

Press release

Education for Sustainable Development: expanding and sustaining the current Eco-Schools network in the Western Indian Ocean region

Zanzibar, 29 September 2016 – The Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) ISLANDS project, funded by the European Union, held today in Zanzibar its third regional meeting in partnership with the Zanzibar National Eco-Schools Committee, aiming at strengthening and expanding the current regional network in the Western Indian Ocean region. This meeting regroups national Eco-Schools committees and NGOs from Mauritius, Seychelles, Madagascar, Comoros and Zanzibar with the objective to develop a regional strategy and action plan for mainstreaming the Eco-Schools programme in the national education systems and its sustainability in each country.

“This is the opportunity for children of the entire region, sharing common ocean and many similar challenges to take collective action in their schools and communities and gain regional and international partnerships, support and awards. The methodology of the Eco-Schools programme compliments the implementation of the Education for Sustainable Development programme which empowers learners to take informed decisions and responsible actions for environmental integrity, economic viability and a just society for the present and the future generation, while respecting cultural diversity. This is a part and parcel of quality education”, stated Hon. Riziki P. Juma, Minister of Education and Vocational Training in Zanzibar, at the opening ceremony.

Children in schools across the Western Indian Ocean region are facing the damaging day to day effects of climate change: sea-level rise, soil erosion, flooding, water shortages, high frequency of natural disasters. These endanger their safety, health and wellbeing and affect the livelihoods and economies of their families and communities.

“Many sustainability and environmental issues are extremely complicated. They are often multi-causal and difficult to define, and involve a range of stakeholders, all of which usually have different versions of what the problem is. We have learned that addressing sustainability challenges through education requires thinking that is capable of grasping the big picture, and understanding that there are interrelationships and underlying factors, which must also be addressed. It often requires broader, more collaborative and innovative approaches, and incorporation of local and indigenous knowledge and values”, declared Olivier Tyack, Indian Ocean Commission ISLANDS project team leader.

The aim of the Eco-Schools Indian Ocean programme is to provide a regional framework to integrate themes of sustainable development, climate change and disaster risk reduction into national education systems, and strengthen cooperation to address the unique vulnerabilities of the region. Eco-Schools provides the methodological tools for schools and communities to evaluate their own challenges, assess risks and develop the solutions within a structure of on-going improvement. The schools are guided to re-orientate existing curricula around sustainable development themes, and work collaboratively with their local communities to develop practical projects which draw upon and strengthen local knowledge and skills particularly suited to specific contexts.

Within the region, a total of 72 schools, representing over 25,000 pupils in the participating countries, are involved in the pilot phase of the programme. Since the beginning of the year, the number has increased significantly as more and more schools are seeing the tangible benefits of implementing the programme. Examples of school activities include projects for rainwater harvesting, soil stabilisation, food production, sanitation, and waste management amongst many others.

“These initiatives are crucial in accelerating a regional integration of our cause through encouraging our young people to engage in their environment by allowing them the opportunity to actively protect it. We have engaged our youths on matters of sustainability, equity and development because we believe that a real sustainability push towards the future that we want lies in the hearts, hopes and expectations of our youths”, continued Mrs. Shadya A. Karume, Chairperson of the non-profit organisation ZAYEDES in Zanzibar.

International policy, including UNESCO's Global Action Programme on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and the post-2015 sustainable development agenda and 17 goals, devotes special emphasis to Small Island Developing States (SIDS) as priority areas. These agreements ask that effective ESD is employed on SIDS to address several major needs which include: instilling sustainability values, enhancing disaster preparedness, increasing the economic participation of graduates, developing greater synergies between school and community and re-aligning education with local contexts.

“As part of the global Eco-Schools movement of the Foundation of Environmental Education, Eco-Schools Indian Ocean will open up new partnerships between schools, organisations, funders and even national governments, providing increased access to international support, and enabling countries to share successes and good practices with other countries and regions around the world,” concluded Olivier Tyack.

For more information, please contact:

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