

Identifying Key Elements of Community-based ESD: ESD-J's Projects to Collect ESD in Practice in Japan and Asia

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Abstract

Since its establishment in 2003, the Japan Council on the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD-J) has paid close attention to informal learning processes in community-based efforts to promote local sustainable development. ESD-J carried out two projects to collect information on and visualise community-based ESD practice: the “Asia Good ESD Practice Project (AGEPP)” (2006-2008), covering the Asian region, and the “ESD×Biodiversity Project” (2009-2011) at the national level. This article presents key elements of community-based ESD, derived from the observed cases of ESD in practice documented through these two projects.

Key words: Asia, community-based approach in ESD, ESD case study, local community

1. Introduction

At international ESD forums, especially the ones organized by UNESCO, often there is a token presence of civil society actors who are working closely with local communities, while voices of the UN agencies, government officials and academics are louder than those of the NGOs. Although civil society is clearly recognized as an important sector in promoting ESD in the International Implementation Scheme for DESD (UNESCO, 2005) and the Bonn Declaration (UNESCO, 2009), the lack of financial resources to attend international conferences and the limited opportunity to access international ESD discourses on the part of civil society actors have marginalized the voices from the grass-roots level in international ESD debates.

As a consequence of the insufficient participation from the civil sector in international ESD discussions, one particular view has become dominant, namely that “ESD” refers to learning activities in the limited educational settings of formal and non-formal education. With its focus on institutionalised education, ESD tends to be higher education-initiated, science education-based, teacher-centred and knowledge- and technology-oriented. It is difficult for these ESD practices to result in social and political changes. Educational responses to sustainable development should not be restricted to inserting thematic sustainability contents into curricula or addressing technological and scientific questions. ESD has a broader sense; it is about our lives, living and livelihood.

ESD needs to go beyond the existing educational framework, which is based on transmission of knowledge; it is important to focus on informal learning processes as well. A more “complete” ESD should be promoted leading to social and political action by empowering those who do not relate themselves to educational institutions or “ESD” as a global education movement. Based on the understanding that the key to mainstreaming ESD is to involve it in local community activities, the Japan Council on the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD-J), a Tokyo-based civil consortium for ESD promotion, has emphasised informal learning processes in community-based efforts to promote local sustainable development in Japan and other Asian countries since its establishment in 2004. ESD-J has carried out two projects to document and showcase community-based ESD in practice: the “Asia Good ESD Practice Project (AGEPP)” (2006-2008) covering 34 cases from six Asian countries, and the “ESD×Biodiversity Project” (2009-2011) covering nine Japanese cases. This article presents the background of these two ESD-J projects and describes some of the reported cases that exemplify multi-stakeholder and community-based approaches to local sustainability. It identifies “key elements of community-based ESD” based on the author’s summary and synthesis of accounts provided by NGOs reporting their own “good practices” through the ESD-J projects. It will therefore sketch the contours of community-based ESD in the geographic contexts of Japan and the Asia-Pacific region, based largely on anecdotal evidence, with the hope of

contributing to the conceptualization and theorization of informal learning in community-based efforts to promote local sustainable development.

2. Two Projects of ESD-J

ESD-J is a consortium of Japanese organizations and individuals working in diverse areas relevant to sustainable development. ESD-J members, many of whom are NGOs, have emphasised local communities as the core site of ESD promotion in Japan and Asia, and NGOs as the key players in community-based ESD, based on their own experiences at the grass-roots level. These views have been repeatedly expressed in ESD-J newsletters, board members' meetings and local gatherings. However, since "community-based ESD" had neither been carefully analysed nor discussed theoretically, ESD-J felt the need to document community-based sustainable development initiatives led by NGOs, including both education-oriented and action-oriented activities. ESD-J carried out two projects the "Asia Good ESD Practice Project (AGEPP)" and the "ESD×Biodiversity Project," in order to document locally-based ESD practices in civil society.

2.1 The Asia Good ESD Practice Project (AGEPP)

AGEPP was carried out from 2006 to 2008 to document community-based ESD efforts in Asia. ESD-J worked with six NGOs of six Asian countries that were selected through an open application process: BINTARI Foundation (Indonesia), Environmental Broadcasting Circle (Philippines), Centre for Environment Education (India), NRC-NFE (Nepal), Friend of Nature (China) and the Local Sustainability Alliance of Korea. AGEPP also aimed to strengthen networking amongst these NGOs in order to enhance the NGOs' ESD efforts in each country.

