



Workshop of UNESCO Chairs in Education for Sustainable Development

4-5 October 2012

UNESCO, Paris

Meeting REPORT

Opening/Introduction

The meeting was opened by Soo-Hyang Choi, Director, Division of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development, UNESCO. She emphasized that Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) has considerably been gaining momentum as we move towards the end of the UN Decade of ESD in 2014. She welcomed all participants and thanked them for attending. She introduced the workshop of UNESCO Chairs in ESD as an opportunity to exchange experiences among Chairs and as an important chance for UNESCO to gather input for the end-of-Decade report and the post-2014 ESD framework.

Following a short round of introduction of participants, Alexander Leicht, Chief, Section of ESD introduced the three objectives of the meeting: to promote the exchange of experiences; to use the Chairs' expertise to discuss the post-2014 ESD framework and identify good initiatives that can be scaled up after 2014; and to further conceptualize a whole-institution approach.

Session I: Exchange of Experience

Chairs presented their recent work and focused in particular on opportunities and challenges with regard to implementing ESD in higher education. The following **challenges** were particularly highlighted:

- *Communication*: Challenge to engage and partner with communication/media experts to promote the ESD message and transmit results of academic work. Inter-university communication as a long process to obtain support from different academic faculties/departments, but also from the administration.
- *Funding*: Securing financial resources for research, and ensuring access to (free/affordable) courses and programmes.
- *Evaluation and assessment of ESD results*. Methodological questions of how to measure education reform towards ESD still open. Impact research often very costly.
- *Engaging in and promoting ESD related research*. The 'ESD research community' is still rather limited and there is a limited number of outlets for academic work. Sometimes difficulties with reaching mainstream publishing channels with ESD work.
- *Scaling up of activities*: Challenges in extending programmes to other stakeholders.

Opportunities highlighted:

- *Collaboration and networking:* International and national networks have proven to be key for successful ESD work. Cooperation with the community and the region (e.g., through Regional Centres of Expertise) is also important. Cooperation with the private sector is another promising avenue to secure commitment and funding.
- *Engaging with the whole institution:* Chairs shared examples of having developed a Master Plan for Sustainability, engaging with the whole campus and university. While challenges were mentioned, participants saw many opportunities in involving the broader institution.
- *ICT's:* Offering free web based education courses and programmes is an important tool to reach teachers and students across geographical and cultural boundaries as well as to enhance international perspectives on sustainable solutions.
- *Collaborative (team) learning and peer learning:* Joint learning among students, teachers and tutors seems particularly appropriate for ESD and can also be a successful means to achieve a vibrant and interactive alumni network.

Session II: The UN Decade of ESD, 2014 and Beyond

End-of-Decade assessment and post-Decade planning

Alexander Leicht presented the planning for the end-of-Decade assessment and initial considerations for ESD work beyond 2014. The objective of the session was to collect feedback on the end-of-Decade assessment and post-2014 framework as well as to identify successful ESD initiatives.

The consultation process for submitting suggestions on the post-2014 framework will be open to a broad range of stakeholders. One important consideration regarding the post-2014 framework is that it should build on successful initiatives that can be scaled up. Tentatively, these initiatives can be grouped into the areas policy (e.g., integration of ESD into national education strategies), practice (e.g., ESD in schools), and supporting mechanisms (e.g., ESD networks). The drafting process of the framework will take into account the role of different stakeholders and also consider the range of sustainability challenges as outlined in the Rio+20 outcome document. The framework will likely further address issues such as ICTs, social media and non-formal education.

Recommendations brought forward in the discussion:

- *Formulate a clear overall objective* for the ESD framework and get across a sense of urgency.
- *Collect post-2014 commitments* by Member States, organizations and individuals in the lead up towards the 2014 ESD World Conference similar to the Rio+20 process.
- *Take into account weak areas of ESD, such as non-formal learning*, and ensuring they are not left out of a post-2014 framework.
- *Consider the importance of intersectoral approaches.*
- *Address how ESD looks like in the digital age:* Social media should be used. Concrete good practices can show how social media can improve advocacy, empowerment and participation.
- *Reach out to further target groups/communities of practice:* Sub-regions such as the Mediterranean region and regional organizations should be consulted. ESD should also reach out to other 'agendas' such as human rights education to ensure the participation of wider communities of practice.

- *Successful initiatives identified to be scaled up* should be as inclusive as possible and take into account resources provided by governments and resources generated by the initiatives themselves. Initiatives in the pipeline should also be considered for being scaled up. Mentioning some initiatives and not others has to be done diplomatically.

Concrete successful initiatives that may be considered for post-2014 ESD activities include: Regional Centres of Expertise, the Global University Network for Innovation (GUNI), the teacher education network coordinated by York University, Toronto (Charles Hopkins), various sustainable development networks in higher education, as well as declarations/commitments at national and international levels by higher education institutions to sustainable development, such as the Rio+20 Higher Education Sustainability Initiative (a comprehensive mapping would have to be underdone).

Plans for the final Decade report

Rosalyn McKeown presented plans for the final Decade report. This was followed by a discussion on the contribution of higher education to strengthening the evidence base of ESD, aiming at identifying existing qualitative and quantitative data collections on ESD that could be used for assessing the Decade. The need for solid and concrete data was highlighted as a key concern.

