

# AHMEDABAD

## THE ENCOUNTER OF ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION WITH EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABILITY

The **IV International Environmental Education Conference**, was accomplished from the 24<sup>th</sup> till the 28<sup>th</sup> of November, 2007, in the Center of Environmental Education in Ahmedabad (India), an institution founded in 1984, in the Gujarat State, that counts with 48 regional nucleus in all the states of the country. Participated on this conference 1200 people from 97 countries. 30 working groups covered all the aspects of the general theme. It was built in a participative form with preparatory meetings in Durban, South Africa, in New York and Paris.

In Ahmedabad many references were done to **Tbilisi**. Thirty years before (1977), in Tbilisi (Georgia), had been accomplished the I International Environmental Education Conference. Before Tbilisi the theme had already been rise in the United Nations Conference about Sustainable development held in Stockholm (1972) and in the Belgrade Conference (1975). Until Tbilisi, environmental education was much more known as education for conservation (conservationism). Tbilisi had given a step ahead, consecrating the expression “environmental education”, in the broader vision that we have today. Tbilisi became a divisor in the question of environmental education.

The 60's and the 70's were decades of questioning of formal education and the environmental education seemed to be an alternative education to the teaching system. A second lecture of Rousseau, Froebel, Dewey, Montessori, Steiner, and later, Freire, served as basis for this area of knowledge and the so called pedagogical practice of “environmental education”. This diversity of inspirations and practices has turned environmental education a rich field of studies, researches and intervention projects.

Ten years later, happened the II International Environmental Education Conference in **Moscow** (1987). In this conference, environmental education was associated to the theme of “environmental management”. The conference gave a lot of emphasis to the gender of education. “Gender and environment” became also a theme on the educational agenda. It discuss also the education for development, for peace and for human rights. Right after came RIO-92, where it was approved, by the Global Forum of the NGOs and the popular movements the *Environmental Education Treaty for the Sustainable Societies and the Global Responsibility*. RIO-92 gave much more emphasis to three interdependent dimensions of sustainable developments: *ecology, economy and society*.

It was in Thessaloníki (Greece), in 1997, the III International Environmental Education Conference that the theme of education for the sustainable development appeared, for the first time, associated to environmental education, in function of the recover to Chapter 36 of the *Agenda 21*, approved in RIO-92. In 2002, at Rio+10, held in Johannesburg, environmental education was much more understood as a strategy for governance of the environmental education questions, associated to three dimensions of sustainable development defended in Rio.

From Tbilisi to Ahmedabad there has been a great practical and theoretical advance. The first preoccupations with environment were much more focused to “preserve” nature, to “conserve” it. After that, the central theme became biodiversity. These themes did not stayed in the past, but now, facing the global warming and the climatic crisis, the central theme of environmental education becomes the people's **lifestyle**: if we do not change our way of producing and reproducing our existence, we may be putting in danger all of the lives in our planet.

The **Ahmedabad Declaration** reflects this new context. In a way, it remembers a little the first version of Earth Charter from the RIO-92 Global Forum, a call to education for a sustainable life. The debates were dominated for the presence of a central thought of Gandhi's work: “my life is my message”. According to Kartikeya V. Sarabhai, “the Gandhian philosophy of education is all about the development of Body, Mind and Spirit. His concept of education has impacted the framing of the objectives of Indian education, emphasizing self-reliance and dignity of the individual which would form the basis of social relations characterized by non-violence within and across society” (SARABHAI, Kartikeya V. and Preeti R. Kanaujia, orgs. 2007a. *Environmental Education*

*in the Indian School System: Status Report 2007*. Ahmedabad: CEE, p.1). Doubtless, we need to give examples, we also need to be the difference we pray to be. The Declaration of Ahmedabad makes it clear: "The example we set is all important. Through our actions, we add substance and vigour to the quest for sustainable living. With creativity and imagination we need to rethink and change the values we live by, the choices we make, and the actions we take (...). We must reconsider our tools, methods and approaches, our politics and economics, our relationships and partnerships, and the very foundations and purpose of education and how it relates to the lives we lead". Sustainability needs to see starting for others points of view; not only of the point of view of the concept of Environment.

In Ahmedabad it was a lot discussed the theme of **global warming**, still under the impact of the IPCC's reports. It was instituted that, in what it refers to this theme, the risk is global, although the solutions are local, therefore, it is in environmental education that we can directly act. The climatic issue is not apart from the economical growth, and this one's question is linked to the relationship among the nations and to the demands of cooperation, equity and transparency. We came out from Ahmedabad with the firm conviction that is needed to do all possible efforts, as educators, to change global economy. The difference can be made from education. The Declaration of Ahmedabad reflected this intense debate about the economy, development and way of life: "Our vision is a world in which our work and lifestyles contribute to the well-being of all life on Earth. We believe that through education, human lifestyles can be achieved that support ecological integrity, economic and social justice, sustainable livelihoods and respect for all life. Through education we can learn to prevent and resolve conflict, respect cultural diversity, create a caring society and live in peace".

