

Halftime of the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)

2009

*Nicht Mit
Gold
aufzuwiegen*



„Education – more precious than gold“

VENRO Discussion Paper 1/2009

Halftime of the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)

The World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development comes at a time when education is increasingly recognized as an important motor for change.

UNESCO, 20th February 2009

The Association of Development German Non-governmental Organisations (VENRO) has taken up this notion and stresses that development and any intentionally brought about change rely on learning processes. In a world shaped more than ever before by economic, ecological, social, political and cultural crises, everyone has to participate in Global Learning. The accent here is on the human right to education, but on a commitment to lifelong learning too, also for those bearing responsibility for others and exercising power.

In a discussion paper¹ already issued at the beginning of the UN Decade, VENRO explicitly welcomed the early creation of the institutional prerequisites for the implementation of the Decade in Germany. It has called on its members to actively participate in the campaign, presented its own notion of education as “Global Learning” and described the learning process towards sustainable development as empowerment.

At halftime in the Decade, it has become apparent that while recognisable progress has been made with regard to the core demands formulated four years ago, they still represent a challenge for the 2nd half:

- 1. to effectively establish the guiding notion of sustainable global development in our education system**
- 2. to give enhanced profile to the global and development dimension of Education for Sustainable Development, and**
- 3. to strengthen the opportunities for civil society organisations and initiatives to participate in implementing the Decade.**

VENRO is using the World Conference in Bonn and the international NGO Congress “Global Learning, weltwärts and beyond” taking place in the run-up to the conference as an opportunity to present **10 recommendations** on necessary “course corrections”. They are based on an analysis of the following deficits:

- (1) Neither in national nor in international education policy do ESD and Education for All (EFA) meet the considerable demands made on them.
- (2) ESD and EFA are not being integrated as effective, mutually complementary programmes.
- (3) In assessing global development, narrowed views dominate. Shifting perspectives is a key competence that has not yet become a matter of course.
- (4) The guiding notion of sustainable development has not yet attained the significance it deserves in education prac-

tice as an ethical frame of reference for analysis and assessment of complex development processes.

- (5) As yet, developing teaching and learning methods on the basis of empirical research towards a self-determined acquisition of competencies has only played a marginal role in ESD.
- (6) The structural framework conditions for educational activities of development organisations have deteriorated.

1. Neither in national nor in international education policy do ESD and Education for All (EFA) meet the considerable demands made on them.

The German Federal Parliament welcomes the UN General Assembly’s decision to give top priority to promoting Education for Sustainable Development in education policy. (unanimous vote given by the Federal Parliament on the 1st July 2004)

Contrary to this resolution, Education for Sustainable Development, the guiding notion of sustainability and new demands on learning in a globalised habitat have not been referred to in the **National Education Reports** issued every two years on behalf of the Standing Conference of State Ministers of Cultural Affairs (KMK) and the Federal Ministry of Education and Research. Thus the latest “Bildung in Deutschland 2008”² report does not mention ESD, and the term “sustainable” is merely used in the sense of “lasting”. The only consequence drawn from the impacts that globalisation has had on the economy and the labour market is that education levels need to be raised because more and more jobs for low-qualified staff are being phased out (p. 23).

Neither does the **2008 Progress Report of the Federal Government on the National Sustainability Strategy**³ give Education for Sustainable Development the fundamental significance it is frequently assigned (also in this report) for a sustainable future. Education has not been adopted as a priority, and even under “Sustainability in further individual policy fields”, it is merely dealt with on just over two pages and with regard to the Federal Government’s Qualification

1 VENRO Policy Paper No. 15, Bonn June 2005; Download: www.venro.org/arbeitspapiere.html

2 "Bildung in Deutschland 2008. Ein indikatorengestützter Bericht mit einer Analyse zu Übergängen im Anschluss an den Sekundarbereich I"; Editors: "Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung" on behalf of the Standing Conference of State Ministers of Cultural Affairs in the German Federal Republic and the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, W. Bertelsmann Verlag, Bielefeld 2008, 352 p.; Download: <http://www.bildungsbericht.de>

3 2008 progress report on the national sustainability strategy “Für ein nachhaltiges Deutschland”, Federal Government 2008, 218 p.. Download: <http://www.bundesregierung.de/Webs/Breg/nachhaltigkeit/DE/Startseite/Startseite.html>

Initiative. ESD is only mentioned in the Progress Report as the last of three examples of “Applied Sustainability” in a very short chapter. No reference is made to the Federal Government’s report on ESD or to the final report on the BLK model programmes “21”.

In their contribution to the 2008 Progress Report the **States of the German Federal Republic**, in their special Federal responsibility, first report – albeit in a very general manner – on “Education for Sustainable Development”. However, what gives rise to concern here is that unlike the Federal Government, they assess the integrative force of the guiding notion of sustainable development to be lower and obviously do not like to see sustainability as an overarching strategy (p. 191).

