THE ABU DHABI ROADMAP
Recommendations from Delegates of the 12th World Environmental Education Congress, Abu Dhabi

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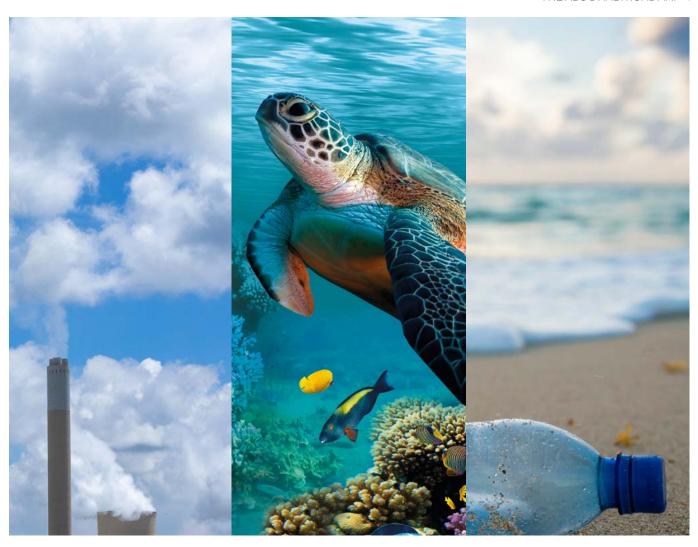
World Environmental
Education Congress
Network

A CALL FOR URGENT ACTION

The **Abu Dhabi Roadmap** is a call to raise the ambition of EE and ESD with an unmatched urgency by 2030 as the UN SDGs and the Decade of Ecosystem Restoration come to a close and beyond.

PREFACE

Humanity is confronting planetary crises, which are escalating at an unprecedented rate.

The triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss, and widespread pollution intersect, putting societies, economies, and ecosystems at risk.

With six of the nine Planetary Boundaries breached, *"Earth is now well outside of the safe operating space for humanity."*

When the IPCC released its AR6, Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis, UN Secretary-General António Guterres declared it *"Code Red for Humanity".*
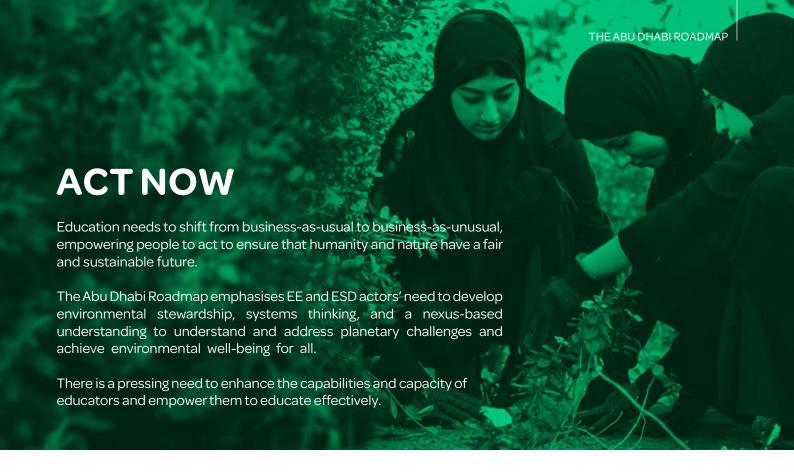
The Stockholm Conference held half a century ago, declared, *"a point in history has been reached when we must shape our actions throughout the world with a more prudent care for their environmental consequences"* (UN Conference on the Human Environment, Stockholm 1972).

We still have time to change the course for the better. Environmental Education (EE) and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) are responsible for laying the groundwork for humanity's transition to a sustainable planet.

Though rapidly shrinking, a window remains to alter our unsustainable trajectory. Transforming education is imperative to catalyse this shift. Reorienting systems to champion Environmental Education (EE) and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) can empower learners across all disciplines and sectors to drive the transition toward a sustainable future.

The Abu Dhabi Roadmap comprises recommendations drawn from consultations with youth, experts, NGOs, networks, and intergovernmental organisations in the run-up and during the 12th World Environmental Education Congress, Abu Dhabi, UAE.

These recommendations aim to spur coordinated action from all relevant actors, including those at the highest leadership levels. Such collective response fostering inclusive participation can build the momentum to mitigate these existential threats.

ACT NOW

Education needs to shift from business-as-usual to business-as-unusual, empowering people to act to ensure that humanity and nature have a fair and sustainable future.