Three international workshops were held in Tokyo and Korea as an integral part of the project (Fig. 1). In the case documentation process, member NGOs brainstormed the direction and key ESD elements that they thought Asian NGOs should emphasize based on their own experiences in their local communities. They discussed



Fig. 1 AGEPP 2nd International Workshop held in Tong Yeong, Korea, 2007.

what ESD meant to them, the uniqueness of the Asian context, and sustainability challenges faced by local communities in Asia. In particular, AGEPP members highlighted NGOs' role in paving the road towards local sustainable development and developing culturally, economically and socially appropriate practices by integrating traditional/ indigenous knowledge with modern scientific knowledge.

In total, 34 cases (approximately five cases per country) were reported on by AGEPP members. These case reports cover formal, non-formal and informal education activities, focusing on various thematic areas such as agriculture, poverty, gender, public health, poverty eradication and tourism as well as diverse target groups such as youth and children, the disabled and indigenous peoples. All the executive summaries have been translated into Japanese, Indonesian, Tagalog, Chinese and Korean, and both the English case reports and executive summaries in local languages are downloadable from the AGEPP web site (www.agepp.net/) (Fig. 2). AGEPP has also provided the space for civil society actors to share information not only on ESD activities across countries but also on critical factors in ESD implementation, which will be discussed in Sections 3 and 4 of this article. AGEPP members are now deliberating on post-project activities, and they are planning to establish an Asian NGO network on ESD by 2014.

2.2 The ESD×Biodiversity project

The announcement of the Japanese Government's hosting the Tenth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD-COP10) in Nagoya City in 2010 motivated ESD-J to conduct a three-year project called "ESD×Biodiversity" (2009-2011). This project aimed to document ecologically sustainable community development practices in Japan and highlight the interrelatedness amongst people's empowerment, social justice and biodiversity conservation. In 2009, Japanese NGO members of ESD-J

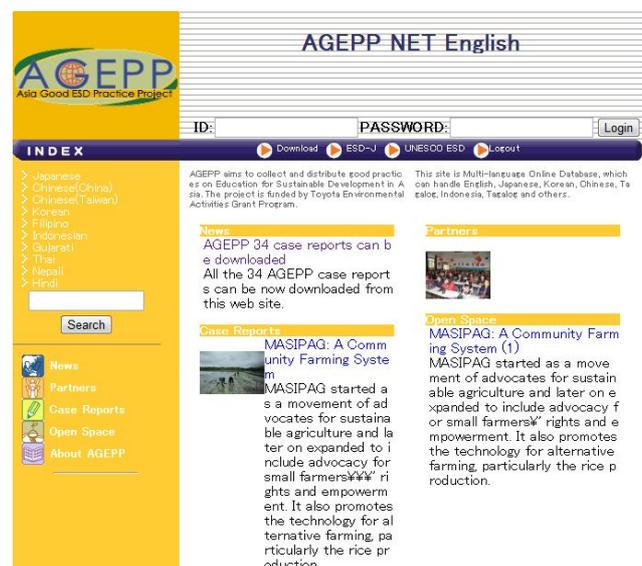


Fig. 2 AGEPP website – 34 community based ESD cases are downloadable.

reported on nine community-based activities (see Box 1 below).

Box 1: The ESD×Biodiversity Project.

1) Towards a sustainable Okhotsk-Monbetsu community, from the indigenous Ainu perspective (Hokkaido Prefecture, Japan's northernmost island)

An Ainu fisherman, Mr. Hatakeyama, and a few supporters had been requesting the government to protect indigenous people's right to use natural resources and land in a sustainable way and to help them recover indigenous rights in other areas. In particular they appealed to the Hokkaido Municipal government against its plan to construct an industrial final waste treatment facility at an Ainu sacred site. The NGO *Sapporo Free School "You,"* sympathizing with Hatakeyama's calls for fulfilling the indigenous rights of the Ainu people, started supporting his activities and organised a network called the "Mo-pet Sanctuary Network (MSN)." MSN includes local citizens as well as NGOs outside the community, such as international NGOs for indigenous right protection and Ainu-related organisations. MSN has been working towards building a community consensus for achieving sustainable development in Monbetsu, by bringing a case to the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (PFII), organising symposiums, and conducting local environmental surveys on wild salmon, which have been excluded from the socio-environmental survey by the developer and the local government.

