

The forgotten priority: Promoting gender equality in Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)

Discussion paper

To be discussed at the side event on the 2 April 2009, 13.30-14.30

As the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD) approaches its second half, noteworthy achievements have been made throughout the world with regards to awareness raising and the implementation of ESD in educational systems. While progress should be celebrated, the midterm conference also provides an opportunity to look ahead by reviewing critically not only the achievements made but also the lessons learnt and examine future challenges and areas for improvement.

Recent developments in environmental protection policy show that the awareness is increasing on the critical role that education has in environmental issues in development. However, the level of progress that has been made in addressing economic and social challenges to sustainability by the education reform processes initiated by DESD yet needs to be fully understood in terms of long-term educational reforms, assessed and, finally, addressed. Many countries have paid considerable attention to how the social, economic and environmental dimensions of ESD are interrelated and how these can be integrated into educational planning that aims to engage in meeting certain development challenges, e.g. food security. With regard to many of the global challenges such as hunger, poverty or environmental degradation, some countries have demonstrated their capacity to identify ways and means by which education can contribute to alleviate these challenges at the local level.

In parallel with the Sustainable Development (SD) movement, the promotion and achievement of gender equality has been widely recognized as the fundamental condition for development. Promotion of gender equality is clearly embedded in the Millennium Declaration and is one of the eight MDGs (MDG 3). Although gender equality is clearly at the heart of the overall development agenda and is critical to achieving the MDGs and EFA, gender inequality remains generally poorly addressed in education sector strategies, policies, planning and implementation. Of course, this is telling of a broader scotoma and does not relate to education alone. Amartya Sen has noted that "the perception that there is an incorrigible inequality [...] may well be missing in a society in which asymmetric norms are quietly dominant"¹. Unfortunately, such societies continue to abound.

The upcoming side event aims to examine how gender can be mainstreamed and gender equality promoted in the current development of ESD and to explore applicable tools that can assist stakeholders in assessing and increasing the gender sensitivity of their current strategic planning of ESD. While focusing on observations from the Asia-Pacific region, the event will draw upon experiences from other regions. Key speakers representing different regions will present showcase examples of how gender equality can be successfully addressed in the context of ESD. Furthermore, a conceptual "framework" including practical

¹ Amartya Sen, 1998: The Possibility of Social Choice, Nobel Lecture, December 8, 1998.

strategies and tools for the purpose of assessing the gender sensitivity of current educational planning and policymaking for ESD in a global context will be presented and discussed.

This discussion paper serves as a basis for further discussion to be held at the event. It is based on initial analyses of the current state of DESD implementation in the Asia-Pacific with regard to the extent to which attention has been paid to gender mainstreaming and the issues of gender equality in general. Initial discussions in the region have initiated the idea of creating a tool that might assist stakeholders in the education sector in assessing practical linkages between identified national SD challenges, potential responses of the education sector, and the existing/current state of gender (in)equality.

Reflections from the current development of ESD in Asia-Pacific

Many countries in the Asia-Pacific region actively involved in the DESD are at a stage where they are engaged in outlining national ESD priorities and drafting action plans for the integration of ESD into their educational systems and policies. During a series of sub-regional workshops organized by UNESCO, with the financial support of the Japanese Funds-In-Trust and in consultation with national ESD focal points, it has become increasingly apparent that the majority of Member States have focused their efforts to nationally contextualize the international ESD implementation scheme on a limited number of national SD priorities. This focus allows to streamline ESD related initiatives and to consolidate the wider trends in the understanding of the concept. Outcomes from sub-regional cluster capacity development workshops conducted by the UNESCO Regional Bureau in Bangkok in 2008 indicated that many countries are beginning to identify national priorities and have drafted national ESD implementation plans.

An initial analysis of the national ESD priorities and DESD implementation plans in the Asia-Pacific indicates that gender equality has not been a central issue or mainstreamed gender across SD priorities. The relevance of including a gender equality perspective into national ESD policies which focus on national SD priorities is becoming especially obvious when regional and sub-regional Human Development reports are taken into account.² In the case of South Asia, sub-regional reports indicate that there are potential synergies between common regional SD priorities, such as health, poverty reduction or food security and gender.³

A central question that can be asked at this point is not only how education can contribute to mitigate an identified development challenge, but also how this affects education. At the same time, it is critical to ensure a structural change in the preconditions that maintain and reproduce human suffering and inequality. A possible solution is to examine how national objectives for SD and ESD link up to identified global objectives. The MDGs identify gender equality as a global commitment and UNESCO concurs with this commitment by setting gender equality as one of its two global priorities in its medium term strategy and as a prerequisite for SD. It can therefore be argued that ESD initiatives at both global

