United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development **(DESD, 2005-2014)**

Review of Contexts and Structures for
Education for Sustainable Development 2009

Key Findings & Ways Forward

Learning for a sustainable world

The United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development

In December 2002, the United Nations General Assembly, through its Resolution 57/254, declared a Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD, 2005 – 2014). It also entrusted UNESCO with a dual responsibility – as leader and global coordinator of the DESD and as an implementer.

Given its ambitious goals, the DESD has raised high expectations among the countries and stakeholders who seek to promote and develop Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). To this end, UNESCO and its Member States are called upon to deliver quick, visible and tangible results.

The International Implementation Scheme (IIS): Guiding the Decade

The DESD International Implementation Scheme, the result of a wide-ranging consultative process, provides a broad framework under which all stakeholders can make their varied contributions. It is a strategic document that focuses primarily on what nations have committed to achieve through the DESD under UNESCO's leadership. The IIS summarizes the goals and objectives of the Decade, and its relationship with other key educational and development-related movements like the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Education for All and the United Nations Literacy Decade.

Monitoring and Evaluation: Determining the Difference

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) is one of the seven implementation strategies enshrined in the International Implementation Scheme. The M&E strategy underscores the importance of developing adequate and relevant indicators at all levels – local, national, regional and international – and for each initiative and programme within the Decade.

Monitoring and Evaluation Expert Group

UNESCO has appointed a Monitoring and Evaluation Expert Group (MEEG) comprising international ESD experts. The MEEG provides technical advice and support to the DESD Secretariat to develop and implement the DESD M&E process at the global level.

Learning for a Sustainable World: DESD Monitoring & Evaluation Report Series

The "Learning for a Sustainable World" DESD M&E report series will be published during the life of the Decade – in 2009, in 2011 and in 2015.

A well-defined monitoring and evaluation process, that includes relevant methodologies and indicators, is the basis for the development of the DESD M&E reports.

The 2009 DESD M&E report entitled ''Learning for a Sustainable World: Review of Contexts and Structures for Education for Sustainable Development'' reviews the progress achieved and challenges encountered during the first five years in establishing provisions, strategies, mechanisms and contexts that support the development and implementation of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). It also indicates ways forward for the remaining half of the Decade.

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KEY FINDINGS

1. Meanings of ESD

Regional, national and local differences influence the meaning of ESD. Excessive consumerism, high oil-dependency, persisting poverty, high rates of HIV & AIDS, rapid loss of biodiversity and desertification are only some of the numerous issues that influence the way ESD is interpreted.

Although encouragement should be extended to interpreting ESD in various ways, the importance of interconnections between the economic, environmental, social and cultural dimensions of development should be the common thread that runs through all education and learning for sustainable development.

2. UN Contributions to the DESD

The Decade of Education for Sustainable Development is a UN endeavor, characterized by the engagement of a number of UN agencies in implementing ESD. DESD launches at international, regional, national and local levels, ESD-related workshops and meetings, and numerous ESD-related publications are some of the many activities and initiatives that UN agencies have undertaken in the framework of DESD implementation.

However, much work remains to be done before a concerted 'delivering as one' UN response becomes a reality. In this regard, reinforcing financial and human resources could help to improve implementation of the DESD.

3. ESD National Coordination Bodies

A national ESD coordination body is vital to the implementation of ESD in a country. Out of the 97 countries that completed the DESD M&E 2008 questionnaire, 79 reported the presence of a national ESD coordination body.

Although there has been a rapid rise in the creation of national ESD coordination bodies, more insight and thought needs to be given to the processes that lead to their creation and the role that they are supposed to play.

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4. ESD in National Policy Documents

There is a notable presence of ESD in a wide range of national policy documents. In most cases, ESD is integrated into national educational policies and curricula at the primary and secondary levels of education. The presence of ESD is also observed in national environmental and sustainable development policies.

The presence of specific ESD policies or strategies is not common in most of the countries that responded to the DESD M&E 2008 questionnaire. To this end, international and regional impetus is needed to encourage countries to develop ESD-specific policies and strategies.

