

# The Global Action Programme on Education for Sustainable Development – UNESCO

Expert: José Manuel Gutiérrez Bastida

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## Background

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Concern about the environmental crisis, (both because of the overuse and destruction of ecosystems resulting in the reduction of its capacity, and the lack of social justice and equity), arises in the middle of the twentieth century. The importance of education in finding ways to solve this problem appears right from the start.

With respect to the United Nations system, the first major meeting on this issue is the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, held in Stockholm in 1972. In the final document, the Stockholm Declaration, Recommendation 96 highlights the need to generate an interdisciplinary approach to environmental education (EE), of both formal and informal character, covering all levels of education and directed to the general public, (young and adult alike), in both rural and urban areas, with a view to teaching the simple measures, with which to manage and control our own environment as far as we can.

The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, better known as the Earth Summit in 1992 agreed on "Agenda 21", in which Chapter 36 is dedicated to "Promoting education, training and awareness." This section states that education is linked to virtually all areas of Agenda 21, and even more closely with those relating to the satisfaction of basic needs, such as the creation of necessary structures, data and information, science and the role played by the major groups. A global reorientation of education is proposed which directs it towards sustainable development.

Johannesburg (South Africa, 2002), World Summit on Sustainable Development (Rio + 10), evaluates the achievements of Agenda 21 and the importance of education for sustainable development (ESD) is confirmed and recommended to the General Assembly to consider the possibility of proclaiming a United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014), which is carried out in 2004.

Once more in Rio de Janeiro, the Rio + 20 Summit (Brazil, 2012) is held where the document "*The future We Want*" is adopted. This agreement highlights the need to "promote education for sustainable development and to integrate sustainable development more actively into education beyond the Decade of the United Nations Education for Sustainable Development" from 2005 to 2014.

In another vein, apart from the aforementioned Stockholm Conference, UNESCO takes up the UN mandate for the development of environmental education and begins a series of meetings that start shaping this new field: Seminar in Belgrade (1975), Tbilisi (1977), Moscow - Tbilisi + 10 (1987), Thessaloniki - Tbilisi + 20 (1997) and Ahmadabad - Tbilisi + 30 (2007) in which the purpose and actions of EE are developed. At the meeting in Thessaloniki, UNESCO changes the name from "environmental education" to "Education for Sustainable Development" (ESD), a factor that triggers a great debate.



## Global Action Programme

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UNESCO also takes on the responsibility for the development and monitoring of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development 2005-14. This Decade ends with the celebration in Aichi-Nagoya (Japan) from 10 to 12 November 2014, of the World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development. Under the slogan "Learning Today for a Sustainable Future", 1000 assistants "by invitation only" participated in presentations and discussions of the event that brought the Decade to a close, and saw the birth of the Global Action Programme (GAP) in ESD.

This programme is contextualized by UN plans in its post-2015 Agenda, containing the *Goals for Sustainable Development*, the *Education for All programmes* and the document *The Future We Want Rio + 20*, etc.

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From the resolution of the UN, UNESCO has developed the route for the implementation of GAP on ESD. This instrument begins by noting that there is now a growing international recognition of ESD as an integral element of quality education and a key factor for sustainable development (<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002305/230514e.pdf>)

## GAP: principles and dimensions

(Slide #6)

Before posing its objectives and goals, the GAP presents some preliminary concepts defining Key Principles and dimensions of ESD.

The key principles of GAP for understanding ESD are:

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- a) The ESD allows every human being to acquire knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that contribute to SD, to make informed decisions and take responsible measures for the environmental integrity and viability of the economy and achieve social justice for both current and future generations.
- b) ESD involves the inclusion of the key issues of SD in teaching and learning methods which should be innovative and participatory, empowering and motivating learners to act in SD. ESD promotes skills such as critical thinking, understanding of complex systems, the imagination of future scenarios and participatory, collaborative decision-making.
- c) ESD is based on an approach towards education based on human rights.
- d) ESD is a transforming education since its purpose is to reorient societies towards SD.
- e) ESD refers to ecological, social and economic aspects of SD in an integrated, balanced and comprehensive manner.
- f) ESD covers lifelong formal and informal learning.

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- g) ESD covers all activities which comply with the above principles, whichever term is used (ESD environmental education, education for sustainability, global education, education for development etc.).

