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# Education for Sustainable Development Worldwide

Conference Report  
International Workshop on the UN Decade of  
Education for Sustainable Development  
28-29 November 2006, Bonn

German Commission for UNESCO

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## **Welcoming address by Armin Laschet, Minister for Generations, Family, Women and Integration of the State of North-Rhine Westphalia**

International cooperation is one of my Ministry's principal responsibilities. These include the area of worldwide development. Education is the key for development and innovation – as well as for a sustainable, forward-looking society.



For this reason the United Nations has proclaimed the UN Decade of “Education for Sustainable Development”. The aim is to offer all people worldwide equal educational opportunities as well as transferring knowledge and values that are required for a better future and a positive social development.

If we want to win the race against hunger and poverty, if we want to promote economical development in countries and regions that were formerly at a disadvantage and if we want to support the process of democracy and human rights to a positive conclusion we need a worldwide effort regarding sustainable education.

Approximately 5.4 billion people live in developing and emerging nations, nearly 30% of them are younger than 15 years of age. We are thus facing an immense educational challenge which can only be dealt with by means of a common global effort.

We should however be aware that the initial positions in the developing nations of Africa, Asia and Latin America are completely different than those of the highly developed industrial and service-based nations of the north.

But there is one key concept that applies to all regions of our world: We need an education towards sustainable development to promote global progress and global equity and to make sure that future generations will inherit a world worth living in.

These are huge and ambitious aims. In order to reach them we need to decide upon concrete steps. For this reason, the State Government of North Rhine-Westphalia has agreed upon a plan of action on how to implement the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development.

One aim of the plan of action is to 'think and act in an international context'. Another point is global and intercultural learning: People throughout the world, especially younger persons should be motivated and supported to take an active part in the creation of sustainable education relevant not only to their local environment but also in a global context. There is an increasing amount of global networks, partnerships and projects within the area of education in which young persons from the North and South can engage in processes of exchange. These activities are supported by us.

People from developing countries who live in North Rhine-Westphalia play an important part in such processes. They should build bridges to their home countries, improve cultural understanding and promote economic relations.

Creating educational opportunities for all people throughout the world is indeed a great vision but at the same time a Herculean task. We can only cope with it if we intensify our international exchange and cooperation.

The International Workshop in Bonn, which was hosted in close collaboration of UNESCO and the State Government of North Rhine-Westphalia, provided an excellent opportunity to discuss this question from the perspective of both developed and developing countries. Bonn as an international centre of development and environment policy is particularly suitable to continue this discussion within the UN Decade of 'Education for Sustainable Development'.

## **Welcoming address by Dr. Roland Bernecker, Secretary-General, German Commission for UNESCO**

Learning how to shape a future in which everyone can live in dignity. This is the central vision of education for sustainable development shared around the world. In the context of the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development many individuals contribute to making this vision a reality.



While the Decade is founded on a global vision, local implementations and regional specifications of education for sustainable development vary greatly. Education for sustainable development needs to respond to different political and administrative circumstances, to different learning traditions and cultural settings, and, of course, to whether everyone has access to formal education at all.

The variety of approaches to education for sustainable development are a tremendous strength, an opportunity to learn from and assist each other. We have thus for a long time felt the need to intensify the international exchange of views between experts working in education for sustainable development. In particular, we felt that exchange between practitioners, administrators and academics from the northern and the southern hemispheres needs to be strengthened further.

We were therefore very pleased that so many eminent experts from all over the world accepted our invitation to come together in November 2006 in Bonn and discuss principles and best practices of education for sustainable development. The discussions at our workshop were truly stimulating and inspiring. It was impressive and encouraging to see so many committed individuals working all over the world towards making education for sustainable development a reality. After all, much remains to be done in education for sustainable development, and only if we join forces will we be successful in the pursuit of our common vision.

