



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Statement by UNESCO

on the occasion of the First Meeting of the Open Working Group on SDGs

14 – 15 March 2013

UNESCO welcomes the start of the Open Working Group and stands ready to provide its technical expertise throughout the process.

A new global development agenda needs to balance universality and focus. It needs to be universal in terms of its appeal and contents, while it also needs to help us focus on the eradication of poverty and the reduction of inequalities. It needs to place the values of equality, human rights and sustainable development at its core. It must respond to the needs of contemporary societies, including social inclusion and unemployment, in particular among the youth. It must help us deal better with environmental degradation. And last, but not least, it must promote peace and security by urging people to learn to live together. UNESCO shares the common vision developed in the UN Task Team Report 'Realizing the Future We Want for all'. UNESCO prepared two think pieces - one on education and skills and one on culture for sustainable development - and contributed to the one on science, technology and innovation. We will gladly make them available to everyone interested.

We need to build on the outcomes of Rio+20 and the currently ongoing thematic processes, including post-2015 national, regional and thematic consultations.

We need an emphasis on quality. We need to extend the concept of poverty beyond income poverty – in particular by committing to reducing extreme education poverty in the world.

The Rio+20 outcome document emphasized that quality **education** is essential for sustainable development. The relevance of education to sustainable development is one of the preliminary outcomes of the post-2015 thematic consultation on education, which is led by UNESCO and UNICEF. The call for a broader education agenda, encompassing transformative, quality and relevant education for all people, has come up consistently as an important theme throughout the Global Thematic Consultations on Post-2015, including the ones on Environmental Sustainability and Inequalities. UNESCO and UNICEF stand ready to make the preliminary results of the consultations on education available. Ensuring that education is at the heart of the global development agenda is also one of the key objectives of the Secretary General's Global Education First Initiative, which UNESCO, as the Secretariat for the Initiative, is coordinating with UNICEF and all of our education partners.

Rio+20 recognized the centrality of the **sciences** for sustainability. Regional consultations on Post-2015 conducted in Africa have highlighted innovation as a priority and called for investment in research and technology transfer in line with each country's development needs. Scientific and technical decision-making support was identified as an enabler for development. Scientific evidence and ethical principles should inform behaviors, policy action and governance decisions in support of sustainable development. The natural and social sciences, as well as traditional and indigenous knowledge, are indeed key drivers to developing and realizing sustainable solutions. UNESCO stands ready to mobilize this knowledge to support the work of the OWG. The UN Secretary-General has decided to establish a Scientific Advisory Board under the lead of UNESCO's Director-General to

advise him and the executive heads of UN entities on the strengthening of links between science, policy and society in furtherance of sustainable development.

The crucial role of the **oceans**, freshwater and **biodiversity** for sustainable development resonates with the Post-2015 consultations in Asia-Pacific which stressed that sustainable management of oceans needs to be included in the new development agenda. Preserving the ocean requires strengthening global scientific efforts to fully comprehend and protect coastal and marine environmental health, as well as to conserve biological diversity, and mitigate the impact of ocean threats, such as ocean acidification. More support is also needed for disaster prevention and increased disaster preparedness, including for early warning systems, communication, education and public awareness.

There is an urgent need to go beyond the previous MDG 7c target of reducing by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking **water** and basic sanitation to mobilize international cooperation, strengthen the science-policy interface and develop institutional and human capacity to ensure water security for all. Building on the reports of the UN World Water Assessment Programme hosted by UNESCO and the on-going Post-2015 consultations on water, there is a need to further study and provide scenarios on possible goals and targets based on a cost-benefit analysis not only using economic criteria, but also looking at social benefits. UNESCO is ready to facilitate such a study. On behalf of UN-Water, UNESCO, with UNECE and support from UNDESA, is leading the 2013 United Nations International Year on Water Cooperation and will use this opportunity to catalyze joint action on improving water management worldwide.

Regarding **culture for development**, the regional consultations on Post-2015 in Africa are identifying credible participatory processes, also displaying cultural sensitivity, as key development enablers. UNESCO will organize with our Chinese partners on 15-17 May 2013 an International Congress on Culture and Development, in Hangzhou, China. It will also contribute to the 2013 ECOSOC Annual Ministerial Review on “Science, Technology and Innovation, and the Potential of Culture, for Promoting Sustainable Development and Achieving the MDGs”. PGA Jeremic has mentioned in his intervention the thematic debate on Culture for Sustainable Development that he will organize with UNESCO on 12 June. UNESCO is convinced that, mainstreaming and integrating culture within development efforts are crucial to address a large number of the present global challenges. The paradigm of sustainability needs an explicit cultural component.

Finally, the Pre-Meetings to the Global Thematic Consultations on Governance in Africa recognized the importance of transparency and accountability for development. It was emphasized that these require, in the first instance, freedom to information and freedom of expression. Indeed, **universal access to information and knowledge, freedom of expression and media development** are important enablers of sustainable development. UNESCO co-organized, with ITU, UNDP and UNCTAD, the first WSIS+10 Review Event in Paris last month. The meeting reaffirmed that major challenges lay ahead for counteracting the wide disparities pertaining to universal access to information and knowledge, including broadband technology.

The future development framework and its goals should aim at “sustainable results”, as recommended in Busan, not just short-lived and short-term fixes. It must ensure country ownership and the participation of all stakeholders. We must together harness the full power of education, the sciences, culture and communication to steer the changes necessary for sustainable poverty reduction, equity, and the preservation of the planet. UNESCO stands ready to make all its expertise available in these domains.