

What is Education for Sustainable Development?

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) processes emphasize the need for stimulating a holistic, integrated and interdisciplinary approach to developing the knowledge and skills needed for a sustainable future as well as changes in values, behaviour, and lifestyles.

This requires us to reorient education systems, policies and practices in order to empower everyone, young and old, to make decisions and act in culturally appropriate and locally relevant ways to address the problems that threaten our common future.

According to UNESCO, ESD is about learning to:

- respect, value and preserve the achievements of the past;
- appreciate the wonders and the peoples of the Earth;
- live in a world where all people have sufficient food for a healthy and productive life;
- assess, care for and restore the state of our Planet;
- create and enjoy a better, safer, more just world;
- be caring citizens who exercise their rights and responsibilities locally, nationally and globally.

This represents a new vision of education, a vision that helps people of all ages better understand the world in which they live, addressing the complexity and interconnectedness of problems such as poverty, wasteful consumption, environmental degradation, urban decay, population growth, health, conflict and the violation of human rights that threaten our future.

ESD aims at demonstrating the following features:

- Interdisciplinary and holistic: learning for sustainable development should be embedded in the whole curriculum, not as a separate subject;
- Values-driven: it is critical that the assumed norms - the shared values and principles underpinning sustainable development - are made explicit so that that can be examined, debated, tested and applied;
- 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 which model the processes. Teaching that is geared simply to passing on knowledge should be recast into an approach in which teachers and learners work together to acquire knowledge and play a role in shaping the environment of their educational institutions;
- Participatory decision-making: learners participate in decisions on how they are to learn;
- Applicability: the learning experiences offered 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. Concepts of sustainable development must be carefully expressed in other languages - languages and

cultures say things differently, and each language has creative ways of expressing new concepts.