As for the dimensions of ESD to take into account the GAP route lists: **(Slide #9)**

1. Contents: Curricula should integrate factors that constitute the current socio-ecological crisis: climate change, biodiversity, disaster risk reduction and sustainable consumption and production.

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- h) Teaching and Learning Environments: Must be based on the design of pupil-centred, interactive teaching and learning, which allows for exploration and discovery leading to action-orientated and socially transformative learning. We must rethink learning environments, both physical and virtual, to inspire action for sustainability.

**(Slide #11)**

- i) Learning Outcomes: Based on stimulating learning and the promotion of basic skills: critical and systematic thinking, collaborative decision making and responsibility towards present and future generations.

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- j) Transformation of Society: Empowering the students of any age, in any field of education, to transform themselves and the society in which they live; enabling the transition towards a greener economy and society, with more actively committed citizens.

## **GAP: Goal and Objectives** **(Slide #13)**

The GAP establishes its aim to: Generate and intensify initiatives in all areas of education and learning in order to accelerate progress towards achieving sustainable development.

To reach this objective a couple of goals are set:

- a) To re-orientate education and learning so that all people have the opportunity to acquire knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that can contribute towards sustainable development
- b) To strengthen education and learning in all programs, agendas and activities to promote sustainable development.

## **GAP: Priority lines of action**

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In order to develop the objectives the following priority lines of action are established, with their corresponding actions, expected results and main actors:

**ACTION 1. Formulate policies to support ESD:** Incorporate ESD both in educational policies and in SD, to create an environment for ESD to flourish and to achieve a change in the system.

Current policies are insufficient to implement ESD. In order to make changes in the system, policies must be relevant and coherent. Collaboration with other social sectors is necessary.

- **ACTION:** Take the necessary measures for the implementation of ESD in different policies.
- **EXPECTED RESULTS:** integrate ESD into different policies.
- **MAIN ACTORS:** Policy makers in sustainable development and the education system:
  - Establish policies ESD.
  - Those who work in climate change, biodiversity, disaster risk ... should integrate ESD.

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**ACTION 2. Transform learning environments and training:** Comprehensive sustainability principles in education and training environments.

Not only must the theory of SD be shown, it must also be put into practice. Environments such as those offered by eco-schools or green campuses are good examples of this. But it is not just about management, it is also about ethics and good government. We must involve the entire institution.

- **ACTION:** Plans for ESD with the collaboration and participation of the community.
- **EXPECTED RESULTS:** Plans and strategies carried out by schools and institutions
- **MAIN ACTORS:** Leaders (heads of different education centres and stages ...)

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**ACTION 3. Strengthen the capacity of educators and trainers:** It is essential to increase the capacity of teachers and educators to deliver ESD more effectively. ESD training is very important both in knowledge and skills, and attitudes and values. The development of ESD carries a bonus of motivation and commitment.

- **ACTION:** Integrate ESD in lifelong learning, teacher training and the training of trainers and staff of private institutions.
- **EXPECTED RESULTS:** Integration of ESD into training trainers plans. Creating certifiable standards of capacity. Improvements in training teachers in ESD.

**MAIN ACTORS:** Agents related to education and lifelong learning.

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**ACTION 4. Empower and mobilise youth:** Increment ESD actions among young people.

Youth is central to a more sustainable future (the group most affected today and tomorrow). They are an important group in the consumer societies and demand participation in the solution of problems. Young people have great potential as agents of change.

- **ACTION:** Make the most of IT and networking. Empower young people by giving information about the problems and asking them to participate creatively in solving them.
- **EXPECTED RESULTS:** To generate IT learning opportunities.
- **MAIN ACTORS:** Agents related to education and lifelong learning.

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**ACTION 5. Accelerate sustainable solutions locally:** At community level, increase the scale of ESD in programmes and networks for the many people interested in this subject.

The cities, where half of the world population are concentrated, will be the future scenario of the struggle for sustainability. Local, urban and rural communities are the engines of SD and should have greater support.

- **ACTION:** Strengthen networks of various parties and improve learning platforms. Give attention to formal and informal education. Empower communities to meet the challenges.
- **EXPECTED RESULTS:** Integration of ESD programmes and prospects in planning and decision-making. Increased number of networks of various parties.
- **MAIN ACTORS:** Public authorities, agents interested in education and SD, leaders of educational institutions, private companies and civil society representatives.

