

Decade of Education for Sustainable Development Taking it Forward Together

Inputs from the International Conference 'Education for a Sustainable Future'
Centre for Environment Education, Ahmedabad, India 18-20 January, 2005



Ministry of Environment and Forests
Ministry of Human Resource Development
Government of India



United Nations Educational,
Scientific and Cultural Organization

CEE

Centre for Environment Education



Asian Development Bank



Canada



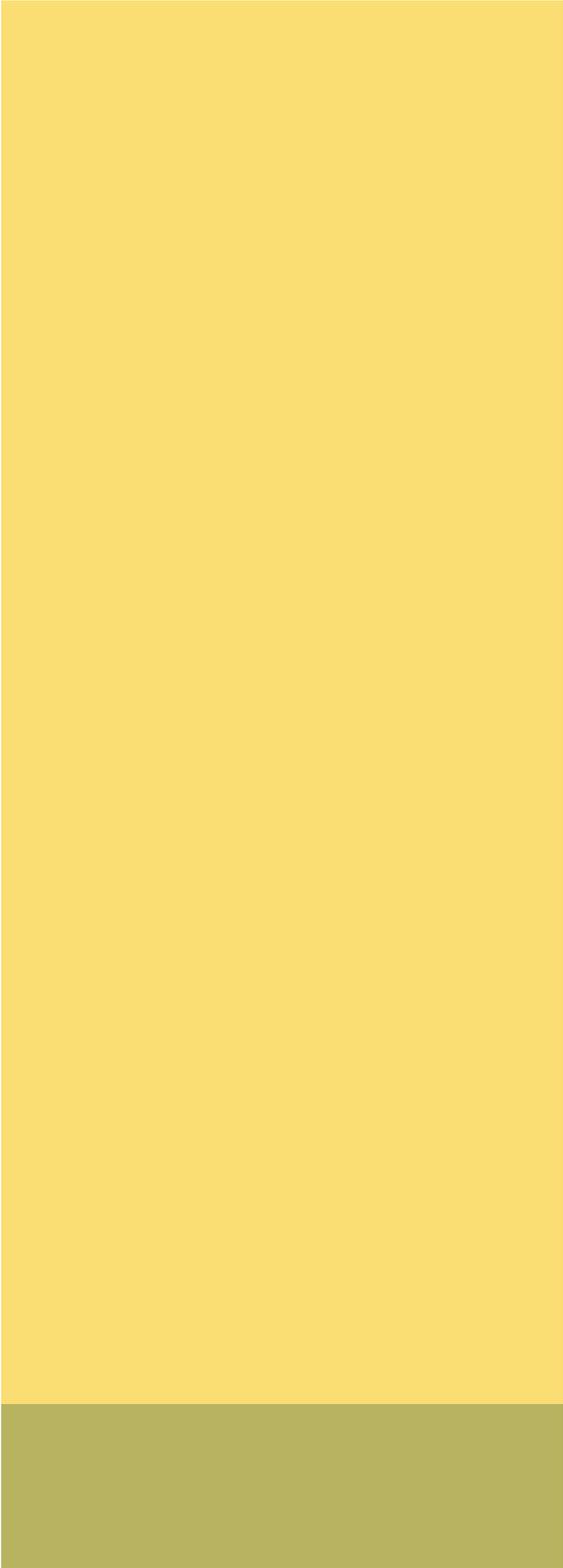
Decade of Education for Sustainable Development

Taking it Forward Together

Inputs from the International Conference 'Education for a Sustainable Future'
Centre for Environment Education, Ahmedabad, India 18-20 January, 2005

CEE

Centre for Environment Education



Decade of Education for Sustainable Development

The United Nations General Assembly on December 20, 2002 adopted, by consensus, a resolution establishing a United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD). The resolution designates the ten-year period as 2005-2014. The DESD offers an opportunity to advance progress made in human resource development, education and training to support sustainable futures. The Decade aims to promote education as the basis for a sustainable human society, and to strengthen international cooperation towards the development of innovative policies, programmes and practices of Education for Sustainable Development.

Education for a Sustainable Future

The first international event to mark the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development was organized by the Centre for Environment Education at Ahmedabad, India from January 18 to 20, 2005. The conference “Education for a Sustainable Future”, an event supported by the Government of India, UNESCO and UNEP and several other partners, was attended by over 900 educators, experts and development practitioners from 50 countries.

