



COLLABORATING FOR THE TRANSFORMATION OF EDUCATION

A deep dive into the Education for Sustainable Development project in Mongolia

Mongolia is rapidly transitioning to urbanity, with approximately 66% of its population living in cities. This substantial shift, resulting from two decades of economic growth, raises pressing issues. There are increasing concerns over growing inequalities, rising pollution, unchecked exploitation of natural resources, a rise in desertification, and threats to the wildlife. Rapid urbanisation has also led to significant cultural changes, often at the cost of losing culturally significant values and traditions.

To respond to these concerns, the Mongolian government has recognised the importance of integrating principles, values, and practices of Sustainable Development into all aspects of the education system. With this in mind, the Swiss Development and Cooperation Agency (SDC) partnered and co-funded the Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) project together with the Ministry of Education and Science and the Ministry of Environment and Tourism.

The goal of the project is to support the citizens of Mongolia in creating a socially and economically responsible, equally accessible and sustainable future through education for sustainable development.

Pivotal years of Sustainability

The ESD project finds its origins in the UN Sustainable Development Goals, adopted in 2015, and the following translation of these in the "Mongolian Vision for Sustainable Development 2030", contextualising the global goals in 2016.

The project was set up to empower individuals and related institutions of Mongolia to contribute to the sustainable development of Mongolia by anchoring the sustainable development principles in the normative framework and the learning plans of the Mongolian education system.

What sets the ESD project apart, is that it promoted a holistic approach and engaged diverse stakeholders at different levels. This deep dive focuses on the behaviour changes of the different stakeholders involved, presenting how eleven organisations changed their ways of collaboration to promote Education for Sustainable Development, broke silos and enhanced partnerships at the national, provincial, and district levels to successfully implement a multi-stakeholder project.

A challenging organisational set up for an ambitious project

Sustainable development is a universal and complex challenge that can only be effectively tackled through cooperation. Created in response to this issue, the ESD project was an ambitious project, which strived for a comprehensive reform of the policy and school curricula to include concepts of sustainable development. Actions were implemented in several sectors, involving actors at different levels, from policy decision makers to local community members.

Specifically, the project's first phase provided technical advice on the integration of ESD ideas and principles in Mongolia's education system as well as on environmental awareness and responsibilities. It engaged teachers, students and parents at the school level, and the public and private sector. It supported adjustments in teacher training to reflect the policy changes, and staff of the Education Evaluation Centre were trained to include the ESD elements in their assessments. It also organised awareness raising and training for students and parents as well as the private sector.

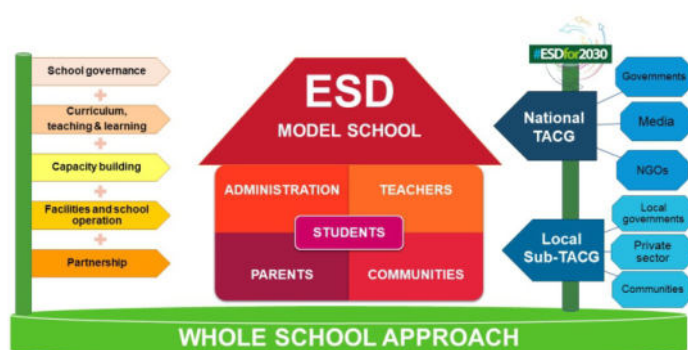
SDC mandated GIZ International Services and its partners Swiss Institut for Internationale Zusammenarbeit in Bildungsfragen (PH Zug) and the University of Uppsala (Sweden) to lead the implementation of the ESD project's from 2013 to 2018. During this first phase, *"Mongolia succeeded to integrate ESD into the general secondary education system, to create the institutional capacities of the education agencies and most importantly, to create an awareness and understanding among the public."* Ms. Zayasaikhan Dugeree, Senior National Programme Officer, SDC Mongolia

Building on these results, SDC changed the implementation modality for the project's second phase. Starting in 2019, the ESD project was implemented solely by national partners, to promote local ownership and the sustainability of the project's achievements.

