

## Learning For Sustainable Living in Kenya

Eric M. S. Deche\*

### Abstract

Nature Kenya (the East Africa Natural History Society) is a non-profit society with over 1,000 members, working with 12 local community groups. Nature Kenya works for the study, enjoyment and conservation of nature and the environment.

Kenya, like many other developing countries grapples with a variety of socio-economic and environmental problems as it aspires to develop. The utilisation of natural resources is the immediate response of the poor in Kenya who form the majority of the populace. Coupled with the socio-economic problems, there is also a great lack of capacity in Kenyan schools and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) to deliver effective, locally relevant education on issues relating to Sustainable Development (SD). We are attempting to address this problem believing that, by doing so, we will help to improve understanding of SD throughout Kenyan society. We are confident that this will, in turn, result in the enhanced implementation of SD initiatives at the local and national levels, and will ultimately contribute to the reduction of poverty and the prevention or reversal of environmental degradation.

Our approach covers three main activities.

- Development of high-quality, up-to-date, locally relevant teachers' guides and educational posters on issues relating to SD.
- Distribution of these resources to primary schools and NGOs involved in community education throughout Kenya, and to relevant decision-makers.
- Organisation of high-profile seminars for decision-makers and the media to launch these resources and highlight the importance of SD.

The first phase of the resource material development process has already been implemented and the draft produced took into consideration, the school curriculum, the main ecological areas in Kenya, and WEHAB issues.

This FORD FOUNDATION funded project is run in collaboration with the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, UK (UK-RSPB).

---

\* Education Project Manager, Nature Kenya

E-mail: [office@naturekenya.org](mailto:office@naturekenya.org), [www.naturekenya.org](http://www.naturekenya.org)

## **Introduction**

Nature Kenya is a non-profit-making, membership-based society that aims to promote the study of natural history and the conservation of the natural environment in Kenya. In pursuing this mission, Nature Kenya strives to:

- Build a strong constituency for conservation across the country.
- Enhance knowledge of Kenya's biodiversity.
- Advocate policies favourable to biodiversity conservation.
- Promote conservation of key species, sites, and habitats.
- Encourage community participation in conservation through promotion of sustainable benefits.
- Create awareness of Important Bird Areas in Kenya as key biodiversity conservation areas of extreme importance.

Nature Kenya takes a people-centred approach in its conservation work. It believes that local communities are the best guardians of their natural heritage and seeks to integrate them into, and help them to benefit from, the conservation of their resources. It has identified the expansion of its educational activities as a key priority to achieve this.

Nature Kenya is 94 years old, having been established in 1909, and was responsible for the establishment of the National Museums of Kenya in Nairobi. It is a major conservation force in Kenya and has 21 staff and more than 1,300 subscribing members.

## **Project overview**

The project **Learning for Sustainable Living in Kenya**, came up as a challenge posed by the United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan, during the preparations for the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), Johannesburg 2002. At the conference, he proposed that by conserving Water and Energy, providing Health care, and ensuring food security through responsible Agriculture we should be able to conserve Biodiversity—what came to be known as the WEHAB initiative. This has been linked to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Kenya's National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) is in the process of developing a national strategy on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). Coincidentally, realising the lack of appropriate materials and skills to teach SD in Kenya, Nature Kenya took up the challenge to develop these for schools.

The WEHAB initiative has great relevance to Kenya's socio-economic and political development. Water, energy, health, agriculture and biodiversity resources are some of the basic ingredients needed to eradicate poverty, boost economic development and enhance the health status of Kenyans. These resources need to be developed in a sustainable way. These resources have been used since time immemorial, but recent studies show that this utilisation has not been sustainable (MENR, 1994; NEMA, 2004).

**Table 1: The relationship between the WEHAB initiatives and MDGs**

<b>WEHAB</b>	<b>MDGs</b>
<b>Water</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Key to poverty eradication—supports agriculture, livestock, industry.</li> <li>- Supports biodiversity.</li> <li>- Safe drinking water—reduces child mortality and improves maternal health.</li> <li>- Malaria and other diseases lead to poverty and death.</li> </ul>
<b>Energy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Provision of energy to the poor is vital in reducing poverty.</li> <li>- Renewable energy, energy efficiency and clean conventional fuels are vital in ensuring environmental sustainability.</li> <li>- Reduction of pollution from energy sources improves health.</li> </ul>
<b>Health</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The three goals that directly relate to health need interventions such as clean water, sanitation, household energy and sound environmental management.</li> <li>- Eradicating extreme poverty and hunger leads to the improvement of human health.</li> <li>- Universal primary education is the key to improving health.</li> <li>- Promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment improves the health of children.</li> <li>- Environmental sustainability ensures that health gains are sustained in the long term for the benefit of future generations.</li> </ul>
<b>Agriculture</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Agriculture is the key to stimulating sustainable economic growth and rural employment.</li> <li>- Enhances food security and poverty reduction.</li> <li>- Women are the key to agricultural growth in developing countries and hence gender equality and women’s empowerment are important for achieving SD.</li> </ul>
<b>Biodiversity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Biodiversity ensures the survival of human societies by providing food, income and medicines, which is why conservation, use and equity issues are important.</li> <li>- Women are custodians of traditional knowledge and direct users of biodiversity, therefore gender equity and women’s empowerment are important.</li> <li>- Biodiversity reduces risks associated with natural disasters and stress resulting from human activities—pollution and climate change.</li> </ul>

