4th International Conference on Environmental Education (ICEE)

The 4th International Conference on Environmental Education held last year and sponsored by UNESCO, UNEP, and the Government of India with the overarching theme, “Environment Education towards a sustainable future – Partners for the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development,” brought together 1200 people from over 78 countries. The five-day meeting took into account the development of environmental education since the first international conference on the subject was held at Tbilisi thirty years ago. In 2005, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution declaring the Decade for Education in Sustainable Development (DES 2005-14).

The 4th International Conference on Environmental Education (ICEE), began at the Centre for Environment Education (CEE), Ahmedabad on November 24 and ended on November 28 with delegates urging everyone to join “in pursuing the principles of sustainability with humility, inclusivity, integrity and a strong sense of humanity.”

The conference declaration, titled ‘Ahmedabad Declaration 2007: A Call to Action’ encapsulated the spirit of the conference in ‘education for life; life through education’ and declared that education processes were integral to meeting the transformation of developing alternative models and visions for a sustainable future. The Ahmedabad Declaration 2007, which was endorsed by 1200 participants from 78 countries, stated: “Our vision is a world in which our work and lifestyles contribute to the well-being of all life on Earth. We believe that through education, human lifestyles can be achieved that support the ecological integrity, economic and social justice, sustainable livelihoods and respect for all life. Through education we can prevent and resolve conflicts, respect cultural diversity, create a caring society and live in peace.”

“Mahatma Gandhi said, ‘Let my life be my message.’ The example we set is all important. Through our actions, we add substance and vigour to the quest for sustainable living. With creativity and imagination we need to rethink and change the values we live by, the choices we make, and the actions we take.”

Here, a few words about the CEE. The Centre for Environment Education (CEE) is an internationally acclaimed institution in the field of environment education and education for sustainable development, which was set up as a Centre of Excellence in 1984 by the Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India. CEE has considerable experience and expertise in addressing its primary mandate of improving public awareness and understanding of the environment with a view to promoting the conservation and sustainable use of nature and natural resources. Further, CEE has a vast official infrastructure of 40 regional, state and project offices across the country with its headquarters located at Ahmedabad in Gujarat. Most importantly, CEE’s unique position at the national level and in the Asia-Pacific region through its network partners will help leverage experience, expertise and resources for ESD programmes in the region.

People who drive into the CEE campus for the first time usually pause and wonder whether they are in fact in Ahmedabad! They find themselves in a small urban forest with buildings that wind around trees; where peacocks and langurs, small squirrels and the occasional monitor lizard greet the visitor as much as the people do. It is as if the space of a busy office almost derives its energy from the nature that surrounds it.

The Thaltej Tekra or hill is approximately a 6-acre stabilized sand dune, which was, till recently just outside the western boundary of Ahmedabad City. CEE is located on the 14-acre campus of its parent organization, The Nehru Foundation for Development (NFD). In the 1960s, when NFD was formed and this land was acquired, there was hardly a tree that stood on it. Today, the campus has inspired others to rethink their institutional areas, and in some cases NFD has even taken on the responsibility of developing the landscape in other campuses. The little wooded area is a reminder of how a modern office establishment can symbiotically co-exist with the natural environment, even in dense urban areas.
The 4th International Conference on Environmental Education (IC EE) was held from 24th to 28th November, 2007 at Centre for Environment Education (CEE), Ahmedabad. CEE was the nodal and host agency. The Conference was organized by Government of India with UNESCO and UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme) as co-sponsors. Being the fourth in the series of Conferences on Environmental Education since the first Intergovernmental Conference held in 1977 at Tbilisi, Georgia, the aim of this Conference was to look into understanding what has emerged out of the discipline of Environment Education (EE) since Tbilisi and the role of EE within ESD. A particular significance was attached to this Conference in light of it being held in the third year of the on-going United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD 2005-2014). Towards this, the Conference provided a forum to look at how EE and ESD can partner and strengthen each other towards building a sustainable future.

