

## Workshop 3: Advancing Sustainable Lifestyles and Responsible Consumption through ESD

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This workshop was divided into a number of sessions which were all characterised by a series of small group discussions; sharing of experiences, lessons learned and best practices from attendees representing institutions from across the world; and questions and contributions from the floor.

### **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?**

**Education**, as defined in this workshop, entails actions integrated to formal and informal education but also professional training and lifelong learning as well as information and sensitisation of citizens. **Consumption**, as defined in this workshop, entails all actions that imply selecting, buying, using, caring and disposing of goods and services, and which are considered to significantly shape contemporary lifestyles, representations, attitudes and behaviours. **Lifestyles**, as defined in this workshop, entail the choices and behaviours of individuals and communities in their every-day lives. The social and environmental dimensions of such choices today bring us to consider not only its economic dimension but also its ethical and political dimensions.

**Education for Sustainable Consumption (ESC)**, a core theme of Education for Sustainable Development, is essential to train responsible citizens and consumers in this context: individuals need to be aware of their fundamental rights and freedoms, appropriately informed to participate actively in the public debate, oriented towards a conscientious participation in the markets. Hence, ESC has become a core component of ESD and global citizenship and generates awareness of the interrelatedness of central ESD issues: "Citizens need training in how to define issues; gather, handle and apply relevant information; consult; plan courses of action; make choices; analyze and assess the consequences of their actions, and reflect upon the effect they have made locally, nationally and in a global context. This is particularly true in their role as

consumers"<sup>1</sup>. It contributes to understanding the symbolic aspects of consumption and to recognition of the moral and civic responsibility behind sustainable lifestyles.

ESC can be seen as an integrated approach partly based on the merging of sustainable development and consumer education. Consumer education policies at national level generally aim at individual empowerment (consumer rights, household budgeting, critical thinking skills) but also at promoting public interest. However, in most cases the promotion of public interest through consumer education focuses on political dimensions of consumerism rather than on social and environmental ones. ESC, as a cross-cutting issue, could go further to combine all those aspects and become a new educational paradigm to raise education levels without creating an ever-growing demand for resources and consumer goods, to foster responsible individual and collective choices towards the environment and society. In this perspective, *Here and Now* defines ESC as follows: "Education for sustainable consumption consists of the acquisition of knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary for functioning in today's society. It is responsibility learning which aims to contribute to the individual's ability to manage his own life while also participating in the stewardship of the global society's collective life."<sup>2</sup> The objective is to empower people so that they are able to responsibly manage their social and environmental impacts, but also to participate in and stimulate the public debate about values, quality of life, responsibility and accountability.

### **Conference Objective 2: To Promote International Exchange on ESD** **What can we learn from each other?**

Despite increased awareness of the human impact on the environment and a greater focus on the consequences of individual lifestyle choices, sustainable consumption is still not always seen as a central topic in educational systems and is not identified as a priority in national education policies. In fact, many aspects of sustainable consumption and development

<sup>1</sup> CCN The Consumer Citizenship Network. Project Report Year 3. 2005-2006: 6

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Environment Programme / Marrakech Task Force on Education for Sustainable Consumption. Working paper: HERE and NOW: Education for sustainable consumption. Recommendations and Guidelines. 2008: 3

are already taught in schools, but ESC often remains sporadic or hardly visible due to a lack of cohesiveness and innovation. Yet, meeting the challenge of sustainable consumption will demand an appropriate reorientation of formal education, both in terms of institutions and curricula. Including ESC into national sustainable development strategies is an opportunity to do so at different levels: development of education policies from primary schools to high schools, adaptation of teacher training, promotion of sustainable education institutions and creation of pedagogical approaches and tools based on constant interaction between educators and other ESC actors, especially at local level. Furthermore, ESC must be built upon social, economic and cultural diversity to reach out to all urban and rural areas, developed and developing countries, wealthy and at-risk populations, as ESC consists in challenging behaviours and beliefs to reorganize our lifestyles worldwide.

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

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

The following points were emphasised during the workshop:

- There has been greater access to scientific information exchange and assessment as the topic of ESC and the mandate of the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD) have gained in visibility and interest at both policy and informal education level;
- An increased awareness of the consequences of present lifestyles on the environment and society is reflected in the products available on the market – an availability made possible by the choices and demands of consumers;
- The development of life cycle approaches to products and services, by both producers and consumers, have entered both the economic and education realms rendering it easier to educate people.

