



The Bonn Conference: Basic Information Document

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This document provides basic information about the UNESCO World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development, to be held from 31 March to 2 April 2009 in Bonn, Germany. It places the conference in the context of the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD, 2005-2014), explains the overall objectives, the programme elements and the expected outcomes of the conference, and also provides a brief outline of the main themes and concerns of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). The document was prepared in consultation with the International Advisory Group of the conference.

Sustainable Development

Sustainable development is one of the central challenges facing the world today. In the light of persisting global patterns of poverty and inequality, as highlighted by the MDG agenda, along with emerging issues like the impact of climate change and the current financial and economic crises, it is no exaggeration to say that, at the start of the 21st century, the world is at a major turning point. The definition of sustainable development given by the World Commission on Environment and Development ('Brundtland Commission', 1987) remains valid and timely: "Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." This implies a balance between and an integration of the environmental, economic and social aspects of development, with attention also paid to the cultural dimension. Sustainable development, in fact, has become the guiding principle for achieving just and equitable development options that benefit all people everywhere. Sustainable development can thus be understood both in time and space: it takes into account the needs of future generations, and equally the needs of people today in every part of the world.

Achieving sustainable development requires a global change of mindset and behaviours. Indeed, it has long been recognized that education is crucial for achieving sustainable development. The UN Conference on the Human Environment ('Stockholm Conference') in 1972 emphasized education as a way of addressing human-environment problems. Agenda 21, the document adopted at the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED, 'Rio Summit', Rio de Janeiro, 1992), emphasized the need to promote education, public awareness and training in order to assist bringing about sustainable development. In particular, Chapter 36 (Promoting education, public awareness and training) states: "*Education is critical for promoting sustainable development and improving the capacity of the people to address environment and development issues.*" The World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD, Johannesburg, 2002) reaffirmed this commitment and recommended to the United Nations General Assembly the establishment of a United Nations Decade of



Education for Sustainable Development (DESD, 2005-2014), which clearly recognizes the increased need to integrate sustainable development issues and principles into education and learning. Thus, while education clearly is not a sufficient condition in itself for achieving sustainable development, it is certainly a necessary condition.

Education for Sustainable Development

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) seeks to integrate the tenets, values and practices of sustainable development into all aspects of education and learning. ESD aims at providing every individual with the opportunity to acquire the values, competencies, knowledge and skills that enable him or her to contribute to a humane, socially just, economically viable and ecologically sustainable future. Among other things, ESD promotes a sense of both local and global responsibility, encourages future-oriented, anticipatory thinking, builds recognition of global interdependence and emphasizes cultural changes that embrace the values of sustainable development. Rather than remaining passive in the face of the above-mentioned challenges, ESD seeks to empower societies, communities and individuals everywhere to shape their future actively and responsibly. ESD raises interesting questions, for example, about learning how to generate creative solutions to current global challenges; about reflecting on new lifestyles which combine well-being, quality of life and respect for nature and other people; and about considering the viewpoints of people from different countries about what sustainability means in practice.

ESD is relevant not only to formal education settings, training and workplace learning but also to public awareness-raising and non-formal and informal learning of many kinds. Thus, ESD should not be seen narrowly as another subject or concern to be added onto the formal education system or a workplace training programme. Rather, ESD is a teaching and learning process through which understanding of and orientation towards sustainable development become embedded in the core education and learning processes to be found in societies everywhere.

In whatever setting, ESD encourages an interdisciplinary and holistic approach to teaching and learning and promotes critical and creative thinking in the educational process. It therefore implies new ways of teaching and learning. The aim of ESD - for individuals to act responsibly in a globalized world - must be integrated into the manner in which all learning occurs: life-long and life-wide, in the workplace, the home and throughout society in general. To holistically address the development of ESD initiatives, four main thrusts have been identified: access to quality education, the reorienting of existing education systems to address sustainability concerns, public awareness and understanding initiatives, and training programmes to address specific social, environmental and economic sustainability issues.



The UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development

In December 2002, by Resolution 59/237, the UN General Assembly declared the years 2005-2014 the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD). Member States thus committed themselves to intensified efforts to integrate the principles, values and practices of sustainable development into education and learning. The UN General Assembly designated UNESCO the lead agency for the global implementation and coordination of the DESD.

The International Implementation Scheme for the DESD (IIS, 2005), states: “The basic vision of the DESD is a world where everyone has the opportunity to benefit from education and learn the values, behaviour and lifestyles required for a sustainable future and for positive societal transformation.” The DESD should provide an opportunity for refining and promoting the vision of and transition to sustainable development through all forms of education, public awareness and training. It should also help to give an enhanced profile to the important role of education and learning in promoting sustainable development. In this context, the IIS proposes four main objectives for the DESD: to facilitate networking, linkages, exchange and interaction among stakeholders in ESD; to foster an increased quality of teaching and learning in ESD; to help countries make progress towards and attain the Millennium Development Goals through ESD efforts; and to provide countries with new opportunities to incorporate ESD into education reform efforts.

The complexity, breadth and diversity of sustainable development issues and of ESD require that a wide range of stakeholders become active and come together to implement the DESD through a partnership approach: governments, parliaments, non-governmental organizations, media, the private sector, education institutions, research institutes, individual educators and students, among others. Bottom-up and top-down strategies must be combined. The local, national, regional and international levels are all relevant for a successful implementation of the DESD.

As global coordinator, UNESCO’s role is to catalyze new partnerships; encourage monitoring and evaluation; facilitate the development of a research agenda for ESD; provide a forum for bringing together important stakeholders; share good practices; promote exchange between Member States on ESD; convene working groups on specific ESD topics; and provide strategic guidance.

Since the start of the DESD, many activities have been undertaken by a broad range of stakeholders. National Committees have been set up, networks have been established, education materials have been developed and disseminated, good practices have been highlighted and shared, and meetings have been organized to encourage international exchange. Much remains to be done, however, before ESD occupies a truly central place in educational and learning processes and before ESD fulfils its potential to improve the quality of education as a whole.

The DESD needs to be seen in conjunction with other international priorities in development and education. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) provide the relevant framework for international development cooperation; the six Education for All (EFA) goals aim at extending the reach of basic education to everyone; and the United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD) focuses on the contribution of youth and adult literacy to building knowledge societies in which all may participate. With



its orientation towards the principle of sustainable development, the DESD focuses specifically on the content and purpose of education and learning.

The World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development: Objectives, Themes and Expected Results

As the DESD approaches its mid-point, the “World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development – Moving into the Second Half of the UN Decade” will be held in Bonn, Germany, from 31 March to 2 April 2009, organized by UNESCO and the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research, in cooperation with the German Commission for UNESCO. The conference will provide a platform for dialogue and advocacy on ESD at the global level, involving some 700 participants from all regions representing UNESCO Member States, UN agencies, civil society organizations, youth and the private sector. The preparation of the conference is being carried out in consultation with an International Advisory Group.

The World Conference on ESD comes at a time when education is increasingly recognized as an important motor for change. It is ever more clear that a massive reorientation of the ways people all over the world think and act is required if a sustainable future is to be ensured. The conference will be a major opportunity to highlight the role ESD must play in this process.

Conference objectives

The World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development will pursue four main objectives:

1. To highlight the essential contribution of ESD to all of education and to achieving quality education

-- “*Why is ESD relevant?*” --

ESD, which is relevant to all types, levels and settings of education, is an approach to teaching and learning based on the ideals and principles that underlie sustainability. Since ESD engages with such key issues as human rights, poverty reduction, sustainable livelihoods, climate change, gender equality, corporate social responsibility, and the protection of indigenous cultures in an integral way, it constitutes a comprehensive approach to quality education and learning. By dealing with the problems faced by humanity in a globalized world, ESD will shape the purposes and content of all education in the period ahead; ESD is, indeed, education for the future. The World Conference will draw out the relevance of ESD to education as a whole and its importance for improving the quality of education while attaining Education for All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals. Moreover, it will seek ways to move ESD further from the margins into the centre of all education.