2) Learning from a model of a sustainable lifestyle from a village community (Miyagi Prefecture, Tohoku Region, Honshu – Japan's main island)

Traditional knowledge on sustainable natural resource management and traditional lifestyles harmonised with nature still remains in Yamada Village located amongst paddy fields and mountains in Miyagi Prefecture in northern Japan, but traditional knowledge about natural resource management is now disappearing due to aging of the local population coupled with out-migration of youth and serious depopulation of rural communities. The local NGO *Kurikoma Highland Nature School* has been conducting study tours and workshops to revalue the local culture and ecological environment, to nurture pride in the village amongst villagers, and to revitalise the local economy in a sustainable way through tourism.

3) Learning through collaboration for national forest management amongst local communities, an NGO and the government (Gumma Prefecture, Kanto Region, Honshu Island)

In 1983, the national government planned to develop a ski resort and dam in the Akaya national forest. The local residents and the Tokyo-based NGO *Nature Conservation Society of Japan* (NACS-J) conducted participatory research on the development plan's possible impacts on the local ecosystem, and made an appeal to the public about its potential adverse impacts on the local ecosystem and local economy. Seventeen years later, the

government gave up the plan. Since then, the local people, NACS-J and the government have made a triangular agreement for co-management of the Akaya forest, and have been carrying out ecological surveys with local people as well as people from outside the community, environmental education at local primary schools, re-development of the natural forest and streams, and documentation of oral history.

4) Development of a management structure for biodiversity conservation at the Fujimae Wetland (Aichi Prefecture, Chubu Region, Honshu Island)

In 1984, the government planned the construction of a final waste treatment facility at the Fujimae Wetland to treat wastes from the major urban centre of Nagoya. A local environmental conservation NGO stood up and for fifteen years took organized actions to halt the plan, including ecological research, multi-stakeholder dialogues, broad advocacy and awareness raising activities, disseminating information through newsletters and symposiums, and forming partnerships with domestic and international NGOs. In this process, the Nagoya residents reduced waste by 23%, and the plan was cancelled. The case presents a process of consensus building and implications for ESD, highlighting the importance of leadership and participatory assessments, as well as partnership and dialogue amongst a diverse array of stakeholders.

5) High school students mobilized to recover a local *Satoyama* environment (Ishikawa Prefecture, Hokuriku Region, Honshu Island)

The Mitsutani area has been facing depopulation and aging issues; the traditional knowledge and practices of sustainable natural resource management have been lost, and the community forest areas have been abandoned for a long time. Since 2002, local high school teachers and residents have organised a student volunteer programme through which students can learn traditional forest management practices and take care of the community forest. The students have developed a sense of self-esteem about being part of the community through these volunteer activities. The programme is now open to all the local residents as a part of a life-long learning course offered by the municipal board of education.

6) Efforts to develop a hometown with rich biodiversity in the Takeeda Area (Okayama Prefecture, Chugoku Region, Honshu Island)

Takeeda Primary School has about 30 students and is located in a small district that has a population of only 755. The school and the local community have jointly developed a group to teach future generations about the natural and cultural assets of their hometown. The case study examines their activities such as recovering the natural river environment, conducting nature-based education and performing field ecological research, in order to have the students develop a sense of community and to learn about the natural environment of Takeeda.

- 7) Revitalisation of Teshima Island – from a dumping ground for illegal industrial wastes to an island of biodiversity (Kagawa Prefecture, Shikoku Island)

In 1990, a company was charged with dumping industrial wastes illegally on Teshima Island. The local residents continued with a local environmental survey, appeal and dialogue until they won compensation for environmental pollution through arbitration. Ten years later, the government implemented environmental conservation projects to stop the outflow of polluted water from the old dumping site, and the marine ecosystem has gradually recovered. The local residents have held an “Island School” every year and conducted activities to share Teshima’s experience of conflict resolution and the island’s rich environment with the media, scientists, lawyers and children both in Teshima and elsewhere.

- 8) Recovering the Shigetomi Wetland by re-connecting humans with nature in the community (Kagoshima Prefecture, Kyushu Island)

The Shigetomi Wetland Small Museum was established based on a partnership amongst the local government, a local NGO, researchers and local residents. The museum got its start when the local NGO heard one of the residents say, “I wish we could recover the beautiful beach that we used to enjoy.” In the process of developing the museum, the NGO made efforts to involve local residents through beach cleaning activities, raising their sense of ownership of local natural resource use, and conducting participatory research on the marine ecosystem. In addition, the NGO developed a database on the local ecosystem easily accessible to the residents and networked with the local government, university and businesses.

