

Education for Sustainable Development and Disaster Reduction

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In order to achieve disaster reduction and to introduce the culture of disaster prevention into societies, education is essential. Education for sustainable development and education for disaster reduction go hand in hand.

An early and appropriate definition of sustainable development has been given in 1987 by the Brundtland Commission. Sustainable Development is the development that *"meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs"*.

Disaster Reduction is an indispensable component of sustainable development. It consists of initiatives and measures which are taken in order to enable a society to cope with risks and hazards and to minimize the potential for loss of lives and properties as a result of some hazardous events. Such events may be caused by natural hazards, e.g. earthquakes, volcanoes, floods, and technological hazards, e.g. industrial, transportations, fuels, wastes, and other hazards, e.g. health, traffic, household, unexpected events. Hazards will continue to cause major disasters unless we introduce education and the culture of prevention at all levels. Education for Disaster Reduction is an integral part of education for sustainable development. Disaster reduction initiatives should be rooted in schools and in educational programmes.

Education is regarded in its broader concept. As defined in Chapter 36 of Agenda 21, "Education is critical for achieving environmental protection and ethical awareness, values and attitudes, skills and behavior consistent with sustainable development. Both formal and non-formal education are indispensable to sustainable development." Education for sustainable development and disaster reduction represents a dynamic concept which is trans-disciplinary and inter-sectoral, encompassing economic, social and environmental dimensions. The concept creates or enhances an understanding of the linkages among the issues of sustainable development and disaster reduction.

Education for disaster reduction utilizes all aspects of public awareness-raising, education and training to create or enhance a culture of prevention by identification and understanding of risks, learning of risks reductions measures, and disaster response. There is a tandem between the disaster management community and the educational community.

Education for Sustainable Development and Disaster Reduction has four major Thrusts: (1) Promotion and improvement of basic education, i.e. formal (schools) and non-formal (civil society, workers, decisions-makers); (2) Re-orienting existing educational policy and programs; (3) Developing public understanding and awareness of sustainability; and (3) Specialized training programs.

Schools are the most appropriate place for disaster reduction initiation. Schools can be used to spread the knowledge of risks and resources present in the community; to diffuse and instill into young generations the educational elements that lay the foundations for achieving a safer community; and to facilitate suitable interfaces between disaster reduction actors and the less accessible basic founding groups of the society at risk, i.e. the family groups.

Schools have dual purposes: Disaster-proof educational buildings do fulfill the dual purposes of withstanding potential damage and collapse over occupants in time of disaster, and providing refuge and relief centre during and after a disaster. The upgrading and construction of schools that will be relatively safe during the occurrence of natural hazards should be part of the long-term planning of a nation.

The International Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2015) has been proclaimed by the United Nations. The expected outputs from the Decade include guidelines for governments on how to adopt a holistic and trans-disciplinary approach to education for sustainable

development and the integration of education for sustainable development in the educational policies and systems. Education for sustainable development will not necessitate a new and autonomous plan of action. UNESCO has been named as the lead agency to promote the Decade. In this context, UNESCO is expected to develop a draft international implementation scheme by establishing its relationship with the existing educational processes and providing recommendations for governments on how to promote and improve the integration of education for sustainable development in their educational strategies and action plans.

The roles of UNESCO in the International Decade of Education for Sustainable Development are as follows: To serve as facilitator, convener, and promoter of actions in support of education for sustainable development and the Decade; To assist countries in their efforts to educate for sustainable development; To serve as a forum for discussion of ideas and the promotion of strategies; To work with civil society in an effort to mobilize grassroots support for sustainable development; To contribute to the exchange of relevant experience globally; and To promote research, practice and innovation for education for sustainable development.

As the beginning of the Decade coincides with the January 2005 Kobe Conference, it would be appropriate that an international initiative on education for disaster reduction be launched in Kobe as a major contribution to the Decade.