² See Human Development in South Asia 2000: The Gender Question

³ Human Development in South Asia 2002: Agriculture and Rural Development s.115

and national levels should be more sensitive to issues of gender equality. Meanwhile, the regional observations from the Asia-Pacific reveal a lack of awareness in this regard. A possible explanation of the absence of a gender perspective in ESD at the regional level might originate from a lack of awareness on how gender issues feed into existing national SD priorities, calling for pragmatic tools that might help stakeholders to address gender equality in educational policy making for sustainable development.

Questions for reflection:

- By what means is gender (in)equality addressed in existing national ESD strategies /SD priorities/ ESD policies?
- How might gender inequality affect SD challenges in your national context?

Linking gender and identified SD priorities: concept of a tool to increase gender sensitivity in strategic planning for ESD.

A potential tool for assisting stakeholders in addressing gender issues in ESD policymaking should on one hand help to assess the current gender sensitivity of their planning and on the other hand provide them with realizable recommendations on how to address gender in the context of existing strategy outlines. Such tools have already been applied and proven in other educational initiatives, such as Education for All (EFA). A tool applied in the context of ESD should utilize already existing data, tools and expertise. By adapting existing guidelines and tools to the ESD framework synergies that aim at the promotion of gender equality in education can be maximized as well as progress towards the goals set in the Dakar Framework, while at the same time enhancing the MDGs. While adjusting existing tools, their area of application will need to be adapted to be able to have a higher level of focus on quality issues of education and to take a wider understanding of education into account, especially in regard to overall societal development.

An existing tool that could be adapted is the *Toolkit for Promoting Gender Equality in Education* (2006) produced under the Gender in Education Network in Asia (GENIA) programme framework by UNESCO Bangkok, which includes a wide variety of resources to be applied in diverse educational contexts. The toolkit is applicable at different levels of educational planning and assessment, reaching from policy making and planning to classroom observation and interaction. A tool for ESD that includes an initial situational analysis from a gender perspective might be a feasible first step, as it can help stakeholders to assess the current gender sensitivity of planning processes and through that build a solid basis for the identification of further means and objectives.

For example, the GENIA toolkit contains a guideline for implementing, monitoring and evaluating gender responsive EFA plans.⁴ The guideline suggests an initial situational analysis and identification of issues. A tool that assists stakeholders to undertake initial situational analysis of ESD strategy planning could therefore provide concrete questions that could help to analyze if the document draws on certain aspects that generally affect the gender sensitivity in/of education. The level of specificity that the questions should aim at, would most likely depend on the category of users and level of planning, referring to local, state or national

⁴ See <http://www2.unescobkk.org/elib/publications/GenderEFA/index.htm>

strategic planning documents. "Gender in ESD" guidelines and tools should preferably focus on quality aspects of learning, i.e. help to assess how gender in the national context affects certain issues that ESD is aimed to engage in. In the case of educational content, it could be an assessment tool to help to reflect on how common and normative practices in regard to a certain issue both affect and are affected by gender roles.

Questions for reflection:

- Are there other ways of addressing gender in ESD already in use in your country?
- What aspects of gender sensitive education would need to be highlighted/emphasized, to make the toolkit applicable in your country?
- What level should the toolkit be suited for? Educators, policy makers, officials?

Three key questions to be discussed at the side event:

Following show case presentations the side event will include an open discussion which will focus on a limited number of key questions. These key questions aim to gather a diversity of inputs on the suggestions made in this discussion paper, with the overall objective of identifying a mutually shared strategy for generating a "gender in ESD" set of guidelines and tools to help stakeholders to address the issue of gender equality and to "engender" the process of strategic planning for ESD.

1. How is/could gender equality (be) addressed in strategic planning for ESD in your country?
 - a. What synergies between gender equality and development challenges might exist?
 - b. How could these synergies be addressed in educational planning?
 - c. What national examples could be applied or "modelled" in other national and regional contexts?
2. Are the proposed "gender in ESD" guidelines and tools applicable in your national/regional context?
 - a. What modifications would be needed in your national context?
 - b. What additional tools beside the initial analysis guideline should be developed?
 - c. Which stakeholders should the tool be developed for? Policy makers, educators, educational managers? For all?