



The Global Search for Sustainable Schools

Guidance Note

*BRINGING SUSTAINABILITY
TO SCHOOLS ACROSS THE WORLD*



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National Coordinators and Partners:

	Brazil	Akatu Institute for Conscious Consumption
	Cambodia	Ministry of Environment; Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports
	Kyrgyz Republic	State Agency for Environmental Protection and Forestry of the Kyrgyz Republic; Kyrgyz Academy of Education of the Kyrgyz Republic
	Namibia	Namibia Environment Education Network (NEEN)
	Norway	Centre for Collaborative Learning for Sustainable Development (CCL)
	Philippines	Philippine Centre for Environment Awareness and Sustainability (PCEAS)
	South Africa	Water Explorer; Rhodes University
	Suriname	SUWAMA Suriname Waste Management
	Uganda	National Environment Management Authority (NEMA)
	Viet Nam	Institute of Strategy and Policy on Natural Resources and Environment (ISPONRE)

About this Guidance Note

This Guidance Note, based on the experience of the Global Search for Sustainable Schools (GSSS), has been created to assist those interested in developing a programme to implement sustainable school projects at the sub-national, national, regional, or international level. To support the creation of this document, national coordinators and school project implementers were surveyed to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the programme as it was implemented.

Below, the Guidance Note walks through the experience of the GSSS, starting by placing the GSSS in context. Next, a brief overview of the five stages of the programme is presented. The next five sections explore the lessons learned from stages 2 - 5 of the GSSS: Programme Coordination and International Exchanges; the Search for Sustainable Schools; School Project Planning; School Project Implementation; Greenhouse Gas Reduction Assessment. These sections outline the lessons learned during programme activities, providing useful insights for anyone seeking to create a sustainable school project programme.

Within each of these sections, reflections are presented based on the GSSS Coordinating Team and national coordinators' experience of programme implementation across the nine participating countries. The most important lessons are highlighted at the top of each section. Each section concludes with a set of tips for successful implementation based on feedback from national coordinators and project implementers.

The Guidance Note concludes with a list of resources that may be helpful to those creating a similar programme. The resources presented include: GSSS websites and online assets; digital resources for Education for Sustainable Development and Sustainable Lifestyles; Reports; and Video Media. Many of these resources were created through the activities of the Global Search for Sustainable Schools, the One Planet Network's Sustainable Lifestyles and Education Programme, or closely associated partners.

Global Search for Sustainable Schools

The Global Search for Sustainable Schools (GSSS) has been carried out as one of the global initiatives under the Sustainable Lifestyles and Education (SLE) programme of the One Planet Network. The GSSS programme recognises the central role of education in creating the enabling conditions to achieve sustainable lifestyles within planetary boundaries. Education directly develops the leaders and innovators of tomorrow, fostering the critical skills of life-long, active learning that are necessary to achieving healthy, flourishing, and just lifestyles that facilitate limiting climate change to 1.5 degrees Celsius.

Nine countries from around the world were selected to participate in the GSSS. It is vital to develop capacities at the individual, organizational and societal scales to enable more responsible and reliable patterns of living. These capacities are essential for creating truly sustainable societies. The GSSS aimed to mainstream sustainable lifestyles into formal education; make sustainable lifestyles the guiding principle in every learning environment; mobilise and empower youth; and promote sustainable lifestyles.

Coordinated by the Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES) and implemented by government agencies and national-scale NGOs in the nine participating countries, the GSSS called for schools to submit sustainability action plans. 84 schools were selected and were given grants to implement their ideas, turning their plans into more than 200 school-based sustainability projects with the support of experts from their country and around the world.

Although all schools' actions were severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and associated restrictive measures such as school closures and restriction of travel or meetings, all 84 schools in the nine implementing countries found innovative ways of continuing the work. Project implementers showed a high level of patience and creativity in learning from the crisis, flexibly adapting their actions to achieve the overall project goals, growing the capacities of students, teachers, and communities to make their schools, communities, and individual lives more sustainable and resilient.

Through these experiences, the GSSS coordinators and the national implementing teams have determined that the Search for Sustainable Schools exercise could contribute to the promotion of global and local sustainable living. Building capacity in educators, learners, and practitioners to develop and implement innovative approaches to education and learning environments that integrate education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles has proven to be highly effective in promoting sustainable living. Similarly, the national implementing teams discovered the power of enabling the larger communities in which schools are embedded to work in partnership with educators and learners to further the movement toward sustainable living.

This Guidance Note seeks to summarize the major lessons learned through the processes of planning, implementing, and measuring the impact of the Global Search for Sustainable Schools. The objective is to provide others with useful reflections, tips, and models of implementation to consider in replicating the GSSS programme in their country or region. Through a series of interviews and surveys, the SLE Coordination Desk has solicited feedback from school implementers at the 84 participating schools, as well as the coordinating country partners.



GSSS participating countries: Brazil; Suriname; Namibia; South Africa; Uganda; Kyrgyz Republic; Cambodia; Viet Nam; and the Philippines.

