



The Mutually Complementary Relationship between EFA and ESD in Cambodia

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Abstract This paper examines 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 paper analyzes 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 paper 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 paper 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 and 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 its principles and characteristics. Although EFA focuses on the diverse states of education in and out of school, its chief concern lies in enhancing the quantity and quality of school education. Moreover, fundamentally, it is public organizations, such as governments under international agreements, who take on most of the responsibility of promoting EFA, expanding basic education together with various other stakeholders. In contrast to this so-called top-down feature of EFA, ESD is a more bottom-up operation, based on autonomic educational activities by proactive citizens; the areas it covers include a wide range of issues, such as daily life, social forms, and the natural environment. As a conclusion, the paper emphasizes that the positioning of EFA and ESD as essential lifelong learning is important to achieve a sustainable society.

Keywords life-skills, environmental education, peace education, human rights education, Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), Education for All (EFA)

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 results of these reforms are gradually becoming apparent; however, many issues have also come to light, such as the 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.¹

First, this paper considers the significance of the concepts of EFA and ESD in the context of education reform and education improvement in developing countries, and discusses the issues

found therein. Within this discussion, this paper 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 paper will also consider the state of “citizenship education,” which is thought to hold a major key to the promotion of ESD.

Following the examination of the concepts of EFA and ESD, this paper 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 as such, they certainly embody its principles and characteristics.

LINKAGES BETWEEN “EFA” AND “ESD”

It is widely known that the international goals to promote 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.

One notable issue in the promotion of EFA is the emphasis on achieving macro-level objectives; no specific initiatives are suggested for tackling issues such as rectifying regional disparity within a country or improving learning outcomes in schools. One reason for this is a policy-level connection between the strong demand from the aid providers for international targets to be reached by 2015 and the government’s motivation to maintain power and stability. This has led to situations where despite substantial funds being invested into basic education, ordinary people are not guaranteed the opportunity to participate in the policy dialog process and education is often turning into a governmental means for populism.

On the other hand, under global capitalism-in which funds, goods, labor, and technology move freely-economy and culture become internationalized, and with phenomena such as an increase in migration, there is a greater necessity for multicultural education. As a consequence, many countries are promoting “citizenship education” to develop democracy and cultivate community ethics. Furthermore, with the transfer of the state’s redistributive function to the market accompanying the rise of neoliberalism, the power of state has become more relative. The relationship between the state and individual citizens has altered; “independent/autonomous citizens” are expected to survive in a competitive society at their own risk. Moreover, many developing nations in which the social and political systems are still fragile often have multicultural, multiracial, and multilingual settings, making national unity through education and the cultivation of a national identity essential. This indicates that, in reality, education reforms based on neoliberal ideology are often being promoted in a mutually complementary relationship with a nationalist trend of thought.

Thus, as many countries search for an education system that meets the needs and aspirations of both the individual and the state, which may seem contradictory at first, it is necessary to ask who ought to take charge of new education reforms. The answer to that question is “citizens,” first and foremost; the government and international organizations—the public actors—ought to keep playing a supporting role to the independent and autonomous reforms of “citizens.” To further deliberate on this question, it is necessary to look at ESD, an attempt at “bottom-up reforms” aimed at independent/autonomous education reforms at the local level, such as reforms by individuals and communities. This is because ESD can potentially provide an opposing or complementary discussion to the “top-down reforms” seen in the EFA promotion process.

The concept of ESD that covers diverse areas initially came out of a concern for the “quality of education.” Behind this is the fact that despite EFA advocating a concept of basic education to cover a wide range of areas, in reality, there was little awareness of education’s initial role in raising “citizens” who are able to build sustainable society, while many countries became more interested in the quality of academic learning achievements in formal education. By contrast, ESD,

which raises “citizens” as members of a democratic society and the community and is supported by those “citizens,” is a conceptual mechanism to broaden the scope of the “quality of education.”

This can be seen in the fact that the Education Sector in UNESCO headquarters established a Section for Education for Sustainable Development within the Division for the Promotion of Quality around the year 2002—the period in which the concept of ESD was being proposed—with UNESCO having placed the role that ESD plays in planning for improving the quality of education to be important.² Although there is not really any general international consensus on how to position ESD as an educational practice, the author considers that the significance of promoting ESD will be made clear by returning it to its original purpose of improving the quality of education.

