

Dialogue on Canada and the UN Decade on Education for Sustainable Development: Oct. 7, 2004 (Draft)

Background:

January-February 2005 is the international launch of the UN Decade for Education for Sustainable Development (DESD). Many countries have expressed interest in subsequent national launches of the DESD. The United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the designated lead agency for promotion of the Decade, is encouraging countries to hold their national launches in April/ May 2005 and has made numerous suggestions for consideration in that regard.

As a result of discussions among Canadian delegates at CSD 12, Foreign Affairs Canada (FAC) agreed to host a first meeting of interested parties within civil society and the federal government to discuss how the two groups might work together to establish a Canadian national process for engagement on the DESD. Leslie Adams, Director, Protect our Water and Environmental Resources, took the initiative along with Chuck Hopkins, UNESCO Chair Reorienting Teacher Education to Address Sustainability, to develop a program and to invite representatives from civil society inclusive of the NGO, Youth, Indigenous and Labour communities. Efforts were made to ensure that the representatives from the non government sector understood their role to be that of bringing large scale thinking to the table. FAC invited federal colleagues working as an interdepartmental group on a compendium of federal government initiatives already underway in the area of education for SD.

Summary:

A first dialogue on Canada and the DESD took place on October 7, 2004 at the Courtyard Marriot Hotel in Ottawa. Participants included twenty-two representatives from the civil sector and the federal government (see attached participant list). It was acknowledged that there are many other interested parties who should be involved in future meetings.

Whereas the agenda indicated the possibility of deciding on an approach for coordinated engagement for the DESD, the need became apparent to step back and have general discussions. They fell within three broad categories: relevant initiatives already underway and how they might fit with future plans; some of the effective components of successful education/awareness programs; and, perceived essentials for effective advancement of education for SD during the Decade.

Relevant initiatives already underway:

- The civil sector expressed affirmation for the federal working group initiative underway on a compendium of SD education/awareness commitments in the 29 departmental and agency sustainable development strategies covering the 2004-2006 period. The compendium will serve to communicate what is already taking place federally and possibly indicate the potential for shared initiatives in the future.

- All participants were interested to hear that 40 university faculties around the world are developing innovative ways to reorient teacher education to include SD, and that Canada has some recognized expertise in this area that should be shared. Canada also has recognized experience in building and maintaining coalitions.
- Work has begun among civil sector/NGO groups on a potential method to establish a national process for engagement on ESD with an aim to offering an approach that is inclusive and identifies root shifts for SD. The attached DESD paper by Leslie Adams was circulated in advance of the meeting.

Existing education/awareness programs are proving most effective when:

- policies at the provincial and federal levels are sympathetic to, and supportive of, programs that essentially take place in the community where everything eventually happens or gets implemented.
- attention is captured at the grass roots by inspirational figures (e.g., Terry Fox)
- dynamic players are engaged (e.g., Shad) as well as funding agencies in the private sector
- successful messages used by centres of expertise such as the United Nations Cities are distilled or rewritten for use by local governments
- children are moved by the logic of what they have learned and influence their elders to change
- efforts are multi-faceted and lead to substantive shifts

Essentials for effective advancement of education for SD during the Decade:

- a common vision exists with room to interpret that vision within each organization's core values
- "concretizing" of any goals and the recognition that we are often dealing with a disconnect between what we do and what we say we do.
- appropriate messages are embedded in institutions at the local level
- all levels of government are seen to be working together - particularly the federal and provincial levels
- a focal point or lightning rod is established- inspiration versus regulation/legislation
- exploration and promotion of existing models takes place - such as those in the aboriginal communities and youth organizations
- the role that various arms of organizations in Canada (UNESCO, UNECE) will play in relation to DESD is clear
- partnerships are developed between all sectors of society
- the focus of the DESD is made valuable to Canadian institutions for many reasons including funding for capacity building
- non-separation of education for SD from action for SD, and the communication methodology "connects the dots" to illuminate the connections between the parts
- work is ongoing on reliable indicators for SD

Conclusions:

It was agreed that it is not necessary to develop something new at this time but to;

- map what is out there

- identify ways to enhance communication and coordination among existing bodies and sectoral networks recognizing their distinctive strengths
- assess possible models - the Stewardship Council, Model Forests, Canadian Biosphere Reserve, Sustainable Cities, and review the Framework for Environmental Learning and Sustainability in Canada on Environment Canada's website: http://www.ec.gc.ca/education/framework/framework_overview_e.htm
- develop a collective approach utilizing the expertise of our principle players at CSD and the OECD
- look for synergy in combining funding for communal action.

It was also agreed that for now, Carol Burchill is to act as the clearing house for information particularly as it relates to a next meeting, and that FAC will ensure a second meeting is called in early December. It was made clear, however, that FAC's role is to see domestic policy interpreted abroad and in multinational fora and that the evolution of the domestic plans for the Decade for Education for SD should be assumed by others.

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