2. To promote international exchange on ESD

-- “What can we learn from each other?” --

All sustainable development programmes, including ESD, must consider the three spheres of sustainability – environment, society and economy, with culture as an underlying dimension. Because ESD addresses the local contexts of sustainability, it will take many forms around the world. The World Conference will provide an opportunity to share experiences, best practices and views on ESD from around the world. The question of how ESD can meet different regional, national and local as well as global needs will be addressed. Examples of good practice from all over the world will play an important role in identifying viable approaches to ESD.

3. To carry out a stock-taking of DESD implementation

-- “What have we achieved so far, what are the lessons learnt?” --

The empirical results as well as the global and regional reports from the first Monitoring and Evaluation exercise – currently being carried out by UNESCO – will provide input into discussions on the implementation of the DESD. The successes so far will be celebrated and presented while obstacles encountered and lessons learned will also be discussed.

4. To develop strategies for the way ahead

-- “Where do we want to go from here?” --

It is important that the analysis of implementation so far and the identification of past and emerging challenges and opportunities leads to the development of new strategies, ensuring the further implementation of the DESD in its second half. Strategies for the way forward may include, among others: the further integration of ESD in educational policies, plans and programmes; the mobilization of more resources for ESD; the establishment of effective partnerships (especially through North-South and South-South cooperation) and the inclusion of stakeholders not involved in implementing the DESD so far. Emerging sustainable development issues and the educational responses to them will also be discussed in this context.

Conference Thematic Clusters

In pursuing the four objectives, the workshops of the World Conference will focus on four thematic clusters. It is assumed that all four objectives will be addressed by each of the following four clusters. The following cross-cutting issues will be addressed in the workshops: Gender, Inclusion, Culture, Traditional Knowledge, Human Rights, UN Millennium Development Goals, Technology.



I - Relevance of ESD for key sustainable development challenges

ESD can contribute substantially to addressing key sustainable development challenges. Indeed, without reorienting education, successfully confronting issues like water and climate change, among many others, will not be possible. Moreover, introducing sustainable development issues into all areas of education will help to make education more relevant. Engaging students and learners in contemporary questions related to development brings education closer to life and enhances the learning experience by stimulating motivation and interest. The following workshops are foreseen for this thematic cluster:

Workshop themes
1. Water education and training for sustainable development
2. Learning about climate change through ESD
3. Advancing sustainable lifestyles and responsible consumption through ESD
4. ESD and risk management : building resilient societies
5. Educating for food security : the contribution of ESD
6. AIDS, Health and Education for Sustainable Development
7. Mainstreaming Biodiversity into education and learning
8. The economic pillar of SD: educational approaches

II - Building partnerships to promote ESD

With sustainable development relating to all areas of society, reorienting education towards sustainable development must be a multi-stakeholder endeavour. Learning for sustainable development takes place not only in education institutions but also in many other sectors of society. Education stakeholders therefore need to reach out to other important actors and build strong partnerships. Because sustainable development is a global challenge, international partnerships and the integration of the local and the global are decisive elements for ESD as well. How strong partnerships for ESD can be built will be addressed in the following workshops:

Workshop themes
9. UNESCO Biosphere Reserves as learning sites for integrating local and global sustainability issues
10. Delivering on CSR and private sector participation in the DESD
11. Media as partners for ESD
12. ESD in North-South-South & South-South partnerships and development cooperation

III - Capacity Development for ESD

If ESD is to become a central aspect of all education, supporting structures at the global, national and local levels are required. Among other things, this implies political frameworks that enable the inclusion of sustainable development issues and principles into all areas of teaching and learning. The active involvement of civil society is equally key to introducing a broad concept such as ESD into education. Finally, ESD implementation itself must be a learning experience. Monitoring and evaluating progress must therefore be an important concern for all stakeholders.



