

Mongolia • A Nation's response to mainstreaming ESD practices utilising a WSA

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In Mongolia exists a partnership, funded by the [Swiss Agency for Cooperation and Development](#)¹⁴⁸ (SDC), together with the Mongolian Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET) has spearheaded bringing Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) into all spheres of Mongolian education. This is a long term ESD project that started in 2015 and is now in phase 2. Some [key results in Phase 1](#) are outlined below:

- Strengthened media and its capacity by focusing on building a common understanding on ESD.
- Created a [web-based platform](#)¹⁴⁹ for teachers and practitioners for sharing the best practices and information on latest development and application of ESD.
- ESD mainstreamed in curricula of secondary education schools in Mongolia reaching out to over 500,000 students and 26,000 teachers.
- The school text textbooks and examination formats adjusted and aligned to ESD principles
- A selective course on gender developed, based on ESD principles, and given the weightage of two credit points by MNUE.
- Mongolia became the first country to develop a policy framework for ESD and integrate and implement ESD in all schools of basic education nationwide.
- The National Programme on ESD 2018-2022, developed under the leadership of MET disseminated ESD across multiple sectors to ensure a multi-stakeholder participatory approach was taken for its implementation.
- The legal framework towards a more sustainable Mongolia strengthened by providing technical support to the Action Plan for Implementation of the Green Development Policy.
- Support extended to 7 out of 21 provinces (aimags) for the establishment of their Green Development (GD) Strategic Plans.

In 2019, Phase 2 of this partnership commenced and is an example of a cross -sectoral approach and pilot that supports the mainstreaming of ESD. The pilot includes 30 schools situated in six provinces and two districts in



Students working in the Healthy Food – Peace - Life school garden

Ulaanbaatar. 75% (21) of the selected schools are upper secondary schools, 7% (2) are lower secondary schools, 14% (4) are comprehensive schools, 4% (1) are specialised upper secondary schools. Out of the 30 schools involved in this pilot, 27 are now [Eco-schools](#)¹⁵⁰. The ultimate objective of phase 2 is to eventually upscale this to all the schools in the country. They envision achieving this by further strengthening and deepening the engagement with key agents for change in this process. Mongolia will create its own unique context-rich ESD programme anchored by robust institutional and organisational framework. 30 “ESD model schools are identified and supported to further integrate ESD effectively by adopting a whole school approach” (SDC, 2019).

“A holistic approach has been ushered in by bringing in a whole school approach, moving beyond doing environmental projects only. Project based learning focusing on local issues and involving the local community and authorities has been another significant achievement” (Mita Nangia Goswami, SDC’s Back stopper for the ESD Phase 2 project).

The schools are situated in urban (4), semi-urban (13) and rural (10) communities. 30-40% of the students are from nomadic herder-families located in 5 different provinces of the country.

These Mongolian examples of a WSA in action, and insights from the lessons learned during this project, give valuable insight in how a WSA framework is being utilised to create a "unique context rich ESD programme" (SDC, 2019).

“By further strengthening and deepening its engagement with key agents for change in this process, Mongolia will create its own unique context-rich ESD programme anchored by robust institutional and organisational frameworks”

Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation in Mongolia

Generally, the pilot, despite covid setbacks, has continued. Small Grants have been provided to schools to work on local issues with the help of the local authorities and communities after they identified relevant issues and wrote proposals seeking funding. A funding of 450 million Tugriks (15800 USD) was provided for the 30 projects, which was equally shared by SDC and the local province (aimag) authorities. Another 17500 USD was given by parents and private entities to support these projects. These projects are led by students and explore issues that are context rich and include topics such as food, local art and culture, school campus and building, green house for horticulture, waste management and eco-tourism. At the start of the pilot, all 30 schools conducted a self-assessment encompassing the 6 strands of a WSA. This was used to build school-specific action plans.

These self-assessments have also been compiled into a report offering valuable insights and a baseline of the schools' current ESD capacity. Inevitably this contributes to understanding how to better support the schools, and how the project outcome can be achieved, that "the necessary competences are embedded within the Mongolian education system, both at central level, among policy makers, and at local level, among teachers, practitioners and local authorities, to ensure sustainable application of ESD" (SDC Factsheet 2019). Each school's action plan resulted in a unique entry point to embedding a WSA.

The following example is from Temuujin Secondary School, one of the pilot schools involved in the Phase 2 project. The school is located in Khentii soum, Khentii, a province founded in 1962 and has 2001 students studying in 58 classes of grades from 1 to 12. Total number of teachers is 122 teachers.

Contribution by, Shinetsetseg Erdenebayar executive director at the Information and Training Center for Nature and Environment (FEE Mongolia¹⁵¹), and head teacher of Temuujin Complex School, Zolzaya.M:

Our school vision is "Temuujin Complex School is a House of Happiness Shining with Love" and the school's mission is "To grow boys and girls with skills to learn, to lead others with knowledge and culture to love life and to change the school into a lifelong learning community".

