



Ahmedabad Plan of Action

In September 2015 global agreement was reached to pursue a sustainable development path for humanity via an historic set of Sustainable Development Goals. Achieving this development path requires wide scale societal transformation, and a transition away from actions, systems, mind-sets and lifestyle choices that have eroded and degraded the systems that sustain life on Earth. It requires ongoing expansion and urgent amplification of a new, more socially just and sustainable world order characterised by practices, processes and systems that contribute pro-actively to the well-being of all people, and all life on Earth. This new emerging world order is a necessity and urgent action is needed to amplify and expand those actions, systems and lifestyle choices that characterise a more just and sustainable world.

Business as usual is no longer an option. Education and all institutions involved in sustainable development need to urgently transform to act accordingly in a sustainable world. Education is a driver of change in facilitating the effective implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in formal, non-formal, informal and life-long learning contexts and should be inclusive of all people. As such, education should be recognised within each of the goals; and as a cross cutting, integrating force and enabler necessary for realising all of the Sustainable Development Goals. Education for Sustainable Development empowers learners to transform themselves and the society they live in.

A turning point

2015 was a significant policy turning point for sustainable living at a global level. This turning point was achieved by two high-profile meetings where, in September 2015, 193 countries approved and finalised the global goals for sustainable development. This water-shed development was followed by the Paris Agreement on Climate Change at COP21 which took place in December 2015 and which agreed to work towards retaining global warming at 1.5 degrees Celsius.

Additionally, at the World Education Forum in Incheon in May 2015, the world agreed that Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) has a key role to play in strengthening the quality and

relevance of all forms of education, and that education is a key enabler for sustainable development. This consolidates the objectives of the Global Action Programme on Education for Sustainable Development:

- **Objective 1:** to reorient education and learning so that everyone has the opportunity to acquire the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that empower them to contribute to sustainable development.
- **Objective 2:** to strengthen education and learning in all agendas, programmes and activities that promote sustainable development.

2015 was a critical year for deciding important goals and targets. 2016 has already commenced with the development and expansion of strategies and actions towards achieving these goals. With a mobilising vision of action towards sustainability, with education as a driver; over 750 participants from 22 Countries met at the Centre for Environmental Education in Ahmedabad on 11th- 13th January, 2016. This Ahmedabad Plan of Action overviews the implementation and action outcomes of this meeting which addressed the role of education in amplifying actions for implementing the 17 SDGs through a range of 20 workshops.

Outcomes of the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (UN DESD) show the existence of ESD policies, activities and expertise around the world. These are already being expanded under the new Global Action Programme on Education for Sustainable Development which is led by UNESCO and implemented in partnership with a wide variety of other stakeholders. The finalization of the 17 SDGs, with their 169 targets provides a new context for the further upscaling and mainstreaming of ESD.

Additionally, in preparation for the second session of the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA) in May 2016 and thereafter, UNEP will continue to support implementation of the SDGs. This will be done through its objectives to integrate environmental education and training which ensures strong sustainability responses to critical issues such as climate change, biodiversity loss and ecosystems degradation, and the increased risk of disasters and conflicts. Other crucial issues include the sound management of chemicals and waste, the development of a green economy, sustainable consumption and production, and sustainable lifestyles through relevant social and policy actions to support the effective implementation of all 17 SDGs.

Case studies at local, national and international levels profiled at the conference show unequivocally that education can drive action and change towards sustainable development. While Governments at various levels, including municipalities, businesses, NGOs, education and research institutions as well as UN Agencies, are showing various forms of commitment to sustainable development goals as well as the INDCs announced in Paris, there is need to amplify the role of education in these processes and institutions. Although education is recognized as a goal in its own right (Goal 4), its potential as an agent of change towards sustainability across the other 16 goals has not, as yet, been adequately mobilised or understood. Where appropriate case studies should contribute to policy making and inform decision making.

The conference recognized that the transformation required by the agreed upon sustainable development goals will require an in depth re-thinking of education itself. Also acknowledged is the fact that dominant education systems have tended to impose a narrow conception of rationality at the expense of emotional understanding, learning acquired through life's experiences and traditional knowledge systems. Additionally, the transformative education that is now called for is not amenable to easily defined outcomes or measurement. Education must be reconceived in a way that allows space for diverse ways of knowing and new ways of being and becoming that reflect inclusivity in the true sense of the term.

For those who are developing plans for implementing the SDG's it is noted that:

- SDG's are interconnected and must be approached in an integrated way
- Education must be included into the implementation plan for each goal. Education also provides a means for integrating the goals in various contexts.
- Educational institutions (involved in formal, non-formal and life-long learning) have an important role to play in co-creating the sustainability transition together with other stakeholders and in all sectors of society

Further observations from the conference include:

1. The educational community needs to continue to engage with sectors and stakeholders outside of the education sector on sustainable development to ensure that education is integrated into society and sustainable development processes, through an active, integrated approach to education and learning that recognises the value of multi-actor engagement and co-learning.
2. Students and youth can and need to play a major role as change agents and should be respected as equal citizens with important capabilities to both lead and contribute to the transformation of society towards sustainability.
3. Although several institutions, mechanisms and programmes were created during the DESD many of these still need to be expanded into a wider range of contexts. Ways of mobilising new technologies to enable the kind of learning that will help to achieve the SDGs is a challenge and needs to be pro-actively explored, especially open learning systems and resources.
4. It is important to recognize that multiple stakeholders and actors have a role to play in achieving the SDGs and INDCs and that whole institution approaches need to be strengthened.
5. There is a need to recognise the centrality of the role of women in achieving the SDGs and this should be done through a spirit of openness to learn from all organisations and communities.
6. Integration of systems thinking, complexity thinking, and the adoption of an integrated, critical, transformative and reflexive approach to learning and the SDGs is needed. Emphasis on an integrated approach to the SDGs should continue to foreground the interrelated nature of environment, society and economy.
7. Transformative learning that is dialogical, holistic, humanistic, creative and critical should be foregrounded. Such learning should also be inclusive of a variety of forms of knowledge, and should help to create vibrant and rich ecologies of knowledge for transformative praxis. A transformative learning model should engender inclusivity in the true sense of the word, consciousness raising, critical reflection, conviction, desire to change and contribute to the well being of all.

8. There is need to recognise, strengthen and amplify the work and role of various education and ESD networks at national, regional and international levels in enabling the achievement of the SDGs.
 9. Monitoring and evaluation needs to recognize that a programme impacts on and across several SDGs and should be applied and developed in an integrated manner. Besides formal evaluation / measurement, space should also be created for informal / non-formal evaluations that are reflexive and generative of changed practices.
 10. It is recognised that measurement plays an important role in tracking SDG outcomes. However, non-measurable factors such as dignity, empathy, passion, commitment, kindness, care and vigour are crucial to create an enabling environment for educational transformation towards sustainability.
 11. For government the immediate task will be to take account of education and test current development plans from a SDG perspective. Sustainable development requires a learning-centred, integrated and reflexive methodology for planning, collaborating, executing and monitoring, which will require close co-operation with different departments and across institutions.
 12. There is a need to ensure adequate resources including funding for ESD.
 13. There is also a need to provide support for the active and meaningful engagement of universities in contributing to international policy discourse and implementation towards achieving the SDGs through research, education, training and outreach and networking activities.
-