Education for Sustainable Development in the Pacific

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EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE PACIFIC
Context. Relevance. Sustainability

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Introduction

The Pacific Ocean covers an estimated one-third of the earth’s surface and holds “a scattering of around 25,000 countries” with “…a land area of only 550,073 km²” (Chandra, 1995). The largest Pacific island country (PIC) is Papua New Guinea with a land mass of over 460,000 km², and the smallest, Tokelau with a meagre land mass of 12 km². PICs may be discussed in three clusters with Papua New Guinea as a fourth stand alone category given the vast differentiation in both land mass and population.

Pacific Island countries are globally recognized as being scattered, vulnerable islands in the Pacific Ocean, commonly categorized in three main groups; Melanesia (the black islands); Micronesia (the small islands) and Polynesia (the many islands).

Figure 1. Map of the Pacific

1 Maps-Pacific.com
That the Pacific is in crisis on many fronts is a reality that cannot be denied. Social, economic, political and environmental tensions and challenges form the backdrop to the Pacific Island context. Christianity and Colonialism, by far, had the greatest impact on the small island communities, influencing current worldviews about education, development and everyday lifestyles. The so called politically independent PICs continue to struggle for economic stability and development, surviving for the most part on international aid.

Globalization marks the influence of the west in PICs. The influence of the west meets culture is marred by consumer demands, commodification and convenience lifestyles. This new way of life is inconsiderate of the long term impact of indiscriminate use of limited resources and or socio-cultural, -ecological and -economic costs and agendas. As a result of this, Pacific communities are struggle to keep abreast with the rest of the developed world, torn between the reality of small economies and the luxuries of the developed world that are marketed on various new media including Television, and the Internet.

Aware of the challenges in the islands, there is a marked shift in thinking by Pacific leaders about sustainability and the benefits of sustainable development and sustainable consumption in local markets. The ESD approach that is ascribed to is one that takes this context and places it within the broader discussion of sustainable socio-cultural development. It aims to nurture local communities while working towards a replenishment and conservation of the local environment.

**Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)**

ESD is growing interest in the Pacific Region, recognized as an inclusive “life-skills” package bringing together formal and non-formal education. This paper examines a range of regional efforts in planning, development and implementation of ESD initiatives in the Pacific and explores the role of the University of the South Pacific as a Regional Centre of Expertise (RCE) and Centre of Excellence (COE) in ESD.

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2 These statistics are estimates derived from a number of sources including in-country statistics departments and regional organizations. Appendix one provides 2011 estimates in a summary by region.

1) Policies | Projects | Mainstreaming efforts

In 2006, Pacific Islands Forum Education Ministers endorsed the Pacific ESD Framework (PESDF) as a guiding document for ESD practice in the islands. The PESDF, like other regional policy documents, is purposefully linked to the Pacific Plan (PP). PP aims to "enhance and stimulate economic growth, sustainable development, good governance and security for Pacific countries through regionalism" (p2).

Building on this, PESDF (2006) has five (5) priority action areas; Formal education, Non-formal education; ESD Governance; Research and Innovation; and, Communication and Advocacy towards the vision:

To empower Pacific peoples through all forms of locally relevant and culturally appropriate education and learning to make decisions and take actions to meet current and future social, cultural, environmental and economic needs and aspirations (PESDF, 2006 p.3).


In 2009, a Progress mid-point progress report on the implementation of the PESDF was compiled. This document highlights efforts in ESD advocacy education and mainstreaming and found that:

[t]here already exists in the Pacific a vast array of local/community-based, national and regional initiatives aimed at improving the quality of people's lives. A wide range of donors provide funding and technical assistance to many of these initiatives. Whilst there has been some attempt to coordinate activities, the fact remains that most occur in isolation, sometimes overlapping so much in their objectives that the same individuals are involved in several projects at once (p.4).

Increased ESD awareness and collaborative efforts has led to interlinking of regional policy development. For example, the Traditional Knowledge Action Plan 2009; the Pacific Cultural Strategy 2010; Pacific Culture and Education Framework 2010 – 2015; and the Pacific Youth Strategy 2010 and others.

Most Pacific island countries incorporate ESD at the national level within the broader education policy framework and/or, in various development plans demonstrating an understanding that an integrated across-policy approach may better ensure 'sustainability' issues and 'sustainable development' prioritization in a range of sectoral planning policies and programs. In the interest of brevity, three country examples are provided.

