

The 5th Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD V)
Side event on “Building Inclusive and Resilient Societies in Africa through Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)”

Organizer: United Nations University Institute of Advanced Studies (UNU-IAS)
Co-organizers: UNESCO, UNICEF and Regional Centres of Expertise on ESD (RCEs)
Supporter: The Ministry of the Environment, Japan
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Sustainable development in Africa cannot be achieved without building capacities and competencies that enable people to address complex sustainability challenges and move forward for better changes. This is where the crucial role of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) comes into play.

During the second part of a special two-part event on ESD at the 5th Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD V), partners from UNU-IAS, UNESCO and UNICEF joined ESD experts from Africa and the Government of Japan to highlight the important work being done to build inclusive and resilient societies in Africa through strategic partnerships for ESD.

Africa faces a wide range of challenges: suffering climate change-induced hazards such as droughts and floods, diversifying sources of economic growth, providing sustainable livelihoods to communities, and dealing with rapid urbanization and combating corruption, to name just a few. Building resilient societies in Africa requires a comprehensive response that addresses all these challenges. Speakers at the side event argued that ESD offers a promising solution, as it has the potential to facilitate sustainable development actions while harmonizing the development of education so that it is properly founded on a set of principles that will help whole sectors of society reshape their thinking and actions.

Prof. Govindan Parayil, Vice-Rector of United Nations University, opened the event. He reminded participants of the need for ensuring that education systems and overall infrastructure in Africa have the capacities needed to build inclusive and resilient societies, while boosting economic growth, ensuring human security and addressing environmental issues. Mr. Shunsuke Miyazawa, the Director of the Office of Environmental Education at the Japanese Ministry of the Environment, expressed the importance of sharing good practices and know-how and learning from each other. The event, he said, would provide such an opportunity. The Ministry of the Environment of Japan is a major supporter of the ESD Programme at UNU-IAS.



(Photo: Daniel Powell/UNU)

Mr. Ayub Macharia Ndaruga, Director of Environmental Education, Information and Public Participation at the National Environmental Management Authority of Kenya (NEMA), presented his country's efforts under the national development policy framework for forging strong partnerships among diverse stakeholders. At the same time, he recognized the challenges of integrating various development portfolios and also emphasized the importance of building competencies for contextualizing sustainability so that it is relevant to the local context.

Trans-boundary regional collaboration under the Southern African Development Community (SADC) has also brought forward important achievements. Mr. Victor Tichaona Pesanayi, Programme Manager of the SADC Regional Environmental Education Programme (REEP) highlighted a series of success stories about mainstreaming ESD into policies and curricula. These include supporting technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and teacher education, as well as engaging government officials from different ministries in joint capacity development projects and ESD dialogue. While relevant competencies are important for any group in Africa, he stressed that it is particularly critical for children and youth, reflecting the fact that the children and youth population of Africa continues to grow rapidly and constitute the future of the continent.

Much of the work on ESD that promotes development of required competencies and learning systems for their development is already underway. Yet, to progress further, speakers stressed the need to create synergies between this ongoing work and the work being done in other sectors. Several initiatives were highlighted as playing crucial roles in bringing different stakeholders together: the UNU's Regional Centres of Expertise on ESD (RCE) initiative that provides an innovative platform for multi-sectoral and interdisciplinary information-sharing, dialogue and collaboration at local and global levels; and UNEP's Mainstreaming Environment and Sustainability in African Universities (MESA) Partnership Programme that aims at transforming universities and their curricula to reflect environment and sustainability concerns.



(Photo: Daniel Powell/UNU)

From an international perspective, representatives of the UN agencies speaking at the side event offered suggestions on how African countries might prioritize development efforts, stressing the importance of placing new forms of learning and new systems to facilitate such learning high on the action agenda. Mr. Abel Barasa Atiti, UNU-IAS Research Fellow, addressed the values of open and inclusive learning systems that equip learners with problem-solving skills as well as interpersonal and anticipatory competencies for achieving resilient societies in Africa. Furthermore, Ms. Stephanie Hodge, Programme Specialist for Cross-Sector Coordination, Education Division at UNICEF emphasized that investments in quality education should be recognized not only as a direct means to fulfilling the right to education, and

safeguarding and advancing progress towards development goals, but also as short, medium and longer term strategies for disaster recovery and reconstruction, and as a pathway to sustainable development, resilience and equality.

Important milestones for ESD lie ahead in the near future, including the final year of the UN Decade on Education for Sustainable Development (DESD 2005-2014) and the target year for the Millennium Development Goals in 2015. UNESCO, as the lead agency for the DESD, and the Government of Japan will be hosting the World Conference on ESD in Nagoya, Aichi in November 2014 to celebrate the achievements of the Decade and to launch the Global Programme on ESD as a post-DESD framework for action. According to Mr. Alexander Leicht, Chief of the Section of ESD at UNESCO, a number of consultation meetings and online questionnaires have helped identify a tentative list of priority areas and leverage points for ESD actions after 2014. These include integrating ESD into both education policies and sustainable development policies as well as across the whole education institution. As these important events draw near, it becomes more critical than ever for all stakeholders to commit themselves to ensuring that ESD ranks high on the international agenda in the years ahead.

The side event was attended by more than 120 participants including youth, academia, the private sector, and development agencies.