

World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development

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First Plenary

Address

by

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Assistant Director-General for Education,
President of the German Commission for UNESCO,
Distinguished Guests,
Conference Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of UNESCO, and in particular the DESD Coordination team led by Aline Bory-Adams, I would like to extend a warm welcome to all our respected guests and participants.

Since I may have no other moment to do so, I would like to take this opportunity to warmly thank all the members of the Conference Task Force – in particular, Alexander Leicht of the German Commission for UNESCO and his colleagues Katja Romer and Lina Franken, as well as Alexander Renner of the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research, and not forgetting Aline, Bernard Combes, Santosh Khatri and Olivier Laboulle. It has been a lot of very hard work over many months but it has been done in a good spirit, with some moments of real hilarity which helped us through.

Since I am in a thanking mode, I would also like to express my appreciation to the members of the International Advisory Group for their strong commitment and wise counsel. Let me thank in particular one of its members, the Deputy Assistant Director-General for Education, Ana Luiza Machado, for all her support, her questions and her advice.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The UNESCO World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development is important for several reasons. It not only marks the mid-point of the Decade but it is a moment to take stock of what we have achieved, reflect on the lessons learned and plan for the remaining half of the Decade.

In December 2002, the UN General Assembly entrusted UNESCO with the dual responsibility of 1) coordinating the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development; and 2) contributing to the implementation of the Decade.

At the mid-point of the Decade, it is important to review the progress achieved with regard to these two responsibilities and to the overall trends thus far in implementing the Decade.

The 2009 DESD Global Report endeavours to accomplish this task. The report is still in its draft stage and we invite your inputs in order to finalise it.

Before I present a brief overview of the draft report, I would like to revisit the process on which the report is based.

The International Implementation Scheme (IIS), the guiding document of the Decade, identifies monitoring and evaluation as one of the seven strategies for the effective implementation of the Decade.

As the designated lead agency, UNESCO is expected to establish mechanisms to monitor and evaluate progress achieved with regard to its dual responsibility. To this end, UNESCO set up in 2007 an ad hoc Monitoring and

Evaluation Expert Group (MEEG) as a key source of advice and support on appropriate monitoring mechanisms. The MEEG, many of whose members are attending the Bonn Conference and will meet immediately after this event, is providing valuable guidance, which is much appreciated by UNESCO.

The MEEG recommended that UNESCO develop and publish three DESD Global Reports during the life of the Decade:

- in 2009, focusing on the contexts and structures of work on ESD;
- in 2011, focusing on processes and learning initiatives related to ESD; and
- in 2015, focusing on the impacts and outcomes of the DESD.

The DESD M&E process is guided by the Global Monitoring and Evaluation Framework.

The 2009 DESD Global Report focuses on contexts and structures of work on ESD. It reports on progress made and obstacles encountered during the first five years in establishing provisions, strategies, mechanisms and contexts that support the development and implementation of ESD. The report also outlines several potential ways forward for the remaining half of the Decade.

A summary of key findings and ways forward is available in English and French on the conference website, where the full draft DESD Global Report in English is also available.

While completing the on-line registration formalities for the conference, participants were requested to answer a set of general questions with regard to ESD and the DESD. The findings from this registration poll, which generally confirm the DESD Global Report's findings, identify three priority areas:

First, the need to increase *public awareness and understanding* of ESD;

Second, the need to develop *policies* supporting ESD implementation at all levels of education; and

Third, the need to strengthen ESD in *formal* education (from early childhood education through to vocational and higher education).

More will be said about these and other findings tomorrow morning, but I can already assure you that UNESCO is already paying close attention to such indications.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The DESD Monitoring and Evaluation process has yielded valuable findings regarding a number of important issues. The much-debated meaning and interpretation of the term “Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)” finds an important place in the findings of the report. The emergence of a number of meanings and interpretations indicates that we need to find some common ground with regard to the definition of ESD, bearing in mind, of course, that one size does not fit all.

