Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)
- Short briefing -

1. Why ESD?
There is an increasing international consensus that we need to put our world on a more sustainable development path. The fight against poverty continues to be high on the international agenda with more than 1 billion people living in extreme poverty, while human impacts detrimental to the environment have reached alarming levels. Looming climate change challenges and accelerating environmental, geopolitical and demographic change – and associated risks and disasters – threaten to reverse development gains and pose new challenges to sustainable development. Achieving sustainable development requires a change in the way people think and act, and this is where Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) has a crucial role to play.

2. What is ESD?
Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) aims at providing everyone with the opportunity to acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values necessary to cope with existing and emerging challenges and shape resilient and sustainable societies. It contributes to UNESCO’s overall vision of equitable, quality lifelong learning by fostering creative and responsible global citizens.

ESD key messages
- To achieve sustainable development, political regulations and financial incentives are not enough. ESD helps bring about the needed change in the way people think and act.
- ESD makes education relevant. Innovative, learner-centered teaching and learning methods help empowering learners with the knowledge, skills and values they need to address social, environmental and economic challenges of the 21st century.
- ESD helps building green societies through equipping students with skills for green jobs and motivating learners to choose sustainable lifestyles.
- ESD empowers learners to adapt to the impact of climate change and to address its causes.

In December 2002, the UN General Assembly proclaimed the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD, 2005-2014) and designated UNESCO as the lead agency.

UNESCO developed an International Implementation Scheme for the DESD. Twenty-two UN agencies coordinate their ESD work within the UN Interagency Committee for the DESD. Key partners within this Committee are the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations University (UNU).

The assessment reports on the Decade, published by UNESCO in 2009 and 2012, have shown that ESD is more and more present in national and international education policies. ESD pedagogies are advancing, and practitioners around the world undertake a large amount of high-quality ESD activities. Many stakeholders look to UNESCO for guidance and global agenda setting.

During the DESD, many positive steps have been taken and ESD is gaining momentum. However, much remains to be accomplished. ESD is far from being integrated into all areas of education and learning.

4. A Global Action Programme on ESD as the follow up to the DESD

At the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) in 2012, countries acknowledged the importance of ESD in the outcome document, and made a commitment to strengthening it beyond the end of the Decade.

UNESCO, in consultation with Member States and in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, developed the follow up framework to the DESD, which was endorsed by the UNESCO General Conference in November 2013. A Global Action Programme on ESD is expected to be launched at the World Conference on ESD in 2014 (10-12 November, Aichi-Nagoya, Japan), pending approval by the UN General Assembly in 2014. Its priority action areas are: 1) Policy; 2) Whole-organization approaches; 3) Educators; 4) Youth; and 5) Local communities and initiatives.

The Programme will focus on scaling-up and generating ESD action in relevant areas of education and sustainable development. The Global Action Programme is also intended as a concrete contribution to the post-2015 agenda.