

Chapter 34

Efforts to Promote Sustainable Development through Education in Cambodia

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ABSTRACT

This chapter provides an overview of how “Education for Sustainable Development” (ESD) is being promoted in Cambodia today through historical, social, and cultural contexts as part of the implementation of the goals of “Education for All (EFA),” from three perspectives: (1) acquisition/improvement of life skills; (2) enhancing environmental education; and (3) promotion of peace education and human rights education. It is worth noting here that although the educational activities conducted in Cambodia are not necessarily known as ESD, they certainly embody the concept of it. The chapter emphasizes that the positioning of EFA and ESD as essential lifelong learning is important to achieve a sustainable society.¹

INTRODUCTION

Cambodia was in a state of social disorder, particularly from the 1970s to 1990s, due to ongoing civil wars and genocide by the Pol Pot regime. However, the political situation and

social environment gradually began to stabilize in the late 1990s; presently, Cambodia is achieving steady economic growth. Under these circumstances, Cambodia has actively promoted national education reforms to improve the education situation (especially basic education), particularly since the year 2000, based on the goals of the international initiative “Education for All (EFA)” to expand basic education. The

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results of these reforms are gradually becoming apparent; however, many issues have also come to light, such as the aforementioned issue of education quality. Under such circumstances, promoting “Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)” is not only essential to achieve EFA but also it is expected to be relevant for improving the whole education situation in Cambodia. In many developing countries such as Cambodia, EFA and ESD cannot be treated separately. It is important to examine how a mutually complementary relationship is being built (or attempting to be built) between the two initiatives.³

First, this chapter considers the significance of the concepts of EFA and ESD occurring in attempts at education reform and education improvement in developing countries, and discusses the issues found therein. Within this discussion, this chapter examines why it is important to implement ESD on multiple occasions along with the promotion of EFA, with particular focus on the importance of the role of education in achieving a democratic society. This chapter will also consider the state of “citizenship education,” which is thought to hold a major key to the promotion of ESD.

Based on the above conceptual examination, this chapter then provides an overview of how ESD is being promoted in Cambodia today in historical, social, and cultural contexts as part of the implementation of EFA, from three perspectives: (1) acquisition/improvement of life skills; (2) enhancing environmental education; and (3) promotion of peace education and human rights education. It is worth noting here that although the educational activities conducted in Cambodia are not necessarily known as ESD, they certainly embody the concept of it.

ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

Education Reform in Developing Countries

It is widely known that the goals for international expansion of basic education, based on the concept of EFA, were established in 1990. However, there has been a trend in many countries since the 1990s of governments attempting to reduce costs for public services; the expansion of basic education means difficult decisions for governments as it requires policies and measures accompanied by increased government spending to increase capital and to secure teachers' jobs. In response to this situation, international organizations, such as the World Bank, and aid agencies from developed countries provided support by increasing funding for educational assistance⁴, but it is clear from the *EFA 2000 Assessment* and the *EFA Global Monitoring Report* that neither the amount contributed nor the way in which it was contributed was enough for many developing nations (UNESCO, 2000; 2002)⁵.

Furthermore, EFA is based on a functionalistic view of education in which the expansion of education is linked to social development; fundamentally, it positively values the social function of education from the perspective that education will promote national unification and the maintenance and reproduction of order. However, in the actual classroom, the expansion of basic education under the banner of EFA has been attempted impatiently; there have been cases where the quality of education in public schools has dropped, leading to a greater educational disparity between regions and social classes. Moreover, the policies of free primary education and decentralized education administration have not necessarily encouraged people to actively engage in school management at the local level. On the contrary, empirical research reveals that in some cases, this has had a negative effect on parent participation (Nishimura et al., 2008).

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