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3 Cited as Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat ‘trade policy; for development, PP is often referred to as a regional roadmap for development in the region. www.pacificplan.org

The primary priority area in the Tonga Ministry of Education is “to ensure the country is provided with skilled and competent manpower needed for sustainable development” (MEWAC 2007, p11). Taking an integrated approach, the Tonga Education Support Program 2007 (TESP) was directed at holistic curriculum reform and emphasized sustainability in education.

Similarly, in Fiji, ESD is incorporated into overall educational planning. Complementary to this however, an ESD secretariat is currently housed within the Department of National Heritage, Culture and the Arts, under the broader umbrella of the Ministry of Education. The Secretariat is looking at the development of a Fiji ESD Policy document. In 2011, the Ministry of Education further identified ESD as one of its core areas of focus for the year.

The diversity of ESD approaches is part of localizing PESDF. Pacific island countries take the stance that PESDF is a guide for National ESD Planning and local approaches need to be context-specific and relevant to each Pacific island situation.

The University of the South Pacific (USP)

The University of the South Pacific which was established in 1968 is the only collectively owned University. The USP twelve member countries are Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. ESD at USP aims at “Capacity Building for regional transformation”.

USP plays a significant role in ESD efforts in the region firstly as the premier tertiary educational institution. Secondly, it was identified as a UNU Regional Centre of Expertise in ESD in 2005, and a UNESCO-ACCU Centre of Excellence in 2006. As a result of this, USP is the lead agency for the promotion of ESD in Higher Education and through formal and non-formal education in the wider Pacific islands. The USP Pacific Centre for Environment and Sustainable Development (PACE-SD) provides a centralized coordinated approach to the University's ESD efforts.

Three key core priority areas identified in the University Strategic Plan 2010 – 2012 are quality, relevance and sustainability highlighting the vision of sustainable development through education. The University is currently in the final stages of completing the Pacific Network of Island Universities Higher Education for Sustainable Development Framework 2010/11.

Two significant ESD projects undertaken at USP include the ACCU-USP Project 2007 – 2011 “Mainstreaming ESD for Capacity Building in PICs” and the Network of Island Universities (NIU) Edulink project 2008 – 2012 which brings together the three major Universities in the region, USP, National University of Samoa (NUS) and University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG). Both projects share a three-pronged focus of teacher education; sustainability education and community empowerment.

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Outcomes of these projects include capacity building workshops with emerging youth leaders, and village leaders, teachers, young professionals and others. Institutional ESD efforts include improving accessibility of Distance and e-learning education for regional students in both print and e-learning and more recently, use of mobile phone devices.

A number of courses and programs have also been developed in a variety of areas such as Sustainable Islands and Ocean Development, continuing education, Climate Change and Teacher education at undergraduate and graduate levels. Purposeful stakeholder collaboration has proven critical to effect ESD practice. Two examples from education include, a School of Education and Pacific Association of Teacher Educators (PATE) ‘Reorienting Teacher Education to Sustainable Development’ project; and, ‘Sustainable Livelihood and Education Project’ 2005/2006 facilitated by the Institute of Education, USP and NZAID. Also, USP has membership on the University Consortium of Small Island States since 2005.

As a result of the NIU-Edulink Project, the National University of Samoa (NUS) has begun some ESD work in capacity building, Teacher Education: Maths and Statistics; Environment and Marine Science. NUS is currently looking at course review and development, and, research and technology. The University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG) shares the focus of Teacher capacity building at elementary and primary level; and, disaster management courses and programs in sustainability education as well as non-formal community disaster training. A major outcome has been the development of a Higher ESD Policy Framework 2010/2011. This framework prioritizes ESD at Pacific Higher Education institutions.

2) From the classroom to the community | Good practice(s) – lessons learnt

ESD efforts in Formal Education has aimed at (1) conceptualizing and understanding ESD; (2) Researching ESD; and, (3) Promoting ESD, with ESD work implementation by USP, Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC); and, the Pacific UNESCO office in Apia. The latter has worked primarily in the area of awareness and publication of support materials for understanding and implementing ESD.

Book Production:

A critical area of need remains the lack of funding for localized publications written by and for Pacific islanders. In 2010, the School of Education produced a three-volume ESD series to help contextualize ESD within a culturally situated understanding of sustainability.
ESD Volume 1 - *Continuity and Survival in the Pacific*, Eds. U Nabobo, CF Koya, and T Teaero, School of Education, Faculty of Arts and Law, University of the South Pacific and ACCU-Japan, Suva, Fiji.

Vol.1 presents a number of scholarly articles in which the authors discuss local notions of sustainability and how these may inform ESD efforts.

