

Workshop 11: Media as Partners for ESD

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Introduction

The purpose of the workshop was to facilitate a favourable environment and partnerships between journalists, other media professionals and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) experts in order to promote greater ESD understanding and collaboration. Three topic areas were considered: 1) coverage of ESD by the media in different regions and around the world; 2) cultivating greater participation by the media in ESD; and 3) identification of priority actions to strengthen media as partners in ESD.

Conference Objective 1: To Highlight the Essential Contribution of Education for Sustainable Development to All of Education and to Achieving Quality Education

Why is ESD relevant?

Sustainability, as a concept and practice, is generally viewed by media professionals as broad and vague. Thus, the component of “education” in sustainable development represents an additional conceptual and professional hurdle. Complicating matters further, many in the media are wary of the idea of “sustain-

ability” (e.g., it is difficult to report, is composed of jargon, etc.). “ESD” is not a saleable product for the media until the stories are attractive to its large and diverse audience. Prithi Nambiar, an environmental activist and the Executive Director of the Centre of Environmental Education in Australia, pointed out that the media are by far more attracted to sceptical and sensational stories rather than stories that document process and reflect positive achievement. According to Anne Marie Kalanga, a journalist from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, it is difficult to come across editors in the international media who take an interest in reporting the outcome of high-level conferences on sustainable development issues. Selling a story is not the only challenge journalists face in reporting ESD.

Most journalists in volatile countries have no protection, access to relevant information, or relevant multi-disciplinary knowledge that would empower them with the ability to seek appropriate mentorship and enable them to successfully cover in-depth stories on sustainability issues. Such reporting can be complicated due to contexts that are secretive and resistant to reports that question the accountability of authorities. Journalists who wish to carry out in-depth stories must therefore face real personal security threats.

Prithi Nambiar provided an in-depth account of her struggle to chronicle the human, community, political, and economic processes that unfolded when the state government set aside established review processes, and permitted a cement company to build a limestone mining company on protected lands in India. Ultimately, this story was picked up by national media, and resulted in a reversal of the original policy decision. One “lesson learnt” from this process was that media covering the perspectives of all parties involved helps to reveal the underlying beliefs and motives for environmentally unsustainable actions. Increasingly, international media reports are diversifying reports on sustainability with the ability to cover wide-ranging views and aspects including science reporting. Enhancing ESD in journalism education may be a valuable approach to allow the “human dimension” tell the story of ESD, rather than to allow the media to educate, lecture or lobby ESD to the general public.



Journalist at the World Conference

Andrea Cairola, freedom of expression consultant, provided examples illustrating the importance of freedom of expression in media reporting at all times. He also emphasized that maintaining high professional standards is crucial for journalism. In the advent of new information and communication technologies, journalists may be cautioned not to assume that all news sources are adequately reliable and that verification and investigation must continue to be a core journalistic practice.

Conference Objective 2: To Promote International Exchange on ESD

What can we learn from each other?

The major thematic points that emerged under this conference objective were as follows:

1) media coverage of ESD and sustainable development varies tremendously around the world; 2) political pressure and economic decision-making (often outside the control or remit of journalists) may have an impact on the level of media attention accorded to ESD and sustainable development; and 3) issues that are considered of greater priority and magnitude may relegate ESD coverage to a lower status by editors and media decision-makers. An information sharing platform or mechanism to facilitate a comparative global analyses of media reports on ESD may lead to useful case studies and could initiate systematic monitoring of ESD and sustainable development issues media coverage at country and regional levels.

Conference Objective 3: To Carry out a Stock-taking of DESD Implementation

What have we achieved so far, what are the lessons learnt?

Journalists, particularly in least developed countries, face many obstacles and pressures in promoting greater awareness of ESD. For example, in some countries journalists may be required to pay both for information that is relevant to coverage of ESD as well as access to news and broadcast media. The Internet also represents a new form of competition to journalists as information published on the Web is abundantly consumed by a public, which may not necessarily distinguish between journalistic and non-journalistic sources or be in a position to evaluate the expertise of media sources. The protection of journalists and concomitant restrictions on media who report on ESD and sustainable development issues vary significantly across regions but should nevertheless be addressed in a coherent manner by national and international media and professional organisations. Finally, with

limited economic resources, political instability, and chronic social/cultural conflict, impediments to timely media reports may be as basic and fundamental as sporadic access to electricity. Given an enabling environment, the media is a facilitator of information and a platform for democratic discourse that can contribute greatly to ESD implementation.

Conference Objective 4: To Develop Strategies for the Way Ahead

Where do we want to go from here?

It is important to identify and cultivate a core of experienced and devoted journalists who are motivated to report on ESD and sustainable development. Such individuals should become a source of support, mentorship, and expertise to colleagues around the world. Thus, as a follow-up from this conference, it may be helpful to consider the development of a network of ESD media colleagues who can share their perspectives and experiences with one another. Additional recommendations included the need for media institutions of higher learning to become much more deliberate and proactive vis-à-vis ESD emphasis during university studies. Likewise, greater exposure to ESD should begin at the primary and secondary school level; journalists can be active participants in this process, by channelling accessible ESD reporting to such audiences. Editors in particular need to become more educated about ESD, and those who are should be enlisted to inform their colleagues. Support for the use of alternative media (e.g. blogs), internships and distance education programmes relevant to journalists should be an important component of the ESD movement. In the final analysis, the media can catalyse awareness and change when adequately equipped, trained and informed.

Recommendations

1. It will not be possible to achieve the fundamental aspirations of ESD without considering the media as full and equal partners in the development, dissemination, and communication of ESD information and content;
2. In order for the media to fulfill its potential as a full ESD partner, and thus as an enabler of interactive debate and discussion at all levels of society, prerequisites include but are not restricted to 1) the right to information access, 2) editorial independence and pluralism, and 3) freedom of expression, which should be facilitated through ESD's multi-disciplinary and interdependent approach;





Workshop coordinators on the way to their participants

3. The insights gained during the first five years of ESD will be of great benefit if media capacities are assessed and strengthened in order to enable them to investigate and report issues and programmes that keep the public audience up to date, engaged, and participating in developments that concern all forms of education. Consideration being made for teacher training and education should also apply for media educators and trainers in order to promote an active interdisciplinary approach;
4. Public awareness is essential to mainstream ESD, particularly given the immediacy of priority issues including resource depletion, environment, population, disaster, etc.;
5. Work with media and communication networks and associations to review and affirm core principles that promote lifelong learning, social justice, gender equity, and other relevant values that are integral to ESD;
6. Identify and create appropriate information sharing and development mechanisms between stakeholders and media systems and organisations;
7. Design, produce, and promote a portfolio of "products" and "resources" to support the integration of ESD in media practice (e.g., education and training, curricula and professional development) and to enable recognition of ESD by media audiences around the world.

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