



# UNFOLDING THE POWER OF ESD

Lessons learned and ways forward

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## REPORT OF THE CONFERENCE

The Power of ESD - Exploring evidence & promise  
Visby 24-26 October 2012

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## SWEDES

The Swedish International Centre of Education for Sustainable Development (SWEDES) at Gotland University, Visby, Sweden, has the mandate to assist in developing the capacity of individuals and organisations conducting learning interventions for enhancing sustainable development, to formulate, implement and evaluate relevant, appropriate and effective initiatives, activities and policies. SWEDES is mainly funded by Sida, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency. [www.swedesd.se](http://www.swedesd.se)



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## INTRODUCTION

This report contains key messages on the future development of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), based on the knowledge exchange and creative co-thinking of 120 policy makers, researchers and practitioners at the conference “The Power of ESD - Exploring evidence & promise”, held in Visby, Sweden, from 24 until 26 October 2012.

The document presents conclusions and recommendations to inspire and inform international, national and local efforts to elaborate and accelerate ESD around the world. They address ESD practice as well as ESD research and include a set of recommendations for policy action.

The recommendations are made as input to reinforce the educational dimension of “The Future We Want”<sup>1</sup>. They are aiming at inspiring the final two years of the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014) (UNESD) and the subsequent ESD Programme Framework<sup>2</sup>, as well as the UN Secretary General’s recent “Education First” initiative<sup>3</sup>. Hopefully, they will also contribute to the process leading to the formulation of the Sustainable Development Goals, succeeding the UN Millennium Development Goals<sup>4</sup>.

The conclusions and recommendations are drawn from three days of intensive knowledge exchange and knowledge co-production among 120 ESD policy, research and practice experts from 35 countries.

The format of the conference privileged dialogue and action orientation. Long keynotes and parallel monologues were avoided. Twenty-four parallel seminars and 10 open space workshops allowed active interaction and exchange directed towards producing practice-grounded conclusions on how to move ESD forward.

The discussions and conclusions of the plenaries, seminars and workshops were followed and documented by a group of rapporteurs<sup>5</sup>. This document is based on their notes. It is authored by Jeppe Læssøe<sup>6</sup>, who was general rapporteur at the conference, in collaboration with Frans Lenglet<sup>7</sup>. It is not an agreed conference declaration. It is an interpretation that condenses the comprehensive material from the many sessions in order to expose trends and compelling points regarding the future development of ESD policy, research and practice, in a structured, format.

Part One of this document presents a number of general points and recommendations. The second part includes specific suggestions for next steps, although still of general relevance. Part Three contains a number of important lessons learned by ESD practitioners around the world. It also includes a description of some new and promising ESD practices. In the fourth part the authors of this report reflect on the conference as a whole and formulate a vision on and key challenges for moving ESD forward.

More information on the conference aim, the program, and the participants and their evaluation can be found in the annexes.

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<sup>1</sup>[https://rio20.un.org/sites/rio20.un.org/files/a-conf.216l-1\\_english.pdf](https://rio20.un.org/sites/rio20.un.org/files/a-conf.216l-1_english.pdf)

<sup>2</sup><http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/education-for-sustainable-development>

<sup>3</sup><http://www.globaleducationfirst.org>

<sup>4</sup><http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?menu=1300>

<sup>5</sup>Andreas Baumann, Huiyi Chen, Viktoria Geijer, Eunice Likoko, Aina-Maria Ojutkangas, Christian Williams, Mark Wilson, graduate students in Sustainable Development at Uppsala University, and Jakob Wallin, graduate student in Ecology at Gotland University.

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# PART 1

## MAIN POINTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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### 1. INVOLVE ESD!

There are good reasons to link ESD with current societal issues: It is a way to reach other arenas and people. It is a way to establish innovative partnerships and pool resources. It is a way to maintain ESD as a dynamic concept by including other perspectives. And it is a way to facilitate transboundary dialogue and, thus, social learning. This first statement is supported by the following points made during the conference:

**1.1 ESD is a facilitator of dialogue and learning on key controversial sustainable development issues:** Policy should not only be thought of as a powerful means for promoting ESD. To promote ESD is also to relate to what currently is in focus in politics. In many respects, our world is changing rapidly, and issues like climate change, social justice, urbanization and technological risks and opportunities are subjects for struggles among powerful and less powerful stakeholders. Economy is one of the dimensions of sustainable development and at the same time at the center for the ongoing policy interest in greening the economy. Green economy is a controversial concept. Often it is considered to be in opposition to rather than in consonance with visions of strong economic, social and ecological sustainability. This makes it an obvious issue for critical reflection and innovative thinking. Education is indeed essential to make sustainable transitions of current production systems and economy possible. ESD should not be a blind proponent of at certain opinion on green economy. It should provide the space and facilitate the dialogues through which deliberations and learning on the pros and cons of green economy as well as the creation of new ideas and conditions for a sustainable economy, can take place.

**1.2 ESD should be conducted in more open and inclusive ways:** ESD will fail its mission if it only is able to engage those who already agree on the importance of ESD. There is especially a need for enhanced dialogue with private sector agents and public policy makers.

