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The challenge of education for sustainable development

How can we better understand the complexity of the world around us? How can we conserve precious natural resources for future generations? How are the problems of our world interconnected and how can we solve them? What kind of world do we want for the future, and can our visions be achieved within the limits of Earth’s life support systems? How can we reconcile the requirements of economy, society, and the environment?

Such questions are not new and, in its capacity as the specialized agency for the environment within the United Nations system, UNEP has addressed them over a period of many years. However, inspired by the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014), UNEP is working on such questions with renewed vigour.

Education for Sustainable Development places education and training at the heart of the quest to solve the problems threatening our future. Education in all its forms and at all levels is not only an end in itself, but is also one of the most powerful instruments for bringing about the changes required to achieve sustainable development.

This guide showcases some of UNEP’s many programmes and resources that support the important work of environmental education and training. It contains details of courses in the UNEP Environmental Leadership Programme, UNEP networks for environmental training, our commitment to supporting environmental action learning activities that link schools with their communities, training programmes for women as managers of natural resources, and examples of our public education programmes in newspapers and television. These examples come from countries and regions around the world; from Finland to southern Africa, from Latin America and the Caribbean to Australia, and from the Himalayas to the USA.

This guide also provides details of some of the many books, multimedia materials and web sites that UNEP has prepared to support environmental education and training. These include: the series of Global Environment Outlook reports (on global and regional environmental trends and perspectives), the Taking Action guide (for citizens and communities), Pachamama: Our Earth, Our Future and Water, World Children’s Voices (educational books developed by
children and, young people). Tunza: Acting for a Better World and Tunza magazine (both written by and for young people), and Communicating Africa’s Environment (a resource kit for African journalists). Among the web sites featured are youthXchange, which supports youth leadership programmes on sustainable consumption, the development of better and environmentally sustainable ways of transport, and the integration of the Global Compact principles at all levels of society.

I am proud to commend this publication to you as a guide to UNEP’s programmes and resources for environmental education and training, but I am also humbled by the scale of the task ahead of us in the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development. We must all work together to make our planet a home not only for us today, but also for the many generations that will follow.

Klaus Toepfer
Executive Director, UNEP
Introduction

The United Nations Environment Programme was established in 1972. Its mission is to provide leadership and encourage partnership in caring for the environment by inspiring, informing, and enabling nations and peoples to improve their quality of life without compromising that of future generations.

In working towards achieving its mission, UNEP has developed a number of environmental leadership programmes and resources, as well as playing a catalytic role in assisting in the development and strengthening of environmental networks. This has enabled UNEP to achieve many successes and to develop a series of good practices world-wide.

How can a programme such as UNEP’s inspire nations and peoples to protect and improve our local and global environment for a sustainable future? By providing everyone with the opportunity to develop appropriate awareness, knowledge, skills and commitment.

For this UNEP has been implementing a number of training programmes and initiatives which focus on empowering women, involving youth in decision-making and assisting governments with policy analysis and enforcement.

What can UNEP do to inform nations and peoples to address environmental degradation and transform aspirations into realities? By sensitizing individuals, groups, communities and nations to their ecological, economic, social and cultural interdependence and developing general environmental and development awareness.

UNEP has also assisted nations and peoples to incorporate environment, development and population dimensions into the educational processes of all countries. This is visible in the number of networks, media programmes and information resources that UNEP has developed over the years.

Can UNEP continue to enable nations and peoples world-wide to play an active and pro-active role in promoting effective public participation in decision-making and training with respect to environment and development issues? UNEP’s work in fostering public participation, developing information resources for environmental education and training programmes, and its efforts in assessing the state of the environment is visible throughout this publication.
This guide is not just a medium for highlighting the many UNEP achievements and parading its programmes and resources. It is dedicated to providing everyone with the opportunity to be part of our efforts to improve the quality of our lives without compromising that of future generations.

Furthermore, this publication strives to encourage people to develop new environmentally-friendly behaviour patterns for a sustainable future. It provides access to information on programmes, networks and resources which can be of benefit to many stakeholders working as government officials, involved in institutions of learning, the business/industry sector or part of community groups.

This guide is an outcome of many requests from government officials, teachers, students and other stakeholders for information on programmes and resources in UNEP, as well as a first step in UNEP’s preparation for the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014).