The Five Stages of the Global Search for Sustainable Schools

The Global Search for Sustainable Schools took a five-stage approach to preparing and implementing the programme. The Coordinating Team, led by IGES, first called for national implementing partners to apply to the programme, selecting nine country partners to participate in the GSSS. The Coordinating Team and country partners then worked together to plan, implement, and monitor the national activities, namely, the “search for sustainable schools”, preparation and implementation of school activities, and monitoring and evaluation procedures. Throughout all programme activities, one salient point distinguished the GSSS from other existing national-scale initiatives: the frequent communication among the national partners in the project through regular online meetings and regional exchange visits.

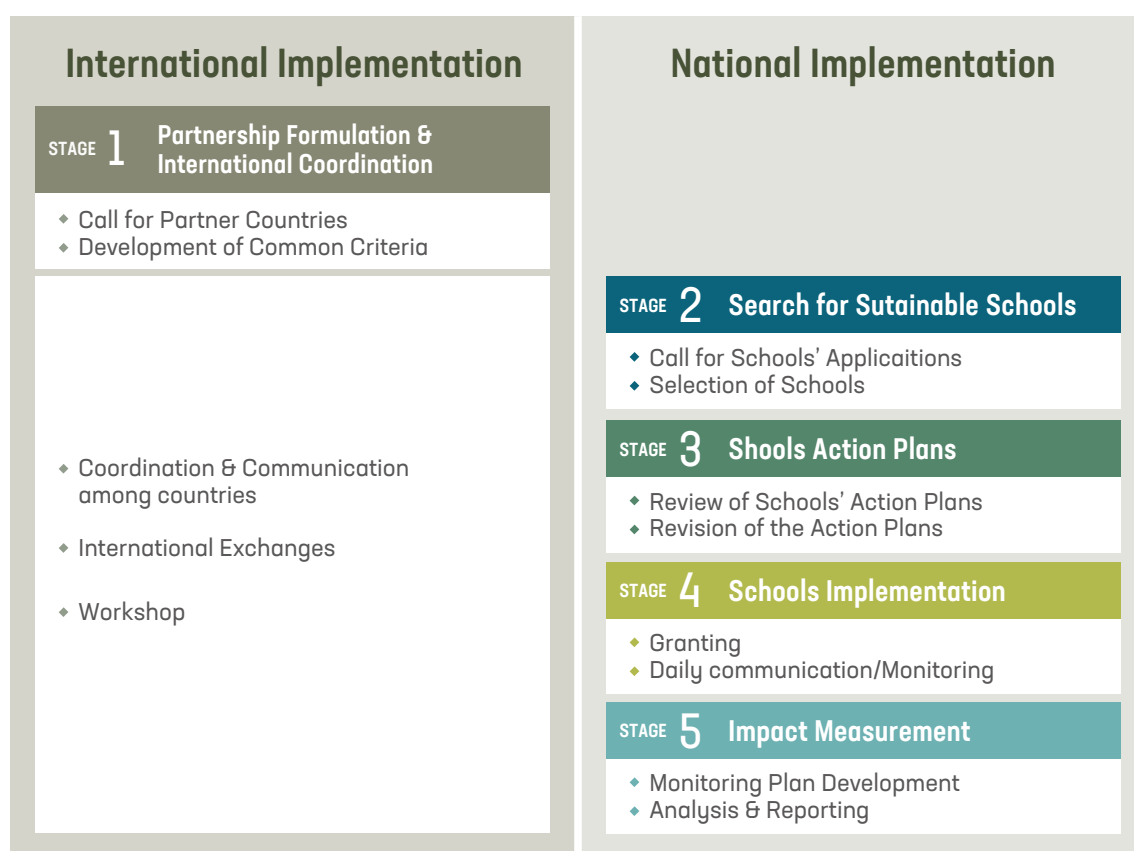


Figure 1: The Stages of the GSSS

This section summarises the overall flow of the GSSS stages, which can serve to guide similar initiatives in future.

STAGE 1 Partnership Formulation & International Coordination

The GSSS Coordinating Team called experts together through the One Planet Network Sustainable Lifestyles and Education Programme (SLE) and other global experts to guide the development of the GSSS programme. A small expert group was created from members of the multi-stakeholder advisory committee and partners of the SLE programme and other environmental education experts. Together, these experts crafted a set of global criteria to guide used to assess countries for participation in the programme.

Then, the Coordinating Team called for countries to join the programme and commit to implementing national searches for sustainable schools and supporting the subsequent sustainable school projects. Nine countries applied for the initiative by August 2019, all of which met the global criteria for joining the GSSS programme. Some of the countries nominated organisations to coordinate project implementation of the national activities on behalf of the government, such as national-scale Civil Society Organisations or research institutes working on issues of education and sustainability.

Once the expert team and the national coordinating teams were formed, they worked together to develop common processes and a set of assessment criteria for the national searches for sustainable schools.

The Coordinating Team, experts, and national teams worked closely throughout the GSSS implementing period to provide necessary support to the national implementers and schools, facilitate information sharing and international exchange visits (prior to the COVID-19 Pandemic), as well as organising international workshops and developing the project outputs including the Synthesis Report and this Guidance Note.

