

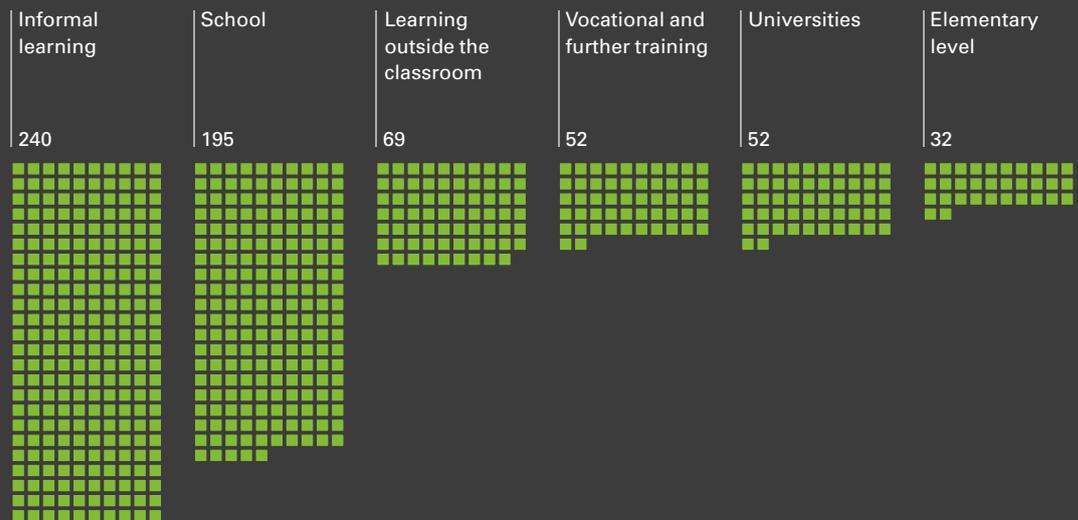


Children explore the world of nature: the theme of Germany's UN Decade is the establishment of an alliance for the learning of sustainability, the aim of which is to persuade young people to support sustainability early on by using imaginative and creative ideas.

### Education themes for the UN Decade projects

Up to now, most Decade projects have focused on informal learning and schools (factors may be counted under more than one heading; as at November 2007).

Source:  
UN Decade – German branch,  
2007



## Think globally – Act locally

Prof. Lenelis Kruse-Graumann

**Although launched by UNESCO only in 2005, the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, which runs until 2014, has already yielded valuable impulses likely to last beyond the end of the decade and influence more than educational policy alone. The important topic of education for sustainability has thus been given extra weight and is generating ever greater interest.**

During the Rio Conference of 1992, sustainable development was declared the normative guiding principle for the 21st century. This concept calls for a balance between environmental preservation and economic growth whilst at the same time not depriving present or future generations of their opportunities. And education is deemed an important component in bringing about a change in mindset and lifestyle.

However, it was not until the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution establishing a Decade of Education for Sustainable Development that the sustainability debate really got under way. As a consequence, education is considered a key political tool for promoting sustainable development – as important as the trade in CO<sub>2</sub> certificates and the development of energy-efficient technologies.

In Germany, the UN Decade is being coordinated by a National Committee comprising some 30 experts from politics, the world of science, the economy and various non-governmental organisations. The Committee has drafted a national action plan combining the activities and backgrounds of the various players involved. It aims to place education on a new and wider footing, extending well beyond the confines of school, and integrating the many aspects of life in which sustainability plays a role (consumption of goods, money and finances, conservation of biodiversity).

In this regard, the awarding of Decade projects has proven to be an effective instrument, and the participants that carry out such projects range from student and youth groups to associations and communities. Exemplary initiatives are thus thrust into the limelight, a fact that not only increases the participants' motivation but also raises the odds that they will be granted added funds. On the occasion of the Decade Week in November 2007, hosted by the state of Baden-Württemberg, North Rhine-Westphalia's State Initiative on New Learning achieved the distinction of being granted the 500th Decade Project Award. The large variety of projects undertaken, which also include artistic activities, thus adds meaning to the well-known slogan "think globally – act locally".

Although the UN Decade can be considered a success, it is important that we do not let up in our efforts. After all, sustainable development is not yet fully understood as a process centred on issues of intra- and intergenerational justice and quality of life. Moreover, the training and educational opportunities offered in the area of development policy should take greater account of ecological conditions and consequences.

Education for sustainable development is a lifelong process. The German UN Decade, which has chosen the alliance for the learning of sustainability as its theme, seeks to loosen the topic's close association with formal institutions such as schools. Sustainable behaviour is not an inborn trait but a skill that needs to be acquired from early childhood and consolidated by culture and society in a variety of different learning environments, with re-education receiving just as much attention as first-time learning.

Our own motto "From Knowledge to Action" strikes a chord in this context. The process behind it is complex, however, and ultimately involves breaking established behaviour patterns and affording as much consideration to the knowledge and values of those affected as to the spatially tangible and social context in which those patterns can be changed.

The UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development will not draw to a natural close in 2014 as planned. Rather, it is to be seen as a first step towards developing vital tools for promoting sustainable development in a learning society.

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The UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development addresses 30 different issues, including the fight on poverty, environmental protection, water and migration. More than 120 Decade projects concern climate change and the environment.  
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More than 100 million children worldwide do not have the opportunity to attend school.  
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More than 850 million people throughout the world are illiterate, of whom 98% live in developing countries and 64% are women.  
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A number of German cities, including Hamburg, Bonn and Heidelberg, are also supporting the Decade with projects concerning energy conservation, one-world and local public transport projects.  
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Inadequate learning conditions in Jakarta: the UN Decade aims at better education opportunities for all, to teach people behaviours that will assure them a viable future.