In 2020, with the support of this phase 2 partnership, based on the "growth model" of organisation development, the WSA was introduced to school management and a WSA to ESD was evaluated by the school self-assessment checklist. Based on the result of our self-assessment the school decided to work in waste management, and addressed our attention to these components. In the frame of this, a more detailed analysis of school waste management found that mishandling of products and plastic packaging which led us to question the impact of our schools actions on both people and planet. Therefore, the "Healthy Food - Peace - Life" project was implemented. This central school project aims to reduce the carbon footprint in the school environment by supporting teachers and students to learn how to live a healthy and environmentally friendly life through both development of curricula and supporting skills to implement them.

Within the frame of this project, we have developed 12 training programs of 40 hours on 'Choosing the right food and learning the right habits'. We are implementing them in grades 1 to 12 in line with learning objectives. For the curricula of primary education, they have been implemented in the following subjects; Mongolian customs and upbringing; relationship of human being; nature and relationship of human being and society. For the curricula of secondary education, the subjects are; health; technology; biology; chemistry; geography; foreign languages; mathematics; physical education; and civic ethics.

In addition, within the training programs, we organise an e-training course for families once a month to teach new ideas and practices that can be used by families. Observations and research are also used to evaluate students' based on multiple factors such as, choice of lunch, height, weight, learning activities, family decisions, impressions, and influences.

In terms of new learning processes, a small project was implemented as a result of the self-assessment based on a WSA to ESD. As part of the project, we have established a "Teacher Development E-centre" to organise a "combined training" to increase the participation of

students, parents and teachers. This has financial support from the local development fund to implement the newly developed school curriculum.

The role of Self-Assessment and Reflection at our school

To make changes in our "School Management", the progress and failure of school development has been compared annually for the last 3 years and classify the work performance as sufficient, average and insufficient. In this context, each subject team conducts its own assessment and makes conclusions by identifying areas for further improvement. Based on this, suggestions for new and further improvements for the next school year are received from the subject teams or teachers and staff. We are starting to accustom school improvements by introducing planning in line with development goals stated in the school strategic plan. Specifically:

- Organisation of meetings and discussions with students and parents.
- Receiving parents' advice, proposals and feedback in electronic form.
- Giving more emphasis on obtaining student feedback in the form of a written report to produce more efficient, feasible, and practical planning based on students' needs.

We have achieved the results by applying the following methods to make our decision-making more democratic. The first step we feel is to make the school management more democratic and open and to ensure that when the head teacher makes final decisions, these decisions are based on the findings of the teachers' council and school community dialogue. School community meetings and inputs provided through the school website are two examples of how the community are involved in decision making for important areas in school management. Some of these areas include teacher and child development plans, also, improvement of the learning environment and budgetary allocations.

Due to the COVID circumstances, more than 40 percent of these project activities, such as lessons, trainings, and activities, were organised online. All school activities were focused on the principle of connecting life and learning, improving reading, listening and research skills, is increasing practices to implement things that were heard. In doing so, the knowledge and skills of students and teachers were important to support real action. School students, parents, teachers, and school staff have jointly identified the issues that should be addressed to improve the implementation of a WSA to ESD. Identification of these issues emphasises the importance of increasing community participation in school management to improve school goals, outcomes, and accessibility to small projects supported by the ESD phase 2 project.

Key WSA Principles in action at *Temuujin Secondary School*

Capacity building

- Nationwide support for ESD based networking
- Teachers have learnt to work more collaboratively and developed cross-curricular content
- Peer-to-peer capacity building - A web-based collaborative platform www.esd.mn developed for teachers and practitioners for sharing the best practices and information on latest development and application of ESD

Vision, Ethos, Leadership & Coordination

- Government led leadership and vision for embracing a WSA to ESD

Curriculum

- ESD mainstreamed in curricula of secondary education schools in Mongolia reaching out to over 500,000 students and 26,000 teachers
- School text textbooks and examination formats adjusted and aligned to ESD principles

Pedagogy & Learning

- Community-oriented projects provide practical examples of how a ESD engagement can involve the wider community and alternative learning arenas and methods

Institutional Practices

- Sustainable solutions and improvements have been made at the schools, for example with waste segregation and waste management. A focus has also been on improving air quality in the urban schools
- In one school a ger, which is a sustainable housing practice with a low carbon footprint (tent made of animal hide) was installed by students (conserving indigenous culture)

Community Connections

- Small grants have been used to seed fund community-based projects connected to various topics such as food, local art and culture, school campus and building, green house for horticulture, waste management and eco-tourism

Since 2017, institutional practice changes have also taken place. The school has been participating in the "International Eco-School Program" and changes have been made to the school environment and buildings. Again school assessment has played a central role with regular assessment of the school environment taking place 8 times since the project started in collaboration with



