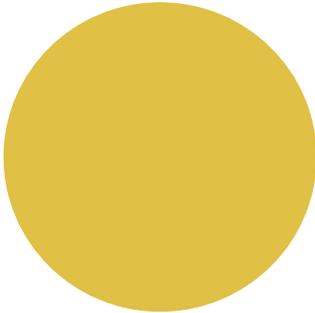




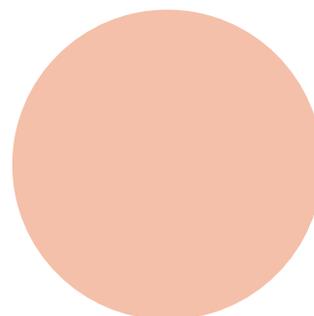
Tales of Hope



Grassroots Activities of
Education for **Sustainable Development (ESD)**
in Asia and the Pacific



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This publication follows the family-name-first style for Japanese people's names in accordance with the Japanese custom.

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Member of High Level Panel on the UNDESD / Science Museum / Former Minister of Education

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Developing Youth in Leadership for Sustainable Living

Sombath Somphone
Director, Participatory Development Training Centre (PADETC)

Good morning. It is an honor to have been invited as a keynote speaker. This is, in fact, my first keynote speech.

The topics that I am going to talk about cover two main issues. One is comparing education and schooling. The other is looking at the model of development, particularly the presentation and visualization of a sustainable model of development. This presentation is meant to elicit your thoughts and ideas. What I am about to say is part of the truth but not the whole truth. The rest of the truth is in you, so we need your participation.

Education for sustainable development contains two very important issues: education itself and sustainable development, both very important concerns today. Little progress is being made in these areas, in fact, the situation is spiraling downwards into a crisis. Yet, most of us have not woken up to this fact. Material comfort is somehow blinding us into believing that somehow, someday, things will work out. Here we are still waiting. Can this Joint

Regional Seminar for Promotion of Education for Sustainable Development, ESD, be a wake-up call? I would like to believe so!

Schooling *versus* Education

First of all, let us look critically at education itself. I strongly believe that we do not practice real education at the moment. What we practice is basically schooling. There is a big difference between education and schooling. In real education, people actually get smarter, but in our present practice of schooling people get dumber.

Schooling is rather boring, even threatening, I would say. It is a one-way communication dominated by teachers. Students are spoon-fed. Schooling can be compared to the imprisonment of human brain cells. It is a dumbing-down process.

On the other hand, schooling can also be made more participatory, more activity-based, more creative, more team-work oriented, more stimulating to the brain, more fun. Let's make it interesting for young people. For example, storytelling can be done in such a way that the children themselves can take part in it, and this has been proven to greatly improve their reading skills because it is interesting and fun for them to participate. Storytelling also promotes teamwork, leadership skills, confidence, and much more. Aerobic dance is a fun way of doing exercises together and also has physical, mental, and social benefits.

You may wonder whether a teacher can do all of this. The answer is "No." A teacher does not have to know how to do all of this. A teacher can enlist the help and participation of the students themselves, young and old, as a peer-to-peer education system.

There are a lot more of these examples, but the dumbing-down process does not only take place in the school system. It also takes place in our homes,

especially in our living rooms, through the TV sets. Mass media is nothing but a one-way communication. It is a weapon of mass destruction of human brain cells. It impedes us from thinking.

But media can also be used for education purposes. Video can be a powerful tool for education by engaging the young to produce their own radio programs, their own TV programs. We actually encourage a lot of young people to listen to and watch their own programs, and their peers' programs. Let them own the airwaves. Why should we give it to the companies? Young people are energetic, curious, always searching for themselves, pursuing their interests. We adults do not allow them to take part in the development process. They need to be more involved in society, and not just be a part of the schooling process. They should not be isolated any longer and we should not continue to isolate the school from the community.

