



# The Gothenburg Recommendations on Education for Sustainable Development

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Adopted November 12, 2008

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# The Gothenburg Recommendations on Education for Sustainable Development

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Adopted November 12, 2008

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the Swedish Ministry of Education and Research,  
the Swedish National Commission for UNESCO  
and the Swedish International Centre of Education  
for Sustainable Development (SWEDES).



**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 UN 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 UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development 2005-2014 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

The Gothenburg recommendations have been produced during a broad international process between the years of 2001-2008, see the document “Learning for Sustainable Development – The Gothenburg Story” page 55.

1.

Access for all  
to a process  
of lifelong  
learning



Early childhood is a natural starting point for ESD in order to promote educational access for all people within a process of life long 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.

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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 interdependent 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 trans-disciplinary 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.

20 1

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.





# Specific Recommendations



# Early Childhood Education

*Authors: Julie Davies, Ingrid Engdahl, Lorraine Otieno,  
Ingrid Pramling-Samuelsson, John Siraj-Blatchford, Priya Vallabh*

These recommendations are grounded on notions that children are competent, active agents in their own lives. They are affected by, and capable of, engaging with complex environmental and social issues. They steer away from romanticized notions of childhood as an arena of innocent play that positions all children as leading exclusively sheltered, safe and happy lives untouched by events around them.

## ACCESS FOR ALL TO A PROCESS OF LIFELONG LEARNING

It is imperative that Early Childhood Education (ECE) is recognized as the starting point for lifelong learning within education for sustainability. There are still a large proportion of children who do not have access to ECE. As ECE offers such a valuable starting point for Early Childhood Education for Sustainability (ECEfS), is therefore of highest priority that access to all ECE services is also enabled for all children.

As emphasized in the preamble, it is within these early years that children present the greatest ability to learn and develop. ECEfS has the potential to foster socio-environmental resilience based on interdependence and critical thinking, setting foundations for lives characterised by self respect, respect for others, and respect for the environment. All efforts to develop education for sustainability at every 'level' should therefore consider the relevance of their work to, and the quality of their engagement with, young children and the early childhood community.

### ACTION POINT:

- Prioritise access to ECE for all children as imperative to their healthy development and life-long learning towards a sustainable future.

## GENDER

ECE is a highly gendered field. It is a potential starting point for identifying, critically analysing and engaging with the important contributions that women from diverse contexts offer to educational practice broadly and to child development and Education for Sustainability (EfS). It also offers the opportunity to critically engage with the roles of men within the field, especially in terms of their impact as role-models for young boys. These same gendered issues and opportunities also relate to ECEfS.

There are strong reasons why we should take gender into consideration – not least among them is the ongoing challenge of all girls into education. Girls' education is a special global priority as they are currently greatly under-represented in terms of educational enrolment and their education provides sustainable benefits to societies in terms of family income, later marriage and reduced fertility rates, reduced infant and maternal mortality (including HIV/AIDS).

#### ACTION POINTS:

- Critical research into gendered approaches of teaching and learning embedded within the ECEfS field needs to be conducted and shared.
- There is a need to critically engage with the ways in which women and men contribute differently to laying foundations of life-long learning within a broad variety of educational contexts.
- There is a need to recognize and celebrate a relational approach often demonstrated by women, in particular, within the ECEfS field, and to adopt or translate this approach to other fields and disciplines.
- Commit resources specifically to encourage the early and continuing education of girls.

#### LEARNING FOR CHANGE

ECE has strong traditions of curriculum integration, engagement with the lived environment and child participation, which align well with EfS. ECEfS can thus readily build on these foundations and embrace the complexities of transformative learning.

We know from experience and research that even very young children are capable of sophisticated thinking in relation to socio-environmental issues and that the earlier EfS ideas are introduced the greater the impact can be. To reiterate, ECE is a key step for all EfS. Furthermore, children are potential agents for change, and often influence their families and grandparents to change towards more sustainable thinking and behaviours.

There is, therefore, a need to further develop existing ECE approaches that lean on the experiences that children bring from their everyday lives and where problem-solving and solution seeking are relevant to sustainable living.