Concerning the *importance of improving the evidence base* for ESD, Chairs raised the question how to verify data provided by Member States and insure transparency. Member States reports should be complemented by data from NGOs, the private sector, scholars, including UNESCO Chairs.

Relevance of information: Chairs proposed to rather use a thematic than a country or region approach for the selection of information to be presented in the final report (i.e., no regional chapters or individual country reports). Furthermore, different actors should have the possibility to prioritise what their most important actions and data are, e.g., some may prefer to report on formal, others on non-formal education. The questionnaire to be sent out should therefore be flexible. Setting up an internet competition was suggested to select good ESD stories to be presented in the report.

Concerning the *format of the report*, the main question was how to balance qualitative and quantitative information. Concerns regarding the length of the report and the possibility to combine all relevant issues and levels into one report were expressed. Suggestions were made to make accessible a full length report online with information from every country, acknowledging best practice in every country. The published version (about 150-200 pages) should be an abridged one, directed towards policy-makers.

On *data collection*, many actors should be mobilized and existing data and datasets from other UN agencies and stakeholders be used. Guidelines for data collection should be given to countries in early 2013 to give them time to produce a final report. The purpose of the report and the benefits for the country should be explained well to encourage countries to collect data. Gerd Michelsen offered to make accessible collected data on ESD in kindergarten, in non-formal education and on youth. Mirian Vilela mentioned wevalue.org as a possible tool for assessment.

Alexander Leicht reassured the Chairs that their recommendations will prove valuable in further designing the process towards and the substance of the post-2014 framework, while he also cautioned that resource and other constraints may not make it possible to follow all suggestions. The Chairs will be contacted again at a later stage regarding their concrete input into a post-2014 framework.

Session III: Rio+20 Outcome and Follow up: Whole-University Approaches

Alexander Leicht gave a short overview of ESD at the Rio+20 conference, pointing out in particular that Member States committed to promoting ESD activities beyond the end of the Decade in 2014. As part of the Higher Education for Sustainability Initiative, many universities pledged implementing ESD within their institutions. The session focused on contributions to conceptualizing a whole-institution approach for universities and sharing experiences on whole-institution approaches to ESD. (The public panel debate organized on the first evening of the workshop together with the Swedish Permanent Delegation to UNESCO also focused on this topic.)

Whole-institutions approaches were characterized as long term processes that include changing the curriculum and pedagogy, introducing a more inclusive, transparent and democratic governance process, greening the campus, as well as interaction of the university with the local community and its efforts towards sustainable development. Whole-institution approaches should involve students as well as teaching staff and administration. A communication plan, targeting different audiences with different messages, was mentioned as vital for the success. Including sustainability into the vision statement of the institution was also regarded as important. Good examples mentioned: Plymouth University, UK; Leuphana University, Germany; University of Santiago de Compostela, Spain, as well as initiatives at Athens University, Greece, and at Lund University, Sweden.

There was agreement that there is not only one recipe to achieve a whole-institution approach. In very big universities (Athens was mentioned with its 150,000 students) a top-down approach may be useful, while in other settings a bottom-up approach may be successful, depending also on the stakeholders willing to go along. It was pointed out that there is the danger that 'greening' a university is interpreted by some actors only as managing the campus sustainably while leaving the curriculum untouched. Teaching was seen by some as the main challenge when reorienting a university. Alternative rankings were pointed out as supporting mechanisms.

Session IV: Other Issues

Possibilities to collaborate

This segment was devoted to concrete initiatives where Chairs sought collaboration. Prof. Michelsen presented the "Virtual Academy for Sustainability", offering free online ESD courses with the possibility to earn credits. Interested Chairs are invited to collaborate with Leuphana University in implementing the courses at their institutions. Cooperation and assistance on curriculum development was another request brought forward, which was followed up bilaterally by UNESCO. Further, the possibility to develop a short electronic information document about the network, based on the Chairs' reports to UNESCO, was discussed.

World Conference on ESD in 2014

Alexander Leicht outlined the current planning for the ESD World Conference in 2014 on the basis of the document outlining the conference objectives shared at the meeting. UNESCO currently develops a website to enable stakeholders to eventually upload contributions to the conference website, which should be in place in spring 2013. There are several entry points for higher education into the conference, e.g., workshops and exhibitions. One idea mentioned was calling together the signatories of the Rio+20 Higher Education for Sustainability Declaration in the lead up to the conference.

Closing

UNESCO representatives thanked the Chairs for their rich contributions and for their engagement in ESD, and committed to further enhancing its cooperation with the Chairs in particular as regards soliciting their expertise for ongoing processes.

Postscript: Workshop evaluation

The evaluation of the feedback questionnaires filled in by the participants confirmed the relevance of the workshop. Evaluations by participants were exclusively positive. 78% of participants gave the highest rate of satisfaction regarding the importance of the discussed topics and the quality of discussions. 67% agreed to the highest degree that it was valuable to have met colleagues of common interest with whom they will be able to collaborate after the workshop. Suggestions included convening Chair meetings more often to strengthen the network and to make more use of Chairs in promoting ESD at all levels. Making use of virtual workshops was another suggestion to consider.