The following workshops will address capacities for the successful implementation of ESD:

Workshop themes
13. Global responsibilities and local realities to foster ESD through institutional frameworks
14. The role of Civil Society in ESD
15. From the margins into the centre: Establishing ESD in education plans and curricula
16. Teacher Education to address sustainability
17. Monitoring and Evaluation of ESD – Results and lessons learnt from the DESD M&E process and indicators for measuring progress in ESD

IV - ESD and the teaching-learning process

The integration of ESD into education varies among different fields of teaching and learning. Requirements, practices and opportunities of ESD vary from one education setting to another. Moreover, when addressing the role of ESD in education, the important question of how Education for All and ESD relate to each other must be considered. The main thrust of each workshop in this cluster is: how can ESD contribute to improving the quality of teaching-learning processes?

Workshop themes
18. Synergies and differences between EFA and ESD [Focus on Educational Quality and how ESD can contribute to Quality Education]
19. Better schools at pre-school, primary and secondary levels through ESD [Focus on methodology, school environment, role of teachers, curriculum]
20. The role of HE and research in ESD (teacher training, multidisciplinary research, innovation and critical reflection)
21. ESD and lifelong learning
22. ESD and TVET – developing skills and labour force competencies

Conference expected results

Among the expected results arising from the World Conference are the following:

- Strong impulse given to positioning ESD higher on the international education agenda.
- Better understanding of the essential contribution of ESD to quality education achieved.
- Further progress made towards acknowledging that ESD is an essential contribution to meeting sustainable development challenges at the local, national, regional and global levels.



- Good practices, experiences and views on ESD from all world regions exchanged in ways that will further enrich the implementation of the DESD.
- Substantial input gathered for the global mid-decade report on the DESD to be presented to the UNGA in 2010.
- Key strategic directions, priorities for action and partnership modalities identified for the second half of the DESD.

The main results of the conference, especially major recommendations, will be expressed in a Bonn Declaration. More detailed results (from plenaries, workshops and other conference processes) will be made available in a post-conference publication. It is envisaged that the Bonn Declaration will be submitted to the Executive Board and the General Conference of UNESCO for consideration with a view to strengthening UNESCO's role in the DESD and enhancing follow-up activities by Member States and other partners in the second half of the Decade.

Programme Elements of the World Conference

The World Conference programme will comprise the following elements:

In the **Opening Plenary**, the Director-General of UNESCO, Koïchiro Matsuura, and the German Federal Minister of Education and Research, Annette Schavan, will officially open the conference and introduce its objectives and themes. Keynote speakers will place the conference in the context of current education and sustainable development concerns and thus set the stage for the work to be undertaken during the three conference days.

Plenary Sessions will focus on the specific contributions of keynote speakers, the presentation and discussion of the Global Report on the DESD, and feedback from the workshops.

The **Closing Plenary** will consider the outcomes of the second set of workshops and draw together the conference's contribution to the four overall objectives with the help of rapporteurs. The Bonn Declaration on ESD will be adopted.

On the afternoon of the first day of the Conference (Tuesday, 31 March 2009), there will be a **ministerial High-Level Segment** on the theme of 'ESD and quality education', from 14.00 to 17.00. The session will be co-chaired by the Director-General of UNESCO, the Federal Minister of Education and Research of Germany (Ms Schavan) and the President of the KMK (Federal Office of the Lander in relation to Education).

A total of 22 **Workshops** – two sets of 11 parallel workshops – will address specific thematic and strategic issues with regard to ESD. They are grouped according to the four thematic clusters of the conference. The workshops will be organized and coordinated by key ESD experts and stakeholders, who are strongly encouraged to use an interactive format.

Project-Based Workshops, on the afternoon of the second conference day, will be held off-site and will provide participants with the opportunity to exchange views on best practice with the organizers of local ESD projects in the region and with one another. Project-based workshops will complement the on-site conference



programme by providing 'hands-on' experiences of ESD. Each project-based workshop will have a specific thematic focus.