- 9) Villagers developing an ESD programme for their villages, a story from Yambaru (Okinawa Prefecture, Japan’s southernmost islands)

Yambaru’s three villages are located in a rich sub-tropical rainforest zone in northern Okinawa, surrounded by a sea with a coral reef. With support from a local NGO and the local government, villagers have developed an educational tourism programme where participants can learn about local biodiversity and contribute to sustainable economic development of the villages. They have conducted a local social and environmental survey involving different generations of residents to re-evaluate the local culture and environment, and held pilot training programmes in 2009.

Source: ESD-J, 2010. Summarized and translated by the author.

3. Core Thrusts of Community-based ESD

Three interlinked ‘thrusts’ can be identified as critical to community-based ESD practice documented through the AGEPP and ESD×Biodiversity projects: i) systemic changes, ii) consensus building and iii) community empowerment. The achievement of these thrusts can be

facilitated by strategies elucidated in the next section. It should be noted that these “key elements of community-based ESD” are based on the author’s analysis of recurrent themes and points raised in the cases reported through the ESD-J projects as well as during deliberations on them in focus group discussions and public symposiums. While these key elements are still tentative, they will be conceptually refined by consulting relevant literature and may be integrated into ESD-J’s action plan towards 2014. As space does not permit providing detailed accounts of all the cases collected through the ESD-J projects in this article, readers are invited to consult the AGEPP website to read the self-reports by the participating NGOs on the concrete results of their activities which have been presented as successful examples of community-based ESD.

3.1 Systemic changes: Challenging conventions and creating new knowledge

In Japan and other Asian countries, people used to appreciate the benefits of rich biodiversity, and they developed lifestyles, traditions/cultures, natural resource management systems, industries and legal systems to support their lives in the given natural conditions. Issues that threatened the principles of sustainability, in particular related to human rights violations and inequalities based on gender, class and ethnicity, did and still do exist, but it can be argued that natural resource management practices were sustainable, or at least more sustainable than today. A common observation shared amongst the participants in the ESD-J projects is that traditional knowledge and practices with regard to sustainable resource use have been and continue to be lost in the process of modernisation.

The cases reported through the ESD-J projects have attempted to change the current modernist social, political, educational and economic systems into more sustainable ones. For example, in the AGEPP case in Ikalahan (Philippines), the local indigenous people challenged conventions and set up a culturally, economically and ecologically sustainable industry producing processed foods such as jam and juice from indigenous plants. They combined traditional/indigenous knowledge on the usage of indigenous plants with modern scientific knowledge on food production and marketing. They studied and critically examined the applicability and effectiveness of marketing methods and food production technologies. At the same time, the Ikalahan people also explored how to keep their indigenous identity and pride in indigenous culture while leading a modern life and established their own schools to pass indigenous knowledge and values on to their children’s generation (Fig. 3). Through food production, the Ikalahan people valued their knowledge, developed a new knowledge system by selecting applicable modern knowledge, determined how to develop their own community and established their unique educational system. In this process, the Ikalahan people have struggled but have been empowered by establishing a sustainable economy and updating their



Fig. 3 Ikalahan School where traditional knowledge and values are passed on to the next generation.



Fig. 4 Residents participating in reservoir cleaning activity, in Jeonju.

indigenous knowledge system by themselves. Other AGEPP cases such as Nagaland (India), Baduy (Indonesia) and Bolinao (Philippines) have followed a similar process. The Hokkaido and Miyagi ESD×Biodiversity cases show local people currently trying to establish alternative sustainable economies and social systems through trial and error learning.

3.2 Consensus building

To solve local sustainability issues requires a community consensus on the importance of the issues. Local sustainability challenges are often identified by those belonging to a minority group who are most vulnerable to those challenges caused directly and indirectly by the dominant majority group and/or developed countries, or those who have different views and opinions from the majority of the society or community members for different reasons. For example, in the AGEPP case in Jeonju (Korea), a small minority of local residents who wanted to protect the local swamp from a reclamation project to develop residential land came into conflict with the local government, a developer and residents who supported the development plan.

The Jeonju Council for Local Agenda 21 (JCLA21) played the role of a facilitator and hosted an open seminar and meetings to encourage dialogues between residents supporting the development plan and those opposing it. Along with the dialogues, a local environmental survey was also conducted jointly by the local people and experts, and collaborative activities between supporters and opponents such as cleaning of the wetland and planting were carried out (Fig. 4). Through face-to-face interactions, sharing of information and joint activities over three years, tensions between the opposing parties gradually disappeared, and trust and cooperative relationships were developed. After both parties became well-informed and came to see the situation more holistically, they reached a consensus for “no development but conservation.” To achieve local sustainable development, the issues identified by a minority group in the community needs to be shared with the majority and

understood well by the community as a whole, so that awareness leads to collective action to change the existing systems and conventions.

