



**Knowledge hub**  
-  
**Collection of best practices**

**Summary of the best practice**

1. Title of the best practice (e.g. name of policy, programme, project, etc.) \*

Promoting ESD through whole-society and whole-institution approaches

2. Country or countries where the practice is implemented \*

Japan

3. Please select the **most relevant** Action Track(s) the best practice applies to \*

- Action Track 1. Inclusive, equitable, safe, and healthy schools
- Action Track 2. Learning and skills for life, work, and sustainable development
- Action Track 3. Teachers, teaching and the teaching profession
- Action Track 4. Digital learning and transformation
- Action Track 5. Financing of education

4. Implementation lead/partner organization(s) \*

Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology

5. Key words (5-15 words): Please add key descriptive words around aims, modalities, target groups etc. \*

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)  
mainstreaming ESD  
whole-institution-approach  
whole-society-approach  
networking

6. What makes it a best practice? \*

Japan has been systematically promoting ESD throughout the government. By introducing ESD principles and perspectives into the National Curriculum Standards at all school levels and promoting ESD in more than 1,000 UNESCO ASPnet schools, the largest number in the world, Japan has been producing results which will lead to transforming learning environments, building capacities of educators, empowering and mobilizing youth, and accelerating local-level actions.

## **Description of the best practice**

## 7. Introduction (350-400 words)

This section should ideally provide the context of, and justification for, the practice and address the following issues:

- i) Which population was affected?
- ii) What was the problem that needed to be addressed?
- iii) Which approach was taken and what objectives were achieved? \*

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is defined as learning and educational activities aiming to create a sustainable society, with the ultimate goal of ensuring an abundant life for humankind for future generations. Since modern society faces the serious risks of climate change, biodiversity loss, resource depletion, deepening poverty, and various other problems resulting from development activities by humans, ESD is designed to encourage us to view these issues as our own challenges, to examine the fundamental causes of the problem, and to motivate us to "think globally and act locally," thereby creating new values and invoking behavioral transformations that can bring solutions for those problems. A United Nations General Assembly resolution adopted in 2019 has reaffirmed that ESD is a key enabler to achieving all the SDGs, which are the goals of humanity as a whole.

The COVID-19 global pandemic has highlighted the importance of fostering socio-emotional skills and non-cognitive skills in the course of educational activities. In order for human beings to overcome a wide range of difficulties and achieve sustainable growth, each and every one of us must transform our own behaviors and then interact with society as well as face and explore the challenges of our society. In this sense, ESD is becoming even more important.

Under the global ESD framework, Japan is promoting ESD through whole-society and whole-institution approaches and leading global activities related to ESD.

Specifically, Japan is promoting ESD with a whole-of-country approach through the following initiatives.

Relevant ministries and agencies collaborate to formulate an implementation plan for ESD, and formulate measures to involve diverse stakeholders in the realization of ESD, as well as initiatives to be implemented by each domestic stakeholder in each of the five priority action areas identified in "ESD for 2030".

Introducing ESD principles and perspectives into the National Curriculum Standards at all school levels.

Promoting ESD through a whole-school approach at more than 1,000 UNESCO ASPnet schools, the largest number in the world, while expanding their networks.

As a global initiative, contributing through Japan Funds-in-Trust for ESD to UNESCO and implementing the UNESCO-Japan Prize on ESD to motivate ESD practitioners around the world to take on more effective ESD initiatives and to disseminate excellent initiatives around the world.

## 8. Implementation (350-450 words)

Please describe the implementation modalities or processes, where possible in relation to:

- i) What are the main activities carried out?
- ii) When and where the activities were carried out (including the start date and whether it is ongoing)?
- iii) Who were the key implementation actors and collaborators? (civil society organizations, private sector, foundations, coalitions, networks etc.)?
- iv) What were the resources needed (budget and sources) for the implementation?

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Under the global ESD framework, the “Plan for Implementing the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD)” was formulated in 2006, and the “Plan for Implementing the Global Action Programme on Education for Sustainable Development (GAP)” was formulated in 2016. In May 2021, based on the review of the aforementioned implementation plan and ESD for 2030, the “Implementation Plan for Education for Sustainable Development in Japan (The Second ESD Implementation Plan)” was formulated, with initiatives being implemented in each of the five priority action areas.

The main initiatives are as follows:

Incorporating ESD principles and perspectives into the National Curriculum Standards for preschool, elementary, junior high and high schools, and implementing ESD-based classes in all schools.

