

Working Together for Education International Cooperation in Action

Linkages between the Global Initiatives in Education:

- Millennium Development Goals
- Education for All
- United Nations Literacy Decade
- United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development

U N E S C O

**Education for Sustainable Development in Action
Action Research Monograph**

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The authors are responsible for the choice and presentation of the facts contained in this document and for the opinions expressed therein, which are not necessarily those of UNESCO and do not commit the Organization.

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Preface

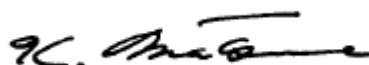
The international community is committed to promoting education for development. We need to link education to efforts aimed at solving some of the difficult problems people face, such as hunger, conflict, AIDS, drought, low income and bad health. We know that many organisations are working to improve the situation – governments, non-governmental organisations and communities themselves. It is important that we all work together, and the United Nations is a place where all the countries of the world can discuss what to do and decide on priorities.

Since 2000, the governments of the world, together with agencies of the United Nations, have launched four initiatives, all of which focus on education in one way or another. These are:

- The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) – eight goals with a target date of 2015.
- Education for All (EFA) – six goals also with a target date of 2015.
- The United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD) – from 2003 to 2012.
- The United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD) – from 2005 to 2014.

Although distinctive in significant respects, these initiatives share much in common in terms of their underlying values and ideals as well as their goals and target dates. While it is important to know why the international community set up these initiatives and how they differ from one another, it is even more important that effective linkages and productive synergies are developed between them. Through mutual reinforcement, more will be achieved.

This brochure explains, in straightforward language, how the international community is working together to promote education for development, and what are the similarities and differences between these four initiatives. I hope that you will find that they are worthy of your support.



Koïchiro Matsuura
Director-General of UNESCO

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Working Together for Education International Cooperation in Action

Working together for education

Over 100 million children in the world have no chance to go to school, and at least 800 million adults have not had the opportunity to learn to read and write.

Education is a fundamental human right. Education is essential for development. Everyone in the world would like a better life for themselves and their children, and education makes a difference – it can help people to work together to find new solutions to their problems and can lead to new opportunities. Just learning to read and write can give a chance to change things for the better.

Education is such an important tool that governments and international agencies decided to make it a joint priority. From the year 2000, they adopted four new initiatives to work together for development and for education:

1. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)
2. Education for All (EFA)
3. The United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD) 2003–2012
4. The United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD) 2005–2014

The Right to Education occupies a central place in human rights, and is essential and indispensable for the exercise of all other human rights and for development. The MDGs, EFA, DESD and UNLD are in line with the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. These initiatives are important steps towards realizing the Right to Education for All. Taken together, however, they could be confusing. Why was each one set up? Why are there four different ideas? Are they all necessary? Are they the same? If not, how are they different? What impact will they have? And who is involved anyway?

This brochure gives basic answers to these questions. It does not provide all the answers because that would require a lot more detail. At the end of the brochure there are some addresses and websites where you can find out more, if you wish. The websites and other information are in at least one of the official languages of the United Nations.

This brochure is an attempt to explain in clear, everyday language the basics of these initiatives. First the brochure looks at each of them in turn, then shows what the similarities and differences are.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

The United Nations General Assembly adopted the Millennium Declaration in 2000 as a way of expressing common worldwide priorities in development which governments and international agencies would work towards. These priorities were then characterized as eight 'MDGs' and eighteen targets, with a target date of 2015:

- Goal 1 - Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- Goal 2 - Achieve universal primary education
- Goal 3 - Promote gender equality and empower women

- Goal 4 - Reduce child mortality
- Goal 5 - Improve maternal health
- Goal 6 - Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
- Goal 7 - Ensure environmental sustainability
- Goal 8 - Develop a global partnership for development

Goal 2 is about education, but only about primary schooling; it does not refer to adult literacy or non-formal education. Goal 3 is about equal opportunities for women and men, boys and girls – this also applies to education. When girls and boys have an equal opportunity to go to school and obtain a good quality education, then we will be well on the road to giving everyone the same rights. Good education contributes to attainment of goals 1, 4, 5, 6 and 7, and is a basis for collaboration in pursuing goal 8.

