



The Gothenburg Recommendations on Education for Sustainable Development

Adopted November 12, 2008

This document calls on governments, civil society and in particular educators to prioritize processes that develop and strengthen education for sustainable development (ESD).

The world has changed since the UN World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002. While there have been significant initiatives and progress has been made, the scale of effort is still overshadowed by the scope of the problem. For instance, human-induced climate change is creating a long-lasting ecological crisis with severe economic and social consequences. Recently the global economic crisis has drawn attention to the problem of borrowing from resources that do not exist. Poverty, conflict and social injustice remain critical issues on the global agenda.

A renewed sense of commitment to the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development 2005-2014 is required. Formal, informal and non-formal education and learning processes for sustainability must be strengthened and prioritized. This document supports and builds on the concepts and values that are put forward within UNESCO's International Implementation Scheme for Education for Sustainable Development and in the Earth Charter.

The purpose of ESD is to reorient education in order to contribute to a sustainable future for the common good of present and future generations. ESD recognizes the interdependence of environmental, social and economic perspectives and the dependence of humanity on a healthy biosphere. Participation and involvement are necessary components of ESD, with an emphasis on empowerment and agency for active citizenship, human rights and societal change. Re-orientation is necessary at all levels and in all phases of education, and encompasses community learning, thus making ESD a wider process challenging the form and purpose of education itself.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. ACCESS FOR ALL TO A PROCESS OF LIFELONG LEARNING:** Early childhood is a natural starting point for education for sustainable development in order to promote educational access for all people within a process of life long learning. Education has the enormous challenge of reorienting curricula and learning processes towards sustainability and ensuring professional development of educators to take up these new challenges. Such a process should be a dialogic and participatory process of learning which values the knowledge and experience that people bring to education. Access for all to education is a necessary, but insufficient condition for ESD. ESD needs to transcend understandings of access for all, and be of a quality and form that helps society to reorient and transform towards sustainability.
- 2. GENDER:** ESD should actively promote critical engagement with norms that define gendered ways of being, doing and living together, and should particularly value the role and contribution of women in bringing about social change and ensuring human well-being.

3. **LEARNING FOR CHANGE:** Learning for change is based on relating multiple perspectives to each other at all times. These perspectives include: space, time, culture and different disciplines, as well as a non-anthropogenic perspective. ESD development is based on principles and values as well as a holistic and interdisciplinary approach. This involves learning to know, learning to do and learning to be, and learning to live together and should involve translation of knowledge into real life contexts. It should include empowerment for acting for social change, examining identities, perspectives and power relations, and should include critical media literacy and action competence. Working with multiple perspectives will require acknowledgement of, and respect for, contested views and interests, and recognition that these are a valuable source for intercultural dialogue, learning and reflexivity.

4. **NETWORKS, ARENAS AND PARTNERSHIPS:** ESD should promote relationships between different educational levels, sites and perspectives, and recognize that they are inter-dependent in the wider context of social reorientation towards sustainability. Networks and partnerships that strengthen international and intercultural cooperation and knowledge exchange should be extended and supported. This should foster dialogue, and create new arenas for local and global interaction and change, and different ways of sharing and using resources. At a community level new arenas for dialogue and interchange should also be oriented towards the local/global interface, and social change. Further, emphasizing relationships and interdependencies in ESD involves integrating research and practice.

5. **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TO STRENGTHEN ESD ACROSS ALL SECTORS:** In order to strengthen ESD, professional development must include teacher education, professional education for educational leaders, and community educators. Education of extension officers, business trainers, journalists and others involved in education in its widest sense are equally important. Professional development should be participatory in orientation and should empower educators involved in ESD to share their knowledge and experience widely. Participation, building on existing knowledge and experience in such professional development, is important in learning and democracy.

6. **ESD IN CURRICULUM:** ESD should be embedded in curricula, steering documents, and learning materials. This includes curriculum review and development of new curricula. Reorientation of education requires that multi-, inter- and transdisciplinary curriculum approaches be developed to extend beyond current disciplinary approaches to working with knowledge. This should involve bringing in other forms of knowledge that exist into formal curriculum.

7. **SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN PRACTISE:** Educational settings should practice values and principles of sustainable development to provide learners to participate in and model solutions to sustainable development issues. This would expand the space for ESD to allow for the development of new behaviour norms in educational settings.