## **GAP: Strategies, resources and launch commitments**

**(Slide #20)**

In order to develop these priority lines of action, UNESCO has strategies like launching a new impetus with the GAP itself, make the most of UNESCO associations, promote Global Community Practice and propose Good Practice.

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In turn, it establishes various mechanisms:

- **Nationally:** it proposes the creation of a national coordination and the development of national targets for EDS
- **At global and regional level:** it will create a GAP (Paris) Secretariat, supervision of worldwide GAP implementation, coordinate associated networks ...
- **The project is financed by the governments belonging to UNESCO.** Countries with fewer resources can seek help from the Global Alliance for Education, the Special Fund for Climate Change, the Green Fund for Climate Change ...



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Finally it highlights its method of monitoring and evaluation:

- Monitoring and periodic reports, both nationally and internationally
- Objectives and quantitative and qualitative indicators will be developed, with emphasis on increasing the number of agents involved
- By 2017: the global monitoring framework; Networks' partners; the Online Information Centre (<http://en.unesco.org/gap>); 1st World Forum and the Interim Report should be completed
- In 2019 the 2nd Global Forum should be held and the final report of the first phase completed.

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Regarding the participation partners will be sought for each of the five areas for priority action and commitments will be solicited regarding specific activities in each priority area (with activities, deadlines and specific objectives) .The launch of GAP commitments are plans for concrete activities in support of one or more of the areas for priority action.

Research into ESD, which entails discovering innovative approaches to ESD, will be promoted in order to step up progress in each of the priority action areas. **(Slide #24)**

A web space has been set up in order to facilitate participation in the GAP: <https://unesco4esd.crowdmap.com/>

Organizations or institutions, public or private, formal and informal, from education or any other sector, are welcome to participate.

Activities for projects or programmes aimed at certain beneficiaries and / or parties interested in ESD may be presented. And particularly large-scale activities beyond the national level are encouraged.

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In early 2016, 493 launch commitments from various agencies, institutions or groups wishing to participate in this program were counted. The distribution of participation is given by US-Canada, 24; Latin America, 43; EU, 135; Asia. 193; Africa, 94; Australia;4.

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Spain's 14 launch commitments include:

- Barcelona (2): Programme for More Sustainable Schools
- Euskadi (4): Environmental Dep. Sustainable Network of Schools REST index 21.
- Madrid: (7) EE Dep. Madrid City Council, the CRUE (5) and the OEI.
- Valsaín (CENEAM) (1): the Network of Sustainable Schools networks (ESenRED)

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To promote the exchange of experiences, UNESCO has created the ESD GAP Information Centre: a bank of ESD resources produced by UNESCO and links to other existing ESD expertise centres to create synergies and catalyze collaboration between the different sectors. Its goal: to serve as an online platform from which to share knowledge, experience and expertise of the global community of practical ESD (<https://en.unesco.org/esd-repo/>).

## **GAP and COP21**

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The GAP also connects with another historical event: the cop21 or Paris Summit, held in December 2015. In this framework, the Paris Agreement also recognises the importance and value of education in the climate crisis. The term “education” appears four times and the word “training” twice. The preamble itself recognises the importance of education in the fight against climate change and is also contained in several articles and points:

a) Preamble: (...) Affirming the importance of education, training, awareness and public participation, public access to information and cooperation at all levels on matters covered by this Agreement,

b) Article 11

1. The encouragement of capacity-building within the framework of this Agreement should improve the capacity and skills of the Parties (...) in order to carry out effective action against climate change, among other things, to implement adaptation and mitigation, and should facilitate the development, dissemination and deployment of technology, access to climate finance, to relevant aspects of education, to training and public awareness and the communication of information transparently, timely and accurately.

1. Article 12 (contains only this paragraph):

The Parties shall cooperate in taking appropriate action towards improving education, training, awareness and public participation and public access to information on climate change, bearing in mind the importance of these measures for the improvement of action under this Agreement.

a) Proposals of the President for implementing the Agreement in points:

83. Calls upon all parties to ensure that education, training and public awareness referred to in Article 6 of the Convention and Article 12 of the Agreement are duly taken into account in their contributions to capacity building;

84. Invites the Conference of the Parties, the meeting of the Parties from the Paris Agreement, at its first session, to consider ways of strengthening the training, awareness, public participation and public access to information in order to improve the work to be performed under the Agreement.

