of our choosing, and that what we have chosen can be changed. The future is up to us, and there are many possible

alternative futures. Now more than ever, there is an opportunity to propose, develop, and build new alternative policies and structures more responsive to global human need and to the long-term requirements of the planet's ecosystem.

Publics have not been effectively informed about the nature of the crisis/opportunity, nor have most found a suitable social process in which their education can take place and their voices be heard. Thousands of organizations of concerned people throughout the world have been conscious of the global crisis and have been responding with activities to increase awareness and to propose positive alternative suggestions for a humane world. However, these significant efforts have usually been unrelated. Their convergence can greatly strengthen their impact. It is time for the collective voices to be heard. The Planetary Initiative will facilitate this process of convergence and collaboration.

II. Planetary initiative background

Acting on the concerns stated above, the heads of five organizations joined together to co-sponsor a major gathering of leaders from a broad spectrum of groups and organizations in January, 1981. The co-sponsors were from the Association for Humanistic Psychology, Club of Rome, Global Education Associates, Planetary Citizens and United Nations Association of New South Wales.

Seventy-five international leaders from a wide range of groups responded, and met at the Stony Point Conference Center in New York State, January 2, 3, 4, 1981.

They came from mainstream church, political and social action groups, from human potential and new consciousness organizations, from globally oriented academic research institutes and from international communities and their networks.

(*) For further information contact: Planetary Citizens, 777 United Nations Plaza, New York, N.Y. 10017, U.S.A. regarding U.S. activities and overall international coordination.

The purpose of the meeting was to explore the possibilities of working together and creating a major program which would involve broad grassroots participation and lead to various internationally visible events with real impact.

The intention of the Planetary Initiative for the World We Choose is to involve people where they are and where they live in approaches to understanding the convergent problem crisis and the ways in which they can contribute to a constructive outcome. The Planetary Initiative will provide the means and impetus for grassroots consideration and participation in the topics and events which will shape people's future. It will assist people in acquiring a perspective and set of values more adequate to an increasingly interdependent and at the same time, a personally more self-reliant world. And it will provide a setting for a wide range of illustrative and constructive activities. It will give them an immediate goal and direction by offering participation in a concluding major global congress.

III. Definition of the project

Recognizing the unprecedented scope, complexity and interdependence of planetary problems, the Planetary Initiative wishes to assist in development of a network for global cooperation among the numerous organizations and individuals addressing these crises, and to provide the opportunity for their collaboration through a common project. The Planetary Initiative will not focus on any one problem or issue, but seeks to assist organizations, programs and individuals to pursue their goals within a larger context. The common task of the collaborative network will be the creation of a process of dialogue at the grassroots level in many countries on topics related to planetary welfare.

To this end, the following steps are planned:

1. Formation of an inter-organizational coalition on a worldwide basis to involve their constituencies and the broadest general public in towns, villages and cities in an intense dialogue on the kind of world people want, and how it can be achieved with their involvement and help.
2. Encouragement to new and existing groups to carry out activities appropriate to their own programs in their communities in parallel and in cooperation with the discussion programs.
3. Conveyance of the results of such discussions from - town hall - or city-wide meetings, to province/state/bioregional conferences, on to national and eventually continental/global meetings, with the United Nations as a point of major impact

4. Development of substantial means of networking laterally and vertically during all stages of the project, which can remain in being thereafter and provide lasting advantages.

IV. Content

The content of the dialogues, from local to global levels, will include, among others, the following issues and their interrelationship:

- Population
- Food production and distribution
- Global resource management and conservation
- Energy - in sources and potential
- Environmental protection and management
- Civil and political rights
- Economic, social and cultural issues and rights
- Technology and its humane uses
- War - the arms race, disarmament and security
- Poverty

V. Values orientation

The grassroots discussions, as well as those at other levels, are intended to be objective and free from bias or the promotion of any particular ideological viewpoint. However, they will not be « value free », in the sense that a broader and more educated worldview will be encouraged. The view that personal action should reflect a constructive response to the global and human condition may be expected to emerge. The need for cooperative global management of global community issues may tend to become apparent, as well as the concept that « thinking globally » also requires « acting locally ».

The Project will not impose any particular blueprint for change or espouse any particular approach or ideology. Rather, it encourages individuals and groups to come together on local levels and to develop their own views and attitudes on the global mega-crisis, based upon objective and adequate, but simply stated information.

