

Asia-Pacific Regional Cooperation through the Development of Teaching/Learning Materials for Environmental Education



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Part I: Organizational background

The Asia/Pacific Cultural Centre for UNESCO, which many people call ACCU, is a non-profit organization established in Tokyo in 1971. It was founded by the joint efforts of the public sector, especially the Japanese National Commission for UNESCO and the private sector. ACCU has since then been implementing, in line with the principles of UNESCO, various regional cooperative programmes in the fields of culture, education and personnel exchange in close collaboration with UNESCO and its Member States in Asia and the Pacific.

In the fields of culture, education and personnel exchange, we have programmes for materials production, training and networking activities.

In the personnel exchange programmes, ACCU has been organizing various activities in the field of environmental education. These activities are organized in cooperation with the Japanese National Commission for UNESCO and the United Nations University, linking various organizations and networks such as:

- 3rd World Water Forum, Kyoto, March 2003
- UNEP International Environmental Technology Centre in Osaka, December 2003
- CITYNET: The Regional Network of Local Authorities for the Management of Human Settlements
- ASP Net (UNESCO Associated School Project)
- Universities
- Schools

The unique feature of ACCU materials development programmes is that they are done through the Joint Production Scheme with the close cooperation and full participation of UNESCO member countries - from the planning stage to implementation, and to distribution and evaluation. This scheme is based on the idea of mutual consent and mutual advancement.

The following is how the Joint Production Scheme works, in the case of producing of books for children.

First stakeholders and experts get together and decide on the themes to be taken up.

Then, based on this decision, text and illustrations are prepared by writers and illustrators in each country. They are sent to ACCU for final editing, and the prototype version is published in English. The prototype English versions are sent to the participating countries to be translated and adapted into the local/national languages for wide distribution to children throughout the country. The whole process then will be evaluated for further improvement

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PART 2: Teaching/Learning Materials for Environmental Education produced through the Asia-Pacific Regional Cooperation

Let me first review, very briefly, the objectives of environmental education.

1. Awareness: Environmental education is to help social groups and individuals acquire awareness of, and sensitivity to, the complete environment and its associated problems.
2. Knowledge: Environmental education is to help social groups and individuals gain a variety of experiences in, and acquire a basic understanding of, the environment and its associated problems.
3. Attitude: Environmental Education is to help them acquire a set of values and feelings of concern for the environment, and the motivation to actively participate in environmental improvement and protection.
4. Skills: Environmental Education is to help them acquire the skills for identifying and solving environmental problems.
5. Participation: Environmental education is to provide them with an opportunity to become actively involved at all levels in working towards resolving environmental problems.

This set of objectives is from the very comprehensive work in "Environmental Education in the Asia-Pacific Region" edited by Dr. Bhandari and Prof. Abe and published by the Institute for Global Environmental Strategies.

1. Books for Children (ACP)

The first set of materials that ACCU has been producing through Asia-Pacific cooperation is the Ecology series of ACP.

ACP stands for Asia/Pacific Copublication Programme, and it was started in order (1) to encourage and support Member States in supplying attractive, low-priced and high-quality books and (2) to foster mutual appreciation of the various cultural values in the Asia-Pacific region by providing common reading materials for children.

So far 29 titles have been published and more than 4 million copies distributed in and outside of the region.

These are four titles in the ACP ecology series: "Trees", "Water", "The Sun" and "The Earth".

The characteristic of these books is that they try to share the wonders of nature not only from an ecological, but also from the cultural point of view. Together with the environmental problems, our age-old proverbs and folktales are introduced.

The examples of national versions of "Trees" in different languages: include Sinhalese from Sri Lanka, Mandarin from China, Malay language from Malaysia, Filipino from the Philippines, Divehi language of Maldives, Japanese, Hindi version from India, in Korean from Republic of Korea, Vietnamese, in Kannada from India, and in Thai.

2. PLANET (Package Learning Materials on Environment)

The second series of materials which has been produced through Asia-Pacific regional cooperation is PLANET: Package Learning Materials on Environment.

