



International Advocacy Reports and Statements

Mid-Point in the Decade for Education for Sustainable Development July 2010

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We are half-way through the Decade for Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014). The last year has been rich with meetings and international conferences organized by different United Nations specialized organizations addressing issues related to Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). Some of the ones that come first to mind are the 5th World Water Forum in Istanbul in March 2009, the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) annual Ministerial Environmental Forum, and of course the UNESCO World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development in Bonn in March 2009.

The Bonn Conference brought together 700 participants from around the world, including government representatives, experts and NGOs. Cynthia Ghorra-Gobin, one of IFUW's Representatives in Paris, was invited by UNESCO to participate in the conference. NGOs had many opportunities during workshops to raise issues and ask questions. The conference highlighted the international political agendas that were at work. The majority of those speaking were firmly convinced that Sustainable Development is essential and that Education is the most effective tool for attaining that goal. The conference addressed themes ranging from lifestyle choices, to water, food security and biodiversity.

Climate change and dangers to the planet are increasingly addressed by researchers, government officials and the media. Each of us has seen the impact of the natural catastrophes of recent years (tsunamis, flooding, drought) and such manifestations will surely continue.

In 2008, 240.000 people worldwide died as a result of natural disasters, with hurricanes Ike and Gustava in the Gulf of Mexico and the cyclone Nargis in Myanmar being the most lethal. This is why there is such a need to develop educational programmes that explain the nature of these events and help prepare populations for the future, to avoid panic and to strengthen resilience. UNICEF's educational programme, integrated in school programmes or used as informal education, is an example of a programme that is gaining prominence.

While there is a special concern for developing countries located in intemperate climates, natural disasters are not limited to developing countries alone, but also have an impact on richer countries and regions. The cycles of fires and flooding in California is often cited as an example. Natural water reserves continue to diminish and agriculture and urban consumption has remained high.

The Bonn Conference reminded us of the sustainable development objectives set in the Brundtland Report in 1987: *"Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs"*. This requires balance and integration of environmental, economic and social factors, while taking into consideration the cultural dimension. Education for Sustainable Development is essential in a wide range of settings, from formal education, to workplace education and general public awareness. It requires an interdisciplinary and holistic approach to learning and training.

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Four important paths to holistic ESD have been identified: access to quality education, the reorientation of existing educational systems toward confronting sustainability concerns, public awareness and information campaigns, and training programmes targeting specific sustainable social, environmental and economic concerns. As UNESCO's documents show, the complexity, breadth and diversity of sustainable development and ESD requires the mobilization of a wide range of committed actors working together in a spirit of partnership. UNESCO plays an important role in contributing to and facilitating the creation of new global partnerships, and serves as a platform for meetings of key actors and exchanges between Member states on ESD issues and as a provider of strategic directions. It was in this context that UNESCO organized the Bonn Conference.

The Bonn Conference had four important objectives:

- To highlight the essential contribution of ESD to all of education and to the realization of quality education
- To promote international exchanges on ESD
- To provide a first assessment of action under the Decade for ESD, and
- To develop strategies for the next stages, and

The Bonn Declaration calls on Member States to

- Promote the contribution of ESD to education in general
- Increase public awareness
- Reorient educational systems
- Form North-South cooperation
- Mobilize resources

Among all the recommendations, three are of special importance for IFUW :

- Enhance the major contribution and key role of civil society
- Value and give due recognition to the important contribution of traditional, indigenous and local knowledge systems
- Promote gender equality, notably access to quality education

The Bonn Conference will orient action programmes for the years to come. One regret was the absence of debate over indicators that would make it possible to measure the effectiveness of the measures adopted. This is something which researchers and militant NGOs have advocated for many years.

Education for Sustainable Development is a priority for IFUW at UNESCO. Cynthia Ghorra-Gobin presides over the Joint Programmatic Commission (JPC) on Education for Sustainable Development. This body facilitates cooperation between NGOs and UNESCO staff in the development of new UNESCO programming.

A few of the key themes for the Joint Commission are: programming for cultural diversity, a prerequisite for ESD; gender programming, particularly education of women and of children, the social impact of climate change, the difficult question of access to potable water for vulnerable populations, assistance to children in difficulty within educational systems, and the contribution of African NGOs to urban development.

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