One should remember that all eight MDGs and their eighteen targets are equally important and that the focus on the MDGs neither diminishes nor precludes the important work of the UN system in other mandated areas (EFA, for example). Governments should take the lead in working towards these goals, and the international agencies and other partners should support these efforts. The MDGs provide a common understanding of development priorities for everyone. The UN system is implementing work on the MDGs both at the global level and at the field level. Progress is reported in the Secretary General's annual report, the Millennium Project report, and in national reports on MDGs. Furthermore, the World Bank uses the MDGs as the framework for decisions about the money it lends, and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) writes an annual report on progress towards the MDGs.

Education for All (EFA)

The globally shared concern that everyone should get a good education – Education for All – goes back to 1990, when there was a world conference in Jomtien, Thailand. In 2000 there was a follow-up conference in Dakar, Senegal, where the countries of the world once again committed themselves to a set of education goals. EFA focuses on basic education – for everyone from young children to adults. There are six goals in the *Dakar Framework for Action*:

1. giving more pre-school children the chance of good care and early learning
2. making sure that all children complete a good primary education, free of charge, by 2015
3. giving young people and adults the chance to learn the skills they need
4. making sure that 50% more people are literate before 2015
5. making sure that boys and girls are enrolled in school in equal numbers by 2005, and that they all enrolled and have equal opportunities in school by 2015
6. improving the quality of education

Three of these goals have a deadline of 2015, the same as for the MDGs. The other three are not timed, partly because they are more difficult to define. However, the aim is to produce results, using clear strategies, including:

- promoting commitment on the part of governments and international agencies
- involving civil society and non-governmental organisations
- linking education policies with development
- regularly monitoring progress

Raising more money for education was at the heart of EFA concerns, and the *Dakar Framework for Action* said that lack of funds should not prevent countries from pursuing EFA, if they had good plans to do so. Countries were encouraged to develop national EFA plans. In response, the World Bank launched the Fast-Track Initiative to raise funds for primary schooling in a number of countries. There has not yet been any similar initiative in relation to the other goals.

United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD) 2003–2012

Over 800 million adults in the world today have not had the opportunity to learn to read and write. Over the last 10 years, the literacy rate improvement has not kept pace with population growth. The United Nations General Assembly launched a Decade of Action to improve the situation. The vision is ‘literacy for all’ – people of every age everywhere, both women and men, gaining access to reading and writing, because literacy is a tool for learning and a means to take part in society. In the age of computers, many jobs require a good level of literacy. The Decade aims to achieve the following goals:

- making sure that 50% more people can use reading and writing by 2015, giving special attention to women
- making a considerable contribution to the other EFA goals for 2015
- helping all learners to read, write and calculate well, to think critically, to have positive values as citizens and to acquire other skills they need
- helping to see that people use their literacy in creative ways, in school and in the community
- making life better through less poverty, more income, better health, taking part more in political life, knowing what your rights and duties are in your country, and taking account of the equal rights of men and women

The UNLD contributes to all the EFA goals by making sure that people have the tools and skills which they need for the full range of education and learning possibilities. The aim is also to help people play a meaningful part in the life of their community by voting, by writing their thoughts and opinions, and by demanding their rights from government, for example. Literacy must be part of learning in school and in other non-formal settings, and it must be in languages that people need and best understand. Literacy is important in all countries, both developing and industrialised.