Although the ESD concept focuses on covering a wide range of issues, its characteristic is that it places each individual person as a starting point, irrespective of the issue. The existing discussions on developing countries tend to emphasize the quantitative aspects of the expansion of education; there has been little interest in the qualitative aspects of what is being taught. Furthermore, where the quality of education has been considered, there has been little interest in subjects that deal with the development of individuals as engaged and responsible citizens—namely, citizenship, ethics, and values—compared to the excessive interest in the level of achievement in academic subjects. Furthermore, the public actors in ESD—the governments and international organizations—are expected to support the independent and autonomous “bottom-up reforms” by “citizens”; this is the way education policies should be formulated and implemented in developing countries in the post-neoliberal era.

Conceptually, ESD can be independent and autonomous educational activities at the local level of schools and communities. In practice, however, pressures from administration play a major role in shaping ESD and people on the ground may easily follow the direction set by the government. Promotion of ESD by governments and international organizations like UNESCO and the United Nations University (UNU), therefore, has the possibility of contradicting the original idea of ESD. It is critically important to synergize citizen-led ESD and government-led EFA.

ESD IMPLEMENTATION IN CAMBODIA

This paper has discussed the conceptual framework of EFA and ESD; on the basis of this discussion, it now examines how these two concepts are implemented in Cambodian education.

Acquisition and improvement of life skills

The basic strategy of the Cambodian education sector is a five-year plan known as the *Education Strategic Plan (ESP)*. Four of these five-year plans have been put in place since 2000: (1) 2001-2005; (2) 2004-2008; (3) 2006-2010; (4) 2009-2013. The education sector has created a five-year program called the *Education Sector Support Program (ESSP)* as an implementation program for the ESP (the five-year period is the same as the ESP). Furthermore, the education sector has also set in place the *EFA National Action Plan 2003-2015* to deal with basic education. The highest priority in each of these policy documents is implementing “fair access to high quality education” at the basic education stage.

However, despite the provision of these education policies, there is probably still room left for improvement in terms of the quality of education, such as textbooks, teaching materials, curriculum, teaching methods, teacher training, and school facilities (Hirosato & Kitamura, 2009). In promoting ESD, formal education (especially primary and lower secondary education), the most basic educational foundation within a society, is more desirable than anything; however, in Cambodia, there are major issues with the quality of basic level school education. Most of all, it is essential to improve the quality of teachers who play a central role in school education. From that perspective, the National Institute of Education (NIE), the main teacher training institution in Cambodia, aims to provide training that incorporates ESD while teaching, especially in the secondary teacher training program, and to improve the quality of education of the regular curriculum while also promoting ESD (UNESCO, 2010).

While Cambodia needs education to support sustainable development, it first needs to raise the quality of basic education. Studies on the quality of education have often tended to focus only on the level of achievement in academic subjects (so-called scholastic improvement). As previously mentioned, however, education has a major role to play in fostering engaged and responsible citizens and critical thinkers who can shape a better future. It is essential to promote broad-perspective initiatives such as ESD.

Accordingly, initiatives to promote ESD are being undertaken, particularly in various areas that cannot be covered by basic school education alone. The most typical initiative is education with the aim of acquiring and improving “life skills.” The *Policy for Curriculum Development 2005-2009*, adopted in 2004, aimed to introduce a new subject known as “Local Life Skill Program (LLSP)” from grades 1 to 10 to raise citizens capable of contributing to building a healthy and productive society. This policy defines life skills as the “intellectual, personal, interpersonal, and vocational skills that enable informed decision-making, effective communication, and coping and self-management skills that contribute to a healthy and productive life” (MoEYS, 2004, p.8). The introduction of these new life skills programs shows that there is an emphasis on educating public-minded citizens and developing useful skills for life in society.

The acquisition and improvement of life skills in school education is particularly conducted through vocational training, health education, HIV/AIDS education, and human rights education. However, school education, which focuses on passing on information and skills in academic subjects, cannot adequately pass on life skills, that is, knowledge and skills covering a wide range of areas. Furthermore, life skills are necessary for everybody, regardless of age or gender. Since school education only targets a certain age bracket, it is not possible to promote the acquisition of life skills to many people in Cambodian society. Consequently, non-formal education is very important.