STAGE 2 Simultaneous National Searches

Following the above preparatory stage, the national searches for sustainable schools were carried out simultaneously in all nine countries.

Each national coordinating body announced the search for sustainable schools in their country. All national coordinators advertised the opportunity to participate in the GSSS through a variety of communication channels, including formal educational channels and digital communications. Some of them held national workshops or roadshows to further publicise the concept and ensure clarity on the format and structure of entries.

Applicant schools submitted applications showing their proposed plans for sustainable school reforms (e.g., curricula, in-and off school activities, infrastructure, and management practices). Following the close of the application period, submissions were analysed through the neutral application of a scoring system based on global and national criteria. In total, 84 schools were selected to move forward with their sustainable school projects.

STAGE 3 Development of the School Activity Plans

Following the national searches, the national coordinating teams supported the schools to develop their activity plans, including implementation timelines and budgeting. Most of the schools needed strong support from the national coordinators as they had limited experiences in developing such activity plans.

STAGE 4 Implementation of the School Activities

Selected schools implement their plans in close cooperation with the national coordinating partners and the GSSS Coordinating Team. Schools were also encouraged to communicate regularly with the other schools in their countries, and periodically with schools and national coordinators in the other GSSS countries. As will be detailed later, many of the school activities were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Many schools saw their project activities suspended due to sanitary lockdowns and school closures. National coordinating partners and the GSSS Coordinating Team kept in close communication to share practical solutions to provide necessary support to the schools.

STAGE 5 Impact Assessment

Most of the ground-level initiatives toward sustainable development or sustainable living were required to measure and report the sustainability-impacts associated with their activities. The participating countries of the GSSS were requested to report the GHG emissions reduction from their project activities.

The Coordinating Team has developed and shared a simple toolkit and guidance note to calculate the GHG emissions reduction associated with ground-level activities like school or community activities. It also provided a few online training sessions to the national coordinating teams. In turn, the national coordinators provided strong support to the participating schools in reporting their GHG reduction impacts.

Programme Coordination and International Exchanges

One of the most important aspects of the Global Search for Sustainable Schools has been the strong system of programme coordination and exchanges between school project implementers both within and across countries. Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, the success of the GSSS programme would not have been possible without this system of supports and the national coordinators making excellent use of it. The most important lessons learned from the experience of programme coordination and international exchange from the Global Search for Sustainable Schools are:

- ✔ Plan to have regular coordination calls and workshops for project implementers to exchange experiences, share opportunities, and support one another through challenges.

- ✔ Have fully developed ESD and ESL curricula in place before the start of the programme or planning projects.

- ✔ Develop an effective set of informational support tools to help teachers implement ESD and ESL curricula, lesson plans, and activities.

- ✔ Facilitate exchanges (in-person where possible) between schools so learners can interact, share their projects, and inspire one another.

- ✔ Make a clear communication plan for the programme that uses multiple channels including formal government and school channels, as well as local and online media such as newsletters, blogs, and social media.

- ✔ Tap into the global network of schools and organisations working to create sustainable schools and promote education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles.

■ Coordination Calls and Workshops

As a core service, the GSSS Coordinating Team provided a collaborative virtual space for country partners to come together and discuss the challenges being faced by the implementing schools in their countries. Through monthly calls, the country partners helped one another to think through disruptions to project implementation and develop solutions together. Where schools were implementing similar projects (e.g.: school gardens, rainwater harvesting, solar panels, etc.) country partners were able to share successful project adaptations and inspire other countries to apply the adaptations where possible. Every country partner has expressed that this series of monthly calls was of critical importance to the success of the GSSS projects in their countries.

A key part of this communication network was a series of workshops held over the course of the project implementation period. These workshops provided space for country partners to present the work of the schools in their countries, sharing their successes and challenges with the global network of schools. World leading experts also presented the latest research on pedagogy and curriculum development for education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, as well as strategies to open up ESD and ESL to all students. Country partners and implementing schools all expressed that these workshops were extremely valuable, and that they learned a lot from hearing the experiences of other teachers and schools.

■ Ensure New Curricula is in Place

The national coordinators of the GSSS programme have recommended a further set of actions that could be taken to enhance the success of a future programme focused on developing sustainable schools. The first recommendation is to develop new, structured ESD and ESL curricula before the planning of projects. Where possible, it would be beneficial for the new curricula to be developed before the search for sustainable schools begins. This would allow schools to design their projects with the new curricula in mind, enhancing the synergies between physical projects and curricular and extracurricular modules.

■ Develop Informational Supports for Teachers

Second, programme planners should consider developing a good set of informational support tools for teachers. This includes the development of new teaching aids and training to increase capacity in the field of responsible consumption and production. This will enhance teachers' ability to effectively integrate considerations of sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles into their classrooms.

■ Facilitate School Exchanges

Third, despite, or perhaps because of the pandemic restrictions faced by schools during the GSSS implementation period, national coordinators have stressed the importance of school exchanges to share experiences and support one another in project implementation. During the pandemic, such exchanges were often limited to virtual meetings, emails, and the use of social media. These connections proved to be very important for project implementers in helping them feel connected to a larger set of work, reminding them that they were not alone in facing the challenges of the pandemic. When health and safety allow, in-person exchanges such as monitoring visits by national coordinators, workshops for project implementers, and inter-school summits to bring together teachers, students, and other stakeholders to share project successes and challenges can greatly benefit a sustainable schools programme.