People will also be encouraged to consider launching and implementing programs for constructive change in their communities. The emphasis is on individual and local community self-education, creativity and initiative rather than on promotion of pat solutions.

VI. Options for involvement

There are many entry paths and modes of participation for individuals and organizations within the Planetary Initiative project. The principal points of entry are described in this section.

A. Coalition Membership. Active participation as **Members of the Coalition** of participating organizations is the option for organizations which wish to help shape, form and direct the Planetary Initiative. Their representatives sit on the Coordinating Councils of the project, and adopt the Planetary Initiative as a major part of their program for its duration. Where they have local constituencies, coalition members will invite their participation in the local dialogue aspects of the Project.

B. Endorsement and Collaboration. Organizations which endorse the principles and aims of the Project are listed as **Collaborating Organizations**, and circulate information on the project to interested persons and groups and to affiliate bodies.

C. Dialogue Within Organizations. Introduction of an organization's membership to the process of dialogue on global issues may be the appropriate entry point to participation in the project for:

- An organization which could benefit from an enriched perspective. This would pertain where there is a limited group perception of the global condition and a potential benefit to understanding the interrelationship with the organization's purposes and issues.
- An organization whose work has previously been devoted primarily to single-issue causes.
- An organization which has been concerned with broad humanitarian purposes focused at the local level and is now interested in completing the connection to global issues.

D. Dialogue Between Organizations. For organizations already immersed in internal dialogue on global issues, a more appropriate entry level in the project may be the fostering of inter-organizational dialogue by linking with other Planetary Initiative participants. This would stimulate:

- Linkage between organizations with allied interests, sharing ideas, resources and actions on local levels
- Linkage of local organizations with a broader global project, effective on international levels

E. Outreach to the Local Community. One of the most important roles for organizations in the Planetary Initiative is participation in galvanizing grassroots discussions and activities. Where possible, **local coalition coordinating groups** will be formed, based on the local affiliates of organizations participating in the international/national coalitions. They will be able to draw on the stature and significance of the national and international coordinating groups. The local coalition will undertake to develop a widening circle of local participating organizations and take responsibility for:

1. Organization of discussion groups sufficiently small to permit significant individual participation.
2. Notification to the public about the opportunity for participation, including information about becoming involved as an individual not organizationally related. This outreach can be done through the local media, as well as through public extension programs and international relations courses at universities, etc...
3. Possible organization of public hearings or televised - Reports to the Community - on the progress of the discussions: conduct phone - in radio or TV discussions; development of other mechanisms appropriate to the particular social or cultural setting, etc...
4. Organization of "town hall" type, community-wide summarizing events.
5. Facilitation of the process of delegate selection, to be initiated and determined by each individual group. Suggestions for various possible processes could be provided.

Groups encouraged to join the dialogue will span public interest groups, labor unions, service clubs, self-help and social aid groups, social action groups of all religious denominations, peace and world order organizations, civic groups, and the like. Kits of background discussion materials on issues will be made available, as will organization and discussion leadership and process kits. In addition, training for discussion facilitators will be available where possible.

Traditional organizations will be able to offer their skills in organization, promotion and planning, their experience and wisdom in social action and education. Some of the newer groups interested in maximizing human potential can contribute an emphasis on humanizing and life serving values as well as new views of human nature and change.

F. Parallel Activities. There are many activities and projects already in place which can profit from closer linkage. The synthesis of voices and activities based on common concern for stewardships of the planet can create an impressive force in communications. These projects range from national conferences, teach-ins, caucuses, national and local television programs to appropriate technology fairs, street theatres, etc.

In addition, the Planetary Initiative project may motivate design of other local projects making the local-global, person - and - planet connection, such as the development of local alternative energy resources, ecological rehabilitation, or organization of public events. Persons may also be motivated to join in traditional public education and course-oriented activities. Some may choose to adopt a lifestyle more in keeping with - voluntary

simplicity - The Project will, not, however, take a position on the specific parallel activities outside the structured discussion program which persons initiate or in which they wish to participate.

Overall, the effect of the Project will be to catalyze additional activity and cooperation among individuals and existing programs, and to encourage new people, not now engaged to involve themselves in constructive social action. The catalysing of new constituencies is a main goal of the Planetary Initiative.

