Education for Sustainable Development Project

UNU-IAS

UNITED NATIONS UNIVERSITY

UNU-IAS
Institute for the Advanced Study of Sustainability

ABOUT US

The United Nations University Institute for the Advanced Study of Sustainability (UNU-IAS) is part of the network of research and training centres within the UNU system, an agency, which in its role as the think-tank for the UN, aims to contribute, through research and capacity building, to efforts to resolve pressing global problems. UNU-IAS conducts research, postgraduate education and capacity development, both in-house and in cooperation with an interactive network of academic institutions and international organisations.

The UN General Assembly adopted a resolution on the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD) in 2002, based on the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation. Following the resolution, UNU-IAS launched the Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) Project in 2003 with funding support from the Ministry of the Environment, Japan, to contribute to the UN DESD, spanning from 2005 to 2014. The project focuses on advocacy and dissemination of ESD principles, promotion of Regional Centres of Expertise on ESD (RCEs), strengthening of ESD activities of higher education institutions, and contributing to evidence-based policy dialogue through research, capacity development and strategic engagement with international processes.

Upon the completion of the DESD in 2014, the project is committed to further generating, accelerating and mainstreaming ESD by implementing the Global Action Programme (GAP) on ESD, and through these activities, contributing to the realisation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

GOAL OF THE PROJECT

The goal of the ESD project is to help in the creation of a Global Learning Space for sustainable development. The project promotes research and actions to advance partnerships for ESD across geographic, knowledge and sectoral boundaries.

The project aims to realise this goal by meeting the following objectives:

➤ Accelerating local and regional solutions to sustainability issues

➤ Re-orienting higher education for societal transformation into sustainable development (SD)

➤ Developing SD and ESD competencies and capabilities as well as a science-policy interface

These objectives comprise the cornerstone in developing strategies, strategic partnerships, and actions for addressing key areas of SD.

FLAGSHIP INITIATIVES

Initiatives of the ESD Project contribute to building broad ownership of ESD through articulation of the value added by each partner – especially higher education institutions and local (subnational) ESD stakeholders. Our initiatives build momentum and participation through building dynamic networks and expanding those networks throughout local communities around the globe. The project develops and implements research and development agendas through its two flagship initiatives: the global network of Regional Centres of Expertise in ESD and its network of higher education institutions for ESD, ProSPER.Net (Promotion of Sustainability in Postgraduate Education and Research Network).

REGIONAL INITIATIVES – RCE

The ESD Project assists in developing Regional Centres of Expertise on ESD (RCEs) all over the world. An RCE is not a physical centre or building, but rather a network of individuals, organisations and experts who are committed to using education as a tool for building a sustainable future. Each RCE is regionally-based and RCE members bring in-depth knowledge of the challenges facing their respective regions.

RCEs aspire to implement the SDGs through education and training, information-sharing, dialogue and collaboration at local and global levels. Their networks include formal learning institutions, like schools and universities, as well as informal learning establishments, such as parks, museums, private enterprises, local governmental organisations, non-governmental organisations and the media. Collaborative undertakings within and across RCEs include policy work, research and development in the key thematic areas of ESD and sustainable development.

HIGHER EDUCATION – PROSPER.NET

ProSPER.Net (Promotion of Sustainability in Postgraduate Education and Research Network) is a growing academic alliance for ESD in the Asia-Pacific region. It was launched with 18 founding members in 2008 and has since grown to 46 members.

As a consortium of higher education institutions, ProSPER.Net implements activities and joint projects to integrate sustainability into curricula and to build and recognise research capacity in sustainable development.

COMPETENCIES AND CAPABILITIES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Under this initiative, we organise expert meetings and coordinate writing and other research projects to advance ESD thinking and practice, with special reference to monitoring and evaluation of ESD and development of multilevel mechanisms to enhance individuals' and institutions' capacities to respond effectively to sustainability challenges. We also engage in postgraduate teaching and curriculum development as an integral part of policy and action research on higher education for sustainable development.

The ESD Project also delivers the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)-Plus-Three Leadership Programme on Sustainable Production and Consumption annually to government officials, business leaders and managers from the ten ASEAN Member States and their three dialogue partners, namely China, Japan and the Republic of Korea. Finally, we participate in important processes to influence ESD policy-making at the international level, such as an expert group in competencies in ESD established by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE).