■ Make a Communications Plan

Fourth, national coordinators have stressed the importance of having a clear communications plan in place at the start of the sustainable schools programme. Such a plan should account for each stage of the programme, from the search for participating schools through to project implementation and impact reporting. Having clear channels of communication with regularly scheduled updates is an important way to share knowledge across the programme. Making use of simple tools such as newsletters, blog posts, and social media posts can go a long way toward building momentum in participating schools and spreading word about the programme to stakeholders. The GSSS made use of a programme website (www.sustainableschools.vision) and a series of Facebook groups to keep in touch and share experiences from schools within each country.

There is also a lot of benefit from sharing project experiences with schools who are not currently participating in the programme. This can be a powerful way to increase interest in sustainable school projects and potentially gain new participants for future programmes. In several of the GSSS countries, such communication activities have resulted in a significant number of schools expressing strong interest in joining a national level programme in the future.

■ Look Beyond Borders

Finally, whether the programme is sub-national, national, or international, participants can benefit greatly from connecting with similar programmes and projects in nearby countries. Over the course of the GSSS several countries have established regional networks of support that they intend to continue after the GSSS programme comes to an end. There are even plans for virtual and in-person exchanges between teachers and students. Such support networks are a fantastic programme legacy for the GSSS and will help to ensure not only that the work continues, but that knowledge and experience continues to develop beyond the confines of any one project.

The Search for Sustainable Schools

The Global Search for Sustainable Schools was a decentralised programme, with each country planning and implementing their own 'Search' for participating schools. As such, the length of time spent, and methods used to bring the programme opportunity to the attention of schools and teachers varied across countries. The most important lessons learned from the initial Search process across the nine participating countries are:

- ✔ Align the search and application process with the academic year to ensure that the start of project planning and implementation occurs at the start of the school year.

- ✔ Ensure enough time is allotted to the application process to allow for significant advertising and for schools to navigate the application process.

- ✔ Make use of a diverse set of communications tools to bring the programme opportunity to the attention of schools and teachers. Official government channels are the most effective means of communication but should be supplemented with efforts through non-governmental organisations and social media channels.

- ✔ Think about what motivates teachers and schools to apply to the programme. These motivating factors can help guide the development of programme supports and communication tools.

■ The Application Process

On average, country partners spent about 3 months conducting their national search for sustainable schools, during which time outreach activities were conducted to solicit applications from schools interested in participating the GSSS. A few countries were able to take a much longer period to conduct their search and application process due to the structure of their academic year.

■ **Align the Application Process with the Academic Year**

As an international initiative, the GSSS attempted to conduct simultaneous searches in all nine countries. This resulted in some schools entering the programme in the middle of their academic years, which presented some challenges in terms of teacher capacity and school resources. This approach could be improved in the future to ensure that schools are not challenged to complete applications and engage in planning processes during busy times of the school year.

■ **Ensure Sufficient Time for the Application Process**

Most country partners felt that taking more time to plan and implement the search will be a key improvement for future efforts. Some felt that the short timeline resulted in some complications in the application process. This is reflected in survey responses from participating schools that showed that while 50% of participants felt the application process was relatively easy, 39% faced some challenges and 11% encountered significant challenges that were difficult to resolve on the tight application deadlines.

■ **Use a Diverse Set of Communication Tools**

Country partners used a variety of communications methods to raise awareness of the GSSS and solicit applications from interested schools. Many made use of formal government channels, spreading the word through national and provincial Ministry of Education notification systems such as newsletters and professional development programmes. Several country partners also made use of social media channels to reach a wider audience, often through non-governmental channels. In a few cases, country partners integrated awareness raising into in-person events such as workshops, community events, and roadshows that travelled across the country.

GSSS project implementers in the participating schools have indicated that formal government communications were the most effective means of alerting teachers and schools to the existence of the GSSS, with 50% reporting that this was how they learned about the opportunity. Non-governmental organisations and social media channels were also quite effective at spreading news about the application process for the GSSS. 33% of project implementers in participating schools

reported hearing about the GSSS through non-governmental organisations, either through newsletters or events, with a further 22% learning about the GSSS through social media.

Throughout the communications materials and application process, the criteria for selecting schools to participate in the GSSS programme were made very clear. The GSSS Steering Committee and the nine country partners jointly developed a global set of criteria (see Table 1 below) that served as a starting point for eligibility for participation in the programme. Each country then adapted these criteria to best fit local conditions, including building upon existing domestic experience and integrating years of institutional experience with national eco-school programmes.





In every country, winning schools were selected by a committee. These selection committees included representatives from the national government, with some countries also including local government. Many countries formed diverse selection committees that included community members and non-governmental organisations in addition to representatives from government ministries.