5. Interdepartmental Governmental Cooperation in ESD

Most countries that responded to the DESD M&E 2008 questionnaire reported the lack of a structure that facilitates interdepartmental governmental cooperation in ESD. This is possibly due to insufficient experience in cross-boundary thinking among policy-makers.

Nonetheless, many responding countries report an increase in efforts to establish ESD linkages between ministries and other stakeholders.

6. ESD in Formal Education

Government support for the inclusion of ESD in formal education, especially at the primary and secondary levels, indicates progress in most countries that responded to the DESD M&E 2008 questionnaire.

Inserting sustainability issues into existing curricula, adopting new approaches to learning such as interdisciplinary teaching and learning, and redesigning curricula are some of the ways in which countries have integrated ESD in formal education settings.

Inclusion of ESD is evident in teacher education, higher education and vocational education and training; however, there seems to be little support for ESD in early childhood education.

7. ESD in Non-Formal and Informal Education

Although ESD in non-formal and informal education features on the agenda of most responding countries, international stakeholder networks and civil society organizations, there is little information available on issues like availability of funds, the target audience envisaged for ESD-related activities or the manner in which available ESD-related resources, in print and in digital form, are used and distributed.

New approaches to finding solutions to these challenges are needed.

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8. ESD research, development and dissemination

ESD-related research and development is an area that needs more attention in most parts of the world. Moreover, ESD-related research scholarships are far from common and there is little financial support for ESD-related innovation and capacity-building. The limited amount of ESD-related research that takes place is formal education-centric.

Given that there is a sharp rise in ESD practice today, national governments should support the development of ESD quality assessment schemes.

9. ESD Networking at the International Level

From all the UNESCO regions, a wide range of rich examples of regional cooperation is provided suggesting a remarkable increase in international ESD networking. Some of the examples indicate the different ways in which ESD is promoted.

Common groups or organizations that are involved in ESD-related networks include universities, national and local governments, the private sector and NGOs.

10. Availability of Public Budgets and/or Economic Incentives for ESD

Findings indicate that, in most countries, public budgets and/or economic incentives for ESD are minimal or almost completely absent.

Today, governments are aware of the importance of raising money to support ESD-related activities and projects to ensure the successful implementation of the DESD.

It is also important to incorporate ESD within national budget structures. Countries are now beginning to take into consideration financing and budgeting for ESD across ministries by determining how ESD aligns with key documents in different sectors to facilitate coordinated funding and inter-sectoral programming for ESD at the national level.

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WAYS FORWARD

The report has identified ten areas of action for the remaining half of the Decade.

1. Promoting Awareness of ESD

Limited awareness and knowledge of ESD are a major hurdle in creating a wide societal and governmental support-base for ESD.

ESD needs to be communicated in a simple yet creative manner to help people identify and understand it. To this end, the involvement of the media needs to be strengthened to communicate ESD in effective ways. The creative use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in a creative manner should be encouraged to help raise awareness of ESD, especially among young people.

2. Reorienting curricula, teaching and learning

Strengthening and promoting sustainable development-related capacities such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and understanding complexities need innovative methodologies. On the one hand, schools of education, curriculum development institutes and educational research institutes should be encouraged to research and develop new forms of teaching and learning. And on the other, educational policies that allow for these new forms of teaching and learning should be promoted and strengthened.

3. Developing capacity for ESD

ESD-related professional development should focus on building capacities of a wider range of audience that could include teachers, facilitators, managers, and business leaders among others. This could enhance new ESD-inspired forms of learning in schools, universities, neighborhoods and workplaces.

ESD-related capacity-building in formal, non-formal and informal levels of education at local, national, regional and international levels should be encouraged.

4. Supporting ESD-related research, monitoring and evaluation

Support for ESD-related research is vital to enhance the quality and the evidence base of ESD. Such research should be based on i) theoretical underpinnings and critical discourse of ESD; ii) analysis of elements and efforts that support and thwart ESD; iii) analysis of ESD's contribution to the educational community; iv) analysis of ESD's contribution to the sustainability of society; v) use of research-derived data on ESD to inform decisions; and vi) tracking progress of the DESD (M&E).

