

Chapter 2

Context

2.1 Global context of education for sustainable development

While approaches to development which recognise natural limits and shared contexts of global development have been increasing in profile since at least the 1980s, it was the call of the United Nations General Assembly for a Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (UNDESD) 2005–2014 which brought ESD onto the global agenda. The four objectives of the UNDESD (UNESCO 2005) were as follows:

- Facilitating networking and collaboration amongst stakeholders on ESD;
- Fostering greater quality of teaching and learning of environmental topics;
- Supporting countries in achieving the MDGs through ESD efforts;
- Providing countries with new opportunities and tools to reform education.

The UNDESD was presented alongside other global agendas and internationally agreed goals (IAGs) including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Education for All (EFA) and the United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD), as being complementary, with its focus on sustainability not as additional content, but as an approach to the purpose of education which cuts across all subjects (UNESCO 2005b). The implied approach was not to place an additional burden on education systems struggling to achieve universal access targets or basic quality indicators, but rather to reorient underlying assumptions which have guided education over decades of industrialisation and economically-oriented development. The UNDESD aimed to address a necessary shift in lifestyles, values and behaviours. In order to accomplish this, the UNDESD and related literature advocated reorientation and invigoration of both formal and non-formal education, as well as other aspects of education systems including higher education, technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and teacher education/training.

Reports on the progress of the UNDESD, and ESD implementation more generally, have tended to suggest that while the concept of ESD has gained profile and importance since the launch of the decade, more work needs to be done to support and strengthen actual ESD implementation (IALEI 2009; UNESCO 2009), and that more research is necessary to systematically identify success factors and effective approaches to ESD (Collins-Figueroa et al. 2005; IALEI 2009). While a broad range of success stories and effective practices have been documented (see for example UNESCO 2007a; 2007b), monitoring reports often point to areas which remain problematic in ESD implementation, such as continued ambiguity around the term 'ESD' itself and what it means in practice (UNESCO 2009).

At the 2009 Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers, ministers requested the Commonwealth Secretariat to prioritise work in the education sector that takes into account global trends, including ESD, with a particular emphasis on climate change. ESD and climate change were accordingly incorporated into the Commonwealth Secretariat's 2010–2012 Education Strategic Plan, including an activity to assess the current situation at the country level and provide strategies in education that would help to support their climate change agenda.

Small island developing states are some of the most vulnerable countries with regard to the impacts of climate change. Many SIDS are already being confronted with effects ranging from rising sea levels and loss of land in coastal areas to increased frequency and intensity of tropical storms. Local livelihoods in many SIDS are also being threatened as the climate change and non-sustainable development models jeopardise fisheries, agriculture, tourism and other industries. Consequently, there is a need to accelerate ESD implementation in SIDS in order to enhance adaptive capacity to climate change, and strengthen social and economic commitments to sustainability (University of Mauritius 2009; UNDP 2005).