Preparation of “A Guide to Promoting ESD” to build specific curricula in schools and to understand how to promote cooperation on ESD-related activities inside and outside schools.

Positioning the UNESCO Associated Schools Network (ASPnet) as the hub for advancing ESD, holding an annual national conference of ASPnet schools to strengthen the networks between schools, establishing the inter-university network (ASPUnivNet) to support the UNESCO Associated Schools Network’s activities, and supporting the implementation of ESD in local communities through the formation of ESD-SDGs consortiums.

Implementing the UNESCO-Japan Prize on ESD to motivate ESD practitioners around the world to take on more effective ESD initiatives and to disseminate excellent initiatives around the world as well as supporting the creation of country initiatives and the strengthening of ESD networks in each country.

The Second ESD Implementation Plan includes: 1) commitment to achieve the SDGs, 2) enhancing partnerships among stakeholders, 3) promoting efforts in the five priority action areas (advancing policy, transforming learning environments, building the capacities of educators, empowering and mobilizing youth, and accelerating local level actions), and 4) Leading role to promote ESD in the global community. The plan aims to contribute to the commitment of each stakeholder (including the national government, local governments, civic groups, corporations, media, research institutions, academic societies, educational institutions including schools, and individuals including teachers and staff). In implementing the plan, policy formulation is conducted through a cross-ministry collaboration system, and opinions are heard from a wide range of stakeholders through the Japanese National Commission for UNESCO and the Roundtable Meeting on the Education for Sustainable Development. In addition, through the UNESCO Future Co-creation Platform, collaboration across the five priority action areas is being conducted.

The progress of the Second ESD Implementation Plan will be examined and evaluated in the Inter-ministerial Liaison Committee on ESD.

## 9. Results – outputs and outcomes (250-350 words)

To the extent possible, please reply to the questions below:

- i) How was the practice identified as transformative? (e.g., impact on policies, impact on management processes, impact on delivery arrangements or education monitoring, impact on teachers, learners and beneficiary communities etc.);
- ii) What were the concrete results achieved with regard to outputs and outcomes?
- iii) Has an assessment of the practice been carried out? If yes, what were the results? \*

Japan has been promoting ESD through a whole-of-government approach since the beginning of the UN Decade for Sustainable Development in 2005, and has achieved the following outcomes in five priority action areas.

### (1) Advancing policy

- Positioning of ESD in the SDGs Implementation Guiding Principles

- Promoting ESD in the policy areas contributing to the achievement of SDG 4

- Positioning of ESD in the Basic Plan for the Promotion of Education, which defines the government's five-year plan

- Practicing ESD based on the National Curriculum Standards

- Positioning of ESD in policies associated with global issues

- Cooperation with foreign countries

- Educational support in developing countries

- Promoting ESD through support for projects implemented by international organizations

### (2) Transforming learning environments

- Practicing ESD in all schools based on the National Curriculum Standards

- Enhancing education environments through ICT

- Building and enhancing networks to promote whole-institution approaches

- Ensuring a wide variety of learning opportunities such as experience-based learning activities for youth and children both inside and outside of schools.

### (3) Building the capacities of educators

- Training for teachers and preparing A Guide to Promoting ESD

- International exchange programs for teachers

- Promoting mutual learning among diverse stakeholders in the ESD promotion network

- ICT-driven training on ESD

### 4) Empowering and mobilizing youth

- Creating peer-to-peer communities for youth through building platforms or networks, holding forums, and operating portal sites

- Creating environments to facilitate the participation of youth in international discussions

- Promoting exchanges among youth

- Encouraging self-initiated efforts of youth

### 5) Accelerating local-level actions

- Leveraging ESD to promote local SDGs

- Networking for supporting ESD across the nation

- Cooperation with educational institutions and social education facilities, etc.

- Promoting learning focused on experience-based learning activities

## 10. Lessons learnt (300 words)

To the extent possible, please reply to the following questions:

- i) What were the key triggers for transformation?
- ii) What worked really well – what facilitated this?
- iii) What did not work – why did it not work? \*

Through the implementation of the above-mentioned initiatives regarding ESD in Japan, the following achievements and characteristics can be seen.

## (1) ESD initiatives centered on school education

In Japan, many ESD initiatives are implemented through school education. Based on the Basic Plan for the Promotion of Education, ESD has been incorporated into local governments' plans for education, and systematic ESD initiatives are progressing in local communities.

In addition, ESD principles and perspectives have been incorporated into the National Curriculum Standard for preschool, elementary, junior high, and high schools, and ESD-based classes are being implemented in all schools.