People involved in education and development do not really know how to best make use of the media whereas commercial people and those in the entertainment industry make billions of dollars out of it. It is time that we wake up to this fact and do something about it.

So far, we have been talking about the methodology of teaching and learning. Now, let us critically look at the content of what we teach. School curricula generally do not respond directly to the needs of the students nor those of their families and the community. Schools hand out certificates as rewards that have little intrinsic value, just as the mass media encourages a false sense of what we need to fulfill our lives that drives us into indebtedness and an unsustainable materialistic lifestyle.

Activity-based Learning Should Start from Young Years

There is no reason why we cannot incorporate a sustainable lifestyle into the curriculum today. That would generally make our ESD more relevant. We

can and must start educating the young at an early age: We should not make the mistake of believing that they are too young to learn. We know very well that young people can learn from what they see, hear, and do a lot faster than we think. They should have the opportunity to learn survival skills from the communities and their families (**Figure 1**). Indigenous knowledge should be the bulk of the local curriculum.

First, we must identify what young people are interested in, and use these activities to teach as many skills as possible. Through cultivating earthworms with kitchen waste, children will learn about biology, the environment, and the discipline of taking care of another form of life. Through organic gardening, children can learn math, science, economics, culture, and health, as well as about the environment, in a very concrete way. Parents can help in deter-

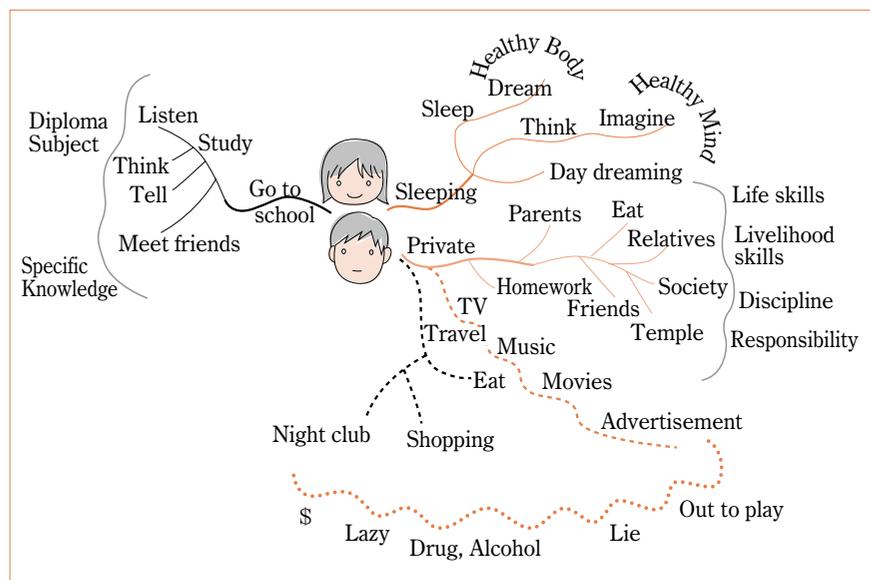


Figure 1 How young people spend their time of the day—roughly eight hours for on sleeping or resting, eight hours in school, and eight hours on their private activities. In the old days they practically all of the eight hours of private time are spent with the family learning useful life skills. In modern days they spend most of their private time on shopping and entertainment.

mining what the contents of the garden should be, whether in schools or local communities. Learning should be activity-based, discovery-based, and participatory. Schools and communities should be integrated with each other. Students should be allowed to enjoy learning. We should not subject them to mental stress and boredom.

Fundamental Components of a Model of Sustainable Education

On a larger picture, education can be sustainable only if it is operated within a sustainable model of development. The two are inseparable and interdependent. Let us visualize what a sustainable model of development is.

Figure 2 looks a bit like a UNESCO logo but that was not the intention, just a coincidence. A sustainable model of development is a model that strikes a balance between the four pillars: economic development, environmental harmony, cultural promotion, and preservation, and, most important of all, the development of the heart and the mind, the inner development. Sometimes we call it spiritual development, but this aspect is very much missing from most development models and also from education.