2.2 Context of ESD implementation in SIDS

2.2.1 Educational profiles of small island developing states

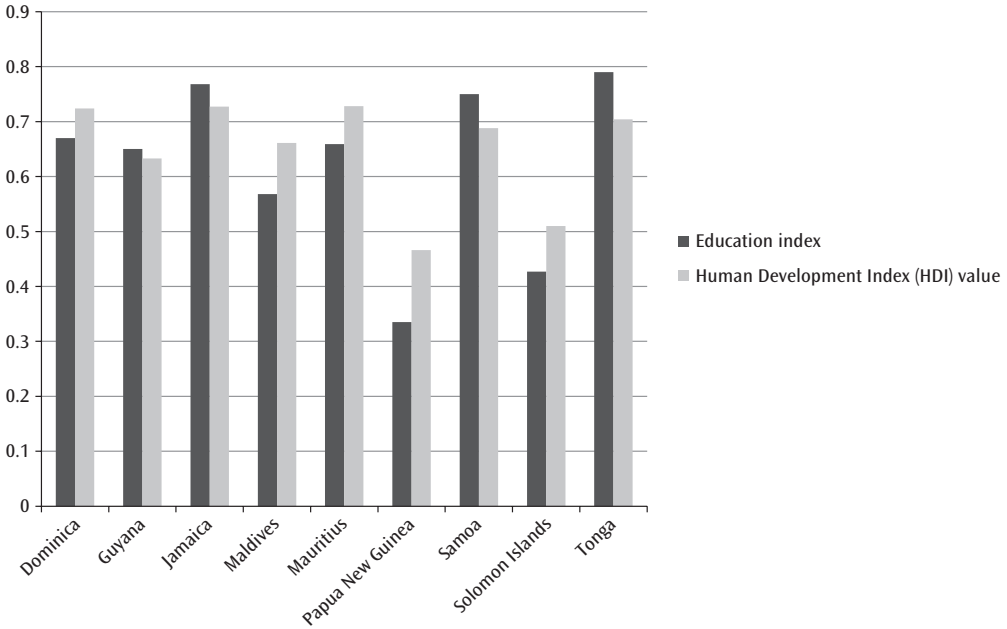
While the focus countries of this study vary widely in their socio-economic context, geography and culture, as well as their educational profiles, there are a number of commonalities related to their education and development context. Speaking generally, the focus countries share concerns with reaching universal access and literacy targets, and hence enrolment and completion rates. In addition, most face significant challenges with respect to sovereign financing of their education systems – with many being reliant on foreign aid. At the ground level, needs range from physical adequacy of buildings to availability of basic teaching and learning resources to qualified personnel and updating of curricula. Schools are often under-resourced, even in urban areas, and rely on outdated materials and minimally or untrained staff. However, there are examples of outstanding, well-resourced schools within the focus countries, with competent staff and good leadership. In most cases, these remain an exception to the norm.

Figure 2.1 below provides a comparative illustration of 2011 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Index (HDI) and Education Index data (UNDP 2012) for nine of the ten focus countries¹ for this study. HDI data is not available for the tenth country, Nauru. The variation between countries is evident, with most falling in the range from moderately low to moderately high on both indexes. Both indices are scored on a scale from zero to one.

2.2.2 Policy context of small island developing states

Over the last two decades, increasing attention has been paid to the specific vulnerabilities of SIDS in the face of issues related to climate change and disaster risk.

Figure 2.1 Education and development context of focus countries



An important series of policy developments was triggered by the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (also known as the Earth Summit), at which 179 governments voted to adopt the Agenda 21 policy document. Chapter 17, section G of Agenda 21 notes that ‘small island developing states are a special case both for environment and development ... [and] are considered extremely vulnerable to global warming and sea level rise’ (UNCED 1992). The following year the United Nations General Assembly passed Resolution 47/189, which called for the convening of a global conference on sustainable development in small island states (UNGA 1993). This conference, held the following year in Barbados, was the first Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island States.

The Barbados conference culminated in the development of a pivotal policy document, the United Nations Programme of Action on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, more commonly known as the Barbados Programme of Action (BPOA). The BPOA outlines a comprehensive yet integrated approach to addressing the social, environmental and social development vulnerabilities of SIDS (UNGA 1993). Ten years after Resolution 47/189, UNGA passed Resolution 58/213 to convene an international meeting to review the BPOA implementation. The conference was hosted by Mauritius, and led to the development of the Mauritius Strategy for the further Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. The Mauritius Strategy was subsequently endorsed by UNGA Resolution 60/194, giving the strategy a high stature as the UN’s primary guiding document for support to SIDS, and as ‘the only global strategy to address specifically and exclusively the problems of island states’ (UNDP 2005: 1).

Both the BPOA and the Mauritius strategy articulate the concerns of SIDS related to sustainable development, climate change and disaster risk preparation, as well as other aspects of global concern such as biodiversity and the preservation of unique habitat areas. Building on the foundation of these global agreements, a number of regional agreements have been established in the Caribbean, Pacific and AIMS regions, including overarching documents like the Pacific Plan, and sector-specific commitments such as the Tortola Declaration on Climate Change Education for Sustainable Development in the Caribbean. Some of the specifics of these policies and their implementation are discussed further in the findings of this report.

