

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Background

Education is critical to sustainable development, and is an essential element of the global response to environmental challenges such as climate change. Sustainable development can be understood as ‘development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’ (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987). Contemporary perspectives on sustainable development hold that sustainability is not simply a matter of technological innovation, but rather that, in addition to technological innovations, societies themselves must develop, focusing attention on the cultural, psychological and behavioural aspects of societies which lead them to continually push ecological limits (Ayres et al. 1998). This perspective is reflected in touchstone documents of the global education for sustainable development (ESD) movement, including the Earth Charter (Earth Charter Commission 2000) and the Bonn Declaration (UNESCO World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development 2009). With the United Nations Decade for ESD (UNDESD), 2005–2014, now in its final years, implementation of ESD in many countries has progressed relatively slowly, demonstrating at best mixed results.

Over the next few years, a number of global initiatives and internationally agreed goals (IAGs) in education will be coming to a close. These include not only the UNDESD, but also Education for All (EFA), the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the United Nations Literacy Decade, among a great many related regional agreements. Research on the implementation of activities within each of these initiatives, as well as country-level education sector reform programmes which tie into them, will help to contribute meaningful information for the formulation of the successors to these IAGs. The recent UN Conference on Sustainable Development outlined a process for the development of internationally agreed ‘sustainable development goals’ (UNCSD 2012). Small island developing states (SIDS) have a unique context and vulnerability with regard to sustainability issues, especially to climate change. As such, many SIDS have been working concertedly to reorient education to better support sustainable development and adaptive capacity. Therefore, there are important lessons to be learned from the ESD work being done in the SIDS community, which should help to inform ESD activities in other countries, as well as the formulation of the next round of IAGs in education.

1.2 Aims and objectives

The overall aim of the study is to identify gaps, shortcomings and best practices in the delivery of ESD, with an emphasis on climate change education, and to use the

findings to produce practical and realistic recommendations on how ESD may be better integrated in education policy and strategy, and delivered more comprehensively.

The specific objectives of the review are:

- To identify and analyse gaps in ESD provision in ten sample countries;
- The identification, collation and analysis of good practice in ESD in these countries; and
- To synthesise the findings to make recommendations for filling gaps and for adapting successful practices in a culturally relevant and practical way.

1.3 Summary

This desk-based review of ESD in SIDS explores good practices as well as gaps in ESD implementation, generalising from the available information from ten countries representing the Caribbean region (Dominica, Guyana and Jamaica), the Africa, Indian Ocean and Mediterranean and South China Seas (AIMS) region (Maldives and Mauritius), and the Pacific region (Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands and Tonga). These countries are home to some of the planet's great stores of biodiversity and endemic species, as well as invaluable cultural heritage and diversity. The effects of global climate change are also likely to be felt more rapidly and more intensely in these regions than in some others. As such, ESD has been identified as a priority for SIDS and donor countries, not only in the context of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (UNDESD), but also in light of the specific context and vulnerabilities of SIDS related to climate change.

Building on the broader concept of sustainable development, which balances social, environmental and economic considerations with an emphasis on lasting quality of life, ESD can be understood as a transformative approach to education that aims to foster a transition towards sustainability. ESD, therefore, consists not only of relevant and necessary content, but also emphasises pedagogical approaches and educative experiences that contribute to the development of learners as citizens who think and act in sustainable ways. This review explores three dimensions of ESD implementation: the availability of ESD opportunities (access); the quality of ESD initiatives; and the management and co-ordination of implementation. A summary of findings is presented below.

1.3.1 Access and coverage

Good Practices	Gaps
Using broader education system reforms to lay an institutional foundation and create entry points for education for sustainable development (ESD).	Despite the presence of some supportive policies, ESD is not consistently making it into schools in a systematic or comprehensive manner.

