

ESD Coordination in the Asia-Pacific: Learning for Change

UNESCO BANGKOK

Evidence from the first four years of ESD implementation in the Asia-Pacific suggests that ESD should be integrated into national development strategies to further promote change through quality education requiring close coordination among national stakeholders.

In early 2008, practical challenges for ESD in the region began to surface – many potential partners were struggling to move beyond the scope of environmental education to fully engage in ESD; national actors conducting ESD-related activities were not coordinated and collaboration among key stakeholders and sectors was proving difficult; UNESCO Member States also had concerns about the depth and substance of activities being branded as “ESD”; limited financing for ESD was becoming a barrier for further collaboration; and, most importantly, national sustainable development priorities still needed to be acknowledged to guide ESD programmes towards concrete objectives.

To assist UNESCO Member States in the Asia-Pacific to coordinate ESD at the national level, in 2008, UNESCO Bangkok, with the contributions of the Japanese Funds in Trust, conducted a series of capacity building workshops throughout the region. The workshops aimed to prepare for the *World Conference on ESD* to be held in Bonn, Germany in March/April 2009, to build additional capacity for ESD leadership, coordination and monitoring at the national level and to meet the immediate challenges of implementing ESD in the region.

More than 50 senior-level ministerial representatives from 24 countries have participated so far in one of five sub-regional workshops along with members of civil society, higher education and the private sector. The workshops were conducted in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan (Central Asia), Ha Long Bay, Viet Nam (Mekong sub-region), Manila, Philippines (South-East Asia), Hangzhou, China (East Asia) and Colombo, Sri Lanka (South Asia). Eleven countries, engaging in ESD for the first time, worked with colleagues familiar with a wide range of ESD challenges in order to provide practical insights and recommendations that will carry ESD in the Asia-Pacific forward.

Lessons learned, identified during the coordination and capacity building workshops, to carry forward to *the World Conference on ESD* include:

Focusing ESD on national sustainable development priorities – Countries can focus ESD by identifying *three* or *four* key national sustainable development priorities, such as food security, literacy, health, climate change, etc., to develop a practical foundation for ESD and foster the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes to address sustainable development more generally.

Incorporating ESD into national development plans - ESD not only needs to be included on the national agenda, but also incorporated into national sustainable development strategies, national poverty reduction strategies, education sector development plans, etc.

Establishing inter-ministerial support for ESD – Cross-sectoral collaboration is seen as essential for linking ESD to EFA, the MDGs and other programmes in order to address national sustainable development priorities.

Internalizing ESD within national budget structures - Budget ownership needs to be advocated for ESD within the relevant ministries, starting with education.

Establishing support for capacity building – ESD capacity is needed for policy makers, for educators (to support the integration of thematic content into curricula, relevant pedagogy and learning), and for national ESD indicator development and monitoring.

Countries participating in the Asia-Pacific ESD Capacity Building Workshops in 2008

Central Asia:

Kazakhstan
Kyrgyzstan
Tajikistan
Uzbekistan

South-East Asia:

Brunei Darussalam
Cambodia
Indonesia
Laos
Malaysia
Philippines
Singapore
Thailand
Timor Leste
Vietnam

East Asia:

China
Japan
Mongolia
Republic of Korea

South Asia:

Bangladesh
Bhutan
India
Maldives
Nepal
Sri Lanka