Plenary Sessions

Two plenary sessions on the theme ‘Setting the tone - Conference objectives’ were devoted to the background and objectives of the Conference. A special plenary dedicated to Climate Change highlighted the importance of education in its all-encompassing sense which includes communication, awareness, capacity building, engagement with diverse stakeholders, cooperation, knowledge sharing, partnerships in meeting the challenges posed by climate change to sustainable development.

Climate Change (CC) was also a cross-cutting theme for the Conference and the resource group formed for Climate Change identified linkages between CC and the thematic sessions. The Climate Change Plenary brought together the various strands and recommendations discussed in the thematic Working Groups, in which climate change is addressed as a cross-cutting theme and highlighted the current state of debate on global negotiations to combat climate change, and the role of stakeholders such as industry, government, media and youth.

It also had highlights on the importance of mainstreaming climate change impacts in development planning, and the associated role of and need for education.
A Plenary Session in Progress

Plenary presentations at the special plenary on “Water” mainly looked at the role of education in water and its linkages to the need for understanding the integrated nature of water resources flows, the livelihoods dependence and the end uses of water.

A special parallel plenary for governments titled ‘Government Session: Sharing of Experiences’ was also held. The focus of the government session was on sharing experiences in the development of national approaches to education for sustainable development and identifying areas for potential collaboration. This session had representation from over 40 governments across the world and was led by the Department of Environment and Heritage, Government of Australia. Some of the Countries which were represented include Canada, Japan, Mongolia, United States, Cambodia, Brazil, Afghanistan, Korea to name a few.

Participants

The Conference had over 1500 participants of which about 650 were women and 150 were youth. Participants came from 97 countries across the globe. There was representation from developing countries, least developed countries and developed countries from all five continents. Some of the countries from which participants came included Botswana, Mauritius, Cameroon, Egypt, Ghana, Namibia, South Africa, Armenia, Brunei, Georgia, Nepal, Oman, Uzbekistan, Vietnam, Latvia, Lithuania,

Serbia, Ukraine, Estonia. Costa Rica, Fiji, Palau, Dominica, Chile, Brazil Burkino Faso, Malawi, Senegal, Japan, Kuwait, Cambodia, Maldives South Korea, Denmark, Greece, Italy, Australia, Canada and the United States to name a few. In addition to participation from 97 countries, there was representation from 40 governments across the world. The governments participated in the special session for the governments which was led by Mr. Peter Woods, Department of Environment and Heritage, Government of Australia. About 100 participants
were from UNESCO, UNEP and other UN organizations. The Conference participants were
from varied backgrounds and included policy makers from the government, health
professionals, researchers, communication specialists, field practitioners, educators, youth
representatives as well as persons from various UN and other international agencies.

Outcomes

There are three major outcomes of the conference:
1. The Ahmedabad Declaration 2007: A Call to Action
2. The Overall Recommendations of the Conference
3. Specific Recommendations from the Government Session

1. The Ahmedabad Declaration 2007:
   A Call to Action;
   Education for Life: Life through Education; 28th November 2007

This declaration was developed from the 24th to the 28th of November 2007. The drafting
process involved more than 1,500 participants from 97 countries at the 4th International
Conference on Environmental Education. This declaration was drafted in the context of
the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development.

Our vision is a world in which our work and lifestyles contribute to the well-being of all life
on Earth. We believe that through education, human lifestyles can be achieved that support
ecological integrity, economic and social justice, sustainable livelihoods and respect for all
life. Through education we can learn to prevent and resolve conflicts, respect cultural
diversity, create a caring society and live in peace. We can learn from indigenous and
traditional patterns of living that respect and honour the Earth and its life-support systems
and we can adapt this wisdom to our fast-changing world. We can make individual,
community, national and even global choices with due consideration for the collective good.
Individuals including youth, civil society, governments, businesses, funding partners and
other institutions can appreciate that their daily actions can shape a viable future of which all
can be proud.