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

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

Based upon the values of sustainable development, education for sustainable production and consumption should be included as an integral part of Education for Sustainable Development and therefore lobbying for

the inclusion of ESC at all schools levels is essential in bringing about change. Education for sustainable lifestyles should include all stakeholders, with particular attention to youth and policy-makers. Education for sustainable lifestyles should be lifelong, interdisciplinary, innovative and include, among other dimensions, citizenship training as well as knowledge of systems and processes.

#### Strategy 1: Developing Education and Research Policies for Sustainable Consumption

##### → Adapting School Programmes and Curricula

Education has a role to play in protecting individuals and giving them the means to keep making free and informed choices. In the framework of education for sustainable consumption, media literacy is therefore needed for people to be able to understand, analyze and evaluate the overwhelming amount of messages they receive every day. ESC addresses topics as diverse as life quality and lifestyles, resources, economics, consumption and the environment, consumer rights and responsibilities, health and safety and global issues (environment, poverty, human rights, etc.). In the framework of citizenship and media literacy, information management (digital and media, advertising and persuasion, labelling) is also among the important themes covered by sustainable consumption. Among other key elements, media literacy stands as a crucial pillar of ESC, a necessary condition for informed and responsible behaviours. In this regard, the *Here and Now* Guidelines presented during the workshop suggest several ESC implementation options to be adopted by education policies: 1) mainstreaming ESC as part of existing subjects/disciplines; 2) teaching ESC as a crosscutting interdisciplinary theme and/or incorporated into projects and other activities as well as in schools clubs and after school activities; 3) integrating ESC as a specific subject.<sup>3</sup>

##### → Fostering Research on ESC

Comprehensive research is essential to strengthen the foundation for what is taught in ESC. It is meant to provide data on consumption patterns and their various impacts as well as on how different cultures accept or reject changes. Research can examine a diversity of approaches to sustainable consumption based on different social, economic, geographic and cultural conditions. Didactic questions are also important: how to teach sustainable consumption; the choice of topics, facts and pedagogical approaches relevant to diverse cultural contexts.

<sup>3</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 17



### Strategy 2: Providing Teachers with the Right Means through Initial and Continued Training

One of the main conditions for educational curricula and pedagogical tools on ESC to be efficiently developed and implemented is for teachers and trainers to understand its relevance in education patterns as well as in their own disciplines. They first need to be informed about what is at stake and what is the difficulty – bringing sustainability into young people's core values, translating abstract and complex issues into individuals' daily life – but also to be given well-adapted tools to develop lesson plans. Reorienting teacher education therefore stands as a strong recommendation in the *Here and Now* Guidelines presented in the workshop: "Facilitate teaching and teacher training which strengthens global, future-oriented, constructive perspectives within education for sustainable consumption."<sup>4</sup>

### Strategy 3: Building Supportive Educational Institutions

ESC policies without relevant infrastructures and means at institutional level are unlikely to be implemented efficiently. Teachers and students need their educational institutions to adapt their own management systems to recognize sustainable consumption as a legitimate issue and to understand the actions it refers to. For educational institutions, adapting management systems takes effect through sustainable procurement, equipment, building management, public administration and services as well as participation of staff and students in school events on sustainable

consumption. In addition, integrating ESC into campus management is one of the objectives of School Agenda 21 in the framework of the Local Agenda 21 process.

### Strategy 4: Developing Appropriate Pedagogical Approaches and Tools

ESC relies on the ongoing and coherent development of pedagogical approaches and tools. But ESC faces several challenges, tackled by those who develop and disseminate resources and tools. The concept of sustainable consumption itself is perceived as difficult to translate into people's daily reality; didactic resources available are fragmented, sometimes based on outdated scientific data or models not adapted to real life and students' experience; and students tend to express disillusionment, passivity and a sense of powerlessness that makes it difficult to create the motivation for them to be actors of change. Numerous resources have been developed at international, regional and national levels, including tools for setting up projects and lesson plans on ESC at school and outside the classroom. They could be adapted to different contexts and disseminated through educational networks and platforms.

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4 See *ibid.*, p.7