Giving students real experiences with nature, sustainability and caring for their environments.	Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) programmes and structures oriented towards sustainability.
Development of specialised post-secondary programmes in priority areas for sustainability.	The implementation gap – putting training into practice.
Assessing ESD in post-secondary institutions beyond the programme level.	Establishment of ESD-oriented 'learning community' mechanisms.
Incorporating ESD into research and scholarship in post-secondary institutions.	Targeting school leaders as key change agents in school-based ESD.
Increased focus on ESD in teacher education institutes.	Systematic approaches to community-based ESD.
Localised, focused, curriculum-linked teacher training accompanied by resource materials.	Leveraging the potential of mass media as a medium for ESD.
Bridging school-based ESD with community life.	
Providing a progression of learning opportunities in local natural environments.	
Provision of topical ESD opportunities at the community level.	
Collaboration between ministries of education and mass media outlets.	
Building institutional capacity for sustainable development – ESD for governments.	

Ways forward

Focus on reorientation rather than adding on or adding new.

Strategic work in the kindergarten to grade 12 (K-12) system focusing on key drivers and constraints.

Increase attention to lagging areas such as TVET and mass media roles in ESD.

Increase research activity and the sharing of research on ESD.

1.3.2 Quality and rigour

Good Practices	Gaps
Developing authentic and locally-relevant conceptualisations of sustainability and ESD.	There is a need for a stronger and more coherent formulation of what students should be learning.
Teaching sustainability by practising sustainability.	Prevailing lack of clarity around how to 'do' ESD and slow proliferation of whole school approaches.
Increasing emphasis on the role of physical environments in learning.	Many of the available ESD resource materials not being used in classrooms.
Recognising the importance of language in ESD.	Lack of standards and general policy coherence around ESD.
Building ESD out from the core of local culture.	Lack of time and other resources to focus on ESD despite prioritisation in principle.
	Emphasis on issues related to social justice, gender equality, or the rights of marginalised groups.

Ways forward

Leveraging reform activities to embed ESD more deeply at the policy level.

Review the operationalisation of ESD in local policies and practices to ensure they remain relevant, comprehensive and balanced.

Development of standards which strongly incorporate ESD, and outline expected practices in all areas of the education system.

Development of practical models and examples of ESD.

Increased focus on students' immersive experiences.

1.3.3 System management

Good Practices

Documentation and participation in ESD activities at the regional level.

Balancing regional funding with country-level interventions.

Strong national policies supporting sustainable development being translated into institutionally-grounded changes in the education sector.

Engagement and ownership of local experts and involvement of end-users.

Interministerial and interdepartmental collaboration guided by higher-level ESD strategies and frameworks.

Gaps

Lack of effective regional co-ordination on ESD implementation.

Need for more strategic and streamlined approaches to regional planning.

The implementation gap – translating policy into practice.

Co-ordination mechanisms and multi-stakeholder processes to guide on-the-ground implementation.

Formalised co-operation between governmental and civil society organisations.

Lack of consistency and continuity in leadership and co-ordination.

Ways forward

Development of an integrated global framework of educational priorities which includes ESD at its core.

Streamlining of policy and planning environment under the banner of ESD.

Current and comprehensive sector mapping around ESD to support better co-ordination and partnership.

Establishment of clear co-ordinating mechanisms and accountabilities for ESD at the national level.

Results-oriented ESD reporting.

References

Ayres, R, J van den Bergh, J Gowdy (1998), *Viewpoint: Weak versus Strong Sustainability*, Discussion papers, Tinbergen Institute 98-103/3, available at: www.tinbergen.nl/discussionpapers/98103.pdf (accessed 10 July 2012).

Earth Charter Commission (2000), *The Earth Charter*, available at: www.earthcharterinaction.org/invent/images/uploads/echarter_english.pdf (accessed 11 July 2012).

UNCSD (2012), *United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development: Outcome document*, available at: www.uncsd2012.org/content/documents/774futurewewant_english.pdf (accessed 11 July 2012).

UNESCO World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development (2009), *Bonn Declaration*, available at: www.esd-world-conference-2009.org/fileadmin/download/ESD2009_BonnDeclaration080409.pdf (accessed 6 March 2012).

World Commission on Environment and Development (1987), *Our Common Future*, Oxford University Press, Oxford: conclusion, para.1.