A similar process of consensus building was also observed in the Aichi and Kagoshima ESD×Biodiversity cases, and the Nagaland (India) AGEPP case. Sections 4.2 through 4.5 illustrate how informal learning leading to consensus-building was facilitated in these cases by NGOs.

3.3 Community empowerment

Those who organize themselves to solve a local sustainability challenge (and sometimes constitute a minority group in the community) need to first inform the community of its significance, so that the majority of local people who do not consider the issue problematic can understand it as their own problem. Better information, however, does not automatically translate into action to address the problem. ESD needs to go far beyond better information and better awareness to democratic deliberations on competing or conflicting norms, values, attitudes, beliefs and assumptions. To understand the interconnectedness between oneself and the issue is the first step in developing a sense of ownership towards the issue and eventually taking action to encourage systematic changes that can help solve it.

For example, in the AGEPP case in PPLH (Indonesia), the local residents in Trawas used to cut trees in the local forest illegally, and deforestation caused serious landslides and floods in the area. While multiple factors led to illegal logging, the 1990s currency crisis in Asia caused massive unemployment, making logging an easy way to obtain cash income. According to a narrative provided by the local NGO, PPLH, the difficulty of finding alternative sources of income led to a feeling of powerlessness amongst the local people, which sometimes drove them to gambling or prostitution, which in turn drove them to cut trees for fast cash. Observing that the community was in a vicious circle of poverty – environmental destruction – disempowerment, PPLH invited the local residents to come together to identify local issues, and organised



Fig. 5 Farmers use water buffalos for tillage and their manure is used as fertiliser, at PPLH site.

working groups for interested residents. These groups were organized around various themes such as forest management, organic farming, renewable energy generation and women's empowerment (Fig. 5). Through these group activities, the local villagers reflected on their traditional knowledge on natural resource management and combined it with "modern" knowledge for more sustainable practices. They created learning opportunities, sometimes inviting experts from outside. Now the villagers can make a living from organic farming, processed food production and the sales of generated electric power to the government, and they have also learnt to save money for financing their children's education and purchasing home electric products.

The villagers in Trawas developed a sense of "hope" for their lives as well as ownership over community decision making. It is the process of empowerment – from ignorance to awareness, from powerlessness to efficacy, and from a marginalised outsider to a proactive participant in community decision making. A similar process of community empowerment is also observed in the ESD×Biodiversity cases in Kagoshima and Aichi and AGEPP cases of the Farmers School (India and Indonesia) and MASIPAG (Philippines).

4. Critical Strategies for Community-based ESD

4.1 ESD coordinators' role in facilitating changes

It is not easy to find individuals who have heartfelt sympathy for the interested parties, understand the historical, social and economic contexts of the issue well, decide to work with the interested parties, make patient and endless efforts to redefine an issue initially deemed to be of private concern as a social issue relevant to the well-being of the local community at large, and empower the community to take actions to address it. Although those individuals can be anyone, including ordinary citizens, school teachers, government officials, or NGO staff inside or outside the community, often they are not

from the local community but outsiders who can provide opinions and views alternative to those held by the insiders/local people who have always lived in the community.

In the cases reported through ESD-J projects, NGOs often play the role of facilitating processes of change leading to local sustainable development. In the sections that follow, four strategies often employed by these NGOs are discussed. They play integrative roles in building consensuses amongst the local stakeholders and leading collective actions towards a more sustainable future for the local community. ESD-J has named such persons who facilitate change "ESD coordinators."

4.2 Creating a space for multi-stakeholder dialogues and open-ended deliberations

ESD coordinators often create safe and open spaces for dialogue amongst multiple stakeholders where they can meet and exchange opinions, such as roundtable meetings, open symposiums, forums and study groups. ESD coordinators also often make maximum efforts to avoid unnecessary conflicts amongst the interest groups in the community. They often position themselves neutrally and take time in helping the key persons to consider and carefully examine both the advantages and disadvantages of action and non-action by providing alternative data and survey results conducted through participatory research.

