



Research Report

GA3

*Addressing the importance of
education on a sustainable lifestyle*

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Introduction

As the spiraling challenges caused by climate change and unethical unsustainable consumption are continuously being confronted internationally, the UN has repeatedly highlighted the irreplaceable role of education, when accomplishing long-term global sustainability.

Sustainable lifestyles are rooted in everyday choices of individuals, through mutual societal values. Because of this, it is important for Member States to recognize that education—formal, informal, and community-based—should be a driving force in encouraging citizens to make environmentally responsible decisions. The General Assembly continues to make a case for the necessity of education on sustainability and contribution to climate action.

However, despite the noted essentiality by GA Member states, disparities in educational values and quality make progress in this issue minor. It is vital for the UN system and its Member States to strengthen cooperation and create more effective strategies for promoting sustainable lifestyles worldwide through education.

Definitions of Key Terms

1. Sustainable Lifestyle

A way of living that aims to reduce an individual's or community's environmental impact by making choices that conserve natural resources, minimize waste, and promote long-term ecological balance.

2. Sustainable Development

Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

3. Environmental Education

The process of teaching individuals about the natural environment, human impacts on ecosystems, and the knowledge and skills needed to make environmentally responsible decisions.

4. Carbon Footprint

The total amount of greenhouse gases, especially carbon dioxide, produced directly or indirectly by human activities, usually measured in units of carbon dioxide equivalent.

5. Circular Economy

An economic system aimed at eliminating waste and promoting the continual use and recycling of resources, contrasting with the traditional linear model of “take, make, dispose.”

6. Renewable Resources

Natural resources that can be regenerated over time, such as solar energy or wind power.

7. Eco-Literacy

The ability to understand the principles of environmental systems and apply this knowledge to make responsible decisions regarding ecological sustainability.

8. UNESCO

UNESCO is the *United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization*, a specialized agency of the UN that promotes international cooperation in these fields to build peace and a more just society.

9. ESD

Education for Sustainable Development empowers people with the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes to address global challenges like climate change, poverty, and inequality to build a sustainable future. ESD integrates social, economic, and environmental issues into teaching and learning at all levels of education.

General overview

The current climate crisis and other environmental sustainability crises result from human behavior. The joint actions of humans have changed the planet's ecosystems to the point where our existence is at risk. The shift is increasingly rapid, and challenging to undo each day. Two-thirds of the 1°C global temperature increase in the past 100 years has occurred since 1975, while the amount of renewable and nonrenewable resources yearly extracted globally has doubled since 1982. The International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) warns that in order to contain the effect of global warming to 1.5°C until the end of this century compared to the 2°C scenario regarded as extremely dangerous; we need 'rapid, far-reaching and unprecedented changes in all aspects of society.' (*Global Warming of 1.5 oC* —, n.d.) This means not only addressing environmental challenges but also looking at the complex mix of social and economic issues such as inequality that combine themselves with the cause and impact of these problems. What we have learned so far does not prepare us for the upcoming issues and the window of opportunity is closing fast. We must quickly learn

to live differently.

Global temperature change
relative to 1850-1900 (°C)

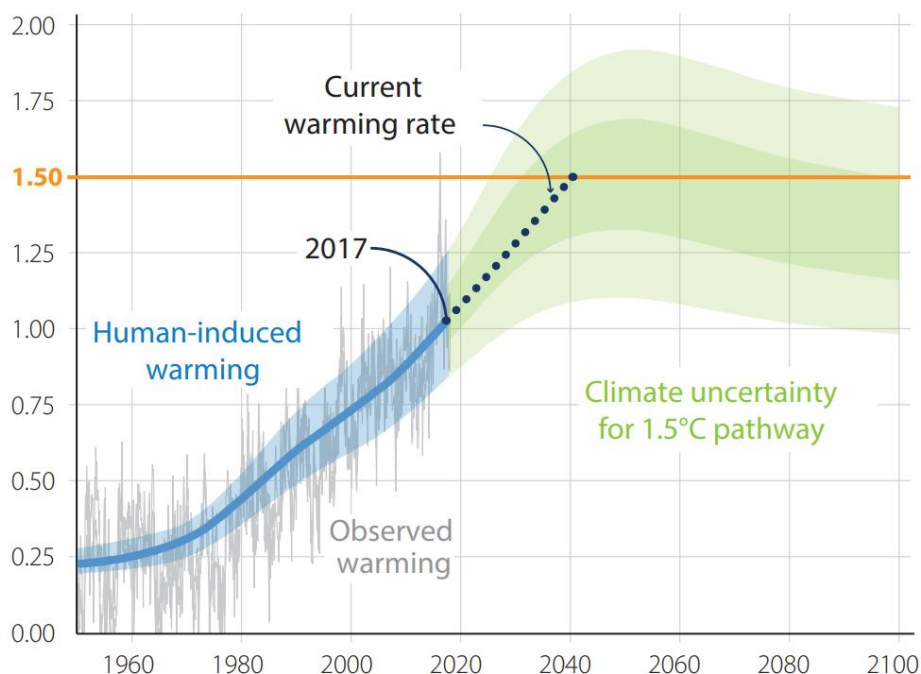


Figure 1. How close are we to 1.5°C?