Healthy food – Peace – Life project

teachers, students, staff, parents and public organisations. To implement school environment improvements, we used the “Citizens’ Voice” method to raise donations and support from parents and public organisations, and received investments the equivalent of well over 300.000 US \$ from the state budget. The external and internal school environment was then improved using the private and government funds raised. As a result and through further school environment assessments (both qualitative and quantitative data is collected) we have measured the quality of the internal environment has improved from 63.8% to 87%, and the quality of the external environment has improved from 47% to 82%. Now, the school also uses an area of 372,5 m² for 2 greenhouses and open fields to plant potatoes and vegetables. We use these fields not only for training our community how to grow food, but also to ensure the school community is consuming healthy food. Community satisfaction reported also shows that training on healthy lifestyle has a positive effect on productivity of school staff.

Over the last 3 years, 4 different studies have been conducted to reduce the carbon footprint in the school environment. These calculations are done based on the training content provided to Eco-Schools. We are pleased to be able to contribute to reduce global warming by saving energy by almost 55.000 kg (CO₂ avoided) and reducing water use by 7730,56 kg (CO₂ avoided), air pollution by 5925 kg (CO₂ avoided), and waste by 8489.41kg (CO₂ avoided).

The main purpose of our involvement in the ESD Phase 2 project was to lead the local community by school knowledge, skills, attitudes and culture and introduce

concept, content and methodology of Sustainable Development to citizens, communities and families through school activities, lessons and trainings. The “Healthy Food – Peace - Life” project also connects with “Healthy lifestyle” topic which was implemented to achieve this goal. This is based on the WSA self-assessment results, under the frame of the relevant research, school mission, and Eco-School program. Through the project-based school curriculum, we worked with students, faculty, staff, their families, parents, community members, and public organisations. Specifically developed training curricula for kindergartens no. 1, 4 and 9, the province’s Governor’s Office, Education Department, Department of Environment and Tourism, Specialised Inspection Agency, the Kherlen River Basin Administration, World Vision, KHENNES non-government organisation and the Life-long learning Centre, “Numrug Altai” Company. We also organised trainings on healthy eating habits, knowledge, skills and culture, and opened a model cafeteria with a hall for organising trainings and exhibitions. A lot of these activities stimulated the process of introducing a WSA, improved our schools projects outcomes, and helped us to share knowledge about healthy eating. These activities were the most influential in building habits to make right choice of food and its consumption among parents and their children. The implementation of this project in the whole school has also given us valuable experience and knowledge needed to continue further with the project development long term.

Under the frame of the ESD Phase 2 project, capacity building has also been strengthened, as a school team of 30 people, including school administration, teachers, students, staff, parents and community representatives was established. The team received e-learning, and



Eco-committee students

combined trainings were provided in stages with the methodological support of the Environmental Information and Training Centre. This training cooperation not only improved the capacity of the school team and provided training for children's volunteer organisations and participation groups, subject teams - teachers, and parents-community representatives, but it also expanded their participation. All of our schoolteachers were also involved in trainings on concept, content and methodology of Sustainable Development.

Based on the WSA school self-assessment results, and the development needs of the teaching staff identified on the basis of their own and external evaluations of teachers' performance, we also now have a "Calendar plan to support teacher professional development". The focus is on moving to more project-based learning methods and participatory pedagogy. This is being developed and implemented in accordance with the requirements and the "Skilled Teacher" program implemented by the Government of Mongolia.

Due to COVID and its consequences, methodological trainings and discussions were organised through e-learning. These trainings for teachers aided them in addressing fears of overuse and other risks that the internet brings, improving child protection, and providing psychological services to the students. Moreover, with the support of the ESD Phase 2 project, employing educational psychologists in schools is a measure which was timely, and it is now being implemented as a service that meets the priorities of teachers, parents and students.

Lastly, in order to increase our achievements and implement our objectives it will be important to identify the causes of our problems and correct them. We aim to plan well, carry out what we have planned, monitor what we have done, and follow up to see what has been improved. This is a continual cyclical process and through this approach aim for activities and changes made at the school to be done well, and in a way that creates motivation to further sustainable school development.

Strengths/prospects

- The parental community in the schools is very supportive and collaborates with the schools on a regular basis
- The local authorities are another strength as they are actively involved with the schools and give support both in terms of resources, funding and expertise
- The Government of Mongolia (Ministries of Education and Environment & Tourism) has been partnering with [Swiss Agency for Cooperation and Development](#)¹⁵² since 2015 to bring in the ESD approach into all spheres of Mongolian education. A cross-sectoral approach has been upheld by the partnership between the two ministries and provide support to schools on multiple levels

Challenges

- Teachers need more support and capacity building in order to be able to develop cross-curricular, learner centered pedagogy
- A common understanding about the WSA needs to percolate to all the stakeholders for its scaling up to the national level
- Resource constraints once projects and funding streams finish is a challenge