**1.3 Transboundary partnerships and governance structures are necessary and realistic ways to give ESD more traction:** Promotion of ESD by means of top-down regulation will easily be too rigid, and bottom-up volunteering will typically be too weak. Structures and resources to promote interaction between levels and stakeholders are needed to strengthen the development of ESD.

At the general strategic level there is a need for increased integration of educational institutions and ESD in governance structures and processes. Through cross-institutional structures, governance creates the necessary connections for negotiating multi-stakeholder decisions. However, educational institutions are often not included in decision-making processes related to sustainable development. And specific governance structures to coordinate and promote ESD are generally missing. This impedes ESD in two ways. Firstly, by a lack of powerful strategic management and resources to promote ESD. Secondly, by counteracting the ambitions of school-community cooperation, as well as social and transboundary learning, that often is stressed as key principles of ESD. On the policy level there is thus a need for innovative governance structures that can support ESD while bringing education into the existing governance structures on sustainable development.

At the project level, steps forward can be taken by establishing partnerships between educational institutions and other agents, such as private enterprises, civil society organizations, media companies, national or international NGOs, branch organizations, municipalities, governmental institutions, etc. Besides concrete project development, this is a promising way to establish new alliances and arenas for ESD.

However, strengthening ESD by means of governance structures and partnerships is not just a matter of policy decisions and opening the doors for other stakeholders. Governance structures and partnerships do not work automatically. Power is an inherent part of governance. Power differentials and cultural differences are always a challenge in building transboundary partnerships. ESD-agents have to learn to cope with that.

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## 2. EXPAND ESD!

Potentially, ESD covers a large number of issues, spaces and approaches. Some of these have not yet received enough attention. Efforts are needed to unfold them in the coming years. Three issues that need more attention are:

**2.1. ESD as part of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD):** The potential synergy between ESD and CBD is obvious but until now only a few ESD agents have been working on unfolding it. Recently an important step to link ESD and CBE was taken with the signing of a MoU between the CBE secretariat and the Centre for Environmental Education, India (CEE)<sup>8</sup>. To further strengthen this synergy it is recommended to identify stakeholders working with different aspects of biodiversity and to collaborate with them in organizing workshops and step-by-step strengthening ESD as part in the efforts to ensure biodiversity for the coming generations.

**2.2. ESD should address the global risks towards the health of the present and coming generations:** Human health is an aspect of sustainable development that only to a minor degree has been a part of ESD until now. In some regions of the world certain risks towards human health, such as AIDS, have been addressed as an integral part of ESD. But there are other global risks, such as antibiotics resistance, that challenge sustainable development. Education is needed to counteract this.

**2.3. Efforts to promote green skills through Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) should be acknowledged and integrated into ESD;** but not uncritically. Generally speaking, ESD has a tendency of strongly concentrating on the ecological dimension of sustainable development thus marginalizing its social and economic equity and justice dimensions. The current policy trend of focusing on green economy and green skills carries the risk of reinforcing this bias. At the same time, sustainable development cannot do without green skills. However, up until now this

<sup>8</sup><http://www.cceindia.org/cee/esd-cop11/downloads/final-outcomes.pdf>

<sup>9</sup>Soo-Hyang Choi, Director of the Division of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development, UNESCO (France)

<sup>10</sup>Kartikeya Sarabhai, Director of the Centre for Environment Education, CEE (India)

has not really been reflected in relation to ESD. So, rather than replacing ESD with green skill education or maintaining the gulf between TVET and ESD, there is a need to integrate and elaborate TVET as part of ESD. Thus by connecting to the issues of equity, capabilities, justice and employment, TVET may strengthen, rather than weaken, the social and economic dimension of ESD.

The spaces for unfolding ESD do also need to be expanded. Schools, local communities, cities, work places, households and nature sites are obvious spaces for ESD. Two spaces in particular need more attention:

**2.4. ESD should take part in, and influence, the virtual transformation of education.** All over the world education is under transformation due to the new media and virtual communication technologies. Interactive TV, videos, internet, social media, serious computer games etc. are changing how we live, interact and learn. It is both an important part of the changing world that is the subject of ESD, and a new space for communication and learning that ESD, to a larger extent than until now, should utilize and influence. This expansion of ESD is much stronger now than a few years ago. Multimedia-classrooms, 3D DVD material for ESD, ESD computer games, use of social media, and "virtual" ESD were presented and discussed. There are good examples of use of these tools to visualize complexities, create future scenarios, make global learning possible and support deliberative social learning. The discussion revealed that the ongoing virtualization of education implies new opportunities as well as risks. Therefore, it needs to be critically examined and creatively explored in practice. The new media also expand access to information and teaching material, thus widening the horizon and global knowledge of the learner. In Sweden, for example, all teachers have free access to TV programs on sustainable development issues. It opens new opportunities but it does also raise questions on their use. One question is about the integration and use of such materials in specific settings and specific pedagogical approaches. Another question is about how materials, developed in one

country/culture, can or cannot be used in another country/culture. A third important question is about how media and materials can be developed to facilitate the dialogue and learning between people from different contexts.

