

**Education for a Sustainable Future:
UNESCO Asia-Pacific Regional Consultation on a
Post-DESD Framework**

Bangkok, May 16-17, 2013

Outcome Document

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I. Introduction

The Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD) is soon coming to an end. As with most conclusions of United Nations decades, two processes are assumed essential – an assessment of what the decade achieved and a decision as to what, if anything, to do next. Decades are sometimes declared to have achieved their purpose and are seldom heard of again; or they are repeated, to complete unfinished business or expand their scope and reach, leading to the “Second Decade” of X; or they attempt to build on their achievements, on the momentum they have generated, and on the visibility they have gained to transform themselves into something both more relevant (still global but increasingly local) and more practical (still focused on advocacy but increasingly programmatic).

Thus it is with the DESD. At its 57th session in December 2002, the United Nations General Assembly adopted Resolution 57/254 declaring the period 2005–2014 as the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD), emphasizing the critical role of education in achieving sustainable development, and designated UNESCO to lead the Decade. The Decade was launched internationally by Mr. Koïchiro Matsuura, Director-General of UNESCO, at UN Headquarters in New York on March 1, 2005.

The Decade is now moving towards its conclusion to be marked at a global conference scheduled to be held in Japan, November 10-12, 2014. In its 190th session, the Executive Board of UNESCO expressed “its preference for a programme framework as follow-up to the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development after 2014”. The Board requested the Director-General “to develop, in consultation with Member States, and in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, the proposal for a programme framework, led by UNESCO, which should cover at least the period of the forthcoming Medium-Term Strategy for 2014-2021.” Furthermore, the framework should “address education at all levels and in all forms, be based on a comprehensive sustainable development agenda, while also encouraging strategic focus and national commitment.”

In preparation for this conference and for the development of the desired programme framework, a series of regional consultations is being held both to assess “backward” and plan “forward”. The UNESCO Asia-Pacific Regional Consultation on a Post-DESD Framework was therefore convened in Bangkok, Thailand, on May 16-17, 2013. With additional support from UNEP, some 65 participants (see attached list) attended from National Commissions, Ministries of Education/Environment/Natural Resources, universities and research centres, non-government organisations, and development agencies.

The objective of the consultation was to contribute to ensuring a transparent, participatory preparation of the post-2014 ESD programme framework through collecting input from relevant stakeholders from all UN regions. The expected outcomes were as follows:

- Priority areas for ESD activities post-2014 identified
- ESD initiatives that could be scaled-up in a post-2014 framework identified
- Key partners to involve in a post-2014 framework identified
- Suggestions for the preparations of the UNESCO World Conference on ESD collected. (This last outcome was not achieved since staff of UNESCO Paris presented what was considered to be a detailed outline of the conference for which additional suggestions were not required.)

The agenda included plenary presentations related to each of the expected outcomes; these presentations, in most cases, were followed by smaller group discussions and plenary presentations of discussion outcomes. These are reported on below.

II. Session 1: Towards a Post-2014 ESD Framework

The facilitator for the consultation reviewed the history and original framework of ESD and the Decade built around it (see attached) and reviewed the objectives of the consultation. He also presented some “provocations” to challenge the participants to reflect more seriously on what the Decade had done and what still must be done post-2014. These included the following:

- Has the DESD’s intended balance of economic, environmental, and social-cultural considerations been achieved? If not, why not?
- Have the DESD’s ideals of gender equity, justice, peace, human rights, environmental preservation, cultural diversity, and poverty alleviation been sufficiently – and equally -- emphasised? If not, why not?
- Has the DESD’s desired partnership of multiple sectors and stakeholders – including media and the private sector – been achieved? If not, why not?

- Should these issues be more prominent in ESD post-2014? If so, why and how?

A brief description of the proposed Post-2014 Framework was then presented by Danilo Padilla, head of the ESD unit in UNESCO Bangkok. This was followed by a presentation on “ESD in the Post-2015 Development Agenda” by Prof. Masahisa Sato of Tokyo City University (see attached). His principal message was the need to coordinate ongoing efforts and processes to achieve greater synergy among the various post-2015 development agendas now being discussed related to the Millennium Development Goals, the Sustainable Development Goals, and Education for All. The major thrusts of his presentation focused on educational development, the development agenda, the environmental Agenda, emergency education; international agendas and indicators; EFA and ESD synergies; and a conceptual framework on “sustainability”

Small group discussions were then organised around the themes of ESD successes, ESD priorities, and ESD challenges and partners with the following general outcomes:

A. ESD Successes

Participants discussed a long list of what they considered **successful ESD initiatives** (environmental, economic, socio-cultural) which could be most usefully scaled up post-2014. Most of these related to **the environmental dimension of ESD**, especially on the integration of climate change and environmental education into various levels of education, both in the curriculum and extra-curricular (from K-12 and up to higher education including M.A. degrees in ESD. Also mentioned were Indonesian “green schools” (or eco-friendly and safe schools) which link together the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of the Environment, school re-cycling and community garden projects, links between community learning centres and biosphere reserves in Vietnam; environmental ambassadors, and the work of the Global University Partnership on Environmental Sustainability.