The goal of development should be Genuine National Happiness, GNH, learned from the Bhutanese experience of GNH which is Gross National Happiness. I think right now they are considering using Genuine National Happiness, because Gross National Happiness somehow infers that you have to measure it, but Genuine National Happiness is something that we all strive towards. We do not need to account for it. We do not need to number it.

Here you see that education is at the heart of the model (**Figure 2**). The four pillars representing different contents are anchored in the curriculum and are part of the education process. Hence, the contents of education should also be balanced against the four pillars of development. Balance is the key to the success of the model.

The Education System and the Role of Governance

At the base of the model is good governance, which is necessary to support and promote such a sustainable development model.

A government system is only as good as the people who run it. They must be competent, caring, honest, responsible, and socially committed. Where can we find people of such character? In this model, they are shown as the product of education and not of schooling. Unless we have a good education system we will not be able to have good governance. The two are interlinked.

How do we break this vicious cycle of bad education and bad governance? What are the points of entry?

Changing from one type of government system to another is certainly not a

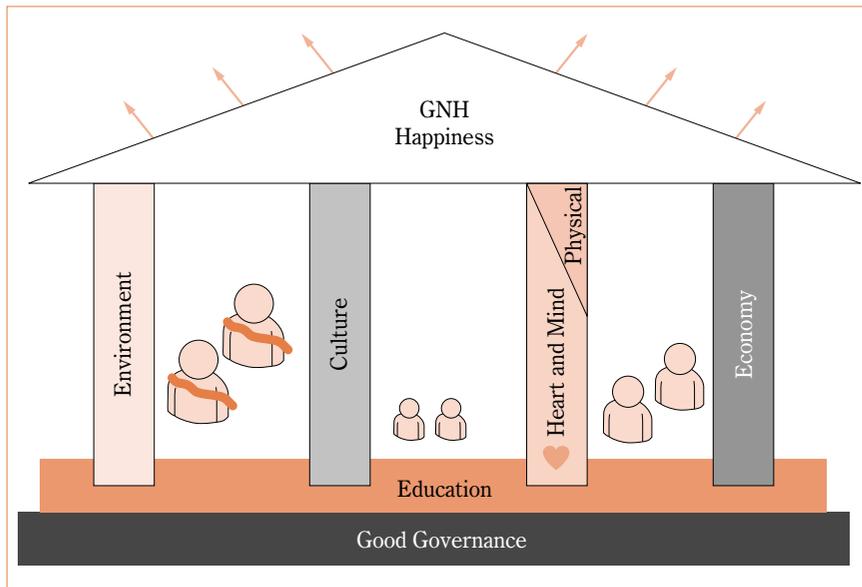


Figure 2 Model of sustainable development People shown in the picture represent elderly (left), children (center) and adult (right).

good point of entry. Many countries have tried it. They have experienced feudalism, capitalism, socialism, communism, and back to capitalism again but in a big way called “globalization.” (By the way, I would like to remind you that globalization is a predominantly one-way system. This means that the big economies engulf the smaller ones.)

It has been proven that the governance system is not really a good point of entry for setting up this model of development because good governance is only as good as the people who run it, and the people who run the governments are the product of the model of development. As long as we have only the present schooling system, we are not going to have good governance. We should improve our schooling system to enable it to become an education system. Only then can we get what we call “responsible individualism,” which is actually a phrase from the famous Canadian philosopher John Ralston Saul, rather than communism, capitalism and so on (Figure 3).

But since all of these are interdependent, education is dependent on whether we have good governance to set it up. Good governance depends on whether we have a good product from education, good people to run it. So where are the points of entry? How do we break this cycle? They are all interdependent. I don’t know the answer. I hope to get more answers from you. I hope that this strikes up some discussions.

