

Environmental Education as an Integral part of Sustainable Development

The Vision of the Foundation for Environmental Education

The end of the 20th century has witnessed the growing emergence of local environmental problems, faced in every community on earth. Local environmental problems have far reaching consequences and the cumulative impacts have resulted in mankind's actions effecting the global balance of the climate and biosphere. These environmental problems are not isolated from the economic and human crises that are occurring in parallel. Despite the great advancements in knowledge, medicine, and technology, a large part of the World's population is living in a state of extreme poverty, starvation and in the context of wars, degraded ecosystems and depleted natural resources.

The 21st century has opened with a great challenge for the World's people, inviting all stakeholders, leaders and individuals to consider how they can change their current patterns and structures to achieve a sustainable World situation. How can this be done? Sustainable Development, as a term and a theory, aims to promote a mode of development in which economies, societies and culture, and the environment are considered as entities of one sphere, where they do not conflict, but rather support and sustain each other. Sustainable Development should consider development which "meets the needs of today without compromising the needs of tomorrow" (Bruntland), equally considering the environment, societies and economies.

Clearly, this kind of development cannot be done by market mechanisms alone, nor can it be achieved by technological development alone. Sustainable development will rely heavily on the responsible actions of individuals. All individuals rely on the environment for their basic life needs, a collection of individuals creates a society and individuals drive economies. To act responsibly, an individual first needs to be aware, have knowledge and understanding of the world around them, and have the skills to act on their knowledge.

FEE promotes environmental education as a way to **spread awareness and enhance knowledge**. However, FEE believes that environmental education cannot be limited to knowledge, it must also be **action oriented**, with observable and measurable results. FEE also believes that effective environmental education should be promoted through individual and collective **participation and commitment**. Hence, the FEE programs are all based on strong methodology requiring participants to turn their knowledge and understanding into action.

The FEE programs work with environmental education through: awareness raising, formal education, and training of staff. Each of the FEE programs are aimed towards one or more target group, such as students, teachers, communities, decision makers, tourists, citizens, etc. The FEE approach is always **voluntary, positive and constructive**. FEE believes that the

demonstration of successful, positive initiatives is the best method to disseminate good actions to others, and win over their voluntary participation. At the same time, FEE does not take a political position in the frame of existing environmental debates. The FEE vision of environmental education aims at empowering people to develop their own thinking as a guide for action, rather than delivering ready-made solutions. It is only in this way that people can become skilled, critical and active participants in a process of change driven by their own desire and will.

The action oriented method of environmental education that FEE promotes also involves certain **skills**. The skills needed in this context are, the ability to work with others, the capacity to contribute to a constructive debate, the ability to question oneself, and the ability to be open to alternative points of view. Why is this so important? Many of the problems that the World is facing today are related to the fact that individual, sectoral, and national interests are primarily short term; they do not satisfy the global, long term, collective interests of the World and future generations. This is why many stakeholders currently conflict with each other, rather than cooperating. To achieve sustainable development, it is essential to enhance mutual understanding, conflict resolution and general democracy. To encourage this on a global level, FEE has made group work, collective dialogue, shared projects and governance part of the framework for environmental education in its programs.

Last but not least, FEE recognizes **creativity** as an essential skill for each individual. Current practices are clearly not meeting the requirements for a sustainable World. Creativity is essential for designing an alternative, sustainable future.

In this context, the vision of FEE is to bring environmental education to people across the World through its member network of non-profit, non-governmental organizations. FEE aims to foster awareness, knowledge, participation, commitment, skills, actions and creativity through its programs, which are voluntary, positive and constructive.