



EDUCATION IS THE KEY TO A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

Civil Society Statement to the UNESCO-Roadmap „ESD for 2030“¹

Climate change, loss of biodiversity, growing inequality, misguided privatisation of education, health and infrastructure, the threat to democratic structures and the lack of political participation – global challenges such as these require immediate, decisive and solidarity-based political action. Time is running out to design a socially, ecologically and economically sustainable future in the sense of the Agenda 2030! Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) offers an important key to urgently needed social transformation. We appreciate that the UNESCO-Roadmap "ESD for 2030" creates an ambitious framework for the UNESCO member states to implement SDG 4.7 by 2030 and, thus, contribute to realise the Agenda 2030.

The implementation of SDG 4.7 through UNESCO member states falls short of these requirements. Equal access to quality education is the essential requirement of SDG 4 and thus the prerequisite for implementing SDG 4.7. Although it is enshrined in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, access to quality education continues to be restricted worldwide, especially for people affected by poverty. This situation has recently been exacerbated by the corona pandemic. At the same time, freedom of science and teaching is threatened due to shrinking space, populism and fake news. This accounts in particular for the subjects of ESD.

It is time that policymakers not only set out the importance of ESD as the core of social transformation in plans, but also create the conditions for its implementation. The role of civil society as equal partner of state actors, as important catalyst for continuous development of ESD, and as representative of critical perspectives must be recognized and strengthened. There is a need for closer cooperation and networking among all actors, at the political and civil society level, international and national, and at regional and local levels. There is also a need for closer cross-sectoral cooperation to address the interdependent global issues we are facing. ESD must not remain the sole field of work of the ministries of education in the UNESCO member states. The UNESCO roadmap "ESD for 2030" and its principle of linking sustainability and education policy form the basis for this.

Therefore, we call upon all UNESCO member states, and all state and non-state actors in Education for Sustainable Development to recognize the following claims and implement them within the framework of the new UNESCO-programme „ESD for 2030“. The actors involved and consulted in the development of the statement offer themselves as partners.

¹ VENRO formulated this statement together with 41 education experts and practitioners from all five continents, who were asked for their expectations, requirements and opportunities for the future of ESD and the new UNESCO roadmap "ESD for 2030".

1. ESD must not continue to lag behind other educational goals or to be treated as optional subject within education. „ESD for 2030" strongly emphasizes the importance of ESD as the key to achieving all SDGs. In order for ESD to fulfil this role:
 - a. public funding for the implementation of ESD at all levels of education and for learners of all ages must be secured and expanded nationally and internationally on a comprehensive, long-term and structural basis; thus, at least 10 percent of the respective gross domestic product (GDP) should be provided for education; the current Corona pandemic increasingly shows the importance of public funding for education as the pandemic amplifies social inequalities,
 - b. ESD must be comprehensively integrated into the training of teachers and multipliers,
 - c. knowledge of ESD must be made an integral part of educational assessments in order to facilitate monitoring processes for the implementation of SDG 4.7, and
 - d. bridges must be built between ESD and other value-based educational concepts.
2. The political agency of critical citizens needs to be strengthened. The responsibility for social, economic and environmental transformation processes must not be imposed solely on citizens in their role as consumers. Political participation and self-awareness, access to and competencies for co-determination and participation for all must be recognized as a decisive educational objective of ESD. Access to quality education as a central prerequisite for political and social participation must be guaranteed, especially for marginalized groups, people affected by extreme poverty and refugees. ESD must empower all learners to participate constructively in social negotiation processes.
3. Learning cultures have to not only teach the values of ESD but they have to live them. We appreciate that the roadmap "ESD for 2030" identifies a holistic educational approach as the central aspect for transformation. Education should create space for self-awareness and development, for community building, for exploring utopias and experimenting with lived alternatives. Prevailing concepts for learning and educational settings need to be critically questioned and reformed in this sense. Opening formal educational institutions to society should be strengthened as well as linking them to non-formal and informal learning and engagement spaces. Civil society impulses and concepts for a holistic transformation of learning environments are crucial for this process and must be used.

4. We appreciate that the roadmap acknowledges children and young people as one of the central target groups and actors of ESD. Children and adolescents under the age of 18 represent the majority of all learners in the formal education system worldwide. They are the ones who, today and in future, are most affected by whether humanity succeeds in transforming itself toward sustainability. Their openness and creativity make them important drivers for change. Therefore, their participation rights, as laid down in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, must be strengthened. ESD must provide children and young people with the skills and opportunities to participate in politics and society. At the same time, children and young people must be involved in the further development, implementation and evaluation of ESD, so that they can help shape it. This participation must be inclusive, appropriate and significant and it must reflect the diversity of children's environments. Permanent structures for genuine participation of children and adolescents must be established and consolidated.
5. The consequences of the climate crisis are increasingly life-threatening and becoming the reason to flee and migrate. ESD offers the opportunity to pick up on the challenges posed by current and future loss and damage through the climate crisis. Equipped with these issues, motivating educational work can stimulate people to change individual actions and commit to climate protection, and impart skills for dealing with climate change and its consequences. To achieve this, ESD must clearly describe the causes of the climate crisis in all areas of learning and life, and point out alternatives and solutions. It is at the least questionable if striving for a balance between economic growth and sustainability as proposed by the roadmap „ESD for 2030“ is adequate. The fossil-fuel based, growth-oriented and destructive economic system must be addressed in principle.
6. In the face of growing populism, nationalism and persistent structural racism worldwide, ESD must contribute to social coexistence based on equality, critical of racism and sensitive to discrimination. Within the framework of the new UNESCO-programme "ESD for 2030", this dimension of ESD must be taken up urgently. Educational settings, both in and out-of school, must point out global interrelations and include colonial and postcolonial inequalities as cross-cutting issues. ESD must contribute to global justice by providing specific offers and safe spaces for people who have experienced racial discrimination. Additionally, educational spaces for encounters between people with and without experiences of flight or migration need to be established.

7. In recent decades, the globally increasing use of digital technologies has significantly changed the lives of people with access to digital equipment, and the educational landscape. ESD and digital education offer the opportunity to join others in the response to global challenges and to improve international communication, especially between the Global South and the Global North. Thus, equal access to digital education has to be ensured. At the same time, digitisation opens up new possibilities to circulate manipulated facts and restrict informational self-determination.

Democratic structures that are based upon self-determination and maturity as educational goals are increasingly influenced by algorithmic analyses and digital controls. Digitisation therefore urgently requires critical shaping and should be implemented in teaching individual subjects, cross-curricular projects and extra-curricular activities within holistic school and university concepts. The challenges of digitization must be clearly identified and addressed in educational work.

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 Phone: +49 30/2 63 92 99-10
 E-mail: sekretariat@venro.org

Editor

Lara Fedorchenko

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