United Nations

Briefing Notes
by

Mr. Cheick Sidi Diarra

Under-Secretary-General,
Special Adviser on Africa and
High Representative for the Least Developed Countries,
Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island
Developing States and

to the

Panel Discussion on the UN Decade for Education
for Sustainable Development in Africa

New York

8 May 2008
[In December 2002, the United Nations General Assembly adopted resolution 57/254 proclaiming the period 2005-2014 the Decade on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). The Declaration invited all member states to have ESD mainstreamed in their educational plans and systems. In 2005, the United Nations launched the Decade on Education for Sustainable Development (DESD). This resulted from the acknowledgement of the importance of education in the harmonization of knowledge and in cementing societies that are politically, socially and economically sustainable].

[The Special Adviser may be requested to share his experiences and insights on ongoing activities, explore challenges and identify approaches and stronger collaboration mechanisms between partners in supporting the African nations in the implementation of DESD.]

In response, the Special Adviser may wish to say the following:

✓ [Highlight that] the Education sector in NEPAD reflects the holistic approach to sustainable development and clearly corresponds to the principles underlying ESD.
✓ [Further state that] the Decade on Education for Sustainable Development and the Second Decade of Education in Africa launched by the African Union (AU) in 2006 are in clear synergy and are mutually reinforcing.
✓ [State that] the overall goal of ESD in Africa should be to integrate the principles, values, and practices of sustainable development into all aspects of education and learning in Africa. This will enable a type of education and learning that will encourage changes in behavior that will eventually create a more sustainable future in terms of environmental integrity, economic viability, and a just society for present and future generations.

Ongoing activities:

1. The Africa region launched the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD) and its regional Strategy of Education for Sustainable Development for Sub-Saharan Africa (SSAESD) at the biennial meeting of the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) at Libreville, Gabon, from 27-31 March 2006. The Ministerial Statement of Commitment and Call for Support and Action on the strategy [SSAESD] underlines the importance of ensuring that “African cultures, knowledge systems, languages, ways of life are integrated into frameworks, programmes and activities developed within the Decade”.

2. Eastern Africa Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) Network: UNESCO-Nairobi is spearheading supports to DESD and ESD activities in the Eastern Africa sub-region. This was launched with government representatives from six countries in the region, namely Burundi, Eritrea, Kenya, Rwanda, Somalia, and Uganda. The ESD Network is a collaboration between National
ESD Steering Committees and stakeholders in member countries of the sub-region. It intends to create an Eastern Africa Learning Space for Sustainable Development by translating the objectives of the Decade into the context of local communities in the sub-region. The Network's focus is on policy dialogue and strategic planning; vision-building, advocacy, public awareness; partnership-building; information-sharing such as exhibiting ‘best ESD practices’ and innovations; training and capacity-building; resource mobilization; research, monitoring and evaluation. The Network has also set-up a clearinghouse to compile and share a database of expertise in the region, facilitate exchanges and cross-border dialogue and linkages to the global ESD learning space.

3. In January 2007, the United Nations University (UNU) endorsed the creation of several Regional Centers of Expertise (RCE): one for the Greater Nairobi area to promote education for sustainable development in some of the city’s largest slums; one within the Rhodes University Environmental and Sustainability Education Unit (South Africa); and one based at the Wildlife and Environment Society in KwaZulu Natal, where the SADC Regional Environmental Education Centre is also located.

4. Tunza Regional Children’s Conference on the Environment in Cameroon: was organized by UNEP from 23 to 26 July 2007. The Conference has prepared the children for the Tunza International Children’s Conference that is going to take place in Norway, in June 2008. It will bring together children from all parts of Africa to learn about and voice their concern for the environment. The main themes of the discussion are: Climate Change & Food Security, Forest and Biodiversity, Water, Waste Management & Recycling, Dry Lands & Deserts. The Conference will have a number of workshops, plenary sessions, focused group discussions, field trips as well as panel discussions and result in individual commitments by the participants.