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the Ministry of Generations, Family, Women and Integration of the State of North-Rhine Westphalia for co-

organizing the workshop and for providing major funding. The workshop also benefited from substantial support from UNESCO. The German Savings Bank Association provided additional support, not least by welcoming us in their beautiful conference rooms.

## **Welcoming address by Werner Netzel, Executive Member of the Board, German Savings Bank Association**

In November 2006, the German Savings Bank Associations gladly hosted the international workshop on “Education for Sustainable Development.” This not only reflected on the business philosophy promoted by the German Savings Bank Financial Group, but also continued the link our banks have to the idea of sustainability and longevity. For the past 200 years, we have supported the breadth of society in its savings efforts and have promoted financial foresight. We provide chances for individual development and offer creative options for innovative and business thinking customers - not only in metropolitan, but also in peripheral areas.



We contribute to education for sustainable development not only through sponsorship and promotion of suitable initiatives, but also from our own competences as providers of financial services. Because for us, being competent in handling money is an important asset in shaping one's life. The Savings Bank School Services and the Money, Budget, and Financial Advice Initiative offered by the Savings Bank Financial Group, have both been recognized as Official Decade Projects by the German Commission for UNESCO, and offer a variety of materials in regards to finances, saving and responsible consumption for teachers, pupils and adults. Through these projects, we want to make a contribution to improving economic competencies and financial flexibility of the German population. The activities we offer, therefore, are also meant to promote participation of all sectors of society in all aspects of economic and social life.

Education is the key to a responsible lifestyle. For this reason alone the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development is an important effort. Within the implementation of the Decade, the individual topics will perhaps change over time and according to the geographical locations of the concerned. However, the educational task of teaching to everyone the interdependency of economical, environmental and social issues in all phases of life will stay the same. The Savings Banks wish lasting success to all of the activities of the UN Decade.



## Conference Report

On the 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> November 2006, experts from more than 35 countries gathered in Bonn, at the conference rooms of the German Savings Bank Association, to discuss progress to date in implementing the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD, 2005-2014), and to continue to develop the concept of ESD. Around 50 participants – drawn from the fields of science and research, government ministries, UNESCO National Commissions, non-governmental organisations and international bodies – met at the invitation of the German Commission for UNESCO and the Ministry of Generations, Family, Women and Integration of the German state of North Rhine Westphalia, with support from UNESCO in Paris.



The aim of the workshop was to clarify the goals and the scope of the concept of education for sustainable development (ESD), and also to identify regional specificities and differences in implementation, as well as examples of good practice. One particular focus was on dialogue between the countries of the South and the ‘industrialised world’, and the geographical origins of the participants reflected this. The approaches

and experiences of the participants took centre stage in the discussions, and after brief input presentations these approaches and experiences were exchanged and developed upon in an informal debate.

Sustainable development means living our lives today in such manner that future generations shall also inherit a world in which they can live according to their needs. The UN Decade of ESD should contribute to integrating this concept into all areas of the education sector. The scientists and education experts concluded that the extent to which this has already taken place in the individual countries

depends above all on the level of support provided by the government concerned, and on the degree to which civil society organisations have been mobilised for the cause.



In his introduction, Roland Bernecker, the Secretary-General of the German Commission for UNESCO, stated that, to date, only very few debates have taken place on the differing conceptions of sustainability in the North and the South. The Bonn conference, he added, provided a platform for discussion on the aims of ESD. Werner Netzel, Executive Member of the Board of the German Savings Bank Association, stressed the significance of the debate on sustainability for the private sector. The Minister for Generations, Families, Women and Integration of North-Rhine Westphalia, Armin Laschet, used his opening speech to the conference as an opportunity to honour the UN Decade as a contribution to the struggle against hunger and poverty. He

argued in favour of further support for bilingual education and international dialogue among schools. His ministry, he added, would contribute to seeing migration not only in quantitative terms, but to value it as a contribution to cultural diversity in Germany.