**The Problem**

There is a scarcity of relevant learning support materials for effective ESD in Kenya—a critical need that ought to be addressed. Primary schools and NGOs in Kenya lack the capacity to deliver effective, locally relevant education on issues relating to SD. The reason we wish to address this problem is that we believe that by doing so, we will help to improve the understanding of SD throughout Kenyan society, resulting in the better implementation of SD initiatives at all levels. Such initiatives have the potential to reduce poverty, improve people’s livelihoods in many other ways, and prevent or reverse

environmental degradation. Therefore, their implementation is a high priority. Enhancing the educational capacity of schools and NGOs will lead to an improved understanding of SD in two main ways:

- Firstly, schools will be able to improve understanding among their students. These students will impart at least some of their new knowledge to their parents, and will soon go on to become influential members of their communities and, in some cases, important decision-makers.
- Secondly, NGOs will be much better equipped to educate the communities they work with. These communities include the poorest people in Kenyan society, who have the most to gain from SD because they are the most dependent on natural resources.

Similarly, improved understanding of SD will result in enhanced implementation of SD initiatives in two main ways:

- Firstly, improved understanding among students, their parents and other members of local communities will enable them to make informed decisions about actions which have positive or negative impacts on their local environment. These citizens will also become more aware of their right to key environmental services and a sustainable livelihood, and will be better able to protect this right by demanding that decision-makers in positions of power implement appropriate initiatives.
- Secondly, improved understanding among decision-makers will strengthen their ability to identify alternative development options and assess their relative merits.

### **The way forward**

Nature Kenya has tried to bridge this gap through the project **Learning for Sustainable Living** in Kenya, which will develop materials to enhance ESD. Nature Kenya's material development initiative hopes to enhance the MDGs on SD using WEHAB and Environment and People as important themes.

The project proposes to tackle the problem outlined above by carrying out three main activities:

- We will develop high-quality, up-to-date, locally relevant teachers' guides and educational posters on issues relating to SD. These resources will be designed primarily for teachers of 10-12 year-olds, but will also be suitable for use by NGO staff involved in community education.
- We will distribute these resources to primary schools and NGOs involved in community education throughout Kenya, and to relevant decision-makers.
- We will hold high-profile seminars for national and local decision-makers and the media to launch the resources and highlight the importance of SD.

### **The learning resource material development process**

This process of material development is expected to empower teachers and all participating stakeholders because of its participatory nature. It clearly reflects a shift from the traditional expert-centred approaches that focus on the Research-Develop-Disseminate-Adopt (RDDA) model. The involvement of the learners in an active learning process that leads to action makes learners feel ownership over the projects and value the environment as theirs.

They develop motivation with the confidence that their knowledge is valued and that they can do something for their local environment.

- Phase 1** will use a workshop approach whereby the participants develop activities and draft content for a teachers' guide. A panel of teachers from this initial group will also be formed.

- Phase 2** will culminate with the first draft of the resource material that integrates teachers' and expert ideas on WEHAB and ESD.

- Phase 3** is the pilot stage. The teachers will be expected to examine the suitability of the resources to their teaching subjects and propose any adjustments needed. Their comments will be used to guide the development of the final draft of the resource material.

- Phase 4** will be a consensus building phase and will involve reflecting on the experiences of teachers with the resource material and their additional comments. This phase will again use a workshop approach and will culminate in the final version of the resource material. The final version will be printed in bulk quantities and distributed to schools, NGOs and education resource centres. The use of these resources will be evaluated and the findings used to guide future editions.