2.3 Operationalising ESD

ESD can be understood as having evolved alongside concepts such as sustainable development, which recognise the interlinkages between issues of social, environmental and economic importance. While ESD shares some commonalities with narrower approaches, for example environmental education and global education, it is distinctive in its holistic and interdisciplinary nature, as well as its emphasis on leading social change towards sustainability, and hence its emphasis on helping students to adopt sustainable behaviours and perspectives rather than simply learning about relevant issues. Despite a broad recognition of the term ESD, and progress in its advancement around the world, there remain ambiguities in what the term means in practice. Because good ESD is closely related to contemporary thinking on what constitutes ‘good education’ more generally, because of the importance placed on locally relevant practices, and because of the breadth of issues within the scope of sustainable development, there is a risk of dilution in which almost any educational act could be considered ESD. This issue is compounded by the breadth of scope that ideas around sustainable development tend to entail, covering themes and issues ranging from environmental protection to economic development, to social and cultural considerations.

Rather than restricting the scope of ESD to a fixed set of parameters, most work has instead focused on highlighted key areas of relevance to ESD that collectively serve to guide the discussion (IALEI 2009; UNESCO 2009). In operationalising ESD, it is important to remember that it is not a static concept, but is steadily evolving in sophistication along with the cultures in which it is practised (UNESCO 2012).

‘Initially, we thought that ESD was a new programme being introduced and we panicked and worried about its development, implementation and keeping abreast with the rest of the world. As we got more and more involved in the understanding of ESD, we realised that it was not a new programme, but an umbrella for any type of education that uses and applies sustainable development approaches, these types of education and approaches already exist in diversity in government Ministries and NGOs. The process also made us aware of the pivotal need to know what programmes/ projects/ initiatives are being implemented nationally (by ministries) and locally (by NGOs, villages, etc.) and through joint ventures to be able to assess the level of our involvement, success and achievement.’ (MoE representative from one focus country)

2.3.1 What gets taught?

While ESD does not focus merely on knowledge acquisition (McKeown and Hopkins 2007; Sterling 2001; UNESCO 2005), there is nonetheless a loosely-defined body of content that has come to be associated with ESD. Most prominent is a focus on the environmental perspectives, with reference to key issues such as climate change, biodiversity and disaster prevention. Socio-cultural issues related to traditional cultures, values, equity, peace and human rights are also prominent. Economic issues also factor in to a lesser extent, such as poverty reduction, livelihoods and corporate responsibility. However, most ESD literature also stresses the importance of relevant skills, values and perspectives, including critical and reflective thinking, problem-solving, values clarification, viewing issues through different perspectives, as well as systems thinking. Guiding literature for the UNDESD, such as the International Implementation Scheme (UNESCO 2005) identifies important content themes in ESD, but places the emphasis on promoting ‘... a set of values, relational processes and behavioural outcomes, which should characterise learning in all circumstances’ (p.9). As such, while ‘content’ in the conventional sense of knowledge and skills is duly recognised, a relatively heavy emphasis is placed on the development of students’ deeper attributes.

Part of the reason why ESD is not more clearly defined is that there is an understanding that what is considered ‘good ESD’ needs to be locally defined and determined, based on the unique backgrounds, context and issues of different localities. While environmental sustainability is a common theme throughout, relevance is an important determinant of good ESD, which has led to different elements being emphasised in different regions:

- Asia–Pacific: knowledge systems, cultural contexts, climate change;
 - Latin America and the Caribbean: literacy, environment, habitats;
 - The Arab States: desertification, sustainable consumption;
 - Sub-Saharan Africa: poverty alleviation, partnerships, food security;
 - Europe and North America: sustainable consumption; diversity; natural resources.
- (Adapted from UNESCO IBE 2009)

2.3.2 What to look for

Outside of various content emphases, it can be difficult to identify distinguishing characteristics of ESD. In general, good ESD *builds on* the practices of good education. The literature advocates a shift towards student-centred active learning approaches which engage students in participatory activities in relation to the relevant content, including such approaches as: student-led inquiry; cross-disciplinary project-based rich tasks; problem-solving and perspective shifting activities; discussion; reflection on values; and other participatory approaches (UNESCO IBE 2009; UNESCO 2010). The emphasis on student activity is intended to connect students’ learning of content with sustainable behaviours and an active orientation in relation to relevant issues.

Thus, while ‘good pedagogy’ in general does not necessarily mean that ESD is being practised, one would expect to see good pedagogy in classrooms where ESD is being implemented.

