

# Ways Forward



## ENHANCING SYSTEMIC CAPACITY

Both sustainable development and global citizenship are epistemologically incompatible with an outcomes-oriented approach to education. Neither can be pursued in a manner that allows the success of a curriculum to be measured within any short-term planning horizon. These are necessarily long-term goals (Mochizuki with Hatakeyama, 2016; Bower, 2004), requiring planning over a long-term cycle (e.g. 15 years rather than the typical 5) in the following areas:

- Enhancing systemic strength in order to gather and deploy the best available academic resources for designing the curricula, syllabi and textbooks that engage with sustainable development and global citizenship.
- Rebuilding teacher confidence through systemic reforms that bolster teachers' intellectual autonomy, responsibility and capacity for absorbing

sustainable development and global citizenship, and adapting their pedagogical practice appropriately.

- Equipping primary and lower secondary schools with the resources teachers will require to fulfill their pedagogic responsibilities in relation to sustainable development and global citizenship.

Our report demonstrates that juggling new ideas and creating artificially circumscribed space for them within school curricula are strong tendencies in many countries. This may result in the transmission of information, but the impact on learning is likely to be limited. At the same time, acquiring the systemic capacity to develop appropriate curricula and, especially, teaching materials, and to engage teachers in this process, represents an immense challenge for many societies. Many countries across Asia lack sufficient systemic capacity to adapt their curricula and provide appropriate professional development for their teachers; while those that possess a more robust and sophisticated curriculum development and teacher training infrastructure typically organise this in a highly centralised, bureaucratic and conformist fashion. Assistance with the development of systemic capacity in the areas of curriculum development and teacher training is one area in which UNESCO can provide significant help, but this cannot ignore or downplay the significance of the political and social context for educational reform.

Political instability (or the threat of it), conflict and disasters (natural or man-made) can severely erode the capacity of any schooling system to embark on reform, but it can also direct policymaking priorities towards ends that may be diametrically opposed to those with which we are concerned here. Such tensions are highly salient in a number of the societies examined in this report. As is illustrated vividly in the case of post-Soviet Central Asia, and to varying extents elsewhere, political instability tends to fuel the impetus for often militantly nationalistic approaches to education, the possible ‘outcome’ of which risks swamping all other outcomes. The monomaniacal preoccupation with measuring and accountability that animates many globetrotting educational experts and ministerial technocrats often involves willful blindness to these kinds of crucial but unmeasurable factors. This report seeks to highlight, and hopefully correct, that tendency.

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE ACTION**

Despite the global consensus on the importance of education for peace, sustainable development and global citizenship that SDG 4.7 represents, integration of these concepts in national curricula remains an under-researched and under-theorized area. The aim of this review was not to gather and showcase ‘good practices’ self-reported by countries or those agencies and organisations mandated to promote ESD, GCED and other related areas. The current study affirms that efforts to achieve the necessary educational changes need to

be considered in tandem with reforms to political and social structures, and reappraisal of the cultural or ideological assumptions that underpin them. Education needs to be seen as a process that leads learners to form their own pictures of the world, arousing curiosity and facilitating its transformation into critical inquiry.

**1. Rethink the fundamental priorities of education policy.** A narrow economism dominates much contemporary educational debate. The potential of education for promoting collective prosperity and individual opportunity is beyond doubt. But schooling is important not just for its capacity to confer job-ready ‘skills’ or build ‘human capital’. It can both divide and unite, oppress and liberate, warp minds and enlighten them, and by promoting unsustainable socio-economic models ultimately impoverish rather than enrich us. Policymakers urgently need to place the promotion of peace, sustainability and a consciousness of shared humanity at the centre of their vision for educational development. In UNESCO parlance, therefore, SDG 4.7 should be seen not just as one of a menu of educational ‘goals’, but as the central goal around which all others revolve.

**a. Put education for peace at centre stage in SDG 4.7 implementation.**

Despite the explicit reference to ‘culture of peace and non-violence’ in the wording of SDG 4.7, UNESCO is promoting ESD and GCED as discrete pillars of SDG 4.7. The articulation of these goals needs to be rendered more coherent and forceful, and this should be done through acknowledging the central importance of education for peace.

**b. Rethink the priorities of subject curricula, particularly with respect to history, civics and language teaching.**

The role of history and civics education in political socialisation, and its potential for fostering peace or fueling conflict, has been much analysed and discussed. Less widely acknowledged is the role of language education in this respect – despite the intimate relationship between language, identities and civil conflict in many societies, not least across post-colonial South Asia (Guha, 2007, pp. 186-200; pp. 593-95). Foreign and second language teaching has considerable potential for enhancing understanding across communities and nations. However, opportunities for learning languages other than one’s ‘mother tongue’ (especially where this is the single national language) and English tend to be rare across most of Asia. This is related in part to the heavy curricular emphasis on maths and science. Rebalancing the curriculum to give greater space for the study of other Asian languages, and taking steps (at the level of tertiary education and teacher training) to build capacity for instruction in these languages, are measures that deserve serious consideration for the sake of promoting sustainable peace throughout Asia.

