



Rede  
der Ministerin für Schule und Weiterbildung  
des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen,  
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**Eröffnungsveranstaltung zu Projekten zum  
Thema „Umwelt“ der Deutschen Bundesstiftung  
Umwelt mit internationalen Schulen**

*„Sustainable Education at schools in  
North-Rhine Westfalia“*

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*– Es gilt das gesprochene Wort. –*

Ladies and gentlemen,

welcome to all of you and thank you, Mr Noe, for inviting me today. I am very happy to be here and bring you a warm welcome.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to talk about environmental protection as well as a careful use of resources and what our schools can do to promote sustainable developments.

Isn't it curious? We have difficulty envisioning a sustainable world, but we have no difficulty identifying what is not sustainable in our societies. We can rapidly create what I like to call my "laundry list of problems": inefficient use of energy, lack of water conservation, increased pollution, abuses of human rights, overuse of personal transportation, consumerism, etc.

But we should not chide ourselves because we lack a clear definition of sustainability. Indeed, many truly great concepts of the human world - among them democracy and justice - are hard to define and have multiple expressions in cultures around the world.

I do not need to tell you that our global society faces an unprecedented set of challenges.

Some of these are relatively new issues, such as climate change, access to clean water and threats to biodiversity – while others, such as poverty, ill-health, the need to protect human rights and promote equality among people – have been the subject of fierce debate and efforts for many years.

Experience has taught us that addressing each of these issues individually does not bring about long-term improvements. Similarly, fixing the problem, and not the source of the challenges we face, is not a sustainable solution.

We will not achieve sustainable development with technological solutions, regulatory frameworks and financial instruments alone. What, then, do we need? My answer, and I believe the answer of those of us here today, is: Education.

Our vision is ambitious but clear:

Every human being should benefit from education that fosters the values, competencies, knowledge and skills

to shape a future in line with the demands of sustainable development.

This means integrating themes relevant to sustainable development – such as climate change, biodiversity or disaster risk reduction – into education plans and curricula.

It also means – and I think this aspect is especially important - organizing teaching and learning in a way that encourages students to think critically and to act in a responsible way for their and for our common future.

If we achieve this, we will guarantee that our students will develop the skills necessary for true sustainability: skills such as the ability to understand the complexity of this topic, to think in an interdisciplinary way, to participate in decision-making processes, and to cooperate with others where necessary.

If we want to achieve that our future generation and especially its decision-makers are equipped with values and knowledge to promote sustainable development, it will make sense to integrate the concept in all subjects. Projects like the one presented at this school today are therefore extremely important and show the right way

in order to incorporate such a complex theme into the school curriculum.

I am also pleased to see that more and more of our universities offer science studies with a focus on sustainable development as part of their overall study package (for example the bachelor of science at the University of Bochum). We need a partnership approach which incorporates schools, universities, but also the media and our private industries.

Ladies and gentlemen,

let's take a closer look at education for sustainable development, there are many core issues that are reflected in the education programs:

- conservation of natural resources,
- climate change,
- transformation of rural societies,
- sustainable urbanization,
- disaster prevention and mitigation.

There are, of course, economic issues as well:

- poverty reduction, as well as
- the issue of world-wide responsibility and accountability.

And I repeat – for this aspect the multinational project of the Overberg-Kolleg is a very good example of how to elucidate this in schools and it is certainly heading in the right direction.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I want to add another important theme for the field of sustainable education and that is it should always be focusing on values and community based action.

Knowledge is important, specific skills are important, but underlying it also is an analysis of, and a change of, values and action.

I believe in value-based programs like this one – I believe in education for international understanding, and global understanding, moral education, education for peace, for democracy education, for citizenship, for those very life skills that we need today in our one and only globalized world.

Our thoughts and actions are based on the conscience and knowledge that all of these different kinds of value-based education really have to be seen underneath – so to say – a larger umbrella or a larger conceptual framework about the values necessary for sustainable development.

This kind of education for sustainable development which I try to represent focuses on critical thinking, problem solving individually but also collectively. It's multi-methodological in nature.

Ladies and gentlemen,

the goal of sustainable development is to enable all people throughout the world to satisfy their basic needs and improve the quality of their lives without compromising the quality of life for future generations.

In this regard education for sustainable development is an ideal vehicle for interdisciplinary learning and can be used to bring relevance, depth, challenge and breadth to learning as you all have experienced with your excellent project – focusing on environmental learning and environmental action.

There are real career opportunities:

Embedding themes relating to sustainability – within the curriculum and in the life of the school –, develops our children and young people as global citizens and equips them with skills, values and attributes for learning, life and work. It is estimated that many new jobs will be created in the next ten to fifteen years in the energy sector.

Distinguished guests,

I would like to give you a concrete example of how we introduce sustainability to our schools in North-Rhine Westphalia:

The Campaign "School of the Future – Education for Sustainable Development" supports our schools on their way towards a future-oriented learning process. The campaign is sponsored by my ministry as well as the Ministry for the Environment.

The campaign's most important aim is to develop sustainable and supportive networks in the regions of North-Rhine Westphalia, especially in cooperation with



non-educational partners, and to use the networks' advantages to support schools.

The schools focus on climate and energy, consumption and ways of life, diet and health, nature, forest, habitats, soil, and diversity of species. Yet, they also deal with the issues of international justice, the economy and social development.

They apply for the campaign and then are rewarded as we apply to them the nice and suitable title "School of the Future". More than 650 schools are on their way up to now and I invite everyone to join them. Schools can also join with their international partners. The Academy for Nature- and Environmental Preservation (abbreviated NUA) is responsible for the organization of the campaign.

Ladies and Gentleman,

to sum up – what we have already with our curricula regarding education in sustainable development is not yet the one and only solution – but we have just made a good start as the ambitious international project of the Overberg Kolleg shows.

I hope we all will see and learn with the help of such projects and your good example that Education is an essential tool for achieving sustain-ability. People around the world recognize that current economic development trends are still not sustainable, that public awareness, education, and training are keys to moving society toward sustainability and that there is still a long way to achieve our common and ambitious task, learning and acting for a sustainable world.

Thank you very much again for your commitment to this project!