#### ACTION POINTS:

- Prioritize ECE as a first step in learning to live sustainably. This includes international educational and social development resource allocation, policy prioritization and cross-sectoral support (including with social and community workers, formal and higher education, and other community support structures).
- Build capacity of communities and families, to strengthen their roles within learning, doing and being, with an emphasis on inter-generational learning.

#### NETWORKS, ARENAS AND PARTNERSHIPS:

We are aware that good practices that integrate indigenous knowledge, sustainable living practices, basic human rights and learning through experience and doing already do exist in many community ECEfS provisions. However, these practices remain largely undocumented and un-promoted.

Children live different childhoods. There is a need not to romanticise, but to critically engage in the varied contextualised approaches, and to document and share successful practices.

#### ACTION POINTS:

- Develop and promote ECEfS frameworks, approaches and practices that are strong on family and community participation, indigenous community knowledge, and every day and immediate issues related to sustainability.
- As far as possible ECEfS projects should: a) contribute towards inter-cultural understanding and a wider recognition of mutual interdependency, and, b) involve local collaborations that provide access to, and a greater visibility of, community contributions and cultural heritage.
- Develop a broad-based global alliance and international community of ECEfS practitioners, informal and formal teacher educators, policy-makers and researchers to collaborate in efforts to raising the profile of ECE, improve its development and implementation of ECEfS and to build communities of practice.

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TO STRENGTHEN ESD ACROSS ALL

As ECE is foundational for lifelong learning, there is an urgent need for capacity building within practitioners and other members of society to form strong safety nets and communities for young children, including strengthening the capabilities of their primary caregivers in a tradition that embraces sustainability.

**ACTION POINTS:**

- Explicit professional development in EfS for ECE practitioners and those in the extended community who work with young children is needed. Similarly, the broader EfS community needs explicit professional development in ECE.

**ESD IN CURRICULUM**

ECE has a tradition of integrated curriculum approaches embedded in children's everyday lives, even if not always fully enacted. Such approaches need to be more widely adopted into the formal curricula of schooling and into informal and non-formal learning approaches.

**ACTION POINTS:**

- Rework the traditional ECE approaches to better serve the needs of sustainability including stronger support for the implementation of integrated curricula.
- Build collaboration with formal, informal and non-formal educational services and systems that build on the foundations developed within ECEfS. These include: primary and secondary schools; higher education; informal learning programmes; local, national and international decision makers and curriculum developers.
- There are challenges in the implementation of ideal ECE curricula. Stronger support for the implementation of integrated curricula still needs to be realized in many contexts.
- Curriculum development and re-orientation should include children as active participants, as well as adults (teachers, parents and others), thus helping to ensure the relevance of content to children's everyday lives and their development as active citizens of sustainability.



## SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN PRACTICE

The group recognises that you live as you teach is very important. ECE settings and services need to be places where sustainability is practiced. This means that all early childhood education settings should examine their own ‘ecological footprints’ and work towards reducing waste in energy, water and materials. They should aim to live out democratic and participatory social practices. They should ‘practice what they teach.’

### ACTION POINTS:

- Support the development of ‘whole of settings’ approaches to Education for Sustainable Development where the goal is to create a ‘culture of sustainability’.
- Create new traditions that celebrate good practices in ECEfS, including awards, festivals, exhibitions and prizes.

## RESEARCH

As an emerging field of practice, ECEfS is seriously under-researched. This must be remedied in order to build the field on an evidence-base of critique, reflection and creativity.

### ACTION POINTS:

- Increase the allocation of resources for research in ECEfS.
- Initiate research studies that are participatory and action-centered, through transdisciplinary collaboration with professionals from all sectors and disciplines.
- Enable structures and processes that support ECEfS practitioners to conduct their own research studies.

- Provide greater research mentoring and capacity building. While important everywhere, this is especially important in industrially developing countries where significant portions of research are still conducted by researchers who have no experience in teaching ECE in the sector.





# Schools and Teacher Education Institutions

*Authors: Inger Björneloo, David Chapman,  
Charles Hopkins, Mark Rickinson*

While school systems cannot reorient societies on their own, the profound societal change that is needed will not occur without engaging the world's 60,000,000 teachers and the systems that support and direct them. Engaging these systems will not be easy as many causes and initiatives are currently seeking entry into the curriculum. Furthermore, the ESD initiative is relatively unknown to many of the world's formal education systems. To make matters even more difficult the perspectives and values that underpin current schooling are possibly the antithesis of what is needed to mold a sustainable future.

