

# Bonn Conference Report

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## Facts:

- Held at site of the former Bundestag buildings (from time when Bonn was capital of West Germany)
- March 31 – April 2, 2009
- Over 700 participants from 150 countries
- UNESCO “category IV” conference (experts meeting)<sup>1</sup>
- More than 50 Ministers and Vice- Ministers attended (“High Level Segment”)
- No representative of the Government of Canada (!! ) I think Canada was the only one of the 150 countries that did not have anyone from the national government in attendance.
- Gerald Farthing from Manitoba (representing CMEC) occupied that “seat” for Canada in the plenary.
- Letter of strong support from US Secretary of Education was presented at the high-level session:

“Let me congratulate you on the convening of the UNESCO World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development. President Obama and I share a great interest in your important work to promote education for sustainability.... We intend to do everything in our power to encourage education for sustainability....

In addition, education for sustainability is not just about the environment, as important as that is. It is also about people – about providing maximum educational opportunity – at every level for every person.”

Arne Duncan, Secretary of Education, USA

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<sup>1</sup> Bonn was a “non-representative meeting where the chief participants act in a private capacity.” Furthermore, as per this category of meeting, Bonn was an “International Congress” defined as “meetings whose purpose is to facilitate an exchange of views among specialists in one of UNESCO’s spheres of interest. The results of their work are addressed to the Director-General, who secures their distribution to and utilization in the appropriate circles.” So, even though there were Ministers present, they were technically (according to the meeting rules) there in a personal capacity. Since this was an international education conference, Canada was represented by CMEC, as per an agreement between the federal government and CMEC available at <http://www.cmec.ca/Publications/Lists/Publications/Attachments/159/ententes.en.PDF>. [I’m grateful to Dominique Potvin and Sheila Molloy for clarifying these points.] I also benefitted from comments by Chuck Hopkins, Lyle Benko, and Pam Schwartzberg.

## **Canadian participants played key roles:**

- Chuck Hopkins chaired Drafting Committee that authored the Bonn Declaration (see Appendix)
- Gerald Farthing represented Canada and was a member of the Drafting Committee
- Steven Mannell (Director, Dalhousie School of Sustainability) selected as the only profiled “good practices” exhibitor from North America
- Dominique Potvin (CCU) co-facilitated and served as panelist at a workshop on Biosphere Reserves as Learning Areas for SD
- Alex Michalos helped facilitate the workshop on monitoring and evaluating DESD
- David Bell facilitated Workshop 8 ( and reported to the Plenary of the German Round Table meeting April 3 on the results of the Economy and Industry Workshop)
- Lyle Benko was an active participant/delegate in the development of the Climate Change workshop, and also helped facilitate a sub-group on Climate Change and Teacher Education that submitted some of the information that was directly included in the declaration. He was also part of the 6 member panel that presented at the U.N.U. Special Event on the RCE's to over 100 people. He represented North America as the Co-Coordinator of RCE Saskatchewan. Lyle was also asked to lead a sub-group on Teacher Education and ESD based on his research and work with the Train the Trainer Project for Pre-service teachers that has been researched and published by Environment Canada in September 2007. At the kiosk, he offered electronic presentations of the following: a) Go GREEN Saskatchewan (Provincial Environment Ministry initiative on public education on ESD); b) RCE Saskatchewan (Formal, non-formal, informal regional examples of ESD); c) WOW (Wings Over Wascana) Festival ( Informal/Non formal example of ESD); d) Craik Sustainable Living Project (Community example of ESD in action)
- Christian Payeur was a panelist in the francophone conference
- Canadian Commission for UNESCO had a booth profiling Canadian ESD activities
- There was a strong “Youth delegation” that met and presented a stirring report to the plenary
- There was also an NGO Declaration (which in my view is not as powerful as the final Bonn Declaration [reproduced below])