■ Consider School Motivations for Applying

Teachers and school administrators across the nine participating countries indicated a similar set of motivations for participating in the GSSS programme. Project implementers reported that access to additional funding beyond their existing school budgets was a significant motivator for applying to the GSSS programme. Many said that they already had plans but no resources to implement their sustainability projects, or to upscale existing projects. The GSSS offered an excellent opportunity to amplify the efforts already underway at their schools, bringing in additional resources to help address shortfalls and make significant infrastructure upgrades that would otherwise be impossible.

Similarly, project implementers in every country have reported that tapping into a national and international network of schools and experts working on sustainable schools was a major motivator for applying to the programme. For many teachers, participation in the GSSS programme provided access to local and global experts on Education for Sustainable Development. Teachers were able to tap into this network to support the development and implementation of new curricula and subject teaching pedagogies.

Table 1: GSSS Criteria and Indicators

Criteria	Indicator
 School Governance	Description of a process for developing a vision that involves the whole school.
	Describes how stakeholders will be identified and how they will be involved in the governance of the school.
 Teaching and Learning	Description of a process for bringing sustainability and sustainable lifestyles concepts into the formal curriculum across subjects.
	Description of how students will be taught about local and global sustainability issues and the linkages between them.
	Description of capacity building for teachers on sustainability and sustainable lifestyles
	Description of a practical element to learning about sustainability (e.g., gardening, or similar activities)
 Facilities and Operations	Describes Infrastructure and/or policy changes are across multiple areas (energy, food, water, waste management, greenery etc.).
	Describes how all stakeholders will be involved in the design of the changes.
	Describes changes to the physical infrastructure of the school.
 Community Partnerships	Describes how the school will be involved in the local community
	Describes a range of different activities (e.g., clean up events, helping green local cultural events, meeting with local businesses to discuss sustainability issues, approaching local media, linking with local NGOs etc.)
	Describes a role for the local community in the life of the school (e.g., sustainability tours of the school, guest lectures, sources of technical assistance etc.).

For example, responding to local concerns was a top motivator for many schools for participating in the GSSS programme. Teachers and school administrators expressed a strong desire to implement projects that addressed local issues such as vulnerability to extreme weather conditions, food and energy security, and episodic water scarcity. The GSSS provided access to expertise and resources to support these local efforts, ensuring that schools were able to implement projects that were responsive to local needs and relevant to the daily lives of learners.



Tips and Advice from Project Implementers

Teachers and school administrators have recommended the following additional actions to help ensure that the Search runs smoothly:

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- Provide enough time for the application process, especially if the Search is conducted during the school year when teachers and administrators are often very busy.
- Make sure that the selection criteria for schools is clearly communicated in the application process.
- Provide support to schools in developing necessary documentation such as formal work plans and budgets or securing quotes from businesses for infrastructure projects.
- Take into consideration limited access to internet infrastructure. Not all schools will have similar access to communications infrastructure, and some may require alternative methods of application and communication.

School Project Planning Process

The project planning process in each country was also largely determined by collaboration between the country partners, schools, and communities. Country partners provided support to schools in developing their sustainable school project plans, particularly formal plans, subcontracting quotes, and budgets. Access to local and global experts on Education for Sustainable Development and Sustainable Lifestyles was also of great value to schools and teachers in developing their project proposals and plans.

The most important lessons learned from the Project Planning process across the nine participating countries are:

- ✓ The country partner / national coordinator should play a strong role in supporting schools and teachers in navigating the project planning process.

- ✓ Involve students and parents in the project planning process to increase their interest and make integrating sustainability into lesson plans easier.

- ✓ Wherever possible, involve the local community, including local government, in project planning to ensure projects respond to local needs and have the support of families and local interest groups.

■ Developing Sustainable School Projects

In each of the nine participating countries, project implementers reported that they relied heavily on the country partner to help them through the planning process. Many school administrators and teachers did not have any experience with planning sustainable school projects. For some schools, the GSSS projects were the first sustainable projects implemented by the school, and the country partner supported the school in learning how to approach a project through sustainable methodology. For other schools, navigating the many reports and documents required for participation in a global initiative presented a challenge. The country partners were able to provide support with tasks such as creating

the formal project plans, making a project budget, securing pricing quotes for infrastructure upgrades. Tables 2 and 3 below summarise many of the most common projects that were planned and implemented by schools in the GSSS, organized by the impact area and impact approach of the activity.

Table 2: GSSS Projects by Impact Area









Impact Area	Project Types
Ecology 	Biodiversity, ecological stewardship, ecological restoration, conservation, disaster preparedness, climate change mitigation, topsoil retention, agricultural production
Energy 	Energy conservation, GHG emissions, solar panels, biogas generators, embodied energy/emissions
Food 	School gardens, greenhouses, orchards, irrigation systems, nutrition, food waste, composting, nutrient cycles, agricultural production, biodiversity, bees, insects, animal-rearing
Waste 	Consumption and production systems, reuse, repair, recycling, waste sorting, waste flows, waste management systems, circularity
Water 	Consumption, resource scarcity, hydrologic cycles, rainwater capture, water reuse systems, grey water, irrigation systems, sewage and water treatment, water conservation, solar water heaters, hygiene

