WANTED – SUSTAINABLE CAMPUSES IN THE ASIA PACIFIC

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1. Introduction

In December 2002, resolution 57/254 on the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly and UNESCO was designated as lead agency for the promotion of the Decade (http://portal.unesco.org). This year, 2005, marks the beginning of the Decade and provides universities throughout the world with an important challenge. A draft International Implementation Plan is in place and is outlined in the next section which is taken from the Executive Summary (http://portal.unesco.org/education).

2. International Implementation Plan

“The Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD) is a far-reaching and complex undertaking. Its conceptual basis, socio-economic implications, and environmental and cultural connections make it an enterprise, which potentially touches on every aspect of life.

The overall goal of the DESD is to integrate the values inherent in sustainable development into all aspects of learning to encourage changes in behavior that allow for a more sustainable and just society for all.
The basic vision of the DESD is a world where everyone has the opportunity to benefit from education and learn the values, behaviour and lifestyles required for a sustainable future and for positive societal transformation. This translates into five objectives, to:

1. Give an enhanced profile to the central role of education and learning in the common pursuit of sustainable development;
2. Facilitate links and networking, exchange and interaction among stakeholders in ESD;
3. Provide a space and opportunity for refining and promoting the vision of, and transition to sustainable development – through all forms of learning and public awareness;
4. Foster increased quality of teaching and learning in education for sustainable development;
5. Develop strategies at every level to strengthen capacity in ESD.

This plan presents three key areas of sustainable development – society, environment and economy with culture as an underlying dimension.

Society: an understanding of social institutions and their role in change and development, as well as the democratic and participatory systems which give opportunity for the expression of opinion, the selection of governments, the forging of consensus and the resolution of differences.

Environment: an awareness of the resources and fragility of the physical environment and the affects on it of human activity and decisions, with a commitment to factoring environmental concerns into social and economic policy development.

Economy: a sensitivity to the limits and potential of economic growth and their impact on society and on the environment, with a commitment to assess personal and societal levels of consumption out of concern for the environment and for social justice.

The values, diversity, knowledge, languages and worldviews associated with culture strongly influence the way issues of education for sustainable development are dealt with in specific national contexts. In this sense, culture is just not a collection of particular manifestations (song, dance, dress, …), but a way of being, relating, behaving, believing and acting through which people live out in their lives and that is in a constant process of change.

ESD is fundamentally 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. Education enables us to understand ourselves and others and our links with the wider natural and social environment, and this understanding serves as a durable basis for building respect. Along with a sense of justice, responsibility, exploration and dialogue, ESD aims to move us to adopting behaviours and practices that enable all to live a full life without being deprived of basics.

ESD mirrors the concern for education of high quality, demonstrating characteristics: such as:
Interdisciplinary and holistic: learning for sustainable development embedded in the whole curriculum, not as a separate subject;
Values-driven: sharing the values and principles underpinning sustainable development;
Critical thinking and problem solving: leading to confidence in addressing the dilemmas and challenges of sustainable development;
Multi-method: word, art, drama, debate, experience, .. different pedagogies for modelling processes;
Participatory decision-making: learners participate in decisions on how they are to learn;
Applicability: learning experiences are integrated in day to day personal and professional life;
Locally relevant: addressing local as well as global issues, and using the language(s) which learners most commonly use.

ESD will be shaped by a range of perspectives from all fields of human development and including all the acute challenges the world faces. ESD cannot afford to ignore their implications for a more just and more sustainable process of change. The plan notes the important perspectives provided by: human rights, peace and human security, gender equality, cultural diversity and intercultural understanding, health, HIV/AIDS, governance, natural resources, climate change, rural development, sustainable urbanisation, disaster prevention and mitigation, poverty reduction, corporate responsibility and accountability, and the market economy.

ESD is for everyone, at whatever stage of life they are. It takes place, therefore, within a perspective of lifelong learning, engaging all possible learning spaces, formal, non-formal and informal, from early childhood to adult life. ESD calls for a re-orientation of educational approaches – curriculum and content, pedagogy and examinations. Spaces for learning include non-formal learning, community-based organisations and local civil society, the workplace, formal education, technical and vocational training, teacher training, higher education educational inspectorates, policy-making bodies, ..and beyond.

