VISION & DEFINITION OF ESD

Education for sustainable development is about learning to:
- respect, value and preserve the achievements of the past;
- appreciate the wonders and the peoples of the Earth;
- live in a world where all people have sufficient food for a healthy and productive life;
- assess, care for and restore the state of our Planet;
- create and enjoy a better, safer, more just world;
- be caring citizens who exercise their rights and responsibilities locally, nationally and globally.

BACKGROUND

There can be few more pressing and critical goals for the future of humankind than to ensure steady improvement in the quality of life for this and future generations, in a way that respects our common heritage – the planet we live on. As people we seek positive change for ourselves, our children and grandchildren; we must do it in ways that respect the right of all to do so. To do this we must learn constantly – about ourselves, our potential, our limitations, our relationships, our society, our environment, our world. Education for sustainable development is a life-wide and lifelong endeavour which challenges individuals, institutions and societies to view tomorrow as a day that belongs to all of us, or it will not belong to anyone.

The United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm in 1972, helped to focus attention on environmental concerns and in the years following the conference, the global community acknowledged that more exploration was needed of the inter-relationships between the environment and socio-economic issues of poverty and underdevelopment. Thus the concept of sustainable development emerged in the 1980s in response to a growing realisation of the need to balance economic and social progress with concern for the environment and the stewardship of natural resources.

The concept gained worldwide momentum with the publication of Our Common Future by the World Commission on Environment and Development in 1987. The Commission defined sustainable development in the publication as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” This definition considers that while development may be essential to satisfy human needs and improve quality of life, it should occur in such a way that the capacity of the natural environment to meet present and future needs is not compromised.

The publication Caring for the Earth: A Strategy for Sustainable Living by the World Conservation Union (IUCN), the United Nations Environment Programme and the World Wide Fund For Nature (WWF) in 1991, document contains a definition of sustainable development which complements the one from Our Common Future. It defined sustainable development as “improving the quality of human life while living within the carrying capacity of supporting ecosystems.”
The Brundtland Commission definition emphasizes meeting human needs in a manner that respects intergenerational responsibility and the IUCN definition emphasizes improving the quality of human life while protecting the Earth’s capacity for regeneration. The two definitions together give a good understanding of the meaning of sustainable development as benefiting both people and ecosystems.

The UN Conference on Environment and Development in 1992, the Earth Summit, gave high priority in its Agenda 21 to the role of education in pursuing the kind of development that would respect and nurture the natural environment. It focused on the process of orienting and re-orienting education in order to foster values and attitudes of respect for the environment and envisaged ways and means of doing so. By the time of the Johannesburg Summit in 2002 the vision broadened to encompass social justice and the fight against poverty as key principles of development that is sustainable. The human and social aspects of sustainable development meant that solidarity, equity, partnership and cooperation were as crucial as scientific approaches to environmental protection. Besides reaffirming the educational objectives of the Millennium Development Goals and the Education for All Dakar Framework for Action, the Summit proposed the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development as a way of signalling that education and learning lie at the heart of approaches to sustainable development.

Chapter 36 of Agenda 21 emphasized that education is critical for promoting sustainable development and improving capacity of the people to address environment and development issues. Ever since sustainable development has been a common concern in all UN conferences and there has been a common consensus that education is a driving force for the change needed. It has also been pointed out that peace, health and democracy are mutually reinforcing prerequisites for sustainable development.


As the United Nations lead agency in education, UNESCO must play a key role in setting quality standards in education for sustainable development. It needs to reorient its own programmes to include the changes required to promote sustainable development. Improving the quality of education and reorienting its goals to recognize the importance of sustainable development must be one of UNESCO’s and the world’s highest priorities.
The United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development is a complex and far-reaching undertaking. The environmental, social, and economic implications are enormous and touch many aspects of life of the world’s population. The overall goal of the DESD is to integrate the principles, values, and practices of sustainable development into all aspects of education and learning. This educational effort will encourage changes in behaviour that will create a more sustainable future in terms of environmental integrity, economic viability, and a just society for present and future generations.

The overall goal of the DESD is to integrate the values inherent in sustainable development into all aspects of learning to encourage changes in behavior that allow for a more sustainable and just society for all.