In spite of these challenges, all ministries of education are encouraged to consider their social responsibilities and to develop plans of action, collaboratively, with schools and teacher education institutions as full partners, in order to maximize the impact they can have with their available capability. This system-wide approach will require the reorientation of pedagogy, learning materials, assessment systems and even teacher education. It requires a re-examination of how schools relate to, connect with, and draw upon resources from the wider community.

To actualize the profound reorientation of schools and teacher education institutions that is required to address ESD in a meaningful way, Member States need to acknowledge that addressing ESD is a core priority.

## ACCESS FOR ALL TO A PROCESS OF LIFELONG LEARNING

### **Strengthen Teacher Education Institutions to address the need for millions of additional teachers that will be needed globally.**

There are currently approximately 90 million students between the ages of 6 and 11 years who are not enrolled in schools. In addition, this goal of six years of basic education (6 to 11 years) is not sufficient to equip one to live fully and ignores the benefits of schooling in the adolescent years. Hundreds of millions of students are not receiving any secondary schooling and less than 1 percent of the population has access to a university. The UNESCO figure of 80 million additional teachers currently required to meet the Millennium Development Goals, Education For All and the Literacy Decade does not address the additional need for a large teacher replacement programme. The current salary levels in many countries and the impact of HIV results in a massive loss of teachers that must be addressed. To further compound the problem, the issue of the millions of under-educated youth in all societies is also an ESD issue.

## GENDER AND EQUITY

### **Support educational policy-makers and practitioners in developing ESD programmes and approaches that respond to gender equality.**

Gender and equity issues must be mainstreamed throughout educational planning – from infrastructure planning to material development to pedagogical processes. ESD provides a powerful stimulus and context for critically examining and challenging gender inequities.

## LEARNING FOR CHANGE

### **Support teacher educators, teachers and students in developing more participatory approaches to learning and teaching through ESD.**

Developing ESD capability also involves pedagogical development. Collaborative approaches to learning, action competence development, the ability to think critically about information and to reflect critically on behavior are complex skills required by teachers and learners. Many sustainability issues are global in scale and scope making them difficult for school age learners to comprehend. Teachers need to be supported in interpreting these wider environmental, social, and economic issues in ways that relate to national curricula, and that engage the classroom learners in ways that are relevant and comprehensible.

## NETWORKS, ARENAS AND PARTNERSHIPS

### **Support system-wide capacity development for all professional groups and stakeholders involved in education systems.**

To date, much of the ESD progress has been at the individual school level. In many regions, ESD advances in developing Sustainable Schools, Green Schools, STAR Schools (Students and Teachers Against Racism) etc. have pioneered the way. However, these initiatives have demonstrated that profound change requires a coordinated systemic approach on a number of fronts. Those who control the directional and enabling systemic instruments such as policy formation, curriculum development, school construction, examination procedures etc. are crucial to the reorientation. So is also the positive political involvement of unions and other professional bodies. Underlying all of this is the need for professional development and training to build an informed and collaborative system working with a common purpose.



## ESD IN CURRICULUM

**Continue to develop a comprehensive approach to ESD by engaging all curriculum subject areas and beyond-school learning opportunities.**

ESD is not to be treated as a separate subject in the curriculum but rather a way of dealing with all the curriculum subjects. Involving more than content alone, it should encourage critical dialogue in the classroom by relating curriculum subjects to wider environmental, economic and social issues. Thinking globally is also an important component of ESD and opportunities for international exchange (both actual and virtual) need careful examination.

## SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE

**Support schools in becoming working models of sustainability in practice.**

Schools themselves need to reflect the values that are inherent in ESD. The ways in which schools use energy, manage waste, conserve resources such as water and care for their campuses are critical for successful ESD. So too are the social and economic manifestations of ESD. The ways in which gender and other equity issues are modelled are equally significant. The reorientations of all of these institutional practices are powerful learning opportunities for schools, teachers, students and communities.

