

The Tbilisi Communiqué – Educate Today for a Sustainable Future
Outcome document adopted at TBILISI+35
Intergovernmental Conference on Environmental Education for Sustainable Development
Tbilisi, 6-7 September 2012

Tbilisi Communiqué

EDUCATE TODAY FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

1. WE, the representatives of governments from 98 countries, as well as international intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations present at the “Tbilisi+35 Intergovernmental Conference on Environmental Education for Sustainable Development” (Tbilisi+35) held in Tbilisi, Georgia, on 6-7 September 2012, at the invitation of the Government of Georgia in partnership with UNESCO and UNEP, adopt this Communiqué.
2. RECOGNIZE the historic significance of the *1977 Tbilisi Declaration* adopted by the First Intergovernmental Conference on Environmental Education, and further, we recognize that environmental education (EE) processes support and champion education for sustainable development (ESD). This recognition is embodied in the Tbilisi+35 title “Environmental Education for Sustainable Development”. The United Nations system and governments need to support EE within sound ESD policy frameworks. Different regions of the world have evolved sophisticated understandings of the relationship between EE and ESD, which is recognized in this Communiqué. This Communiqué’s references to ESD acknowledge the critical importance of EE as it has evolved since the Tbilisi Declaration and speak to EE as well as ESD.
3. COMMEND the objectives of TBILISI+35, which are to:
 - i. commemorate the 35th anniversary of the *1977 Tbilisi Declaration*;
 - ii. provide a platform for environmental, educational and other relevant authorities to enhance international cooperation for a concerted action for a sustainable future;
 - iii. acknowledge achievements of the global community in the implementation of EE and ESD;
 - iv. address the need for a balanced approach between environmental conservation and development; and
 - v. present recommendations in light of recent developments, particularly those resulting from the Rio+20 UN Conference on Sustainable Development.

Evolving Vision from Tbilisi to Tbilisi (1977-2012)

4. RECOGNIZE that the recommendations from the First Intergovernmental Conference on Environmental Education and the *Tbilisi Declaration* in 1977 have played a crucial role in framing education around environmental protection and sustainable development, thus providing the fundamental principles for ESD. The objectives outlined at the 1977 Tbilisi Conference – namely



awareness, knowledge, attitude, skills and participation – are still valid today, and the main goal – aligning human behaviours, actions, practices and social conditions towards a sustainable future – has yet to be achieved.

5. ACKNOWLEDGE the historical roots and contributions of EE and the related vision of ESD and its evolution from the UN Conference on the Human Environment (Stockholm, 1972); the International Workshop on Environmental Education (Belgrade, 1975); the First Intergovernmental Conference on Environmental Education (Tbilisi, 1977); the International Congress on Environmental Education and Training (Moscow, 1987); the World Conference on Education for All (Jomtien, 1990); the UN Conference on Environment and Development (Rio de Janeiro, 1992); the International Conference on Environment and Society: Education and Public (Thessaloniki, 1997); The United Nations Millennium Summit (New York, 2000); the World Summit on Sustainable Development (Johannesburg, 2002); the UN Decade of ESD (2005-2014); the 4th International Conference on Environmental Education (Ahmadabad, 2007); the UNESCO World Conference on ESD (Bonn, 2009); and the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio de Janeiro, 2012).

6. ACKNOWLEDGE the achievements of 35 years of EE and the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD) thus far and the global community's progress towards establishing ESD policies, strategies and initiatives at the global, regional, national and local levels; nevertheless we note with regret that progress is still insufficient and unevenly distributed.

7. RECOGNIZE the key role and positive impact of the Communication, Education and Public Awareness provisions of Multilateral Environmental Agreements and the development of environmental human rights, acknowledging as well the relationship between human rights and the environment; however we note that their potential has yet to be fully realized in order to address the current sustainability challenges.

Rio+20 and The Future We Want: New Challenges for Education

8. TAKE NOTE of *The Future We Want* - Rio+20 outcome document, in particular the articles pertinent to education, as well as the recent findings of the UNESCO 2012 Report on the DESD *Shaping the Education of Tomorrow*, the UNEP Foresight Report on the *21 Issues for the 21st Century*, the fifth edition of the UNEP *Global Environment Outlook* (GEO 5) report, and the report of the UN Secretary-General's High Level Panel on Global Sustainability, *inter alia*.