Conference Objectives

- Share understanding, current status and needs of ESD
- Showcase best practices for ESD from different parts of the world
- Strengthen networking and active participation of all stakeholders for ESD for the next Decade
- Develop a strategy and a blueprint of action for the Decade, including India's strategy and its role in the Decade
- Work towards developing guiding principles, roadmaps and priorities for ESD for the Decade.

Ways of Sharing

The Conference highlighted the role of ESD in the context of the expectations for the Decade. During the plenary sessions, keynote speakers from across the world helped focus the conference on critical issues facing educators.





Participants discussed sector-specific concerns and developed roadmaps for ESD action, at 20 concurrent workshops.

Workshop Themes

1. Education for Sustainable Livelihoods
2. Enabling Cleaner Solutions - Industry and Environment
3. Communication for Biodiversity Conservation
4. Ideas to Action - Policies and Practices for Sustainable Development
5. Education for Water and Sanitation
6. Education towards Sustainable Human Settlements
7. Participation in Sustainable Waste Management
8. Educating for Sustainable Energy Management
9. Education for Ocean Conservation
10. Education for Sustainable Development in Mountain Regions
11. Reorienting Formal Education
12. Training Professionals in ESD
13. Local Initiatives as Global Learning Opportunities

14. Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) for SD
15. Using Media for SD
16. Youth and ESD
17. Open and Distance Learning for ESD
18. ESD: Values and Perspectives
19. University Leadership for ESD
20. Community-based Approaches for ESD

They also studied the UN DESD Draft Implementation Scheme with a view to enrich and enhance the document.

Participants were encouraged to contribute their vision for the Decade in a special space that was termed “The Declaration Wall”. An international committee drafted a Declaration based on the comments on the Wall.

The draft of the Ahmedabad Declaration was discussed, and unanimously adopted at the final plenary session of the Conference. The plenary also received inputs and feedback from the workshops relating to the UN DESD Draft Implementation Scheme.

Exhibitions were an important medium for sharing information at the Conference. Over a hundred participants put up displays of their organizations and projects. The exhibition also showcased local crafts and arts. The Conference received more than a hundred papers on various aspects of ESD, which were shared with all participants.



Outputs

The Ahmedabad Declaration articulates the spirit of ESD and a joint vision for the Decade. This declaration is being shared widely with the international community of educators and practitioners. It has already been translated into Spanish and is being translated into several other languages.

The feedback from the Conference on the UN DESD Draft Implementation Scheme has been shared with UNESCO, UNEP and other key stakeholders.

The sectoral roadmaps and action plans are being shared with relevant stakeholders for further inputs and comments.

The Conference website is being developed as an ongoing forum for discussion on ESD issues and the activities for the Decade.



Samvaad - A Dialogue for Sustainable Rural Development

UNDESD calls for involvement and participation of all stakeholders at different levels to develop a shared vision of ESD and its implementation. Consultative processes not only at international, regional, national levels but also at local and community levels have been outlined as crucial inputs to add value to, and provide a broad ownership to, the whole Decade.

In line with this thinking, 'Samvaad - A Dialogue for Sustainable Rural Development' was organized by Centre for Environment Education and its sister organization VIKSAT as the process leading upto ESF. Samvaad was both an event and a process with the aim of facilitating dialogue and lateral learning for sustainable rural development. More than 1200 people from about 200 villages in Gujarat, where CEE and VIKSAT have been working, were the participants in this dialogue. Participating with them were government representatives, NGOs, experts in various aspects of sustainable development, and academics.

Thematic workshops, plenary sessions, exhibitions, demonstrations, cultural events and informal interactions all added to the communication value of the event. Exhibitions were an important part of the communication media at Samvaad. Each village had developed a panel on the one sustainable development initiative which they were proud of, and wanted to share with other villages. The children participated in two full days of activities. 'Joyful Learning' was the basis of the activities designed for them.



Some of the clear messages that came out of Samvaad were:

- There is tremendous scope for horizontal communication and learning from village to village, from person to person. Forums and media need to be built.
- Having understood that not all development is sustainable, people need methods to evaluate plans from a sustainability point of view.
- That village communities would like to set their own agenda and determine the pace of development activity. They would like to call their own *Gram Sabhas* (Village Councils).



The Samvaad (dialogue) will continue. Several village communities have worked out ways to be in touch and share. The CEE and VIKSAT teams will be there to facilitate them to translate the ideas and visions developed during the event into reality.