## RESEARCH

### **Engage schools, teachers and teacher educators in the creation, communication and utilization of ESD research.**

There is a clear need for more and better evidence on the nature and dynamics of learning for sustainable development. The task of generating such evidence is not one that can be carried out by researchers alone. Investments in school-based ESD must encompass strategic support for: practitioner research and curriculum development projects in ESD; the communication of ESD research through networks and resources; new research collaborations between schools, universities and teacher education institutions; and research and evaluation training amongst ESD practitioners and students.





# Higher Education

*Authors: John Holmberg, Heila Lotz-Sistka, Bo Samuelsson,  
Arjen Wals, Tarah Wright*

Higher Education Institutions are in the position to address sustainability in at least five areas: learning & instruction, content & curriculum, research, university as an institution and community linkages. The principles identified below each relate to these five distinct but related areas.

## ACCESS FOR ALL TO A PROCESS OF LIFELONG LEARNING

### **Higher Education Institutions need to become open ESD centres and hubs.**

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) can become an ESD interface between the local and the global community: addressing local sustainability issues but also using its global tentacles and networks to take advantage of perspectives and expertise grounded in contexts elsewhere. HEI expertise in both ESD and Sustainable Development (SD) needs to be easily accessible to all members of society. This expertise needs to be globally and openly accessible, through for instance, open-source internet-based platforms to allow for scientists, community groups and individual citizens from around the world to contribute to and benefit from this new kind of research. Mechanisms need to be in place that allow all members of society to contribute to the continuous advancement of (E)SD-expertise.

## GENDER AND EQUITY

### **In order to become a sustainable organization Higher Education Institutions need to embrace diversity and inclusivity.**

HEIs seeking to incorporate sustainability cannot do so without actively bringing in marginalized and underrepresented groups into all sectors of the university system.

ESD bring an important and often missing platform to the universities for consider and discuss issues related to diversity and inclusivity, this include such fundamental aspects as: gender, equity, power and norms.

## LEARNING FOR CHANGE

**Higher Education Institutions need to develop knowledge and education that penetrates through and transcends disciplines, space, time and cultures.**

Our search for a more sustainable world requires a spirit of innovation and cutting-edge knowledge which can deal with the kind of complexity, uncertainty and risks that characterize sustainable development challenges. HEIs should be challenged to advance systemic thinking by examining connections, relationships and interdependencies. Simultaneously, HEIs should research, develop, and introduce new forms of learning that can help people understand and engage in sustainable development. Hence, adequate and robust theories as well as practises of learning and change need to be developed, researched and shared by multidisciplinary teams.

## NETWORKS, ARENAS AND PARTNERSHIPS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TO STRENGTHEN ESD ACROSS ALL SECTORS

**Higher Education Institutions need to contribute to the development of (E)SD-competence in all both within and outside the higher education community.**

HEIs have a key role to play in capacity-building and competence development for (E)SD through its courses, professional development programmes, community outreach activities, and post-initial education and training in both the public and private sector. Developing this role could help various groups in society become more competent in exploring the

sustainability dimensions of their personal and professional lives. HEIs should provide resources for all members of the university community who can be considered SD-change agents and for those who wish to pursue careers in ESD within or outside the university structure.

## ESD IN CURRICULUM

**Higher Education Institutions must incorporate sustainability concepts and the implications of sustainability into curricula.**

The use of topics, contexts, examples and case studies that allow sustainability to enter even the most disciplinary-oriented programmes and courses should be encouraged. At the same time new teaching and learning tools, methods and forms of evaluation and assessment need to be developed, introduced and shared that can support such incorporation.

## SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN PRACTICE

**Higher Education Institutions must model sustainability in practice.**

HEIs need to consider the repercussions of including sustainability in their research, teaching and community outreach for their own operations (democratic governance, energy use, waste management, green building design, food services, campus mobility, contracting and purchasing policy).



