

## Media needed to tout sustainability

# Reporters asked to join the fight to educate the public about preserving the world's resources

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The media have an increasingly important role in promoting Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) as we face a race against time to preserve our planet's dwindling resources.



Education is also intrinsically linked to sustainability, as Derek Elias, chief of Unesco Bangkok's Education for Sustainable Development unit said, "Our world is a planet with many finite resources and education is a powerful tool to help us realise the challenges to this limitation."

ESD is an educational process of approaching "sustainable development", simply known as a balance between the three dimensions of development: environment, society and the economy.

The concept of ESD was highlighted in the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, South Africa, in 2002.

Later in December 2002, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, 2005-2014, "emphasizing that education is an indispensable element for achieving sustainable development" and designating Unesco as the lead agency responsible for the decade.

By preserving the mangroves, we can slow land erosion, safeguard seafood supplies and stabilise the livelihood of the villagers who rely on the sea to survive. The media reporting on such ecosystem issues can raise environmental awareness and stress the importance of planting trees. UNESCO BANGKOK

A recent conference in Bonn, Germany, discussed several focal questions around ESD. One of them was, "Are the media really a partner for Education for Sustainable Development?" Over 700 participants from 150 countries took part.

During the two-day "Media as partners for ESD" workshop, a number of journalists, academics, public relations experts, NGOs and government officials discussed the needs and challenges of becoming closer partners with the media.

"How can we make sure that the media cover a story in the context of ESD if they still don't have knowledge about ESD?" questioned Barbara Holler from the Austrian Agency for Education for Sustainable Development.

Outcomes of the discussion were detailed in the Bonn Declaration, which stated: "This should include promoting the role and contributions of the media for fostering public awareness and the understanding of sustainability issues and related capacity-building of media professionals."

"The media can be a powerful partner by informing the public of the importance of ESD and gathering support and supporters for ESD," said Elias.

However, reporting in the context of ESD doesn't have to be very academic or complicated. It can cover priority issues or concerns of both Thai and this global society, which any journalist should be able to do.

Dr Ampai Harakunarak, of the Thailand Environment Institute, which is in charge of environmental education projects, said Thailand's media have great potential to contribute to ESD, as they have already demonstrated a willingness to cover issues like global warming, scientific case studies and best practices, among other issues.

Savitree Srisuk, director of the Environmental Education Section of Thailand's Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, also highlighted the great potential of the Thai media in promoting ESD issues like global warming and natural resources depletion, but welcomed, nevertheless, more in-depth news reports.

"Although we have witnessed more media reports about issues like global warming, the coverage in general is just reporting. It is still shallow [and] lacks analysis and continuity. It should encourage readers to learn," she said.

Kultida Samabuddhi, a board member of the Thai Society of Environmental Journalists, said that to compete with other news items, the coverage needs to have a high human interest element and to provide useful knowledge and information at the same time.

A Unesco publication, Media as partners in ESD: A training and resource kit, provides media professionals with basic information and practical exercises about priority issues for sustainable development.

Unesco regularly publishes press kits and publications, and holds ESD training workshops for the media.

For more information about ESD, visit <http://www.unescobkk.org/education/esd/> and <http://tinyurl.com/newztt>.

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