

## **”SWEDESD Strategies and Activities”**

**Gotland University, Visby  
3 and 4 October 2008**

### **SUMMARY REPORT**

On 3 and 4 October, 2008, Swedish and international experts and practitioners in the field of education for sustainable development (ESD), representing universities, civil society organizations, national governments and international organisations from 15 countries, attended the first event organized by the recently established Swedish International Centre of Education for Sustainable Development (SWEDESD) at Gotland University, Visby, Sweden. By tapping into the wealth of experience, insights and networks represented by the participants, the purpose of the conference was to elicit ideas on and recommendations for what SWEDESD could or should do, how the Centre should relate to other significant national and international initiatives, institutions and networks, and how SWEDESD should operate in order to address the many ESD challenges and opportunities.

SWEDESD is financed by the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) for an initial period of 5 years. Its purpose is to facilitate and support education and learning in the field of sustainable development, especially in and with developing countries – it should result in learning connected with serious commitment to sustainable development.

Dr. Karin Bengtsson, the Acting Rector of Gotland University, welcomed the 80 participants and emphasized the important correspondence between the Centre’s mission related to ESD and the University’s own Liberal Education agenda.

In his opening remarks, the new SWEDESD Director, Dr. Frans Lenglet, elaborated his vision for what the Centre could become. The Centre would be an international “meeting place”. Physically – in Gotland and in the locations of its SIDA-country partners. Virtually – through a cutting edge internet platform for exchanging experience and practice, for research, learning, debate, advice and advocacy. With, in and through Sweden-based and international networks, the Centre would work with institutions, organisations and persons in the Global South determined to master their own development processes within a sustainability framework. The Centre would not repeat or duplicate what others are doing well. In stead, it would be scrutinizing existing paradigms and seeking new ones, using the tools of scientific and critical inquiry. It would also explore the power of non-traditional learning methods, as can be found in music, theatre, the plastic arts, video, etc.

During the two days of the Conference three international speakers highlighted critical dimensions of ESD thinking and practice. With vivid, practical examples from Southern Africa, Mr. Jim Taylor, Director of the Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa, encouraged SWEDESD to favour “open”, “active” and “process-oriented” learning, that would be inclusive and based on indigenous and “scientific” knowledge and understanding. He developed a “vision of fairness” that should permeate all ESD work. He presented SWEDESD with a copy of the Ahmedabad Declaration<sup>1</sup>, signed by the participants of the Advanced International Training Programme “Education for Sustainable Development in Formal Education”<sup>2</sup>, also attending the Conference.

The second speaker, Ms. Ajanta Sikdar, speaking on behalf of Ms Shivani Jain, Senior Programme Coordinator, Networking and Capacity Building of the Centre for Environment Education, Ahmedabad, India, stressed the opportune moment at which SWEDESD was appearing on the scene. She invited the Centre to assist with enabling governments in participatory policy making processes; enabling civil society institutions to scale-up successful SD efforts; supporting regional and international institutes of excellence in SD Support; and, supporting research and advocacy on a host of critical issues,

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<sup>1</sup> The Ahmedabad Declaration 2007 was adopted by the Fourth International Conference on Environmental Education (ICEE) in November 2007. The drafting process involved over 1,500 participants from 97 countries. The Conference was sponsored by UNESCO, UNEP and the Government of India and was hosted by the Centre for Environment Education, Ahmedabad, India.

<sup>2</sup> The first part of this Sida-sponsored programme took place in Sweden, from 15 September to 3 October, 2008. In November and December 2008 the second part will take place in South Africa for the African participants and in India for the Asian participants.

including production-consumption and lifestyle patterns, city and urban planning, energy production and use, transport innovations, waste management technologies, making information and communication technologies accessible for education, and rethinking global, national and local governance.<sup>3</sup>

Ms. Christine Alfsen-Norodom, Senior Program Specialist for Sciences at the UNESCO Office in New York was the third speaker. By “weaving a tale around the ESD landscape”, she invited SWEDESD to play an active intellectual role in recognizing, scrutinizing and “bridging” the tensions and gaps between the promise and targets of the UN Millennium Development Goals and the Education for All goals on the one hand and the ways they are playing out on the ground on the other. In order to establish its credibility, she urged SWEDESD to lead by example, to be explicit about its own values, to be realistic about what it can and cannot do, and to produce some results quickly, while adding value to what others are already doing well.

The Conference participants had the opportunity to attend three different thematic workshops out of a total of five dealing with (a) ESD networks and partnerships, (b) teaching, training and learning methodologies for ESD, (c) ESD policy analysis and development, (d) ESD research strategies, and (e) ESD in practice: good, better and best practice.

At the end of the Conference the Chairs and Rapporteurs of the five workshops<sup>4</sup> presented a summary of the findings and recommendations each of their workshops.<sup>5</sup> These represented a vast and rich “menu” of options and directions, which SWEDESD will be taking into serious account while formulating its strategy and program of activities. The reports of each workshop are available on [www.swedesd.se](http://www.swedesd.se).

In his closing remarks, the SWEDESD Director thanked the participants for their active participation and contributions and invited them to extend their continued support to make SWEDESD a catalytic player in the ESD domain. He underlined the “heritage” on which SWEDESD would build: the fascinating ESD policy and practice of the last 30 years, the rich humanistic tradition of emancipatory education and the stimulating intellectual tradition of critical and interdisciplinary action research. SWEDESD is arriving at a very critical point in time, ecologically, economically and politically. There is now a great opportunity for ESD practitioners, research and policy makers the world over – and therefore also for SWEDESD itself – to become “messengers of hope” rather than remaining “prophets of doom”. They can transform humanity’s “footprints of destruction” into “handprints of creation”. SWEDESD’s work will assist in transforming “knowledge transmission” into “knowledge creation”, in moving away from “extractive” research to “nourishing” research, while adopting “multiple languages” rather than “one single language”. If the Conference itself was any indication, SWEDESD’s activities will have a strong process orientation. They will be participatory and inclusive and will invite to creativity, critical reflection and scholarship. They will privilege local practices and experiences that can inform and be informed by global sustainability perspectives.

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<sup>3</sup> A panel discussion of Jim Taylor, Ajanta Sikdar, Karin Bengtsson and Frans Lenglet, chaired by Ruud Maarschall (IVN International, The Netherlands) followed the presentations by the two speakers.

<sup>4</sup> The Chairs and Rapporteurs of the five workshops were: Workshop I - ESD Networks and Partnerships: Lars Ingelstam (Prof. Em.) and Angelica Broman (Sida); Workshop II - Teaching, Training and Learning Methodologies for ESD: Derek Elias (UNESCO, Bangkok) and Hilligje van 't Land (IAU, Paris); Workshop III - ESD Policy Analysis and Development Martin Westin (Sida) and Hanna Rådberg (Plan Sweden); Workshop IV - ESD Research Strategies: Karin Bengtsson (Gotland University) and Per Lind (Gotland University); Workshop V - ESD in Practice Mats: Alfredson (Hushållningsällskap) and Kerstin Sonesson (Malmö University).

<sup>5</sup> This session was chaired by Mats Segnestam.