Child Education as a Point of Entry

What I can say is that I have tried out something. I have my point of entry right here, education itself. But before I came to this point of entry, I started by introducing sustainable agricultural techniques, and then broadened this to bottom-up planning involving everybody for rural development processes. Then, I realized that this does not quite work because the attitudes of the people that we wanted to influence had been set already. It is very difficult to change their mindsets. They are less open to new ideas and new techniques.

After fifteen years of working, I shifted down to working with younger people, university graduates. I worked with them for three years hoping that I would be able to influence their mindsets. After three years, I realized it was too late. By the time they graduate from university, especially our Lao university, they have not acquired certain essential skills, their minds are no longer open to new ideas and you cannot really change their attitudes.

So, I am now working with a much younger age group, primary, secondary, and university levels, on extracurricular activities. I promote leadership skills, and include them to help improve the education system or the schooling system itself. In the paper which will be circulated to you, you will see how youth leadership skills and sustainable lifestyle have been described.

Bringing in young volunteers to help teachers with activities both inside and outside the classroom has increased the interest of the young student in

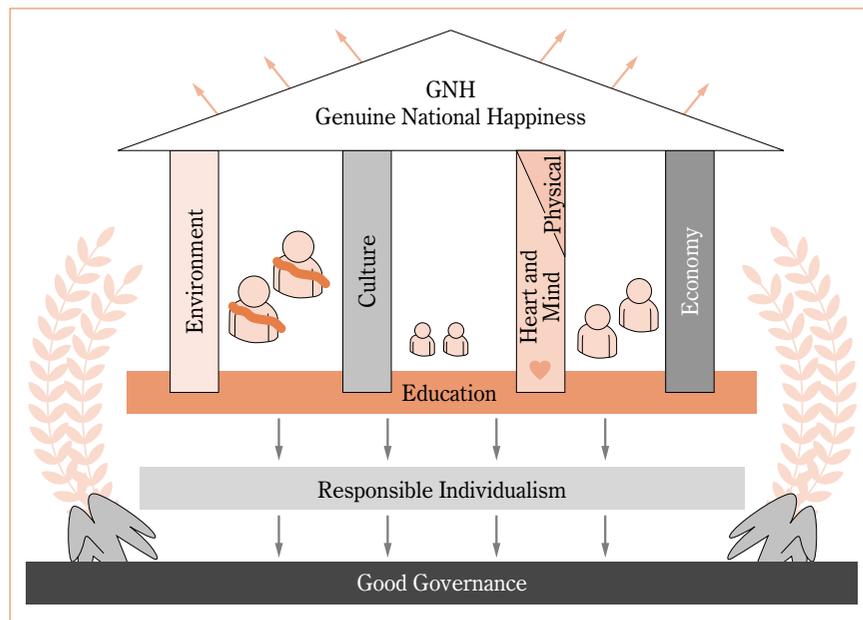


Figure 3 “Responsible individualism” and model of sustainable development

learning. After less than two years, we have observed that young students learn a lot faster this way. But this is only a small example. I am sure all of you have many good experiences, but how to build on these is still the big question, because whenever you scale something up, the quality tends to drop. At this point, I would like to say that unless we have this model of development, it will not be possible to scale it up.

A Tutoring Tool for the Development Model

Here, the media plays a very important role. Our future plan is to produce and test tutoring tools using video films, not to replace teachers but to supplement and to facilitate. We are planning to record the best teachers teaching their favorite subjects, using the best lesson plans, the best teaching and learning tools, combined with real life activities. This video will help teachers to improve themselves as well as benefit students who can excel faster. It is a tutoring tool, and with the best teachers and best materials, I hope that we can expand it without compromising quality, and the video can be accessible anywhere at any time.