In order to promote non-formal education, a number of villages have established Community Learning Centers (CLCs) or similar educational organizations. These CLCs provide non-formal education, making use of existing facilities wherever possible, such as temples, village offices, homes of village heads, etc., and building new facilities wherever necessary. In 1994, UNESCO and the National Federation of UNESCO Associations in Japan provided assistance to the Cambodian government to establish the first CLCs in the provinces of Siam Reap, Battambang, and Kandal. Support then began to come in from other aid agencies and NGOs. Presently, villages in several provinces have established CLCs (or similar educational organizations) and implemented literacy training, vocational training for income generation and family education for childcare, playing a major role in fostering people’s life skills. An important feature of CLCs is that although they receive assistance from the government, they are basically managed and operated by villagers. This type of community-based style of management is essential to embody the concept of ESD. The aforementioned *EFA National Action Plan* identifies the importance of CLCs in implementing non-formal education.

Supplementing environmental education

Although the term ESD is not generally used in the Cambodian education sector, the field of environmental education is one area where education activity is actively promoted based on the concept of ESD.

In 2009, Cambodia’s Ministry of Environment set out its five-year plan, *the Five-Year Strategic Plan on Environmental Education for 2009-2013*, asserting the importance of “Environmental education for sustainable development” (EESD) at the beginning of the policy document (Department of Environmental Education and Communication, 2009). This *Strategic Plan* stipulates the *Strategic Goal and Action Plan on EESD for 2009-2013* from an ESD perspective, in particular.

If we examine these initiatives, we see that they are plans to further enrich basic environmental education and do not necessarily focus on ESD. Nevertheless, providing “training on environmental issues and ESD” under the human resource development initiative aims at fostering people with a deep understanding of ESD to become involved in environmental education. Moreover, at-

tempting to raise people's awareness by spreading information on environmental issues will require the use of a wide range of media, from printed media, such as books and magazines, to electronic media, such as the Internet. The use of printed media is very significant in Cambodia, where provincial towns and villages still have limited access to electronic media, despite the fact that in recent years an increasing number of people own mobile phones and that internet cafes and the like are becoming more commonplace.

Furthermore, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, the Ministry of Tourism, and the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts are working together on a master plan for building a learning program on environmental protection and biodiversity in the Tonle Sap Basin.³ This learning program is known as a "learning laboratory"; it aims to provide opportunities to learn about sustainable development while coming into close contact with the actual natural environment. The program can, for example, deepen people's understanding of how a body of scientific, experiential, and indigenous knowledge about protecting the biosphere can be used to implement sustainable development. Moreover, the program can also have people think about policies to make improvements in the environment (such as biodiversity conservation), human life and livelihood (such as reducing poverty) or economic benefits (such as increased income through developing the tourism industry). Other countries outside Cambodia, such as Vietnam, are also building these "learning laboratories," supported by UNESCO (Nguyen et al., 2010).

Peace education and human rights education

Cambodia entered a state of war in the late 1960s affected by chaotic situations of the Vietnam War; a coup was staged in 1970, followed by a civil war. In the 1970s, Cambodia came under the Pol Pot regime of the Khmer Rouge and their radical Maoist ideology. The political instability continued into the 1980s with interference by Vietnam and the Soviet Union; the Cambodian society remained at the height of chaos until the late 1990s. However, after the signing of the 1991 Paris Peace Agreement, the social situation did begin to gradually stabilize despite various issues, and Cambodia began to show a significant economic growth in the 2000s.

Given this history, more than anything, the people in Cambodia want to maintain a peaceful society that they have taken such great pains to bring about. In order not to repeat the tragedies of violence and atrocities in the past, it is important to address peace and human rights through education. This paper will now outline how Cambodia is implementing peace education and human rights education, which constitute the main fields of ESD.

While peace education exists in Cambodia, in reality, there has been a limited number of classes on peace education in schools until recently. For example, it was not until recently that history classes began to adequately address the issue of what the Pol Pot regime did in the 1970s. Behind this was the thinking that children would be able to envisage a bright future for Cambodia if they were not taught the negative aspects of history, as well as the viewpoint that it was unnecessary to teach children things that would only fuel conflict between people as many people who supported the Khmer Rouge are still alive and living in society. However, in 2003, the Cambodian government and the United Nations agreed to the establishment of a special tribunal to administer justice for the genocide of the Pol Pot regime. Investigations began in 2006 and the trials are still being conducted at the present time. Because of these developments, Cambodia has begun to acknowledge the importance of teaching children the accurate facts of this negative part of history and has begun to publish revised history textbooks and supplementary teaching material *The History of Democratic Cambodia*. Initiatives toward peace education in schools are gradually starting to increase.

