

Think Globally Act Locally: Environment Education Has Always Been Here

Lucille C. Gregorio

Consultant, UNESCO National Commission of the Philippines

Department of Foreign Affairs

Manila

ABSTRACT

EE is not new – it has always been here. The Japanese government has fully confirmed the importance to education's '*think globally and act locally*', as a catalyst and driving force for human innovation and social transformation. It also maintains that the EE/ESD should include not only the teaching of a notion and a concrete image of what SD is, but the provision of norms of behavior in favor of the SD, and thereby urging people to transform their minds to acquire knowledge, skills, values, behavior and lifestyles in compliance with the SD. The evolution of the program EE – EPD – ESD is discussed in this paper, organized as follows: *I. The Historical Background; II. Major Constraints in EE Implementation; III. Agenda 21 Chapter 36 and EPD; IV. The UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development: UNESCO's Role as a Lead Agency; V. The Current Thrusts for Environment Education.*

Key Words: Think Globally and Act Locally, Agenda 21 Chapter 36, catalyst and driving force for human innovation and social transformation, comprehensive and holistic environmental education, building human capacities, equitable distribution of wealth, participation by the population in the process of decision-making, protection of environment, preservation of the cultural identity of the community, re-orienting the goal of education to Sustainable Development, UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development

Historical Background

Environment and nature have always been a center of the life of people since the Stone Age where men and women have always lived symbiotically. Ancient religions have been based on nature – humans worshiped the sun, stars, trees, rivers, mountains, etc. Mountains and rivers were made sacred and revered as Gods, thus protected from human exploitation. It is significant that valuing natural phenomena also brought about respect to the environment. Without labeling it as environmental education, people have been made aware that it is important to respect and protect the environment.

It was in 1972, during the Stockholm Conference where major problems of the human environment, was discussed. It was recommended that UNESCO and other agencies establish an international interdisciplinary programme in environmental education, targeting all levels of education, in and out of school. In October 1975, in Belgrade, the International Environmental Education Programme (IIEP) led by both UNESCO and UNEP was launched. The Belgrade charter spelled out the framework and objectives of environmental education. IIEP was to impart knowledge concerning nature. Follow-up regional workshops were organized. Asia held a regional workshop in Bangkok in 1976.¹ 15 recommendations were proposed under four programme areas:

environment education, personnel training, non-formal environmental education, and the development of teaching-learning materials for environmental education. It was in 1977,² at the Tbilisi Conference when environmental education was truly recognized "as a learning process that increases people's knowledge and awareness about the environment and associated challenges, that develops the necessary skills and expertise to address the challenges, and fosters attitudes, motivations, and commitments to make informed decisions and take responsible actions". The Conference focused on environmental education, introduction of legislation to protect the social and physical environment.

In 1980, Asian countries, during the regional follow-up in Bangkok made specific recommendations for implementing EE. IEEP immediately made a follow-up during 1981 and 1982, wherein a global survey was conducted to identify the needs and priorities of member states with regard to EE and training. Results of the survey indicated that almost all the countries need training in all education levels (primary to tertiary), in-school and out-of-school, especially in dealing with the curriculum, research and experimentation. Environmental training was also required in the following areas: conservation of resources, pollution, nutrition and health, urban and disaster management. Subsequently, IEEP sourcebooks were produced for formal and non-formal environment education, prototype modules for school education and teacher training guides for EE methodologies and multi-media packages among others. The materials were presented in the UNESCO-UNEP International Congress in 1987 – with 300 specialists from 100 countries with the participation of the World Conservation Union (IUCN), and other international organizations.

IEEP a global programme managed by both UNESCO and UNEP, accessed the information available (CONNECT as a publication – which up to this time is still being published by UNESCO Headquarters, Paris); undertook research and experimentation; developed educational programmes and teaching materials; trained education personnel; promoted technical and vocational education; educated and informed the public; supported general higher education; organized special training; and set-up international and regional co-operation programs. During that time, it was proposed to designate 1990-2000 as the "World Decade for Environmental Education," with emphasis on interrelationships between people and the biosphere in their full range of economic, social, political and ecological dimensions.

Major Constraints in EE Implementation

Environment Education has dealt with many problems and issues, focusing on the need for change, for sustainability, for awareness etc. using different modes of delivery. A whole range of organizations in the public, private and 'popular' sectors are involved, using different messages to target different audiences. Examples include - local and national governments, private sector, academia, NGOs, professional bodies, research, organizations, donor agencies, UN and international organizations, community and citizens groups, media etc. The target is usually the man-on-the-street, the ordinary citizen, but has also included policy and decision makers, business and industry etc. depending on the scale of EE.

There were major constraints met in the implementation of EE. These were the : (1) difficulty in including innovations in the school programme because of the rigid centralized bureaucracy and traditional teacher training curriculum; (2) complex interdisciplinary nature of EE and its integration in various subject disciplines and consequent changes in the teacher training programs which often

¹ UNESCO Bangkok Publication, 1976.

² UNESCO, Tbilisi Declaration, 1978.

conflicted with traditional beliefs and approaches; (3) inadequate training of teachers especially in handling/integrating EE in their classroom transactions; (4) difficulty in undertaking field-based and participatory activities due to the traditional teacher-centered, and examination-based teaching; and the lack of resource persons to conduct the teacher training; (5) lack of authentic updated materials/information regarding the environment and associated problems; (6) non-availability of tools to assess impact of training programmes; (7) lack of research in the field of EE methodologies and competencies; and (8) resistance to change on the part of the teacher. It was also a challenge to renovate the initial EE concepts which were concentrated on nature, overlooking the socio-cultural, economic and political dimensions of environmental protection.