Table 3: Projects by Impact Approach

Impact Approach	Project Type
Awareness 	Campaigns focused on: climate change, ecology, energy, environment, food, materials (paper, plastics, etc.), waste, water
Community 	Workshops, webinars, extracurricular clubs, education centres focused on engaging the larger community in sustainable development education and action
Infrastructure 	Water harvesting systems, waste management systems, LED lighting, cook stove upgrades, solar panels, biogas generators, campus greening

Many GSSS project implementers have indicated that they faced some challenges gaining cooperation from school management and other teachers. There were also some challenges in building consensus among teachers and school administrators about which projects to pursue and what form the projects should take. In some cases, these challenges were the result of a disconnect between the agenda of project implementers and school management, in others, school management did not immediately see the benefits to the school of taking a sustainable approach to project implementation.

■ **National Coordinators Should Support Project Planning**

Country partners played a strong role in resolving conflicts between project planners and school management and refining project proposals, ensuring that the projects focused on sustainability outcomes that benefited the entire school. This required navigating competing interests within the schools, with some school administrators or teachers wanting to include less sustainable aspects to the projects. With the support of the country partners, these schools were able to bring school administrators and other teachers on board with the sustainable school projects. This process led to stronger projects with more in-school support.

As a result of the strong support of the country partners, 45% of schools reported that the planning process was easy or very easy, with very few problems encountered. A further 39% reported that the project planning process was only moderately challenging. They experienced some problems but were able to resolve them with the support of the country partner. Only 16 % of schools found the project planning process to be difficult, experiencing significant challenges that required a lot of effort to resolve. Many of these schools reported that the challenges arose due to school closures early in the COVID-19 pandemic, which interrupted project planning and made collaboration with local stakeholders such as contractors more difficult.

■ **Include Students and Parents in the Planning Process**

Many of the GSSS participating schools were able to directly involve students in the project planning process. This enabled students to help guide the types of projects developed and ensure that projects were reflective of student interests and locally relevant. It also increased student excitement about and ownership of the projects. Not all schools were able to include students in the initial planning process; however, when projects needed to be adapted due to the COVID-19

pandemic, all project implementers were able to benefit from student and parent input. This collaboration made it possible for many projects to continue, often making use of resources that would not have been available without the strong support of families.

■ Involve as Many Stakeholders as Possible

The process for developing school projects was in all cases a collaboration between multiple stakeholders. In about 95% of schools both teachers and students were involved in the project planning process, with 72% of schools also including parents in the process. 67% of schools opened the planning process to engage with local non-profits, businesses, and the larger community. Finally, 56% of schools included government ministries and agencies in the discussion, particularly around the development of new curricula focused on education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles and infrastructure projects.



Tips and Advice from Project Implementers

Teachers and school administrators have recommended the following additional actions to help ensure that the project planning process is successful:

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- Provide clearly defined criteria for project plan approval. This set of criteria could be based on the GSSS global criteria (see Table 1 above) or could be developed locally. Consider holding seminars to walk teachers through the planning process and requirements for a sustainable school project.
- Include as many stakeholders as possible, from students to community leaders, in the project planning process. This will help to build a sense of ownership and win the support of the community.
- Tailor your project to your local needs, ensuring it is an appropriate match to local interests, concerns, and geography.
- Engage dedicated teachers with a passion for sustainability and the environment to lead the projects.
- Consider the longer-term impact beyond the project funding cycle. Can the project continue after the cycle?

School Project Implementation

Project implementation was heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic through public health and safety measures such as school closures, the shift to online or distanced educational delivery (where possible), social distancing, and enhanced sanitary measures. As such, many project implementors reported experiencing some difficulty with the implementation process. The key lessons learned from the project implementation process are:

- ✔ Implement projects that align with local community needs. This will facilitate community support for projects and make it possible to leverage local knowledge and traditions.

- ✔ Make project implementation plans flexible. Even in the best of times there will be setbacks or challenges that arise, and it is important to plan for adaptability.

- ✔ Reach out to local government and the community to support project implementation. These stakeholders can be invaluable allies, especially where projects face significant barriers or challenges to implementation.

- ✔ Maintain a good collaboration between teachers and school management. Project implementation is much easier when all stakeholder objectives and priorities are aligned.

■ The Project Implementation Process

Among the 84 implementing schools, just 32% reported experiencing only minor disruptions to their project implementation. The remaining 68% reported moderate or significant challenges to their implementation plans, mostly resulting from school closures and other impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic. As schools closed, it became difficult or impossible to implement projects on school grounds such as infrastructure upgrades, retrofits, or construction projects. Implementing new teaching materials also became more difficult with the switch to distanced learning, especially where internet connectivity was unequal.

■ Tailor Projects to Local Community Needs

As was the case for the application process and project planning, each country tailored their approach to project implementation to reflect the priorities, cultures, and resources in their schools. This was important for project implementation as different communities were able to leverage different sets of local and traditional knowledge, as well as the unique stock of resources available in their communities. An unexpected benefit of this approach was that schools across the nine countries were able to successfully tap into those local resources and stakeholder networks to allow project implementation to continue despite the global pandemic, often with some adaptation.