Ever-increasing human production and consumption is rapidly undermining the Earth’s life-
support systems and the potential for all life to flourish. Assumptions about what constitutes
an acceptable quality of life for some, often means deprivation for others. The gap between
rich and poor is widening. The climate crisis, loss of biodiversity, increasing health risks and
poverty are indicators of development models and lifestyles that are unsustainable.
Alternative models and visions for a sustainable future do exist and urgent action is needed
to make them a reality. Human rights, gender equity, social justice and a healthy
environment must become global imperatives. Education for Sustainable Development is
essential to making this transformation.

Mahatma Gandhi said, “Let my life be my message.” The example we set is all important.
Through our actions, we add substance and vigour to the quest for sustainable living. With
creativity and imagination we need to re-think and change the values we live by, the choices
we make, and the actions we take.

We must reconsider our tools, methods and approaches, our politics and economics, our
relationships and partnerships, and the very foundations and purpose of education and how
it relates to the lives we lead. In making our choices we draw on, and are inspired by, much
work that has gone before us, including the Earth Charter and the Millennium Development
Goals.

Environmental Education processes support and champion Education for Sustainable
Development. Such education processes must be relevant, responsive and accountable.
Research is encouraged to provide additional rigour and credibility and to identify increasingly effective methods of learning and sharing knowledge.

We are all learners as well as teachers. Education for Sustainable Development encourages a shift from viewing education as a delivery mechanism to a lifelong, holistic and inclusive process. We pledge to build partnerships and share our diverse experiences and collective knowledge to refine the vision of sustainability while continually expanding its practice.

In a world with increasing capabilities to network, we embrace our responsibilities and commit ourselves to carry forward the recommendations from this conference. The United Nations system and governments worldwide need to support Environmental Education and develop sound Education for Sustainable Development policy frameworks and commit to their implementation.

We urge all people to join us in pursuing the principles of sustainability with humility, inclusivity, integrity and a strong sense of humanity. We move forward from Ahmedabad in a spirit of hope, enthusiasm and commitment to action.

2. The Overall Recommendations of the Conference

The Fourth International Environmental Education Conference:

1. Reaffirms the recommendations made by the Third International Environmental Education Conference and the United Nations’ International Implementation Scheme for the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development that education must be recognized as an effective driver of change in conjunction with other drivers, such as ethical actions, government policies and regulations, economic incentives, and technology.

2. Applauds governments that have instituted policies and frameworks for environmental education and ESD, and urges all countries to give greater priority to funding and supporting the implementation of these policies and frameworks.

3. Supports the work of communities, groups and institutions that are working towards a secure and sustainable world.

4. Realizes that we need to search continuously for new paradigms and innovations as we do not have all the answers for creating sustainable futures.

5. Urges everyone to learn from history, nature and natural systems to develop understandings of how to respect and live within the limits of nature, and to evolve social, production, technological and economic systems that are creative, innovative, equitable and sustainable.

6. Promotes education that builds capacity to engage critically with contemporary (unsustainable) development discourses and practices and that nurtures and strengthens dialogue and advocacy skills.

7. Endorses education for the achievement of equitable and sustainable livelihoods for all people.

8. Endorses Gandhi’s words that “there is enough in the world for everyone’s need, but not for anyone’s greed” and recognizes that there are people who are still unable to meet their basic needs, people living within their needs, and systems that are turning greed into need. Environmental education must recognize and critically engage the tension between needs and greed.

9. Encourages the use of monitoring and evaluation practices that are designed to be a valuable learning process for all involved.
10. Supports the concept of a Planetary Fund for Environmental Education for building sustainable societies, through development of policies, programmes and initiatives that are equitable, and that are supported and sustained over the long term.

The Conference further recommends changes in several areas of thinking and practice.

1. Change thinking about education: Redirect education, which is a social process, towards bringing change in lifestyles (in consonance with sustainable consumption and production); building social cohesion and respect for cultural diversity; directing organizational practices towards sustainability; and towards including all people in all walks of life at all stages of the life-long learning process.