**c. Emphasise nature study and arts as a component of basic education:**

In addition to freeing up curricular space for the study of other Asian languages, space also needs to be made in school timetables for

other areas of learning that are less susceptible to monitoring and measurement, but are nonetheless crucial to realising a humanistic vision of education. These include the kinds of opportunities to experience the natural environment mentioned above (e.g. through gardening activities at primary level). They also include the teaching of music, art, drama and dance – aesthetic activities with the potential to contribute significantly to fostering appreciation of cultural diversity and a culture of peace. This report has had little to say about such activities, since its focus has been primarily on ‘core’ school subjects. But precisely this fact speaks to the curricular marginalisation of learning in these areas. This is an issue which deserves more research and attention from policymakers and curriculum developers.

- d. **Enhance the role of educational research in informing policy and curriculum development.** Involvement in education policy making of academics from a wide range of social science disciplines is necessary to ground policy discourses and decisions in contemporary social realities. But relevant capacity, or a willingness to use it, is often lacking across Asia, given the highly centralised and bureaucratized nature of policymaking, and the tendency to treat expert advice largely as a source of post-hoc legitimation for official decisions. Especially in developing countries, rigorous academic research into educational issues conducted by local researchers is often scarce. Building capacity to conduct such research, as well as official willingness to respect its findings, is urgently needed to create a sound basis for curriculum reforms.
2. **Create a platform to bring together experts in child-centred education and curriculum design for core subjects at primary and secondary levels.** Sweeping calls for the integration of ESD, GCED and other related concepts across all types and levels of education (formal and non-formal, kindergarten to postgraduate) mean that a necessary focus on the particular challenge of designing curricula for basic schooling has largely been lost. Re-designing the curriculum of core school subjects to promote sustainable development and global citizenship calls for the highest levels of multi-disciplinary academic expertise and awareness. Academic expertise is required not only in the area of curriculum design, but also in the psychology and sociology of education (to investigate how youngsters think and learn in different circumstances), and in the pedagogic sciences.
3. **Promote a participatory model of curriculum development.** Teachers are often treated as functionaries whose job is to execute decisions taken by higher-level experts and officers. It is important to treat teachers as partners in curricular design and planning debates rather than simply as delivery technicians. Lack of professional excitement, interest and autonomy is causing ambitious teachers in many societies to leave the profession. It is crucial to involve teachers in shaping curriculum policy

that affects classroom life. Teachers who lack autonomy and freedom to think themselves can hardly enhance these capacities in their students. We must therefore look to restore the confidence of teachers as autonomous professionals modeling the kind of active and engaged citizenship we seek to promote amongst students – rather than treating them as passive minions of controlling authorities. Efforts must also be made to engage with debates over teaching methods and the potential of technology to assist teachers at the level of basic schooling – without seeing technology as a panacea or substitute for critical reflection on the goals of education.

4. **Reassess the international emphasis on monitoring and measuring educational ‘outcomes’.** Policymakers need to work from broader conceptions of the purposes of education, and focus much more on improving *inputs* – such as curriculum development, teacher training and teaching materials – rather than simply on monitoring *outputs*. Competitive mechanisms and testing procedures aimed at securing ‘accountability’ tend to lead to curricular narrowing and reduced teacher autonomy and confidence. In line with 2, 3 and 4 above, involvement in designing these ‘inputs’ also needs to be less centralised and more participatory.

In the case of a concept like sustainable development, learning will mean something worthwhile or life-long if the concept is incorporated into a child’s lived ‘reality’ (Piaget, 1976). This kind of incorporation can hardly be demonstrated by testing at the conclusion of a module, no matter how carefully the test is designed. A long-term view of learning calls for radical review of prevailing ideas about evidence, outcomes and systemic accountability. What constitutes ‘evidence’ in the field of education requires thorough reconsideration if we wish to promote new forms of learning that are really transformative in their impact on lifestyles, behaviour, attitudes and values.

Finally, it must be stressed again that any suggestions for specific actions in the sphere of schooling must take into account the context beyond the school gates. While acknowledging the importance of reconciling curricular objectives and pedagogical approaches with children’s ‘lived reality’, we must also recognise the need to transform that reality in ways that schooling alone cannot accomplish. Preaching the virtues of peace, harmony, tolerance, environmentalism and creative autonomy within the classroom means little if the reality confronting children outside it consists of savage competition for individual, familial or national advantage; denial of shared public responsibility for the less fortunate; impotence in the face of state authority; the branding of political critique as deviant and treacherous; and the habitual demonisation of ‘enemies’ abroad and at home. The young are liable to read the actions of their elders, not just their words. All of us, not just teachers, who wish to nurture in the next generation the qualities required for peace, sustainable development and global citizenship, are going to have to lead by example.