

## Chapter 7

### Ways Forward

---

#### 7.1 Access and coverage

**Focus on reorientation rather than *adding on* or *adding new*:** In many cases, ESD continues to be seen as an add-on or alternative to existing programmes. Implementing ESD will require helping those within the education system to understand that ESD is not something separate from regular education, but rather a central part of what education should be doing in the first place. The effectiveness of ESD will be enhanced if it can be embedded within the core values of education systems. Reorienting education to support sustainable development in this manner would require a systemic approach, providing policies, resources, curricula and training grounded firmly in the values of sustainable development. This would provide the scaffolding and support necessary to make ESD practicable. This approach would not neglect other considerations in educational development, since effective ESD is entirely compatible with effective education. The goal of sustainable development can and should be used to enrich understandings of education's basic value as a public good.

**Strategic work in the K-12 system focusing on key drivers and constraints:** While some countries are behind others in terms of policy and curriculum development, one of the major constraints common to most, if not all, of the focus countries is the capacity of the existing teaching workforce. With limited resources available, in-service professional development for teachers and school leaders on ESD should receive special consideration. In addition, noting the importance of exams as a driver of school and classroom practice, it will be important to begin reorienting exams to focus on learning outcomes relevant to sustainability, such as critical thinking and systems thinking, to help push educational practice in the direction of ESD.

**Increase attention to lagging areas such as TVET and mass media roles in ESD:** While much of the early attention in the DESD went to K-12 education and non-formal education, the importance of these areas has now been well established. More current sector mapping is required in most countries in order to determine the areas most in need of more concerted effort.

**Increase research activity and the sharing of research on ESD:** While a great deal of energy and resources are going into ESD-related initiatives in the focus countries, there is a dearth of real research related to what is working and what is not, with continued ambiguity around what results should be expected and how they could be measured. While this ambiguity remains, it will be difficult to make meaningful or efficient improvements in ESD implementation. In addition, attention should be given to making relevant research and publications available online through

consolidated platforms so that information is easily accessible to policy-makers and practitioners throughout the SIDS community.

## 7.2 Quality and rigour

**Leveraging reform activities to embed ESD more deeply at the policy level:** Many of the focus countries are in the process of broad educational reform activities, ranging from curriculum development to sector-wide interventions. This presents an excellent opportunity to embed ESD within the core institutional structures of education systems, particularly as many of the focus countries' development plans and strategies already identify sustainable development as a priority area. Policies can be viewed as the institutionalised values of the education system, and serious reflection should be given to what those policies say about what is important to each country.

**Review the operationalisation of ESD in local policies and practices to ensure it remains relevant, comprehensive and balanced:** In most countries, ESD implementation has been a process of making the road by walking it. This has led to a rich diversity in how ESD is being implemented in each of the focus countries, with unique features related authentically to each local context. However, analysis of the existing policies and initiatives suggests that there would be value in reflection on these concepts to ensure their balance of scope and issues – including those related to citizenship and social justice which have been somewhat peripheral in most countries.

**Development of standards which strongly incorporate ESD, and outline expected practices in all areas of the education system:** In order to make ESD widespread, it is important for practitioners throughout the education system to have a clear idea of what ESD should look like in their particular area of work – whether it is curriculum development, classroom teaching or school construction. While many countries have begun a move towards standards-based curricula, and many have incorporated ESD into high-level education policies, there are natural gaps between these national policies and many practices. A comprehensive set of national standards that incorporate ESD principles into all domains would be invaluable to scaffold and direct work such as teacher training and resource development systematically. These standards would serve to illustrate what is expected in each aspect of the education system, with careful consideration to ESD. A comprehensive approach would include standards, across multiple domains each, for:

- student learning (learning outcomes, processes and domains of development);
- teachers (qualifications, professional development, planning, pedagogical approaches);
- school leaders (similar to teachers, but also including school development planning and other school-level practices);
- supervisors (including ESD-related supervisory practices);
- school environments (including resource usage, schoolyards, school climate etc.);

- community participation (engagement with local communities, with parents etc.); and
- additional areas such as curriculum standards etc.