2. Change patterns of leadership and partnership formation.

3. Change how we understand environmental issues.

4. Change how we conceptualize and engage with the environment – development relationship.

5. Change how knowledge is viewed, and our communication practices.

6. Change sites of learning and participation patterns and practices.

### 3. Specific Government Session Recommendations

1. All countries should identify ways in which they can improve their current ESD performance, acknowledging the immediacy of the sustainability issues facing the world, in particular climate change. Areas of focus should include current decision-makers in all areas of society; “educating the educators” in ESD; promoting holistic approaches to sustainability education in educational institutions, particularly schools; and the development of appropriate indicators.

2. All countries should give greater priority to education as an effective tool to achieve lasting change in people’s lifestyles and organizational practices, in support of sustainability.

3. All countries should seek to integrate their education activities with other measures adopted by governments in order to maximize the prospects of change towards sustainability.

4. Countries in a position to do so should identify ways in which they can work with other countries, which are less able to implement effective national ESD policies and programs.

5. Consistent with its UNDESD charter, UNESCO should facilitate wider distribution and greater access to work already done by countries and regions, e.g. the work done by the UNECE, the Asia Pacific and other regions of the world.

6. UNESCO should facilitate a process of bringing together interested countries from different regions to identify in more detail practical ways in which countries and regions can work together, including the development of national ESD policy frameworks, pilot programs and demonstration projects.

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**Women’s Rights: a Tamil Tribe Shows the Way**

T.S.V. Hari

Udhagamandalam (Tamil Nadu), March 20 (IANS) It’s a tribe that practices what others preach. A small tribe here has a highly progressive system of gender equality that includes property rights for women and simple, low cost, dowry-free marriages.
The 2,000 people strong Kotha tribe has simplified every social milestone in its members’ lives into just the bare necessities. The tribe inhabits seven villages in this hill station, also known as the Queen of the Hills, some 650 km southwest of state capital Chennai, the bustling southern Indian metropolis.

A huge marriage bill is conspicuous by its absence here. What is more, no priests or politician presides over it.

R. Vishwanathan, one of the elders of the Kotha tribe, told IANS: ‘Our matrilineal family ethos ensures that women take all important decisions, including marriage without the interference of priests or politicians.

‘After the groom and the bride meet and agree to marry, an alliance is fixed virtually the next minute.’

Immediately, the groom’s mother adorns the girl with a white shawl - a deed that completes the betrothal. A few days later, the girl is welcomed into her in-laws’ home with a small black-bead garland by the groom’s mother.

‘A token fee of Rs.1.25 is offered to the eldest man in the family marking the completion of the marriage ceremony. Our costs are 1/100th of what they are in the plains. The number of guests may be as little as 10,’ he said.

Both the sexes have equal rights over movable and immovable assets and they can choose their life partners.

‘In the past, most of our dwellings used to be made of thatched materials. Now there are some concrete houses. Though we have several deities and different festivals, most of us are Hindus.

‘After living in the hills for hundreds of years, the commonalities with the people of the plains are very few. We live our lives to the fullest, are choosy about liquor, cook vegetables and meat to certain peculiar specifications that suit the cold climate here and have community dance festivals very often,’ Vishwanathan added.

T.M. Kullan, retired principal of a government college, who belongs to the Badaga tribe but has knowledge of all the major tribal customs in the region, said: ‘Most of us can trace back our lineage to some family in ancient Mysore, Mesopotamia or Europe. Though we do not possess a script, our dialect is a mix of Tamil, Kannada, Malayalam and English.’

‘The expenses of marriage, childbirth and funerals are borne by the entire community. Pregnant women are given a good diet so that they can have healthy babies,’ he said.

Ostracising of widows is unheard of. When breadwinners die due to illnesses or snakebite, the women remarry and give their children the new husband’s name. In most tribes, the onus is on the men to maintain the family in some style, said Kullan.

‘The biggest is the Badaga tribe followed by Todas, Kurumbas, Irulas, Paniyas and Kothas,’ he said.

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