

## Education First

Launching the *Education First Initiative* in September 2012, the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, highlighting the connection between education and development, said, ‘Our internationally agreed development goals are a complex tapestry and education is the indispensable thread’. The initiative aims to ensure quality, relevant and transformative education for everyone. Its three priorities are to ensure that every child goes to school; that the quality of learning is such as to be transformative; and that it inculcates a sense of global citizenship.

The *Education First Initiative* recognizes education, throughout the document, as a major driver of change to achieve environmental sustainability, sustainable living, gender equality, economic opportunity, health and in inculcating a sense of being a responsible global citizen. As the Sustainable Development Goals evolve, this initiative provides an opportunity for ESD to be integrated into strategies and work programmes as a key driver to achieve these goals. At a recently held UN DESD Reference Group meeting, during a session to discuss the ‘Advancing Policy on ESD’, one of the major components of the proposed framework on ESD post 2014, the group noted that the DESD has promoted the use of ESD, built capacity in governments and in NGOs, created a global network of individuals and institutions and generated several projects that in turn have built a rich base of experience on ESD. This experience needs to be documented and communicated to relevant policy-makers at the local, national and international levels to build the necessary credibility for ESD to be used as one of the key tools to achieve sustainability. ESD not only supports quality education at school and higher education levels, but also supports nations in implementing their Sustainable Development strategies and plans as well while contributing to achieving the goals of the climate change, biodiversity and desertification conventions and the Marrakech process.

Education in the context of ESD is defined very broadly, and it consists of formal, non-formal and informal learning. It is inclusive of training, capacity building and public awareness. There are wide varieties of sustainability training initiatives including those by corporate bodies. However, not many of these training initiatives are categorized as ESD. These experiences need to be captured as part of the overall knowledge on ESD. ESD thinking has often entered the formal system through environmental education or subjects such as geography or natural science. This experience also needs to be documented.<sup>1</sup>

The concept of a Global Citizenship is often misunderstood. Multiple identities—the local, national, regional and global—are seen as competing and, at times, conflicting with each other. In Texas, for instance, International Baccalaureate schools endorsed or promoted the Earth Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the concept of global citizenship. It was perceived as a threat by the community because for them it meant that ‘teaching global citizenship would undermine American citizenship and the authority of Declaration of Independence, Bill of Rights and Constitution’.<sup>2</sup>

Global Citizenship, in the context of the Education First document, has to be understood in relation to sustainability. There was a time not so long ago where environmental problems were considered as essentially local in nature. If the air in our atmosphere was polluted, it had to do with the industries around. However, increasingly the inter-connectedness of the people in the planet has come out stronger. Climate change has become the prime example of interconnectedness to the world and its leaders, leading to the recognition that the problem cannot be dealt with within the confines of one’s city, region or country.

Buckminster Fuller had spoken about ‘Spaceship Earth’<sup>3</sup> in the 1970s. Like a ship, a hole in any part will sink the whole ship and not just the people near the hole or those responsible for it. In this sense, responsible behaviour is not differentiated based on loyalties at different levels. I may cheer my local team and feel passionately competitive about it; I may salute my flag with pride when my country wins a medal; but on issues of sustainability I need to move beyond these boundaries.

Being a Global Citizen does not mean that people do not argue from country perspectives even on issues like climate change. However, there is a difference between a ‘narrow’ country view and a more enlightened one. The challenge for the ESD community is to operationalize this concept and explore ways of dealing with it in schools and other educational institutions.

## Notes

1. Unpublished report, Discussion on the major components of the proposed framework (1) Advancing Policy on ESD, UNESCO Reference Group for the DESD, 9–10 April 2013, Paris, France.
2. Quist M. Julie. 2010. *The International Baccalaureate will bring Controversy to Ozark High School*. Warnings from Upper St. Clair, PA School District. Retrieved from <http://bungalowbillscw.blogspot.in/2010/12/international-baccalaureate-will-bring.html>
3. Fuller, Buckminster. Operating manual for spaceship earth Retrieved from [http://www.therealityfiles.com/wp-content/uploads/edd/2012/12/3-fuller\\_operating-manual.pdf](http://www.therealityfiles.com/wp-content/uploads/edd/2012/12/3-fuller_operating-manual.pdf). Accessed 26 April 2013.

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