



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization

Organisation  
des Nations Unies  
pour l'éducation,  
la science et la culture

Organización  
de las Naciones Unidas  
para la Educación,  
la Ciencia y la Cultura

Организация  
Объединенных Наций по  
вопросам образования,  
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منظمة الأمم المتحدة  
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、  
科学及文化组织

**Address by Irina Bokova,**

**Director-General of UNESCO**

**on the occasion of the Conference on Education for Sustainable  
Development in Support of Cultural and Biological Diversity**

**Oman, 24 January 2011**

His Excellency, Abdul Aziz Al-Ruwas, Advisor to His Majesty the Sultan for Cultural  
Affairs,

His Excellency, Yahya Saud Al-Sulaimi, Minister of Education of the Sultanate of  
Oman,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you first for this invitation. It is a pleasure and an honour to be here.

This International Conference reflects the deep commitment of the Sultanate of  
Oman to education and, in particular, to education for sustainable development.

The 2010 United Nations Human Development Report pointed to Oman as one of  
the countries that has most improved in human development over the last 40 years.  
This has reflected a national focus on health and education.

This focus is shown also in the national initiative of the Economic Vision 'Oman  
2020.'

The Sultanate has developed rich experience in education for sustainable  
development for which I would like to congratulate you. This was presented to the  
World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development, held in Bonn in 2009  
that the Minister just pointed out. UNESCO has drawn on this experience in its  
forthcoming publication on National Journeys towards Education for Sustainable  
Development.

The importance of this Conference lies also in the links it builds between education for sustainable development and cultural and biological diversity.

Too often, cultural and biological diversity are placed in separate policy categories. If we are to foster new models for sustainable development, we must break down these divisions. Education is one way to weave these issues together.

Developing sustainably is one of the most important tasks we face today.

This challenge raises complex questions of global governance. They involve many different actors and issues. I have no doubt that we must craft stronger international legal mechanisms and mobilize greater financial resources at the global level.

As the Sultanate of Oman is showing, national leadership is also vital to develop more sustainable societies.

At the same time, sustainability starts with each of us. It starts with our attitudes and our behaviours.

Education is vital in this respect.

It is the way to shape new ways of thinking and to forge new practices. It is the way to build more resilient societies that are able to respond to the pressures of change.

These are the objectives of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development which started in 2005, which the United Nations General Assembly tasked UNESCO to lead. The aim of the Decade is to equip individuals with the knowledge, attitudes and skills to allow them to make informed choices and responsible decisions -- now and in the future.

To this end, UNESCO pursues four angles.

The first is to re-orient existing education programmes. This involves revising curricula in science and mathematics education as well as the social sciences and humanities.

Our aim is to educate about climate change and develop the problem-solving and critical thinking skills needed to generate new solutions.

Second, UNESCO seeks to deepen public understanding and raise awareness in order to support lifestyle changes.

For instance, in partnership with the United Nations Environmental Programme, YouthXchange seeks to raise awareness with young people and develop educational resources for more sustainable consumer choices.

A third angle is to respond and adapt better to natural disasters and pressures linked to climate change. These objectives guide UNESCO's work to rehabilitate education in Haiti after the 2010 earthquake and in Pakistan after the floods.

Finally, training is vital. Most adults today were educated before climate change was an issue. New skills for sustainability are needed throughout life and throughout all parts of our societies.

Sustainable development needs to build on cultural and biological diversity.

UNESCO has been a pioneer in arguing this case. Our thinking is clear: societies and ecosystems are more resilient when they make the most of their diversity.

Cultural and biological diversity are woven together through our languages, our economic practices, our social interactions and our belief systems. Public policy must reflect this. To be sustainable, development should build on this.

Culture is about our identities. It is the lens through which we interpret the world. Cultural diversity multiplies the sources of knowledge and innovation for responding to climate change in ways that are sustainable. It is a source of resilience in a context of uncertainty and pressure.

The emergence of new categories of World Heritage sites – in the shape of cultural landscapes -- highlights the link between cultural and biodiversity and sustainable development.

UNESCO's network of biosphere reserves – 564 in 109 countries – provides unique opportunities to explore the interaction between human activity and ecosystems. These are learning sites for the management of cultural and biological diversity. These are real-world schools for new scholarship and policy.

These objectives guided UNESCO's activities in the context of the 2010 International Year of Biodiversity and our support to the 10th meeting of the Conference of Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity held in Nagoya last year. This will be also UNESCO's contribution to the agenda of the UN Conference on Sustainable Development or 'Rio+20' in 2012.

In all of this, girls and women are vitally important.

They are on the front lines of climate change. They are often primary producers of staple food and water collectors. They are often the unpaid labour directly affected by climate change.

We can do more to educate and train girls and women. The gender perspective should be integrated into the climate change negotiations.

Local and indigenous communities are also especially vulnerable to the impact of climate change. As custodians of cultural and biological diversity, their knowledge and experience must be protected and shared.

The Climate Frontlines project seeks to address these issues. This is a multi-lingual internet-based forum that promotes exchanges on climate change. Some 50,000 individuals have been involved since 2008, from local and indigenous communities worldwide.

Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I see translating the concept of sustainable development into reality as the agenda for the century ahead.

Education for sustainable development is a key factor. Education weaves together work for cultural and biological diversity. It is the path to responsible citizens and to more resilient societies.

UNESCO's 1996 Our Creative Diversity Report stated that "development divorced from its human or cultural context is development without a soul."

This is true. I believe we can take this a step further -- development divorced from its natural context is development without a future.

Thank you.