

## KEY MESSAGES OF WORKSHOP

The Regional Workshop on ASEAN+3 Policy Dialogues on Education for Sustainable Development was held at the UNESCO building in Bangkok, Thailand on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> of December, 2009. The workshop brought together governmental officers, experts and academics in the field of ESD, and community practitioners for a series of stimulating and productive dialogues on the current status of ESD throughout East Asia and on specific means for improving its implementation and efficacy. The workshop was attended by a total of 42 participants, and during the two days the participants explored twenty presentations in total. The ensuing discussions were both diverse and in-depth. During the policy dialogues, participants debated on ways to better conceptualise “education for sustainable development”, means to advance ESD both in policy and implementation, mechanisms for strengthening educational practices in non-formal sectors through ESD, and the possibilities for linking ESD with community capacity building and sustainable livelihood approaches.

The workshop examined four key sectors for improving and advancing the practice of Education for Sustainable Development. First, from the perspective of leading international agencies, the achievements of the first half of the UN Decade on ESD (UN-DESD, 2005-2014) were discussed. The progressive focus for DESD in the next five years was also elaborated, and it was explained how direct connections are being drawn between ESD and the practice of poverty alleviation, climate change adaptation, and post-disaster redevelopment. Second, reporting on the current progress on the ASEAN Environmental Education Action Plan (AEEAP) 2008-2012 was investigated across the present member countries. In addition, reports were provided from the +3 members on the status of ESD in policy and practice in these countries. Moving beyond reporting on current status, the policy dialogues took a strong focus on opportunities and challenges for the advancement of ESD in each country. Third, the participants explored the potential for application of ESD in non-formal sectors with the primary consideration of how ESD can serve as a community capacity building tool and aid in strengthening sustainable livelihood approaches. Fourth, the panel discussion and the conclusive session addressed practical means for advancing the current application of ESD policy and its implementation.

Substantial discussion focussed on how ESD can be improved in formal education. This is an area in which much existing good practice was shared, and from this a clear framework was promoted. ESD should be viewed as a tool for educational reform and should be directly connected with the development of a whole school approach. In this model, ESD is not a specific topic or subject of teaching, rather it is a thematic method for providing integration across the entire curriculum. The issue of curriculum reform must consider both how to develop locally based learning opportunities while at the same time ensuring a national consistency. Several objectives for the whole school approach were detailed:

- Maintenance of the school campus should be green and ecological;
- Opportunities for students to develop inquiry-based learning should be advanced;
- Students should be encouraged to become environmental advocates and sustainability leaders in their communities;

- Field based learning should be promoted, but also directly connected to structured learning of sustainable development and ecological principles in-class.
- Projects and learning opportunities should be developed to incorporate investigation across diverse disciplines.
- Active communication, participation, and knowledge sharing should be encouraged as important tools of learning.
- Capacity development is needed for both educators and administrators to understand the value and purpose of this process.

The workshop provided for significant discourse on the expansion of ESD in non-formal education sectors. It was well agreed that one of the major challenges in SE Asia for securing sustainable development is achieving full-scale poverty alleviation, and furthermore the importance of education to support this was well cited. It was within this theme that the idea for developing ESD as a tool to strengthen sustainable livelihood approaches was creatively expounded. One of the key efforts for this process must be to advance common methodologies that can respond to local contexts and accommodate diversity. The process of ESD for Sustainable Livelihoods should be grounded in participatory action learning, with communities learning through their doing, and in securing more direct access to/management of local resources and environmental conservation. The goal of this process should aim at establishing resilient livelihood assets/support systems that communities have the knowledge and skills to wisely manage and conserve.

In the final session of the workshop, participants discussed several means for promoting better knowledge sharing and to ensure better regional cooperation. First and foremost, countries need to undergo internally a clear mapping of the existing capacities for supporting ESD and then develop clear strategies for integrating these diverse aspects. This was highlighted due to a concern that though there has been substantial 'ESD-related' action, it remains disconnected and lacks any cohesive strategy. Second, clear mechanisms for distinguishing appropriate information and policy based on situational contexts must be developed to support the more effective sharing of good practice. Third, better tools for supporting implementation and practice of ESD should be developed. Fourth, efforts should be made to secure more communication across the region and further opportunities for regular networking should be provided for.