The Abu Dhabi Roadmap emphasises EE and ESD actors' need to develop environmental stewardship, systems thinking, and a nexus-based understanding to understand and address planetary challenges and achieve environmental well-being for all.

There is a pressing need to enhance the capabilities and capacity of educators and empower them to educate effectively.

Address the Crisis of Climate Change

Time is of the essence; there is an urgent need to ramp up the scale and speed of EE and ESD implementation.

World leaders and governments must provide funds to prioritise educator support for EE and ESD with unmatched urgency to confront the Climate Crisis. Education sits at the core of culture shifts and transformative change, emphasising the importance of global, national, and sub-national commitment through policy, capacity building, and financial support. A solid educational foundation with active participation of people, businesses and governments is essential for ensuring sustainability.

Education systems must act decisively to implement initiatives such as the Greening Education Partnership in letter and spirit. In response to *the Declaration on the Common Agenda for Education and Climate Change* made at COP 28.

All educators and education systems should prioritise climate change education. In addition to imparting knowledge and science, it is essential to include transformative pedagogies, integrating sustainable principles into the curriculum across all grade levels, including practical learning experiences that encompass the emotions of confronting climate risks.

Address the Crisis of Waste and Pollution

Educators must draw attention to the inter-connectedness of global resource systems and environmental concerns that intersect and converge, necessitating collaboration across different sectors and disciplines. EE and ESD must help communicate nexus challenges, uncover research gaps, drive technical advances, and contribute to better decision-making.

Combine and expand education around circularity and the circular economy to oppose linearity. Support and empower young people to engage in wise interdisciplinarity and participatory/hands-on ways to reason, analyse, assess, connect, and construct sustainable lifestyles.

Address the Crisis of Biodiversity Loss

Children are naturally part of the environment and have an innate sense of exploration. Our vision of tomorrow will become our children's reality. EE and ESD actors should respond to *the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021–2030)* call for protecting and reviving ecosystems worldwide to build a harmonious relationship with nature. Emphasising outdoor and place-based learning and Nature-based Education (NbE) approaches will create a greater understanding of the environment and facilitate nature-based solutions.

Embrace Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Smart Technologies

Technology is an integral part of our society. It is everywhere and growing. It is imperative to create ethically responsible AI and smart technology and teacher and student learning experiences through pilot projects in various cultures that can be shared globally via a repository, ensuring that EE and ESD advocates have AI-enabled actors to achieve their goals faster, more equitably, and with more significant impact. Empower individuals to effect change and close inequality gaps between complex information and impactful environmental action.

Sustainability from the Start in Early Childhood Education & Care

While education for sustainability begins at birth, we should ensure that it continues through youth, adulthood and across society from formal education, industries, governments and communities to realise its full potential. Early childhood and ECE have a significant opportunity to promote sustain-ability-related attitudes, behaviours, habits and meaning-making. A holistic early childhood pedagogy incorporates social, cultural, psychological and economic dimensions of sustainability. Using this pedagogy emphasises wellness to promote calmness and connection to the natural environment with children learning through play and active participation in matters that concern them.

Societies must increase opportunities for children to learn in nature and build critical thinking and resilience skills to understand and face the evolving world with a positive mindset. Improving educators' and carers' capacity and capabilities in formal and non-formal education will enhance such learning.

Pay attention to Aesthetics, Ethics, Values and Cultural Diversity

EE and ESD must provide opportunities to support the roles of aesthetics, ethics and values in sustainability and social and emotional development that can lead to sustainable societies. The nurturing of an ethic of care and responsibility for the common good is vital, enabling learners (future leaders) to make judgements and act with awareness of our human-nature interconnectedness with a determination to protect nature. Understanding it is the foundation of all life and contributes to the well-being of current and future generations.

Network and Collaborate

Building and sustaining robust networks and collaborations fuels environmental education and sustainability efforts. Particularly from a whole-education perspective, the network also needs to address facilities and parents as partners in the home education of the children of today who will be enablers and advocates of EE and ESD for the future.

Such networks enable cross-pollination, multiply opportunities to share and replicate effective practices, amplify collective voices, increase visibility, and build stronger social movements. Networks catalyse social change and promote the sharing of resources, such as the Environment Sustainability cross Curriculum Framework developed by the UAE's Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure and Department of Energy, as well as many further rich sources of information from around the world. They bring knowledge, connections, funding, and technology to accelerate EE and ESD. Ensuring inclusivity across society and promoting civil society involvement is vital.

