

International Conference  
**Education as a Driver for  
Sustainable Development Goals**

January 11-13, 2016. CEE, Ahmedabad, INDIA



## Investing in Environmental Education and Building Human Capacity towards Achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2030

### Opening Ceremony

Statement by H.E. Madam Oyun Sanjaasuren, President of the first United Nations Environment Assembly and Member of Parliament of Mongolia



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Distinguished participants, ladies and gentlemen,

Today, I am privileged send my message of congratulations to the opening ceremony of the International Conference on Education as a Driver for the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals. I wish to thank the Centre for Environment Education (CEE) and the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, Government of India for hosting this conference at the beginning of the year 2016. I wish to also thank UNEP and UNESCO colleagues for organizing this conference.

This is the first international conference on education following the landmark adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in September 2015, and the Paris Agreement on climate change at the COP21 of the UNFCCC just a month ago. 2016 marks the beginning year for the implementation of our common goals and commitment for a sustainable future. And education is key to cultivate people's skillset, competencies, mindset, behavior and lifestyle for that future.

I was honored to be elected as the President of the first United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) in 2014. Today, I would like to take this opportunity to underscore the importance of **environmental education** for achieving sustainable development goals.

**First of all, environmental education forms the foundation of our knowledge, understanding and awareness of environmental challenges and issues. And this is where actions can possibly begin to be taken.**

Over the past 250 years, our relationship with the environment has gone through a far accelerated change. Since the Industrial Revolution, we are becoming an ever more influential and defining part of our planet. The collective impact of 7 billion of us today is changing the atmosphere and

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the biosphere at an unprecedented order or magnitude. The challenges have never been so profound and complex.

On the other hand, we are also becoming more capable nowadays to develop and use of new scientific tools and technologies to manage and adapt to changes, restore destroyed ecosystems, enhance resilience and shift towards a new economic paradigm.

The magnitude of human total impacts on the planet tells that sustainability must come from a conscious, wise choice of the common. Education empowers us to make sensible choices and explore better solutions for achieving our goals. More than just imparting knowledge or providing answers, good education nurtures creative and critical thinking and cultivates people who can develop new solutions and understand issues of complexity.

**Environmental education as a cross-cutting issue is instrumental to the implementation of all the 17 sustainable development goals, especially through empowering behavioral changes.** It enhances our resilience and capacity in ending poverty; promotes food security, nutrition, healthy lives and well-being; safeguards quality education, lifelong learning opportunities for all and reduces inequality; contributes to gender equality; conserves ecosystems and their services; promotes green economies, efficient energy generation and consumption; provides knowledge and skills to meet the needs for a resource efficient and more sustainable economic growth and industrialization; encourages the development of green cities; and develops capacity for sustainable consumption and production.

**Education holds a promise for sustainable future. However, we must note the existing gaps in education quality and accessibility from country to country.** Thus, national support and investment in education should go hand in hand with support to strengthening global networks, such as the Global Universities Partnership on Environment and Sustainability (GUPES), to bridge the gaps through facilitating exchanges and cooperation among hundreds of universities around the world, sharing knowledge, expertise, education resources and opportunities.

**In May 2016, United Nations Environmental Assembly (UNEA-2) will be convened at UNEP's HQ in Nairobi. Mongolia and other countries have proposed a draft resolution on "Investing in Human Capacity through Enhanced Environmental Education and Training". I wish to see the adoption of this resolution by member States, and I truly believe that, by putting education at the heart of the SDGs, we can make sustainable development sustainable.**

Let's reflect on Mahatma Gandhi's words, "Live as you would die tomorrow, and learn as you would live forever." Our passion for knowledge and truth has been driving human civilization over millions of years. I hope this Conference will send a strong message to the global community on the important role of education at the turning point of humanity towards a sustainable future.

I wish you successful deliberations over the next three days.