Let me now say a few words about the Global Report’s findings concerning the different constituencies and stakeholders who are active in and committed to the Decade. I shall preface my remarks with two reminders: first, that the Decade is a “UN endeavour” and, second, that it is a decade of education. For some, this may seem a little contradictory: the Decade is supposed to be UN-wide but a number of UN bodies may not see ‘education’ as part of their remit. However, if we take a broad view of education as including raising public awareness and understanding, then we can see how a wide range of UN entities may contribute to and participate in the Decade in ways both large and small. The Global Report shows that many UN agencies have indeed integrated ESD into their line of work. However, we need to review our strategic strengths and maximize the impact of our work in the years to come.

Many governments across the world have taken important steps to facilitate the implementation of ESD and the DESD. Findings show that considerable progress has been achieved in the short time span of five years in certain areas of action. For instance, there has been a marked effort to integrate ESD into the various levels and settings of education. However, much still remains to be done, especially in those countries which have been slow in starting. We need to build on the work that has been achieved in the first half of the Decade to ensure a meaningful impact of the Decade at the end of 2014 and beyond.

Other stakeholders, like NGOs and civil society organizations, also report important ESD-related activities. In particular, much work has been achieved by them to reach the unreached and to undertake concrete activities at the ground level.

If I may add a personal observation here, it is that the report does not yet capture the role and contribution of the private sector to ESD through the Decade.

The report also outlines some potential ways forward. Synergies with existing initiatives like the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Education for All (EFA) and the UN Literacy Decade (UNLD, 2003-2012) are necessary to reinforce the importance, visibility and relevance of ESD in our fast-changing world.

Raising funds for ESD, a key element to ensure the successful implementation of the Decade, remains a challenge. We need to think differently and more creatively in order to attract more partners to lend support to ESD and the DESD.

We also need to think more seriously about how to integrate ESD into development frameworks like the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAFs) and Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs). Given

that education is a cross-cutting theme in PRSPs, we should envisage weaving the theme of ESD into them.

Given the wide scope and outreach of ESD, building the capacity of such a varied range of stakeholders and actors remains a challenge. We need to come up with innovative solutions to meet this challenge.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Bonn Conference provides a good platform to engage in discussions that could identify solutions to the challenges that we face in implementing and promoting ESD and the DESD. As I have said earlier, the report is still in its draft stage and we request your invaluable input to finalise it.

I am aware that I have provided merely a sketch of the Global Report. The findings of the draft report as well as the registration poll results will be discussed in much more detail at the second plenary which is scheduled for tomorrow morning, when the regional dimension will figure more strongly than it has in my presentation. But I hope that this brief overview of the report has whetted your appetite for more, especially in terms of facts and evidence that might counteract certain misapprehensions about the Decade and provide useful guidance for determining the way forward.

There is a phrase in English which seeks to capture a person's cast of mind or their attitude: whether positive or negative, optimistic or pessimistic. We ask whether a person sees a glass as half-empty or half-full. Well, for you, is the Decade half-empty or half-full?

My own disposition is to see it as half-full and this leads me to value and appreciate everything that has been done so far to advance the Decade and to use that as a foundation to do even more. For me, the great value of the monitoring and evaluation process is that it provides evidence and analysis of interesting trends and important developments. This is not a recipe for complacency,

however, because it is clear that more might have been done, or done differently, and more needs to be done. The important thing is that we learn from experience in order to build better.

Relevance, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder; it is a subjective thing. But I can't help feeling that there is a lot of shared subjectivity in this room today and that we all feel that the relevance of ESD and the Decade are much higher now than they were in 2005, especially in view of the era of crisis we have entered. But that relevance may not be so obvious to people outside this room. I hope that one of the key outcomes of this meeting, therefore, will be a real drive to show and demonstrate the relevance of education for sustainable development to the problems the world is facing. In a way, of course, the relevance of ESD is not the question: the real challenge is about how, if applied thoughtfully and vigorously, ESD can help education in general to become much more relevant to the crises and problems confronting our fast-changing world.

In conclusion, I would like to lay emphasis on the collaborative nature of the DESD endeavour. There is so much we can learn from one another and so much more we can achieve if we work closely together. Most immediately, we need to galvanise all the partners and stakeholders represented here today in order to collectively chart the way ahead towards the successful achievement of the Decade's goals and objectives.

On that note, let me thank you all for coming. I wish you a very productive and a very enjoyable conference.

Thank you.