## **Education for Sustainable Development – A common vision, a common platform**

Session I set out the aims and possible orientations of the UN Decade, and was chaired by Aline Bory-Adams, Chief of Section for ESD at UNESCO in Paris. The general debate on the conceptual and programmatic challenges of ESD and of the implementation of the Decade took centre stage. Requirements and goals for continuing work on ESD issues were discussed and defined.

### **General Considerations**

There was a consensus among the participants that the scope of ESD – as an integrative, interdisciplinary and holistic concept of education – extends far beyond just environmental education. Rather, it is built upon the wide-ranging concept of sustainable development as defined by the UN and UNESCO. Sustainability is no longer understood to encompass environmental issues alone, but in particular also social and cultural issues which must always be taken into account as part of the context for ESD. Carl Lindberg – a member of the High Level Panel which advises the Director-General of UNESCO on the UN Decade – recalled that ESD did not just imply environmental education and education for sustainable thinking, but also peace education and the struggle against poverty. ‘Discussing environmental



protection with people who have nothing to eat makes little sense,’ said Lindberg. Gerd Michelsen, UNESCO Chair of Higher Education for Sustainable Development at the University of Lüneburg, stressed that a change had taken place in the understanding of sustainability, from a ‘green orientation’ to a ‘cultural orientation.’

In the age of globalisation and after the end of the colonial system, new demands are being made of learning, as Aline Bory-Adams explained. She identified four fronts which must serve as the foundation for future work: the principles of ESD must prevail at all levels and be accorded priority treatment; access to 'Education for All' is a fundamental condition for achieving the aims of ESD; lifelong learning with a holistic approach is of great importance; ESD does not only address all levels of the formal education system, but also informal education. In this area, too, a sustainable value system should be transmitted, opening up the possibility of meaningful societal decision-making.

The values upon which ESD is based, however, vary widely from one world region to another, even though the concept of sustainability provides a broad common basis. Similar problems are addressed around the world in the context of ESD, such as poverty and disasters, economic and social issues. Nevertheless, different regions are working from very disparate starting points and therefore set different emphases. It is at the regional level that the general concept of ESD takes on sharper contours and tangibility. Increased integration in regional and national contexts was therefore repeatedly referred to as important in the discussion.

Carl Lindberg described ESD as a concept for forms of social learning that could be applied to employee training in companies or in trade union educational work. Informal learning, he suggested, contributes to changing public opinion and thus to



helping to defuse the threat posed to the planet by human activities. Visions of ESD should not exclusively – nor even primarily – remain limited to righting wrongs, a number of participants added, even if these wrongs constituted a major motivation for getting involved with ESD. Rather, the positive vision of a humane future is a significant element in the transmission of ESD.

## Implementation in Practice

In most countries, universities have hitherto been the institutions which have shown the strongest commitment to ESD and been most active in implementing the principles of the Decade in practice. For example, Akpezi Ogbuigwe from the United Nations Environmental Programme in Kenya presented the programme ‘Mainstreaming Environment and Sustainability into African Universities’ (MESA). In addition to spreading ESD, a toolkit was put together and presented to the administrations of African universities. MESA is funded mainly through university fundraising.



In Sweden, universities were even obliged by a law passed in 2005 to orient their teaching towards sustainable development. Carl Lindberg reported that this supposed attack on the freedom of teaching and research had raised few objections, although in the past similar efforts in other areas had been highly controversial. This suggests that the vision of ESD has established itself as a broadly consensual topic, at least in academic circles. Furthermore, this shows the great importance of a political leadership that actively intervenes to support ESD.

The workshop participants, however, saw the school sector and the area of informal learning as being in great need of making up lost ground in the implementation of ESD. Linda Condon, from the National Centre for Sustainability in Melbourne, Australia, stressed that the divide between ESD at universities and ESD at schools was too wide, and that young people in particular should increasingly be encouraged to work in a sustainable manner. Hannes Siege from the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Federal States in the Federal Republic of Germany mentioned that Germany is currently developing ESD working materials for all 16 of its federal states, which are set to be endorsed by the Standing Conference in 2007.

