

Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1 Overview

This study was conceptualised as a best practices review and gap analysis of ESD implementation in ten SIDS. By design, and because of the limitations of the budget and timeline, the study was conducted remotely, with no travel to the focus countries. However, in addition to a review of available documents, information was also collected through correspondence, questionnaires, and interviews with a number of personnel from government offices, public institutions, multilateral organisations and civil society organisations (CSOs) involved with ESD implementation in the focus countries (see Appendix B). The direct contact with these individuals and organisations yielded a great deal of additional information as well as further documentation which was not available online. A list of documents reviewed is included in the Bibliography.

3.2 Technical scope

The technical scope of this study was focused on the identification of good practices and gaps in ESD implementation at the country level. The intent was not to produce a catalogue of activities across the focus countries, as a number of mapping exercises and related surveys have already been undertaken by other organisations. Rather, the intent was to produce an analytical report which would help to inform new directions in ESD implementation through discussion of what has been working well and what has yet to be accomplished. While this focus naturally involves some evaluative analysis, the study itself should not be taken as an evaluation or monitoring exercise. As such, no indicators or other preconceived criteria were utilised in the identification of good practices and gaps. Furthermore, it is recognised that what is considered to be 'good ESD' is contextually dependent and constantly evolving. As such, the author has adopted an appreciative approach, and has relied primarily on local accounts of what have been considered 'effective' activities – those that have achieved results, gained traction, or generated momentum in the focus countries. These good practices have been analysed in relation to the international literature on ESD, and in relation to the practices of other focus countries. Gaps, on the other hand, were identified largely as areas where there has been relatively little activity, or where information sources have identified barriers and challenges that could be resolved through some 'missing' intervention.

While the main focus of the study was on implementation at the country level, this scope evolved somewhat during the study to include discussion of the regional level, owing to the preponderance of regional activities and international organisations involved in ESD. However, the focus remained as much as possible on *implementation*

of ESD – which is naturally concentrated at the country level. While each of the countries has its own unique educational issues and socio-cultural/economic contexts, a full contextual analysis, and comprehensive mapping of more general educational considerations within each, was beyond the scope of this study. Rather, the intent was more simply to survey the ESD implementation of the focus countries in order to identify good practices that would be valuable to share, as well as to identify gaps where further work appears necessary.

3.3 Selection of countries

This study discusses the ESD implementation of ten countries. The original intention was to include *nine* SIDS, representing the Caribbean and Pacific regions, as well as Maldives. The selection of countries was aimed at creating a diverse and representative sample of Commonwealth SIDS from the Caribbean and Pacific regions. Consideration was given to a broad array of factors, including: cultural features (diversity, presence indigenous cultures and knowledge systems, religion etc.); landmass; population; per capita GDP; educational indicators (literacy rates, enrolment etc.); and characteristics of the formal, non-formal, and higher education systems. During the development of selection rationale, it was agreed that Mauritius could be included among the nine countries in order to have two countries representing the AIMS region. Rationale was developed informally through correspondence with the Commonwealth Secretariat, and through discussion of additional factors such as accessibility of information, the final country list was agreed to. Official letters were issued to the education ministries of the focus countries requesting the appointment of a focal point in each to provide support in collecting information. During the course of the study it became clear that there would be limited participation from a number of the focus country governments, and one additional country was added, giving a total of ten, in the interests of broadening the available information base and enriching the report. Table 3.1 below presents the final list of focus countries for this study.

3.4 Presentation of findings

The findings of the report are presented as ‘good practices’ and ‘gaps’. The former term was selected in lieu of ‘best practices’ with recognition that what works well in one country may be less appropriate in others, and that ‘best’ is a far more subjective term. Following each of the ‘good practices’ is a short section on ‘extending the good work’,

Table 3.1 Focus countries of this review

Caribbean region	Africa, Indian Ocean, Mediterranean and South China Sea (AIMS) region	Pacific region
Dominica	Maldives	Nauru
Guyana	Mauritius	Papua New Guinea
Jamaica		Samoa
		Solomon Islands
		Tonga

which outlines how effectiveness could be further increased, or provides examples of initiatives that enrich the finding. Similarly, each of the ‘gaps’ is followed by a short section on ‘bridging the gap’, which provides either suggestions for how this gap could be addressed, or gives examples of countries which are atypical and are demonstrating good work in this ‘gap’ area.

Since the study explores the work of ten countries, most of the findings are generalisations, and there are inevitably some exceptions to those generalisations. This is to say that for each of the ‘gaps’, there are usually also examples of one or two countries doing rather well in that particular area. Similarly, with some of the common ‘good practices’, there are inevitably some countries doing relatively less. This heterogeneity allows for some reaction against each of the findings – ‘good practices’ often reveal gaps that, if filled, could strengthen the good work; and broad ‘gaps’ sometimes provide a useful context within which to discuss an isolated case where that gap is being mitigated.

An appreciative approach rather than an evaluative one has been used, and while good practices are usually mentioned by name and country, gaps are presented more generally, with care not to single out individual failures. Contact details for the various ESD initiatives and organisations are presented in Appendix A. Where these initiatives are referenced in the main text, the titles are in italics to signify their inclusion in the appendix.

3.5 Limitations of the study and mitigation measures

Several constraints to the validity and generalisability of this study are acknowledged, generally stemming from the fact that it was carried out as a desk review:

1. **Lack of first-hand information:** As this review was conducted remotely, there has been no opportunity to obtain information through direct observation. The majority of the information utilised has come from the first-hand accounts of others – including reports, articles and individual accounts provided during interviews. Extensive online research was conducted, and a great deal of effort was expended in trying to establish contacts with individuals (both governmental and non-governmental) in the focus countries. In cases where this was successful, new information was obtained directly through interviews, correspondence and questionnaires.
2. **Limited current information:** The most current information available has been used. However, in many cases the information available online was somewhat dated. Because of its specialised nature, this study has sought earnestly to build on the existing knowledge base, and has therefore made extensive use of earlier reports and analyses in the field, including those whose shelf life has nearly expired. In cases where older reports were consulted, efforts were made to get in touch with the original authors in order to verify and update the information, or alternately to triangulate the information with other in-country contacts.
3. **Incomplete participation of governments:** The original planned methodology for the study involved working with government-appointed focal points in each of the

focus countries in order to obtain detailed information and first-hand accounts. However, due to a variety of factors, this approach had to be modified for some countries. The resultant methodology relied much more heavily on information obtained through contacts outside of the government systems, and information available online. The lack of individual contacts in some countries has resulted in an asymmetry to the report, with the work of some countries discussed much more than others.

4. **Incomplete information:** While every attempt has been made to access relevant information, there have been serious limitations related to the availability of ESD-related information in some countries. It is recognised that some of the good work being done may not be labelled as ESD or other obvious titles, and many good initiatives may have limited online presence. Accessing information online depends heavily on knowing what to look for.
5. **Non-generalisability:** Although ten countries constitute a meaningful sampling of Commonwealth SIDS, the findings of this study should not be taken to be generalisable. There is wide variability in both the contexts and ESD activities of the ten countries. Furthermore, it should be duly noted that Commonwealth SIDS are only a subset of a much longer list of small states, including many not belonging to the Commonwealth which differ quite markedly from those included in this study.

This study has been conducted with care for the accuracy of information. The draft of this report has been the subject of both an informal fact-checking exercise through circulation to key informants in the focus countries, as well as a more formal peer review process undertaken by the Commonwealth Secretariat. A full list of the information sources, including documents, websites and individuals, is presented in the Appendices and the Bibliography.