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**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women
and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled
“Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace
for the twenty-first century”: implementation of strategic
objectives and action in critical areas of concern and
further actions and initiatives**

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The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.



Statement

It is time to make a difference

Education is the most powerful weapon one can use to change the world. It is essential to sustainable development. Citizens of the world need to learn to achieve sustainability. Our current knowledge base does not contain the solutions to contemporary global environmental, societal and economic problems. Education is crucial to the ability of present and future leaders and citizens to create solutions and find new paths to a better future. The United Nations Millennium Declaration (2000) and the Millennium Development Goals reinforce the centrality of education in human development. The goal of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014), for which the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is the lead agency, is to integrate the principles, values and practices of sustainable development into all aspects of education and learning.

Education for sustainable development is not a particular programme or project, but rather an umbrella for many forms of education that already exist, and new ones that remain to be created. It promotes efforts to rethink educational programmes and systems (both methods and contents) that currently support unsustainable societies. It affects all components of education, including legislation, policy, financing, curriculum, instruction, learning and assessment.

Education for sustainable development aims to help people to develop the attitudes, skills, perspectives and knowledge to make informed decisions and to act upon them for their own benefit and for the benefit of others, both now and in the future. It helps the citizens of the world to learn how to forge a path to a more sustainable future. It also requires participatory teaching and learning methods that motivate and empower learners to change their behaviour and take action for sustainable development. It consequently promotes competencies such as critical thinking, imagining future scenarios and making decisions in a collaborative way. It requires far-reaching changes in the way education is often practised today. It calls for lifelong learning and recognizes the fact that the educational needs of people change over their lifetimes. The following skills are essential to education for sustainable development:

- Envisioning — being able to imagine a better future. The premise is that if we know where we want to go, we will be better able to work out how to get there.
- Critical thinking and reflection — learning to question our current belief systems and to recognize the assumptions underlying our knowledge, perspectives and opinions. Critical thinking skills help people learn to examine economic, environmental, social and cultural structures in the context of sustainable development.
- Systemic thinking — acknowledging complexities and looking for links and synergies when trying to find solutions to problems.
- Building partnerships — promoting dialogue and negotiation, learning to work together.
- Participation in decision-making — empowering people.

Recommendations

We urge the international community to take into consideration the following recommendations for the success of education for sustainable development:

- Promote education in sustainable development by means of an international development goal on education to accelerate increases in educational availability and accessibility.
- Propose a framework for education in sustainable development that progresses from quantity increases to quality improvements in universal education and learning for sustainability. Although development goals have generally been set around quantitative targets, it is important to recognize the value of both quantitative and qualitative indicators.
- Empowering educators must be central to any professional development initiative. Educators are important agents for change within education systems. Effective educational transformation depends on educators being motivated to bring about change, as well as being capable of and supported in doing so.
- Models of leadership that promote the enhancement of competences should be developed and supported. Leadership is a key determinant of success in educational transformation at the institutional level. Education in sustainable development requires the distribution of power across institutions in order to facilitate educational exchange.
- Textbooks and other educational materials should be reviewed to determine whether they reflect educational approaches suggested by the competences. Materials may need to be developed to further support education in sustainable development.
- Academic quality assurance instruments (e.g., school inspections, institutional and departmental reviews and external evaluations) should be emphasized at the local and national level.
- Enhance the ability of learners to adapt to challenges of a rapidly changing world and to achieve sustainable well-being and engender social learning and empower society with the capacities to envision and realize sustainable development.