Somewhat fewer initiatives related to ESD’s **economic dimension** (green economics, green growth, and a sufficiency economy) were discussed, but there was considerable focus around its **socio-cultural dimension**. This included community-based linkages with world heritage sites in the Philippines; youth camps and national service programmes in Malaysia to foster inter-ethnic understanding; the development of curricula focusing specifically on peace, social cohesion, cultural diversity, democracy, human rights, and justice; activities related to the empowerment of indigenous people (often ethnic/linguistic minorities) including multi-lingual education using mother tongue as the initial language of instruction and the documentation of traditional knowledge from community elders.

Another set of initiatives related to **pedagogical approaches supportive of ESD**, also considered appropriate for further scaling up. These included:

- more collaborative, experiential, self-autonomous, action- and learner-centred teaching and learning
- peer learning and hands-on, action/service learning
- stronger community involvement and initiatives linked to the school; e.g., “learning from the bottom” through community-based learning and localised curriculum development
- the greater use of media and ICT in promoting ESD
- teacher and student exchanges around ESD and DRR, both within and across countries
- accreditation schemes for schools which achieve a certain level of adherence to the principles and practices of ESD
- awards for ESD implementation (e.g., SEAMEO awards for best DESD practices and recognition of the most sustainable townships, the best DRR school plans, and the best ESD websites)
- ASPnet schools as a catalyst for ESD through useful for experimentation with, and the sharing of, good practice (e.g., through videos)

Considered especially important was one critical factor – encouragement by individual teachers and the school as a whole for more critical, creative, and divergent thinking by its students. As an example of this, three students from the International School of Bangkok (grades 9 and 11) presented a refreshing review of the kinds of creative thinking and hands-on learning promoted at their school designed to create “passionate learners” through, among other things, meetings and projects around issues of global concern, student exchanges, the insertion of global perspectives into the curriculum, and ESD-related school clubs and other extracurricular activities.

In addition to a discussion of what was working and could be further scaled up, there was also the identification of **key factors needed for successful scaling up**. These included:

- strong partners for ESD (from government, the private sector, NGOs, and academics) and strong collaboration among them
- political support and commitment at a high level (e.g., president or prime minister)
- a comprehensive, national sustainable development Action Plan that includes ESD as one of its major components
- the demonstration of linkages between ESD and a nation’s international obligations and agreements

- incentives for good practice (e.g., awards, recognition, financial)
- strong and visible media support (e.g., newspaper/TV reports of sustainable development challenges and of good ESD practices)
- a sharper focus on local issues and situations
- monitoring and assessment mechanisms and indicators that can provide evidence of positive results
- the systematic inclusion/integration of ESD concepts into the core curricula of both teacher education institutions and classrooms
- capacity building of all stakeholders toward understanding, programming for, implementing, and assessing ESD activities

B. ESD priorities

Linked to the discussion around past ESD successes was further debate around **future ESD priorities** – action areas to be addressed in the post-2014 framework, where particular priorities should lie, and how this framework can best be linked to the post-2015 development agenda. These priorities covered both the content and implementation of ESD programmes.

In terms of **future ESD priorities related to content**, several were considered particularly important. As expected, they included areas already prioritised in the current Decade: climate change, environmental issues such as biodiversity and disaster risk reduction, sustainable consumption and production and the sufficiency economy; and the whole set of issues related to moral/values-based education including peace, social justice, tolerance (racial, ethnic, religious), international understanding, global citizenship, and the need to inter-cultural dialogue and welcome difference and diversity in schools, communities, and societies.

Also listed as priorities were areas that participants felt had been inadequately emphasised in the current Decade: sustainable agriculture, land use, and food security; the challenges of sustainable development in remote, rural areas; ESD in early childhood care and development programmes; ESD in TVET programmes (including employability and working sustainably and for sustainability); gender equality; human rights; and cultural and linguistic diversity and the preservation of cultural heritage.

