

UNESCO's Approach to Implementing the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD) in Asia and the Pacific

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Abstract As lead agency of the DESD, UNESCO focuses on partnerships to activate networks and projects in support of ESD. Established committees in Asia and the Pacific are enhancing coordination and cooperation throughout the region. At present, the focus is on mobilising the media, private sector and youth as key stakeholders in achieving ESD. UNESCO recognises the value of linkages and is linking to other programs such as teacher education and supporting existing institutions working in related fields of ESD. UNESCO is involved in a collaborative project to develop monitoring and reporting mechanisms for the DESD in Asia-Pacific. Awareness-raising is increasing understanding of ESD and encouraging active involvement of partners across the region.

Introduction

In December 2002, the United Nations General Assembly adopted resolution 57/254 confirming the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD) spanning from 2005 to 2014 (UNESCO, 2006). United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) was designated as a lead agency for the promotion of the Decade. The DESD aims to raise the importance of education in achieving sustainable development and to develop initiatives that can showcase the special role of education. The terms, "DESD", "the Decade" and "the Decade of ESD" are used interchangeably in this paper.

UNESCO defines Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) as "a world where everyone has the opportunity to benefit from quality education and learn the values, behaviour and lifestyles required for a sustainable future and for positive societal transformation" (UNESCO, 2005a). ESD itself is really about helping people envision the type of future they want and working towards it. It is about "values, with respect at the centre: respect for others, including those of present and future generations, for difference and diversity, for the environment, for the resources of the planet we inhabit (UNESCO, 2005b). Therefore, ESD attempts to encourage people to embrace behaviours and practices that empower all to enjoy a full life without being deprived of fundamentals.

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UNESCO's role as lead agency of the DESD involved developing an International Implementation Scheme (IIS) for the Decade. This is a guiding document that sets out a broad framework for all partners, all over the world, to contribute to the Decade.

UNESCO Bangkok is the Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education and is applying three main strategic approaches in order to implement ESD activities in the Asia Pacific region; 1) Partnerships, 2) Linkages, and 3) Awareness Raising. This paper summarises DESD activities in the Asia and Pacific region from the perspective of UNESCO Bangkok.

Specific Activities of UNESCO Bangkok for the DESD

Specific activities of UNESCO Bangkok involve; partnership and coordination of the DESD at the regional level; national initiatives of the Decade of ESD throughout Asia-Pacific with a focus on strengthening ESD in the Pacific; mobilizing the media, private sector and youth as key stakeholders; linkages; ESD Monitoring and Evaluation; and awareness raising. The work of ESD is co-ordinated through the Asia-Pacific Programme of Educational Innovation for Development (APEID).

Partnership and Coordination of the DESD at the Regional Level

Some of the challenges faced by international agencies in implementing the DESD include a mismatch of activities, both within countries and between sector specific programmes and agencies; duplication of efforts; lack of coordination; and a lack of funds to implement ESD at the regional level. To enhance cooperation with other UN agencies, an "Asia-Pacific Regional UN Interagency Steering Committee for the DESD" has been organised. Meeting every three months, the Steering Committee also undertakes various ESD advocacy, communication and networking tasks.

In collaboration with the Steering Committee, an "Asia-Pacific Regional Consultative Group for the DESD" has been established. The Consultative Group consists of experts representing stakeholder and geographic interests. This Group performs knowledge management and research functions in addition to activating networks and projects in support of ESD. It also facilitates the process of ongoing stakeholder dialogue for the Decade.

National Initiatives of the Decade of ESD throughout Asia-Pacific

A number of launches and special events have been held in countries throughout the Asia-Pacific region. These include events in Australia, China, Iran, Japan, New Zealand, Pakistan, Vietnam and Uzbekistan. These countries are amongst the forerunners in initiating activities for the Decade and developing a strategic approach for future activities. UNESCO Bangkok is developing a publication to showcase these countries' experiences as models to other countries for developing their own approaches to national implementation of ESD. The main objective of this publication will be to highlight progress made and assist countries that are still facing the challenges of engaging new stakeholders and developing a participatory approach to ESD.