To achieve the goals of such an important decade, governments, United Nations agencies, institutions of learning and civil society have to work together.

Hence, this publication is part of UNEP’s contributions to working together for a common goal: a sustainable future for everyone.

The guide has been formulated to share information about environmental leadership programmes and on-going training courses that UNEP offers as well as publications and websites relevant to environmental education and training. It is directed particularly at national governments, institutions of learning, public and private libraries, community groups, media, business/industry and people involved in education and training.

Putting together a publication such as this is not easy, considering the amount of work UNEP has done and is continuing to do in terms of environmental education and training. It includes the most recent programmes and resources as well as those being reviewed, redeveloped and updated.

Part 1 of the guide includes information on environmental leadership programmes and training courses offered by UNEP in partnership with a range of learning institutions. Programmes in both the formal and non-formal sectors of education are included. Relevant networks for the promotion of environmental awareness and training, programmes for youth as well as environmental media programmes are also included.
Part 2 includes summaries of UNEP’s most recent publications which are pertinent to environmental education and training. It presents resources useful for information, research and planning purposes; training manuals and resource kits; a number of handbooks and atlases; and resources useful for children and youth.

Part 3 is a collection of relevant resources available electronically on the Internet, particularly in UNEP-related websites. These include resource kits; resource packages; activities and tips for action for a better world.

We are at the beginning of a century when achieving sustainable development is extremely relevant to the survival of our planet. We have much to do to turn development in a sustainable direction. To reach that turning point, knowledge is vital.

Svein Tveitdal
Director, DEPI
Over the past three decades, rising concerns about the unsustainable rate of resource consumption and the degradation of the environment have helped many people to become increasingly aware of the need for changes in our lifestyle choices and behaviours, notably our patterns of production and consumption. Along with legislative and economic tools, education and training have essential roles to play in motivating and empowering people to participate in working towards a sustainable future and better environmental management measures.

To effectively bring about the changes in lifestyles and behaviour needed to reduce human impacts on the natural world, and thus enhance the transition towards sustainable development, environmental education must integrate learning for the wise use of natural resources – conservation – with the equally important concerns of social and economic sustainability.

Directed towards sustainable development, environmental education develops the understanding, motivations and skills that can enable all citizens and, through them, governments and business institutions, to integrate conservation goals with appropriate forms and levels of economic development and social improvement.

Directed towards such ends, not just in the formal education sector, but in all educational settings, environmental education has a pivotal role to play in building a supportive social context for sustainable development and in empowering citizens to encourage business and policy-makers to hasten the transition towards sustainability. Indeed, without such education, even the most enlightened legislation, cleanest technology and most sophisticated research will not achieve the long-term goals of sustainable development.

In support of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014), UNEP’s goal is to provide continued and sustained support to ensure the protection of the environment and the improvement of people’s quality of life by developing and strengthening environmental education and training initiatives which are responsive, culturally appropriate and locally relevant, and aimed at transforming people’s visions and aspirations into reality for present and future generations.
To achieve this, UNEP works with all sectors of education and training in all countries and regions to provide direction and leadership in the advancement, co-ordination and improvement of environmental education and training policies, programmes and activities with the following objectives:

- To implement and support key priority areas as flagship programmes towards achieving UNEP’s mission world-wide;
- To provide a focal point for advocacy and promotion of environmental education and training around the world;
- To act as a catalyst for innovation and the sharing of successful policy development and implementation practices in environmental education around the world;
- To provide innovative and responsive professional development and training for people working in the various fields of environmental education across all sectors of society;
- To support the development of high quality environmental education learning support materials for use in different sectors and contexts and as catalytic models for adaptation;
- To establish, maintain and strengthen mechanisms for facilitating networking and partnerships to advance environmental education and training around the world;
- To undertake ongoing research into environmental education and training, and evaluating existing approaches, particularly with respect to the integration of sustainable development principles across all educational sectors;
- To establish awareness-raising initiatives to increase people’s understanding of the goals and principles of sustainable development and to contribute to the development of informed citizens in different parts of the world;
- To ensure that environmental information is easily accessible through mass media and public education initiatives in different mediums around the world.

For more details of UNEP environmental education and training, contact the UNEP Environmental Education and Training Unit, Division of Environmental Policy Implementation.
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