**2.5. Make Early Childhood ESD part of the post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals.** It is often argued that the road to developing sustainable societies should start in childhood. However, until now too little attention has been paid to ESD at the pre-school level. There is a need for policy initiatives and resources to open and activate this space for ESD by means of action-oriented research and development programs.

The conference discussed two methodological approaches to ESD that until now have not received much attention:

**2.6. Moving ESD towards learning of basic social values.** Sustainable development implies a number of values. Therefore ESD is often approached as a matter of facilitating ethical reflections. However, these reflections and their effects on practice are influenced by the social values we have learned in practice. As such they are embedded in our feelings. They can be, for example, feelings of compassion, respect for dignity and trust. Already in the early stages of life, ESD needs to be developed to promote such social capital. It can be done through role play exercises and collaboration in a learning environment where the children feel secure. Rather than schools where they feel pressure and fear, they need learning environments where they feel good about themselves and each other.

**2.7. Drama can be a powerful tool.** Drama is not new as an educational tool, but it has a special potential for ESD, allowing learners to explore the conditions of themselves and others. People's normal lives can be approached as dramas. Drama allows them to tell their own stories and to try out other settings and roles. This activates learners' reflections on how things are and could be. Not only in their private life but also in their communities and in society at large.

### 3. USE ESD TO REORIENT EDUCATION!

While much education has contributed to unsustainable development, it can equally contribute to changing it. This requires a paradigm shift. Education should not only become available and accessible for all, but also be of high quality allowing learners to become well-informed, reflexive and action competent citizens (community members, consumers, workers, managers).

ESD is quality education, addressing complex societal issues in locally adapted ways. It can provide the quality dimension of education for all as long as it incorporates the important sustainability aspects of equity and human rights as well as the environment. With ESD, education becomes reoriented towards life skills education, in the most comprehensive sense, rather than focusing on narrow employable skills.

From the level of international policy to the level of concrete educational practices steps have to be taken to reach this ambitious goal. More should be done. Recommendations are:

**3.1.** UNESCO should enhance the dialogue and concrete connections between the Education for All (EFA) initiative and ESD, in order to strengthen EFA's quality dimension.

**3.2.** Ministries of education and other authorities should use ESD to strengthen the quality of educational programs and strategies.

**3.3.** There is a strong need for following up official and established national SD and ESD policies, in order to help scaling up and spreading innovative practices.

**3.4** The challenge of integrating ESD into the existing curriculum can be met by developing context-specific ESD teaching materials and manuals, for use in teacher education and in other learning settings.



### 4. MAKE ESD POLICY CONTEXT-SENSITIVE!

ESD policy is needed. However, policies formulated in terms of general norms, incentives and models are at odds with the diversity of settings in which policies need to be applied.

A process of mediation is needed to translate and adapt general aims and principles to meaningful and supportive policy at the local level. Otherwise top-down policy regulation can easily restrain people's capability and mental ownership of new policies and approaches rather than improve it.

<sup>11</sup>Kaspars Abramenko, Lecturer, Latvia University of Agriculture, Dept. of Environmental Engineering and Water Management (Latvia)

## PART 2

# SPECIFIC SUGGESTIONS FOR NEXT STEPS IN POLICY AND RESEARCH

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### POLICY:

- 1. International guidelines for Climate Change Education for Sustainable Development (CCESD) should be flexible and process facilitating:** UNESCO is preparing a set of international guidelines to commit countries to take responsibility and promote CCESD. However, even if such guidelines are thought of as a help for the development of national ESD policies, they can easily be out-of-tune with specific challenges and ongoing processes in a particular country. Therefore, it is recommended to formulate them as process facilitating tools. A general introduction, for those who are not familiar with the field, can be helpful; but, otherwise, they should be inspiring by addressing potential challenges and possibilities as well as by giving examples of promising practices and process recommendations.
- 2. Better links between action-oriented development projects and ESD policy:** Action-based research and learning have proven to be successful at many places. However, there is still a need for better communication of research results to a broader public, not least to inform ESD policy. Local schools and NGOs can create an arena where they invite politicians into a dialogue. By creating a safe space for exploring new ways of approaching SD issues and decisions, the traps of existing behavioral patterns can be avoided and joint deliberations and collaborative learning may occur.
- 3. Support the expansion of Whole School Approaches (WSA) to all levels of education:** Policy support might help to expand the whole school approach to all levels of education and from single schools to whole school systems. However, policy support to WSA should not be too rigid in its demand. Contexts are very different it should be possible to form the WSA in accordance with their particular setting and conditions.
- 4. Policy to encourage the transformation of higher education institutions through embracing ESD:** There needs to be more support for university staff to engage in integrating SD topics into their courses. Support is needed both for networks of knowledge exchange and ESD promotion and for providing the time and space for revising curricula and developing teaching methods, appropriate for ESD. Besides removing structural barriers and incentives, such as making ESD an integral part of university assessment, quality assurance and ranking systems might also be ways to promote the desirable changes.
- 5. Policy support to establish student platforms for ESD through exchange of ideas and experiences.** Student empowerment through participatory action-oriented learning risks to become a temporary bubble unless structures are established to ensure that students can continue to exercise their agency as change agents, can continue to monitor and recognize the effects of their efforts, and can continue to learn by exchanging ideas for next steps as well as experiences from achievements and difficulties with other students.
- 6. Remove bureaucratic roadblocks for global learning cooperation:** Recent experiences have revealed that global learning structures and practices are impeded by national curricula, school authorities, school administrations, etc. This has made it hard for innovative approaches to implement ESD on the global scale to succeed. To further promote global learning, educational policy strategies must be combined with “bottom up” efforts, i.e. global programs and campaigns aimed directly at individual teachers and students.



