

ASPnet Strategy 2014-2021

Global Network of Schools addressing Global Challenges: Building Global Citizenship and promoting Sustainable Development

Introduction

2013 marks sixty years of successful engagement of the UNESCO Associated Schools Project Network (ASPnet) in improving the quality of education for all in the pursuit of 'building peace in the minds and hearts of children and young people'. Starting off with 33 schools in 15 countries in 1953, the ASPnet represents today the largest global network of schools worldwide involving some 9,700 institutions in 180 countries, ranging from pre-schools to teacher training institutions. ASPnet is often referred to as a 'pulse taker', sensitive to what is happening in the world and as a 'pace setter', striving to introduce new issues and concerns in the classroom so that students are better prepared to deal with both present and future challenges. ASPnet has risen to the challenge of translating the United Nations (UN) and UNESCO ideals and priorities into improved learning through the conduct of effective pilot and flagship projects and the production of innovative educational resource materials.

For education to provide a powerful response to the challenges of today and the future, a focus on the quality and relevance of education is needed. Knowledge, skills and competencies must be pertinent to the 21st century and make a contribution to forge attitudes and behaviors conducive for peace, sustainable development and to promote responsible citizenship. These skills and competencies encompass creative problem solving, critical thinking and learning to live together in an increasingly multi-cultural world. In short, non-cognitive elements and the relevance of education become increasingly important. As UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon noted when he launched the Global Education First Initiative (GEFI) in 2012:

*Education must fully assume its central role in helping people to forge more just, peaceful, tolerant and inclusive societies. It must give people the understanding, skills and values they need to cooperate in resolving the interconnected challenges of the 21st century.*¹

GEFI was set up in order to generate a new push to achieve the internationally-agreed education goals set for 2015. The initiative focuses on putting every child to school, improving the quality of learning and fostering global citizenship. While achieving the MDGs will be a priority until 2015, the contours of a post-2015 development agenda are currently taking shape. It is likely that the Post-2015 Global Education Agenda will include education beyond the primary level, shifting from a focus on access to a focus on quality, equity and skills. Global Citizenship Education (GCE) and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) are well placed to support this shift.

Over the next 8 years, ASPnet needs to respond to the needs of education in a rapidly changing and increasingly complex world. The following strategy, therefore, has to remain flexible and requires regular re-evaluation in the light of a changing environment. Globalization and growing interconnectedness ask for increased networking and cooperation. ASPnet has proven to have a great potential for global school networking and educational innovations,

¹ http://www.globaleducationfirst.org/files/GEFI_Brochure_ENG.pdf

which remain largely untapped. UNESCO can make much fuller use of ASPnet in its quest for and implementation of a successful Post-2015 Global Education Agenda.

In accordance with UNESCO's Draft Medium Term Strategy (2014-2021) and the Programme and Budget (2014-2017), ASPnet will mainly contribute to Strategic Objective 2 *Empowering learners to be creative and responsible global citizens* through the development of knowledge, values and skills in the area of peace, human rights and sustainable development as well as other key UNESCO and UN priorities. The Network will also help facilitate the implementation of the Global Action Programme on ESD.

The replies to the evaluation questionnaires sent to all ASPnet National Coordinators and selected Associated Schools in 2012/2013 showed clearly that the Network's main advantage are its well-established structures which provide direct sharing of information and knowledge: The linkage between National Commissions for UNESCO and ASPnet provide an unprecedented global coverage which can disseminate information and good practices to a multitude of communities within a relatively short time frame.

The following strategy will build on this distinctive strength of ASPnet as well as on the outcomes of the International Forum, organized by the Republic of Korea in partnership with UNESCO, in Suwon, Republic of Korea (7-9 September 2013) under the theme "UNESCO ASPnet for Global Citizenship: Peace Education and Education for Sustainable Development", which recommended 'global citizenship' as the main theme for ASPnet for the period 2014-2021.⁴ It also draws on the outcomes of the Technical Consultation on Global Citizenship Education, organized by UNESCO and the Republic of Korea in Seoul (9-10 September 2013)⁵, the ongoing post-2015 consultations and the Global Action Programme on ESD.

Global Citizenship Education aims to empower learners to engage and assume active roles both locally and globally to face and resolve global challenges and ultimately to become proactive contributors to a more just, peaceful, tolerant, inclusive, secure and sustainable world. Global citizenship education is transformative, giving learners the opportunity and competencies to realize their rights and obligations to promote a better world and future. It draws upon learning from other transformative education processes including human rights education, education for sustainable development, education for international/inter-cultural understanding, and education for peace.²

Sustainable development cannot be achieved through technological solutions, political regulations or fiscal incentives alone. It requires a fundamental change in the way people think and act, and consequently a transition to sustainable livelihoods. Only education and learning at all levels and in all social contexts can bring about this critical change. **Education for Sustainable Development** aims at reorienting education worldwide, so that it provides everyone with the opportunity to acquire the values, attitudes, skills, and knowledge that are needed to contribute to sustainable development.³

I. Goal of ASPnet:

"ASPnet aims to promote quality education in pursuit of peace and sustainable development."

