

**DRAFT**

## **LEARNING FOR A SUSTAINABLE WORLD**

**Review of contexts and structures for Education for Sustainable Development**

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**KEY FINDINGS AND WAYS FORWARD**  
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## **Context**

The United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD, 2005-2014) has reached its mid-point. This review reports on progress made and obstacles encountered during the first five years in establishing provisions, strategies, mechanisms and contexts that support the development and implementation of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). It also outlines ways forward for the remaining five years.

## **Key findings**

This review has identified 10 key findings.

### **1) Meanings of ESD**

Regional, national and local differences mean that ESD may be interpreted in many different ways. These differences in interpretation are often rooted in a country's particular tradition in governance but may also derive from the concrete challenges a country or region might be facing. As a result, there is a wide range of interpretations of ESD. The tradition in governance, for instance, affects whether a country adopts a more pedagogical orientation towards ESD emphasizing (social) learning, participation and capacity-building or a more instrumental one emphasizing changing people's behaviour. Countries facing extreme poverty, problems of HIV & AIDS, and rapid loss of biodiversity are likely to focus the content of ESD differently from those that are facing high oil-dependency and excessive consumerism.

Thus, national and local debates are seen as crucial to arrive at a consensus over the meaning of ESD.

### **2) UN Contribution to the DESD**

The UN contribution to the DESD is characterized by the engagement of a number of UN agencies in implementing ESD.

UNESCO has put in place Thematic Programmes to facilitate collaboration across its sectors, appointed ad-hoc advisory expert groups and mobilised its Regional Bureaux and the UNESCO National Commissions to ensure efficient implementation of the DESD. In addition, UNESCO has also mobilised the UNITWIN/UNESCO Chairs Programme to support ESD and the DESD.

In 2005, there were a number of DESD launches at regional and sub-regional levels as well as at national and sub-national levels. ESD-related meetings and workshops have taken place around the globe and a number of UN-supported ESD documents and ESD resource materials have appeared both digitally and in print. At the mid-point of the Decade, however, it is too early to speak of a 'one concerted UN response' to ESD and there remains much work to be done. Strengthening inter-sectoral collaboration and providing human and financial resources within UNESCO at headquarters and at the regional level would further improve the implementation of the DESD.

### **3) ESD national coordination bodies**

Of the 97 countries that responded to the 2008 survey, 79 report that a national ESD coordinating body has been created. This is quite an achievement in a period of roughly five years. However, there are some regional variances. A large number of countries in the Europe and North America region have an ESD national coordination body. However, progress in creating an ESD national coordinating body in a number of African countries has been slow.

Although the rapid rise of the coordinating bodies is remarkable, more insight is needed into the processes leading up to their creation and the roles they actually play.

#### **4) ESD in national policy documents**

The participating countries report a notable presence of ESD in national policy documents. The majority of them address broadening participation in ESD and its integration in curricula. ESD is mainly integrated in national educational policies and curricula, especially in primary and secondary education but also in sustainable development and environmental strategies.

At the same time, it can be concluded that most countries do not yet have a specific national ESD policy or strategy. Specific policies that support informal and non-formal learning in the context of sustainable development (SD) were not reported, which is not to say that they do not exist in countries and regions that stress the importance of community participation and multi-stakeholder social learning. Responding countries from all regions report that mechanisms are either in place or are being developed to support the conservation, use and promotion of indigenous knowledge and ways of living, also in the context of ESD.

#### **5) Interdepartmental governmental cooperation on ESD**

In most parts of the world, a structure for interdepartmental governmental cooperation on ESD is still lacking as there is little experience in cross-boundary thinking among policy-makers and governmental departmental structures. Nonetheless, many responding countries do report increased efforts to establish ESD linkages between Ministries and other stakeholders.

#### **6) ESD in formal education**

Many governments from the responding countries have committed themselves to supporting the inclusion of ESD in formal education, most notably in primary and secondary education. This inclusion, incidentally, can lead to a re-design of curricula, teaching and learning and, indeed, the way an entire educational institution operates (e.g. in the case of a whole school approach). A more common response is to make minor adjustments to the existing system to create more space for sustainability issues, sometimes using existing facilities that have been created in the past for accommodating Environmental Education (EE).