Agenda 21, Chapter 36 and EPD

Environment, Population and Human Development (EPD) was adopted by over 170 countries during the 27th session of the UNESCO General Conference, 25 October to 16 November 1993, in Paris. It was singled out by the former Director General Federico Mayor as one of UNESCO's immediate priorities, taking into account the recommendations of UNCED (Agenda 21 Chapter 36) and ICPEd (the first International Congress on Population Education and Development, Istanbul 1993). It was meant to focus on: (1) sustainable development taking into account the importance of human dignity in improving the quality of life and of the environment, while promoting a culture of peace, solidarity and international understanding; (2) the diversity of life and the balance between reasonable human activities and the need to preserve natural ecosystems; (3) a global and local perspective with regard to the impact of global environment and population change; (4) building human capacities, promoting people participation and cooperation among people and institutions; and (5) re-orienting and improving the quality of education and the means to disseminate knowledge on aspects of human sustainable development.

Three principles were made the basis for the implementation strategies of EPD: These were: (1) refinement of the knowledge-base and development of action frameworks; (2) development of new or re-oriented education training and information programmes and materials and strengthening of capacities of member states; and (3) mobilization of the support of decision-makers and opinion leaders at international, regional and national levels in favor of project actions, with cooperation of major news agencies. The target audiences would involve those which would produce multiplier effects, in a wide range of environments and involving as many individuals and partners as possible. Many actions and pilot projects were undertaken in the region following the framework adopted, including support to "Model Building: Community Empowerment" Projects.

The UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development:

UNESCO's Role as a Lead Agency

The World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) held in Johannesburg, South Africa 2002 focused on ESD (Education for Sustainable Development). A declaration was adopted celebrating 2005-2014 as the Decade of ESD and UNESCO designated as the 'lead agency' for the celebration. ESD calls for a process to reorient educational policies, programs and practices so that education plays its part in building capacities of all members of society to work together to build a sustainable future. ESD came about from a broad understanding of development which includes: (1) equitable distribution of wealth; (2) participation by the population in the process of decision-making; (3) protection of environment; and (4) preservation of the cultural identity of the community. Later revision also added a global dimension, aimed at correcting the imbalance and inequality in the international distribution of the benefits of the global process, thus conceived as a process of societal

change, and it has become a normative, rather than a descriptive, concept which stipulates how things ought to be, not how they really are. With the shift of development models from 'all for economic growth' to 'equitable and sustainable people-centered development' in the late 20th century, the concept of development has considerably evolved and broadly redefined, which transcends economics to encompass its social, ethical, cultural and ecological dimensions as well.

The Japanese National Commission for UNESCO proposed the International Implementation Scheme on ESD in 2003 considering the diversity of developments in Asia and the Pacific.³ The proposal approved during the 112th UN General Assembly on July 29, 2003, identified seven items applicable to Asia and the Pacific, based on the concept "Think Globally, Act Locally." These are: (1) implementing ESD in conjunction with the MDGs which include poverty eradication, promoting universal primary education, equality of gender, reducing infant mortality, improving reproductive health, preventing contagious diseases and realizing a sustainable society in harmony with the environment, for each nation to achieve by 2015; (2) developing various educational programs, which meet the needs of local conditions in developing countries; (3) making developed countries aware that ESD is their own issue to deal with; (4) valuing the bonds of local communities; (5) improving the quality of education based on ESD; (6) taking measures to improve the quality of teachers in view of the importance of teachers' roles in ESD; and (7) realizing ESD in partnerships with concerned organizations and individuals. These proposals have been categorized in three dimensions, (a) common understanding; (b) policy changes, and (c) curriculum rearrangement. The proposal stressed the critical role of teachers in ESD.

UNESCO as the lead agency, has responsibilities in re-orienting the goal of education to SD; improving the relevance and quality of education; providing professional and technical support to Member States; promoting system wise reform of education within the framework of EFA, UNLD and MDGs; and coordinating stakeholder activities and strengthening partnership at local, national, regional and international levels. UNESCO advocates a new vision of education as 'the primary agent of transformation towards sustainable development', increasing people's capacities to transform their visions for society into reality, and links the new vision with other international priorities.⁴ Education could contribute to social cohesion and sustainable development in many ways. Education has been placed at the core of the value order, and values as the sustaining force in education. In serving the development needs of the people, both education and culture becomes a means to and an end of development⁵

The Current Thrusts for EE

Governments have accepted the notion that EE should be a part of all education that environmental problems are interdisciplinary, and direct experience in the natural world is an essential part of EE. The way education happens is as important as content learned.

Much of the current thrusts are for a comprehensive and holistic environmental education. This has been derived from Chapter 36 of Agenda 21 "promoting education, public awareness and training." Raising of public awareness and training are linked to virtually all environment issues and even more closely to meeting basic needs, capacity-building, data and information, science, and the role of partners. The Declaration and Recommendations of the Tbilisi Intergovernmental Conference on Environmental Education organized by UNESCO and UNEP in 1977 have provided the

³ Paper of Prof. Shuichi Nakayama during the NIER Seminar on ESD, 2004.

⁴ UNESCO's ESD Strategy, Paris, 2004

⁵ Zhou Nanzhao, Paper presented at the NIER Workshop, 2003.

fundamental principles for what we call today as "Education for a Sustainable Development." As environment educators, we are faced with a major challenge in promoting a sustainable future.

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Acronyms: EE: Environmental Education, EPD: Environment Population and Human Development, ESD: Education for Sustainable Development, EFA: Education For All, IEEP:International Environment Education Programme, MDG: Millenium Development Goals, SD: Sustainable Development, UNLD: United Nations Literacy Decade, UNEP: United Nations Environment Program, UNESCO: United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization