

Proposed Canadian Approach to the United Nations Decade on Education for Sustainable Development

National Policy Forum on Education for Sustainable Development (Model proposed by some federal departments)

Introduction

The purpose of this document is to present an option for a national approach to the United Nations Decade on Education for Sustainable Development (UNDESD), one that provides a means to engage all Canadians and one that strengthens and extends partnerships between Provinces/Territories, Federal departments, Indigenous Peoples, communities, industries, foundations and stakeholders. This proposal does not constitute a federal approach to the UNDESD, rather it outlines a means to allow Canadians to drive the process and set the framework for Canada's overall contribution.

Background

The UN DESD came about as a result of recommendations from the World Summit on Sustainable Development to the United Nations General Assembly, and was adopted in December 2002. The resolution was introduced by Japan and co-sponsored by 46 countries – including Canada.

This initiative calls on countries, stakeholders and industry to examine their approach to sustainable development education in context of:

- Overcoming Poverty
- Health Promotion
- Environment
- Rural Transformation
- Sustainable Tourism
- Intercultural Understanding
- Indigenous knowledge
- Gender Equality
- HIV/AIDS
- Water
- Sustainable Consumption
- Human Rights
- Cultural Diversity
- Media and Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)

As the UN's lead agency in education, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has been tasked to coordinate this initiative.

The UN DESD is slated to be launched January – February 2005, in a maximum of 3 to 4 countries. The names of these countries will be decided at a meeting between the UNESCO Director General and a High Profile Panel which has been constituted for this purpose. Further, many countries have indicated their intention to hold national launches after the international launch.

The Government of Canada's Initial Approach to the Decade

The recent tabling of the Federal Sustainable Development Strategies (SDS) in Parliament, February 2004, presents an opportunity for the Government of Canada to profile its approach to sustainable development education both to a domestic and international audience.

The Federal SDSs are submitted to Parliament every three years by 29 federal departments and agencies, and are a key tool for addressing the challenges and opportunities related to sustainable development in their policies, programs, areas of science and technology, legislation, regulations and operations.

In June 2004, Natural Resources Canada (NRCan) and Environment Canada (EC) approached the Interdepartmental Network on Sustainable Development Strategies (INSDS) with a proposed initial contribution to the Decade, the development of a horizontal product, a compendium, that would provide Canadians – as well as an international audience – with a federal vision and goals for the Decade, as well as a snap shot of the Government of Canada's approach to sustainable development education through the 2004-2006 period.

This compendium is not meant to be comprehensive. Rather, the material drawn from the SDSs provides an overview of the federal approach and commitments towards sustainable development education.

The preparation of such a compendium has been endorsed by an INSDS Task Force which includes Health Canada, Transport Canada, Social Development Canada, Foreign Affairs Canada, Finance Canada and the Treasury Board Secretariat. The task force is chaired by NRCan and EC, and will serve to oversee and coordinate this initiative.

As a first step towards a national approach to the UN DESD, Foreign Affairs Canada (FAC) at the behest of stakeholders, held an initial consultation on October 7th, 2004 to gauge the current level of activity on the Decade. This proposed approach is based on that consultation.

National Policy Forum on Education for Sustainable Development

At the recent consultations held by FAC, stakeholders stressed the need for a collaborative and integrated approach to the UN DESD based on partnerships and concrete deliverables. The process would need to engage communities, all level of governments, Indigenous peoples, industry, foundations, stakeholders and academia, as well as advance the education for sustainable development (ESD) agenda for the next ten years. This approach would also help set Canada's direction for the UN DESD with the development of a national vision, goals and targets.

To facilitate a horizontal approach driven by Canadians, the following framework is presented for consideration. It is built upon a similar process developed for the *Biodiversity Stewardship in Resource Industries Forum (BSRI)* a multi-sector national policy forum designed to explore the development of a vision, commitment, and path forward on how to enhance biodiversity

stewardship in Canada. That process was built on the understanding that only a cooperative and integrated approach would achieve the desired results.

