

UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development

2005 - 2014



The DESD at a glance



Education for Sustainable Development is everyone's business.



1. WHAT IS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, AND HOW CAN WE MAKE IT HAPPEN?

What do we mean exactly by sustainable development and how to attain it? Here are some concrete examples:

► **Fostering peace**

The 1990s saw an increase in conflicts in Africa and South America, as well as in Asia and Europe. War is a state of extreme human rights violations, namely the right to life, and of deep country-wide disorganization, that destroys all social and economic progress. Without peace, no model of development will be possible. Fostering peace is thus also working towards sustainable development!

► **Fighting against global warming**

Experts from around the world study the causes and effects of greenhouse gas emissions that are the root of the planet's global warming. The international community is mobilized to address this problem. Measures are taken to preserve the planet from the negative consequences of global warming caused by air pollution (transportation, factories and power plants) including climate change, rising sea levels, and modification of marine currents. We must, therefore, protect the planet in order to pass on a sustainable heritage to future generations.

► **Reducing North/South inequalities and fighting against poverty**

An importer from the North organizes a purchase and distribution circuit for coffee produced by farmers in the South in a preserved environment. These farmers sell their production at a fair price,

which allows them to cover their production costs and to live decently. This is fair trade, and it contributes to poverty reduction.

► **Fighting against the marginalization of women and girls**

Literate women and girls enrolled in school in the South guarantee the well-being of their families: children are better nourished, cared for, and attend at least primary school from the first to the last year. Mothers can then contribute to the household income through economic activities and fully take part in community life. Providing literacy to adults or schooling to children allows everyone to benefit from her or his right to education!

► **Sustainable development means having a different vision of the world**

Sustainable development, a constantly evolving concept, is thus the will to improve everyone's quality of life, including that of future generations, by reconciling economic growth, social development and environmental protection. As the above examples illustrate, improving the quality of life takes on a different aspect from one continent to another, from one region to another, and from one country to the next. No single continent, government, institution or individual, however, can attain this alone because the nature of the challenges to overcome requires a global, collective, and individual commitment.

Improving the quality of our life implies a change in our learning. As UNESCO's Director-General Koichiro Matsuura stresses: *"Education – in all its forms and at all levels – is not only an end in itself but is also one of the most powerful instruments we have for bringing about the changes required to achieve sustainable development."*





**Education
for Sustainable Development
is not an option
but a priority.**

2. WHY A DECADE OF EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT?

Education is a motor for change. That is why in December 2002, the United Nations General Assembly, through its Resolution 57/254, declared a Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014). It also designated UNESCO as the lead agency for the promotion of this Decade.

3. WHAT DO WE EXPECT FROM THE DECADE?

Throughout the Decade, education for sustainable development will contribute to enabling citizens to face the challenges of the present and future and leaders to make relevant decisions for a viable world.

These actors will:

- have acquired various skills (critical and creative thinking, communication, conflict management and problem solving strategies, project assessment) to take an active part in and contribute to the life of society,
- be respectful of the Earth and life in all its diversity,
- and be committed to promoting democracy in a society without exclusion and where peace prevails.

This vision of the world is not an utopia but an ideal towards which to work, by:

- taking into account education in sustainable development plans,
- creating public awareness of the importance of sustainable development,
- having regular and substantial coverage of sustainable development issues in the media.



4. HOW TO IMPLEMENT THE DECADE?

To attain the objectives mentioned above, the Decade will focus on:

▶ **Promoting and improving quality education**

Basic education needs to focus on sharing knowledge, skills, values and perspectives throughout a lifetime of learning in such a way that it encourages sustainable livelihoods and supports citizens to live sustainable lives.

▶ **Reorienting educational programmes**

Rethinking and revising education from nursery school through university to include a clear focus on the development of knowledge, skills, perspectives and values related to sustainability is important to current and future societies.

▶ **Building public understanding and awareness**

Achieving the goals of sustainable development requires widespread community education and a responsible media committed to encouraging an informed and active citizenry.

▶ **Providing practical training**

All sectors of the workforce can contribute to local, regional and national sustainability. Business and industry are, thus, key sites for on-going vocational and professional training, so that all sectors of the workforce can have the knowledge and skills necessary to make decisions and perform their work in a sustainable manner.

This Decade will also seek to create synergies with the other global initiatives that preceded it, like the Millenium Development Goals

(MDGs) that centered on the reduction of poverty; Education For All (EFA) that focuses on the universal access to education; and the United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD) that aimed to provide adults with education. All share a common vision: education is the key to sustainable development.