At the start of the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, Samvaad was a demonstration of the value of dialogue and lateral learning in a sustainable development process.

Education for Sustainable Development

It is not just “development” that needs to be redefined

It has taken a long time to realize that the paradigm of development that largely ignored the environment was a disaster. The journey from Stockholm to Rio, and on to Johannesburg took thirty years. Now, at long last, there is the acceptance that we need to move towards a more sustainable form of development.

It is also being recognized that in order to achieve sustainable development, there need to be policy changes, changes in the systems of work, changes in the technologies we use, etc. What is also getting better recognition is that for this to happen, we need to use education and communication to raise awareness, capacity build communities to envision, and participate in bringing about the change, and equip societies with the kinds of expertise required to make the change.

But what is perhaps not as widely recognized is that it is not only the paradigm of development that needs to be changed to achieve sustainability, but that the paradigm of education also has to change in certain fundamental ways. Some of these changes are listed below. The various points are interrelated and form part of a single paradigm shift which is needed as we move towards education for sustainable development.

- **Learning** rather than *teaching*:

This change is fundamental to the way one thinks of education. Education from being something that society determines for its citizens, or adults decide for their



children, will have to become “seeker” oriented. The classical “guru” concept of ancient India where the guru would teach, as strictly as a teacher, but recognizing that the pupils would someday seek their own path. Teaching therefore needs to be focused on making the student a better learner, rather than filling the student with information per se. And ESD is not only about learning individuals, but learning institutions and societies.

- **Life long and continuous** rather than *confined to a specified period*:

Education was something thought of as an activity you essentially did during the first quarter or so of your life. It aimed to give you the knowledge and skills required for the rest of your life. With the rapid pace of change today, this is obviously not quite enough. Institutions have started a variety of in-service courses. Increasing adult education programmes are available. Non-formal opportunities, and opportunities for community education have increased manifold. But the older paradigm still remains largely intact. In a new world through internet and other emerging educational opportunities, it is likely that certification will no longer be based on “residency” factors. Technology is also driving people to learn new skills. But there are still many who have a diffident attitude towards new learning. “I’m too old” to learn. Distance learning is emerging as a major alternative way for learning. But issues such as access for all, digital divide, are continuing concerns.



- **Multi-sourced and accessed** rather than *top down, controlled, and orchestrated*:

The school and the textbook no longer have the virtual monopoly they had on the child's mind. Most children have independent access to information, without “gate keepers”. Even parents can't “control” the educational exposure the child has. And this is only going to increase. The teacher now has to “compete” with other sources. The student can verify information given in the class room.

- **Empowering** rather than *socializing (indoctrinating)*:

ESD is about individuals and communities, questioning, visioning and making changes. It is, in that way, contrary to conventional education which is a process of a system meant for fitting people to fit in and not upset the status quo, to a process where people are empowered to change the world.

- **Global and yet locale specific**:

Education today needs to give people the global perspectives and connections, at the same time enable them to interpret generic learnings in their local context, and to not only act locally, but see the wider impacts of their actions.

- **Capacity building** to build abilities for critical thinking and problem solving:

With the onslaught of information from various sources and ever-increasing amounts of data, the issue is often of being able to select and process information, critically analyze it, and take decisions based on this. It is these skills that ESD attempts to develop.





- **Multi-disciplinary** approach as opposed to a *single new discipline*:
Real world problems need integrated, multi-disciplinary solutions while most institutions from school education on, and including, government are organized sectorally. This compartmentalization starts with school education. An important task for ESD is to break these barriers, and help in seeing connections and the holistic linkages.
- **Sensitivities** to gender, diversity etc.:
ESD needs to not only be sensitive to, but also support and enhance the celebration of diversity of cultures, languages, societies, and diversity in the natural world. Sensitivity to gender, equity and other issues, needs to be an integral part of ESD, and it needs to be inclusive of, as against discriminatory on, gender, caste, and other factors.
- **Participatory** and based on learning with peers:
Conventional education dictates what and how learners should learn. In an increasingly complex world, people will decide what they need to learn and how best, and when, they need to learn. ESD needs to empower and enable learners to learn when, where, what and how they choose, as opposed to one-directional teacher to passive learner.

The UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is an international recognition of the key role that Education and Communication can play in enabling and enhancing sustainable development efforts, and processes leading towards these. The recognition that education is a

critical agent of transformation in terms of changing lifestyles, attitudes and behaviour, in increasing participation in visioning and realizing a sustainable world, and facilitating the use of Communication, Education, Participation and Awareness (CEPA) to foster the change needs in different sectors, needs to be further strengthened. Reflection, visioning and sharing are the crucial elements of ESD.

The International Conference 'Education for a Sustainable Future', looked at these issues generically in the plenary sessions, and discussed the paradigm shift required for ESD. In addition, the links of DESD to other global commitments like Millennium Development Goals, Education for All, and UN Literacy Decade and how these can work synergistically, were considered. The various workshops discussed the specific Education and Communication related issues in relation to the specific sectors.

Kartikeya V. Sarabhai

Director, Centre for Environment Education, Ahmedabad, India.

Perspectives on DESD Draft International Implementation Scheme

Recognizing the importance of UN DESD Draft International Implementation Scheme in setting the tone and guiding activities during the Decade, the participants of the Conference discussed this document in great detail. The Workshops detailed out how the Decade could be effectively planned in their sector. Apart from sectoral comments, certain larger comments emerged at the Workshops, which were discussed at the Plenary. These were:

- It is not the DESD document that will change the world, but the processes it has initiated, must.
- Through a widening process, we encourage others to make their contributions to this living document.
- The Ahmedabad Conference sees the need to reach out to other stakeholders and a wider audience so as to achieve the objectives of DESD.



The participants felt that it was important to capture and articulate the spirit underlying the Decade. This would help stakeholders to use the opportunity of the Decade to initiate processes and actions which would strengthen ESD. The Document, it was felt, should serve as a starting point for a process of dialogue, discussion, and action, but not be perceived as a limit to what needs to be done. It was also recognized that the Document itself needs to continually evolve with inputs from a diverse variety of stakeholders, and not be frozen at any point in time, and become cast in stone.

- The DESD processes must include as many inhabitants of the world as possible, and must support people to develop the capacity and skills to engage with the issues and risks relevant to their situation and context.

This came from the feeling shared by participants that everyone is a stakeholder in ESD, and there is no one who should remain untouched by these processes. In the course of reaching out to all, it was stressed that ESD must be contextualized to the needs of every learner.

- The UN DESD must engage with the environment in its totality, including the pressing social, economic, political and biophysical challenges our planet faces, and help develop the capacity to overcome these.

The Conference participants discussed the need to interpret the word 'environment' in its widest sense, and to engage with all aspects of this.

- The DESD must be guided by the principles of the rights of all life on earth; justice and equity.
- The limits of the life-support systems must be recognized, respected and accepted in economic decision making.

The Conference stressed the need to move away from an anthropocentric view of the world, and value and respect the rights of other lifeforms. Justice and equity, inter- and intra-species and inter- and intra-generational were recognized as the cores underpinning sustainable development. At the same time, the need to understand





the close links between the well-being of life support systems and economic development was urged.

- It must be recognized that while there are some basic universal values, there are many others which are culture-specific. ESD must empower communities to engage in an ongoing dialogue to decide which values or modifications in them will prevail.
- Contents and methods of transacting values must be determined through dialogue and discussion, rather than by governments or experts.
- Prevailing values which have promoted unsustainability are supported by existing systems, and therefore these systems must be addressed through ESD.

While it was appreciated that ESD is based on values, the group had a number of concerns about the 'universality' of values and how values should be dealt within an educational process, and the dangers of top-down value education which could quickly tend towards indoctrination. At the same time, the group felt the need to question prevalent societal values which promote unsustainability.

- The narrow log-frame approach to evaluation currently indicated in the document is limiting and may even inhibit the potential of the Decade. The evaluation criteria listed do not do justice to the overall objectives of the Decade. We need to find new, different and creative ways to find out

if the processes that we see as essential to ESD have in fact taken place.

The group had a large number of concerns regarding the approach to evaluation. It was felt that the indicators suggested in the document would lead to a measurement of the wrong things, and may in fact lead to a loss of the spirit and essence of ESD. The participants felt that a major re-thinking was required on this aspect of the Draft.

- We support the participation of youth in developing the plan of implementation for the Decade, with the belief that they are uniquely equipped to do so, and urge the system to facilitate these inputs.

The Conference recognized the special importance of youth in the DESD, both as the citizens of tomorrow, and as those who will be most impacted by the decisions and actions that we take today. Thus, it was felt that youth had a special role in DESD.