## Key Conference Themes and Learnings:

- Glass half-full, half empty made empirical [report of the results of survey of participants]
  - Half full: c 60%
  - Half empty: c. 25%
  - Completely full: c. 5 %
  - Completely empty: c. 8%
- Passion and impatience of southern participants (especially from Africa) over broken pledges, non-fulfillment of initiatives promised at previous conferences, and lack of achievement of goals for ESD:
  - “At Jomtien we were promised a ‘right to education’: to know, to do, to live together and to be.”
- Disturbing statistics cited:
  - 750 million people (mostly women) illiterate
  - 75 million children lack access to education
  - Half the world’s population is under 20 – 90% live in developing countries where access to a quality education is very limited
- ESD needs to fit together with the MDG of “education for all” and with the idea of “quality education”
- Clear consensus that ESD involves “knowledge, skills and values”; that it links multiple perspectives and that it provides a new approach to learning and education
- Connections drawn to current financial/economic crisis (“a product of greed, risky pursuit of profits, short-term thinking”) with ESD cited as an “antidote” to the culture that led to the crisis
- Many examples of good ESD practices from around the world
  - in many areas Canada has clearly accomplished a great deal
- Several references made to the need for UN agencies to collaborate more effectively around ESD and DESD

## Other benefits of the Conference:

- Meeting several Canadian colleagues for the first time:
  - Steven Mannell who is the Director of Dalhousie’s new “College of Sustainability”
  - Christian Payeur with whom I discussed (inter alia) the importance of getting a Working Group established in Quebec (which is currently the only province not to have one)
- Reconnecting with key American colleagues
  - *Rosalyn McKeown* (co-author of the ESD Toolkit) now at Portland State U which just received \$50million for sustainability endeavours
  - *Peter Blaze Corcoran*, of Florida Gulf Coast University, which has a strong emphasis on sustainability across the curriculum.

- Meeting (in some cases reconnecting with) colleagues from other parts of the world
- Opportunity to participate in day-long meeting with the German Round Table meeting hosted by Deutsch Telekom (which has 250,000 employees in 50 countries and has strong commitments both to sustainability and to ESD – including a Sustainability Academy for non-formal ESD of employees)
  - Learned about a study of 1000 Japanese firms which showed that those with an explicit ESD commitment outperformed the rest

### **Future Directions for Remainder of the Decade:**

- ESD requires more resources and better partnerships
- Better monitoring and use of indicators required
- International exchanges should be encouraged
- Must seek synergy with “adjectival educations”
  - avoid competing with them instead serve as an umbrella
  - positive relations with EE especially important

### **Memorable Quotes:**

- “Self interest in the 21<sup>st</sup> century means caring for each other.”
- “There can be no SD while half a billion women are illiterate and 41 million girls are excluded from education.”
- “The MDG’s for education [globally] could be met with an expenditure of \$7B.”
- “Our children need more books, not more guns, in their hands.”
- “We need a university course [and a book and a film] entitled “Homo Sapiens: the last 130,000 years; the next 200 years.” [Michael Wadleigh, producer of the documentary Woodstock 1970 which had the highest gross revenue of any documentary ever made]
- We need [in our thinking and ideas] to “get out of the box. Or risk being buried in it.”
- “Decrease our footprint but increase our ‘handprint’.” (of sustainability actions). This idea originated with a Grade 4 student in India and has become a key theme for the Centre for Environmental Education (CEE) India which has recently established CEE-Canada.
- ESD values “must become part of the social DNA of the 21<sup>st</sup> century” [This was a quote from Chuck Hopkin’s closing remarks at the Ahmedabad Conference.]