Change
towards a better quality of life
starts with education.



5. WHICH GOOD PRACTICES ?

► **Develop appropriate education programmes**

Thanks to the contributions of professionals from around the world, UNESCO proposes a free training programme on a CD-Rom: Teaching and Learning for a Sustainable Future (www.unesco.org/education/tlsf). Intended for teachers, educators, textbook writers and decision makers, this training programme offers 25 modules on many topics: consumer and health education, culture and religion, indigenous knowledge, women, agriculture and sustainable tourism. South Africa and Kyrgyzstan have already developed regional adaptations.

► **Educate through Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)**

In the community multi-media centers supported by UNESCO, local radios and Internet access are both a means of training and exchange for solving community problems. The Lumbini center in Nepal allows teachers, some living in remote places, to select teaching materials on Internet. This center supports democracy through public discussions on community life and allows information to be provided to local authorities. It also contributes to the development of sustainable tourism. Indeed, information is made available to tourists, and local young people in the community are trained as guides.

► Change youth lifestyles in the West

To lead young people and future adults in adopting viable lifestyle and consuming in a responsible way thanks to concrete information in an accessible language: such is the goal of the United Nations Environment Program and UNESCO. Following a study of the behaviors and ways of life of young people carried out in 2004, these two agencies developed and put online the YouthXchange web site (www.YouthXchange.net) in early 2005. Tested among young Westerners, this site yielded enthusiasm from both young people and teachers. A user's guide for teachers, youth groups and NGOs, is also available in several languages, thanks to the support of various NGOs.

► Enhance the commitment of cities

Half of the world's population lives in cities, and urban areas with high concentration of factories and transportation are a major source of pollution. This is why cities also make commitments in favour of sustainable development (www.unep.org/wed/2005/). Since 1998, the town of Vevey, Switzerland, has implemented Agenda 21, an outcome of the Rio Earth Summit (1992). Vevey has adopted the Lisbon Action Plan of the European sustainable cities campaign. And from now on, this town wants to mobilize more effectively elected officials to widen partnerships, to sensitize citizens, and to support national programmes such as Energy 2000 (rational energy management and energy policy development at the local level). Locally elected officials as well as municipal employees are now strongly motivated. Developing social actions, increasing community participation and evaluating on-going actions remain challenges to overcome.





6. WHAT IS UNESCO'S ROLE?

UNESCO, as lead agency for the coordination of the Decade,

- develops its action plan,
- provides guidance to governments and organizations for the implementation of the Decade,
- catalyses new partnerships with the private sector, faith-based institutions, media groups, youth, indigenous people, etc.
- serves as a forum, assists networks to facilitate exchanges,
- shares good ESD practices,
- encourages a research agenda,
- contributes to identifying indicators to ensure the monitoring and evaluation of the Decade,
- convenes flexible working groups on specific topics,
- contributes to enhancing education reforms.

(for additional information, see: www.unesco.org/education/desd).

7. WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES?

This Decade will be a success if we not only contribute to it together as governments, international organizations, associations, communities, educators, private sector and citizens, but also, if we manage to take up the following challenges:

- ▶ **Going beyond environmental education to reach education for sustainable development:** the concept of sustainable development being closely related throughout its evolution to the question of the protection of the planet, environmental education today is widely known and practiced. The Decade is not limited,

however, to environmental education. Developing adequate teaching contents is, thus, a challenge to take up immediately.

- ▶ **Drawing up an inventory of what exists for the Decade:** many countries have carried out education for sustainable development programmes or activities. Identifying these, evaluating the results, and disseminating information about them will allow us to accelerate the integration of this new vision of education into national plans.
- ▶ **Mobilizing the media:** the media represents a powerful means of awareness-raising and dissemination about the principles and values of sustainable development, as well as about promising experiences. Making the media an ally for transmitting quality information to citizens is a pledge of success for the Decade.
- ▶ **Establishing partnerships and creating synergies among the initiatives and programmes:** no institution, even at a global scale, can manage to achieve the goals of sustainable development on its own. Only united together, from North to South, East to West, can we be sure to build a viable world for us and for generations to come.

CONCLUSION

"Our biggest challenge in this new century is to take an idea that seems abstract – sustainable development – and turn it into a reality for all the world's people."

KOFI ANNAN,
Secretary General of the United Nations





***And what about you,
what will be your next action
in favour of Education
for Sustainable Development?***

ED/2005/PEQ/ESD/3



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