- As the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development commences and we proceed on our widening journeys, we are aware of our responsibilities as inhabitants of planet Earth. We recognize that we will be confronted by many diverse challenges and are determined to meet these in a spirit of commitment and goodwill, and encourage others to do the same.

Finally, the group recognized that the successful implementation of DESD would depend on the participation of all stakeholders, and acknowledged its responsibility in this.



The Ahmedabad Declaration

This Declaration was made on January 20th, 2005 by more than 900 learners, thinkers and practitioners from 50 countries, engaged in education for sustainable development, at the 'Education for a Sustainable Future' conference held at Centre for Environment Education, Ahmedabad, India.

As the first international gathering of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD), we warmly welcome this Decade that highlights the potential of action education to move people towards sustainable lifestyles and policies.

If the world's peoples are to enjoy a high quality of life, we must move quickly toward a sustainable future. Although most indicators point away from sustainability, growing grassroots efforts worldwide are taking on the enormous task of changing this trend.

We accept our responsibility and we urge all people to join us in doing all we can to pursue the principles of the Decade with humility, inclusivity, and a strong sense of humanity. We invite wide participation through networks, partnerships, and institutions.

As we gather in the city where Mahatma Gandhi lived and worked, we remember his words: "Education for life; education through life; education throughout life." These words underscore our commitment to the ideal of education that is participatory and lifelong.

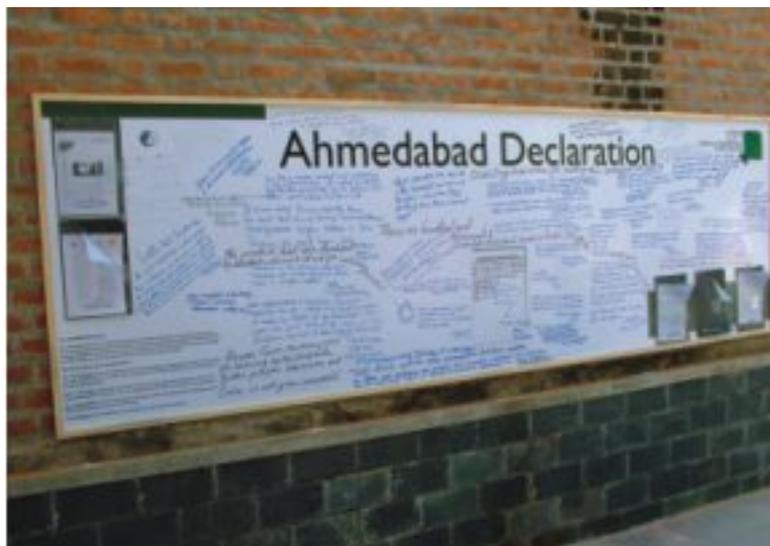
We firmly believe that a key to sustainable development is the empowerment of all people, according to the principles of equity and social justice, and that a key to such empowerment is action-oriented education.



ESD implies a shift from viewing education as a delivery mechanism, to the recognition that we are all learners as well as teachers. ESD must happen in villages and cities, schools and universities, corporate offices and assembly lines, and in the offices of ministers and civil servants. All must struggle with how to live and work in a way that protects the environment, advances social justice, and promotes economic fairness for present and future generations. We must learn how to resolve conflicts, create a caring society, and live in peace.

ESD must start with examining our own lifestyles and our willingness to model and advance sustainability in our communities. We pledge to share our diverse experiences and collective knowledge to refine the vision of sustainability while continually expanding its practice. Through our actions we will add substance and vigour to the UNDES D processes.

We are optimistic that the objectives of the Decade will be realized and move forward from Ahmedabad in a spirit of urgency, commitment, hope, and enthusiasm.





Department of
Ocean Development
Government of India



TECHNICAL SERVICES



IDRC * CRDI

Indian
Environment
Association



IOI



Ministry of
Agriculture
Government of India

Ministry of
Non-Conventional
Energy Sources
Government of India



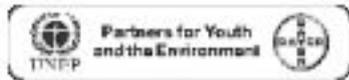
NEPL



ASIA PACIFIC



ULSF



world ocean
network



CEE

Centre for Environment Education
Thaltej Tekra, Ahmedabad-380054, Gujarat, India
Tel: +91 79 26858002 Fax: +91 79 26858010
E-mail: esf@ceeindia.org

www.ceeindia.org/esf