9. FURTHER NOTE that humanity faces persisting global challenges as underlined by *The Future We Want*, including, but not limited to poverty, inequitable ownership, distribution and the unsustainable use of resources; social and environmental injustice; unequal educational opportunities; poor health systems; overpopulation; gender inequality; disparities between rural and urban development; loss of cultural heritage and biological diversity; and climate change and exposure to disasters and risk.



10. COMMEND the decision of the UN Conference on Sustainable Development, Rio+20, which stressed the importance of promoting ESD and more active integration of sustainable development into all levels and phases of the education and training system, and further welcome enhanced efforts on early childhood development, primary, secondary, vocational and higher education and training systems beyond the DESD.

11. WELCOME the statements of *The Future We Want*, which recognize the green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication as one of the important tools available for achieving sustainable development and resilience. This requires an emphasis on education in bringing about a meaningful change in people's mindsets and attitudes in pursuing sustainable consumption and production patterns, as well as training and re-skilling the labour force.

Capturing Progress: Endorsing Good Practices

12. AFFIRM that education is critical to achieving sustainable development, *inter alia* fostering green economies and sustainable societies, to overcome social and economic inequality and to promote inter and intra-generational solidarity, peace and responsible lifestyles.

13. COMMEND the practices of continuous monitoring, re-assessment and the revision of education so that it is a lifelong, holistic and inclusive learning process delivering its purpose beyond mere knowledge acquisition and enhancing values and ethics, creating new patterns of behaviours and lifestyles in line with the core intent of the 1977 Tbilisi Declaration and the principles of the Earth Charter.

14. STRESS the importance of lifelong learning experiences and learner-oriented systems that include formal, non-formal and informal education empowering people and communities with the essential knowledge and life skills to foster societal transformation toward sustainability. In particular, practices that encourage ESD to develop key competences that facilitate the understanding of complexity, dealing with uncertainty, ethical dilemmas and risk management.

15. WELCOME efforts towards equal access to quality education at all levels for attaining sustainable development, particularly for disadvantaged groups including women, young people, indigenous communities, internally displaced persons and refugees, persons with disabilities, rural and urban poor, and ethnic and racial minorities.

16. AFFIRM the importance of the foundations of ESD starting in the early childhood years for formal and informal learning of young people.

17. ACKNOWLEDGE the contribution of indigenous people and local wisdom in developing a 'sense of place' and respect for land, especially in nature, as critical for promoting a society that cares for the environment.



18. RECOGNIZE the positive role the corporate sector may play in reducing overconsumption and material throughput, addressing energy, water and food security, environmental degradation, promoting resource efficiency, low carbon societies and sustainable development.

19. AFFIRM the potential of strong intra-governmental cooperation and public-private partnerships, as well as rigorous civil society involvement and meaningful dialogue among all stakeholders—governments, academia, enterprises, consumers, civil society, media and the general public as a core condition for ESD.

20. ACKNOWLEDGE ongoing international cooperation in promoting public policies and the practice of ESD, sharing good practices between states and regions, including in school curricula and management, transferring educational technologies and innovations; and facilitating exchange opportunities, partnerships and joint endeavours by institutions.

21. RECOGNIZE the efforts for adequate and diversified funding of ESD through public, private and corporate contributions at local, national, regional and global levels.

22. WELCOME the development of adequate educational infrastructure and the incorporation of information and communication technologies (ICTs) into education, fostering teacher competencies, research and promoting social learning in all settings as crucial for the effective implementation of ESD objectives.

23. SUPPORT governmental and non-governmental initiatives that enhance scientific excellence, research and innovation on ESD through the involvement of higher education institutions and research networks, and the adoption by higher education institutions of sustainable development approaches, particularly in developing countries.

24. RECOGNIZE that despite the documented progress towards ESD, persisting and emerging challenges for sustainable development and education prevail, including, but not limited to: poverty, unequal access to quality education, uneven ownership distribution of resources, conflicts, economic crisis, unemployment and underemployment, underinvestment in sustainable development initiatives, increased pressure on the carrying capacity of ecosystems, and climate change.