As can be seen, the GAP and indications of the Paris Agreement go hand in hand. Ultimately it comes down to giving education a space on the stage of EE.

## **GAP and schools**

Schools have spent decades working for education in sustainability, solidarity, responsible consumption, in resolution of conflicts, in treatment of cultural diversity and gender ... in a context that promotes just the opposite. Therefore, the GAP offers schools a good opportunity.

## **What can GAP bring to school?**

Schools are not being asked for more than they already do in the areas listed above. The school can provide expertise to other social sectors and can take a few steps more in the sense of knowing what is knowing is, to promote knowledge capable of addressing global problems, to deploy partial and local knowledge, making education the essential object of the human condition, to cope with the complexity of the global crisis that frames the twentieth century showing that all humans live in the same community of destiny, to learn to sail in an ocean of uncertainties through archipelagos of certainty, to foster mutual understanding between humans and to generate awareness that the human individual is at the same time, part of society, part of a species, part of life on Earth. This means to say, to move in the direction of the seven complex lessons in education for the future proposed by Morin and UNESCO.

The school is an exceptional laboratory for these lines of action, it is a stage like no other for the development of skills that will lead us to them and can serve as a role model to other social sectors involved in offering alternatives to the environmental crisis and climate change.

Schools, as far as fighting against climate change is concerned or with their solidarity projects and multicultural processes ... are already working to overcome the eco-social crisis afflicting the planet. Collaborating in the GAP involves working in a large network of actors who change the world a little every day, as does the school.

The environments that are offered by programmes such as Agenda 21 for Schools, eco-schools, recycling programs, solidarity markets, pedestrian school routes and so many other school experiences are of vital importance. The participation and involvement of the entire educational community is also essential.

Finally, it is another context in which to innovate pedagogically, to provide a more prominent role in the learning process to students, to seek new ways and methods and, at the same time, to continue to fight against climate change and against global environmental crisis from the school and the local area.

## What can the GAP offer us?

The first element is that it offers visibility and recognition. Participate in the GAP, in the development of one of its priority lines of action gives schools the opportunity to show their experiences and successful processes, achievements, challenges faced ... and be recognised for it.

It provides training for teachers and educators who are one of the main factors in the promotion of educational change and learning towards sustainability. Therefore for the UNESCO it is urgent to strengthen the capacities of educators and trainers and other agents of change, in issues related to sustainable development, ESD and to appropriate teaching methodologies.

It is the school's responsibility to follow the priority lines of action in order to transform learning environments and training, to strengthen the capacity of teachers, to participate in sustainable solutions locally and, above all, empower and mobilize youth, and to the extent that other agents are capable of, -in their corresponding priority action lines - formulate policies to support ESD, strengthen the capacity of teachers and accelerate sustainable solutions at local level; the school will find a more consistent environment with the work performed. In this way the gap will be reduced between the solidarity, healthy habits and responsible consumption that is worked on in the classroom, and the competitiveness, junk food and exacerbated consumerism offered to students after school.

Another opportunity that we have is to discover and exchange experiences and establish networks and synergies with other schools, institutions, organizations and social actors working in ESD. In this way, the school can export all their baggage, get to know other realities and create common processes where each party involved may contribute from its own environment.

The school can transfer the importance of these actors in their environment, offering space for the protagonism and action of students, empowering them as agents of social change both in the present and the future.

## In summary

THE GAP emerges as a continuation of the UN Decade for Education for Sustainable Development and plans to generate and intensify initiatives in all areas of education and learning in order to advance towards the achievement of sustainable development.

GAP and other UN programmes Agenda post 2015 or the Paris Agreement of COP 21, are the latest bets to reinforce efforts to alleviate the environmental crisis and climate change afflicting the planet and the living beings that inhabit it.

It offers a new scenario for schools in which to gain visibility and recognition as well as training and the opportunity for synergies and networks with other agents of social transformation. The role of students in their learning and sustainable action will be a key factor on the way to overcoming the global environmental crisis.