The **2009 UNESCO World Education Report**⁴ also demonstrates that so far, it has not been possible to achieve the central education goals: 75 million children world-wide still do not go to school, and in Sub-Saharan Africa, it is even almost a third of all children. 16% of the adult world population are illiterate. Two thirds of these illiterate people are women. World society is obviously not sustainable in terms of its education systems. The alarming dimensions of child poverty and the violation of children’s rights in other parts of the world must not be used to play down lacking education opportunities as well as the legal and social disadvantages of children in Germany, as demonstrated in reports of the United Nations and children’s rights organisations. The UNESCO Report arrives at the conclusion that national governments have to give a higher priority to social justice.

2. ESD and EfA are not being integrated as effective, mutually complementary programmes.

Education for Sustainable Development has something to do with the quality of education. The aim is to prepare people everywhere for individual challenges and empower them to participate in necessary change processes. “Education for Sustainable Development” and “Education for All” are the proverbial two sides of one and the same coin. “Education for Sustainable Development” encompasses “Education for All”, while “Education for All” is “Education for Sustainable Development”. Separating them into ESD here and EfA there would conceal causal links, responsibility in solidarity and co-operative development prospects. A succession in time of the two would also be educationally contradictory. Anyone learning to read also ought to understand the contents and learn what they are useful for. Literacy campaigns are not an end in themselves.

Often, rising student numbers are not indicators of the goals of qualitative primary education having been attained: Classes reaching unbearable sizes, unsatisfactory learning conditions, a lack of teachers with sufficient basic qualifications and dwindling allocations of funding are raising concern that this Millennium Development Goal (MDG) is not going to be achieved.

3. In assessing global development, narrowed views dominate. Shifting perspectives is a key competence that has not yet become a matter of course.

In a world shaped by cultural diversity, social plurality and complex globalisation processes, shifting perspectives becomes a key qualification.

Developing and strengthening this competence probably constitutes the most important challenge of Global Learning. Not only does shifting perspectives demand a broad horizon, for one has to know at least something about the people, their living conditions and cultural links and the economic and political structures to be able to understand their world. Shifting perspectives also requires willingness to communicate across frontiers, the ability to bear irritation, to be able to dissociate oneself from certain concepts and readiness to develop one’s own principles and notions of the world in a manner open to the future.

Given the great global challenges of climate change, the world economic crisis and lasting violent conflicts in parts of Africa and the Middle East, the contradictions in our narrowed perspectives are becoming particularly clear. Even in dedicated approaches taking the dangers of climate change seriously, one will only occasionally detect attempts to view the consequences from the angle of the poorer world regions. Neither the dimensions of the consequences for the South, in many regions of which they are far more severe, nor the extent of the injustice of having to bear the consequences for something the causes of which others are mainly responsible for have come fully to the fore so far. Only far too rarely is climate change also viewed as a threat to fundamental human rights and global security. In ESD, climate justice is often not yet playing the role it has to be attributed.

4. The guiding notion of sustainable development has not yet attained the significance it deserves in education practice as an ethical frame of reference for analysis and assessment of complex development processes.

VENRO has always felt committed to the guiding notion of sustainable development as a frame of reference for the analysis and assessment of development and for setting goals. Here, the political dimension of sustainable development as good governance has been consistently considered. This has also often happened in contrast to other ESD approaches restricting themselves on the three original target dimensions of “ecological compatibility”, “economic efficiency” and “social justice”.

The significance of the integrative guiding notion of sustainable development for self-determined learning and acting was underlined in the “Orientierungsrahmen für den

4 EFA - Global Monitoring Report 2009, Overcoming inequality: why governance matters, UNESCO 2008; Download: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0017/001776/177683E.pdf>

Lernbereich Globale Entwicklung” (2007)⁵ issued by the Standing Conference of State Ministers of Cultural Affairs (KMK), but so far, it has found hardly any attention in educational practice, except for general references to the guiding notion itself. It offers the opportunity to analyse and assess complex developments from the perspectives involved at different levels (individual to global). As a comprehensive ethical frame of reference, this guiding notion can structure the reaching of a verdict on an issue without predetermining any judgement. It remains open as a guiding notion with a potential to develop. Important world conferences such as the one in Johannesburg in 2002 have shown that peace, security, stability, observance of human rights and basic freedoms as well as cultural diversity have become constitutive elements of an understanding of sustainability world-wide. Given the plurality of societal concepts, this openness is certainly not the frequently complained of shortcoming of sustainability but rather a prerequisite for the outstanding importance of this guiding notion in education.

5. As yet, developing teaching and learning methods on the basis of empirical research towards a self-determined acquisition of competencies has only played a marginal role in ESD.

Major education surveys of the last few years have demonstrated with astonishing clarity that learning success in other OECD countries is greater and that we suffer from a lack of equal opportunities and justice. Success at school and prospects for life still considerably depend on the family that children come from.

Both the strongly divided school structure, the forms of teaching, which are partly related to it and oriented on (allegedly) homogeneous groups and insufficient co-operation between government and non-governmental providers of education are, in many cases, not sustainable and urgently require reform.

