



8th International Conference on Sustainability Education (ICSE) 2026

Theme: *Sustainability Education for Transformative Action*

2-3 September 2026 | India Habitat Centre, New Dehi

Concept Note

1. Introduction and Context

The **International Conference on Sustainability Education (ICSE)** is a global platform that convenes educators, policymakers, researchers, industry leaders, youth, and civil society to advance dialogue and action on the role of education in building a sustainable, inclusive, and equitable future. Over the years, ICSE has evolved into a space for thought leadership, collaboration, and innovation, contributing meaningfully to the global sustainability discourse.

The **8th ICSE 2026** marks a decisive shift from dialogue to delivery by positioning sustainability education as a driver of **deep, systemic, and transformative action**, grounded in sustained and cumulative change. While large-scale transformation is the long-term goal, ICSE 2026 recognises that meaningful impact is achieved through **consistent, incremental actions that collectively lead to lasting systemic change**. This edition places a sharper emphasis on who must act and how, recognising that transformation requires coordinated efforts across sectors. ICSE 2026 intentionally engages educators and professors as change-makers in learning spaces; policymakers and government officials as enablers of systemic reform; the private sector as drivers of innovation and skills development; researchers as solution builders; civil society organisations as bridges to communities; and youth as leaders of the present, not merely the future.

The world today is experiencing accelerating climate change, biodiversity loss, ecosystem degradation, widening inequalities, and increasing socio-economic and geopolitical instability. These interconnected crises place unprecedented pressure on planetary systems and human well-being, directly challenging progress towards the sustainable development.

In this context, sustainability education emerges as a strategic enabler of transformation. It must move beyond awareness and knowledge dissemination to foster systems thinking, ethical leadership, innovation, and collective responsibility. By translating knowledge into action and aligning education with lived realities, ICSE 2026 seeks to strengthen education as the foundation for resilience, equity, and a better tomorrow.

2. There Is No Planet B: Advancing Sustainability Education for Urgent and Collective Action

The scale, complexity, and interconnection of global challenges demand a fundamental rethinking of how societies learn, make decisions, and act. Environmental degradation, climate risks, social inequalities, and economic uncertainty are increasingly interlinked, reinforcing one another and amplifying vulnerabilities. These dynamics directly affect progress across multiple SDGs, highlighting the need for integrated, cross-cutting responses.

Sustainability education must therefore evolve into a **transformative process** that enables learners to understand complex systems, navigate uncertainty, and contribute meaningfully to solutions. It must cultivate ethical leadership, social responsibility, and a shared sense of stewardship for present and future generations. Action-oriented learning that connects knowledge with practice, innovation, and community engagement is essential to advancing **SDG 4 (Quality Education)** while accelerating outcomes across climate, biodiversity, equity, and sustainable livelihoods.

For India, the urgency is both global and deeply local. As the country balances rapid economic growth, demographic transitions, and development aspirations, it also faces increasing climate vulnerability and environmental stress. Heatwaves, water scarcity, air pollution, biodiversity loss, and urban pressures underscore the need for informed, resilient, and future-ready societies. Sustainability education becomes a critical bridge between national development priorities and ecological responsibility, enabling inclusive and context-specific responses aligned with India's SDG commitments.

3. Global Perspective: From Commitments to Action-Oriented Education

Over the past decade, global sustainability dialogues have shifted decisively from agenda-setting and consensus-building towards **implementation, accountability, and action at scale**. International platforms increasingly emphasise that while global goals provide direction, their success depends on how effectively they are translated into national policies, institutional practices, and community-level action.

Global climate, biodiversity, development, and economic forums recognise that environmental risks, social inequalities, and economic instability are deeply interconnected. This understanding reinforces the integrated nature of the SDGs and the need for **systems-based approaches**. It is now widely acknowledged that technological and financial solutions alone are insufficient unless accompanied by transformational shifts in mindsets, governance systems, skills, and societal behaviour.

A key insight emerging from these global processes is the recognition of **education as a central enabling mechanism for action**. Education is no longer viewed merely as a supporting sector, but as a strategic lever shaping how societies understand risk, make decisions, adopt innovation, and participate in collective solutions. Action-oriented, values-driven, and

systems-based education is increasingly seen as essential to strengthening SDG implementation, accelerating innovation, and enhancing societal resilience.

4. Indian Perspective: Education at the Heart of Sustainable Development

India's education and policy landscape increasingly recognises education as a cornerstone of sustainable development. The **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020** promotes holistic, multidisciplinary, experiential, and value-based learning, strongly aligned with SDG 4 (Quality Education). Guidance from the University Grants Commission (UGC) encourages higher education institutions to integrate sustainability, community engagement, and research for societal impact. Curriculum reforms led by National Council of Education Research and Training (NCERT) emphasise environmental awareness, critical thinking, and experiential learning from an early age.

National sustainability dialogues further reinforce education's role in strengthening climate resilience, green growth, and inclusive development, contributing directly to SDG6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), SDG 13 (Climate Action) and SDG 14 (Life Below Water), SDG 15 (Life on Land). Sustainability education in India thus becomes a powerful mechanism to translate national priorities into local action, empowering institutions and communities alike.

