

Workshop 7: Mainstreaming Biodiversity into Education and Learning

Coordinators: David Ainsworth, Convention on Biological Diversity; Ana Persic, UNESCO

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 for Sustainable Development recognises the importance of integrating knowledge and knowledge systems from a variety of sources and groups (i.e. traditional and local knowledge, scientific knowledge). Understanding ecosystem processes and the role of biodiversity requires systemic thinking, which encourages and supports this process of integration. Moreover, managing natural resources requires a social learning process, which could be one approach towards reforming traditional education towards inquiry-based systems, thereby ensuring quality education.

Conference Objective 2: To Promote International Exchange on ESD

What can we learn from each other?

Biodiversity (especially ecosystems) illustrates global interdependences, the consideration of which is vital to ESD. Secondly, the success of ESD depends on the structural involvement of all relevant actors and extending cooperation beyond the (formal) education sector. The use of already existing internationally connected networks of knowledge, practice and research and the promotion of the biodiversity-ESD nexus in a comprehensive concept is important. It is also essential to involve all levels of government. Examples of this approach are eco-schools, UNESCO's Associated Schools Project Network, non-formal and adult learning networks (Centre of Adult Education), professional training, Biosphere Reserves, UNESCO Chairs, UN University research areas, the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives et al. National policy debates and existing mechanisms should be used to link the desired learning and education goals.

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

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

The UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD) has benefited from a reinvigorated global debate on climate change and biodiversity loss. More environmental education is required in formal and informal education, with a better focus on biodiversity in a more holistic way, involving links to ethical, social, cultural and economic aspects. It is also important to raise awareness of the importance of the work of civil society in biodiversity conservation, sustainable use and education. In this respect, efforts are beginning to be made to link formal and informal education in the ESD context. In fact, a variety of activities have been implemented at all levels – from local to international. However, some feel that the favourable momentum of the Decade has not been sufficiently harnessed.

Conference Objective 4: To Develop Strategies for the Way Ahead

Where do we want to go from here?

One aim would be to mainstream the opportunities offered by ESD into the work programmes of different international organs, Government departments, private sector, NGOs, taking advantage of other events and processes such as the International Year of Biodiversity in 2010 and the Conferences of the Parties (CoPs) of those Multilateral Environmental Agreements dealing with biodiversity. We should try to improve the connection to UNESCO's conventions dealing with cultural diversity, the Man and the Biosphere programme and Biosphere Reserves. Furthermore, additional efforts should be made to strengthen learning in informal contexts that links biodiversity to sustainable development. This should include communities' intergenerational settings, local authorities, cultural and religious contexts. There is a need to broaden the concept of training to a range of modalities of professional updating (e.g. e-courses, professional dialogue, on-the-job learning, citizens' dialogues etc.).

Workshop rapporteur: Kiran Chhokar, Center of Environmental Education, India