This is why education has to be designed in the form of individualised and largely self-determined learning processes. Very much true to the sense of “education for all”, they are, of course, not limited to certain institutions such as school or certain phases in life or sections of the population. In its earlier discussion papers on Global Learning, VENRO already put the concept of empowerment at the centre of considerations. This term corresponds to a large extent to the key term of self-determined, individualised learning.

The crucial elements of the new culture of learning are:

- developing and supporting core competencies
- individualising co-operative forms of learning
- strengthening self-responsibility
- addressing relevant topics of global change
- promoting a diversity of methods
- and promoting a holistic, cross-disciplinary approach.

The roles of all those involved in the learning process are subject to significant changes, especially those of the learners and teachers. Both the contents and the relations have to approach the axiom of modern didactics: Effective learning processes combine constructive activities with appreciating relations.

6. The structural framework conditions for educational activities of development organisations have deteriorated.

Member organisations of VENRO and the One-World State Networks are committing themselves for the goals of the UN Decade of “Education for Sustainable Development” and the “Alliance for Learning Sustainability”. They are represented in the National Committee of the UN Decade and at the Round Table, participate in the national working groups and have been officially honoured as Decade Projects many times. Engagement for Global Learning and Education for Sustainable Development, which many sides have called for, has resulted in a growing number of continuously improving education programmes, teaching material and Internet presentations, but also in an increased requirement for resources that can often no longer be covered by people working in an honorary capacity.

Already more than 20 years ago, the Minister-Presidents of the Federal States jointly declared that development-related educational activities are an important part of development politics and that the Federal States assume a special responsibility here owing to their constitutionally assigned responsibility for education policy. This was repeatedly emphasised in the further Resolutions of the Conference of Minister-Presidents, recently in their resolution of the 24th October 2008.

In spite of these resolutions, the corresponding budgetary allocations of the Federal States to promoting NGO educational activities have been considerably reduced over the last few years and are only partly made up for by increases in the budget of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). For long-term educational activities, the networking and professionalisation that they entail as well as the involvement of people working in an honorary capacity structural funding is urgently required in some areas in addition to project funding.

5 “Orientierungsrahmen für den Lernbereich Globale Entwicklung im Rahmen einer Bildung für nachhaltige Entwicklung”, adopted at the 318th KMK in Berlin on the 14.6.2007
Download: www.globaleslernen.de

Recommendations

1. The implementation of conventions, resolutions, strategies and measures to strengthen education ought to be assessed in terms of their orientation on the guiding notion of sustainable development. Reporting on education at all levels as well as reports on the sustainability strategy and general reports of civil society organisations operating in the education sector should appropriately address how ESD is being strengthened as an individual and societal learning process. They ought to be compiled with the involvement of all relevant actors.

2. The discourse on ESD has to be oriented even more strongly on the design of learning processes and the acquisition of necessary competencies as a prerequisite for changes in behaviour. Decision-makers and their institutions and organisations should also clearly commit themselves to their own learning in the sense of sustainability.

3. “Education for sustainable development” and “Education for All” are to be looked upon as a unity. Their measures should mutually encompass and complement each other.

4. As “Education for All” ESD must not be tied to origin, sex or proficiency in certain languages. With its structures and programmes, it also has to reach and integrate sections of the population for whom access to education is difficult in order to contribute to combating poverty and promote social integration.

5. Education for sustainable development as education for all is to take the different backgrounds of learners into consideration and provide them with the necessary individual support in heterogeneous learning groups. The UNESCO Concept of Inclusive Education sets a framework for high-standard education of all people and their participation as co-designers of their own learning processes and actors in sustainable development.

6. A conscious shift in perspectives is to become a lasting learning process, a basic attitude and a precondition for making judgements and taking decisions. It has to play an important role as a key competence in all ESD programmes. Programmes such as the voluntary learning service “weltwärts”, which can make a crucial contribution to strengthening this competence, are to see further development involving all responsible actors and be supplemented by a reverse programme.

7. The guiding notion of sustainable development forms the ethical frame of reference for Global Learning and provides the link between the wide range of ESD approaches and scenes of actors for an understanding of global change and the design of globalisation. With regard to its significance for the analysis and assessment of complex

development processes, it has to be introduced in educational practice.

8. Designing forms of learning with the aim of strengthening self-determined, individualised and co-operative learning processes ought to become a central goal of Global Learning and ESD. Co-operation between government education institutions, civil society providers of ESD and academic developers of teaching and curricula ought to evolve in this process.

9. An impact-oriented mode of working, as called for in the VENRO Code of Conduct, is to become a basic principle of all activities in education for sustainable development. It is meant to be understood as a learning process in partnership aiming for an evaluation of achievements and benefits of educational measures.

10. In accord with their constitutionally assigned responsibilities and in co-ordination with the German Federal Government, the German Federal States have to create improved framework conditions for more effective development education in the context of ESD and also provide structural funding support where this is required.

VENRO is a voluntary association of more than 100 German non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The VENRO members are private and church-oriented agencies of development co-operation, emergency relief and development education, public relations and lobbying activities.

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