

A New Era, A New Responsibility

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New Opportunities and New Responsibilities

Never before has humanity had to face such unprecedented geopolitical, socio-economic, demographic and climatic changes, which stand to threaten human dignity and the very basis of the values on which UNESCO was established. We witness major conflicts and growing tensions, leading to mass migrations of refugees and increasing inequalities. Despite global efforts and technological advances to improve livelihoods, societies around the world continue to struggle with poverty, terrorism, youth unemployment and climate change. We are at a critical turning point and urgently need to chart a new course in a new era for generations to come.

In this time of uncertainty, UNESCO, as the only intellectual organization of the United Nations system, is increasingly needed to carry out its historical responsibility to provide answers to the future orientation of humanity and exercise its preventive function by “constructing defences of peace in the minds of men and women”. In the coming years, UNESCO must draw on its significant “soft power” across its programmes to support Member States in meeting the commitments of the 2030 Agenda. To do this, it needs to cultivate a generation of global citizens with a sense of responsibility, while preserving national and cultural identities, to help find the best-contextualized solutions in fostering inclusive, equitable and peaceful societies.

UNESCO is going through a crucial phase of its existence. With limited and diminishing resources as well as needs for a comprehensive reform, priorities have to be re-assessed and choices have to be made. These demand strong technical knowledge, sound judgement, credible experience and global leadership.

Why me?

UNESCO needs a strong visionary leader and experienced manager to overcome its external and internal challenges, serve Member States and reposition the Organization to fulfil its purpose and functions in today’s changing world. After 24 years at UNESCO, being part of a third of its history, my dedication, devotion and personal commitment to its mandate have never been stronger.

Seven years ago, when I took on the responsibility of Assistant Director-General for Education (ADG/ED), I promised to revitalize the Education Sector and provide a vision for UNESCO to spearhead the global education agenda. Today, with the support of my dedicated colleagues, I can proudly say that I have delivered on my promise. UNESCO’s well-recognized leading role in the formulation and coordination of Sustainable

Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) on education clearly demonstrates the success of the Sector's vision. These achievements were made despite severe financial constraints. My proven track record in revitalizing the Education Sector serves as a valuable experience in staking out new directions for UNESCO.

Coming from the largest developing country and from a family of university professors, I grew up exposed to the vast oriental culture and civilization. I have worked in poor, remote and rural areas of China and taught at secondary school, and thus know first-hand the enormous benefits that education can bring to a person's and a country's development. I completed my Master's and Ph.D. studies in Canada, which allowed me to become well acquainted with Western culture at an early stage of my career. Guided by the traditional Chinese principles of harmony, tolerance and inclusion, I carry with me the best of both oriental and occidental worlds and serve as a bridge between the two.

In the course of my career, I have visited more than 90 countries. This has consolidated my appreciation and understanding of cultural diversity. Despite differences in culture, language, lifestyles or political systems, all peoples share the same expectations of peace and sustainable development, and belief in the power of education, the sciences, culture as well as communication and information to achieve these. Mutual understanding, respect and tolerance among cultures, civilizations and religions are key ingredients for peace.

While carrying out my responsibilities as ADG/ED, I have also been entrusted to lead two crucial Central Services (Bureau of Strategic Planning and Bureau of Human Resources Management) as Director *ad interim*. Within a limited period, I have operationalized a series of reforms to reinforce programme delivery. My experience also allowed me to promote stronger links between the Programme Sectors and Central Services and render the work of the bureaus more effective. These initiatives were highly appreciated by staff across UNESCO. In turn this enabled me to better grasp what and how to improve the management of the Central Services; one of the greatest challenges for the Organization.

Reform is a central part of my experience. In a United Nations agency, however, reform has never been easy, with various stakeholders and interests. Mobilizing support from both Member States and UNESCO staff is key for progress and efficiency. My accomplishments and ways of working in the past years speak for themselves, and reaffirm that I am the right person to lead the Organization.

My Vision and Actions

If I am elected as the next Director-General of UNESCO, I will abide by and follow through on my conviction that adjustments of UNESCO's Programmes and Central Services are needed. **Transparency** and **accountability** will be my prerogative. To achieve concrete results, my approach will focus on consultation, consensus building and multilateral cooperation; a major factor of my success in the Education Sector.

I, therefore, will establish a senior management team composed of highly competent professionals from various backgrounds and count on Member States' confidence and trust in my team and me to make proposals of priorities in a transparent manner. Naturally, choices will be made only after comprehensive consultations within the Secretariat and with Member States.

UNESCO's financial crisis has undoubtedly had severe consequences. UNESCO's core programmes thus need to be re-evaluated to determine their relevance, so that we can **prioritize** and **concentrate** on those areas where the Organization has the greatest comparative advantage and significant impact. If we continue spreading ourselves too thinly, we run the risk of being marginalized in our core areas of competence.