United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD) 2005–2014

It was again the United Nations General Assembly that called for this Decade. Its title requires some explanation. First of all, what does ‘sustainable development’ mean? The Brundtland Commission, which met in the 1980s, defined it as: development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. Sustainability is not just about conserving the environment, but about learning to live in respectful relationships with each other and with our world. So education for sustainable development means learning the values, behaviours and knowledge which will enable us to develop now without robbing our children and grandchildren of that possibility too. The Decade will promote these ideas by:

- making people aware that education is a good basis for a sustainable way of life;

- making sure that ideas about sustainable development are part of schools, colleges, universities and other ways of learning;
- making sure that organisations and governments worldwide work together, so that they can learn from new experiences and from activities in different parts of the world.

The DESD tackles more than education – it addresses the way we live, our values and our behaviour. Because of that, education for sustainable development is not a subject to teach, but rather cuts across many subjects. It also means that education must be of a high quality, not merely passing on knowledge but changing the way people think. The principles of sustainable development must find their place in children’s schooling, higher education, non-formal education and community-based learning activities. This means education will have to change so that it addresses the social, economic, cultural and environmental problems that we face in the 21st century.

What do these initiatives have in common?

These four international initiatives have important aspects in common. This is not surprising since they represent the agreed agenda of the nations of the world. If we are clear about what goals and strategies they share, then everyone will be able to work together better.

The aspects common to all four initiatives are:

- a concern to improve the quality of life: all of them aim to reduce poverty and to improve health;
- the promotion of human rights: all of them see education as a right, and they aim to increase the equality of women and men, as well as advance the human rights of all, particularly minorities and other marginalised communities;
- a commitment to education: all believe education is a key to development, as a way of enabling people to fulfil their potential and take increasing control over decisions that affect them. The MDGs and DESD focus on broader purposes beyond education, whereas the purposes of EFA and UNLD are about making sure that basic education, and literacy within that, is available to all;
- primary education: all four recognise that primary education plays an important foundational role in development.
- the participation of everyone in education and development: all of the initiatives call not only for governments to play their role, but also non-governmental organisations, civil society, the private sector, communities and individuals.

In addition, some of the initiatives share the following aspects:

- a focus on the quality of education: EFA and DESD place emphasis on the quality of learning, both what students learn and how they learn it;
- non-formal learning: EFA, DESD and UNLD emphasise the non-formal learning that goes on outside the school system, as well as school itself. The MDGs only talk about schooling.
- literacy: UNLD and EFA both place a focus on literacy as a key part of learning and education; UNLD reinforces EFA and DESD because literacy is essential for meeting the other goals.

There are also some differences – we will consider them in the next section.

How are these initiatives different?

If the four initiatives were the same there would be no need for all of them. Thus, there are some significant differences:

- The eight goals and eighteen targets of the Millennium Development Goals provide a framework for international development cooperation. Both developing and industrialised countries have committed themselves to the MDGs, and the focus is on tackling poverty in its many aspects. Provision of primary education, and gender equality in education are the two areas where the MDGs overlap with the EFA agenda. Other aspects of education, such as literacy, quality, or non-formal education, are not an explicit part of the MDGs.
- The six EFA goals are concerned with extending basic education to every child and adult – it should be available to both females and males, to learners of all ages, offering relevant learning and life skills and striving to increase quality. Basic education should have a positive impact on the quality of life and on poverty, but the goals do not specify the underlying purposes of education.
- The UNLD situates itself within the EFA movement, where literacy is a thread running through all the six goals and a condition for their attainment. Literacy is a key instrument of learning and must be part of all forms and stages of education. In some respects, the UNLD goes beyond education, by demonstrating strategic links to other aspects of life – learning and using literacy has an impact on mother and child health, on fertility rates, on income levels, as well as increasing self-confidence, initiative, participatory citizenship and cultural self-esteem.

What is the place of the DESD in relation to these significant international initiatives? Education for sustainable development is a vision of education that seeks to balance human and economic well-being with cultural traditions and respect for the Earth's natural resources. It emphasises aspects of learning that enhance the transition towards sustainability including future education; citizenship education; education for a culture of peace; gender equality and respect for human rights; health education; population education; education for protecting and managing natural resources; and education for sustainable consumption. Pursuing sustainable development through education requires educators and learners to reflect critically on their own communities.