There was also considerable discussion around **future priorities in regard to the implementation of ESD**. Many of these, of course, have already been stressed in the current Decade – but with mixed success. Those considered particularly important in a more focused post-2014 Framework included:

- striving toward a more equal balance among the dimensions of ESD in the post-2014 framework
 - promoting a more comprehensive understanding of the interconnected, holistic, and integrated nature of ESD required at all levels and areas of education
 - developing a more systematic, managed approach to achieve such integrated/inter-disciplinary ESD (e.g., depending on the particular cultural, historical, social, economic, environmental context of a nation – or a community – begin where the need is greatest and then expand coverage out to all of ESD’s dimensions)
 - seeing ESD as a spur to the re-thinking and transformation of education systems – not a mere tinkering at their edges
 - promoting SD “literacy” and “competency” among all stakeholders – especially among decision-makers
 - inserting and scaffolding SD concepts throughout the curriculum, building logically from early childhood programmes up through continuing, adult education
 - testing learners for specific competency in ESD concepts, knowledge, skills, and values throughout the education cycle (including, for example, in PISA, the global Programme for International Student Assessment)
 - inserting ESD principles and practices throughout pre-service teacher education
 - developing and disseminating examples of good ESD curricula, teacher manuals, and learning materials/activities at the classroom level
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Part of the discussion around future ESD priorities concerned the links between the post-2014 ESD framework and the post-2015 development agenda. This part of the consultation was not fully explored given the lack of knowledge of many participants of the current range of discourse around the post-2015 agenda. But there was general agreement that ESD (in itself and particularly post-2014) must be linked closely to this agenda. For example:

- that there is a unique opportunity for ESD to influence new EFA targets, new Millennium Development Goals, and any future Sustainable Development Goals
- that this opportunity is strengthened to the extent the ESD is seen as covering both poverty and social exclusion at the local level (e.g., based on cultural/linguistic status, geographic remoteness, gender) and challenges to the global environment
- that ESD needs to insist in the post-2015 discourse on a new educational paradigm based on peace, global citizenship, and sustainable development
- that ESD must be promoted as representing the “quality” piece of education.

Interlude. In this session, a panel discussion on the experiences of UNESCO Centres/Institutes linked to ESD presented reports from the following (see attached):

- Utak Chung, Director, Asia-Pacific Center for Education for International Understanding (APCEIU), Seoul
 - Zenaida Domingo, Interim Director, Southeast Asian Center for Lifelong Learning and Sustainable Development (SEA CLLSD), Manila
 - Kabir Shaikh, Interim Director, Mahatma Gandhi Centre for Education for Peace and Sustainable Development (MGIEP), New Delhi
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These institutions are different in many ways. APCEIU is a long-established, well-respected institution with a strong programme of research, advocacy, and training not only in Korea but throughout the region, having moved beyond “EIU” to cover a range of issues including peace, ESD, and global citizenship. SEA CLLSD has overcome a range of political, programmatic, and financial challenges to establish itself now as a legal, government-financed entity emphasising a life cycle (lifelong) approach to sustainable development. And MGIEP, the only UNESCO Category 1 institute in the region, after several years of gestation, is now on the verge of obtaining the needed facilities, staff, and budget to begin its critically important work of exploring the links between sustainable development and peace – all in the context of Gandhi’s philosophy.

C. ESD Partners

The small group discussions around the main partners to be involved in post-2014 activities did not produce many surprises. One clear conclusion was the need for stronger, more comprehensive “grand alliances” – global, national, and local. These should include not only educational institutions – the Ministry of Education at various levels; ASPnet schools; school boards/committees; universities and professional associations and research institutions, but also development agencies, particularly relevant UN agencies – UNESCO (offices, Chairs, and National Commissions), UNICEF, UNEP, UN Habitat, UNAIDS, FAO, UNDP, et al – and international NGOs. Also essential are media and communication organisations, youth organisations, and the private sector with corporate social responsibility activities and public-private partnerships. Multi-sectoral and interdisciplinary networks such as Regional Centres of Expertise on ESD under the auspices of UNU should be further promoted and enhanced.

Session II: Preparing the World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development 2014

Yoko Mochizuki, UNESCO Paris, and Shibao Tomoko, the Asia-Pacific Cultural Center for UNESCO (ACCU)

As mentioned above, following the presentation on current plans for the World Conference (see attached), no additional input from the consultation participants was considered necessary¹.

Session III: Preparing the End-of-DESD Report: Overview of monitoring and evaluation at UNESCO and regional contributions to data collection for ESD

Robert Didham and Paul Ofei-Manu of the Institute For Global Environmental Strategies in Tokyo presented a comprehensive review of the importance of M&E for ESD, an overview of current M&E initiatives, ongoing work and progress on the development of both quantitative and qualitative ESD indicators (e.g., related to capacities for effective ESD implementation and ESD content and processes), characteristics of and challenges to assessment processes, and the range of approaches that are useful in ESD M&E and reporting.