### **Project Advisory Group**

A Project Advisory Group was formed in recognition of the important roles played by different organisations. This group formed the pillar of the project, providing technical advisory support. The formation of this crucial group was one of the initial tasks, and care was taken in its composition to provide for government interest in order to gain political support, and support from academia and NGOs in order to form a strong partnership. Some terms of reference for this group were also developed to ensure smooth running and avoid conflicts of interests. Members of the Project Advisory Group were drawn from NEMA, Kenya Organisation for Environmental Education, Ministry of Education Science and Technology Inspectorate, Kenya Institute of Education, Kenyatta University, UK-RSPB and Nature Kenya.

### **Phase I – Workshop, 9<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> August 2004.**

The first phase of the process will be the main subject of discussion. This process was to be participatory and therefore a cross-section of teachers from different parts of the country were invited. The selection took into consideration teachers who came from the following ecosystems or areas close to them: forest areas, wetland areas, drylands and urban areas. This is due to the fact that these are the main representative ecosystems in Kenya. Key education stakeholders in Environmental Education (EE) in the country were also represented. These included the Ministry of Education, Wildlife Clubs of Kenya, UK-RSPB, Kenya Wildlife Service, Kenya Organisation of Environmental Education, NEMA, Kenyatta University, Giraffe Centre, A-Rocha Kenya, Nature Kenya, and the Elsamere Field Study Centre.

Resource persons, experts in the five key areas of Water, Energy, Health, Agriculture and Biodiversity from the government, NGOs and universities were invited to highlight these key issues as they affect the country.

Each of the resource persons was given a specific WEHAB topic to help orient participants about the current status of these issues in the country. The International Education Manager of the UK-RSPB provided experiences from other countries. A one week long gruelling but satisfying workshop was held and teachers were able to develop specific activities that conformed to the curriculum. During the workshop a smaller team of six teachers was selected to carry on with the process. This team will be involved in further refining the material and writing the accompanying text. The activities were developed according to the following format and checked against the matrices respectively.

### **Activity Template:**

Ecological Region:

Theme:

Sub theme:

Objective:

Learning outcomes:

Subject and curricular links:

Age/year group:

Indoors or outdoors:

Time consideration:

Materials required:

### **Activity**

Further activities or homework:

Reference/further reading

**Matrix for identifying skills in Learning for Sustainable Living activities**

Theme: \_\_\_\_\_ Ecological region: \_\_\_\_\_

Does the activity help to develop the following skills?

	Activity number _____	Activity number _____	Activity number _____	Activity number _____
Develops creative skills				
Develops critical thinking skills				
Develops oral communication skills				
Develops written communication skills				
Promotes collaboration and cooperation				
Develops decision-making skills				
Develops problem solving and planning skills				
Promotes practical citizenship				
Develops conflict management skills				

## Matrix to identify sustainable development factors in activities

Does the activity include a reference to these factors?

Theme: \_\_\_\_\_

Ecological region: \_\_\_\_\_

	Activity one	Activity two	Activity three	Activity four
Problems caused through economic reasons				
Solutions through economic reasons				
Problems caused through social reasons				
Solutions through social reasons				
Problems caused through political reasons				
Solutions through political reasons				
Problems caused through physical environment reasons				
Solutions to solve physical environment problems				

### August workshop outcomes

- The proposed resource book structure is 8-10 pages of information about each WEHAB theme followed by selected activities linked to the four key ecosystems.
- Teachers at the August workshop developed several practical learning activities.
- The table of contents and structure of a proposed resource book was later developed.
- The information collected on practical activities was then inserted into the tentative resource book table of contents.
- Following the first workshop held in August, gaps were identified.

It was found necessary to convene a second workshop for a much smaller team of selected teachers and experts in EE and development to review the materials developed at the first workshop. This consultative workshop, made up of a core team, is charged with the responsibility of filling in the gaps and charting the way forward. It is expected that this workshop will help shape further activities.

## **Lessons learnt**

- The creation of the Project Advisory Group has served as a strong point of reference as the group has helped to shape and guide the process. This group remains essential for both political and policy gains, and also helps in soliciting academic input.
- The organisers of the workshop assumed that teachers would quickly grasp the idea of SD and thus ESD, but this assumption proved to be false. They realised that time was needed to initiate teachers into these concepts and future endeavours should take into account that initial orientation is necessary.
- Although the teachers did their best to develop activities, some needed thorough editing while others had to be totally discarded, calling for the development of new ones.

## **Conclusion**

The project strongly feels that since the teachers are the users of the resources, they should be allowed to develop them. **Learning for Sustainable Living** in Kenya remains a prerequisite for true development and this project is Nature Kenya's contribution towards the UN Decade on Education for Sustainable Development 2005-2014.

## **References**

Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (MENR). 1994. *The Kenya National Environment Action Plan Report*. Nairobi: MENR

National Environment Management Authority (NEMA). 2004. *State of Environment Report*. Nairobi: NEMA