■ Make Flexible Project Plans

Of the 202 projects and sub-projects in the GSSS programme, more than 60% had to adjust their implementation plans in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and associated school closures. Awareness campaigns were particularly impacted, often restricting their impact to students where project plans had called for a wider school and community engagement through posters and events. For many school garden programmes, seeds were not planted on time for one or more crops as school closures prevented students and staff from tending to them. Infrastructure upgrade or installation projects, such as rainwater harvesting systems and energy retrofits, were also significantly impacted as materials became scarce and it became very difficult to secure contractors to perform the work.

■ Tap into Community Support

For projects in each of the nine participating countries, the adaptation of projects was critically important to allow for a new model of implementation. Such adaptations required close collaboration between school and community stakeholders to ensure success. Importantly, by engaging with the wider community, including businesses and non-governmental organisations, project implementers were able to develop innovative solutions and tap into new resources that allowed projects to move forward during the pandemic. In some cases, owing to this wider support, schools were able to add components to their projects as the community became more interested in the work and learned about the benefits of sustainable school projects.

While many school projects had to delay implementation by months, in all cases the local community provided key supports. These supports included things like helping schools to find materials made scarce and expensive by the pandemic, helping to move some projects from the school to the homes of students, and facilitating distanced education models through sanitary pick-up and drop-off locations for teaching materials and homework. Without this key support from the community, many schools reported that they would have had to significantly scale back implementation for some projects, and completely cancel others.

■ **Collaboration Between Teachers and School Management**

The GSSS school project implementers also found that keeping a good relationship between teachers and school management was essential to successful project implementation. Many project implementers and national coordinators reported encountering some level of pushback or reluctance to support sustainable school projects on the part of school administrators. In such cases, projects faced additional challenges. Often these differences were the result of school administrators not fully understanding the objectives and impacts of sustainable school projects. This provided project implementers with the opportunity to engage with school management to educate them on sustainable lifestyles and build school capacity more broadly. Once school management understood the rationale behind the projects, in terms of educational opportunities, local environmental impact, and the long-term benefits to the lives of learners, they became better able to support the work of the implementing teams.



Tips and Advice from Project Implementers

The teachers and school administrators of the GSSS programme have recommended the following additional actions to help ensure that project implementation runs smoothly:

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- Make sure to have dedicated staff working on the project. Committing enough time and effort to the project is essential to success.
- Share ideas and discuss with other schools that have experience with or are currently implementing sustainable school projects.
- Work with the local community to find solutions to resource or labour shortages for project implementation. Families and the local community can also help to raise additional funds to adapt to unexpected challenges, or to extend the project to achieve an extended goal.
- Work closely with your national coordinator. They can support you with new ideas and connect you with experts.
- Engage with your local, provincial, and national government where possible. They are well-equipped to help you with support on curriculum development and implementation.
- Lead by example! Work as a team and involve others in your decision making, including teachers, administrators, parents, and the community. This can win allies and help you take your projects to the next level.

Greenhouse Gas Reductions Assessment

The Global Search for Sustainable Schools required schools to measure, analyse, and report the greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reductions resulting from their projects. The process of measurement presented a unique set of challenges for implementers and country partners. Challenges encountered ranged from procedural (incorporating the measurement process into overall project plans) to technical (many implementers and country partners were unfamiliar with methods for measuring greenhouse gas emissions reductions). The most important lessons learned from the process of measuring the GHG reductions from the sustainable school projects in the nine participating countries are:

- ✓ Supply teachers with a toolkit they can use to track their projects and measure GHG reductions.

- ✓ Provide training for national coordinators and project implementers on the GHG reductions measurement methodology and toolkit early in the programme process, including through workshops and tutorials.

- ✓ Use easy to understand language when training national coordinators and project implementers in how to measure greenhouse gas reductions.

- ✓ Consider assisting project implementers directly in measuring GHG reductions, with national coordinators doing the calculations in partnership with project implementers.

- ✓ Develop a database of greenhouse gas intensity figures for relevant materials and processes that project implementers can use to assist their measurements.

■ The Greenhouse Gas Reductions Measurement Process

Overall, country partners and project implementers reported that the greenhouse gas reductions measurement process was straightforward. About 70% of implementers found the process easy or only moderately challenging with very few challenges encountered. For these implementers, the biggest difficulty was in finding greenhouse gas intensity data relevant to their country or for specific sub-sets of materials such as water, wood, or plastics. The remaining 30% of implementers experienced the same challenges in tracking down data for their country and materials but faced additional barriers in engaging with the measurement process, largely owing to a lack of training or familiarity with quantitative methods.

■ Provide a GHG Measurement Toolkit

To quantify the impact of small sustainable school projects, the Sustainable Lifestyles and Education Programme developed a toolkit for implementing schools to use. The greenhouse gas reductions measurement toolkit provides two simple methodologies for measurement that are suited to most types of projects. The toolkit walks implementers through the process of choosing a methodology, planning how to measure project impacts, identifying which project components to measure, and automates calculations.