REGIONAL CENTRE OF EXPERTISE ON EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

ACKNOWLEDGED BY

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OUR PARTNERS

UNU-IAS has been closely collaborating with the Ubuntu Alliance – an alliance of the world's foremost educational and scientific institutions who are signatories of the *Ubuntu Declaration on Education, Science & Technology for Sustainable Development*. The Ubuntu Alliance aims to:

➤ strengthen collaboration between science and technology researchers and educators;

➤ better integrate science and technology into educational programmes for sustainable development; and

➤ strengthen cooperation between formal and non-formal education.

The Ubuntu Committee of Peers for the RCEs meets once a year to review RCE applications and recommend acknowledgement of new RCEs. UNU-IAS closely collaborates with UNESCO, the designated lead agency for the GAP, and other UN agencies. In addition to RCEs and ProSPER.Net members, we also collaborate with influential research and policymaking institutions and regional organisations such as ASEAN and UNECE.

FACILITATING MULTI-STAKEHOLDER NETWORKS

During the UN Decade of ESD, RCEs:

➤ Created strong thematic networks in diverse research areas

➤ Engaged policymakers as key partners at local, national and international levels

➤ Undertook joint projects, capacity development, monitoring and evaluation

➤ Identified outstanding ESD practices through the RCE Awards

➤ Developed learning cases and the RCE Portal for sharing and learning

RCEs are ideally positioned to translate global sustainable development policy and vision into local realities and undertake actions that are relevant to both local and global contexts. Because RCEs develop innovative modalities for action, education, and research, they can serve as the driving force to implement and synergise the GAP Priority Action Areas and ESD Project focus areas.

ALIGNING HIGHER EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Through collaboration with higher education networks and initiatives around the world, the ESD Project is advancing innovative research, learning methodologies, and pedagogies that strengthen the science-society-policy interface in line with international SD and ESD processes. ProSPER.Net's goals are to develop curriculum for SD and ESD, create leadership on sustainability, and respond to a wide variety of SD challenges through joint research and capacity development. ProSPER.Net members are committed to contributing to the GAP Priority Action Areas, in particular, transforming learning and training environments by disseminating ESD knowledge, promoting innovative research, and influencing policy for higher education.

Photo credits (from left): RCE Greater Western Sydney, RCE Yogyakarta, and RCE Okayama.

ENGAGING INTERNATIONAL PLATFORMS AND PROCESSES

RCEs and ProSPER.Net work in tandem, as well as with other global sustainability networks and alliances, to link local and regional initiatives to international SD and ESD platforms and processes. In particular, the ESD Project prioritises areas such as sustainable consumption and production, biodiversity and ecosystem services, climate change and disaster risk reduction, and higher education-driven initiatives. Multi-stakeholder network actions align with a number of international platforms, including:

➤ The Global Action Programme (GAP)

➤ The Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)

➤ Article 6 of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)

➤ Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030

➤ Higher Education-driven initiatives such as Higher Education Sustainability Initiative (HESI), Future Earth, and the Rio+20 Treaty on Higher Education

WHERE WE ARE TODAY

The Global RCE Service Centre and the ProSPER.Net Secretariat have been established at UNU-IAS to provide assistance to individual RCEs and ProSPER.Net members respectively, and to facilitate their communications, networking, and research and development activities. During the DESD, RCEs and ProSPER.Net successfully mobilised support for the DESD and increased the visibility of ESD. As of 2018, there are 168 RCEs around the globe and 46 ProSPER.Net members contributing to the GAP on ESD.

REGIONAL CENTRES OF EXPERTISE

➤ As of December 2018, there are 43 RCEs in Europe, 63 in Asia-Pacific, 38 in the Middle East and Africa, and 24 in the Americas.

➤ National governments, such as those of Japan, Kenya and Denmark, have recognised RCEs as an effective strategy to implement ESD. The ASEAN Environmental Education Action Plan recognised RCEs as partners.

➤ RCEs collaborate on key sustainability topics such as biodiversity, health, climate change, sustainable production and consumption, poverty, youth, higher education, transitional knowledge, teacher training for ESD and institutions of higher education.

PROSPER.NET

ProSPER.Net activities and joint projects include:

➤ Young Researchers' School on SD for graduate students;

➤ Leadership Programme to develop inter-disciplinary skills to lead sustainable development initiatives; and

➤ development of case studies and training materials on social entrepreneurship skills, public policy, SD practice, poverty reduction, biodiversity, climate change, and sustainable production and consumption within the fields of business, architecture, and material science.

RESEARCH AND PUBLICATIONS

The ESD Project's researchers have published numerous items on ESD, RCEs and ProSPER.Net in peer-reviewed academic journals, books, training materials and policy briefs.