Furthermore, I would like to use this tool in what they call video servers that are found in hotels, where you can choose whatever movies to see and so on. If it is accessible through video servers, students and teachers can choose to watch whatever lesson back and forth any time. The technology is available but we are not using it for educational purposes. It is being used purely for entertainment.

So I would like to recapture the key points. At present, we only have schooling. We do not really practice education, and the model of development being followed is not sustainable. The media plays a great role, but only if we involve young people, involve the community, take some control over the media and produce the films ourselves as technologies become more available, I think only then will we be able to really promote education for sustainable development.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.

Q & A

Q Your presentation has made us feel hopeful about the situation. Basically, we are facing a very serious problem. At the intellectual level there is more work, but we are facing a problem at the implementation level. As you pointed out it is necessary to scale up but not at the cost of losing quality.

Also, you have suggested that more use of technology can be helpful. My question is whether it can be standardized. Can we generalize and standardize taking into context the situation and level of development which varies so much?

I also wonder about the reason why you have used heart and mind but not soul or spirituality.

A Thank you very much. These are very good questions. Yes, hearts and minds and spirituality, all of this should actually be represented in the human body. If you look at a person as a whole person, we have to develop the physical, the inner feelings and spirituality of that person. For example, it is known that human beings are born with multiple intelligences. However, when we educate people, we only look at one or two of these intelligences, basically logic and the arts, and the way we teach is basically through imposing knowledge and forced feeding. We are not stimulating or encouraging the other intelligences enough. Therefore, a lot of children are classified as not very smart by omission. This is a crime against human intelligences. Yes, a lot of this can be standardized by sharing the information and the experience from all the people here. I think many things, especially the process, can be standardized if you work together, set up whatever you think are the best practices and best ideas through graphics or whatever, and then

they can be translated into different languages. So many things can be done, and I hope that this stirs up more interest.

Q I would like to ask you about scaling up and implementation. Political will is extremely important. And international trends such as globalization are much more powerful than local initiatives. I would like to hear your ideas on that.

A Again, this is a very important question. That is why I propose the Bhutanese model. I think the advanced countries, as Dr. Arima mentioned, have gone too far, the material aspects of life predominating at the expense of the heart. And they now feel they are missing something and want to move back. However, developing countries are saying that such a model is not sustainable while the corporations are promoting more consumption. It is the corporations that are behind the politicians. The politicians are basically puppets of the corporations while the corporations run the world. But we can look at this from a positive point of view. That is, we as the consumers or the public are the ones who have power over what to consume. It follows that the public needs to be educated to recognize who wields the real power. But who is responsible for telling the public what to consume even if they don't really need it? It is the media. However, there is opportunity in the area of media also. Technologies have evolved to the point where we can own and produce our own media at much lower cost. So media is an important point of entry. Also, I think concerted efforts will work. Political will can come from people like us here, not from the politicians.

Q Your four pillars remind me of the pillars of 21st Century Education that were expounded by UNESCO and written about in a book called "*Learning: The Treasure Within*". When you pointed out the spiritual development in education, were you considering the mentality of the child as it grows from pre-school when they are learning to become independent, in grade school when they are so intelligent that very few fail, and then in high

school when they fail but their sense of learning how to work is so strong? I wonder if you had considered in your four pillars the background of the four pillars of UNESCO's 21st Century Education.

A Sorry I have never seen the four pillars of UNESCO. This is my ignorance and I have to learn more.

Q Thank you for the video. I think it is so stimulating and you have shown us the real aspect of what disturbs us about education, and you are right about the video. As a journalist, I sometimes feel that what UNESCO tells us is not easy to understand and even incomprehensible to society. I spend more than half of my time writing about our work. The video was an excellent portrayal of your thoughts. Thank you.

A Thank you.

Q A comment I would like to make is that I think adults should continue to learn and be educated because children stay with their parents after schooling. Sometimes we think that we are too old to learn new things, but I think we should continue the learning process. Particularly in Asia-Pacific, where we have a large number of illiterate adults, I think if we go for both schooling and also education outside schooling, then I think we can strengthen this ESD effort.