The primary goal for the DESD is laid out in the United Nations General Assembly resolution 59/237 in which the General Assembly “encourages Governments to consider the inclusion … of measures to implement the Decade in their respective education systems and strategies and, where appropriate, national development plans”. Furthermore, the General Assembly “invites Governments to promote public awareness of and wider participation in the Decade, inter alia, through cooperation with and initiatives engaging civil society and other relevant stakeholders, especially at the beginning of the Decade”.

Within the broad goals established by the General Assembly, subgoals for the DESD at the national level are to:
- Provide an opportunity for refining and promoting the vision of and transition to sustainable development – through all forms of education, public awareness and training.
- Give an enhanced profile to the important role of education and learning in sustainable development.

The objectives for the DESD are to:
- facilitate networking, linkages, exchange and interaction among stakeholders in ESD;
- foster an increased quality of teaching and learning in education for sustainable development;
- help countries make progress towards and attain the millennium development goals through ESD efforts;
- provide countries with new opportunities to incorporate ESD into education reform efforts.

Recognizing that how sustainable development, and related educational processes are attained will vary from context to context, these objectives will share the key tasks for UNESCO to perform in support of Member States through its role as lead agency of the Decade. UNESCO’s leadership role and, in fact, the task of Member States are also defined by the four major thrusts of education for sustainable development:
- improving access to quality basic education;
- reorienting existing education programmes;
- developing public understanding and awareness.
- providing training.
The global consultation to prepare the International Implementation Scheme led to identifying the following seven strategies as essential for moving forward with creating regional, national, and sub-national implementation strategies and plans. All seven should be thoughtfully incorporated into the initial process to create an implementation plan, and again all seven should be part of any implementation plan. Through incorporating these strategies, such as public consultation, organizers will discover that many educational programmes related to education reform, corporate training, and public information campaigns already exist. The DESD is in part about integrating and coordinating the activities from these various existing efforts in the three spheres of sustainable development and the four thrusts into the overall ESD plan.

While the range of activities will vary widely, stakeholders can apply the following seven strategies both in their own institutional frameworks and in the networks and alliances in which they function:
- vision-building and advocacy;
- consultation and ownership;
- partnership and networks;
- capacity-building and training;
- research and innovation;
- use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs);
- monitoring and evaluation.
UN Decade for Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014)

Quality Education

Quality education is a prerequisite for education for sustainable development.

Education for Sustainable Development has several major domains, reflecting diverse goals and audiences, including:
- Promotion and improvement of Basic Education
- Reorienting Existing Education Programs at all levels to address sustainable development
- Developing Public Awareness and Understanding of Sustainability
- Providing Training
- Involving Higher Education

Education: Making the Abstract Real
Making the abstract real, and developing the capacities of individuals and societies to work for a sustainable future is, essentially, an educational enterprise. Indeed, the four principles for achieving sustainable human development enunciated at the World Summit for Sustainable Development in 2002 reflect the four pillars of education described in the Delors Report.

Achieving sustainable development requires:
- Recognition of the challenge
- Collective responsibility and constructive partnership
- Acting with determination
- The indivisibility of human dignity

Education provides the skills for:
- Learning to know
- Learning to live together
- Learning to do
- Learning to be

Thus, education is the primary agent of transformation towards sustainable development, increasing people’s capacities to transform their visions for society into reality. Education not only provides scientific and technical skills, it also provides the motivation, justification, and social support for pursuing and applying them. The international community now strongly believes that we need to foster — through education — the values, behaviour and lifestyles required for a sustainable future. Education for sustainable development has come to be seen as a process of learning how to make decisions that consider the long-term future of the economy, ecology and equity of all communities. Building the capacity for such futures-oriented thinking is a key task of education.

Quality education
EFA and the MDGs introduced the concept of quality education into their goals and international development targets. Providing any education, regardless of quality, is not the goal. A myth exists that access must come before quality. Both can occur simultaneously. A large debate continues about what a quality education is.
“Quality has become a dynamic concept that has constantly to adapt to a world whose societies are undergoing profound social and economic transformation. Encouragement for future-oriented thinking and anticipation is gaining importance. Old notions of quality are no longer enough ... despite the different contexts there are many common elements in the pursuit of a quality education, which should equip all people, women and men, to be fully participating members of their own communities and also citizens of the world” (Ministerial Round Table on Quality Education, UNESCO, 2003, p. 1).

At this point in time, quality education has essential characteristics that can be implemented in many culturally appropriate forms.