In recent years, a number of reports have highlighted the value of more comprehensive and ambitious ‘whole school approaches’ to ESD (IALEI 2009; Henderson and Tilbury 2004). Whole school approaches to ESD incorporate principles of sustainability and student participation into aspects of school governance and care, as well as implementing school-wide policies and programmes that help students to adopt sustainable behaviour patterns and mind-sets. In short, the aim of ESD is to go beyond teaching ‘about’ these sustainability or related issues, to teaching ‘for’ sustainability and immersing students in a context that supports deep learning and direct experiences in working with the related issues.

2.3.3 Where to look

It has been convincingly established that all education has a political quality to it (Apple 2003; Freire 1985; Shor 1992), and by the same measure, it has more recently been suggested that all education is environmental education (Orr 2004). This is to say that through what is taught or not taught, what is prioritised, how messages are conveyed and how ideas are organised, students (often unknowingly) come to internalise certain political and environmental perspectives, as well as assumptions about their relationship to the relevant issues. This forms the foundation for values as well as political and environmental activities. This same logic applies to sustainability, meaning that all learning is in some way connected to the development (or not) of citizens who think and act (or don’t) in the interests of sustainability.

A natural starting point to look for ESD is in formal educational institutions; K-12 schools and higher education institutes, as well as early childhood education programmes, internship programmes and other somewhat formal sites. A great deal of ESD also takes place in non-formal education, through advocacy and outreach work of civil society organisations, or through community-based activities of other educational programmes. A comprehensive exploration of ESD would also need to consider the role that learning in families plays, as well as mechanisms such as television, newspapers and the Internet, as all of these contribute to socialisation and enculturation, and hence, social development.

2.4 Conceptual approach

This study reviews good practices and gaps in ESD implementation in ten SIDS, with an emphasis on analysis rather than simple cataloguing of initiatives. The inquiry itself has been structured around three main pillars: access and coverage (the availability of ESD opportunities across the formal and informal education systems); quality and rigour of ESD implementation; and management and co-ordination. These three pillars are intended to provide a logical and comprehensive analysis of ESD implementation, with discussion of relevant findings – best practices and gaps – developed through the use of examples from the ten countries.

2.4.1 Access and coverage of ESD interventions

To explore the presence and absence of ESD opportunities, this section discusses relevant initiatives within subsectors of the education system, including: K-12 education; higher education and TVET; pre-service teacher training; in-service professional development of teachers and school leaders; non-formal and community-based education; mass media; as well as institutional capacity strengthening at the government level. Covering the key subsectors of the education system (leaving out only the family), the discussion in this section is focused on the sustainability-related learning opportunities in the ten focus countries. The intent has not been to comprehensively map out interventions, nor to rank countries, but rather to explore some of the good practices in each of the subsectors through discussion of key initiatives, as well as to recognise gaps in relevant policies and practices which impact implementation and the availability of learning opportunities.