8. **RESEARCH:** There is a need to promote research, evaluation and practitioner enquiry in order to strengthen and extend education for sustainable development. Research must embrace the multiple sites and foci of ESD, include community participatory research, and mobilize indigenous and local knowledge. Further, it is necessary to support transdisciplinary research and engage civil society in creating solutions to sustainability problems and social change.

The Gothenburg recommendations have been produced during a broad international process between the years of 2001-2008, see the document "Learning for sustainable development - the Gothenburg story".



Background to the Gothenburg Recommendations on Education for Sustainable Development, adopted Nov 12, 2008

Learning for sustainable development - the Gothenburg story

Shortly before the EU summit in Gothenburg in 2001, the University of Gothenburg and Chalmers University of Technology arranged an international conference entitled 'Knowledge and Learning for a Sustainable Society'.

One conclusion of the conference was that learning in a broad sense is of fundamental importance to the achievement of sustainable development. At the end of the conference the two vice-chancellors of the University of Gothenburg and Chalmers University of Technology delivered a joint offer to the then EU President, Mr Göran Persson, and to Ms Margot Wallström, the then EU Environment Commissioner, to create a university network intended to serve as an independent reviewer on issues concerning sustainable development. The Gothenburg Centre for Environment and Sustainability (GMV), co-owned by the two universities, was proposed as the lead actor. The tasks of the university network also included the arrangement of conferences and seminars.

This was the point of departure when the Swedish Prime Minister Göran Persson offered at the UN World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg 2002 that Sweden would arrange an international conference on learning for sustainable development. The conference was held in Gothenburg on May 4-7, 2004 and was entitled 'Learning to Change Our World – the Gothenburg Consultation for Sustainable Development'. Some 350 delegates from more than 70 countries took part. In connection with the closing ceremony of the consultation, the vice-chancellors of the two universities offered to jointly host a further conference on the same subject within three years.

To preserve the knowledge and experience gathered at the consultation in 2004 and to prepare for the next international conference in Gothenburg, the GMV initiated four international workshops on learning for sustainable development in higher education, in school, in preschool and in informal learning.

- 'Drivers and Barriers for Implementing Learning for Sustainable Development in Higher Education', December 7-9, 2005
- 'Drivers and Barriers for Implementing Learning for Sustainable Development in Pre-School through Upper Secondary and Teacher Education', March 27-29, 2006
- 'The Contribution of Early Childhood Education to a Sustainable Society', May 2-4, 2007
- 'The Right to Knowledge – Public Learning for Sustainable Development. Laboratory for Democratic Learning', October 11-13, 2007

All the workshops took place in Gothenburg and each produced a report, three of which were published by UNESCO. The aim and hope was that these reports would provide valuable source material for the coming international workshop.

The final workshop, 'Visions and Preparations for a Common Blueprint on Education for Sustainable Development' took place in Gothenburg, November 10-12, 2008, at the invitation of the two UNESCO Chairs, Professor Ingrid Pramling Samuelsson, University of Gothenburg, and Professor John Holmberg, Chalmers University of Technology. Some 50 delegates from more than 15 countries took part in the workshop, which brought together ESD experts as well as policy-makers and decision-makers. The Swedish Government contributed to the event through the Swedish International Centre of Education for Sustainable Development (SWEDESD), the Ministry for Education and Research and the Swedish National Commission for UNESCO. The purpose of the workshop, based on the previous work, was to generate recommendations for learning for sustainable development that could be used in many different future processes, for instance through the UNESCO.

Four groups of experts, one from each of the earlier workshops (higher education, school, preschool, and informal learning), were formed to prepare the workshop. The groups were given the task of preparing specific recommendations for each educational field and general recommendations applicable to all areas of education. The groups were asked to build on the earlier reports. Their working methods included advanced blogging, e-mailing and internet telephony. The group recommendations were then finally compiled and formed the starting point for the final workshop, November 10-12, 2008. During the first one and a half days, the four groups thoroughly trimmed the specific and general recommendations. In the closing one and a half days the four groups were joined by specially invited policy-makers and decision-makers from all over the world, whose task was to scrutinise the recommendations from their perspectives. They were also to give advice on further action.

At the end of the workshop, a specially invited professional negotiator, Mr Svante Bodin from the Swedish Ministry of the Environment, assisted the group in finalising the document in a consensus-based process. The final document is called 'The Gothenburg Recommendations on Education for Sustainable Development' and calls on governments, civil society, and, in particular, educators to prioritise processes that develop and strengthen education for sustainable development.