



Bonn Symposium 2009

Sustainable Development
in Times of Crises
Opposition or Opportunity?



Workshop F

Education for Sustainable Development: Changing Mindsets and Behaviour. The UNESCO World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development and Beyond

Organised by: German Commission for UNESCO / Inwent - Capacity Building International
Chair: Alexander Leicht (German Commission for UNESCO)
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Building upon the outcomes of the UNESCO World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development (31 March – 2 April 2009, Bonn) and specifically the Bonn Declaration, the workshop explored the concept of education for sustainable development as a powerful motor of change towards sustainable lifestyles.

Key questions were:

- What is the potential of education for sustainable development for changing mindsets in society?
- What is good practice in education for sustainable development?
- Which direction should the implementation of education for sustainable development take after the Bonn conference, also in the light of possible synergies with other sustainable development initiatives?

The panellists agreed on the fact that there are a number of strategies to promote sustainable development, such as political agreements or financial incentives. Still, in the long run the most effective way of raising public awareness and changing mindsets is education. But how does education contribute to sustainable development?

According to Professor **Charles Hopkins** (UNESCO Chair for Education for Sustainable Development, York University, Canada) education and sustainable development are simply two sides of the same coin. Hopkins asserted that it is difficult to have environmental education where there is no education at all. "Sustainable development is not possible without at least a basic education", he said. The key to changing mindsets was to move from institutions to individuals. Hopkins believed that one has to make people understand that the issue being talked about was not merely about "going green" but in fact about existence. People had to be enlightened about the significance of every single person changing his/her life and the difference it made. Hopkins remarked that the OECD countries were overwhelmed with technological and scientific information about sustainable development. Nevertheless, they only make up a small part of the world. Given that only one per cent of the global population got higher education the "uneducated rest" had to be mobilized to learn. Teachers should be trained to make pupils comprehend the issue. In Hopkins' view different components of education needed to be available in order to make "Education for Sustainable Development" (ESD) work. One of

them was access not only to basic education for uneducated people but also access to higher education in the North. Another element was to move to a global educational system rather than to just stabilize education in the North. A third essential part was to raise public awareness not only formally but also in an informal way. The final constituent was the training of e.g. engineers for sustainable development not in a way of simple knowledge transfer, but rather highlighting the learning process.

Hannes Siege (Standing Conference of the German Culture and Education Ministers) pointed to the problem, that most ESD activities in Germany were extra-curricular ones. Because subjects defined the core curricula in German schools and teachers had to spend 75%-80% of their time on subject teaching, it seemed unrealistic to him to demand for ESD to become a subject on its own. Thus, the main challenge was to link the concept of ESD to the subject contents. This would require an institutional set-up of partners to develop and implement ESD into the regular curricula. Mr Siege also advocated a competence driven approach, because: "You cannot teach ESD. You have to do it in a participatory way." Siege listed some skills students ought to have: the comprehension of the topic and the technical aspects as well as the ability to shift the own perspective, to feel empathy for others, to reflect critically and to form opinions, are core competencies pupils should acquire. Mr Siege highlighted that "students should learn to learn".

Matthew Hare (UN Water Decade Programme on Capacity Development) drew the attention to a specific case in sustainable development and asserted that education for water sustainability is particularly essential. "It's a limited resource", Hare stated and therefore teachers have to promote and demonstrate the social, economic and environmental value of water. According to Hare it will be the children who will eventually take lessons learned to their parents and to wider communities. Crucially, teaching materials should be freely available and their quality should be assured. In order to change the mindsets of children, governments should support the access to and the use of appropriate teaching and learning materials. Like the other panellists Hare also agreed on the idea that teaching has to adjust to different cultural contexts, although the main message must be universal. With respect to water, Hare agreed with Hopkins on the need for higher education to raise awareness for sustainable behaviour among future decision-makers. Teachers and trainers should be trained on appropriate methods and didactics. As an example Hare mentioned the trainer courses for the development of interdisciplinary masters' programmes.

In his concluding statement, the workshop chair **Alexander Leicht** (German Commission for UNESCO) pointed out the variety of innovative concepts for realizing ESD. He stressed the fact that changing mindsets and thus lifestyles must be accompanied by a reorientation of teaching and learning. There are many areas where ESD has already been integrated into teaching and learning, but there still is space for further improvement, although he admitted that it is not possible to incorporate ESD into all learning activities.

Workshop Report of the Bonn Symposium 2009

Organised by: Development and Peace Foundation (SEF) und
Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ)

In Cooperation with: World Conference Center Bonn and Deutsche Welle



The Bonn Symposium is co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the State of North Rhine-Westphalia under the programme "Regional Competitiveness and Employment", the City of Bonn, and the Foundation for International Dialogue of the Savings Bank in Bonn.



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