2.4.2 Quality and rigour of ESD implementation

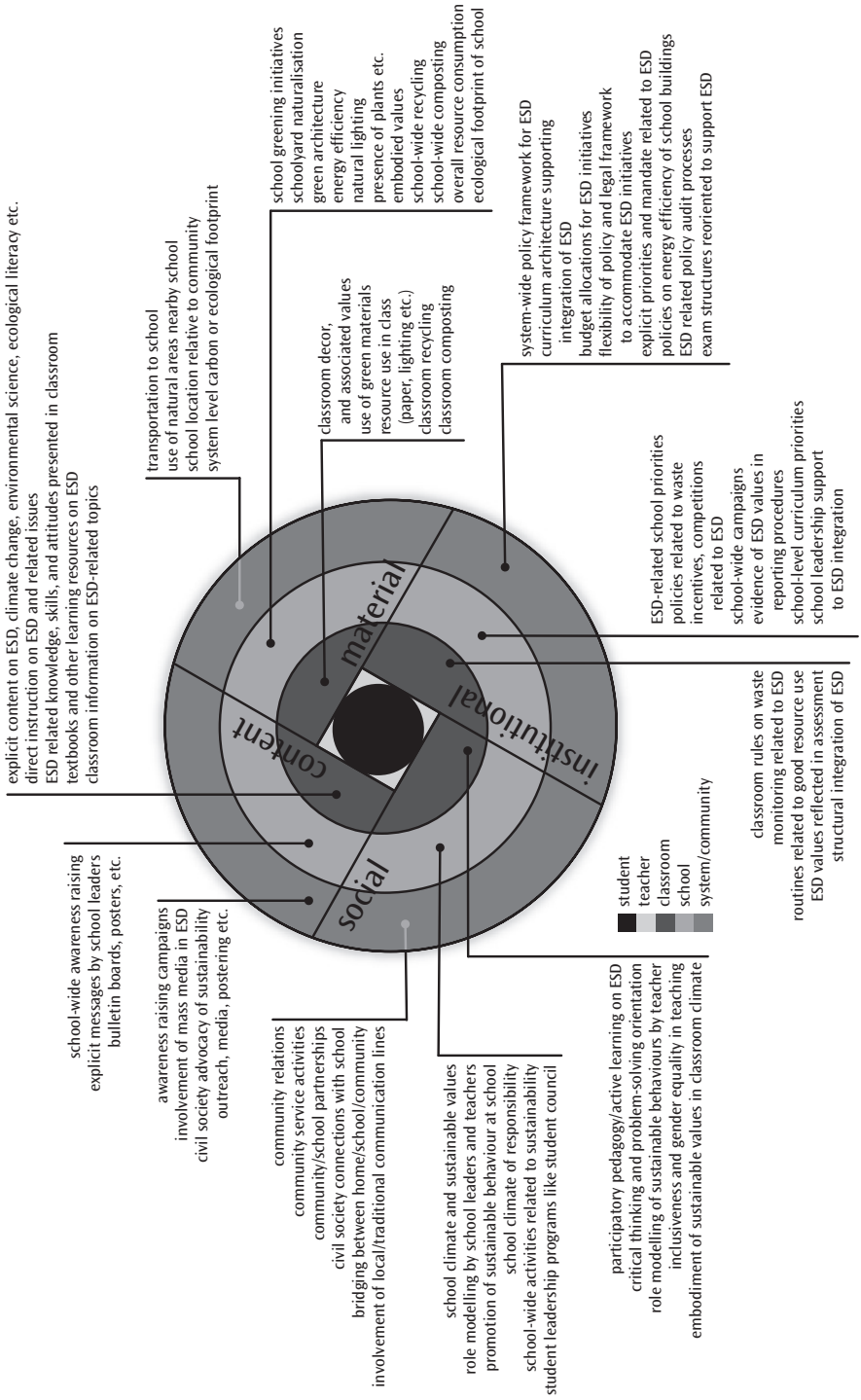
ESD is a developing concept, which emerged in part out of reflections on the insufficiency of earlier approaches, such as global or environmental education, that have sought to advance progressive goals related to environmental, citizenship, social justice, or cultural agendas. The concept of ESD that forms the basis for the analysis provided in this report builds on the literature and practical work to date. Grounded in an understanding that issues in sustainability are not – or at least not only – related to deficits in knowledge, skills, or even attitudes, there is a recognition of the need for ESD to support the development of more deeply-held character traits and dispositions – schemes of perception, thought and action – which link to sustainable development goals.

However, such dispositions and values cannot be taught directly. Rather, they are cultivated over time through a process more akin to socialisation than education in the colloquial sense (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990; Snyder 1970). This cultivation depends on the *context* in which a learner is immersed day after day, in addition to explicit *content* that is taught directly (Taylor 2008). The context is considered *educative* because it provides the background against which explicit knowledge is interpreted, and can either strengthen or subvert explicit learning on sustainability – consider the result, for instance, of learning about conservation in a wasteful school. Therefore, in addition to ESD-related content, this study has given consideration to contextual aspects of learning, including physical and material elements (school sites, learning materials, experiences in natural areas etc.), institutional and foundational elements (underlying policies, institutional structures) and socio-cultural elements (linguistic and culture-related factors). Figure 2.2 below illustrates this concept from the perspective of a school-based learner, recognising the nested system within which that learning takes place.

2.4.3 System management and co-ordination

While access and quality are often discussed in relation to education policy, a major factor affecting implementation is the institutional capacity of the system in which

Figure 2.2 Sample content and contextual factors impacting ESD outcomes at school



implementation is proposed. The final section of findings discusses good practices and gaps in the management and co-ordination of ESD from both an international/regional perspective, and a national perspective, rolling up insights gained through the review of information from all ten of the focus countries.

Note

1 The rationale for country selection is presented in Chapter 3. Methodology.

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