Measure EE and ESD

Guide, promote and strengthen EE and ESD interventions by integrating participatory monitoring, evaluation, and reporting processes that draw on qualitative and quantitative data, case studies, surveys and syntheses to iteratively refine pathways to impact and mobilise participants' active engagement in shared, critical reflections.

Dovetail Green Skills and Green Jobs

EE and ESD can lay the ground for youth to positively impact sustainability by connecting educators, scientists, and employers to ensure a climate change-resilient workforce, as it can ensure the demand and pace of sustainable development in the real world of careers and livelihoods. However, it is critical to demystify green jobs for a just transition before glorifying them.

A SOLID FOUNDATION

In developing the above recommendations, we acknowledge that EE and ESD are built on the solid foundation of communities and leaders who believe in a culture of sustainability furthered collectively by a worldwide community.

Intergovernmental and international conferences on environmental education, such as Tbilisi (1977), Moscow (1987), Thessaloniki (1997) and Ahmedabad (2007), have provided much direction and guidance over the years for EE and ESD.

EE and ESD have received much attention in global frameworks such as UN Agenda 21, Chapter 36 (1992); the Earth Charter, the UN Decade of ESD (2004-2015), the Gothenburg Consultation on ESD, UN SDG 4-Target 4.7, and many more.

Networks such as the World Environment Education Congress (WEEC), IUCN Commission on Education and Communication (CEC), Regional Centres of Expertise on ESD (RCE), Australian Association for Environmental Education (AAEE), FEE (Foundation for Environment Education), Global Environment Education Partnership (GEEP), North American Association for Environmental Education (NAAEE), South and Southeast Asia Network for Environmental Education (SASEANEE), and many others, have been contributing and working collaboratively to strengthen EE and ESD.

While awards like the UN Climate Action Award (youth category), Japan Prize for ESD, Young Champions of the Earth (UNEP), EE 30 under 30, and the Zayed Sustainability Prize incentivise young people, students, teachers, and educational institutions to take action.

There is much that has been done. However, there is now an even greater sense of urgency demanding a ramping up of scale and speed, for which this roadmap provides a solid foundation of high-level recommendations upon which to anchor future projects, programmes and initiatives to address this demand.

The recommendations above are further strengthened by the passion, determination, and ideas of the youth committed to building a sustainable future. The recommendations from youth are separate from those above to ensure that their unique perspective and identity are preserved. Their views carry equal importance and are an essential part of the overall message conveyed by this roadmap.

YOUTH EMPOWERMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

• Ensure inclusive, transparent, and meaningful Youth engagement.

• Authentically include youth in decision-making processes, engaging them in the co-construction of knowledge as well as elaboration of educational curricula, tools, and approaches.

• Assure full transparency in all processes through intentional and meaningful dialogues with diverse youth backgrounds, including indigenous and marginalised youth.

• Allocate the necessary resources for youth input and feedback, including but not limited to financial, technical, and technological resources.

• Revolutionise education by seamlessly integrating Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) green-skill-based learning. Emphasise interdisciplinary, hands-on, problem-based education, addressing local issues in a real-world context. Augment learning through guest speakers from diverse backgrounds in relevant fields.

• Champion digital literacy in the ESD context, advocating for the effective use of AI in sustainable development. Infuse existing curricula with STEAM integration, fostering holistic understanding and innovative problem-solving skills, particularly in the realms of eco-entrepreneurship and social enterprises.

• Enhance education through experiential learning and outdoor education, cultivating a profound connection to the natural world. Invest in educator training programmes to deepen ESD knowledge and instil ESD principles in teaching.

• Foster intergenerational exchange between teachers and students, incorporating storytelling, mentorship, and indigenous ecological practices into curricula. Develop environmental policy frameworks embedding ESD, transforming bureaucratic structures to address the triple planetary crisis efficiently.

• Facilitate global reflective practice of ESD to drive research and development on effective strategies. Promote partnerships between private and public sectors, civil society, NGOs, and advocacy groups to overcome challenges in resource allocation and reduce socio-economic gaps in quality education access.

• Support programmes turning educational institutions into nodes of environmental action, connecting them globally to tackle overarching issues. Create learner-driven curricula emphasising disaster management skills and biodiversity as a life-support system.

• Integrate climate change education across subjects, linking it to local symptoms. Consult local educators for effective integration strategies. Employ arts as a medium for ESD, using it to engage youth in navigating complex terminology and concepts.

• Systematically collect data on all ESD activities related to established goals for periodic review. Prioritise job creation within ESD research and development, combining modern and indigenous knowledge.

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