Education systems in different countries are only comparable to a certain extent. Informal education, for example, plays a leading role in precisely those countries where formal education has not achieved full institutional coverage. The call for reinforced integration of ESD in basic education takes on particular urgency in countries where access to further education and higher education in particular is limited or reserved for a small educated elite. In such cases, access to education should be addressed in conjunction with ESD and there are clear points of connection to the Dakar Declaration on ‘Education for All’.

### **Demands and Objectives**

Only governments can create the framework conditions for ESD at the national level, stated Balazs Kalydy, advisor to the Hungarian Commission for UNESCO. Thus, in the implementation of the Decade, it is also a question of educating governments and political leaders to act in a sustainable manner, and of teaching and learning how to go about lobbying work for sustainable development at the political level. The EU, Carl



Lindberg argued, could provide a lever for pushing through ESD, as the EU constantly stresses that it has committed itself to the overarching goal of sustainability. Intergovernmental summits also provide opportunities for raising awareness for the concept of ESD, he suggested. In countries where it is hardly to be expected that governments will implement ESD fully, cooperation between civil society and the private sector for ESD was considered worthwhile as a ‘second best option’. Wynn Calder from the US NGO Association of University Leaders for a Sustainable Future (ULSF) agreed, but stressing the greater difficulty of achieving the aims of ESD without government support, as there is often a funding shortfall in such cases.

Greater cooperation between state institutions and NGOs was also repeatedly called for. Kartikeya Sarabhai, Director of the Centre for Environmental Education (CEE)

in Ahmedabad, India, raised the point that many NGOs lack scientific expertise. Here, a mutual learning process could bring benefits, and reinforced cooperation between universities and NGOs would be worthwhile. Moacir Gadotti from the Instituto Paulo Freire in São Paulo, Brazil, brought out the possibilities of building synergies with other campaigns: besides the environmental debate and 'Education for All', AIDS prevention should also be made a component of ESD. Gadotti saw bridges between ESD and social projects run by critics of globalisation, such as the 'social economy,' and called for the Decade to be more actively expanded into a worldwide movement. In this process, cooperation with NGOs would be indispensable.

Practical implementation of ESD was called for by Magdy Hefny from the Egyptian Ministry of Water Resources and Irrigation – Regional Centre of Research and Studies of Water Ethics. He also praised the German initiative of identifying and



recognising projects demonstrating best practice as being exemplary. International benchmarking for implementation concepts and increased networking beyond national borders were considered necessary.

## Education for Sustainable Development – What is it that we need to learn?

The competences and skills which are to be transmitted by ESD formed the core of debate in Session II, led by Maik Adomßent from the Institute for Environmental Communication at the University of Lüneburg. The connection between ESD and the general learning goals of a humane and sustainable society was the starting point for a wider thematic debate.

### The Competences to be Learned through ESD

Gerhard de Haan, Chairman of the German National Committee for the UN Decade, began by arguing that learning specific competences was a means to achieving the goals of ESD, as they instil thinking oriented towards problem-solving. He presented the concept of *Gestaltungskompetenz* ('shaping competence') as an aim for ESD. This concept describes a combination of problem-solving capabilities and a readiness to take action. People with *Gestaltungskompetenz* identify problems, acquire skills and knowledge about these problems, and draw conclusions from their reflections. Finally, they take decisions and trigger changes in the three areas of sustainability: society, economy and environment. De Haan saw the possibility of linking this concept to the OECD's definition of 'key competences', which is based on three pillars: the ability to act autonomously; the ability to use tools interactively; and the ability to interact appropriately in socially heterogeneous groups.



Furthermore, the explicit normative basis for the OECD's concept of competences is defined as human rights, democracy and sustainable development.

While such concepts of competences for ESD were considered to be essentially worthwhile, some participants expressed reservations as to whether such criteria

could be applied to all countries. Although the question of how these criteria are to be evaluated remained open, there was a broad consensus that the concept had to be broken down into measurable criteria, and that these criteria should differ between cultures.