ESD in the Pacific

A Pacific Consultative Meeting on the DESD was held in Apia, Samoa in March 2006 to bring together Pacific ESD practitioners and experts. The meeting resulted in the establishment of a Pacific Consultative Group and preparation of a draft framework for action on DESD in the Pacific to serve as the coordinating mechanism for implementing ESD in the region.

A strategic plan is also being developed for cooperation on ESD in the Pacific. It aims to harmonize current initiatives, identify existing and potential resources, and to develop a communication strategy in order to engage stakeholders.

Mobilizing Key Stakeholders

In order to achieve the DESD's visions, UNESCO has identified stakeholders who can help deliver messages to each sector, including; governments, National Commissions for UNESCO, NGOs, the media, schools, research institutions, UN agencies and the private sector.

UNESCO recognizes the contributions of the media and aims to further sensitize the media on ESD and examine how it can play an informed and responsible role in publicizing and mainstreaming ESD to the community. A consultative meeting on the development of a media resource and training kit on education and sustainable development was held in Bangkok in December, 2005 at UNESCO Bangkok. The meeting was a gathering of media professionals, NGOs active in the field of communications, and new technology experts. As a result, a media training kit for ESD is currently being developed.

The idea of business models, i.e. supply chains, stakeholder management, the rise in importance of the social enterprise, and social business, correlate to sustainable development. A proposal to engage multinational corporations in ESD is being developed. The proposal highlights community needs within textile and electronics industry through several case studies.

Finally, the engagement of youth has been initiated through the Asia-Pacific Regional UN Interagency Steering Committee. A project proposal has been developed on how to involve youth groups in ESD through existing youth networks. It also includes organising a youth envisioning contest for ESD through the UNESCO Associated Schools Network Project (ASPnet) to encourage critical discussion of ESD in schools.

Linkages

In collaboration with the Asia/Pacific Cultural Centre for UNESCO (ACCU), UNESCO has assisted in the development of a "Centre of Excellence (COE) Programme for ESD" and an "Innovation Programme for ESD". A COE is defined as an organization which works for the promotion of ESD while the Innovation Programme for ESD initiates and supports projects that are good examples of ESD implementation in the Asia-Pacific Region. The overall objective of these programmes is to support existing institutions working in related fields of ESD in order to foster and promote them as good examples for ESD.

The Regional Expert Meeting on Teacher Education for ESD (Thailand, May 2006) was conducted in order to identify links or common areas within major education initiatives. This Meeting aimed to; 1) conceptualize and identify content areas for ESD, 2) discuss the relationship of ESD with major education initiatives/mandates such as: Education for All (EFA), Education for International Understanding (EIU), Environmental Education (EE), Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD), and 3) to prepare an action plan for mainstreaming ESD in education systems.

The 10th UNESCO-APEID International Conference, "Learning Together for Tomorrow: Education for Sustainable Development" will be held in Bangkok, Thailand in December, 2006. This conference will serve as a platform for sharing information and knowledge, including innovative practices in ESD.

ESD Monitoring and Evaluation Project

The UNESCO-IUCN DESD Indicators Project for the Asia-Pacific region is conducted in collaboration with IUCN-CEC and Macquarie University, Australia and is in the process of finalizing pilot countries.

Monitoring and reporting mechanisms for the region are being established including the development of a prototype DESD monitoring system. The DESD monitoring system will be adapted and implemented in pilot countries and progressively rolled out to more countries as the Decade progresses. Guidelines, a framework and indicators will also be developed to measure the DESD at the regional level.

Awareness-Raising

UNESCO promotes ESD as well as the DESD by means of awareness-raising through media releases, advocacy materials and promotion through participation. A number of ESD resources have been developed in order to advocate the concept and importance of ESD and the DESD. UNESCO Bangkok is also developing its website in order to promote and disseminate information on ESD including publications and tool kits.

Conclusion

Considering the broad range of issues covered by ESD, UNESCO, as the lead agency of the DESD, is very keen on promoting cooperation and channels of communication among stakeholders in ESD. UNESCO Bangkok is also committed to further strengthening cooperation and partnerships among ESD stakeholders through intersectoral actions and initiatives throughout the Decade.

Keywords: Sustainable development; UN Decade; education; DESD; ESD.

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