One particular challenge in ESD reporting and M&E is the need to more clearly identify correlations between ESD implementation/practice and learning performance and outcomes. If M&E of ESD is to serve as a tool for both learning from and improving current ESD, then it needs to support the clarification of what are effective interventions for improving ESD. In other words, from a policy standpoint the only clear way to validate effectiveness is be able to demonstrate a correlation between ESD inputs/throughputs and resulting outputs/outcomes. The inclusion of M&E mechanisms that can identify such correlations in the post-2014 ESD framework would be an important way to start achieving a clear knowledge of what supports transformative learning approaches.

A small group discussion focusing on indicators that could be used to measure progress in implementing the post-2014 ESD framework came up more often questions rather than suggestions:

- Is it possible to identify baseline (2005) data for comparison with end-of-decade data?
- Do the national strategies, action plans, and implementation processes and structures get assessed as well as ESD content, processes, and impact in the classroom?
- Do the indicators actually demonstrate any change that has taken place (e.g., in terms of a paradigm shift or more incremental change in systems)? For different sectors? At national, sub-national, community, and school (curriculum, teaching learning, environment, management) levels?
- Are indicators of socio-cultural change (e.g., related to language preservation and cultural empowerment) included?

¹ Although this topic was not discussed during the meeting, there was some informal discussion among participants.

- Are both quantitative and qualitative methods and indicators being used in ESD M&E.?
- Can ESD assessments identify, analyse, and disseminate good practices in terms of inputs, processes, and initiatives?
- Should the M&E of ESD be done by governments based on tools and procedures designed by UNESCO?
- Should they require school-level, self-assessments by schools and local communities (e.g., whether all dimensions of ESD have been incorporated in the school curriculum)?
- Finally, will a more systematic and comprehensive M&E plan be designed from the beginning in the post-2014 framework?

Some specific Indicators to measure progress in the post-2014 framework were also listed; e.g.,

- the percentage of local ESD content in the school curriculum
- the percentage of teachers who can speak and teach in their learner's mother tongue
- the percentage of time dedicated to activities taught by community members and linked to local content
- the percentage of a government's total budget devoted to ESD activities?

One group summarised the essential of M&E for ESD as having to be:

- H – holistic
- O – owned
- P – participatory and based on partnerships
- E – empowering

D. Challenges of ESD implementation

The final outcomes of the consultation presented by Etienne Clement, Deputy Director of the UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau of Education contained many of the above conclusions but ended with a focus on the **challenges remaining in the further enrichment and expansion of ESD post-2014**. These included the challenges of:

- **promoting a comprehensive understanding of and consensus around the nature of ESD** -- inter-disciplinary, interconnected, holistic, and integrated -- especially among key decision-makers and their political masters
- **developing a clear, generic definition of ESD** – once and for all -- and conceptualising the links among (inter alia) peace, sustainable development, global citizenship, and education for international understanding

- **presenting ESD in a clear, simple way** (and not a long list of demands) to all important stakeholders
- **gaining a better balance among the various dimensions of ESD** – not only environmental (biodiversity, deforestation, water management, green workplace practices) but also economic and socio-cultural (e.g., the maintenance of local languages and traditions, the status of ethnic minorities, the preservation of cultural heritage)
- **developing an evidence-based, national policy framework for ESD** to ensure that it is infused/internalised in all levels and areas of education and using ESD to “re-think” or transform education, systemically and holistically
- **moving from pilot to policy**, from small- to large-scale, and from the margins of the Ministry of Education system to be internalised throughout the education system
- **raising the international and national visibility of ESD** (e.g., through links to international obligations and agendas; the insertion of ESD in national development/SD plans; the establishment of national ESD committees)
- **developing stronger partnerships and high-level political support** (e.g., ministerial champions, parliamentarians)
- **promoting broader, longer-term, global action** -- not only narrow, short-term, local action
- **building the capacity of governments** to not only conceptualise and implement ESD but also reconcile differences among stakeholders
- **ensuring that essential concepts of ESD are integrated into the core curriculum** of learners and teachers
- **using more systematic research and innovation in ESD** to develop and then prove the effectiveness of “good practices”
- **disseminating and adapting such practices** to other nations, systems, and schools
- **pooling resources** (not only financial) across ESD-related institutions – to prevent duplication and build complementarities (e.g., clearinghouses, division of labour)
- **internalising ESD in regular budget planning processes**
- **framing ESD in terms of specific targets**, with benchmarks for learning achievement outcomes, which leaders can understand (e.g., at regional ministerial meetings and internal, inter-ministerial coordination meetings)
- **determining the impact of ESD** on the values and behaviours of learners
- finally, not repeating the same conclusions and the same recommendations at every ESD consultation (among the converted) but instead **taking more managed, systematic, assertive action to win more converts and make more visible changes in education systems around the world.**