

# The Tbilisi Declaration

## **Intergovernmental Conference on Environmental Education: October 14-26, 1977**

*The Tbilisi Declaration is considered to be one of the most important seminal documents in environmental education. Key elements of the Tbilisi Declaration are contained in this reading. Due to space limitations, the original has been abridged. Those wishing to read the entire document are referred to Connect, the UNESCO/UNEP Environmental Education Newsletter, Vol. III, No. 1 (January 1978).*

The world's first Intergovernmental Conference on Environmental Education, organized by UNESCO in cooperation with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) was convened in Tbilisi, Georgia (USSR) from 14 to 26 October 1977.

Delegates from 66 Member States and observers from two non-Member States participated as well as representatives and observers from eight agencies and programmers of the United Nations system, three other intergovernmental organizations and 20 international nongovernmental organizations. In all 265 delegates and 65 representatives and observers took part in the Tbilisi Conference.

Adopted by acclamation at the close of the Intergovernmental Conference, the Tbilisi Declaration noted the harmony and consensus which had prevailed and the unanimous accord on the important role of environmental education in the preservation and improvement of the world's environment, as well as in the sound and balanced development of the world's communities. The Declaration follows in full.

### **The Tbilisi Declaration**

In the last few decades, man has, through his power to transform his environment, wrought accelerated changes in the balance of nature. The result is frequent exposure of living species to dangers which may prove irreversible.

The Declaration of the United Nations Conference on Human Environment organized in Stockholm in 1972 proclaimed: "to defend and improve the environment for present and future generations has become an imperative goal for mankind." This undertaking urgently calls for new strategies, incorporated into development, which particularly in the developing countries is a prerequisite for any such improvement. Solidarity and equity in the relations between nations should constitute the basis of a new international order, and bring together, as soon as possible, all available resources. Education utilizing the findings of science and technology should play a leading role in creating an awareness and a better understanding of environmental problems. It must foster positive patterns of conduct towards the environment and nations' use of their resources.

Environmental education should be provided for all ages, at all levels and in both formal and nonformal education. The mass media have a great responsibility to make their immense resources available for this educational mission. Environmental specialists, as well as those whose actions and decisions can have a marked effect on the environment, should be provided in the course of their training with the necessary knowledge and skills and be given a full sense of their responsibilities in this respect.

Environmental education, properly understood, should constitute a comprehensive lifelong education, one responsive to changes in a rapidly changing world. It should prepare the individual for life through an understanding of the major problems of the contemporary world, and the provision of skills and attributes needed to play a productive role towards improving life and protecting the environment with due regard given to ethical values. By adopting a holistic approach, rooted in a broad interdisciplinary base, it recreates an overall perspective which acknowledges the fact that natural environment and manmade environment are profoundly interdependent. It helps reveal the enduring continuity which links the acts of today to the consequences for tomorrow. It demonstrates the interdependencies among national communities and the need for solidarity among all mankind.

Environmental education must look outward to the community. It should involve the individual in an active problem-solving process within the context of specific realities, and it should encourage initiative, a sense of responsibility and commitment to build a better tomorrow. By its very nature, environmental education can make powerful contribution to the renovation of the educational process.

### **The Role, Objectives and Characteristics of Environmental Education.**

The Tbilisi Declaration together with two of the recommendations of the Conference constitutes the framework, principles and guidelines for environmental education at all levels-local, national, regional and international-and for all age groups both inside and outside the formal school system.

**I. The conference recommends** the adoption of certain criteria which will help to guide efforts to develop environmental education at the national, regional and global levels:

- ❖ Whereas it is a fact that biological and physical features constitute the natural basis of the human environment, its ethical, social, cultural and economic dimensions also play their part in determining the lines of approach and the instruments whereby people may understand and make better use of natural resources in satisfying their needs.
- ❖ Environmental education is the result of the reorientation and dovetailing of different disciplines and educational experiences which facilitate an integrated perception of the problems of the environment enabling more rational actions capable of meeting social needs to be taken.
- ❖ A basic aim of environmental education is to succeed in making individuals and communities understand the complex nature of the natural and the built environments resulting from the interaction of their biological, physical, social, economic and cultural aspects, and acquire the knowledge, values, attitudes and practical skills to participate in a responsible and effective way in anticipating and solving environmental problems, and in the management of the quality of the environment.
- ❖ A further basic aim of environmental education is clearly to show the economic, political and ecological interdependence of the modern world, in which decisions and actions by the different countries can have international repercussions. Environmental education should, in this regard, help to develop a sense of responsibility and solidarity among countries and regions as the foundation for a new international order which will guarantee the conservation and improvement of the environment.
- ❖ Special attention should be paid to understanding the complex relations between socio-economic development and the improvement of the environment.

