**Advancements in Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and the strategic potential of LEAD-ESD in accelerating its integration across Kenya’s education sector**

**By,**

**Patience Awopegba-UNESCO ROEA; Marifa Mwakumanya-UNESCO ROEA, Njihia Mukirai, Kenyatta University & Everlyn Wemali, Kenyatta University**

Kenya, founded on the principles of sustainable development, demonstrates a deep and enduring commitment to embedding Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) across all levels of its education system. The nation recognizes education as a powerful catalyst for creating an enabling environment that addresses societal injustices, mitigates environmental risks, and reduces economic inequalities. Through a transformative approach, ESD in Kenya seeks to foster holistic societal change—cultivating environmental consciousness, promoting equity, and driving sustainable economic growth.

In 2017, Kenya made a major stride in embedding sustainability within its education system by formulating the *Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) Policy for the Education Sector*. This policy laid the groundwork for integrating ESD principles across all levels of education, including the Competency-Based Curriculum Framework, and led to the development of implementation guidelines for the TVET and university sub-sectors. Designed as a strategic framework, it aims to empower learners to become proactive agents of sustainable change. The policy emerged through strong national and international collaboration, aligning with *Kenya Vision 2030* and drawing inspiration from global efforts such as the *United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development*.

Kenya has also adopted sector-specific strategies to promote sustainability across diverse domains. For instance, the *National Environment Policy* outlines targeted measures for the sustainable management of natural resources, including ecologically sensitive coastal zones. The implementation of *Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)* is a shared mandate between the *Ministry of Environment, Water and Natural Resources*, the *Ministry of Education*, and relevant *Semi-Autonomous Government Agencies (SAGAs)*. This collaborative and intersectional approach highlights the importance of designing tailored strategies within each sector, ensuring that sustainability is addressed in a context-sensitive, coordinated, and effective manner.

Proudly Kenya is one of the active countries in the region promoting the global ESD for 2030 Country Initiative, a strategic effort to mainstream Education for Sustainable Development across all sectors of society. This initiative builds on existing national frameworks and activities, including curriculum reform, teacher development, and community engagement, to create a cohesive and impactful approach to sustainability education. Led by the Ministry of Education in collaboration with the Ministry of Environment and other stakeholders, Kenya’s country initiative serves as an umbrella for both ongoing and new ESD efforts, fostering synergies and ensuring alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 4 on quality education, SDG 12 on responsible consumption and production, and SDG 13 on climate action. Through this initiative, Kenya has reaffirmed its commitment to empowering learners with the knowledge, skills, and values needed to shape a more sustainable future.

Despite Kenya’s commendable progress in advancing Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), the country continues to grapple with complex global challenges such as climate change, inequality, and biodiversity loss—issues that deeply impact communities, economies, and ecosystems. In response, the global community has embraced ESD as a universal strategy to accelerate the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and foster a more sustainable, equitable, and resilient future. This transformative approach to education empowers individuals and communities, shifts mindsets, and builds resilience, serving as a foundational catalyst for realizing all other development objectives.

Education equips individuals with the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes necessary to tackle today’s multifaceted global challenges—spanning environmental, economic, and social dimensions. In reaffirming its commitment to integrating Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) into curricula and institutional practices, Kenya is helping to shape a more sustainable future.

In support of this vision, UNESCO, in partnership with UNICEF and in collaboration with Kenyatta University, is implementing the *Leadership for Education for Sustainable Development (LEAD-ESD)* project—also active in Uganda, Seychelles, and Rwanda. This transformative, action-learning initiative is designed to strengthen the implementation of *SDG 4*, with a particular emphasis on *Target 4.7*, by promoting visionary leadership in education institutions that train teachers across all levels—from Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) to primary, secondary, tertiary, and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), including universities.

The project also engages education officers and policymakers within Ministries of Education across the Eastern Africa region, fostering a regional movement toward more inclusive, forward-thinking, and sustainability-driven education systems.

The Leadership for Education for Sustainable Development (LEAD-ESD) project is poised to enhance national capacity by fostering leadership and innovation in sustainability education. It convenes key stakeholders—including the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Environment, development partners, and civil society—to advance ESD leadership, embed sustainability into curricula, and promote climate-responsive education. As a catalyst for multi-sectoral collaboration, LEAD-ESD empowers educators and institutions to drive transformative learning and accelerate progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals. With a strong focus on civic responsibility, climate action, and community engagement, the initiative supports the emergence of visionary leaders in Kenya’s education sector, committed to building a resilient and sustainable future through education.

The LEAD-ESD programme is a strategic effort to advance Education for Sustainable Development through inclusive dialogue, cross-sector collaboration, and innovative practice. It convenes stakeholders from government, academia, civil society, and development partners to reflect on past and ongoing ESD initiatives, evaluate progress, and identify key implementation gaps. The forum offers a platform for generating actionable recommendations tailored to specific stakeholder roles—ranging from policy formulation and curriculum integration to teacher training and community engagement.

Aligned with the ESD for 2030 global framework and Africa’s Agenda 2063, LEAD-ESD is being rolled out in phases across 12 countries in the region. A central component of the programme is the Change Project approach, which empowers participating institutions to form teams that design and implement sustainability-driven projects addressing real institutional challenges. These projects cultivate leadership, innovation, and collaboration in embedding ESD principles within education systems.

By promoting leadership and accountability, LEAD-ESD reinforces Kenya’s commitment to the ESD for 2030 Country Initiative and underscores the transformative power of education in shaping a sustainable, equitable, and resilient future.

The Leadership for Education for Sustainable Development (LEAD-ESD) programme is a regional capacity-building initiative coordinated by UNESCO and UNICEF and implemented by Kenyatta University. It seeks to address pressing sustainability challenges through the education system by transforming teacher education and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) across Eastern Africa. The programme equips educators, policymakers, and institutional leaders with the knowledge, skills, and tools needed to embed Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) into curricula, teaching methodologies, and institutional practices—fostering a more responsive, inclusive, and future-oriented education landscape.