## (2) ESD developing based on environmental education

In Japan, there are many ESD projects being implemented based on environmental education initiatives. At the government level, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) and the Ministry of the Environment (MOE) have collaborated to establish an "ESD Promotion Network" involving schools, businesses, NPOs/NGOs, and other diverse entities, and this network is being developed across government ministries and agencies. A mechanism has been established to organically integrate the know-how of environmental education that has been implemented by various entities, taking into account the principles and perspectives of ESD, and to share it not only with a limited number of practitioners but also with a wide range of people.

## (3) ESD philosophy rooted in existing initiatives

In school education, the importance of building a sustainable society is stated in the National Curriculum Standards, and learning based on the perspective of ESD has become widespread. However, there are many types of education that are conducted within separate frameworks, such as environmental education, consumer education, and human rights education, and they could be based on an ESD perspective without the various entities involved being aware of that. Therefore, we are working to disseminate the concept of ESD through MEXT's A Guide to Promoting ESD and the National Conference of UNESCO Associated Schools Networks, as well as to introduce the concept of ESD into existing educational policies and curricula.

## (4) Development of ESD involving diverse local actors

In Japan, UNESCO Associated Schools Networks were positioned as the hubs for promoting ESD during the UNDESD, and as a result of their promotion and dissemination, the number of schools affiliated with the UNESCO Associated Schools Network has exceeded 1,000, the largest number in the world, and in some regions, local governments are systematically promoting ESD, with boards of education taking the lead. The government's project to promote ESD has made it mandatory for boards of education, universities, and businesses to participate as constituent members, thereby promoting collaboration among various stakeholders and developing ESD beyond the framework of school education. As a result, understanding of the need to create a sustainable society has progressed, including the creation of initiatives to implement ESD with an awareness of global and regional sustainability, rather than simply learning about environmental issues.

## 11. Conclusions (250 words)

Please describe why may this intervention be considered a “best practice”. What recommendations can be made for those intending to adopt the documented “best practice” or how can it help people working on the same issue(s)? \*

In modern society, which is facing risks of climate change, biodiversity loss, resource depletion, deepening poverty, and various other problems resulting from development activities by humans, as well as the COVID-19 global pandemic, ESD is becoming increasingly important, as it is designed to encourage us to view these issues as our own challenges, to examine the fundamental causes of the problem, thereby creating new values and invoking behavioral transformations that can bring solutions for those problems.

- - As a whole, the government of Japan has been systematically promoting ESD, introducing ESD principles and perspectives into the National Curriculum Standards at all school levels, and ensuring that all schools provide education based on ESD principles. In addition, UNESCO Associated Schools Networks have been positioned as the hubs for promoting ESD, and as a result of promoting ESD, the number of UNESCO Associated Schools in Japan has increased from 16 in 2005 to over 1,000, the largest number in the world. These efforts based on a whole-society and whole-institution approach have produced beneficial outcomes in advancing policy, transforming learning environments, building the capacities of educators, empowering and mobilizing youth, and accelerating local-level actions.

## 12. Further reading

Please provide a list and URLs of key reference documents for additional information on the “best practice” for those who may be interested in knowing how the results benefited the beneficiary group/s. \*

Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, Japan, 2017. "Education for Sustainable Development in Japan under GAP"  
[https://www.mext.go.jp/component/a\\_menu/other/micro\\_detail/\\_icsFiles/afieldfile/2017/05/19/1385403\\_01.pdf](https://www.mext.go.jp/component/a_menu/other/micro_detail/_icsFiles/afieldfile/2017/05/19/1385403_01.pdf)

Government of Japan, 2018. "The Third Basic, Plan for the Promotion of Education" (provisional translation)  
[https://www.mext.go.jp/content/1406127\\_002.pdf](https://www.mext.go.jp/content/1406127_002.pdf)

Inter-ministerial Liaison Committee on ESD, 2021. "Implementation Plan for Education for Sustainable Development in Japan (The Second ESD Implementation Plan)" (Provisional translation)  
[https://www.mext.go.jp/en/content/20211208-mxt\\_koktou01-1373244\\_1.pdf](https://www.mext.go.jp/en/content/20211208-mxt_koktou01-1373244_1.pdf)

Office of the Director-General for International Affairs, Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, Japan National Commission for UNESCO, 2021. "A Guide to Promoting ESD"  
[https://www.mext.go.jp/content/20210528-mxt\\_koktou01-000015385\\_3.pdf](https://www.mext.go.jp/content/20210528-mxt_koktou01-000015385_3.pdf)