It is true to say that everyone is a stakeholder in education for sustainable development. All of us will feel the impact of its relative success or failure, and all of us affect the impact of ESD by our behaviour, which may be supportive or undermining. Complementary roles and responsibilities devolve to a number of bodies and groups at different levels: local (sub-national), national, regional and international. At each level, stakeholders may be part of government (or intergovernmental at regional and international levels), civil society and non-governmental organisations, or in the private sector. The media and advertising agencies will support broad public awareness. In addition, indigenous peoples have a particular role, having an intimate knowledge of the sustained use of their environments, and being particularly vulnerable to unsustainable development.

Seven interlinked strategies are proposed for the Decade: advocacy and vision building; consultation and ownership; partnership and networks; capacity building and training; research and innovation; information and communication technologies; monitoring and evaluation. Together they form a coherent approach to the incremental increase over the Decade of the promotion and implementation of ESD. They will ensure that change in public attitudes and educational approaches keep pace with the evolving challenges of sustainable development.

DESD implementation will depend on the strength of stakeholder commitment and
cooperation at local (sub-national), national, regional and international levels. Networks and alliances will be the crucial element, forging a common agenda in relevant forums. A small but dynamic and high-quality ESD Hub at national level will bring energy to promotion and implementation, receiving input regularly from a multi-stakeholder ESD Consultative Group. At the regional and international levels, an ESD Caucus and DESD Inter-Agency Committee respectively will push the ESD agenda forward through focused meetings and events responding to particular concerns. A high-profile international group of ESD Champions, well known and committed personalities, will serve to spearhead the movement.

The outcomes of the DESD will be seen in the lives of thousands of communities and millions of individuals as new attitudes and values inspire decisions and actions making sustainable development a more attainable ideal. For the DESD process as such, eleven expected outcomes are derived from the DESD objectives and relate to changes in public awareness, in the education system and in the integration of ESD into all development planning. These outcomes form the basis for indicators used in monitoring and evaluation; however, stakeholder groups at each level will decide specific indicators and the kinds of data needed to verify them. Qualitative indicators must figure equally with quantitative indicators to capture the multiple connections and societal depth of ESD and its impact.

And so the scene is set by UNESCO for a Decade of active involvement by Universities in the implementation of sustainability knowledge in society. However, other initiatives should not be forgotten. First the Talloires Declaration.

3. The Talloires declaration

Members will be well aware of the Declaration by University Presidents for a Sustainable Future (the Talloires Declaration) which was introduced in October 1990 with the following rationale:

“Higher education is beginning to recognize the need to reflect the reality that humanity is affecting the environment in ways which are historically unprecedented and which are potentially devastating for both natural ecosystems and ourselves. Since colleges and universities are an integral part of the global economy and since they prepare most of the professionals who develop, manage and teach in society’s public, private and non-governmental institutions, they are uniquely positioned to influence the direction we choose to take as a society. As major contributors to the values, health and well being of society, higher education has a fundamental responsibility to teach, train and do research for sustainability. We believe that the success of higher education in the twenty-first century will be judged by our ability to put forward a bold agenda that makes sustainability and the environment a cornerstone of academic practice.”

(http://www.ulsf.org/about.html).

As at March 17 2005 there are 314 signatories. Each signatory commits to the following actions:

1. Increase Awareness of Environmentally Sustainable Development

Use every opportunity to raise public, government, industry, foundation, and university awareness by openly addressing the urgent need to move toward an environmentally sustainable future.
2. Create an Institutional Culture of Sustainability
Encourage all universities to engage in education, research, policy formation, and information exchange on population, environment, and development to move toward global sustainability.

3. Educate for Environmentally Responsible Citizenship
Establish programs to produce expertise in environmental management, sustainable economic development, population, and related fields to ensure that all university graduates are environmentally literate and have the awareness and understanding to be ecologically responsible citizens.

4. Foster Environmental Literacy For All
Create programs to develop the capability of university faculty to teach environmental literacy to all undergraduate, graduate, and professional students.

5. Practice Institutional Ecology
Set an example of environmental responsibility by establishing institutional ecology policies and practices of resource conservation, recycling, waste reduction, and environmentally sound operations.

6. Involve All Stakeholders
Encourage involvement of government, foundations, and industry in supporting interdisciplinary research, education, policy formation, and information exchange in environmentally sustainable development. Expand work with community and nongovernmental organizations to assist in finding solutions to environmental problems.

7. Collaborate for Interdisciplinary Approaches
Convene university faculty and administrators with environmental practitioners to develop interdisciplinary approaches to curricula, research initiatives, operations, and outreach activities that support an environmentally sustainable future.