It is proposed that a National Forum on Education for Sustainable Development (NFESD) be established that would provide a vehicle to:

- share best practices;
- establish networks;
- facilitate partnerships and concrete actions; and,
- build capacity.

NFESD – Purpose and Objectives

Besides providing a venue that brings together all interested stakeholders in dialogue on general education for SD issues, the NFESD could propose an agenda for Canada's contribution to the UN DESD by reaching consensus on:

- *A vision* – one that encompasses a horizontal view of education for sustainable development, and provides Canadians a common definition and understanding of ESD;
- *Goals* – to help guide Canadians in their endeavours, by providing direction for Canada's contribution to the Decade;
- *Objectives* – identifies a series of issues and activities that will help advance Canada's approach to ESD;
- *Communications Plan* – to engage Canadians and promote ESD by communicating what Canadians are doing and what they can do for ESD, this would also include industry, academia, all level of governments, indigenous peoples, communities, foundations and stakeholders; and,
- *A Process* – that ensures that all interested parties are able to participate in Canada's contribution to the UN DESD.

The Forum would not be a means unto itself. As noted at the consultation, the implementation and advancement of ESD is principally driven by individual Canadians, communities, industries, labour organizations, and stakeholders. Instead, the Forum would help facilitate partnerships at all levels, work to avoid duplication, and explore areas for possible synergy through existing programs. This type of structure could be used to house a national network for information sharing and capacity building, setting the stage for future work both domestically and internationally.

NFESD – Structure

The proposed structure of the NFESD suggests a coordinating body that would facilitate a more inclusive process for Canadians in defining how ESD will be advanced. Below we have put forward a simple structure for consideration.

National Champion/Secretariat

To advance a National Forum one needs the leadership of a Champion, an individual who could bring to bear their vision, experience and expertise to this process, and be able to guide Canadians in the advancement of ESD. The National Champion's role would be to:

- Work with a core group of stakeholders to help shape the development of the NFESD – including the drafting of a vision, goals, targets and directives;
- To coordinate a National Biennial meeting;
- Pursue funding opportunities to support the NFESD and to help host a National Biennial meeting that brings together Canadians to discuss education for sustainable development, build networks and facilitate partnerships; and,
- To monitor progress in the advancement of education for sustainable development and develop a biennial document that identifies Canada's progress in advancing the UN DESD that could be profiled at the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development.

To assist the National Champion, a nominal secretariate would need to be established to help provide additional support. The secretariate's role would be to provide both logistic support and central contact point for interested Canadians.

Stakeholder Working Group

Initially, the formation of the Forum would require a stakeholder working group consisting of a core group of Canadians representing all levels of government (Federal, Provincial/Territorial, and Municipal), indigenous peoples, industry and labour, non-governmental organizations, foundations and academia. This group would work with the National Champion to help establish the NFESD – i.e., helping in the drafting of a vision, goals, and direction for the forum in advance of the first biennial meeting. In addition, this group would also provide a network for the National Champion to draw upon in managing the NFESD. Once the forum was established further stakeholder working groups could be established to address issues of common interest raised by the NFESD.

Biennial NFESD Meeting

The purpose of the Biennial NFESD meeting is to bring together Canadians engaged in advancing the various aspects of ESD. Initially the first meeting will be used to help set the stage for Canada's approach to the Decade, gauge and inventory current activities, and begin setting up networks and partnerships. Each subsequent meeting will provide more opportunities to track Canada's progress as well as provide a venue to share best practices and experiences, and help build both capacity and networks.

NFESD – Next Steps

The next consultation currently scheduled for December 2004 provides an opportunity to examine the various approaches put forward for consideration. Should the NFESD concept be accepted, we could begin to formulate a plan of action to identify a champion, set up a temporary secretariat and begin to pull together a core working group.

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