

## Workshop 19: Better Schools at Preschool, Primary and Secondary Levels through ESD

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

#### Why is ESD relevant?

ESD has promoted or given visibility to concepts key to quality education. Examples of this include: the concepts of “*whole school approach*” “*eco-schools*”, and “*sustainable schools*”. These concepts have been put into practice in more and more settings. Other reported initiatives aim to give meaning to, and develop actions around, specific aspects or dimensions of ESD, allowing school experiments such as “*Special Theme Days*”, a week-long stay in the forest, school clubs (focusing on wild life, school gardens or farming), small science projects, and including local knowledge in school curricula.

Even though some of these practices may exist prior to (and without) the introduction of the notion of ESD, and recognition should be given to these practices as such, the broadness of ESD will enable a clearer conceptualisation of all attributes of quality education. (What matters is not the “*label ESD*”.) ESD reinforces the key elements and characteristics of quality teaching and learning: the school environment, the physical set up of the school (recreation areas, classroom, cafeteria, green areas, cultural activity, sanitation, water supply, mini-museums, healthy food, water harvesting, etc.); the social aspect (valuing pupils’ culture), the linkages with the school community; and intercultural approaches.

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

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

There is a need for promoting networks of teachers and encourage exchange programmes both among students, teachers, school principals and parents associations, as well as education managers. Recognition of cultural diversity and national specificities enhances understanding of what works in a specific context and may not in another.

There are alternative ways of generating resources, relying on school initiatives but also involving the larger community with private enterprises and business companies, to support ESD initiatives. Research should also be supported to inform ESD practices and policies. Sub-regional and regional initiatives, e.g., teachers, school leaders networks, research networks, students associations (UNESCO Clubs, UNESCO’s Associated Schools Project Network) contribute to international exchange of experiences.

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

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

First, there is a realization that we should break from the perception of ESD as a “*new thing*”. For this makes it difficult for people (practitioners, mainly) to perceive relevant experiences that qualify as good ESD practices at school level as worth reporting. At the same time, ESD calls for change. Knowledge needs to be “*reconceptualised*”. Teaching and learning are to be viewed as evolving and mutually supportive. Pre-school needs to be revalued.

Apart from this realization, achievements include an enhanced awareness of inter-disciplinarity in ESD practices. The role of teachers and school principals in realizing DESD goals at schools level is increasingly acknowledged as paramount, together with the involvement of parents and communities in the way schools operate and learning and teaching conducted. One impediment to this is the rigidity of “*prescribed*” curricula and of official examination systems, which prevent teachers’ creativity and innovation in teaching and learning. Another limiting factor is the capacity of the actors (teachers and principals) who need to be trained and motivated to become facilitators and promoters of innovative practices towards the DESD goals.



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

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

The majority of workshop participants came from Government, which might lead to the conjecture that other stakeholders (e.g., the private sector) have little interest in school-based issues. There is a need to increase the latter's awareness of the issues for their needed involvement in school-level decision-making and initiatives.

There is also the need to highlight the role of school leadership for a successful, broader and deeper infusion of ESD practices in school activities, and their support to teachers, especially in remote areas, who require (re)-training. Sustainable school environments require consistent funding. Fundraising initiatives at local, national and international levels should be undertaken.

For actual and effective mainstreaming of ESD in learning and teaching, ESD subjects and activities should be made "credit-bearing" to motivate students and teachers. Examinations and testing systems should be reviewed to make them consistent with ESD practices. Learners' creativity and collective initiatives should be adequately rewarded.

While the harnessing of the potential of Information Communication Technologies should be promoted, efforts should be made to allow and make sufficient room for real human contacts for and among school actors: students, teachers, parents, community, at national level and internationally.

Documenting and disseminating information on specific concepts, such as "*Eco-schools*" (although mostly environmental) should be promoted to create familiarity around what they stand for and allow experience sharing from around the globe. UNESCO's Associated Schools Project Network is called upon to continue playing a key role in this process.

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