■ Train Project Implementers in GHG Measurement Methods

The GSSS provided country partners and project implementers with several training opportunities to build capacity in using the measurement toolkit. A recorded tutorial was created to walk country partners and project implementers through the measurement process. Examples were given using both measurement methodologies covering a range of project types. A short review of this material was also conducted during one of the implementation workshops. During the project implementation process a tutorial workshop was held to further train country partners in using the greenhouse gas measurement toolkit. A review of measurement methods was also provided during the final programme workshop prior to the end of project implementation.

■ Use Simple Language in GHG Measurement Training

While most project implementers reported that the methodology of the measurement process was clear, many expressed concerns that much of the language used in the toolkit was too technical, or that they felt less confident in engaging with such a quantitative process. Country partners and project implementers all emphasised the importance of adequate training early in the programme. For country partners, this training was important so they could provide good support to the implementing schools. For project implementers, earlier training would allow them to become more familiar and comfortable with the process and provide more time to work with country partners to build their capacity.

■ Assist Schools Directly in the Measurement Process

Country partners in several countries took the lead in doing the greenhouse gas reductions measurements, leading project implementers through the process with the intention of building capacity at the school level. This was highly successful, especially in locations where resources were strained. Project implementers who participated in this phased approach to greenhouse gas reductions measurement have reported a greater comprehension of the methodologies and more confidence in using the toolkit on their own in the next year.

■ Create a Database of Common GHG Intensity Data

An additional benefit of this phased approach is that the country partners have created a small database of country-specific greenhouse gas intensity data that is relevant to the types of sustainable school projects being implemented in the GSSS. This will remain as a resource for schools moving forward.

Project implementers and national coordinators have both expressed that this type of dataset would be a very helpful tool to share with others in their countries looking to implement sustainable school projects. Such a dataset should include greenhouse gas intensity data on locally relevant greenhouse gas sources and project types. For example, the dataset should include the greenhouse gas intensity of electricity, water, plastic bottles and bags, food waste, landfilled waste, and composting.



Tips and Advice from Project Implementers

- Work with the national focal point to make sure you understand the measurement process and where to find the data you need.
- Have some solid training in greenhouse gas measurement methodology as part of the programme - teachers need to clearly understand the process.
- Plan appropriately for the greenhouse gas measurement phase during the project planning process.
- Where possible, involve students in the measurement of impact. This is an excellent opportunity to discuss greenhouse gas emissions and their contribution to climate change in the context of science and mathematics learning.
- When in doubt, consult with experts! This could be the national coordinator, or a researcher at a local college or university.

Resources

The Global Search for Sustainable Schools and the Sustainable Lifestyles and Education Programme have developed many resources that may be of use to others seeking to launch a similar programme. Below are links to programme websites, education for sustainable development resources, reports, and multimedia resources that will help such efforts.

GSSS Programme Websites

The Global Search for Sustainable Schools:

<https://sustainableschools.vision/>

<https://www.oneplanetnetwork.org/news-and-events/news/global-search-sustainable-schools>

<https://www.cocreatingsustainability.org/global-search-for-sustainable-schools/>

Facebook Groups:

<https://www.facebook.com/GlobalSearchforSustainableSchools/>

<https://www.facebook.com/GlobalSearchforSustainableSchoolsProjectNamibia/>

<https://www.facebook.com/GsssPh/>

<https://m.facebook.com/GlobalSearchKG/>

One Planet Network Sustainable Lifestyles and Education Programme:

<https://www.oneplanetnetwork.org/programmes/sustainable-lifestyles-education>

Resources for Education for Sustainable Development and Sustainable Lifestyles

Sustainable Lifestyles Education HUB

<https://sustainablelifestyleeducation.org/>

Sustainability Starts with Teachers Course

<https://course.sustainabilityteachers.org/>

UNESCO SDG Resources for Educators

<https://en.unesco.org/themes/education/sdgs/material>

Reports

**Global Search for Sustainable Schools:
2020 Virtual Workshop Outcome Report**

<https://www.oneplanetnetwork.org/knowledge-centre/resources/global-search-sustainable-schools-2020-virtual-workshop-outcome-document>

UNESCO Green Academies: guidelines for climate-resilient schools

<https://www.oneplanetnetwork.org/knowledge-centre/resources/unesco-green-academies-guidelines-climate-resilient-schools>

**Global Action Programme on ESD final progress report for the
2015-2019 period**

<https://www.oneplanetnetwork.org/knowledge-centre/projects/global-action-programme-esd-final-progress-report-2015-2019-period>

Video Media

GSSS Impact Video: Brazil

<https://www.oneplanetnetwork.org/knowledge-centre/resources/impact-video-gsss-brazil>

GSSS Impact Video: Philippines

<https://www.oneplanetnetwork.org/knowledge-centre/resources/impact-video-gsss-philippines>

GSSS Impact Video: South Africa

<https://www.oneplanetnetwork.org/knowledge-centre/resources/impact-video-gsss-south-africa>

The Global Search for Sustainable Schools

Guidance Note

BRINGING SUSTAINABILITY TO SCHOOLS ACROSS THE WORLD

by Dwayne Appleby, Atsushi Watabe, Simon Gilby