Equally, research in non-formal and informal education should be strengthened and international donors and national research foundations should be encouraged to support ESD-related research.

5. Establishing ESD synergy with other 'adjectival' educations

The call for greater articulation and synergy between environmental education and education for sustainable development should be extended to other 'adjectival' educations as well.

Synergies between ESD and adjectival educations such as peace education, gender education, inclusive education and health education, among others, should be created and promoted.

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6. Creating ESD resources and materials

While some reference materials are available, there is an overall insufficiency of ESD-specific material. This often obliges countries to resort to documents that address sustainable development or environmental education issues. Development and production of ESD-specific teaching and learning methods should be made available in multiple languages.

The use of ICTs should be promoted to reach out to a wider audience. Knowledge-sharing platforms and open-source resources (e.g. wikis) could be used to facilitate access to ESD-specific materials.

The quality and relevance of these ESD-specific materials should be monitored and updated, if and when necessary.

7. Strengthening international and regional cooperation

Inter- and intra-regional networking is important to carry the ESD agenda forward. North-South, South-South and North-South-South cooperation should be encouraged and promoted more actively in the remaining half of the Decade. Strengthening existing regional networks and initiating the creation of new ones should be a priority issue on regional cooperation agendas.

Regional ESD strategies should be reviewed at periodic intervals to reflect changing regional priorities with regard to ESD. To ensure ownership and maximize impact, regional stakeholders should be encouraged to contribute and endorse the regional ESD strategies.

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8. Strengthening national networking

Establishing and strengthening ESD networks at national and local levels should be actively encouraged in the second half of the Decade. Sustainable development commissions or sustainable development agreements could serve as effective mechanisms to provide impetus to the creation of national ESD networks. These networks should allow for inclusion of local and indigenous perspectives on sustainable development, thereby facilitating active participation of marginalized communities and indigenous groups.

9. Reinforcing coordination

Inter-sectoral synergy and improved coordination among various ministries and levels of government are vital to the promotion of ESD at the national level.

Coordination among stakeholders – NGOs and other civil society organizations, UN agencies and governments - is also very important for the creation and promotion of national strategies and frameworks that support ESD.

Within the UN system, ESD requires cross-boundary 'out-of-the-box-thinking' to provide a concerted 'delivering as one' UN response to the DESD. To this end, inter- and intra-agency coordination and collaboration should be priorities during the remaining half of the Decade.

10. Increasing financing for ESD

Raising funds for ESD activities and projects is one of the key elements to ensure the successful completion of the DESD. The provision of financial resources for ESD should not be left to governments alone. Multilateral and bilateral donors and the private sector have the potential to be important contributors. ESD should be included in the national agenda, integrated into budgeting frameworks, national development plans and national sustainable development strategies. It is equally important to advocate budget ownership for ESD within all relevant ministries.

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Moving into the Second Half of the UN Decade

Following an internal consultation process, UNESCO has been in contact with the DESD Reference Group, the DESD Monitoring & Evaluation Expert Group, the International Advisory Group for the World Conference, and the United Nations Inter-Agency Committee for the DESD as part of a multi-stakeholder consultative process to develop a UNESCO strategy for the second half of the Decade.

This strategy is aimed at ensuring ownership and commitment on the part of UNESCO Programme Sectors, Institutes and Field Offices for an accelerated and focused implementation of the DESD. The UNESCO strategy will be implemented in relation to the International Implementation Scheme (IIS) which, in conjunction with the Bonn Declaration, will provide the global strategic framework for UNESCO and its DESD partners during the second half of the Decade.

The strategy will provide a set of focused priorities through which UNESCO will put knowledge into action and promote the further integration of ESD into all types and settings of education at all levels.

UNESCO will focus its actions for the second half of the DESD on four key areas of strategic action during the next five years:

1. Enhancing synergies with different education and development initiatives (EFA, MDGs, UNLD, EDUCAIDS) and strengthening partnership among ESD stakeholders;
2. Developing and strengthening capacities for ESD;
3. Building, sharing and applying ESD-related knowledge;
4. Advocating for ESD, and increasing awareness and understanding of sustainability.

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