## RESEARCH

### **Support Sustainability Research.**

National and transnational research programmes on SD should be supported with structural funding that is not dependent upon private funding. Such structural funding should be tailored towards research programmes that explicitly emphasize transdisciplinary research focusing on SD related issues. This research, supported by a wide range of methodologies both old and new, would not only focus on a better understanding of sustainability but also on forms of governance, management, community engagement and citizen participation. Researchers seeking to make a career in this emerging field need to be supported by their home institutions. Such support also means that publishing in niche journals that may not have ISI (Institute for Scientific Information) status but provide a platform for integrated research on SD-issues and ESD-issues should be actively supported. HEIs should create special appointments for those who specialize in sustainability-oriented research.



# Informal and non-formal education

*Authors: John Grayson, Mats Havström, Karl Magnusson,  
Merritt Polk, Birgitta Rang*

Informal and non-formal learning and education are concepts which taken together describe the collective learning that takes place outside of formal educational systems. Informal learning is the learning that takes place in everyday life in families, work places, clubs, communities on the internet, etc. Non-formal learning can be more or less structured and range from the learning occurring in study groups, non-governmental organizations, social movements, youth clubs, churches, folk high schools etc.

Informal and non-formal education in all their forms are characterized by being voluntary, by active participation and by the reciprocal exchange of ideas. They are an important part of the concept of life long learning and occur everywhere, even at times within formal education and school systems.

## ACCESS FOR ALL TO A PROCESS OF LIFELONG LEARNING

Promoting a sense of ownership and active citizenship through voluntary participation is the foundation for Sustainable Development (SD), a core element in non-formal and informal education and should receive the necessary support.

In order to improve public awareness, all groups of citizens and residents must have access to knowledge and information about SD, which should be ensured by creating learning arenas for public discussion and action.

Develop and fund programs raising awareness of the need for empowered and educated active citizens and a free and self regulated civil society. Also, equal access to formal democratic processes of voting and political organization should be guaranteed.

## GENDER

Promote the use and dissemination of research that deals with differences in women's and men's experiences, interests and values, affecting SD.

Make women's contributions, priorities and responsibilities for daily life and informal learning, equally visible and acknowledged in informal and non-formal learning processes for SD.

## LEARNING FOR CHANGE

In order to meet the need for individuals to take control over their lives, and to change their worlds – develop and promote new and more open

learning environments for informal and non-formal learning, such as experiential learning and ‘go visiting’ that foster an encompassing and embodied sense of understanding of other places, times, cultures, world views, backgrounds and values which promote SD.

Develop informal and non-formal learning contexts which are especially suited for ESD empowerment and political understanding by, for example, connecting daily actions, interests and needs to wider spheres of activity and influence.

Support informal and non-formal learning arenas to train skills for conflict resolution and to combat racism and promote multiculturalism.

Incorporate learners’ own experiences and needs to sustain daily life activities within strategies for SD.

## NETWORKS, ARENAS AND PARTNERSHIPS

Build upon existing spaces such as smaller groups and organizations in NGOs and diverse social movements, libraries, museums, folk high schools, etc, for raising awareness of SD and ESD.

Create places for intercultural and cross sector meetings, which are crucial ingredients for promoting sustainable societies.

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TO STRENGTHEN ESD ACROSS ALL SECTORS

Acknowledge experience from informal or non-formal learning as an important skill for career development.

Ensure that informal and non-formal learning competencies translate into formal educational equivalents thus allowing their recognition and accreditation.

Make resources for professional development available to the informal and non-formal sectors, such as activists, community leaders and volunteers.

## ESD IN CURRICULUM

Actively integrate ESD into the planning of existing and new teaching and learning programs.

Develop programs which not only teach about sustainable development, but where learners get the chance to define and change their practices and behavior in relation to their own and others' views of sustainable development.

## SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE

Continuously evaluate the infrastructures for non- and informal learning with respect to social, environmental and economic sustainability. The voices of learners, staff and practitioners should be recognized and valued in developing the programs.

Find ways to connect different sources and forms of knowledge in daily life to ESD through informal and non-formal learning processes, especially regarding sustainable livelihoods.

## RESEARCH

Recognize the importance of informal and non-formal learning in transdisciplinary and community participatory research contexts which is often overlooked and disregarded as a potential contributor to SD and capacity building. Special efforts should be made to undertake action-oriented research, the results of which can inform learners, educational practitioners and policy makers alike.