For example, in the AGEPP case in Nagaland (India), the village faced a deforestation crisis in the 1990s. Illegal logging due to economic pressures was destroying the forest which was an integral part of the local culture and livelihoods where local people went for hunting and collecting wood. When the state government banned logging in the Konoma forest, the village people were divided over the decision, debating whether they should stop or continue their hunting tradition for conserving biodiversity in their forest. The village vice-head created a space for a dialogue between pro- and anti- hunting groups, in order to discuss not only the hunting issue but also the future of the local community and their culture. In the process of organizing eleven meetings over three years, experts were invited to give necessary input, and a local environmental survey was also conducted. Villagers learned about the local environment and reflected on the value of their culture. After deliberations, the villagers decided to stop hunting and develop a new sustainable economy, ecotourism, which better suited the current local environmental situation. Through multi-stakeholder dialogues and open-ended deliberations, the villagers obtained information from diverse perspectives, came to value what they had, reflected on what they had lost in the process of modernisation, and altered their culture into a more sustainable one (Fig. 6). A similar strategy was employed in the ESD×Biodiversity cases in Kagoshima, Kagawa and Aichi and the AFEPP case in Jeonju (Korea).



Fig. 6 A Konoma elder proudly showing bones of hunted animals.

4.3 Building alliances and enlisting support from inside and outside the community

In the cases reported through ESD-J projects in Japan and Asia, the interested party that has identified local sustainability challenges is often a minority or group of marginalised people in the community. When the national or local government does not ratify international conventions or agreements pertaining to human rights, this often causes a gap between locally accepted practices and what is internationally required. ESD coordinators often help the interested parties network with other supportive interest groups from inside and outside the community, such as the media, nationwide NGOs, international NGOs and UN agencies. ESD coordinators may help the local interested party network with these organisations to mobilize appropriate support and obtain useful information from the outside. Positive media coverage can provide the general public with opportunities to learn what is happening in their community and sometimes can increase support for the interested party. Views expressed by UN organisations and national governments can also exert pressures on local governments and communities to address the issue.

For example, in the ESD×Biodiversity case in Hokkaido, an Ainu fisherman and an NGO from outside the local community, called *Sapporo Free School You* (SFY), uncovered a government plan for constructing a final waste treatment facility around the upper stream of the Toyooka River, which is a sacred site to the Ainu people, and they realized it would be problematic. However the majority of the local residents, as well as both the Hokkaido municipal and Monbetsu local governments, supported the plan since they viewed it necessary to the treatment of aquaculture effluent from scallop farms and for inviting more industries into the area for further economic development. SFY contacted the Tokyo-based NGO *Shimin Gaikou Centre* (SGC: Citizens' Diplomatic Centre for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples), who had provided expert advice based on their knowledge of international conventions and declarations, in particular, Article 8(j) of the Convention on Biological Diversity, which calls for indigenous/local participation in decision



Fig. 7 An Ainu fisherman demonstrating the traditional way of fishing, in Hokkaido.

making processes in connection with development, and the UN Declaration on the Rights of the Indigenous Peoples. Based on this advice, the Ainu fisherman, SFY, SGC and other supporters collected over 300 signatures from individuals and indigenous rights-related organisations around the world. A statement claiming indigenous land rights was submitted to the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) as well as to the Hokkaido Municipal Government and a related section in the national government, with the long list of 300 signatures.

In the conflict in Monbetsu, the Ainu fisherman and his very few supporters tended to be isolated and often felt lonely and pressured. Through networking, they became aware of the ways in which similar problems were dealt with at the international level, which encouraged them to continue their efforts. Although the situation has not improved much, MSN appealed the issue at CBD-COP10 in Japan in 2010, and it is going to hold seminars and events to increase the understanding of the majority in the local community of the significance of sustainable development, as well as the Ainu people's world view that appreciates the gifts of nature without depleting them (Fig. 7).

In the ESD×Biodiversity cases in Kagawa and Aichi, the Lashi Watershed Project and the AGEPP cases of Green Hope Action (China) and Samvardhan, networking with the interested groups outside the community and country have also served to empower local minority groups.

4.4 Forming local organisations

ESD coordinators have also organised local people's groups based on their interests and concerns. Organising such groups is effective in clarifying local responsibilities in tackling sustainability challenges and preventing unnecessary attacks on specific individuals, especially on minority group members in a conflict situation. It also helps develop a sense of autonomy amongst the local people on local sustainability issues, and facilitates their linking with multiple stakeholders inside and outside the community.

For example, in the case of Samvardhan (India), the

Centre for Environment Education (CEE) implemented a community leader development programme. From 2003, CEE and the trained community leaders organised local councils across 24 villages in order to break the vicious cycle of poverty, unsustainable agricultural practices and environmental degradation in southern Gujarat State. The village councils planned and carried out projects for improving economic conditions and establishing sustainable natural resource management, focusing on three themes: water management, education and sustainable economy.