**Development of practical models and examples of ESD:** While a good deal of work is being done at the ground level, particularly with the support of CSOs, ESD in the formal education system is generally being led from the top down (from policy to practice). Increasingly it will become important to put resources into the development of practical school-based demonstration sites that will be able to provide an example of what ESD looks like in practice. Since most focus countries have a number of examples of ‘green’ or ‘eco’ schools, it would make sense to begin with these, developing a network of demonstration sites which could serve as exemplars and change catalysts. These sites will have an important role to play in clarifying new policies at an operational level, serving as both pilot sites and demonstration sites, and helping to teach others by example.

**Increased focus on students’ immersive experiences:** Much of the effort to date in ESD implementation has gone into the development of resource materials and programmes related to the content of ESD, or specialised programmes intended to engage students actively on a given issue. Relatively little attention has been given to socialisation and enculturation which influences sustainable behaviour and thinking patterns. In the controlled environments of educational institutions, there is untapped potential to support sustainability through whole school approaches that aim to cultivate sustainability-inclined citizens by making sustainable practices, sustainable thinking and critical engagement on relevant issues a part of their daily experience, week after week and year after year.

### 7.3 System management

**Development of an integrated global framework of educational priorities which includes ESD at its core:** While the UNDES has clearly succeeded in placing ESD on the global agenda, the relatively slow response in implementing ESD on a large scale suggests that it is perceived by many to be something complementary to mainstream education – a kind of special interest, rather than a global imperative which should be considered core to education’s role in society. Education is inherently future-oriented; therefore if the future is compromised due to unsustainable human activity, the value of that education rapidly erodes. With this understanding, the next round of IAGs should incorporate ESD not as a component or pillar or subset of goals, but as a fundamental part of the vision of education articulated by the goals. There is a potential for this approach to be undertaken, grounded in the outcome document of the 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development, which outlines a commitment to the development of internationally agreed sustainable development goals.

**Streamlining of policy and planning environment under the banner of ESD:** Most of the focus countries have a highly complex policy environment with many competing priorities, making it difficult to maintain cohesion and efficiency at the

level of programme implementation. Over the next few years, as broad reform projects are implemented and new IAGs are framed, there will be opportunities to revisit overarching policies and to integrate ESD into the foundational policy structures of many systems. ESD policies should be aligned to national sustainable development priorities.

**Current and comprehensive sector mapping around ESD to support better co-ordination and partnership:** While a number of sector-mapping exercises were undertaken in both the Caribbean and the Pacific between 2006 and 2008, a great deal has changed since then. In order to improve co-ordination, there appears to be some need to undertake more comprehensive sector mapping to identify areas where there is duplication of efforts, as well as opportunities for partnership between government, public sector institutions, civil society and private sector. The result of such an exercise would ideally not be a paper document, but rather the establishment of a formal network or other co-ordinating mechanism such as a purpose-built dynamic online database or platform to support ESD going forward.

**Establishment of clear co-ordinating mechanisms and accountabilities for ESD at the national level:** While there are a great number of passionate ESD advocates across the focus countries, it appears that many governments have not yet made ESD a priority. This is evidenced by the ad hoc nature of ESD co-ordination and implementation, as well as ESD agendas that exist largely in rhetoric. In order for ESD to gain real traction, it appears that leadership, co-ordination and accountability all need to be considered further. This tends to start with the establishment of a national focal point, task force, or steering committee for ESD, and ideally not one operating outside of existing structures, but rather within MoEs or sustainable development bodies, with interministerial representation and participation from other relevant civil society and private sector stakeholders.

**Results-oriented ESD reporting:** While there is a wealth of ESD documentation available from the focus countries and regions, the vast majority of it has tended to be descriptive or activity-oriented. While this work has value, there is a complementary need for more tangible results-oriented information about what these interventions are accomplishing. This information is necessary in order to make informed policy decisions to guide ESD going forward. Where this is not feasible within government channels, it should be facilitated through donor-supported projects that are typically designed with a results-oriented logic model. Monitoring and evaluation information on such projects should be disseminated in order to share lessons learned through experience between SIDS. The further development of national ESD indicators, or more appropriately, national education indicators that reflect ESD as a priority, should also be considered.