# BONN DECLARATION

<http://www.cmec.ca/Publications/Lists/Publications/Attachments/159/ententes.en.PDF>

***We, the participants gathered at the UNESCO World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development held in Bonn, Germany on 31 March to 2 April 2009 issue the following statement and call for action:***

1. Despite unprecedented economic growth in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, persistent poverty and inequality still affect too many people, especially those that are most vulnerable. Conflicts continue to draw attention to the need for building a culture of peace. The global financial and economic crises highlights the risks of unsustainable economic development models and practices based on short-term gains. The food crisis and world hunger are an increasingly serious issue. Unsustainable production and consumption patterns are creating ecological impacts that compromise the options of current and future generations and the sustainability of life on Earth, as climate change is showing.
2. A decade into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the world faces substantial, complex and interlinked development and lifestyle challenges and problems. The challenges arise from values that have created unsustainable societies. The challenges are interlinked, and their resolution requires stronger political commitment and decisive action. We have the knowledge, technology and the skills available to turn the situation around. We now need to mobilise our potential to make use of all opportunities for improving action and change.
3. The impacts of unsustainable development, priorities, responsibilities and capacity differ between regions and between developing and developed countries. All countries will need to work collaboratively to ensure sustainable development now and in the future. Investment in education for sustainable development (ESD) is an investment in the future, and can be a life-saving measure, especially in post-conflict and least developed countries.
4. Building on the Jomtien, Dakar and Johannesburg promises, we need a shared commitment to education that empowers people for change. Such education should be of a quality that provides the values, knowledge, skills and competencies for sustainable living and participation in society and decent work. The Education for All agenda underlines that the availability of basic education is critical for sustainable development. It similarly emphasises pre-school learning, education for rural people and adult literacy. Achievements in literacy and numeracy contribute to educational quality, and will also be critical to the success of ESD.
5. Through education and lifelong learning we can achieve lifestyles based on economic and social justice, food security, ecological integrity, sustainable livelihoods, respect for all life forms and strong values that foster social cohesion, democracy and collective action. Gender equality, with special reference to

the participation of women and girl children in education, is critical for enabling development and sustainability. Education for sustainable development is immediately necessary for securing sustainable life chances, aspirations and futures for young people.

### **Education for sustainable development in the 21<sup>st</sup> century**

6. Education for sustainable development is setting a new direction for education and learning for all. It promotes quality education, and is inclusive of all people. It is based on values, principles and practices necessary to respond effectively to current and future challenges.

7. ESD helps societies to address different priorities and issues inter alia water, energy, climate change, disaster and risk reduction, loss of biodiversity, food crises, health risks, social vulnerability and insecurity. It is critical for the development of new economic thinking. ESD contributes to creating resilient, healthy and sustainable societies through a systemic and integrated approach. It brings new relevance, quality, meaning and purpose to education and training systems. It involves formal, nonformal and informal education contexts, and all sectors of society in a lifelong learning process.

8. ESD is based on values of justice, equity, tolerance, sufficiency and responsibility. It promotes gender equality, social cohesion and poverty reduction and emphasises care, integrity and honesty, as articulated in the Earth Charter. ESD is underpinned by principles that support sustainable living, democracy and human well-being. Environmental protection and restoration, natural resource conservation and sustainable use, addressing unsustainable production and consumption patterns, and the creation of just and peaceful societies are also important principles underpinning ESD.

9. ESD emphasises creative and critical approaches, long term thinking, innovation and empowerment for dealing with uncertainty, and for solving complex problems. ESD highlights the interdependence of environment, economy, society, and cultural diversity from local to global levels, and takes account of past, present and future.

10. Linked to different needs and the concrete living conditions of people, ESD provides the skills to find solutions and draws on practices and knowledge embedded in local cultures as well as in new ideas and technologies.

### **Progress in the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development**

11. During the first five years of the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, led and coordinated by UNESCO, many countries have made progress in implementing ESD and have designed innovative policy frameworks. A number of UN agencies, NGOs, regional bodies, and partner networks are engaged in concrete activities that support specific areas of ESD. Many people and organisations are committed and engaged in action. Efforts towards better understanding,

promotion, implementation and assessment of the quality of ESD are underway. A global monitoring and evaluation framework has been designed. Efforts at the global level have been complemented by regional strategies and initiatives.

12. We recognise that education is a significant factor in improving human well-being. We now have the knowledge and experience available to significantly improve the contents, methods and purposes of education. We know how to begin re-orienting education systems to emphasise life-long learning.

