

# Tbilisi Declaration (1977)

The world's first intergovernmental conference on environmental education was organized by the United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in cooperation with the U.N. Environment Programme (UNEP) and was convened in Tbilisi, Georgia (USSR) from October 14-26, 1977.

Delegates from 66 member states and observers from two nonmember states participated. Representatives and observers from eight U.N. agencies and programs also participated. Three other intergovernmental organizations and 20 international nongovernmental organizations also were represented. In all, 265 delegates and 65 representatives and observers took part in the conference.

The Tbilisi Declaration was adopted by acclamation at the close of the intergovernmental conference. The declaration noted the unanimous accord in the important role of environmental education in the preservation and improvement of the world's environment, as well as in the sound and balanced development of the world's communities.

## *The Role, Objectives, and Characteristics of Environmental Education*

The Tbilisi Declaration together with two of the recommendations of the Conference constitutes the framework, principles, and guidelines for environmental education at all levels—local, national, regional, and international—and for all age groups both inside and outside the formal school system.

- I. The Conference *recommends* the adoption of certain criteria which will help to guide efforts to develop environmental education at the national, regional, and global levels:
  1. Whereas it is a fact that biological and physical features constitute the natural basis of the human environment, its ethical, social, cultural, and economic dimensions also play their part in determining the lines of approach and the instruments whereby people may understand and make better use of natural resources in satisfying their needs.
  2. Environmental education is the result of the reorientation and dovetailing of different disciplines and educational experiences which facilitate an integrated

perception of the problems of the environment, enabling more rational actions capable of meeting social needs to be taken.

3. A basic aim of environmental education is to succeed in making individuals and communities understand the complex nature of the natural and the built environments resulting from the interaction of their biological, physical, social, economic, and cultural aspects, and acquire the ~knowledge, values, attitudes, and practical skills to participate in a responsible and effective way in anticipating and solving environmental problems, and in the management of the quality of the environment.
4. A further basic aim of environmental education is clearly to show the economic, political, and ecological interdependence of the modern world, in which decisions and actions by different countries can have international repercussions. Environmental education should, in this regard, help to develop a sense of responsibility and solidarity among countries and regions as the foundation for a new international order which will guarantee the conservation and improvement of the environment.
5. Special attention should be paid to understanding the complex relations between socio-economic development and the improvement of the environment.
6. For this purpose, environmental education should provide the necessary knowledge for interpretation of the complex phenomena that shape the environment, encourage those ethical, economic, and esthetic values which, constituting the basis of self-discipline, will further the development of conduct compatible with the preservation and improvement of the environment. It should also provide a wide range of practical skills required in the devising and application of effective solutions to environmental problems.
7. To carry out these tasks, environmental education should bring about a closer link between educational processes and real life, building its activities around the environmental problems that are faced by particular communities and focusing analysis on these by means of an interdisciplinary, comprehensive approach which will permit a proper understanding of environmental problems.
8. Environmental education should cater to all ages and socio-professional groups in the population. It should be addressed to (a) the general nonspecialist public of young people and adults whose daily conduct has a decisive influence on the preservation and improvement of the environment; (b) to particular social groups whose professional activities affect the quality of the environment; and to scientists and technicians whose specialized

research and work will lay the foundations of knowledge on which education, training, and efficient management of the environment should be based.

9. To achieve the effective development of environmental education, full advantage must be taken of all public and private facilities available to society for the education of the population: the formal education system, different forms of nonformal education, and the mass media.
10. To make an effective contribution towards improving the environment, educational action must be linked with legislation, policies, measures of control, and the decisions that governments may adopt in relation to the human environment.

II. The Conference *endorses* the following goals, objectives, and guiding principles for environmental education:

The *goals* of environmental education are:

1. to foster clear awareness of, and concern about, economic, social, political, and ecological interdependence in urban and rural areas;
2. to provide every person with opportunities to acquire the knowledge, values, attitudes, commitment, and skills needed to protect and improve the environment;
3. to create new patterns of behavior of individuals, groups, and society as a whole towards the environment.

The categories of environmental education *objectives* are:

**Awareness**—to help social groups and individuals acquire an awareness and sensitivity to the total environment and its allied problems.

**Knowledge**—to help social groups and individuals gain a variety of experience in, and acquire a basic understanding of, the environment and its associated problems.

**Attitudes**—to help social groups and individuals acquire a set of values and feelings of concern for the environment and the motivation for actively participating in environmental improvement and protection.

**Skills**—to help social groups and individuals acquire the skills for identifying and solving environmental problems.

**Participation**—to provide social groups and individuals with an opportunity to be actively involved at all levels in working toward resolution of environmental problems.

*Guiding principles*—Environmental education should:

1. Consider the environment in its totality—natural and built, technological and social (economic, political, cultural-historical, ethical, esthetic);
2. Be a continuous lifelong process, beginning at the preschool level and continuing through all formal and nonformal stages;
3. Be interdisciplinary in its approach, drawing on the specific content of each discipline in making possible a holistic and balanced perspective;
4. Examine major environmental issues from local, national, regional, and international points of view so that students receive insights into environmental conditions in other geographical areas;
5. Focus on current and potential environmental situations while taking into account the historical perspective;
6. Promote the value and necessity of local, national, and international cooperation in the prevention and solution of environmental problems;
7. Explicitly consider environmental aspects in plans for development and growth;
8. Enable learners to have a role in planning their learning experiences and provide an opportunity for making decisions and accepting their consequences;
9. Relate environmental sensitivity, knowledge, problem-solving skills, and values clarification to every age, but with special emphasis on environmental sensitivity to the learner's own community in early years;
10. Help learners discover the symptoms and real causes of environmental problems;
11. Emphasize the complexity of environmental problems and thus the need to develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills;
12. Utilize diverse learning environments and a broad array of educational approaches to teaching, learning about and from the environment with due stress on practical activities and first-hand experience.