ESD Volume 2 - *Pacific Stories of Sustainable Living* Eds. CF Koya, U. Nabobo, and T Teaero, School of Education, Faculty of Arts and Law, University of the South Pacific and ACCU-Japan, Suva, Fiji.

Vol. 2 comprises a range of creative interpretations of sustainable living including life-stories, poetry, myths and legends, paintings and photography. These carry with them the message that the idea of ESD is not new and is in fact the basis of Pacific cultural life across the diverse range of cultural communities in the region.

ESD Volume 3 – *An Annotated Bibliography*, P. Furivai, School of Education, Faculty of Arts and Law, University of the South Pacific and ACCU-Japan, Suva, Fiji.

The annotation provides bibliographical details and summaries of available literature on ESD useful for scholarly use at the University.

**Capacity Building of ESD Educators**

Regional capacity building of Pacific ESD Educators is an important priority in ESD mainstreaming. Two such gatherings took place in Suva, March 2010. The 3-day event included, a 2-day regional symposium “Strengthening Institutional ESD Capacity in the Region” which carried the theme “Exploring Possibilities: Education, Sustainability and the role of Pacific Universities”. Day three was a “Pacific ESD Educators Forum: Art, Culture and Curriculum”.

Participants included representatives from USP and NUS as well as Ministries of Education, Teacher Training Colleges and Teachers from Fiji, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Marshall Islands. Outcomes included improved understanding of (1) ESD; (2) Curriculum mainstreaming; (3)”culture and ESD; and, (4) purposeful use of the arts and culture education in ESD curriculum mainstreaming.

A similar 5-day workshop was conducted facilitated at NUS as part of in-house staff ESD awareness and capacity development. The final day of the workshop saw NUS faculty form groups where action plans were developed.

**Conferences**

Conferences have also proven to be useful forums in ESD and sustainability praxis in the Pacific providing opportunities for international participants to engage with Pacific scholars and practitioners. Some examples with specific ESD and SD themes are listed below.

*Oceans, islands and Skies – Climate Change and Creativity,*
*September 13 – 17, 2010, USP, Suva Fiji.*

This conference featured scholarly presentations and art exhibitions including literary arts, visual, dance and music genres. Major themes included indigenous knowledge, environment and creative expression within the broader climate change discussion.


This conference brought major stakeholders from various PICs together to discuss social policies, welfare systems and human security with a view to identify and map these in relation to social and cultural protection and human securities in the region.

_Future Challenges, Ancient Solutions: What we can learn from the past about managing the future in the Pacific?_  
November 29 – December 3 2010. USP, Suva Fiji.

The aim of this conference was to explore past challenges in the Pacific islands in order to inform solutions to challenges, and to enhance socio-cultural and environmental responses that are sustainable in the contemporary Pacific Islands context.

_International conference on Chemistry, Environment and Climate Change_  
September 14 – 16 2011. USP, Suva Fiji.

The goal of this conference was to facilitate a forum for scientists to share recent advances in all disciplines of chemistry and to discuss the issue of ongoing deterioration of atmospheric chemical composition; environmental impact; and, preventative measures, as well as, sustainable solutions to protect and safeguard the global environment.

_Lessons from Non-formal Education (NFE)_

In NFE, the general goal of capacity building emphasizes the life-skills approach and opportunities for empowerment and transformation. In this section, the discussion highlights a selection of good practice examples. Festivals, focused group workshops with youth, teachers, artists, rural community participants; and the use of the arts as social learning tools are discussed.

_Workshops:_

_Equity Leaders Workshops: Youth_

The Pacific Centre of Environment and Sustainable Development (PACE-SD) at USP has provided a number of successful youth-as-emerging-environment leaders-in-ESD. In 2009, two 5-day workshops were facilitated with funding from NZAID and UNEP respectively. The first focused on Youth leadership and governance in Climate Change and participants discussed ways by which youth could use Pacific Culture and the Arts within the scope of Climate change work in their cultural communities (rural and urban contexts). The final day of the workshop was spent working on and sharing of Individual Action Plans (IAP) for implementation within identified communities. The second looked at Environment generically and participants representing Kiribati, Tonga, Samoa, Solomon Islands, and, Fiji were introduced to the vulnerabilities of Pacific environments due to general over-exploitation and the potential threat of Climate Change.

PACE-SD continued this work in 2010, and facilitated the Pacific Youth Environment Network (PYEN) eco-camp village stay with 24 youth participants from Tuvalu, PNG, Kiribati, Tonga, Cook Islands, Nauru, Niue, Australia and Fiji. The youth camp was part of an AUSAID project on “Climate Change Rural Adaptation in Fiji” giving young people hands-on contextualized real life-learning.