An **ESD Projects Exhibition** at the conference venue will present 25 concrete good practice projects selected from all over the world. Five projects per world region and representing different ESD approaches and stakeholders will be shown.

Special Events will address specific aspects and foci of ESD in addition to the conference workshops. Special events will be organized by individual ESD stakeholders – from governments, NGOs, the private sector, and so forth - and will be accredited by the conference organizers. They will take place during lunch hours or in the early evening in rooms at the conference centre and in surrounding institutions.

A number of **Associated Events** highlighting various aspects of ESD, mostly organized by local stakeholders, will take place before, during and after the conference in the city of Bonn.

The **Member States and United Nations Agencies Exhibition Area** will give UNESCO Member States and UN agencies the opportunity to present their activities in the context of the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development in an annex to the World Conference venue.

Links to other education conferences

The World Conference on ESD is one of four major education conferences UNESCO is organizing in 2008-2009. In chronological order, the four conferences are:

- the **48th International Conference on Education**: "Inclusive Education: the Way of the Future" (25-28 November 2008, Geneva, Switzerland)
- the **World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development**: "Moving into the Second Half of the UN Decade" (31 March-2 April 2009, Bonn, Germany)
- **CONFITEA VI** (International Conference on Adult Education): "Learning and Living for a Viable Future: the Power of Adult Learning" (19-22 May 2009, Belém, Brazil); and
- the **2009 World Conference on Higher Education**: "The New Dynamics of Higher Education and Research for Societal Change and Development" (5-8 July 2009, Paris, France).

These conferences tackle, each from a different angle, key challenges of today's world for which education can make a difference, provided that policies guided by a holistic vision of education systems (formal and non-formal) and wider processes of learning are developed.

The shared vision which runs through the four conferences is one of education systems and learning processes that encourage equity and inclusion, quality learning, flexibility and innovation. They are anchored in the conviction that education is a human right as well as a foundation and prerequisite for sustainable development and that learning happens throughout life. They offer a unique



opportunity for broad dialogue on educational priorities and will provide guidance to policy-makers and other stakeholders on paths for transforming education systems and learning processes. Synergies and linkages between the themes and issues addressed by each conference will be sought to ensure maximum benefit from these conferences. With regard to the World Conference on ESD, the organizers will analyze the outcomes of the International Conference on Education and introduce them into the preparatory process for the Bonn Conference; similarly, results from the Bonn conference will inform discussions at CONFINTEA VI and the 2009 World Conference on Higher Education.

The organizers of the World Conference on ESD will also make sure that results of international meetings on ESD that take place in advance of the World Conference are taken into account in the preparation of the event. Results of previous meetings should be submitted to the organizers and should be structured along the four objectives of the World Conference. Preparation for the World Conference is an item on the agenda of the following meetings, among various others: International Conference on ESD, 27-29 October 2008, Bordeaux, France, organized by the French National Committee for the DESD within the framework of the French Presidency of the Council of the European Union; International Workshop: Visions and Preparations for a Common Blueprint on ESD, 11-12 November 2008, Gothenburg, Sweden, organized by the Swedish Ministry of Education and Research, the Swedish Commission for UNESCO, Chalmers University and the University of Gothenburg; International Forum on ESD Dialogue, 2-5 December 2008, Tokyo, Japan, organized by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) of Japan and the Japanese National Commission for UNESCO.

Key ESD Reference Documents

Framework for the UN DESD International Implementation Scheme

This reference document was prepared through consultation with other United Nations agencies, international organizations, governments, NGOs, universities, individuals and the private sector. It was presented at the 59th Session of the United Nations General Assembly (New York, September-October 2004). It served as the basis for the writing of the DESD International Implementation Scheme.

English - <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001486/148650E.pdf>

DESD International Implementation Scheme

The DESD International Implementation Scheme was approved at the 172nd session of the UNESCO Executive Board.

English - <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001486/148654E.pdf>

United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD 2005-2014): the first two years

English - <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0015/001540/154093e.pdf>

Further documents will be made available on the conference website:

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