**Quality education:**
- supports a rights-based approach to all educational endeavours. Education is a human right, and therefore quality education supports all of the human rights;
- is based on the four pillars of Education for All – learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and with others, and learning to be (Delors, et al., 1996);
- views the learner as an individual, a family member, community member, and a global citizen and educates to create individual competency in all four roles;
- upholds and conveys the ideals of a sustainable world – a world that is just, equitable, and peaceable, in which individuals care for the environment to contribute to intergenerational equity;
- takes into consideration the social, economic, and environmental contexts of a particular place and shapes the curriculum or programme to reflect these unique conditions. Quality education is locally relevant and culturally appropriate;
- is informed by the past (e.g. indigenous and traditional knowledge), is relevant to the present, and prepares individuals for the future;
- builds knowledge, life skills, perspectives, attitudes and values;
- provides the tools to transform current societies to more sustainable societies;
- is measurable.
UN DECADE FOR EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (2005-2014)
Aspects of education for sustainable development

SCIENTIFIC DIMENSIONS

Promoting the goals of a transition to sustainability is a major challenge for science and technology. Housing natural and social and human sciences under one roof, UNESCO promotes multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches to the wise use of natural resources and to the improved understanding of human–environment relationships.

ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

Reflections on ethical aspects and dimensions of sustainable development are too often discounted. Yet for a concept such as sustainable development, with its concern with the relations between present and future generations, consideration of the ‘ethics of the future’ would appear critical. This would seem to be particularly so during a period when advances in biotechnology have triggered widespread public and political attention, when the processes of globalization have contributed to a whole new set of ethical challenges and dilemmas. Within such a context, one of UNESCO’s major strategic thrusts calls for the promotion of principles, policies and ethical norms to guide scientific and technological development that is sustainable.

UNESCO support for the Earth Charter

Today, the international community has the Earth Charter as an instrument which contains fundamental principles for building a just, sustainable and peaceful global society.

The Earth Charter sets forth an integrated approach to addressing the interrelated problems confronting the world community, and that this ethical framework involves respect and responsibility for the community of life, ecological integrity, social and economic justice and equity, democracy, alleviation of poverty, non-violence and peace.

It is part of a continuing process initiated by the 1987 call of the World Commission on Environment and Development (Brundtland Commission) for a new code of ethics for sustainable development, and the unfinished process of the 1992 Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit, which attempted to set an ethical framework for sustainability.

In 2003, UNESCO resolved to:
- recognize the Earth Charter as an important ethical framework for sustainable development, and acknowledge its ethical principles, its objectives and its contents, as an expression that coincides with UNESCO’s vision set forth in its Medium-Term Strategy for 2002-2007.
- and, affirm the Member States’ intention to utilize the Earth Charter as an educational tool, particularly in the framework of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development.
CULTURAL DIMENSIONS

People’s attitudes and lifestyles, their responsiveness to educational programmes, their sense of ownership of the drive to preserve a decent future for ensuing generations, the reactions of national and local leaders to scientific and governance policy advice, are all intimately linked to their own cultural identities and values, and no worldwide commitment to sustainable development will get anywhere without that recognition.

COMMUNICATION & INFORMATION

Today, the process of globalization coincides with a fundamental transformation to knowledge-based societies – largely driven by information and communications technologies (ICTs) – where knowledge and information increasingly determine new patterns of growth and wealth creation and open up possibilities for more effective poverty reduction and sustainable development. Indeed, knowledge has become a principal force of social transformation. The leaders of virtually all countries have professed their desire to transform their countries into learning economies and knowledge societies.

Knowledge-based and knowledge-led development holds the promise that many of the problems confronting human societies could be significantly alleviated if only the requisite information and expertise were systematically and equitably employed and shared, and new approaches put into place to ensure freedom of expression, access for all, and the free flow of information and knowledge.

In acting as a knowledge broker for effective sustainable development, UNESCO gives special emphasis to:
- strengthening international scientific and intellectual cooperation and networking, leading to a sharing of knowledge, information, expertise and best practices.
- producing and disseminating scientific knowledge about modes of governing societies.
- broadening access to information and knowledge, especially through the use of ICTs in community multimedia centres and through the public domain at both national and community levels and to deploy and apply both traditional and new media.
- sensitizing media to the various dimensions and exigencies of sustainable development, so as to underpin efforts at promoting broad knowledge about sustainable development.