ORGANISATIONS REPRESENTED AT THE TECHNICAL ADVISORY AND COORDINATION GROUND

- Ministry of Environment and Tourism,
- Ministry of Education and Science,
- Mongolian Institute for Educational Research,
- Institute for Teachers Professional Development*,
- Information and Training centre for nature and environment,
- Education Evaluation Centre,
- National Centre for Lifelong Education*,
- Mongolian National University of Education,
- General Agency for Specialised Inspection*,
- Fresh Water Resources and Nature Conservation Centre,
- Media: Mongolian National Broadcasting Television; and environmental journalists NGO
- General Agency of Education

* later merged with the General Agency of Education



A national-level coordination that brings together several stakeholders...

The project's second phase was guided by a national level Technical Advisory and Coordination Group (TACG) composed of representatives of eleven national educational and environment agencies and institutions, each of which sent two representatives. The Mongolian National Institute for Educational Research (MNIER) was designated as the project host organisation. At the policy level, the project co-implementers were the Ministry of Education and Science (MES) and the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET).

The TACG's responsibilities within the project included guiding, overseeing and ensuring the quality of the work implemented. The group defined, planned, and approved tasks for each organisation. The TACG was also tasked with raising public awareness on sustainable development and ESD principles, through disseminating news, information, and knowledge to the public.

The members of the TACG are responsible to relay the information and decisions from and to the staff of the organisations they represent.

During the second phase, SDC assigned an international ESD expert, who supported capacity building of the TACG and advised the involved organisations in embedding the sustainability concepts in their operations.

The first step for TACG members was to familiarise themselves with the key ESD pillars and identify how they could be applied in the Mongolian context. By the end of the project, the TACG members had become national experts in ESD promotion, designing training modules for the public and the educational community that are now shared through the online ESD platform.

The Technical Advisory and Coordination Group (TACG) – a key player for ESD...



Mr. Itgel Miyejav,
Director, MNIER

“Of course, it is difficult for all to focus on the same goal and go in the same direction at the same time. Each organisation strives to work in accordance with its own goals and strategies, so negotiation is important in deciding to work in line with shared values of ESD. However, the TACG member representatives work with mutual respect, the negotiation process is very flexible.”

“There are advantages and disadvantages of having such a large group coordinating the project. The advantage is that TACG benefits from the support of SDC and the two Ministries coordinating it. The disadvantage is that all TACG members have their own full-time jobs, and due to their workload, they can rarely be fully deployed in the work of the project team.”



Ms. Zayasaikhan Dugeree,
Senior National Programme
Officer, SDC Mongolia

“To enable participation, SDC supported a soft structure of the TACG, in which the relevant stakeholders gathered to discuss, implement the project activities, as well as train and mentor the relevant local stakeholders. Together with academia and media, the group was responsible for building capacities and creating the basis for advancing the ESD concepts.”



**Ms. Uranchimeg
Tserendorj,**
Head of the Environment
and Natural
Resource Management
Department, MET

“This structure itself was a new model not only in Mongolia but also internationally. It was a very important initiative to develop cooperation between the two ministries and other stakeholders. The TACG members are working very well together.”

... and works closely with the local-level actors.

At the local level, in six provinces and two districts, sub-TACGs were created. The sub-TACG included the same organisations represented at the national level in addition to a few more local public agencies, taking the total number of local public institutions represented to up to 20. The role of the sub-TACG was to coordinate ESD project activities with the local development policies, working closely with the local authorities and the schools.

Another key player in the project set up is the Information and Training Centre for Nature and Environment (ITCNE). This non-governmental organisation was selected as the local implementer, responsible for capacity building, establishing partnerships, bridging the national and local levels, and providing

information and knowledge on Education for Sustainable Development to the local organisations and schools. 30 model schools were selected in the provinces that had approved their Green Development Plans. The ITCNE worked closely with selected schools to implement the Whole-School Approach (see box on pages 2) and grant-funded small projects.

The Whole-School Approach piloted in 30 model schools has shown its effectiveness in reforming school management. It promoted participation of all (teachers, students, parents) in the schools related decision-making processes, which was a new concept in Mongolia. School principals' enthusiasm for the approach and the positive results of the schools involved demonstrated the potentials for further national scaling.

The Whole-School Approach



Mr. Temuujin Lundaajantsan,
Board Director, ITCNE

"This approach invites and includes all stakeholders to improve and develop the education programme: students, teachers, parents and other public, private sector institutions. The school-based decisions are initiated and approved by the students, who therefore play a key role in decision-making on school activities. Traditionally, the school management was the only decision-maker. The selected schools are becoming participatory and transparent for all students, parents and communities."