## RESEARCH:

**7. Research to explore the use of innovative ESD teaching materials.** The link between development projects, such as the production of new types of teaching materials for ESD and research on the results of such projects, needs to be strengthened. This applies so much more to those types of materials that are made for global use and thus may gain widespread adoption. Which approaches to ESD do they imply? How are they used, in which contexts, by whom, and with which results? How might they be elaborated? What kind of principles and issues should be considered in developing such materials? These are some of the questions that need to be answered.

**8. Finding ways for understanding and managing the relationship between science and local knowledge.** Science can be innovative and emancipatory by questioning traditional habits and myths. Furthermore scientific contributions are useful for explaining and understanding nature (physics, biology, chemistry, geology) and how it can be handled (informed by sociology, economy, history, philosophy). However, in order to be useful, science needs to be combined with the learners' historically gained insights and practices in order to enable them to make sense of the social, material and ecological reality of their place and to be able to act accordingly.

## PART 3

# LESSONS LEARNED AND PROMISING PRACTICES

ESD is not just wishful thinking. At the beginning of the UNDESD the aims, principles and pedagogical approaches of ESD were at the focus of the discussions. Now, at this conference, most of the seminars and workshops took their point of departure in presentations of experiences from practice. The following gives a structured overview of the lessons learned and promising practices exchanged at these sessions.

For further information on these experiences references are made to the relevant conference seminars.\*

### 1. WHOLE SCHOOL APPROACH:

**1.1.** One challenge is making the teachers actually believe in the concept of ESD, having them on board. They may only focus on one of the three dimensions of sustainability, according to their interests or background. **Seminar 1.1.**

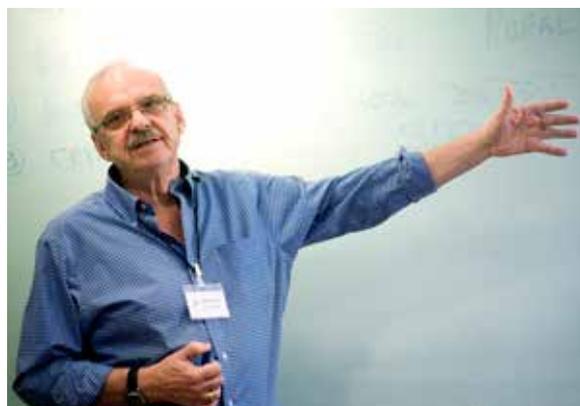
**1.2.** Education is very exam focused. If ESD is not examined, teachers may not see the value of spending their limited time on it. **Seminar 1.1.**

**1.3.** There is a challenge to include the school administration into the WSA. **Seminar 1.1.**

### 2. ESD IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES:

Problem Based Learning (PBL), Collaborative Learning (CL), Inquiry Based Learning (IBL) and other action research oriented approaches to ESD have been used with success at many places. There are, however, challenges in using them, which are important to be aware of:

**2.1.** Teaching outside the classroom can be more effective in learning how to be entrepreneurial, learn what works and what doesn't, learn how to behave well, to respect each other, respect the en-



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vironment and get ahead of poverty. Lack of policy support, scarcity of resources, and dependency on volunteers are challenges for doing it.

**Seminar 3.4., Seminar 2.4.**

**2.2.** Action oriented ESD, like PBL, should take its point of departure in a real issue for the community like e.g. changes in the climate. Furthermore, an enthusiastic key person or group of persons is needed. **Seminar 2.4.**

**2.3.** Broad public involvement, including actors who do not have an obvious link to education, is crucial for the success of action-oriented ESD in local communities. To promote further collaboration between municipalities and other actors on local ESD projects, a signal from the highest political level in the municipalities is needed. **Seminar 3.1.**

**2.4.** PBL can be used to bring different stakeholders together in combined research and planning processes exploring and making differences transparent at the same time as they facilitate the search for common pathways. When it comes to joint actions, it is important to be aware of the fact that their interest may still be different and expectation and roles as well. **Seminar 2.4.**

**2.5.** To pursue inquiries related to complex socio-cultural systems is challenging and requires knowledge of the context. It takes time. Hence, it is important to have a plan for long-term funding from the start. **Seminar 4.1.**

\*See Annex II

<sup>13</sup>Charles Hopkins, UNESCO and UN University Chairs in ESD, York University (Canada)