Occasionally, the inclusion of ESD also leads to the adoption of new approaches to learning such as cross-curricular, interdisciplinary teaching and learning. Few countries report the support of ESD in early childhood education. The situation is more positive for teacher education, higher education and vocational education and training.

#### **7) ESD in non-formal education and informal learning**

ESD in non-formal education and informal learning is on the agenda of most responding countries and of all the responding international stakeholder networks and civil society organizations. However, it is impossible to say whether both the volume and the quality of support are adequate enough to meaningfully tap into the seemingly infinite possibilities for ESD-related learning in non-formal and informal settings. Little information is available about the amount of money that is allocated to ESD in informal and non-formal education. Similarly, there is not enough known about the way in which the many freely provided resources, both in printed and in digital form, are used. Information is also needed on which groups use these resources and in what numbers.

Furthermore, the promotion of ESD in informal and non-formal settings seems to demand new ways of distributing funds to NGOs, faith-based groups and civil society organizations who wish to develop ESD in semi-structured learning environments.

## **8) ESD research, development and dissemination**

ESD research and development is not very well developed around the globe. The vast majority of the reporting countries does not provide ESD scholarships and does not report financial support for ESD innovation and capacity-building. ESD-related research that takes place is mostly focused on formal education and on the policy and regulatory measures related to ESD implementation. As ESD practice is on the rise, there is an increased need for ESD quality assessment. Much of the existing ESD quality assessment schemes (e.g. the development of ESD indicators) is supported by international bodies and not so much by national governments.

## **9) ESD networking at the international level**

From all the UNESCO regions, a wide range of rich examples of regional cooperation is provided suggesting a remarkable increase in international ESD networking. However, some of the regional synthesis reports do note that not all examples used necessarily facilitate ESD networking. Rather, these examples constitute ways to promote ESD. Common groups or organizations that are involved in ESD-related networks include: universities, national governments (Ministries), municipal governments, local governments, the private sector and NGOs.

## **10) Availability of public budgets and/or economic incentives for ESD**

In most responding countries, the availability of public budgets and/or economic incentives for ESD is either non-existent or minimal at best. There appears consensus among them that raising funds for ESD activities and projects is key to ensure the successful achievement of the DESD. It is also important to internalize ESD within national budget structures. Countries are now beginning to take into consideration financing and budgeting for ESD across Ministries by determining how ESD aligns with key documents in different sectors in order to coordinate funding and programming for ESD across sectors at the national level.

## **Ways forward**

This review has identified 10 major action areas for the second half of the DESD.

### **1) Awareness, meaning and scope of ESD**

Limited awareness and understanding of ESD at all levels are still a fundamental challenge resulting in a limited societal and governmental support-base for ESD. This limited awareness and understanding may keep people from recognizing the presence and value of existing ESD, with activities taking place that may not carry an ESD label but which, in essence, constitute education and learning in the context of sustainable development. Efforts need to be made to better communicate ESD more creatively so that the full diversity of ESD and SD is fully understood. The involvement of the media needs to be strengthened (print-based and non-print/web-based) in communicating ESD and SD, and in creating (open-source) dialogues about ESD and SD among and between different audiences, particularly young people across the world.

Although there should be space for multiple interpretations and meanings of ESD, there is a common understanding that education and learning in the context of sustainable development cannot ignore the interconnections between the environmental, social, economic and cultural aspects of SD. Whereas many countries have a tradition in addressing the environmental dimension of sustainability and are quite comfortable in doing so, this is less the case so when it comes to the social, economic and cultural dimensions. During the remaining half of the DESD, multi-stakeholder dialogue among individuals and organisations that represent the economic, social and environmental aspects of SD

should be encouraged. The cultural perspective should be included in all such multistakeholder dialogues.

## **2) Reorienting curricula, teaching and learning**

As ESD-triggered innovations in teaching and learning are still in their early stages, there is a world-wide call for alternative methodologies that can strengthen people's SD-related capacities such as: understanding complexity; seeing connections and interdependencies; participating in democratic decision-making processes; and questioning dominant and long-accepted systems and routines that appear fundamentally unsustainable. Schools of education, curriculum development institutes and educational research organizations should be at the forefront of the search and development of these new forms of teaching and learning and the kinds of curricula, learning environments and school-community relationships that are needed to allow for such learning to flourish. At the same time, educational policies and support mechanisms that allow for more integrated forms of teaching and learning should be strengthened.