Mr. Otgonsuren Lkhagvaa,
Director, School 28,
Ulaanbaatar

"Student based governance is the key factor of the Whole-School Approach. We used to see schools in a traditional way: the school director has the authority, the parents leave their children at school while they are at work, and the teachers are paid employees. With the ESD project, our thinking has changed. Our strategic slogan now is: "Kid, you own this school!". Since our school started implementing this approach, we now rank much higher in school performance evaluations."

Ms. Shinetsetseg Erdenebayar,
Executive Director,
ITCNE



"The project relied on a "mentoring circle": "the TACG members provide mentoring to the local sub-TACG members, who in turn provide mentoring to local schools, and they provide feedback to the members of TACG. In other words, all actors were learning by doing and mentoring each other, and this was a key process to ensure the coordination and communication between the partners." Mentoring can foster meaningful and lasting relationships between the individuals and organisations involved, providing a platform for guidance, support, and growth that deepens mutual understanding and trust."

ESD project results and institutionalisation

The project, throughout its nine years of implementation, has achieved many results. Through policy changes, small projects implemented by schools, and capacity building of teachers, decision-makers, and community members in sustainable development, *"this project has played a very important role in spreading awareness of the global trend of green development and sustainable development in Mongolia."* (Ms. Uranchimeg Tserendorj Head of the Environment and Natural Resource Management Department, MET) Schools, students, teachers, local governments, communities and local private sector all jointly engaged to contribute to Education for Sustainable Development and the sustainable development of their provinces.

Whilst originally not intended as a specific objective, it is noteworthy that one of the biggest achievements of the ESD project was to bring together several organisations that were not used to working with each other around a shared and ambitious goal. The ESD project setup and achievements illustrate that it is possible to break administrative silos to address challenges on sustainable development:

"The ESD project strengthened the interactions between the ministries and authorities. As part of the Ministry of Education and Science, we at MNIER never thought we would work with the Ministry of Environment and Tourism, there was no engagement between us. Since the second phase of the ESD project was launched, the two Ministries and other authorities behind the TACG have had a very good relationship and close cooperation."
Mr. Lkhagvasuren, former Director, MNIER



“At the province level, the cooperation and coordination of the work of the partner organisations improved. Providing environmental education and supporting the activities of model schools has resulted in a positive change in the attitude of students towards protection of nature.” Mr. Tuvshinjargal Agvaanchultem, Deputy Governor Orkhon province, local sub-TACG chairperson

Collaborating for a sustainable future: Lessons learned from Mongolia

The project contributed to enhanced understanding of Education for Sustainable Development, and to behavioural changes towards sustainable development in the target locations. The model schools continue to transfer their knowledge and experiences to other schools.

The online collaborative platform provides access to accumulated theoretical and practical knowledge including lessons, hand-outs, training modules, school-based curricula and individual experiences based on the implementation of ESD small projects. ESD was an ambitious project that allows drawing several lessons on how to engage many different actors.

- The implementation modality of giving the lead and responsibility to national organisations enhanced ownership. For SDC, as a development organisation, this required supporting the national systems as well as strengthening institutional capacities and financial accountability of the government and non-government organisations involved.



As the project comes to an end in 2023, solutions are being explored to institutionalise ESD and maintain the collaborative project approach and structure. This could take the form of a national council for Education for Sustainable Development.

- The first phase of the project established the basis for mainstreaming ESD principles, while the second phase fostered collaboration among diverse ESD stakeholders, overcoming institutional silos at national and local levels. By working together, the organisations were learning-by-doing: “they now understand the interconnectedness of the Sustainable Development pillars and the necessity of applying a holistic approach of ESD.” Ms. Zayasaikhan Dugeree, Senior National Programme Officer, SDC Mongolia

- The direct involvement of ministries and other organisations under a coordinated approach was crucial to ensuring comprehensive support for the project. The TACG specifically contributed to fostering collaboration and synergies. However, it is important to consider, anticipate, and adapt to the challenges posed by administrative red tape inherent in state organisations.

At the local level, creating the sub-TACG as local change agents was key to mainstreaming ESD across various sectors and implementing the Whole-School Approach in the schools.