Being, the way of life, a dominant theme in Ahmedabad, the **sustainable consumption** has had much relevance. There are no way of talking about education for the sustainable development without talking about the education for the sustainable consumption. The State of Gujarat, in India, where was held the IV International Environmental Education Conference, is essentially a vegetarian state. It has been a lot discussed the nurture habits based on animal protein.

It was reminded that the meat consume is the major polluter of the planet. It is necessary something about 16 billion animals to feed the consumers of meat these days. In a period of five years the amount of meat consumed has doubled. It was also reminded that the farming and cattle raising frontier is the principal factor of deforestation, as well as the fact that one kilogram of meat needs 15 thousand liters of water to be produced. While 14% of the emission of pollute gases from the greenhouse effect is provided from transport in the planet, 18% of these same emissions come from the animals.

In addition to that, the massacre of animals involves violent acts contraries to the engagement that we may have with life. All life is sacred. What we eat becomes ourselves, in our body, belongs to us. What we eat reflects our posture in front of behavior, our ideal of life and world that we want to build. Our basic concept should be compassion for all the community of life.

We concluded that the nurture model of rich countries cannot be generalized by the simple fact that we would need one more planet (we would need 2,6 planets) to be able to feed everyone. The needed Earth surface to produce animal protein for all would be 15 times larger than the space necessary to produce vegetable protein. Added to the fact that animal protein is the cause of numerous illness, among then: cancer, diabetes, and vascular illness. Due to all this, the agricultural model is cause. It is needed to invent another model, one more sustainable, in what refers to people's health as much as the issue of protection of environment.

We must eat to survive, but, differently from the animals we don't do that by pure instinct. We feel pleasure on eating and we are able to make choices. The act of eating is transformed by us into a very significant act. It is not a mere satisfaction of a instinctive necessity. Eating is also a cultural act. Society transformed that into a social act. There is a huge variety of aliments and some of these victuals are sufficient for all human beings on Earth. There is a lack of equal distribution.

The best choice of sustenance is that produced locally and the worst is the one that comes packed, from far away, and for that produces much more garbage (the industrialized products) and more social and environmental costs. It is all about knowing how the products that we devour were

processed. Know all the food production system.

In November 27, 2007, IPCC (International Panel of Climate Change), has launched his fourth Report, a synthesis for policymakers, in order to take the necessary decisions to face the global warming. This document reaffirmed what it had sustained in the last Report, that Industrial Revolution, started in the middle of the XVIII Century, is a determinant factor in the increase of CO<sub>2</sub> concentration in the atmosphere, which causes the greenhouse effect and the growth of temperature of the planet. This tendency shall continue for many centuries, even if humanity will be able to control the CO<sub>2</sub> emission and balance gases concentration of greenhouse effect. IPCC affirms, textually, “the growth of the sea level and the warming are inevitable”.

Considering that we will have to live, inevitably, with the global warming, but that we have to diminish its harm effects; considering that our life style and, particularly, our food has considerable impact on the greenhouse effect; considering that ESD and, particularly, education for sustainable consumption is a fundamental part of this education, and may have a positive impact in order to diminish CO<sub>2</sub> emission; as an educator, I proposed that we gather and engage the biggest number as possible of schools and students towards a change in their life style to create habits of a sustainable life, particularly through sustainable ecological food. We still have not used the organizative and transformative potential of schools. More than one billion children and youth study today in the world and a change in their life style would make a big difference.

From Tbilisi to Ahmedabad many changes took place, in the way of thinking environmental education, now more centered in learning, in the new impulse to the partnerships with civil society, in the very concept of environment, incorporating the culture and not only nature and pollution. In spite of the pledge of million educators, the current situation of the planet got worse, demanding an effort still bigger.

Therefore, the **recommendations** of Ahmedabad detached the necessity of a “new sense of urgency” and of a “new paradigm”: “We no longer need recommendations for incremental change; we need recommendations that help alter our economic and production systems, and ways of living radically. We need an educational framework that not only follows such radical changes, but can take the lead. This requires a paradigm shift. The roots of our present education paradigm the world-over can be traced to the Enlightenment era, which gave birth to science as we know today and influenced all areas of human thought, activity and institutions. This Enlightenment paradigm is based on the ideas that progress is rooted in science and reason, and that science and reason can unravel the mysteries of nature. It encourages us to 'know' nature in order to use, transform and consume it for our insatiable needs”.

We need to re-define the notion of progress to be happy and to live in the sustainable form and in peace. Because as Gandhi used to say, “there is enough in the world for everyone's need, but not for anyone's greed”.

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