Fairness, community, far-sightedness and complexity were the most important competences in fostering ESD for Ampai Harakunarak of the Thailand Environment Institute. She stressed the urgency of defining and understanding common goals in order to break them down into diverse regional configurations. Aline Bory-Adams called for education to be provided on an interdisciplinary, comprehensive, value-oriented, lifelong and culturally appropriate basis. In addition, she stated that ESD must aim to strengthen societal competences and present them in a locally relevant manner. Magdy Hefny stressed the value of interdisciplinarity, but observed that unfortunately many scientists are not accustomed to working beyond their subject boundaries.



The education system does not thus far appear to have risen to the challenges of ESD and the transmission of the necessary competences, as Moacir Gadotti stated. He felt that the education system was not part of the solution, but rather part of the problem. The goals of educational establishments should not be tailor-made to fit the needs of employers, but must rather work from a theoretical input through to an output that passes on to people the ability to take practical action.

The following goals of ESD found consensus among the participants: that education for sustainable development addresses knowledge about existing problems and their possible solutions, and changes our way of going about things - but also that ESD is empowerment to lead a sustainable life, reflecting on human abilities and options in a complex context.

## Suggestions, Demands

Rietje van Dam-Mieras from the Open University of the Netherlands criticised the European school systems. Pupils often feel hemmed in and have to learn from books that are not appropriate to current challenges. ESD should thus begin by reshaping the European school system for sustainability. Pierre Varcher from the Swiss Commission for UNESCO added that in Europe, schools are too selective and had a discriminatory function. However, he understood ESD as ‘the political project for a social transformation’, and saw the strengthening of the humanities and social sciences as necessary for the successful implementation of ESD.

Participants perceived the need of reflection concerning more concrete forms of the concept of ESD, that it is still not fully mature and must be discussed further. Magdy Hefny called for the drafting of practical guidelines, and Moacir Gadotti stressed the need to differentiate criteria between different regions of the world, without clinging on to the old categories of ‘North’ and ‘South’. Pierre Varcher



recalled that the development of the concept of ESD was one of the aims of the Decade, which was conceived as an open-ended process. The very openness of the concept also has its advantages. The rather vague formulation of the concept enables it to be adapted to local conditions, argued Gadotti. Therefore, the ability to engage in dialogue is an important part of the concept, as it is not only a case of respecting diversity, but of actively defending it. Many participants also stated that it was important not to base ESD exclusively upon the dominant European knowledge system.

The participants at the conference were also in agreement that ESD can only succeed if the whole of society is involved. Genuine opportunities for participation must be created. One possibility suggested was a reorientation of school curricula towards the goals of ESD. Gerhard de Haan stressed that the answers to the challenges of tomorrow would have to come from today’s learners. Gadotti added that synergies should also be used more effectively and that informal learning is playing an increasingly important role in the globalised world. He suggested that ESD should be

understood as a transitional process on the way to sustainable development: education, it was suggested, was a necessary but insufficient condition for sustainable development.

Changes in behaviour can only be achieved if convictions can be changed, stressed Magdy Hefny from Egypt. William Scott from the Centre for Research in Education and the Environment at the University of Bath said that, on the one hand, it was a question of bringing about change in teaching contents, changing behaviour and attitudes, and, on the other, initiating a social learning process for a better life. Practice and theoretical work must take place in tandem, so that sustainable development can become tangible and concrete for learners.

Ampai Harakunarak explained that many people did not understand why it is necessary to change their behaviour and lifestyles – that the aim is not to satisfy desires for ever increasing prosperity and material goods, but to encourage an attitude of simplicity. After all, globalisation does simply bring more prosperity for all, but is accompanied by undesirable side-effects, such as the breakdown of the family and social relationships. Globalisation shows clearly that the environment is changing so rapidly, even in rural areas, that people must critically and effectively respond to environmental issues and be proactive participants in promoting sustainable development.