Through ESD we are learning how to improve links between formal, non-formal and informal education. We know the importance of strengthening and sharing knowledge of educational change processes.

13. Science has provided us with a better knowledge of climate change and of the Earth's life-support systems; it has gathered significant knowledge about HIV and AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis, heart diseases, and other serious health challenges. We know more about natural systems, and human impacts

on them, and the ways that biodiversity supports our well being. We know that current economic thinking has to change, and that there is a need to avoid unsustainable production and consumption and promote and support the emergence of 'sustainably developed' countries. Social science has provided insight into ethical, cultural, cognitive and affective aspects of human development, as well as sociologies of change.

14. We now need to put this knowledge into action. This is especially important to strengthen and extend the outcomes of the UN DESD in the next five years, but also to ensure longer term implementation of ESD.

### A call for action

15. The progress of ESD remains unevenly distributed and requires different approaches in different contexts. In the coming years, there is a clear need for both developed and developing countries, civil society and international organisations to make significant efforts to:

#### **At policy level in member states:**

a) Promote ESD's contribution to all of education and to achieving quality education, with particular regard to fostering the linkages between ESD and EFA within a coherent and systemic approach. Foster the goals of the ESD agenda in international fora and at the national level.

b) Increase public awareness and understanding about sustainable development and ESD, by mainstreaming and expanding the learning and insights gained in the first 5 years of the UN DESD into public awareness policies and programmes and various forms of informal learning. This should include promoting the role and contribution of the media

for fostering public awareness and understanding of sustainability issues. It should also include capacity-building of media professionals.

c) Mobilize adequate resources and funding in favour of ESD, in particular through integrating ESD into national development policy and budgetary frameworks, into UN common country programming processes and other country-level policy frameworks (such as sector-wide approaches), as well as into EFA and MDG initiatives. Promote and include ESD in the priorities of foundations and donors.

d) Re-orient education and training systems to address sustainability concerns through coherent policies at national and local levels. Develop and implement ESD policies through co-ordinated intersectoral/inter-ministerial approaches that also involve business and the corporate sector, civil society, local communities and the scientific community.

e) Develop and strengthen existing international, regional and national enabling mechanisms and cooperation for ESD that respect cultural diversity. Establish regional and country-level committees, networks and communities of practice for ESD that strengthen local-national, and national-global links, and that enhance North-South-South and South-South co-operation.

#### **At practice level**

f) Support the incorporation of sustainable development issues using an integrated and systemic approach in formal education as well as in non-formal and informal education at all levels, in particular through the development of effective pedagogical approaches, teacher education, teaching practice, curricula, learning materials, and education leadership development, and also by recognizing the significant contribution of non-formal education and informal learning as well as vocational and work-place learning. Sustainable development is a cross cutting theme with relevance to all disciplines and sectors.

g) Reorient curriculum and teacher education programmes to integrate ESD into both pre-service and in-service programmes. Support teacher education institutions, teachers and professors to network, develop, and research sound pedagogical practice. Specifically support teachers to develop ESD strategies that can work with large class sizes, and to evaluate ESD learning processes.

h) Promote evidence-informed policy dialogue on ESD, drawing upon relevant research, monitoring and evaluation strategies, and the sharing and recognition of good practices. Develop national ESD indicators that inform effective implementation and review of ESD outcomes and processes.

i) Develop and extend ESD partnerships to integrate ESD into training, vocational education and workplace learning by involving civil society, public and private sectors, NGOs, and development partners. ESD should become an integral part of the training of

leaders in business, industry, trade union, non-profit, voluntary organizations, and the public services. Re-orient TVET programmes to include ESD.

j) Involve youth in the design and implementation of ESD. Engage the commitment, solidarity and potential of youth and their organisations and networks in enhancing ESD. Foster young people's ownership of ESD questions and issues.

k) Enhance the major contribution and key role of civil society in stimulating debate and public participation, and initiating ESD actions. Explore ways to further this involvement and commitment.