VII. Communications processes

From each of the aforementioned dialogues and activities will emerge opinions, recommendations, actions and projects in all parts of the world. A communication system equal to capturing this data, summarizing it at different stages of the project, and relaying this information to network members and to the press will be developed. This system will serve in preparing and pyramiding the results to the culminating congress.

VIII.- Culminating congress

The culminating Congress(es) will be distinctly unlike presentational conferences of recent years, as there will be a strong foundation of gradual organic development from a broad general public. Having a clear derivation and ongoing, concrete follow-up, the planned culminating event(s) will be a continuation of the process which began with the local groups.

Congresses, whether held concurrently in several world regions or as one large gathering, will contain several parts:

1. Reports by delegates from national or continental congresses, synthesizing the views and perspectives of their area.
2. Concurrent deliberations by world leaders of general acclaim and stature. These would be people who are generally acknowledged and revered around the globe, whose wisdom is respected and who have a transnational status in the eyes of many. Participants could include Nobel Prize winners, outstanding statesmen and women, past Presidents of the United Nations General Assembly, noted scientists and artists, religious leaders, futurists and innovative thinkers in many areas that impinge on the global mega-crisis, etc. A Council of such persons would dramatically bring to worldwide public attention the seriousness of the obstacles to a peaceful future and the substantial shifts in direction which are required to overcome them. Their group recommendations could have powerful impact on local and world community action.

3. Merger of the conclusions of delegates and world leaders into a major global consensus statement, emphasizing specific steps and recommendations for achievement. Many thousands of persons and organizations from around the world will have participated in creating the preferred world future statement and plan of action. Inclusiveness of the diverse views of different regions of the world will be a prerequisite for the validity of the project. The credibility of such a statement would be unusually high because of its long considered and substantial process of derivation.

4. Celebrations in which large numbers of people would be able to participate. These would be expected to include an emphasis on cultural and ethnic contributions from many lands in food, dance and music, paintings, drama and crafts, and upon sharing experiences among people from many different cultures and races.

IX. Third world involvement

For this project to mobilize successfully the creative energies of a broadly dispersed but substantial portion of the world public, active Third World involvement at every level of organization is essential.

Significant networks of appropriate groups and organizations in the Third World exist and can be involved.

With substantial funding, the Project can realistically expect major participation from indigenous Third World organizations and from Third World affiliates of international organizations based in the West. This participation is deemed vital to the significance of the project and to the broadest understanding by the - Northern - participants. Third World participation can be expected to broaden the vision and scope of the dialogues.

X. Program results

The possible and expected outcome of the Planetary Initiative program can be substantial. Following is a brief summary of potential results.

PUBLIC EDUCATION: An extraordinarily wide public in several continents will have been reached and involved in a vigorous self-education process concerning the issues vital to human survival and well being. Eventually, formal community education on local-global problems and cross-cultural and trans-national program may be established.

SOCIAL CHANGE: Such self-education can have major significance in terms of informed participation of publics in policy determination and in constructive social change projects on local, national and international levels.

PUBLIC RE-ORIENTATION: The Planetary Initiative project can serve as a positive offset to gathering pessimism and anxiety, by involving the public in a constructive process illustrative of our capacity to choose and shape the human future. This shift to a more positive general mental attitude can help to catalyze creative responses.

WORLD OPINION FORMATION: The Planetary Initiative program will give substance to the notion of a world public opinion - and demonstrate its capacity for being focused and registered. This potential is inherent in the widespread, phased and organized participation of people throughout the world in a simultaneous, two-year conferencing process. It may provide a prototypic example of sustained global social process.

VALUE AND PERSPECTIVE CHANGE: The Planetary Initiative project will provide the framework for significant examination of the persistent value sets and perspectives which constitute the core of the present crisis period. It also holds the possibility for providing a context for individual and group identification of more adequate perspectives and values, and for a shift in their favor.

FRAMEWORK FOR COLLABORATION AND NETWORKING: The Planetary Initiative project will develop, in the course of its program, an enduring network of individuals, local groups and global organizations, that holds great potential for contributing to the creation of a peaceful, just and humane world order. The Program offers participating organizations an opportunity to interact creatively and also to clarify the validity of their own programs and approaches, through new perspective and feedback. The Project will provide tools to increase understanding of the total mosaic of which each group is a part. In local settings, groups which come together to co-sponsor community dialogue are likely to include a very broad spectrum of persons and concerns, interacting closely, often for the first time, in an operational setting, with mutual benefit.