² Global Citizenship Education: An Emerging Perspective, Outcome Document of the Technical Consultation on Global Citizenship Education, 2013.

³ UNESCO Programme and Budget 2014-2017, 37 C/5.

⁴ International Forum for the 60th Anniversary of the UNESCO ASPnet: A Recommendation for Strategy and Plan of Action, 2013.

⁵ Global Citizenship Education: An Emerging Perspective, Outcome document of the technical consultation on global citizenship education, 2013.

II. Objectives of ASPnet:

1. To integrate GCE and ESD into the teaching and learning processes of ASPnet schools
2. To experiment innovative approaches on GCE and ESD through ASPnet schools
3. To strengthen the sharing of information, experiences and good practices among ASPnet schools

III. Modes of action:

- 1.1. Organizing trainings and Forums for ASPnet school principals, teachers and students
- 1.2. Providing ASPnet schools with UNESCO resource materials on GCE and ESD
- 2.1. Initiating new flagship projects in selected ASPnet schools for innovative approaches on GCE and ESD
- 2.2. Innovating existing flagship projects
- 3.1. Establishing online collaborative platform(s) for learning and exchanging on GCE and ESD
- 3.2. Improving networking, management and communication through ICT and personal exchanges

IV. Plan of Activities for 2014-2017 (examples):

- 1.1.1. Organizing an International ASPnet Student's Forum, 6-7 November 2014 and an International ASPnet Teacher's Forum, 7 November 2014 (Okayama, Japan) in the framework of the UNESCO World Conference on ESD
- 1.2.1. Providing Open Educational Resource Material (OER) on GCE and ESD and relevant educational resource material produced by the Education Sector, other Sectors and FOs for experimentation
- 2.1.1. Launching new flagship projects on GCE and ESD (including biodiversity, climate change and disaster risk reduction)
- 2.1.2. Strengthening and innovating existing flagship projects and campaigns (ex. Baltic Sea, Blue Danube River, Caribbean Sea, Sandwatch, Learning for the Future, World Heritage Education Projects)
- 3.1.1. Developing a student guidebook through an international workshop and a teacher training module on global citizenship for peaceful sustainable development (ASPnet in Action Phase II)
- 3.2.1. Setting up sub-regional online networking in cooperation with regional focal points

V. Strategy:

In order to guarantee an effective ASPnet, the following measures need to be taken:

- Ensure sufficient human, financial and material resources for effective coordination at all levels;
- Reinforce regional/sub-regional cooperation through identifying regional/sub-regional focal points;
- Use ICT to facilitate exchange of information and experience sharing;
- Promote whole-school approach to stimulate both learning and practice;
- Strengthen the network through widened partnerships (e.g. UNESCO Chairs, Category II Centres, media and the private sector).

An effective ASPnet International Coordination is key to facilitate exchange of information and knowledge about ASPnet at all levels (international, regional, national and school level); conducting international flagship projects, special events, campaigns, UN International Years and worldwide contests; encouraging contacts and links of solidarity between participating institutions; and collecting, analyzing and promoting good practices from ASPnet schools worldwide. ASPnet is a prime vehicle for transmitting the values of the UN and to explain the role of the UN in addressing global challenges. ASPnet National Coordinators, principals, teachers and students are expected to assume active roles within their schools, communities, societies, nations and in the international community in pursuit of the attainment of UN and UNESCO ideals and values. For this they require recognition, resources and support from their local and national educational authorities as well as the recognition and support of the ASPnet International Coordination. At the national level an optimum number of participating schools in ASPnet needs to be decided upon from pre-school to teacher training levels, in both urban and rural areas, giving priority to public schools and on the basis of national capacity to ensure effective national coordination of the Network.

The identification of regional/sub-regional focal points will strengthen regional/sub-regional cooperation on on-going ASPnet Regional Flagship Projects and the launching of innovative regional education initiatives.

Making optimum use of ICT, such as by establishing an online platform on GCE and ESD, as well as regional online platforms, will facilitate the sharing of information, exchange of good practices and effective management of activities.

A whole-school approach is a particularly promising way of providing every learner with the opportunity to acquire the values, skills and knowledge needed to actively contribute to sustainable peace and development and could thus serve for effectively addressing challenges of the 21st century in ASPnet schools. Orienting schools in line with peace, and sustainable development implies: integrating key local and global issues into the curriculum; designing teaching and learning methods in an interactive, participatory way so that critical thinking, attitudinal changes and global citizenship are promoted; creating the whole campus as a learning environment by 'greening' school operations; linking the school's efforts with respect for human rights and sustainable development activities in the local community. ASPnet schools shall serve as pioneers of this new whole-school approach.

Building up a comprehensive partnership, including the local community, local and national education authorities, teacher-training institutions, the private sector, the media, NGOs, UNESCO Headquarters (Education Sector especially and all Programme sectors), UNESCO Chairs and Category II Centres, National Commissions for UNESCO and other UN entities, will be instrumental to ensure adequate resources and visibility of the ASPnet.