By organising councils, the villagers have developed a sense of ownership of the local issues, carrying out the entire project, including surveying, planning, implementation and review. They have also learnt about the problem of unsustainable and opportunistic development assistance by international, governmental or non-governmental organisations, such as providing materials and technologies out of sync with the local realities and needs. They have developed a sense of unity by sharing problems and learning that they are not alone in their struggles. The villagers have not only obtained skills and knowledge about sustainable management but also developed the ability to decide and act in order to solve their own community issues. Organisations themselves have led the empowerment process, and the CEE and trained community leaders have played a significant role in facilitating the villagers' development of their potential capacity. A strategy of creating local organizations is also employed in the ESD×Biodiversity cases in Hokkaido, Kagawa and Gunma, as well as the Gram Nidhi and Andhra Pradesh (India) cases and the AGEPP cases of Jeonju and CLEAN 2704 (Korea).

4.5 Conducting participatory research

“Development” in the narrow sense of the word is deemed problematic when it happens in areas with rich natural resources the local people have commonly and traditionally used in collecting edible plants or wood, hunting or fishing, and/or when development destroys the familiar landscape the local people have treasured for generations. Development projects are planned for economic reasons, such as resort construction and agricultural use, and also to meet needs generated by urban development elsewhere, such as the construction of waste treatment facilities or dams. Development is often planned and implemented by entities outside the community, such as the national or municipal government, companies or individual investors.

A social and environmental assessment is often conducted before the development project is implemented. The assessment however is often planned and carried out only by external experts who are not familiar with the local historical, cultural and ecological context, or internal experts who are the developers themselves or have some economic interest in development. The local people are often not involved in the planning and data collection process, and research methods and collected data tend to favour the developers. Therefore, residents lack alterna-

tive information except for what the developers provide, and they have to decide the future of their own community based on the very limited – and often biased – information. Even when the local people feel somewhat opposed to the development plan, they tend to think that they have no power or right to say anything about what the developers are doing.

ESD coordinators have often conducted alternative studies involving local residents, schools and experts such as researchers from higher education institutions. The results of such research often help the conflicting stakeholders understand the situation logically and objectively and avoid emotional disputes. This type of participatory research also helps the local people to re-evaluate the importance of local assets such as nature, tradition and culture that are often ignored in the current economic system. Participatory research constitutes an important learning process for multiple stakeholders, and it can also provide valuable information for alternative economic or social development plans.

For example, in the ESD×Biodiversity case in Gunma, the local people questioned the result of the socio-environmental assessment conducted by the government for the development of the ski resort and the dam construction on the village water source area in the national forest. Concerned about the development plan's long-term impact on the local environment and economy, they conducted a survey on the local ecosystem and water quality, with the expert support from Nature Conservation Society of Japan (NACs-J). The local people and NACs-J invited local residents as well as people from outside of the community to participate in conducting the survey. The local people reconsidered the value of the local environment and their local nature-based culture. The survey resulted in the finding of a pair of golden eagles, a protected species in Japan, on the site where the development project was planned. The local people and NACs-J submitted an opinion paper to the Forestry Agency of Japan, based on their survey results. (Fig. 8) This action exerted pressure on both the Ministry of Construction and the ski resort developer, and resulted in



Fig. 8 Residents checking animal droppings as part of a local environmental survey.

the cancellation of the ski resort development plan and withdrawal of the developer from the dam construction project. As seen in this case, alternative but evidence-based scientific data are effective for convincing the conflicting parties of the rationale behind environmental conservation (Fig. 8). Participatory research was also undertaken in the ESD×Biodiversity cases in Okayama and Aichi and AGEPP cases of Jeonju (Korea), Happy Action About Water and Tracking Cranes (China), and MASIPAG (Philippines).

5. Conclusions and Ways Forward

John Fien (1993) distinguished amongst education *about*, *through* and *for* the environment as follows: “Education about the environment emphasises the knowledge about natural systems and processes and the ecological and political factors that influence decisions about how people use the environment. Education *through* the environment may foster environmental concern if students become captivated by the importance and fragility of ecosystems and the beauty of landscapes, or immersed in the values conflict over an environmental issue. Education *for* the environment builds on education *about* and *through* the environment, a sensitive environmental ethic, and the skills for participating in environmental protection and improvement.” The many cases presented as ESD in the international ESD circle often resemble Education *about* or *through*, but not *for*; Sustainable Development, to borrow Fien’s words. Many of the ESD activities target youth and children and aim at equipping learners with skills and knowledge *about* environmental conservation or providing nature-based learning opportunities outside the school. They are neither directly tackling the fundamental cause of unsustainability issues nor intending to enable community members to participate in the community decision making process or, ultimately, to enhance political participation.