Non-formal and informal learning in the context of sustainable development (SD) should be included in national ESD policies and strengthened, where present, in regional ESD strategies.

## **3) Capacity-building**

In the next few years, ESD-related professional development should also focus on how to build the capacities of teachers, managers and facilitators to initiate and enhance new ESD-inspired forms of learning in schools, universities, workplaces and neighbourhoods. Space needs to be created to develop and experiment with these new forms of teaching and learning. ESD should, possibly in connection with the rise of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), become an integral part in the training of leaders in business and industry. The latter has been little emphasized in the DESD so far, although ESD appears to have made remarkable inroads in some areas of vocational education and training. Finally, capacity-building in multi-stakeholder social learning and the facilitating and strengthening of networking between schools, educational institutions/organisations and other potential partners in ESD at a local, national and international level appears crucial. Such capacity-building is also needed in non-formal education and informal learning settings.

Sensitizing the media to ESD-related issues is a key element in public awareness-raising. To this end, building capacity of media with regard to ESD is important and necessary.

## **4) ESD-related research, monitoring and evaluation**

Support for ESD-related research is needed to enhance both the quality and the evidence base of ESD. Such research could focus on: 1) theoretical underpinnings and critical discourse of ESD; 2) identifying and analyzing elements and efforts that support and thwart ESD; 3) identifying and analyzing ESD's evolving contribution to the educational community (e.g. practice, curriculum, and education outcomes); 4) identifying and analyzing ESD's evolving contribution to the sustainability of society; 5) using research-derived data on ESD to inform decisions; and 6) tracking the progress of the DESD (i.e. monitoring and evaluation).

Research on ESD in non-formal education and informal learning has been minimal at best and will need to be strengthened during the coming years. Furthermore, many actors involved in ESD and its development call for the creation of contextually relevant ESD indicators to assist them in its monitoring, evaluation and further development.

Countries need to be supported in developing their own ESD indicators as well as methods for capturing information in a contextually-relevant manner.

The creation of ESD-related research funds with the help of international donors and national research foundations may help advance the quality and quantity of ESD research by both academics and

practitioners. With regards to the latter, initiatives that support and enable teachers to become ESD researchers themselves in their own schools and classrooms should be supported.

### **5) ESD synergy with other 'adjectival' educations**

In several regions, there is a call for the explicit articulation of the relationship between ESD and Environmental Education (EE) in order to create greater synergy between the two. The expected resulting process of reciprocal enrichment is to resolve existing tensions and is likely to contribute to an improved conceptualization and institutionalization of both. Similar synergies need to be created between ESD and other 'adjectival' educations such as: peace education, gender education, inclusive education, multicultural education, human rights education, HIV & AIDS education, global education, consumer education, holistic education, citizenship education, health education and development education. During the remainder of the DESD, the creation networks that bring together key representatives from these SD-related educations should be stimulated.

Early childhood is a natural starting point for education for sustainable development that promotes educational access for all people within a process of life-long learning. To this end, early childhood care and education should be integrated in the ESD discourse.

### **6) ESD resources and materials**

There is an acute lack of materials specifically designed to promote ESD. While some reference materials are available, many countries have to resort to documents that address general SD issues or resort to more traditional EE content and methods. The availability of ESD-specific methods and innovations in teaching and learning needs to be improved. The creation of accessible ESD knowledge-sharing platforms for multiple audiences using ICTs can help in making ESD resources available. Ideally, these resources should be available in multiple languages. At the same time, such resources need to be constantly reviewed, updated and improved. The creation of open-source, open-access resources for ESD (e.g. ESD wikis<sup>1</sup>) might be an attractive option for ESD resource-sharing and development.

### **7) International and regional cooperation**

#### ***North-South and South-South cooperation***

The way forward in all regions depends in part on the development and utilization of inter- and intra- regional networking. North-South collaboration will remain crucial but in the coming years, South-South collaboration and the associated sub-regional networking that takes place in the context of SD in general and ESD in particular would also need to be well supported. Currently, there are some powerful regionally networked ESD initiatives already taking place around the world which help promote and strengthen ESD at the national level. These networked initiatives need to be supported or initiated by active ESD focal points, ESD national coordinating bodies, UNESCO Regional Bureaux for Education, UNESCO National Commissions and UNESCO Chairs, in collaboration with SD-oriented NGOs, the private sector and civil society organisations.