Public organizations and associations as well as NGOs have also been actively involved in implementing peace education in Cambodia, at times with overseas support. One example of this is the implementation of peace education through the Tuol Sleng Museum, a concentration camp during the Pol Pot regime. The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) established the "Okinawa-Cambodia Peace Museum Collaboration" Grassroots Technical Cooperation Project to support this. In this project, the Okinawa Prefectural Peace Memorial Museum, the implementing or-

ganization, taught the curators and staff of Tuol Sleng Museum about the “peace museum” concept and the know-how necessary to operate it, such as data collection and preservation methods, and peace education activities. The two museums continue to have dialog to further enhance their respective peace education activities.⁴

Furthermore, the aforementioned NIE teacher training program provides training on World Heritage Education as part of its ESD training. This training also encourages the consideration of peace issues through world heritage.

Cambodia is also undertaking human rights education in the form of government-led programs as well as educational activities outside the school classroom. In particular, various projects have been developed by schools, public organizations, and NGOs since 2005 to promote human rights education based on the “United Nations World Programme for Human Rights Education” adopted by the UN Commission on Human Rights in 2004.⁵

These projects include human rights workshops and the publication of a Khmer language version of the “Human Rights Education Lesson Plans for Southeast Asian Schools,” which teaches about human rights issues and situations with a particular focus on human rights in the Southeast Asian region. The Cambodia Office of the United Nations Centre for Human Rights and the Cambodian Buddhist Society, a human rights NGO, also created the “Human Rights and Buddhism Training Curriculum for Buddhist Monks and Civil Servants” and are engaging in other initiatives using Cambodia’s traditional cultural resource of Buddhism to promote human rights education.⁶

CONCLUSION

This paper has outlined Cambodian initiatives to promote ESD, based on its relation to EFA. As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, a consideration of Cambodian education cannot separate EFA and ESD, but should constantly be aware of the mutually complementary relationship between them. Furthermore, the positioning of EFA and ESD as essential lifelong learning is important to achieve a sustainable society.

In particular, although EFA focuses on the diverse states of education in and out of school, its chief concern lies in enhancing the quantity and quality of school education. Moreover, fundamentally, it is public organizations, such as governments under international agreements, who take on most of the responsibility of promoting EFA, expanding basic education together with various other stakeholders. In contrast to this so-called top-down feature of EFA, ESD is a more bottom-up operation, based on autonomic educational activities by proactive citizens; the areas it covers include a wide range of issues, such as daily life, social forms, and the natural environment.

Accordingly, this paper has provided an introduction on ESD in Cambodian education while being always conscious of its relation to EFA (for instance, its placement within school education). It is extremely important to bring ESD into schools from the perspective that it is vital to improve the quality of education not only to raise the level of achievement in academic subjects but also to pass on important knowledge and skills necessary for acquiring and advancing life skills. Furthermore, school education and non-formal education can be organically connected by being based on the concept of ESD. As outlined in this paper, various initiatives for this have been set in place, with active measures being taken. However, we cannot deny that many initiatives are still insufficient, both quantitatively and qualitatively.

To improve this situation, as previously mentioned, ESD initiatives should fundamentally be promoted by citizens. At the same time, this cannot be done without active participation by public organizations such as the government. The United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development will end in 2014, but long term initiatives to promote ESD should continue.

I sincerely hope that the aforementioned active ESD initiatives will continue to grow and further enhance the future of education in Cambodia and that this, in turn, will contribute to the expansion of EFA. From my heart, I hope that raising “citizens” who can give much thought to democracy and public morals will create a sustainable Cambodian society.

NOTES

- 1) See Wade & Parker (2008) for general discussion on the relationship between ESD and EFA.
- 2) Afterwards, there was repeated reorganization within UNESCO and the position of ESD as aiming to improve the quality of education became ambiguous.
- 3) See the Ministry of Tourism website for the Master Plan for Sustainable Tourism Development in Peri-Tonle Sap Lake and Establishment of a Learning Laboratory for Sustainability (<http://www.mot.gov.kh/ministry-activity.php?id=15> [accessed 2-25-2012]).
- 4) For further details on these projects, see the JICA website (http://www.jica.go.jp/topics/2009/20091026_01.html [accessed 2-25-2012]).
- 5) For details on the United Nations World Programme for Human Rights Education, see the website of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. (<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/education/training/programme.htm> [accessed 2-25-2012]).
- 6) See Kimura (2000; 2007; 2008) for the present status of human rights education in Cambodia.

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