ESD Looking Ahead and Beyond 2014

WE RECOMMEND GOVERNMENTS AND OTHER RELEVANT STAKEHOLDERS TO:

25. ADVOCATE for better understanding and dissemination of the content and processes of ESD and the role of media, including the social media, ICTs and other innovative settings of learning in delivering the ESD objectives, for civil society and in particular vulnerable groups.

26. ACCELERATE the institutionalization of ESD commitments at all levels contributing to good governance in overarching sustainable development processes.



27. PROMOTE the empowerment of young people through ESD processes and encourage their creativity and leadership to become change agents for a sustainable future.

28. ENCOURAGE educational, environmental and other relevant authorities to take coordinated action by establishing partnerships amongst governmental agencies, civil society, the corporate sector, and general, vocational and higher education institutions.

29. ADDRESS the issue of green economies in ESD including better understanding of the role of green economies in achieving sustainable development, as well as providing the appropriate knowledge and skills for the creation of green jobs, while ensuring social equality.

30. ENCOURAGE initiatives and partnerships to address priority issues, such as the transition towards sustainable agriculture, water resources and ecosystems management, climate change, disaster risk reduction and resource efficiency, and to strengthen the role of environmental education within the context of ESD.

31. SUPPORT educational, environmental and other relevant authorities to adhere to ESD principles and approaches in their curriculum-planning, institutional mechanisms and staffing frameworks, so that the appropriate capacity exists for mainstreaming ESD into the education and environmental policies of all countries.

32. ENCOURAGE environmental, educational and other relevant ESD authorities and non-governmental organizations to actively incorporate ESD into National Environmental and Education Action Plans. To this end, we commend the full utilization of existing resources including protected areas, such as UNESCO biosphere reserves, for outdoor learning and research; sensitizing children and adults to the existing and emerging sustainable development challenges and equipping them with hands-on knowledge and the skills for sustainable lifestyles.

33. STRENGTHEN and UPGRADE the existing international mechanisms, organizations and institutions for transferring knowledge, technologies and innovations, for creating viable ESD capacities worldwide. Optimize the use of existing international educational exchanges and create new exchanges and partnerships within and across countries sponsoring fellowships, internships, and scholarships by *inter alia* employing new technologies, with special consideration of the needs of developing countries.

34. ADVOCATE for investment in ESD to be considered as an integral part of development financing. Foster provision of financial opportunities through supporting the incorporation of ESD into the investment portfolios of national and international financial institutions.

35. ENCOURAGE and provide incentives for educational institutions to adopt the ‘whole institution approach’ including design, construction, operation, management, curricula, governance and connections with communities. Further promote good practices in this regard, including through building on the ‘handprint’ concept which encourages tangible and positive ESD actions.



36. SUPPORT accelerated reforms in pre and in-service teacher education programmes to enhance teachers' competencies in ESD.

37. ENSURE that ESD is an integral element of the post-2015 education and development agenda and the prospective Sustainable Development Goals, setting tangible global and national targets, in line with ongoing UN processes, to ensure high-quality, relevant, life-long learning for sustainable development for all. In this context, ENSURE that at the end of the UN Decade of ESD, a substantial post-Decade framework is in place for ESD.

38. UNDERTAKE measures to strengthen the evidence-based research on ESD, both qualitative and quantitative, that addresses learning processes and driving forces for positive change for environmental, economic and social sustainability in various contexts and settings.

39. EXPAND globally the regular monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of ESD beyond 2014, after the end of the DESD, in order to capture the lessons learned and capitalize on progress made and challenges encountered, following existing examples at regional and national levels.

40. INCLUDE progress on the recommendations of the Tbilisi Communiqué through existing ESD reporting mechanisms, including on the Bonn Declaration, as appropriate.

WE THANK the organizers of Tbilisi+35 the Government of Georgia and its partners, UNESCO and UNEP.

WE REQUEST the Government of Georgia to transmit this Communiqué to relevant UN forums.