Environment Leaders Workshops: Young Scholars/ Professionals

In 2011, a 10-day learning intensive course is being jointly facilitated by PACE-SD and the Faculty of Arts & Law at USP, International-Lawyers.Org and other regional organizations on the theme Human Rights and Climate Change: The Added Value for the South Pacific. Targeting human resource capacity building in PICs, the course is a component of the AUSAID funded 'Future Climate Leaders Program' and the European Union’s 'Global Climate Change Alliance Project' and is designed for young academics and professionals. The goal of the training is to create an awareness of human rights law and mechanisms, and inter-linkages with climate negotiations and the issue of climate justice.

Environment Leaders Workshops: Scholars/ Environment Practitioners

In October this year, a 5-day capacity building workshop for 24 scholars, practitioners and policy makers from around the region, jointly hosted by PACE-SD and Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) The writing workshop provides one-on-one writing on climate change for publication skills through the workshop proper and on-going mentoring. Thematic area: Disaster Risk Reduction and Adaptation to Climate Change.

Developing a holistic package of multi-modal learning opportunities
An Example from the Arts & Education

Sexual and reproductive health is an area of concern in the Pacific islands particularly in the youth population. Problematic areas of concern include sexually transmitted diseases, teenage pregnancy and HIV and AIDS. These are recognized as threats to small Pacific populations and community livelihoods and as such, Pacific islands aids foundation (PIAF) and Oceania Centre for the Arts, Culture and Pacific Studies at USP, developed a stage production that humanized the HIV experience within the context of a Pacific family. The production was first staged during the Pacific Youth Festival in 2009, held at USP Suva, Fiji. Later that year, it was restaged for the general Fiji Public and in 2010; it was invited for a Tonga staging.

In addition to the main stage showing, age appropriate student activities were conducted at School Matinees and research conducted with teachers. Analysis of teacher challenges in Sexual and Reproductive health led to the development of a curriculum skills workshop teachers’ workshop was facilitated to assist in the development of culture-sensitive, faith-based approaches to the teaching of sexual and reproductive health. This component was crucial as sex is still considered a taboo subject and many teachers are reluctant to teach sex education in schools for fear of parental and wider community reprisal.

Workshops included art-as-social learning and general livelihoods in the areas of dance, music and visual arts. The success of Fiji and Tonga stagings and workshops has led to invitations from American Samoa, Samoa, Tahiti and Marshall Islands. Many attribute the success of the performance in changing the way that people view people living with HIV and AIDS, to the fact that the production is offered bilingually where large segments of the dialogue, songs and chants are

translated into vernacular. Bilingual performances increase the outreach and in both Fiji and Tonga, requests for TV re-runs saw the show being played on national television twice in Fiji and three times in Tonga. It was also shown on Sky Pacific Television which has a regional outreach.

**Festivals**

Festivals are generally associated with pageantry and celebratory festivities bringing communities together in fun-filled organized events, activities, games and food. In the Pacific, three examples of local festival efforts demonstrate how these forums may be used as effective advocacy, awareness and education platforms.

The *Kava Kuo Heka* festival was established in 2008 by the Ministry of Education, Women Affairs and Culture (MEWAC) in Tonga, to coincide with the King’s birthday Public Holiday. The series of events include formal symposiums and forum discussions on contemporary issues in Tongan socio-cultural contexts. A cultural exhibition of the works of Tongan artists living abroad is also a major part of the festival.

The festival organizers explain that their aim was to develop a festival that helped create awareness about culture and education and to “protect and promote cultural diversity in Tonga and to celebrate the UN year of rapprochement of cultures” (Kava Kuo Heka Official Program, 2010). The Honourable Minister for Education (2010) Tevita Hala Palefau argues that “culture is not a hindrance to economic development but is in fact the foundation for the cultivation and nurturing of sustainable economic development” (Ministry of Information, 2010).

In Tuvalu, the *King Tide Festival*, was launched in 2010 on the Climate Change theme: “Tuvalu E! The Tide is High!” It is interesting to see the resilience of this small Pacific island nation. Often used as the poster country for Climate change, Tuvaluans have decided to take a proactive approach in its efforts to create Climate Change awareness and to provide educational learning opportunities for its communities.

This festival celebrates the cultural heritage of the indigenous people including dancing, singing, story-telling, dramas, traditional games, food, heritage arts/crafts and workshops. The objective of the festival is to create awareness about the potential loss of land and culture if Tuvalu is submerged under the rising sea level. Activities include raising awareness about CC to adults and children.