Why it is a package? It has a set of components on the same theme so that learning will be more flexible, effective and enjoyable.

The main components of PLANET are:

- Animation video
- Poster
- Cartoon book (booklet)
- Guide for users/facilitator's guide

The PLANET series is produced in order to raise awareness on various environmental issues and to promote behavioral changes for a better environment.

It has been used for children in schools, learners in Community Learning Centres, in community development programmes and in TV broadcasting in 20 Asia-Pacific countries.

It has been produced through the Joint Production Scheme in the same way as the books for children.

The narrative of the PLANET series takes place in an imaginary Asian village. The main character is a woman called Mina. She used to be illiterate but through learning in a literacy class, she acquired not only literacy skills but also self-confidence and self-esteem. Mina and her husband, Jai, and their five children, are main characters of the PLANET story.

PLANET 1, *Mina's Village and the River* takes up the problem of water pollution. PLANET 2, *Mina's Village and the Forest* deals with the issue of forest conservation.

Here are, again, some examples of the local versions of PLANET 2: from Bangladesh, Cambodia, India and the Philippines.

The production of PLANET 3 is presently underway with the cooperation of experts in the region. PLANET 3 is on waste management, focusing on the importance of co-operation for better waste management to create a cleaner and healthier environment. It is expected to be completed in July this year and will be disseminated to the UNESCO Member States. ACCU is soon to invite proposals from Member States for effective utilization of PLANET 3 in each country.

3. Materials for neo-literates (AJP)

The third type of materials that I would like to introduce here are the educational materials for literacy education for neo-literate people. Neo-literates are those who have acquired the basic reading and writing skills. Without adequate reading materials, however, they easily relapse into illiteracy. As environmental education has to be provided for many different target groups, environment-related issues are important themes in this series of materials for literacy education.

The AJP materials are especially intended to reach out to disadvantaged people. Unlike the books for children, which are designed as common reading materials in Asia and the Pacific, in the materials for literacy education, ADAPTATION in language, illustration, contents, format, etc, is very important. This is because for the literacy learners it is essential that the materials are very relevant to their needs and everyday life, and the learners have to feel very close to the contents of the materials.

These are some examples of national versions of "Better Crops from Healthy Soil with Compost." We are only looking at the cover page illustration, but you would notice that in some cases, the method of compost-making itself is different from

other cases - as a result of adaptation.

Part 3: Towards the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development: an approach of ACCU

As we all heard from the very comprehensive and insightful special lecture of Prof. Dr. Ginkel of the United Nations University, next year is the first year of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development.

Sustainable development is built on three interdependent and mutually reinforcing pillars: (1) economic development, (2) social development, and (3) environmental protection. Sustainable development is stated in "Our Common Future" by the World Commission on Environment and Development of 1987 to be "Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

The UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, for which UNESCO is the lead agency, aims

- (1) to promote education as a basis for a more sustainable human society,
- (2) to integrate sustainable development into the education system at all levels and in all its forms (FE and NFE) for people of all ages.
- (3) To strengthen international cooperation toward the development and sharing of innovative ESD programmes, practices, and policies.

Throughout this decade, education is geared to foster a better understanding of the world in which we live and the complexity and interrelationships of problems that threaten our future. The list of "problems" is a long one and each is interrelated.

It is not an easy task. Full co-operation among government, NGOs, international organizations, etc, will be necessary for us to see fruitful results at the end of the Decade in eleven years, but ACCU would like to continue to be a part of this important international movement.

ACCU's approach for the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development is to strengthen our existing scheme of materials development, training, and networking/information sharing so that they reinforce each other for multiple effect.

We would like to keep working for the ongoing United Nations Literacy Decade (2003-2012), and also for the forthcoming UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, keeping the principles of our Activities:

They are:

- (1) Materials development as concrete and practical process for a behavioral change,
- (2) Emphasizing the process of joint planning and joint advancement,
- (3) Facilitation of partnership/networking within a country and in Asia-Pacific Region, and
- (4) Contribution to mutual understanding.