This information is relevant, because it shows how urgently the world needs to change its habits, as well as the fact that it highlights that educating people about sustainable lifestyles is essential to reducing the human behaviors that drive climate change.

A root cause of the issue lies in unequal/not-uniform access to quality education, this leads to large inconsistencies in sustainability knowledge and awareness all around the world. In most developing countries, there is not enough funding for education on environmental subjects. As a result, even though students may complete their schooling, they haven't learned enough about climate change, or not at all. They are simply not *aware* of what responsible consumption is and might not even have the income to fully implement it either. In contrast, many high-income countries have already begun implementing sustainability modules, placing them ahead in preparation of the community, and environmental consciousness. The imbalance slows the global progress, seeing as achieving sustainable lifestyles requires coordinated action across all nations, not just a few countries that can actually implement it.

The cultural and economic environment where people live is another influence. Transitioning to more sustainable habits may be seen as expensive or unattainable in regions where a significant number of people depend on resource-demanding industries or standard consumption habits. Communities dependent on economies fueled by fossil fuels, for instance, might be against initiatives that increase living costs or risk jobs. Similar to this, nations with fast growth in industry tend to put quickly earned financial developments ahead of long-term sustainability education. It is highly difficult to implement new ideas like waste reduction, and the use of renewable energy sources into daily life because of these structural conditions. The consequences of this, are visible everywhere. Lack of sustainability education directly adds to higher levels of waste, limited societal support for climate actions and overconsumption. Most people remain unaware of how simple lifestyle choices, such as dietary habits, transportation alternatives, and recycling, significantly impact the environment. Without enough knowledge, populations are less likely to support initiatives, making it harder for governments to implement them. A lack of environmental awareness also reduces the effectiveness of Sustainable Development Goals, which depend heavily on public participation and behavior change.



Figure 2. Less educational resources

There are many things that could be done against this all, but there are multiple reasons why the progress on this issue is going slowly.

Main Challenges in Progress on Sustainability Education

- Spread of misinformation - As (media) illiteracy is on the rise, people have less trust in science, and false information is very easily spread. This causes for climate denial.
- Cultural and social values - Existing habits, traditions & expectations can go against sustainable behaviors and people will sooner choose for “keeping” their culture.
- Lack of teacher training - Many teachers are not prepared to teach sustainability topics, especially as our knowledge on the topic is expanding by the day. There are simply not enough resources to educate teachers properly for this.
- Financial difficulties - Sustainable options, like renewable energy or eco-friendly/bio-products, are known to be too expensive, especially for low-income families.
- Consumer culture - Media and advertising constantly promote their products, as well as extreme consumption lifestyles. This contradicts education on sustainability and is more dangerous than ever to remain a problem, as social media is now an unmissable part of most people’s everyday lives.
- Limited global coordination - Differences between countries slow progress, since adopting sustainable lifestyles calls for international collaboration. Higher income countries are not willing to fund enough money for this to lower income countries.

In conclusion, the world's progress toward sustainable lifestyles continues to be limited by a lack of solid sustainability education as well as social, cultural, and financial difficulties. In order to motivate people to make sustainable decisions and address the climate crisis, it is necessary that these issues get fixed through collective education, awareness, and policy changes.

Major parties involved

Germany

Has been recognized as a global leader and example in environmental policy and sustainability for a long time. They integrate sustainable principles across all educational levels and actively promote environmental awareness through their subjects.

Finland

They have consistently ranked among the highest global performers in education, including their strong emphasis on environmental literacy. Sustainability is included in their national curriculum, making it a mandatory part of education.

Japan

Plays a significant role, due to their early adoption of ESD, specifically following the UN DESD, which they were a major contributor of. Sustainability is continuously promoted in school programs, as they continue to support global initiatives through UNESCO partnerships.

China

As one of the largest nations, and the biggest contributor to global emissions, China plays an important role in this issue. The government has introduced policies promoting environmental literacy and sustainable consumption habits. China has increasingly improved in its emissions, in comparison to 10 years ago.

Netherlands

A great example in promoting sustainability education (within Europe, as well as internationally) with a strong focus on implementing a climate awareness program, without overwhelming students. They also support international collaborative projects on sustainable lifestyles, sharing their knowledge and best practices with all participating nations.

India

Continues to face significant challenges with pollution, resource consumption, and land degradation, because of fast industrialization and massive population growth. While the government has introduced policies for environmental education and sustainability awareness, the actual implementation of it remains uneven across different regions. Public awareness limits their ability to promote sustainable lifestyles *effectively*, even though the country has such a critical role in global environmental statistics.