5. Positioning ICSE 2026 within the Global and National Action Momentum

The **8th ICSE 2026** is intentionally positioned within the converging global and national momentum for accelerated sustainability action. Rather than reiterating existing commitments, ICSE 2026 focuses on how sustainability education can **translate Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) aspirations into measurable and transformative action** at national, institutional, and community levels.

ICSE 2026 responds to global and national calls for action by:

- Reframing sustainability education as a driver of SDG implementation, not only awareness
- Highlighting action-oriented pedagogies, systems thinking, and experiential learning
- Strengthening the education–policy–industry–community interface to advance SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals)
- Elevating youth, educators, and institutions as frontline actors of change

By aligning its agenda with the global shift from ambition to action, ICSE 2026 serves as a bridge between global sustainability dialogues and local realities, particularly within emerging economies such as India.

6. Rationale: Sustainability Education for Transformative Action

The theme “Sustainability Education for Transformative Action” reflects the growing recognition that contemporary environmental, social, and economic challenges cannot be addressed through short-term interventions or isolated initiatives alone. Escalating risks related to climate change, biodiversity loss, environmental degradation, and social inequities demand deep and coordinated transformations in how societies think, learn, govern, and act. Sustainability education has emerged as a critical driver of such systemic change, equipping learners with the knowledge, skills, values, and agency required to navigate complexity and contribute meaningfully to sustainable solutions. Moving beyond awareness, it emphasizes interdisciplinary, learner-centred, and action-oriented approaches that integrate systems thinking, local-global linkages, and diverse knowledge systems. By fostering critical inquiry, ethical leadership, collective responsibility, and planetary stewardship, sustainability education enables holistic transitions toward just, resilient, and inclusive futures.

The rationale for convening ICSE 2026 is further strengthened by global and national assessments that highlight persistent gaps between sustainability commitments and on-ground implementation. Many of today’s most pressing risks are rooted in governance challenges, behavioural patterns, and institutional limitations, underscoring the need for transformative learning processes that empower individuals as active change agents rather than passive recipients of information. In the Indian context, this imperative aligns closely with national education reforms that promote holistic, multidisciplinary, and value-based learning, community engagement, and research-driven solutions. By bringing together educators, researchers, policymakers, industry leaders, youth, and civil society, ICSE 2026 provides a strategic platform to strengthen policy coherence, institutional capacity, and community resilience. The conference seeks to advance sustainability education as a catalyst for innovation, leadership, and collective action, thereby supporting climate resilience, nature-positive development, and inclusive growth. Through shared learning and collaboration, ICSE 2026 aims to translate global aspirations and national priorities into measurable, lasting impact for present and future generations.

Sustainability Education for Transformative Action emphasises:

- **Systems thinking** to address interconnections across SDGs
- **Values and ethics**, including equity, justice, and intergenerational responsibility
- **Action-oriented learning** that links knowledge with practice and community engagement
- **Innovation and leadership** to design, implement, and scale sustainable solutions

Education thus empowers learners not only to adapt to change, but to actively shape sustainable futures.

7. Role of Stakeholders in Driving Transformative Action

- **Educators and Teachers** embed sustainability across disciplines and foster critical, action-oriented learning.
- **Professors and Higher Education Institutions** act as hubs for interdisciplinary learning, research, and leadership development, influencing future policymakers, professionals, and entrepreneurs.
- **Researchers and Knowledge Institutions** generate evidence-based and context-specific solutions.
- **Government Officials and Policymakers** translate commitments into effective policies and implementation frameworks supported by strong education systems.
- **Private Sector and Industry** support green skills, innovation, and responsible production and consumption.
- **Youth and Students** act as powerful change agents for community and societal transformation.
- **Civil Society Organisations and NGOs** ensure inclusivity, equity, and grassroots engagement.

8. Objectives of ICSE 2026

The **8th ICSE 2026** aims to:

- Advance global and Indian dialogue on sustainability education for transformative action
- Strengthen collaboration among educators, policymakers, researchers, industry, youth, and civil society
- Showcase best practices and innovative models translating education into action
- Empower educators and youth as sustainability leaders and changemakers
- Inform policy and institutional strategies aligned with national and global sustainability agendas

9. Key Thematic Tracks

The conference will engage with a set of overarching themes central to advancing sustainability, including climate action and ecological resilience, circular economy and responsible resource management, innovations in sustainability education and youth leadership, the role of changemakers and inclusive leadership in driving transformative impact, and pathways for promoting sustainable lifestyles, environmental well-being, population stabilisation, and resource conservation. These themes aim to facilitate meaningful dialogue, knowledge exchange, and collaborative action across education, policy, and practice.

10. Expected Impact and Outcomes

- Strengthened role of sustainability education as a systemic driver for sustainability and inclusive development.
- Actionable recommendations for education policy and institutional practice
- New partnerships and collaborative initiatives across sectors
- Enhanced leadership capacities of educators, institutions, and youth.
- Meaningful contributions to national and global efforts towards a just, resilient, and sustainable future.

11. Conclusion

The **8th International Conference on Sustainability Education (ICSE) 2026** places sustainability education at the core of transformative action for driving the Sustainability agenda. By convening diverse stakeholders and aligning educational practice with societal and planetary needs, ICSE 2026 will catalyse collective learning and action, positioning education as a powerful force for systemic change and a better tomorrow for present and future generations.