## **Education for Sustainable Development – What are the key themes and focuses? Which regional specifications do we work with?**

The Session III debate, chaired by Akpezi Ogbuigwe, concerned the issue of regional implementation of the Decade. Similarities and differences were identified in the strategies for regional implementation of ESD. The debate also looked into the manner in which implementation has taken place to date, and which findings from the workshop could be applied in individual regions.

Derek Elias from UNESCO Bangkok reported on the stage of progress reached in implementing the Decade in the Asia-Pacific region. He cited the promotion of partnerships and the involvement of new stakeholders in Decade activities as priority goals. He particularly praised the engagement of the Japanese government as an important source of support in the region. The private sector, which is involved in numerous CSR initiatives, was also mentioned as an important player, although it is still having some difficulty in doing justice to the full scope of the concept of ESD. He bemoaned the low level of public awareness, the lack of political will, the lack of media interest, the scarcity of resources and the shortage of opportunity and time to reach out to people. He also called for a more accessible treatment of the concept of ESD for the media. As regional emphases of the Decade in the Asia-Pacific region, he mentioned peace, water and the struggle against poverty. He singled out the UN definition of poverty (access to less than one US dollar per person per day) as inapplicable in a region where many people are not part of the money cycle. Additionally, as there are over 8,000 languages in the region, adaptation of the Decade to local conditions was of particular importance.



For Africa, Mphemelang Ketlhoilwe from the University of Botswana described four thematic areas. The most important area of the Decade in Africa are the social aspects of sustainability, such as the struggle against poverty and the lack of access to drinking water. In addition, the HIV/AIDS pandemic must be discussed within the framework of ESD. Environmental and economic aspects of sustainability continue to take a background role in activities. Political changes, however, play an important role while reflecting African identity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. ‘We need political leaders with visions’, said Mphemelang Ketlhoilwe, bringing the concept of good governance to the debate. Supporters of the UN Decade should be aware of the historical context in Africa, create an atmosphere of transparency and not see Africans merely as the objects of policies. Local knowledge and local experience could be brought into ESD. Henri Lo from the University of Dakar, Senegal, called for empirical studies to be undertaken to find out what people in the regions concerned understand by the struggle against poverty and sustainability. The findings could then feed into curricula. Akpezi Ogbuigwe stressed that poverty does not always only mean earning less than one dollar per day. Infrastructure investments, such as roadbuilding, are important in the struggle against poverty, as they also benefit those who live outside the money economy.



Implementation of the Decade in Latin America was presented by Miguel Aguilar of the San Luis Potosí University in Mexico. He criticised what he saw as an institutionalised top-down approach to the Decade thus far. He recalled that ESD is a complex social process which can only be achieved in the long term. If politics is to take more notice of ESD, it must seek new supporters. The task is to find a consensus supported by a broad majority. Achieving this by means of a participative process requires long negotiations and is a great challenge. It is also still unclear exactly how ESD is to be combined with local knowledge and how genuine participation can be achieved. Nor has existing knowledge on environmental destruction and pollution been sufficiently integrated into practical work. He concluded by mentioning that in December 2006 the draft version of a framework concept for ESD in Central America and the Caribbean was to be signed.

Wynn Calder described the situation in the USA. ESD has unfortunately received little support from the government, and only a few individual states encouraged environmental education to a limited extent. Therefore, ESD is primarily pushed forward by NGOs, for instance through direct partnerships at the grassroots level. Even the nationwide alliance ‘US Partnership for the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development’ was a private initiative of NGOs. Universities are taking an interest in carrying out activities on the theme of the ‘Green Campus’, but interdisciplinarity is also in short supply in the US. Sustainability – understood as environmental education – is, however, gradually finding its way into curricula.