Timeline of Key Events

Key events in the history of education for sustainable development

- **1992: Rio Earth Summit**

The first global action plan for sustainable development, officially recognizes education, public awareness, and training as a crucial part of it. UNESCO is tasked as the lead agency for implementing this action plan.

- **2002: World Summit on Sustainable Development**

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is formally recognized as a key party for sustainable development.

- **2005-2014: UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD)**

This period focuses on restructuring education to address sustainability issues and build the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes needed for sustainable lifestyles.

- **2015: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are adopted!! With goal 4 being: Quality Education, including a part that specifically calls for all learners to "acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development" through ESD.

- **2015-2019: Global Action Program on Education for Sustainable Development (GAP)**

This program adds to the DESD and wants to reorganise and strengthen education to specifically contribute to the SDGs.

- **Current: ESD for 2030**

The framework currently used, adopted by UNESCO, that strengthens education's central role in achieving *all* the SDGs. It specifically focuses on empowering learners to take *informed* decisions and action for environmental liability and social justice.

Previous attempts to solve the issue:

1. The creation of UN DESD (see; timeline of key events)

The DESD was started by the UN to introduce sustainability principles into educational systems around the world. Under the direction of UNESCO, the program encouraged Member States to incorporate sustainable development into community education programs, teacher preparation programs, and school curricula. DESD promoted an approach that emphasized problem-solving techniques, critical thinking, and group collaboration to promote sustainable living. Although the program successfully increased global awareness and created *frameworks* for sustainability education, the way it was implemented varied greatly among nations, with developing countries facing challenges related to resources and capabilities.

2. UNESCO Global Action Program (GAP)

In order to improve and implement sustainability education in a more structured way, UNESCO created the Global Action Program after DESD. GAP emphasizes five key areas of importance: sharing knowledge, training teachers, improving institutions, integrating policies, and involving youth. It advances ongoing education for sustainable living by encouraging the collaboration between governments and society. Although GAP has helped many schools/colleges, challenges remain in developing uniform educational programs and determining the long-term impacts on behavior change.

3. The Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)

Japan has established ESD initiatives at the national scale. They integrated sustainability ideas into both elementary and secondary education, placing a strong emphasis on environmental literacy and new knowledge of preparing for disasters. The Ministry of Education supports teacher preparation programs and school initiatives that directly link students to environmental initiatives in their communities. Japan's initiative is widely stated as a good example of best sustainability practices and has influenced UNESCO's global regulations. However, its approach is mostly focused on formal education, and there is still little informal community involvement (learning that happens outside of a school setting, in everyday experiences). This is harmful, because informal education plays a big role in sustainability education and influences every person apart of society, and therefore doesn't limit itself to learners.

Possible solutions:

1. Making sure that environmental education is carefully included into formal education systems at all levels is one of the best strategies to motivate sustainable lifestyles. Students can get a good understanding of how their decisions impact the environment and society by adding sustainability topics into courses like science, arts, and economics. This method makes sure students learn to think critically and get a sense of responsible consumption at a young age. By incorporating sustainability into curricula, eco-friendly practices become more common and implemented in daily life. Guidance from international organizations like UNESCO can offer structures of the study. Moreover, incorporating sustainability into tests and school projects can put an emphasis on the subject's importance and motivates students to use what they have learned in real-world experiences. This solution guarantees that the newer generations are properly equipped to take on sustainable lifestyles and make decisions that will benefit both their community.

2. An effective method to teach society about sustainable lifestyles outside of the classroom is through public awareness campaigns. To reach different audiences and point out the importance of following green lifestyles, these campaigns can make use several kinds of media. By emphasizing that small changes in lifestyle can have a big impact, awareness campaigns can focus on everyday behaviors like cutting back on waste, taking public transportation, and buying environmentally friendly products. They are especially helpful in places with limited access to schools or where formal education systems are unable to properly teach environmental subjects. Together, governments, NGO's, and private groups can create messages which speak to people and make sustainable practices seem possible rather than limiting. These programs have the potential of improving formal education, establish healthier social norms, and increase public participation in environmental initiatives in the future.

3. Collaboration between all Member States and sharing techniques that work among nations can have a significant positive impact on sustainable lifestyle education. States that have successful environmental education programs can offer training materials that other nations can adapt based on their own cultural and economic situations. International collaboration also reduces inequality in sustainability knowledge by connecting the gaps between high- and low-income regions. This solution encourages collaboration in order to have greater results instead of needing elaborate efforts. International cooperation can help regulate important sustainability ideas, while giving room for local needs by encouraging communication between nations. Also, by making education about sustainable lifestyles a shared responsibility, these programs could strengthen ties to global goals like the Sustainable Development Goals.

Further Readings

1. <https://www.unesco.org/en/sustainable-development/education/need-know>
2. <https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/students-and-family/sustainability/sustainability-education/esd>
3. <https://sites.manchester.ac.uk/global-social-challenges/2025/01/16/educational-inequality-why-the-education-system-falls-short-for-the-working-class/>
4. <https://www.education-inequalities.org/>

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