#### ***Regional Strategies for ESD***

Even though the regions are positive about their Regional Strategies for ESD, it is evident that a periodic revitalization is necessary to maximize their impact. This will require an active involvement of all concerned stakeholders to fine-tune, monitor and evaluate the strategy. It is

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<sup>1</sup> A **wiki** is a page or collection of Web pages. Wikis are designed to enable anyone who accesses them to contribute or modify content by using a simplified markup language.

equally necessary to involve those stakeholders who have not contributed or endorsed the regional strategy for ESD.

### **8) National networking**

Establishing well-grounded, coordinated and well-supported national, provincial/state and local ESD networks and partnerships remains a priority. In countries where national ESD commitments are still lacking, they should be developed during the second half of the Decade, taking advantage of the national SD Commissions or national SD agreements that are often already in place. In countries where such strategies do already exist, they should be considered as 'living' and in need of frequent redesigning in participatory ways as conditions change and more stakeholders become involved. Nationally networked ESD should also allow for the inclusion of local and more indigenous perspectives on SD. This can be realized by establishing regional approaches, methods, and mechanisms with active and equal participation of representatives from indigenous communities and other marginalized groups in society. Regionally networked ESD should also result in products, tools and materials that are easily accessible and in the local languages.

### **9) Coordination**

Although there are examples of inter-governmental and inter-institutional coordination of ESD, many countries are still searching for mechanisms and forms of governance that transcend vested sectoral interests. Capacity-building for ESD policy development within all relevant Ministries, including the Ministry of Economic Affairs but also at other levels of government, appears a priority for realizing inter-sectoral synergy and improved coordination.

Coordination is also needed among national, regional and/or local stakeholders to establish priorities, whether thematic or programmatic, in order to form a solid basis for addressing sustainable development through education and learning. In many developing countries, active involvement of the UN Country Team and the inclusion of ESD into United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAFs) is needed to provide a basis for national assistance. In those countries, collaboration with donor organizations is also crucial in the process of developing national strategies and frameworks to support ESD.

Within the UN system itself, ESD requires cross-boundary 'out-of-the-box thinking' and a genuine commitment to ESD. Such thinking and commitment need to be strengthened within the UN system if a 'one concerted UN' effort is to become a reality in the years to come. In this way, the whole of all UN efforts in developing and supporting ESD around the world will amount to more than just a sum of the contribution of individual agencies, networks and national commissions. Critical reflection on the functioning of key offices, UNESCO National Commissions and Regional Bureaux which have been assigned a responsibility in supporting ESD will need to take place as well. The current mid-Decade review did not include such reflection. Critical self-reflection may reveal additional areas of improvement that will strengthen the UN contribution to the DESD.

### **10) Financing**

Raising funds for ESD activities and projects is key to ensuring the successful achievement of the DESD. The provision of financial resources for ESD should not be left to governments alone. Multilateral / bilateral donors and the private sector have the potential to be important contributors. To gain the full support of donors and stakeholders, ESD needs to be not only included on the national agenda, but also to be incorporated into budgeting frameworks, national development plans and national sustainable development strategies (if available). Similar to EFA, ESD needs to have budget support. Budget ownership also needs to be advocated for ESD within all relevant ministries.

At the mid-point of the DESD, it is unclear how the current world economic crisis will affect ESD and SD funding but different possible scenarios can be envisioned. A DESD-friendly scenario would be one where the current world economic crisis leads to a more commonly shared realization that our present systems, including our economic ones, are unsustainable and that now, more than ever, is the time for transition towards more sustainable systems. In this scenario, more funding might become available for ESD and/or SD. A less DESD-friendly scenario would be one where the current economic crisis sets back the ESD and the SD movement as the P for Profit takes precedence over P for Planet or P for People.

If the first brighter scenario occurs, it is crucial that ESD is positioned as a key component of the kind of capacity-building that is needed in business and industry, in communities, and educational institutions to create new economies and financial systems that are based on the principle of sustainability.

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