In the case of Europe, Franz Rauch from the University of Klagenfurt stressed the integrative function of the Decade. He saw the Decade as an opportunity to join together movements which would otherwise work alongside one another but separately. The goal would be to create ‘Learning Landscapes’ in which all interested parties could take part, for example through the construction of a thematic portal on the internet.



## Closing Debate and Summing Up

The overwhelming evaluation by the participants was that the international workshop on the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development made a significant contribution to the international debate on the practical development of the concept of ESD. In the process, it became evident that different approaches must be taken in the different regions of the world. ESD in Africa means something quite different to ESD in Europe or the USA. The diversity of the responses made it clear that ESD cannot be reduced to a simple definition. Although the participants were in agreement that learners must be supported in the development of specific competences in order to enable them respond to the challenges of the future in an environmentally appropriate and democratic manner, the manner in which these competences are to be transmitted within the framework of existing education systems is one issue which requires further work. It was suggested that intercultural dialogue was necessary so that people could express what kind of life they consider worth living. In this context it was also stressed that the perspectives of North and South must receive equal consideration and ideally could be brought together. The North, too, must integrate discussions from the South, such as access to water, into the concepts of ESD: ultimately, the aim around the world is to learn to live in a more sustainable manner.

One of the most important findings of the workshop was that the school sector on the one hand, and informal learning on the other, need to be increasingly brought into the ESD fold. A discussion on access to education must be part of the debate, and the synergies with the Dakar Declaration on 'Education for All' should be exploited, as the two campaigns are mutually supporting. The Millennium



Goals should also be brought into a meaningful relationship with the Decade.

The comprehensive implementation of ESD requires interplay between support from government and a well-developed civil society able to give strength to demands ‘from below’. While the participants expressed differing opinions in their analysis of political strategies, the representatives of all continents were in agreement that ESD is indispensable for the conservation of our environment and the protection of the planet. The Decade is organised as an open-ended process, in which the concept of ESD is subject to continuous readjustment. The workshop was considered to represent a contribution to the further definition of the concept. Increased reflection and conceptualisation remain important in international cooperation, and should be brought forward through further expert meetings.

Specifically, the following *commonalities* regarding the concept of and approach to ESD were identified:

- ESD is an integrative, interdisciplinary, and holistic concept of education that covers far more than environmental education. It is founded upon the wide concept of sustainable development as developed by the UN and UNESCO.
- ESD also transmits a positive vision about how to build a humane future. It should not focus exclusively – perhaps not even mainly – on correcting the wrongs of industrialisation, for example, although these wrongs provide a strong motivation for engaging in ESD.
- ESD is not only about a change of behaviour in individuals. It is also about teaching and learning to influence the political level in order to foster sustainable development.
- Most countries identified the universities as main promoters of ESD.



A number of *regional focuses* were also identified:

- ESD has to work within drastically different education systems.
- The role of the non-formal and informal education is particularly important in countries where universal access to education across the life span is not possible.
- The values on which ESD is built vary widely, although it was also agreed that the concept of sustainable development provides a broad common basis.
- Accordingly, the role of tradition and traditions within ESD varies widely.



workshop was generally well-received and welcomed as an opportunity for continuing debate.

The debates at the workshop – in the view of the participants – were held with extraordinary enthusiasm, with a desire to learn from one another and to create an atmosphere of partnership. Many participants described the workshop as an exceptional opportunity for international debate within a more intimate circle, with representatives from almost all regions of the world. The idea of a follow-up to the

*Charlotte Schmitz, Lina Franken*



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On the 28th and 29th November 2006, experts from more than 35 countries gathered in Bonn, at the conference rooms of the German Savings Bank Association, to discuss progress to date in implementing the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, and to discuss the way ahead for the Decade. Around 50 participants – drawn from the fields of science and research, government ministries, UNESCO National Commissions, non-governmental organisations and international bodies – met at the invitation of the German Commission for UNESCO and the Ministry for Generations, Family, Women and Integration of the State of North-Rhine Westphalia, with support from UNESCO.