The third festival example comes from Fiji in the form of an arts festival. The *Wasawasa Festival of Oceans* aims to create awareness about the need to protect the environment and strengthening communities through the arts. Established in 2008, the festival includes all forms of the arts including poetry, music, dance, visual arts, sculpture, installations, competitions, story-telling, mural painting, tree-huggers and workshops.

The festival is a collaborative stakeholder effort between local, regional and international agencies, environmental groups, youth groups, artists and artist groups, NGOs, CSOs, the corporate community and the wider community in particular vulnerable groups and children. This stakeholder-approach is based on the ideology that sustainability is everyone’s responsibility.

holistic, ensures local ownership, is participatory and is purposefully tailored towards empowerment of the local communities.

3) Past lessons / Future challenges

A reflexive approach to ESD praxis informs concerted efforts in ESD mainstreaming on three-levels: (1) ESD as a guiding philosophy; (2) ESD as a goal; and, (3) as a methodology. The Pacific experience promotes the Glocal approach emphasizing local realities within the wider global ESD discussion. An example of this is the SLEP project conducted in Tonga which highlights the need for greater understanding and building on local cultural notions of 'sustainability', and 'sustainable livelihoods'.

Pacific ESD practitioners agree that conceptualizing ESD means thinking about education holistically. It means rethinking the role of education including higher education in order that a clearer vision for 'transformative education for life-change' is developed. That is, changes in beliefs, attitude and ultimately informed conscientious behavioral change.

The most significant change at USP in has been changing the mindset of Pacific people about ESD. In formal education –this means moving beyond the classroom - chalk and talk, pen-and-paper teaching and testing; to developing pedagogies that emphasise authentic learning experiences, which are grounded in Indigenous Knowledge Systems whilst promoting the use of the arts, culture and practical applications such as service learning.

Appendix 2 presents a summary table of a SWOT Analysis conducted for this review. What is promising find is the level of national commitment to ESD and SD. This commitment is evident at the development planning level and in education. There is still some general confusion about the differentiation between Environment Education (EE) and ESD, but there are more conversations about ESD and sustainability in a range of sectors. The role of Higher Education is also being aligned with ESD mainstreaming evident at both the tertiary level as well as in national school curriculum across the Pacific islands.

Over reliance on foreign aid means ownership and self-determination of ESD efforts is not yet achieved and indicates the potential threat of 'unsustainable' ESD efforts which could cease once the funds ends. This, however, is changing and by building on local efforts towards understanding ESD and building on synergies of Education for All (EFA) and Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS), there is a resurgence of non-formal activities that promote skills for life-long learning. This Education for ‘continuity and survival’ highlights the need for wisdom and discernment towards critical mass and conscientization of Pacific citizens.

Some weaknesses identified include poor inter-institutional coordination in ESD highlighting the need for deliberate collaborations and networking. A second area of weakness is the poor use of the media as an awareness and education tool. There needs to be a concerted effort towards media sensitization of local journalists as this will increase awareness and education to bring about newsworthy stories about sustainability and ESD featuring more prominently rather than mere event news reporting.

Conclusion

The remaining three years of DESD (2012 – 2014) are critical to long-term sustainability in the Pacific. Currently there seems to be high levels of affirmation and commitment to ESD philosophies and goals. This is evident in the layers of change underway from policies to programs in formal and non-formal education. Cross-sectoral approaches also indicate some critical thinking about the best possible ways to ensure that SD and ESD are prioritized in some countries.

There are many challenges in Pacific ESD work, not the least of which remains a general lack of funding. Also problematic is limited/lack of access to funding opportunities, and/or poor knowledge of how to access those funds. A further general lack of sharing of success and failed practice means that there is little opportunity for shared learning experiences. Despite this, given that “Sustainable development” is a core priority in the Pacific Plan, it is probable that SD and ESD efforts will continue in the region beyond DESD, if political will prevails.

Appendix 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region/country or territory</th>
<th>Last population census</th>
<th>Population count at last census</th>
<th>Land area (km²)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Melanesia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>542,377</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fiji</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>837,271</td>
<td>18,273</td>
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<td>Vanuatu</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>234,023</td>
<td>12,281</td>
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<td><strong>MICRONESIA</strong></td>
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<td>Federated States of Micronesia</td>
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<td>2008</td>
<td>13,445</td>
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5 For details see [http://www.spc.int/sdp/](http://www.spc.int/sdp/)