8. Enhance Capacity of Primary and Secondary Schools
Establish partnerships with primary and secondary schools to help develop the capacity for interdisciplinary teaching about population, environment, and sustainable development.

9. Broaden Service and Outreach Nationally and Internationally
Work with national and international organizations to promote a worldwide university effort toward a sustainable future.

10. Maintain the Movement
Establish a Secretariat and a steering committee to continue this momentum, and to inform and support each other's efforts in carrying out this declaration.

Universities have a partial but a significant responsibility for the education of future generations and will educate many future leaders of governments, industry and society. For example, at The Australian National University, a signatory of the Talloires Declaration, important contributions are being made to address environmental and societal aspects related to the goal of sustainable society. Efforts are made individually, in separate academic silos, as well as through cross-cutting activities through the Institute of the Environment and ANUgreen, the University's environmental management program, run by the Facilities and Services Division and offering advice, support and practical solutions for recycling, establishing
a greener office, stormwater pollution prevention, heating and cooling advice, water saving ideas and transport tips (http://www.anu.edu.au/facilities/anugreen/about.html).

Universities are important social actors and need to combine their strengths in the quest for sustainability and a sustainable future.

A lesser known organisation in the Asia Pacific is a network for Sustainability that has been established in Europe called Copernicus.

3. The Copernicus Campus

The Copernicus Campus is a Virtual Sustainability Campus designed to help introduce Sustainable Development in higher education institutions in Europe (see http://www.copernicus-campus.org). It has a particular focus on the area of lifelong learning and the management of the university, where the capacity to foster change in attitudes and procedures is greatest. The role of the Copernicus Campus relates to the question of what universities can do to help society meet the challenge of sustainable development. The organisation perceives itself as a partner of industry, governments, international organizations and other associations in a common effort to raise awareness for making sustainability a major focus of higher education. Hence it concentrates upon:

- The generation of new knowledge on sustainability;
- Spreading of knowledge on sustainability through education, training and awareness raising;
- Spreading of knowledge on sustainability to other stakeholders;
- The implementation of sustainable management practices at university level.

The Copernicus University Charter for Sustainable Development has been signed by 319 members in Europe.

Signature constitutes a commitment to secure the support of their university, teachers and students alike, in adopting and implementing environmental guidelines which are consistent with the Charter.

Like the Talloires Declaration it has ten principles of action:

1. Institutional commitment: Universities shall demonstrate real commitment to the principle and practice of environmental protection and sustainable development within the academic milieu.

2. Environmental ethics: Universities shall promote among teaching staff, students and the public at large sustainable consumption patterns and an ecological lifestyle, while fostering programmes to develop the capacities of the academic staff to teach environmental literacy.

3. Education of university employees: Universities shall provide education, training and encouragement to their employees on environmental issues, so that they can pursue their work in an environmentally responsible manner.

4. Programmes in environmental education: Universities shall incorporate an environmental perspective in all their work and set up environmental education programmes involving both teachers and researchers as well as students - all of whom should be exposed to the global challenges of environment and development, irrespective of their field of study.
5. Interdisciplinarity: Universities shall encourage interdisciplinary and collaborative education and research programmes related to sustainable development as part of the institution's central mission. Universities shall also seek to overcome competitive instincts between disciplines and departments.

6. Dissemination of knowledge: Universities shall support efforts to fill in the gaps in the present literature available for students, professionals, decision-makers and the general public by preparing information didactic material, organizing public lectures, and establishing training programmes. They should also be prepared to participate in environmental audits.

7. Networking: Universities shall promote interdisciplinary networks of environmental experts at the local, national, regional and international levels, with the aim of collaborating on common environmental projects in both research and education. For this, the mobility of students and scholars should be encouraged.

8. Partnerships: Universities shall take the initiative in forging partnerships with other concerned sectors of society, in order to design and implement coordinated approaches, strategies and action plans.

9. Continuing education programmes: Universities shall devise environmental educational programmes on these issues for different target groups: e.g. business, governmental agencies, non-governmental organizations, the media.

10. Technology transfer: Universities shall contribute to educational programmes designed to transfer educationally sound and innovative technologies and advanced management methods.

Comment

As academics with an interest in resolving conflicting social, environmental and economic issues for the benefit of present and future generations we are all participants in the lifelong promotion of education for sustainable development. Let us know how you think we can best contribute towards the Decade. Does a similar organisation to the Copernicus Campus exist in the Asia Pacific? Should one be established? Or is the Talloires Declaration sufficient for our purposes?

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