XI. Follow up

Full maximization of the Project will require very effective follow up. The Planetary Initiative intends to include full and detailed planning for follow up in its program design.

A. Dissemination of Results

The most immediate concern will be dissemination of the results of the two-year conferencing program, largely in the form of final documents. A final statement incorporating a summary - worldwide - and a suggested global - plan of action - could constitute a major - declaration of interdependence - of real substance and insight. Because of the means by which it was created, it will possess important

sanction and mandate. Dissemination of the results would include the following elements:

1. Communication of the results of the Planetary Initiative to the Thirty-Eighth General Assembly of the United Nations in September, 1983.
2. Distribution of the results to the constituent bodies of the cooperating organizations.
3. Follow up with the media which have covered the Congress or received copies of the final documents, with a view to further circulation of results, interviews with key personages, etc.
4. Communications to the academic community for study of the final documents, for review of the social process through which they were derived, for stimulation of their views on the implications for policy planners, etc.
5. Communication with key officials of governments.
6. Communication to other related conferences on world futures and global policies.

B. Maintenance of the Network

Work will be done to stabilize and maintain the network of personal and organizational relationships and of information flow, which will have been established in the course of the two-year Planetary Initiative process. Its lateral and vertical components will be worldwide and will inter-link a wide range of existing and new networks.

C. Coordination of Future Meetings for the World Leaders

Possible planning for further meetings at appropriate intervals could be arranged. As is well known, it is extraordinarily difficult to coalesce such a group of widely diverse and widely scattered eminent persons. For these reasons it would be important to keep up any momentum which may have developed among them for future - State of the World - gatherings.

D. Continuation of Local Discussions

Local, individual and organizational activity will have been sharply stimulated by the Initiative project. Again, a momentum will exist which can be maintained to a certain extent through enhanced opportunities for personal involvement, which will have become visible to a substantial number of hitherto uncommitted people. Organizations concerned with constructive social change will be able to reach out to a wider, sensitized public.

E. Assessment of Project Effectiveness

Close examination of the strengths and weaknesses of the goal setting, planning and implementation of the Project would be most valuable for future endeavors. To the extent possible, budgeting for these follow up measures will be calculated and advance funding sought to assure that the resultant fruits of the Planetary Initiative program can fully mature.

XII. The Secretariat

One of the co-sponsors which convened the exploratory meeting leading to the Planetary Initiative was Planetary Citizens. This organization was asked by the interim Steering committee to function as Secretariat for the project. Given its experience in thinking normatively about global problems and its current work on specific world policy issues and public education, Planetary Citizens was seen as adequately suited for the task.

Derived from the 1970 Conference on Human Survival held at the United Nations, which was hosted by the Secretary General, U Thant, Planetary Citizens enjoys an unusual international parentage. Norman Cousins, a key initiator of the Conference on Human Survival, serves as the Honorary Chairman of Planetary Citizens, which is in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. It is exempt from Federal Income Tax under section 501 (c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code. Planetary Citizens files a yearly report on Charitable Organizations with the New York Department of State which is a public record. The legal counsel is William J. Butler, Esq., of Butler, Jablow and Geller, New York. Further information is available upon request.

XIII. Structure

The work and program of the Planetary Initiative are determined by a Coordinating Council of representatives of organizations joining the coalition, together with members of the former Stepping Committees and Advisory Group. The Council meets regularly.

A group of eminent Endorsers is also being developed.

At present, a European Coordinating Council has been formed, following a 50-organization meeting in London; and organizing efforts are also under way in Scandinavia and Australia.

XIV. Summary

The Planetary Initiative for the World We Choose provides a vehicle for unusual inter-organizational and international cooperation, a goal often sought but seldom realized, and one which should be significant in raising awareness/response to the global dilemma to a new level. The Planetary Initiative sets in motion a social process of several years' duration, with considerable follow on potential in which public involvement in the process of definition of a range of preferred and humane futures is carried forward. By taking these concerns to people where they live, the global crisis-opportunity may be reconsidered at a higher turn of the spiral, as stage by stage, the process described is implemented.