- ❖ For this purpose, environmental education should provide the necessary knowledge for interpretation of the complex phenomena that shape the environment, encourage those ethical, economic and esthetic values which, constituting the basis of self-discipline, will further the development of conduct compatible with the preservation and improvement of the environment; it should also provide a wide range of practical skills required in the devising and application of effective solutions to environmental problems.
- ❖ To carry out these tasks, environmental education should bring about a closer link between educational processes and real life, building its activities around the environmental problems that are faced by particular communities and focusing analysis on these by means of an interdisciplinary, comprehensive approach which will permit a proper understanding of environmental problems.
- ❖ Environmental education should cater to all ages and socio-professional groups in the population. It should be addressed to (a) the general non-specialist public of young people and adults whose daily conduct has a decisive influence on the preservation and improvement of the environment; (b) to particular social groups whose professional activities affect the quality of the environment; and (c) to scientists and technicians whose specialized research and work will lay the foundations of knowledge on which education, training and efficient management of the environment should be based.
- ❖ To achieve the effective development of environmental education, full advantage must be taken of all public and private facilities available to society for the education of the population: the formal education system, different forms of nonformal education, and the mass media.
- ❖ To make an effective contribution towards improving the environment, educational action must be linked with legislation, policies, measures of control and the decisions that governments may adopt in relation to the human environment.

**II. The conference endorses** the following goals, objectives and guiding principles for environmental education:

- ❖ The goals of environmental education are:
- ❖ To foster clear awareness of, and concern about, economic, social, political and ecological interdependence in urban and rural areas;
- ❖ To provide every person with opportunities to acquire the knowledge, values, attitudes, commitment and skills needed to protect and improve the environment;
- ❖ To create new patterns of behavior of individuals, groups and society as a whole towards the environment.

**The categories of environmental education objectives are:**

- ❖ **Awareness:** to help social groups and individuals acquire an awareness and sensitivity to the total environment and it's allied problems.
- ❖ **Knowledge:** to help social groups and individuals gain a variety of experience in, and acquire a basic understanding of, the environment and it's associated problems.
- ❖ **Attitudes:** to help social groups and individuals acquire a set of values and feelings of concern for the environment and the motivation for actively participating in environmental improvement and protection.
- ❖ **Skills:** to help social groups and individuals acquire the skills for identifying and solving environmental problems.

- ❖ **Participation:** to provide social groups and individuals with an opportunity to be actively involved at all levels in working toward resolution of environmental problems.

**Guiding principles - environmental education should:**

- ❖ Consider the environment in its totality-natural and built, technological and social (economic, political, cultural historical, moral, esthetic);
- ❖ Be a continuous lifelong process, beginning at the pre-school level and continuing through all formal and nonformal stages;
- ❖ Be interdisciplinary in its approach, drawing on the specific content of each discipline in making possible a holistic and balanced perspective;
- ❖ Examine major environmental issues from local, national, regional and international points of view so that students receive insights into environmental conditions in other geographical areas;
- ❖ Focus on current and potential environmental situations while taking into account the historical perspective;
- ❖ Promote the value and necessity of local, national and international cooperation in the prevention and solution of environmental problems;
- ❖ Explicitly consider environmental aspects in plans for development and growth;
- ❖ Enable learners to have a role in planning their learning experiences and provide an opportunity for making decisions and accepting their consequences;
- ❖ Relate environmental sensitivity, knowledge, problem-solving skills and values clarification to every age, but with special emphasis on environmental sensitivity to the learner's own community in early years;
- ❖ Help learners discover the symptoms and real causes of environmental problem;
- ❖ Emphasize the complexity of environmental problems and thus the need to develop critical thinking and problem solving skills;
- ❖ Utilize diverse learning environments and a broad array of educational approaches to teaching/learning about and from the environment with due stress on practical activities and first-hand experience.