Looking at the reality of the local community in Asia, even including Japan, and in particular in rural villages, there are numerous and profound day-to-day needs for activities aimed at solving unsustainability issues, such as depopulation of rural communities caused by urbanisation and youth out-migration, rural poverty and the loss of biodiversity and indigenous knowledge. Many undocumented outreach efforts for local sustainability have been conducted by civil society actors in remote and/or peripheral communities where support by governments or international organisations does not reach. These activities have not been highlighted or labelled ESD.

Furthermore, some of the key elements of ESD identified in this article have been discussed for quite a long time with regards to rural development in the field of international development. Discussions on endogenous development (Tsurumi & Kawada, 1986; Tsurumi, 1996; also see the COMPAS website) and participatory methods such as Participatory Rural Appraisal (Chambers, 1997, 2002) seem to have particular relevance to ESD efforts. So far, communication between international cooperation and rural development circles on the one hand and ESD circles on the other has been limited. Many working in the field of community development, for example, people working in bilateral agencies such as the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), have not even heard of the term ESD. Rich theoretical and practical work in the fields of international cooperation and rural development could contribute to the enrichment of community-based ESD, but it has not been well acknowledged or incorporated in ESD discussion. There are many field guides for sustainable rural development and trainings and workshops for local community organisers through which participants can obtain knowledge and skills that can be applied in real community settings (see, for example, SEAPCP’s resource materials; HAP International, 2007). Multilateral and bilateral organisations such as UNDP,

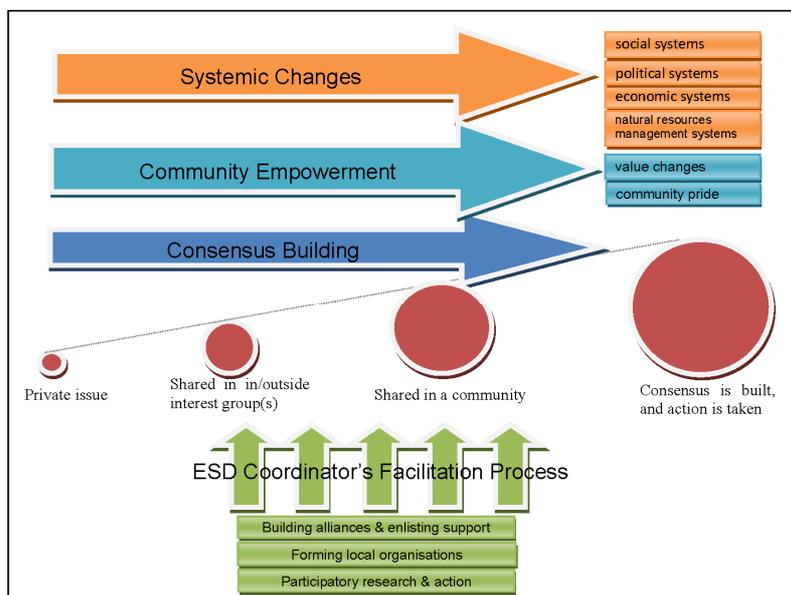


Fig. 9 Key elements of community-based ESD identified through ESD-J projects.

USAID, CIDA, SIDA and JICA also have their own frameworks for local community development. Efforts need to be made by the ESD advocates and practitioners to engage not only with environmental and sustainability experts but also with “development” experts to advance ESD thinking and practice.

The key elements of community-based ESD discussed in this article (Fig. 9) are based on the experiences of Japanese and Asian NGOs that participate in ESD-J’s projects and activities. They are based mainly on self-reports of these NGOs’ experiences such as case reports as well as on focus group and informal discussions ESD-J has held with them, and are not based on theoretical or academic discussions. This analysis needs to be further organized theoretically and developed into some form of framework to guide ESD-J’s future activities. Such a framework would also be useful in sharing the significance of community-based ESD with stakeholders in international cooperation and rural development and strengthening the role of civil society in ESD efforts, for the ultimate purpose of empowering communities to respond to local sustainability challenges. It is hoped that ESD-J’s future activities will contribute to the further development of ESD after the end of UNDESD, by making linkages between ESD and ongoing and planned initiatives or programmes for sustainable development, such as the UN Decade of Biodiversity (UNDB), and the Traditional Knowledge (TK) Initiative by the United Nations University, not to mention global education and development initiatives such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Education for All (EFA).

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