Education is a basic human right and a prerequisite for achieving all SDGs. While continuing to lead, coordinate and review the implementation of SDG 4, operationalizing the Goal at country level should also be the Sector's main priority in the years to come, with increased extra-budgetary resource mobilization.

Natural sciences play a vital role in achieving sustainable development, including through technology and innovation. The Organization has vast untapped potential to steer efforts on water, biodiversity and the oceans, but requires more strategic focus. Drawing on well-established global mechanisms and programmes, such as the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) or the Man and the Biosphere (MAB), we need to integrate and reinforce efforts on climate change, particularly for Small Island Developing States (SIDS).

Social and human sciences are an integral part of all areas of UNESCO's work. I am dedicated to promote youth as a key driver for sustainable development and increase focus on equity and equality, which are key elements for the peaceful coexistence of nations. To attract more resources it is essential to further clarify priority areas and synergies with other Sectors of UNESCO.

For many, *culture* is the most visible part of UNESCO. While recognizing the importance of normative work in this area, we also need a fresh approach to mobilize new partners and resources for the protection of tangible and intangible cultural heritage in order to position culture as a dynamic component of sustainable development.

As regards *communication and information*, the freedom of expression is more than ever essential in knowledge societies, and safeguarding journalists must continue to be at the heart of the Organization's work. In today's Internet era, many Member States struggle with finding the right balance between promoting privacy, the freedom of expression and ensuring national security. UNESCO has a unique niche to provide a forum for debate on this.

I do not agree with labelling UNESCO's five field of competencies as "silos". They are "pillars" of implementation of UNESCO's mandate, with expertise and specialities unique in the United Nations system. They are a survival factor for an intellectual organization. At the same time, we need to ensure **inter-sectoral cooperation** among these five pillars to build synergies, particularly on youth, gender, climate change and global citizenship, including preventing violent extremism, starting from the field.

On *Priority Africa*, I aim to apply my successful approach from the Education Sector, which resulted in a significant increase of resources and focus on the strategic capacity development of African States. The implementation mechanism will require strengthening, by increasing the field presence and utilizing our International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa's (IICBA) capacity development function in all fields of UNESCO's competence. National ownership will remain key.

Priority Gender should continue to emphasize gender mainstreaming and gender-specific programming within all fields of competence of UNESCO. The Education Sector has substantially augmented work and the mobilization of both regular and extra-budgetary resources in support of this, which I would also like to see in the other Sectors.

UNESCO's dedicated **staff** is a major asset for the Organization. Despite financial constraints, my key responsibility will be to attract and protect expertise and create more favourable working conditions for staff so that they are motivated and proud to work for UNESCO's noble cause. However, the distribution pattern of our human resources needs to be reviewed and, consequently, adjustments need to be made. My objective is to ensure that we have the right profiles in the right posts, in order to make optimal use of each staff's expertise and maintain a critical mass of personnel in key priority areas. I will emphasize ensuring gender parity at all levels as well as equitable geographical distribution.

In order to maximize our impact and implementation capacity, we also have to reinforce our **partnerships** with multilateral organizations, bilateral partners and civil society. Apart from National Commissions for UNESCO, we should work more closely with global networks of education experts, scientists and researchers, artists and media personnel.

To overcome the repercussions of the financial crisis, our **resource mobilization** strategy must be driven by a) alignment with the programme priorities, b) the sustainability of partnerships and, c) the flexibility of funding mechanisms. UNESCO needs to demonstrate its relevance and impact by delivering results in order to enhance the trust and confidence of donors and partners. Our efforts should concentrate on reinforcing links with current donors and foundations, opening doors to new partners, particularly from the private sector, and supporting countries' self-benefitting activities within UNESCO's mandate.

Since 2011 and under my leadership, the Education Sector has increased its extra-budgetary income by 6% per year. Today, three quarters of UNESCO's Education Programme are funded by extra-budgetary resources mobilized from traditional donors, new emerging donors, the private sector and foundations. My successful experience in fundraising in the Sector is proof that mobilizing far more resources for the Organization is feasible. The recently introduced approach of integrated budgeting and structured financing dialogue, which the Education Sector spearheaded, will certainly facilitate our efforts.

Translating my Vision into Reality

What UNESCO now requires is an overall plan of comprehensive, structured and focused reforms to ensure optimal programme delivery and long-term stability. Effective reform cannot be made piece by piece. It requires top-level design and careful consensus building to ensure successful implementation and desired results. For any adjustments, the three entities of UNESCO – Headquarters, Field Networks and Category 1 Institutes – must be considered as a totality. Owing to my experiences at UNESCO for the past quarter of a century, I not only know what to do, but how to translate my vision into reality. Actions speak louder than words and my record as a visionary leader and senior manager is evidence that I am the best person for the job.

I am honoured to accept the Chinese Government's nomination as a candidate for the post of Director-General of UNESCO. Four years is not a long period, but I am nevertheless convinced that it is long enough for me to deliver on my promise. I am confident that together with staff, Member States and partners, I can lead UNESCO to reach new heights.