What sets DESD apart from EFA and UNLD is that EFA and UNLD, by virtue of their mission to ensure the right to education for all, address the needs of all learners – in particular those who are excluded from quality basic education - whereas DESD addresses the relevance and necessity of education for sustainable development for all, whether they are within or outside of planned learning activities. All people have to live in a sustainable manner keeping the global situation in mind. In many ways those who are in privileged positions in societies where consumerism dominates have the most to learn and put into practice about sustainable development.

These differences show that each of the initiatives was set up for a specific purpose. We can sum up the distinctive advantages of each one as follows:

- The MDGs provide a set of clear development goals that we can measure, and education is a significant input and indicator;
- EFA focuses on ways of ensuring that everyone has an opportunity to have a quality basic education;
- UNLD concentrates on promoting literacy as a key tool for all kinds of learning;
- DESD promotes a set of basic values, processes and behaviours which should be part of learning in all circumstances.

How will these initiatives work together?

One of the purposes of a Decade is that the countries of the world should adopt its aims and work together to realise them. Coordination is important because, in addition, the different bodies of the United Nations should play a role in making a Decade effective. Civil society and non-governmental organisations also have a significant contribution to make, including through advocacy and grassroots initiatives. So it is important to have a way of coordinating the efforts of all these partners. It is also important to work together on evaluation and monitoring progress, as all these initiatives have target goals to reach and regular progress reports to submit.

Each of the four initiatives has developed its own way of working, but how can they work together?

UNESCO has the job of coordinating three of the four initiatives: the EFA movement, the UN Literacy Decade and the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development. The UN Development Programme coordinates the fourth initiative – the MDGs – and has set up a number of international task forces, one for each of the goals. The Millennium Project, which is an independent advisory panel to the UN Secretary-General, has released a report containing its recommendations - *A Global Plan to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals*. This report was submitted to the UN Secretary-General in January 2005.

UNESCO has developed some ways of promoting international cooperation for each initiative:

EFA

- ✓ The EFA Working Group: to discuss technical and professional matters on reaching EFA;
- ✓ The EFA High-Level Group: a meeting of ministers, agency heads and NGO leaders to examine EFA priorities and mobilise political will for EFA;
- ✓ UNESCO publishes a *Global EFA Monitoring Report* every year to show what progress countries are making.

UNLD

- ✓ An inter-agency group to coordinate approaches and share experience in promoting literacy;
- ✓ The annual International Literacy Day, which highlights a different literacy theme each year.

DESD

- ✓ The DESD will also put in place mechanisms for coordinating and promoting the Decade.
- ✓ A High-Level Advisory Panel has been established.

These activities all take place regularly and enable representatives of all the partner groups to keep up to date, to exchange experience, to learn from each other and to chart the way ahead.

It is important, however, that each group knows what has happened in the others and, above all, that the linkages and differences among these initiatives are understood so that each can build on and reinforce the others. It is helpful that UNESCO has the opportunity to make sure that they complement each other and have no unnecessary overlap.

Further information

If you want to know more about any of these international initiatives you can consult the websites or write to the addresses below:

Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

United Nations Development Programme
One United Nations Plaza
New York, NY 10017, USA
Fax: + 1 212 906 5364
www.undp.org/mdg
www.developmentgoals.org

Education for All (EFA)

EFA Coordination
UNESCO
7 place de Fontenoy
75352 Paris 07 SP, France
Fax: + 33 1 45 68 56 25
www.unesco.org/education/efa

United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD)

UN Literacy Decade (ED/BAS/LIT)
UNESCO
7 place de Fontenoy
75352 Paris 07 SP, France
Fax: + 33 1 45 68 55 17
www.unesco.org/education/litdecade

United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD)

UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (ED/PEQ)
UNESCO
7 place de Fontenoy
75352 Paris 07 SP, France
Fax: + 33 1 45 68 56 35
www.unesco.org/education/desd