l) Value and give due recognition to the important contribution of traditional, indigenous and local knowledge systems for ESD and value different cultural contributions in promoting ESD.

m) ESD should actively promote gender equality, as well as create conditions and strategies that enable women to share knowledge and experience of bringing about social change and human well-being.

n) Develop knowledge through ESD networking. Identify and support schools, universities and other higher education and research institutions, education centres and education networks that could serve as centres of expertise and innovation that develop and share knowledge, and create resources for ESD. Explore the potential of specific geographical and bioregional sites which can serve as spatially defined 'laboratories' for ESD.

o) Encourage and enhance scientific excellence, research and new knowledge development for ESD through the involvement of higher education institutions and research networks in ESD. Mobilise the core functions of universities: teaching, research and community engagement to strengthen global and local knowledge of ESD, and utilise the UNESCO ESD Chairs and UNESCO programme networks in this process. Establish institutional and organisational structures that facilitate flexibility, student participation, and multi-disciplinary programmes and develop model projects that can respond to the complexity and urgency of ESD. Reward structures should be developed and implemented to support ESD initiatives and research in higher education.

p) Develop institutional mechanisms during the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development and other ongoing Decades as the UN Decade for Action 'Water for Life' that will ensure that ESD continues to be implemented beyond those Decades.

q) Engage the expertise available within the UN system to strengthen ESD in key sustainable development conventions for example those focussing on biodiversity, climate change, desertification and intangible cultural heritage.

r) Intensify efforts in education and training systems to address critical and urgent sustainability challenges such as climate change, water and food security by developing

specific action plans and/or programmes within the UN DESD umbrella and partnership framework.

16. The participants in the 2009 World ESD Conference request UNESCO, as lead agency responsible for the UN DESD, to:

a) Enhance its leadership and co-ordination role for UN DESD based on the International Implementation Scheme in co-operation with other UN agencies and programmes such as UNEP, UNU, the EFA convening agencies (UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA and the World Bank) – amongst others, and incorporate ESD into ‘one UN’ strategies at country level, particularly through UNDAF processes.

b) Support member states and other partners in the implementation of the UN DESD, particularly through upstream capacity-building and policy advice on the development of coherent national strategies, monitoring and evaluation, recognising and sharing good practices on ESD, advocacy and global partnership development, with due consideration to post-conflict and least developed countries.

c) Represent and/or promote the ESD agenda in other major education and development forums such as international conferences and negotiations such as the G8, G20, Copenhagen Climate Change Conference, EFA High-Level Group, UN Chief Executives Board, and UNESCO world conferences (amongst other ongoing events and activities).

d) Utilize the expertise that exists within UNESCO biosphere reserves, world heritage sites and other science, culture and education programmes, such as TTISSA (Teacher Training Initiative for Sub-Saharan Africa), ASPnet schools and LIFE (Literacy Initiative for Empowerment) to further ESD objectives and ensure that key priorities for ESD are integrated into longer term programmes and strategies within UNESCO.

e) Promote ESD-related research through UNESCO’s programmes in order to enhance the quality and evidence-base of ESD. Further develop the global monitoring and evaluation system to evaluate ESD and take initiatives to develop international strategies and practices that can lead to a successful conclusion of the UNDESD with visible and concrete outcomes.

f) Highlight the relevance and importance of education and training in the UN Summit on Climate Change (COP 15) in Copenhagen, Denmark, in December 2009 in consultation and co-operation with other partners.

g) Intensify efforts and initiatives to put climate change education higher on the international agenda, in the framework of the DESD, in the context of UNESCO’s strategy for action on climate change, and as a component of UN-wide action.

17. Furthermore, the participants in this conference undertake to work towards implementation of this Declaration.

18. The participants encourage the mobilization of adequate funding in support of the recommendations contained in this Declaration.

19. The participants in the World ESD Conference express their gratitude to the German government for hosting this conference, and welcome the intention announced by the Government of Japan to host jointly with UNESCO the end-of-decade world conference on ESD.