



UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005 – 2014)

Supporting efforts to promote development which is socially desirable, economically viable and ecologically sustainable, the United Nations (UN) General Assembly on December 20, 2002 adopted, by consensus, a resolution establishing a United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD). The resolution designates the ten-year period as 2005-2014, and proclaims UNESCO as the lead agency to promote the Decade. The DESD offers an opportunity to advance progress made in human resource development, education and training to support sustainable futures.

A Movement to Declare a Decade

Since 1985, the UN has designated on-going International Decades to draw attention to major issues and to encourage international action on questions of global importance. The recommendation for a DESD was supported at the World Summit for Sustainable Development (WSSD) Preparatory Committee IV in Bali, Indonesia, in June 2002 and endorsed at the highest political levels at the WSSD in Johannesburg, South Africa, in September 2002. The WSSD Plan of Implementation confirmed the importance of education for sustainable development and recommended that the UN General Assembly "consider adopting a Decade of Education for Sustainable Development starting in 2005."¹ Three months later, the draft resolution A/C.2/57/L.71 was introduced to the General Assembly by the Japanese Government, co-sponsored by many other countries. The resolution was adopted by consensus by the Committee and the DESD declared to commence January 1, 2005.

Aims of the Decade

The outcomes of the Johannesburg Summit and the establishment of a DESD affirm the need to integrate sustainable development into education systems at all levels in order for education to be a key agent for change. The Decade aims to promote education as the basis for a sustainable human society and to strengthen international cooperation toward the development of innovative policies, programmes and practices of education for sustainable development (ESD).

UNESCO's Dual Role in the Decade

UNESCO has a dual role to play in relation to ESD: first as the lead agency in the promotion of the Decade, and second as a substantive implementer of ESD. In its role as the lead agency in promotion of the Decade, UNESCO will:

Develop an Implementation Scheme

UNESCO will play a catalytic role in dialogue and consensus building to draft an international implementation scheme in consultation with the UN and other relevant international organisations, Governments, non-Governmental organisations (NGOs) and other stakeholders. In developing the draft Implementation Scheme, UNESCO will:

- Engage in wide consultations with multiple partners in developed and developing countries, emphasising the global nature of ESD;
- Operate in a cross-sectoral and inter-disciplinary manner, integrating contributions from all stakeholders;
- Use a "bottom-up" approach incorporating field perspectives, experiences and challenges;
- Employ an evidence-based approach, drawing on local, regional and global best practices based on documented research results and country experiences, and emphasising the scaling-up of successful approaches; and

¹ Para. 117d, *World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) Plan of Implementation, 2002.*

- Link activities under the Decade with various other educational processes, including the Dakar Framework for Action on Education for All (EFA), the UN Literacy Decade (UNLD), and the Millennium Development Goals.

The ultimate objective of the implementation scheme is to provide recommendations for Governments on how to promote and improve the integration of ESD into their respective educational policies, strategies and plans at the appropriate levels. The scheme will be developed to achieve the following outputs:

- Specific actions to reinforce commitment to the EFA Goals, the UNLD goals and cross-cutting issues such as poverty alleviation, gender issues and human rights;
- Guidelines for Governments on how to adopt a holistic and transdisciplinary approach to ESD and how to integrate ESD in their educational policies and systems;
- International, regional and national networks with a broad range of partners, including universities and civil society, in support of ESD programmes;
- Programmes for un(der)served areas, and public awareness about education for sustainable development at all levels, relying on information and communication technologies (ICTs), the media and other sources; and
- National capacities for ESD - including human resources (e.g., teachers and planners) and infrastructure (e.g., documentation, and teacher training and research facilities).²

Monitor Implementation and Follow-Up

During the Decade, UNESCO will work with UN agencies and key stakeholders to:

- Incorporate quantitative and qualitative ESD indicators into on-going monitoring and evaluation for EFA and the UNLD;
- Monitor the progress of activities undertaken by UN agencies, Governments and NGOs in observance of the Decade and facilitate implementation and follow-up;
- Evaluate the achievement of measurable results in realising the aims and objectives of the Decade, particularly in terms of encouraging the integration of ESD in educational policies and systems; and
- Make recommendations to further advance the promotion of ESD based on results and lessons learned from the Decade.

UNESCO's Natural Science Sector will continue to play a large role in this endeavour, as their expertise and the application of science and technology in ESD is key to devising options for a future based on the concepts of sustainability, equity, justice and peace.

Secondly, UNESCO also has substantive functions to perform during the Decade as an implementer of ESD. These include accelerating education reforms and coordinating activities of multiple stakeholders to implement quality ESD at international, regional, and country levels. In this role, UNESCO will continue its work in:

- Clarifying and communicating the concept and messages of ESD;
- Reviewing national education policies and reorienting formal education systems;
- Incorporating ESD into national strategic and action plans;
- Educating to promote sustainable consumption and production patterns;
- Promoting investments in education;
- Identifying and sharing innovative practices; and
- Raising public awareness.

Success during this decade will require commitment from and partnerships between UN agencies, Governments, scientific communities, teachers, NGOs, local communities and the media for a common, sustainable future.

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Section for Education for Sustainable Development (ED/PEQ/ESD)
 Division for the Promotion of Quality Education, UNESCO, 7 Place de Fontenoy, 75352 Paris 07 SP, France
 tel: 33 1 45 68 06 86 -- fax: 33 1 45 68 56 29 -- email: esddecade@unesco.org -- web: www.unesco.org/education/desd

² These elements have been abstracted from the draft document, Education for Sustainable Development: the Education Sector Paper, a report prepared by ESD for an inter-sectoral meeting, March 5, 2003.
