

A proposal carried forward from the
G8-UNESCO World Forum on Education, Research and Innovation:
New Partnership for Sustainable Development
held in Trieste, Italy, 10-12 May 2007

for consideration at the G8 Meeting: Heiligendamm, June 2007

1. Preamble

The Forum brought together some 800 participants from research, academia, government and industry from 70 countries, including several international organizations. Speakers from many walks of life examined the relationships between academia and industry, the role of governments in research and innovation, and their impact on society. Discussions focused on topics such as education, energy, environment, health, and knowledge divides across the North and the South. The focus was often on Africa, especially in the special session dedicated to that continent. Informal exchanges among participants took place all through the Forum.

The topics discussed in each of its sessions are summarized by the session rapporteurs. The summaries are available on the Forum website, g8forum.ictp.it, and as part of newsletters published daily at the meeting. The Forum made no formal declarations. The guidelines and recommendations below come from a broad consensus that emerged at the Forum.

2. Broad guidelines for action

- Education is the key to sustainable development just as women's education is central to the performance of society on many welfare indicators. UNESCO's efforts towards "Education for All" were much appreciated.
- Education does not refer to a particular level but to the integration of all levels. Investment must therefore be made also in higher education and innovation, without waiting for perfecting basic education.
- The new divides of the world are knowledge-related, and are often scientific and technological in nature. It is essential to build scientific capacity in all developing countries so that they can use the most appropriate tools for solving their problems and basing political decisions on the best available information. Only with the involvement of a critical mass of indigenous scientists can decision-makers in developing countries make right choices about sustainable development—economic and otherwise.
- Scientific institutions by themselves cannot adequately address the political dimension inherent in science policies. It is essential to explore partnerships—this being the key word in the Forum title—for putting science and innovation to work for development, and for meeting the basic needs of the world's most marginalized citizens.
- To address the complex problems that face us today, we require a multidisciplinary approach that integrates physical sciences with environmental, economical and social sciences.
- More broadly, at a political level, there is a strong need for strengthening cooperative efforts among the myriad cultural, linguistic and historic

diversities of the peoples of the world. A wealth of ideas, experiences and development models can be shared among different geographic regions if the advanced, emerging and developing countries enter collaboration partnerships that engage politicians, scientists and innovators alike.

- The key concept of cooperation is partnership and shared experience—not the transfer of technology, or even of knowledge. As the knowledge agency in the UN system, UNESCO has a fundamental role in this regard.
- There is great urgency for action: If the existing divides in the world, often related to knowledge, are allowed to continue and escalate, the resulting discontent in parts of the world is almost certain to arrest the long-term creative growth of all societies throughout the world.

3. Specific recommendations

- The G8 countries should take the lead for a new partnership with the developing world based on a framework that connects knowledge and sustainable development. This partnership is essential since 70% of the land and 80% of the population belong to developing countries.
- Sustainability requires the strengthening of education and research institutions as well as networks. In cooperation with international institutions such as UNESCO, the G8 countries should support the establishment and networking of 'Centres of Excellence for Sustainable Development' for purposes of integrating education, scientific knowledge and innovation for sustainable development. These Centres should enable the exchange of ideas among educators, scientists and innovators from both developing and advanced nations. They should foster cooperation among top-level institutions around the world that are active in their domains of expertise, and enhance North-South as well as South-South cooperation.
- To fulfil these goals, G8 countries could take advantage of Italy's experience of more than forty years in fostering science in developing countries through the international institutions built up in Trieste. The effort should be expanded as a G8 initiative on the role of research and innovation on sustainability and create interdisciplinary programs; it should generate new partnerships first within those regions where investment in innovation and sustainability is likely to provide most leverage, and then expand elsewhere, especially in reaching out also those usually excluded—in particular women and youth.
- Some participants advocated the idea that G8 countries could divert a portion of their public R&D expenditures to a 'Sustainability Innovation Initiative Fund'. The funding could start at a low level and prioritize the building of fundamental structures for science and innovation. International support should aim at promoting home grown strategies and build on successful local experiences.