

## Workshop 14: Civil Society and ESD

**Coordinators: Sosten Chiotha, University of Malawi; Zabariah Matali, UNESCO Reference Group for the DESD**

The workshop highlighted the role of civil society in Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and its contribution to implementing the UN Decade of ESD (DESD). It aimed at engaging participants in discussions on the pivotal role of civil society in ESD and challenging them to reflect critically on the role of civil society in building capacity for all age groups through formal, non-formal and informal learning arrangements.

The background of the around 20 participants was mostly civil society, including both non- and semi-governmental organizations; a few participants were from academia in West European and Southeast Asian countries. The first topic was the role of civil society as a champion and catalyst for ESD. Secondly, the workshop looked at how civil society has influenced mainstream academic institutions on ESD issues. A third theme dealt with civil society as a diverse entity and the question of what the rallying points for scaling up ESD have been and what points of variance there have been that require further stakeholder engagement. Finally, the workshop discussed what civil society can do in the next five years of the DESD to assist in identifying and addressing the gaps between the kind of education still prevailing and the education necessary for the transition to sustainable development. The results of the group discussions can be summarised as follows.

**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?**

Civil society is often based on voluntary work. This allows civil society to have autonomy, determination and the passion to work together, utilising the most appropriate methods in different contexts. Civil society needs to be recognised as a major expert, facilitator, and partner for the DESD at all levels. Civil society's capacity of running complementary actions with the national and local Governments are unique. Civil society has contributed to reorienting and redefining knowledge so as to generate new knowledge. It has

**Conference Objective 2: To Promote International Exchange on ESD**

**What can we learn from each other?**

helped to identify, strengthen and share local and traditional knowledge. Finally, civil society can contribute to redirecting existing methodologies to enhance demand-driven action research. Civil society's work needs to be recognised and supported as a unique contribution to ESD.

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

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

Workshop participants found that civil society has been both the main addressee and the main promoter of ESD. It has implemented concrete projects, and adapted or utilised the most appropriate methods in different contexts, mobilising individuals and groups in a community. Participants felt that an inclusive and participative approach is essential so that cultural diversity and creativity can be embedded at the centre of sustainable development education and actions. It was concluded that civil society had blended traditional knowledge and non-formal education processes with scientific and formal education to create and implement new and alternative knowledge and promote ownership of what is local.

**Conference Objective 4: To Develop Strategies for the Way Ahead**

**Where do we want to go from here?**

Workshop participants recommend the development of a platform featuring and sharing good practices from the full spectrum of ESD, especially covering non-formal and informal learning. This platform should comprise dialogue and online consultations. Moreover, participants recommended utilising and connecting existing UNESCO networks, such as the UNESCO Associated Schools and UNESCO Clubs and provide them with adequate resources. In addition it was proposed to strengthen the role played by UNESCO, the leading UN agency for the DESD, in particular through its regional offices and UNESCO National Commissions so as to facilitate and support the efforts of civil society.

**Workshop rapporteur:** Fumiko Noguchi, Japan Council on the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD-J)