**2.6.** When trying out new learning approaches, as is often the case in ESD, it is important to be transparent in terms of the new methods employed, in order to avoid confusion and expectations that cannot be met among participants used to conventional approaches. **Seminar 4.1.**

**2.7.** CL can enable community stakeholders with different views, knowledge and power to participate in an open discussion and decide on joint action to address a specific jointly defined issue. The mutuality and ownership of the process that is created is a powerful tool for change. Facilitating such CL is a challenge because of the diverse backgrounds and interests of the stakeholders. **Seminar 1.6.**

**2.8.** In inquiry-based learning, it is important to be aware of power relations coming into play. In a multi-stakeholder setting, it is a challenge to achieve organizational learning based on an inquiry that is negotiated partly outside each organization. It is crucial that from the onset the collaborative learning process is supported by and well anchored within each participating organization. **Seminar 4.1.**

**2.9.** 'Urban X' is a promising example: A mediating unit of public employed facilitators involves children and youngsters in the planning of an area in their own urban district in order to get their perspectives brought into the planning, to train their action competence and improve the dialogue between children and adults, as well as citizens and decision makers, in the local community. **Seminar 3.1.**

### **3. ESD SUPPORTED BY VIRTUAL COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES:**

**3.1.** The Swedish Go YMP (Young Masters Programme) and ESSA-OnLine are examples of global online classrooms. They facilitate cooperation with classes around the world. Contributions from the students have successfully been used to further develop the curriculum and training materials, so it is partly general and partly contextualized by the students' own stories. **Seminar 1.5.**

**3.2.** The Multimedia Classroom for ESD has been established with success in Bangladesh. The approach can, because it is cheap, potentially be applied in all developing countries, where access to computers and books is a challenge. **Seminar 4.3.**

**3.3.** In Africa, computers are expensive while mobile phones are more popular and feasible. They are cheap, light and easy to take along, which mean that they are widely used, also as a tool to support social learning processes. **Seminar 2.5.**

**3.4.** Green Threads is a new global project which connects producers, consumers, retailers and universities globally. The central part of the network is a chain of stores. The idea is that every object in the stores will be telling a story about the background of the product via a barcode that can be scanned by a smartphone. **Workshop 5.8.**

### **4. ESD IN TEACHER EDUCATION:**

**4.1.** In Zimbabwe, three teacher training colleges have adopted a 'Doing to learn and learning to do' approach, where the students have been working manually in the school environment. On the one hand, the school environment has been improved, environmental awareness has been raised at the school and in the local community, and the student teachers have been empowered as change agents. On the other hand, there has been some resistance among the in-service teachers and reluctance from the students to co-operate. **Seminar 4.5.**

### **5. EVERYDAY LIFE APPROACH TO ESD IN PRE-SCHOOLS:**

**5.1.** An integrated, holistic approach, related to the children's everyday life, is better than using separate subjects. The children at this age don't know the boundaries of subjects. By using the existing interests of the children the learning efforts can support them in making meaning of the world around them. **Seminar 1.3.**

## PART 4

# REFLECTIONS: THE IMPORTANCE OF DIALOGUE FOR TRANSBOUNDARY ESD

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The three days of the conference “The Power of ESD – Exploring Evidence and Promise” in Visby, Sweden, gave rise to intensive and productive co-learning, co-thinking and the co-formulation of arguments for the further development of ESD – in practice, in research and in policy. If need there be, the conference proved the importance and utility of bringing practitioners, researchers and policy agents together in a space for transboundary dialogue. In the wake of the conference it is exactly the transboundary character of the joint learning and joint knowledge production that typifies (a) what needs to be done further to unfold the power of ESD, and (b) what important challenges for transboundary dialogue to address.

One can say that in its earlier phase the UNDESD was focused on the concept of ESD and its methodological approaches. Over time, one can see it moving towards an increased attention to establishing ESD structures and policies and to exchanging experiences of applying ESD in practice. Now that we are approaching the last two years of the decade, it is gratifying to see how ESD has been unfolding in many exciting initiatives and projects around the world. However, within a rapidly moving world, ESD is still too marginal a phenomenon. It has not yet acquired the necessary traction to make a significant difference in the world’s response to the many social, economic and ecological sustainability challenges. It is clear that something else needs to be done in order to prevent ESD from remaining caught in its own circles of an enthusiastic, but relatively small, community of innovative “true believers”.

For ESD to further unfold, to enhance its traction and to extend its influence in the coming years, “going transboundary” appears to be the way. By crossing the borders between societal sectors,

academic disciplines and professional groups, between the local and the global, between public, private and civil groupings and between different levels of government, *inter alia*, ESD can be a promising way of making sense of and of dealing with some of the huge issues of our time.

As discussed at the conference and described in this report, ESD can profitably move outside the confines of the classroom and the lecture room and into other settings and realities. It can introduce innovative ways of learning for sustainable change into arenas dealing with issues like bio-diversity, sustainable economy, urbanization, ecosystem services and poverty alleviation, technological transformation, social coherence and integration, climate change, health, work, human rights, democracy and media transformations. At the same time, these issues need to be more explicitly introduced in the thinking and practice of ESD. In other words, the world needs to permeate ESD, while ESD needs to permeate the world. By connecting different agendas and different agents the practice of social and collaborative learning becomes a key to effective ESD. It is in creating and facilitating transboundary dialogues related to common challenges that learning for sustainable development can unfold.