A We should definitely continue learning throughout our lives. Sorry that I have misrepresented this, but I am basically looking for a point of entry in this vicious cycle, and the opportunity that we are not taking advantage of is young people. There is so much potential there. We see things as adults but we don't see things from the child's point of view very much.

Going back to the state of our development again, advanced countries see the problems. They see that less industrialized or less developed countries have their attractions; they have their own characteristics, for example, the concept of livability. A slow pace of life is actually much more livable. Countries such as Nepal, Bhutan, and Laos have some very attractive aspects, but we do not acknowledge these and publicize them. If we do not recognize this capital, we will lose it. I think there is something left for us to capitalize on yet that we can share. Laos, for example, is being labeled as one of the poorest countries in the world. The Lao people seem to be happy, and say "We have a lot of relatives and friends." They do not see themselves as poor, but as being labeled as poor by outsiders. The correct term is "cash poor," not just "poor." In terms of contentment, inner spirit, I think we are quite rich. Environmentally we are quite rich, but we are yet to recognize that, which I think is rather dangerous.

Q I have just one small comment to make. Our main problem regarding the environment stems from rapid globalization. In your model, I think we should also somehow try to fit in education of the corporations. We should also prepare lectures and an education model for the multinational companies, so that along with economic development, they also bring environmental preservation and development.

Secondly, I also feel that in community development programs, which are related to environment and resource saving, the community should also involve corporations and wherever they set up their business, along with the community, they should participate in the overall development of the environment. In case this fails, then we should also build up our legal system in such a way that they are penalized. They should not be let off.

A Yes, definitely, the corporations should be educated. Here again, people who run the corporations are sometimes less concerned about the heart. They basically aim to make profits. That's the flaw. But if people who

graduate from business schools were trained in social responsibility, I don't think they will be heartless as are the present corporations. There is a movement for socially responsible business practices. This is being advocated by people who are more mature so those should be the people we start working on. There are some companies that have no waste at all, 100% recycling. So we should promote and learn from those experiences.

Q Both presentations were very good, but the presentation was mainly concerned with the methodology of the teaching. I think the whole teaching system and education system should be reoriented. We have to look at the context and global issues as well as local issues. When we cannot reorient the entire education system and curriculum, textbooks, teaching-learning activities, and materials, maybe the methodology itself will work, but one methodology cannot work for all the things that we want to achieve. So we also have to discuss the reorientation of the entire education system in such countries. Thank you very much.

A I fully agree with you. I was just looking for a point of entry. The teaching methodology, as looking at the lesson plan itself, should be structured in such a way that is child-centered, activity-based, and includes discovery learning and so on, and then that should be extended to the textbook itself later. Here, we want to reorient textbooks to be more efficient, not confusing for the children nor too narrow on certain issues. Indigenous knowledge, as I mentioned, should be the bulk of the local curriculum. Local curricula in most countries are allotted at least 20%, but it is only contained in the policy, and is not being implemented. The Ministry of Education generally does not know how to include the local curriculum, but the community can participate in identifying what kind of local indigenous knowledge can be part of the local curriculum and that can be taught in or outside the school itself. That is, activity-based, so there are lots of possibilities. I fully agree with you.

Lecturer

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PROFILE



Mr. Sombath received a Bachelor of Education and M.S. in Agronomy and Soil Sciences from the University of Hawaii. He has served as a Chief Technical Advisor of the Rice-Based Integrated Farming System Project and the Participatory Development in Communities Project. Since 1996, he has been the Director of the Participatory Development Training Centre (PADETC). In May 2002, PADETC received an award from the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) for "Empowering the Poor through Human Resource Development". He was awarded the 2005 Ramon Magsaysay Award for Community Leadership, in recognition of his strenuous efforts in motivating the country's young people to become its leaders towards a sustainable future.