This document calls on governments, civil society and in particular educators to prioritize processes that develop and strengthen education for sustainable development (ESD).

The world has changed since the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002. While there have been significant initiatives and progress has been made, the scale of effort is still overshadowed by the scope of the problem. For instance, human-induced climate change is creating a long-lasting ecological crisis with severe economic and social consequences. Recently the global economic crisis has drawn attention to the problem of borrowing from resources that do not exist. Poverty, conflict and social injustice remain critical issues on the global agenda.

A renewed sense of commitment to the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development is required. Formal, informal and non-formal education and learning processes for sustainability must be strengthened and prioritized. This document supports and builds on the concepts and values that are put forward within UNESCO’s International Implementation Scheme for Education for Sustainable Development and in the Earth Charter.

The purpose of ESD is to reorient education in order to contribute to a sustainable future for the common good of present and future generations. ESD recognizes the interdependence of environmental, social and economic perspectives and the dependence of humanity on a healthy biosphere. Participation and involvement are necessary components of ESD, with an emphasis on empowerment and agency for active citizenship, human rights and societal change. Re-orientation is necessary at all levels and in all phases of education, and encompasses community learning, thus making ESD a wider process challenging the form and purpose of education itself.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

1. ACCESS FOR ALL TO A PROCESS OF LIFELONG LEARNING: Early childhood is a natural starting point for education for sustainable development in order to promote educational access for all people within a process of lifelong learning. Education has the enormous challenge of reorienting curricula and learning processes towards sustainability and ensuring professional development of educators to take up these new challenges. Such a process should be a dialogic and participatory process of learning which values the knowledge and experience that people bring to education. Access for all to education is a necessary, but insufficient condition for ESD. ESD needs to transcend understandings of access for all, and be of a quality and form that helps society to reorient and transform towards sustainability.

2. GENDER: ESD should actively promote critical engagement with norms that define gendered ways of being, doing and living together, and should particularly value the role and contribution of women in bringing about social change and ensuring human well-being.
3. LEARNING FOR CHANGE: Learning for change is based on relating multiple perspectives to each other at all times. These perspectives include: space, time, culture and different disciplines, as well as a non-anthropogenic perspective. ESD development is based on principles and values as well as a holistic and interdisciplinary approach. This involves learning to know, learning to do and learning to be, and learning to live together and should involve translation of knowledge into real life contexts. It should include empowerment for acting for social change, examining identities, perspectives and power relations, and should include critical media literacy and action competence. Working with multiple perspectives will require acknowledgement of, and respect for, contested views and interests, and recognition that these are a valuable source for intercultural dialogue, learning and reflexivity.

4. NETWORKS, ARENAS AND PARTNERSHIPS: ESD should promote relationships between different educational levels, sites and perspectives, and recognize that they are inter-dependent in the wider context of social reorientation towards sustainability. Networks and partnerships that strengthen international and intercultural cooperation and knowledge exchange should be extended and supported. This should foster dialogue, and create new arenas for local and global interaction and change, and different ways of sharing and using resources. At a community level new arenas for dialogue and interchange should also be oriented towards the local/global interface, and social change. Further, emphasizing relationships and interdependencies in ESD involves integrating research and practice.

5. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TO STRENGTHEN ESD ACROSS ALL SECTORS: In order to strengthen ESD, professional development must include teacher education, professional education for educational leaders, and community educators. Education of extension officers, business trainers, journalists and others involved in education in its widest sense are equally important. Professional development should be participatory in orientation and should empower educators involved in ESD to share their knowledge and experience widely. Participation, building on existing knowledge and experience in such professional development, is important in learning and democracy.

6. ESD IN CURRICULUM: ESD should be embedded in curricula, steering documents, and learning materials. This includes curriculum review and development of new curricula. Reorientation of education requires that multi-, inter- and transdisciplinary curriculum approaches be developed to extend beyond current disciplinary approaches to working with knowledge. This should involve bringing in other forms of knowledge that exist into formal curriculum.

7. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN PRACTISE: Educational settings should practice values and principles of sustainable development to provide learners to participate in and model solutions to sustainable development issues. This would expand the space for ESD to allow for the development of new behaviour norms in educational settings.

8. RESEARCH: There is a need to promote research, evaluation and practitioner enquiry in order to strengthen and extend education for sustainable development. Research must embrace the multiple sites and foci of ESD, include community participatory research, and mobilize indigenous and local knowledge. Further, it is necessary to support transdisciplinary research and engage civil society in creating solutions to sustainability problems and social change.