“Going transboundary” represents a huge potential, it also implies a challenge. The conference succeeded in making space for co-production of knowledge between policy agents, researchers and practitioners. But it also revealed that more has to be done in order to bridge the gaps between them. It is not just a matter of organizing a conference, a seminar or a meeting. There is a need for creating appropriate structures that can facilitate the continuous learning interaction between these different groups.

During the conference this became very visible when ESD practitioners appealed to the researchers to help them explore the questions they were struggling with. The researchers’ first reply was that already lots of research has been done on those questions (either by ESD scholars or by scholars in other areas of educational research)

and that therefore the practitioners should consult existing research results rather than asking for new research. The observed gap between the two groups is neither the practitioners' nor the researchers' fault. Instead, the problem is the weak mediation between academic research and educational practice. There appears to be a strong need for mediating institutions, such as agents, organizations, web-platforms, networks, journals etc., in order to provide ESD practitioners with research of relevance, and to inform the researchers and those who fund research about the questions that still need to be researched.

There is also a need to bridge the gap between policy makers and practitioners. Usually, the communication between these two groups is unidirectional. It consists of top-down dissemination of information and instructions by decision makers and policy makers to practitioners, who are expected to implement them. In some countries there are structures for hearings and consultations through which messages from the bottom, i.e. from the world of practice, can reach the policy makers. However, what is needed here, we believe, are spaces for regular dialogue and co-thinking. The conference was such a space, though limited in time. However, for a transboundary dialogue between policy makers and practitioners to become effective, additional dedicated and sustained space is needed. And, as was mentioned above, ESD practitioners also need to improve their skills in (a) formulating and communicating their insights, perspectives and arguments, and (b) contacting and negotiating with the policy makers and decision makers. Local platforms and regional networks should be strengthened to improve this dialogue and mutual learning.

For the third relationship between policy makers and ESD researchers to produce the desired results, more and more appropriate dialogue and learning space is required. One challenge here is that usually policy makers demand and expect hardcore operational and instrumental knowledge from the researchers, while the researchers have a natural tendency to avoid simplifications and instrumentality in their statements, as they

may be in contradiction to social and educational realities. Another challenge is the lack of funding for regular ESD research. As a result, policy makers cannot develop knowledge-based strategies, while the researchers have to try to generate new knowledge through sporadic and disjointed projects. A general observation is that the dialogue on these two challenges is weak or non-existing. So again, also here there is a need for establishing more appropriate and regular structures for scaffolding dialogue and joint problem-solving.

The conference did not only give space for dialogue between policy makers, scholars and practitioners. There were attendees from international, national, regional and local levels. It is interesting and encouraging to note that over time the nature of the communication or dialogue between these levels has been changing. It can be said that ESD was born and launched from the top down. In other words, it was developed as a global program aiming at inspiring national governments to establish frameworks and strategies to improve ESD locally and in all different areas of formal as well as non-formal and informal education. Now, when approaching the end of the UNDESD, the process of communication and the desire for dialogue is actually happening at the bottom and is aspiring to go upwards: local ESD-related stakeholders are sharing experiences and are requesting more and better support from national and international stakeholders.

We are hopeful that this conference will help to push towards a continuous interaction and mutual learning between agents at the different levels.

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# ANNEX I

## CONFERENCE AIM, STRUCTURE AND EVALUATION

### AIM

The overall aim of the conference was to bring a group of well-placed Swedish and international practitioners, researchers and policy makers operating in the ESD domain together for sharing and exploring innovative, promising and evidence-based practical, theoretical and policy insights and lessons acquired since ESD was pushed onto the international agenda at the 1992 Rio Conference and the 2002 Johannesburg Earth Summit. Their conclusions and recommendations were expected to serve as inputs for the final two years of the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014) and the period thereafter.

There were two more specific objectives. The first objective was to explore outcomes and evidence acquired over the last ten years of global ESD practice, research and policy: in order to advance their understanding, practical usability and policy relevance. The second objective was to enrich and expand the connections among and between ESD practitioners, researchers and policy makers in Sweden and abroad. Both objectives are central to SWEDESD's mandate of enhancing the capacity for effective ESD practice, research and policy, also through the development and strengthening of partnerships and networks.

This was a learning conference. A premium was placed on interaction, sharing and learning among and by the participants. International and Swedish key note speakers gave inspirational frameworks for the participants' deliberations. Participants actively explored specific ESD issues, approaches, methods and content, and the results thereof in 24 seminars and 10 open space workshops, programmed over the three days, led by conference participants. In each parallel 90 minute seminar, appointed rapporteurs assisted the participants to document their findings and conclusions. These served as the basis for the conference report.