5. Mainstreaming Environmental Education in Francophone Sub-Saharan Africa: A MESA workshop was organized by the Network for Environment and Sustainable Development in Africa (NESDA) in March in Cotonou, Benin to focus on the “Promotion of ESD in Francophone African universities, implemented by UNESCO Dakar in collaboration with UNEP and in partnership with the Association of African Universities in 15 francophone countries in the region. The MESA in francophone countries project will involve translation of the training kit and organizing a training of trainer’s workshop on the MESA kit.

6. Southern Africa sub-region: The Southern African Development Community's (SADC) Food, Natural Resources and Agriculture Directorate commissioned a regional consultation process to mobilize support for the UNDESD through its SADC Regional Environmental Education Programme. This involved country-based consultations in 14 southern African countries with major ESD Stakeholders (Ministries of Education, Environment and Natural Resources, Health, Energy, national NGOs, UNESCO country offices etc.) to establish
possibilities for participating in the UN DESD. 13 countries of the region participates. This has led to the development of 4 consultation reports providing useful baseline information and inputs into the UN DESD. The reports were released in November 2006 and are available on the SADC Regional Environmental Education Programme website www.sadc-reen.org.

7. South Africa DESD Framework for Action: the South African government (Department of Education) has initiated development of a Framework for Action for DESD.

8. Windhoek Southern Africa ESD Sub-regional Meeting, 27-30 November 2006: The sub-regional meeting organized by the UNESCO Headquarters and its offices at Dakar, Windhoek and Harare, with financial support from the Japanese ESD Funds-in-Trust, discussed and clarified the multi-sectoral dimensions of ESD, as related to environmental, economic, social, cultural and political issues and their implications for education (curriculum development, materials production, teacher training and policy making) in the Windhoek and Harare cluster countries. The meeting emphasized the synergies between the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Education for All (EFA), United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD), Education for HIV and AIDS (EDUCAIDS) and the African Union Second Decades of Education in Africa. Each country agreed to identify a focal point and a lead institution for implementing DESD Action Plans. Participants also expressed the need for a monitoring and evaluation mechanism and the development of ESD indicators for the African Region. Despite these multiple activities which illustrate the commitment of Africa to the objectives of UN DESD, many challenges remain. Among these:

1. Insufficient capacities and resources and the negative impact they have on education—illiteracy rate of individuals aged 15 plus is 41% with very high interregional disparities, large gaps between the sexes and between rural and urban areas.

2. Structural adjustment programmes—resulting, inter alia, in reduced public expenditures on education.

3. Uncertain economic growth, and as a result, poverty is widespread (economic growth of the 90s rose to only 2.1% on average per year; far less from the objective of 7% annual growth rate required by Africa to reduce by half, in 2015, the number of persons in extreme poverty, although this trend is changing in recent years.

4. Ecological challenges -High population growth can exacerbate desertification, overexploitation of forest resources, the deterioration of marine and coastal ecosystems and rapid and unprepared urbanization.
5. Health challenges- Africa is affected by some major endemic diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis and the HIV-AIDS pandemic.

6. Political challenges- democratization processes have sometimes been accompanied by painful transitions and readjustments which have thrown some countries into a state of socio-political turmoil or open conflict.

7. Armed conflicts.

**Approaches and stronger collaboration mechanisms:**

8. Major challenge is the design of policies, plans and educational systems together with the mainstreaming of the essential values of ESD----efforts should be made to take into account both formal and non-formal education with emphasis given to the productive sectors and the environment which provides the resources for production.

9. Challenge of how to achieve the targeted integration---efforts should be made to completely reorganize curricula on the basis of the new paradigms and principles underpinning sustainable development; the idea should be to make the curricula and programmes more compatible with the demands of lifelong learning for sustainability.

10. ESD should create new avenues for the emergence and the development of a new type of knowledge and skills as well as some sustainable local practices. The approach to ESD should be designed basically as the means to develop a critical thinking that induces a change of attitudes and behaviors among children, the youth and adults in schools and within the community.

11. Need for regular biennial conferences to provide an opportunity for universities to report on ESD innovations associated with the university's triple mission of research, teaching and community engagement, and to engage in North-South dialogue; and pilot programmes linking universities, communities and business and industry in sustainable development partnerships.