Use informal learning processes that are promoted through trans-disciplinary research to more effectively develop the interpersonal and inter-professional relationships that are necessary to coordinate multi-stakeholder and community actions towards SD.







# Background to the Gothenburg Recommendations on Education for Sustainable Development

# Learning for sustainable development – the Gothenburg story

Shortly before the EU summit in Gothenburg in 2001, the University of Gothenburg and Chalmers University of Technology arranged an international conference entitled ‘Knowledge and Learning for a Sustainable Society’.

One conclusion of the conference was that learning in a broad sense is of fundamental importance to the achievement of sustainable development. At the end of the conference the two vice-chancellors of the University of Gothenburg and Chalmers University of Technology delivered a joint offer to the then EU President, Mr Göran Persson, and to Ms Margot Wallström, the then EU Environment Commissioner, to create a university network intended to serve as an independent reviewer on issues concerning sustainable development. The Gothenburg Centre for Environment and Sustainability (GMV), co-owned by the two universities, was proposed as the lead actor. The tasks of the university network also included the arrangement of conferences and seminars.

This was the point of departure when the Swedish Prime Minister Göran Persson offered at the UN World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg 2002 that Sweden would arrange an international conference on learning for sustainable development. The conference was held

in Gothenburg on May 4-7, 2004 and was entitled ‘Learning to Change Our World – the Gothenburg Consultation for Sustainable Development’. Some 350 delegates from more than 70 countries took part. In connection with the closing ceremony of the consultation, the vice-chancellors of the two universities offered to jointly host a further conference on the same subject within three years.

To preserve the knowledge and experience gathered at the consultation in 2004 and to prepare for the next international conference in Gothenburg, the GMV initiated four international workshops on learning for sustainable development in higher education, in school, in preschool and in informal learning.

- ‘Drivers and Barriers for Implementing Learning for Sustainable Development in Higher Education’, December 7-9, 2005
- ‘Drivers and Barriers for Implementing Learning for Sustainable Development in Pre-School through Upper Secondary and Teacher Education’, March 27-29, 2006
- ‘The Contribution of Early Childhood Education to a Sustainable Society’, May 2-4, 2007
- ‘The Right to Knowledge – Public Learning for Sustainable Development. Laboratory for Democratic Learning’, October 11-13, 2007

All the workshops took place in Gothenburg and each produced a report, three of which were published by UNESCO. The aim and hope was that these reports would provide valuable source material for the coming international workshop.

The final workshop, ‘Visions and Preparations for a Common Blueprint on Education for Sustainable Development’ took place in Gothenburg, November 10-12, 2008, at the invitation of the two UNESCO Chairs, Professor Ingrid Pramling Samuelsson, University of Gothenburg, and

Professor John Holmberg, Chalmers University of Technology. Some 50 delegates from more than 15 countries took part in the workshop, which brought together ESD experts as well as policy-makers and decision-makers. The Swedish Government contributed to the event through the Swedish International Centre of Education for Sustainable Development (SWEDESD), the Ministry of Education and Research and the Swedish National Commission for UNESCO. The purpose of the workshop, based on the previous work, was to generate recommendations for learning for sustainable development that could be used in many different future processes, for instance through the UNESCO.

Four groups of experts, one from each of the earlier workshops (higher education, school, preschool, and informal learning), were formed to prepare the workshop. The groups were given the task of preparing specific recommendations for each educational field and general recommendations applicable to all areas of education. The groups were asked to build on the earlier reports. Their working methods included advanced blogging, e-mailing and internet telephony. The group recommendations were then finally compiled and formed the starting point for the final workshop, November 10-12, 2008. During the first one and a half days, the four groups thoroughly trimmed the specific and general recommendations. In the closing one and a half days the four groups were joined by specially invited policy-makers and decision-makers from all over the world, whose task was to scrutinise the recommendations from their perspectives. They were also to give advice on further action.

At the end of the workshop, a specially invited professional negotiator, Mr Svante Bodin from the Swedish Ministry of the Environment, assisted the group in finalising the document in a consensus-based process. The final document is called 'The Gothenburg Recommendations on Education for Sustainable Development' and calls on governments, civil society, and, in particular, educators to prioritise processes that develop and strengthen education for sustainable development.



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