### ORGANIZATION AND SUPPORT

Susanne Zetterblom, SWEDESD Event Coordinator, was the main organizer of the conference, in cooperation with other SWEDESD and Gotland University staff. The conference gratefully acknowledges the special financial and direct material support from the Swedish Institute and its Baltic Sea Unit, the Swedish National UNESCO Commission, Gotland County Administrative Board, and Gotland Regional Council.



The conference structure and orientation benefited from the conceptual and technical advice of members of SWEDESD's International Advisory Group, in particular, Kartikeya Sarabhai (Director, CEE, Ahmedabad, India), Jim Taylor (Education Director, WESSA, Howick, South Africa) and John Fien (RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia).

## STRUCTURE

Five themes formed the conference structure:

- Agency and empowerment for sustainability and change;
- Learning related to ecosystem services for poverty alleviation, and climate change;
- Collaborative and social learning for sustainability and change;
- Learning for sustainability and change in schools and teacher education; and
- Innovative and alternative ESD methods e.g. serious games, stage art, social networks.

The seminars and open space workshops addressed the following questions:

How does ESD work in practice? Under what conditions is ESD effective? How does it work in non-formal and informal learning settings? What approaches to ESD have proven successful in helping learners become agents or become empowered? What forms does such empowerment take and what is the range of impacts? How do the learners acquire the necessary knowledge, ethic and skills to effectively address sustainable development challenges?

What is the extent and quality of the research base for unveiling the evidence or promise of education and learning for sustainable development? Which research methods are adapted to the particular substance of ESD and why?

How does ESD policy and governance look like? What forms of governance and policy mechanisms at different levels are adapted to the particular substance of education and learning for achieving sustainable development? How well are they working? What lessons might different constituencies learn from them?

What are the implications of the answers to the previous questions for adjusting, changing and improving ESD-related practice, research and policy?

## CONFERENCE EVALUATION

At the end of the conference, the participants were invited to express their opinion on the conference and its proceedings. There was unanimous praise for the way the conference was organized and managed. Participants said that the conference was well-designed, innovative and compact. They considered it well-managed, well-scheduled and planned with a good balance between various activities. They appreciated the many opportunities for dialogue and conversations.

Participants made many suggestions for ensuring that future events of the same nature can be even better and more productive. In particular, it was suggested that more time should be given to key-note speakers. This should allow them to treat their subject in greater depth and detail. Thus conference participants would be able to learn something new. It was also suggested that the final conference session, at which the conference conclusions are presented, should be structured and facilitated in such a way that fuller justice is done to the preceding parallel seminars, and that more than only a few participants partake in discussing final conclusions. A third suggestion was to ensure that the conference venue accommodate the parallel seminars more easily. The physical set-up of the parallel seminar rooms should reflect and be responsive to the envisaged co-learning.

# ANNEX II

## SEMINARS AND CONVENERS

### SEMINARS ROUND 1\*

Wednesday 24 October

- 1.1 A Whole School Approach**  
Mita Nangia Goswami (WWF, India), Zipporah Musyoki Webola (WWF, Kenya), Germund Sellgren (WWF, Sweden)
- 1.2 Sustainability Leadership: Empowerment for Sustainability and Change**  
Mahesh Pradhan (UNEP, Kenya)
- 1.3 ESD goes hand in hand with good early childhood education**  
Ingrid Engdahl (Stockholm University, Sweden)
- 1.4 Policy for ESD and climate change education: a direct opportunity to influence UNESCO's coming guidelines**  
Jeppe Læssøe (Aarhus University, Denmark)
- 1.5 ESSA Online – The Young Masters Programme (YMP) model in Sustainable Development**  
Torvald Jacobsson (Young Masters Programme, Sweden), Shepherd Urenje (SWEDESD, Sweden)
- 1.6 Learning Together for Sustainability**  
Sanskriti Menon (CEE, India), Madhu Bharti (CEPT University, India)

### SEMINARS ROUND 3\*

Thursday 25 October

- 3.1 Learning by doing - ESD models in a local perspective**  
Lari Pitkää-Kangas, Mia Josefsson & Per-Arne Nilsson (City of Malmö, Sweden)
- 3.2 Computer game technologies and methodologies to model SD and facilitate ESD**  
Steven Bachelder (Gotland University, Sweden) & Wolfgang Brunner (SWEDESD, Sweden)
- 3.3 Transformative learning through harnessing ESD policy promises and evidence from sustainability practices in Southern Africa**  
Tichiano Pesanayi (SADC-REEP, South Africa) & Ravhee Bholah (Mauritius Institute of Education, Mauritius)
- 3.4 ESD and the preservation of the integrity of the Lake Victoria Catchment**  
Daniel Babikwa (National Environmental Management Authority, Uganda)
- 3.5 The Challenges of Governance for ESD**  
John Fien (RMIT University, Australia)
- 3.6 Can a school environment really impact it's performance?**  
Peter Inampasa & Martha Shongwe (Ministry of Education and Training, Swaziland)

### SEMINARS ROUND 2\*

Thursday 25 October

- 2.1 The Tree of Life**  
Victoria Thoresen (PERL, Hedmark University College, Norway)
- 2.2 Skills for a Green Economy: Practice, Possibilities and Prospects**  
John Fien & Jose Roberto Guevara (RMIT University, Australia)
- 2.3 Drama is about the Planet in a mess**  
Åsa Bjurström (University West, Sweden), Bernard Mukisa (Budondo Intercultural Center, Uganda), Stephen Lwanga (Actor, Sweden/ Uganda)
- 2.4 Enhancing school community empowerment on water management through based learning**  
Ravhee Bholah (Mauritius Institute of Education, Mauritius)
- 2.5 Social media: Supporting ESD processes**  
Jim Taylor (WESSA, South Africa), Maurice Nkusi (Polytechnic of Namibia)
- 2.6 Drivers and barriers in higher education learning for and about SD**  
Paula Lindroos (Baltic University Programme, CSD Uppsala, Sweden)

### BEST PRACTICE ROUND 4\*

Thursday 25 October

- 4.1 Overcoming challenges in inquiry-based learning – experiences from the Supporting Urban Sustainability (SUS) Program**  
Alexander Hellquist (SWEDESD, Sweden)
- 4.2 Preschool children – playing with their health**  
Ingrid Engdahl (Stockholm University, Sweden)
- 4.3 Teacher-led content development & Multimedia Classroom - A Bangladeshi Model**  
Md Nazrul Islam Kahn (Government civil service, Bangladesh)
- 4.4 How do we find out what we know?**  
Marilyn Mehlmann (Global Action Plan International, Sweden)
- 4.5 Evidence-Based Outcomes of Teacher Training for Empowerment and Agency**  
Iris Chimbodza (Belvedere Technical Teachers' College, Zimbabwe)
- 4.6 The ESSA Program - mainstreaming strong sustainability and agency into teacher education**  
Wolfgang Brunner & Shepherd Urenje (SWEDESD, Sweden)

## OPEN SPACE WORKSHOPS ROUND 5

### Friday 26 October

**5.1** Compassion, dignity, collaboration and service  
Victoria Thoresen (PERL, Hedmark University College, Norway)

**5.2** ESD to partner convention on biological diversity

Kartikeya Sarabhai (CEE, India)

**5.3** Partnership network of sustainable development schools

Sofia Savelava (Academy of Post-graduate Education/ Earth Charter, Belarus)

**5.4** Animation for environmental awareness in education revolving around a young boy called Chimi.

Laxmi Dhaul (Prithvi Media, India)

**5.5** WE4AL – The Green Communities, working towards SD – cooperation among local people  
Seema Dhawan (HNB Garhwal Central University, India)

**5.6** Education of parents for effective ESD  
Badri Pande (National College for Higher Education, Nepal)

**5.7** The role of early childhood education for a sustainable society

Ingrid Engdahl (Stockholm University, Sweden) & Ingrid Pramling Samuelsson (Gothenburg University, Sweden)

**5.8** Green Threads – weaving together the threads of sustainability

Tanya Elder, (Linnaeus University, Sweden)

**5.9** ESD and Life Skills? True or False

Marilyn Mehlmann (Global Action Plan International, Sweden)

**5.10** ESD – Creating the physical and mental space for the use of our own self – do we really continue to develop and listen to our own sensory mechanisms?

Wolfgang Weiser (Freelance, Sweden)

## ANNEX III PARTICIPANTS

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# THE THEMATIC: EDUCATION AND LEARNING FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Central to the theory and practice of ESD is the effort to combine its three constituent components: education/learning, sustainability and development. The substance of ESD resides in the intimate connection between the content of sustainable development and the methods of education and learning. Sustainable development can be understood and acted upon through an appreciation of the dynamic, complex and systemic relationship between the planetary ecological substrate and human societies in their social, economic and cultural make-up.

Sustainable human societies are characterized by social justice, economic equity and enhanced human capabilities. They allow individuals and groups to make considered choices for advancing current and future common welfare while maintaining ecological integrity. The quality of human capability rests on agency. This is a central element in ESD.

Prevailing dominant social, economic and political development paradigms do not necessarily promote social and economic justice. Also, they compromise the integrity of the ecological substrate, while producing physical and biological effects exceeding critical planetary boundaries. At the same time, examples abound of how people, through education and learning, actively engage in shaping ecological, material, social, economic and political conditions for sustainable human livelihoods – in the present as well as in the future, for the many and not for a privileged few.

Development processes are learning processes. They are neither given nor pre-determined. Educational institutions (from pre-school to university, from skills training to adult education) have a critical role to play to enable and empower young and old to comprehend and act on them. But not only there. Wherever people can meet, interact and explore the conditions of their existence – in families, communities, cities, work places and associations – learning can take place.

Therefore the methods of education and learning should do justice to the essence of sustainability and development. They allow the learners to go beyond disciplinary, geographical, cultural and political borders. They create the conditions for agency and empowerment to address the issues at hand; for developing scientific knowledge; for problem solving; for analyzing complexity and synthesizing the acquired insights; for encouraging an ethic of care both for other people and Earth; and, for exploring and establishing sustainable forms of social organization, production and consumption.

