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Education for Sustainable Development and Human Security

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Abstract

Over the past decade, the concepts of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and

human security have emerged in international development and developmental studies.

This paper aims to study the two concepts comparatively. Both concepts cover a lot of

common ground, including the idea of sustainable development that is now increasingly

seen as an important agenda. However, they are still new and often abstract. Many times,

they bring about confusion and difficulties in implementation. Although an exploration of

the conceptual interdependence of ESD and human security has a great potential, such

research has rarely been undertaken. This comparative study might suggest the

interrelation between ESD and human security as well as some choices and challenges in

order to achieve the concepts both as destinations and means of a more sustainable future.

Education for Sustainable Development and Human Security

Over the past decade, the concepts of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and human security have emerged in international development and developmental studies. Although the formation and the development of these two concepts seem to be slightly different, they cover a lot of common ground.

Today, ESD becomes a concept and terminology that is being promoted and driven by different institutional platforms especially organizations under UN umbrella including UNESCO and UNEP. It is being increasingly recognized through the influence of Agenda 21 and the more recent World Summit on Sustainable Development at Johannesburg (2002). The Summit broadened the vision of sustainable development and reaffirmed the educational objectives of the Millennium Development Goals and the Education for All. Following the Plan for Implementation of the Johannesburg Summit, the United Nations General Assembly adopted Resolution 57/254 on the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, 2005-2014, and designed UNESCO as lead agency for the promotion of the Decade (JBIC, 2004). Since then, the concept of ESD has been gaining momentum as one of vital platforms to achieve the goal of sustainable development.

During this same decade, the concept of human security has been around within the international system as well. The concept debuted in 1994 when UNDP issued the

Human Development Report and identified human security for the first time by marking

the distinction between "freedom from want" and "freedom from fear" (UNDP, 1994).

Since then the concept has been adopted by a number of states and international

organizations. Between 2001 and 2003, Canada and Japan provided the leadership and

funding to support the concept of human security on global agenda. Since then, it has

become a topic of reform agendas in the UN and regional organization, such as the

European Union (Tadjbukhash, 2005).

Despite all the interest and support from several groups, governments and

international bodies, ESD and human security, however, have not been adopted and

mainstreamed. To maximize the benefit of the concepts and ensure that they will bring a

better and more sustainable future to all of us, the interconnection between ESD and

human security should be addressed.

Although an exploration of the conceptual interdependence of ESD and human

security has a great potential, such research has rarely been undertaken. Many times,

education is considered the cradle of human security. Lertchalolarr and Sinlarat (2005

p.91) revealed that to secure human capability, education is directly concerned since

education in every aspect empowers human beings to "realize their potential, survive in

their society and environment, have good quality of life, and have dignity". Another

blueprint of human security, *Human Security Now*, by the Commission on Human

Security also dedicated its chapter 7 to "Knowledge, skills and values for human

security". In this chapter, the report highlighted that "education can give people freedom

to promote their human security and that of others" (Commission on Human Security,

2003, p.115). However, most of the studies and documents on human security tend to

focus only on basic education without mentioning ESD. Therefore, this comparative

study aims to suggest the interrelation between ESD and human security, as well as some

choices and challenges in order to achieve the concepts both as destinations and means of

a more sustainable future.

ESD: what is it really?

It is impossible to move to a further discussion or debate without first defining

ESD. However, defining ESD itself can bring about a huge debate. It can be said that to

answer "what is ESD?" can be the first point of contention.

Although ESD has been increasingly recognized as an emerging field of

education especially since the Decade of ESD was initiated, the precise definition of ESD

is still vague and abstract. Many meanings of ESD have been proffered, but there is no

single universal one. Moreover, its concept differs under different agencies. Even in

Resolution 57/254 on the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable

Development, there was no reference that can be referred as a definition of ESD (UN,

2002). The least ambiguous definition of ESD is probably found in UNESCO's

Promotion of Global Partnership for the UN Decade of ESD: The International

Implementation Scheme for the Decade in brief (UNESCO, 2006).

Still, rather than a single solid definition, the booklet offered three definitions.

The first one is "Education that enables people to foresee, face up to and solve the

problems that threaten life on our planet". The second definition stated that ESD also

means "education that disseminates the values and principles that are the basis of

sustainable development (intergenerational equity, gender parity, social tolerance,

poverty reduction, environmental protection and restoration, natural resource

conservation, and just and peaceful societies)". However, the meaning that seems to be

the easiest to understand is the last one, "education that highlights the complexity and

interdependence of three spheres, the environment, society— broadly defined to include

culture –and the economy" (UNESCO, 2006, p.5).

ESD and human security

Besides both emerging concepts having unclear definitions, ESD and human security also share other common ground, including conceptual similarities. Multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary seem to be a common characteristic of the two concepts. UNDP's *Human Development Report 1994* proposed that threats to human security could be grouped in seven categories: economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security and political security. The report also stated that one of the four main essential characteristics of the concept is that "the components of human security are *interdependent*" (UNDP, 1994, p. 22). In this regard, the main seven components of human security are interrelated to each other as it is shown in Figure 1.

ESD is also based on multidisciplinary approach, as Sheldon Shaeffer, director of UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education acknowledged that "ESD is interdisciplinary and holistic" (UNESCO Bangkok, 2007, p.iii).
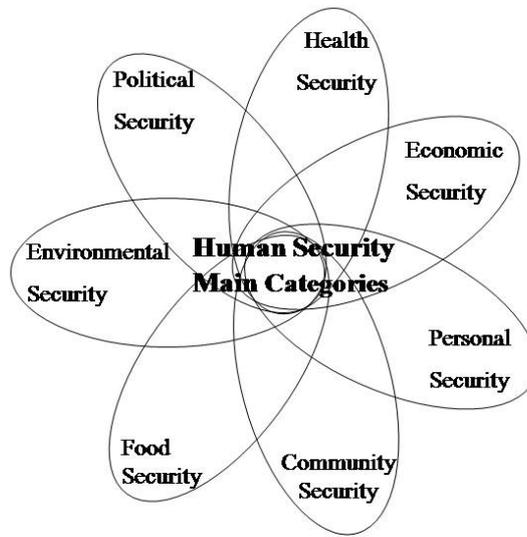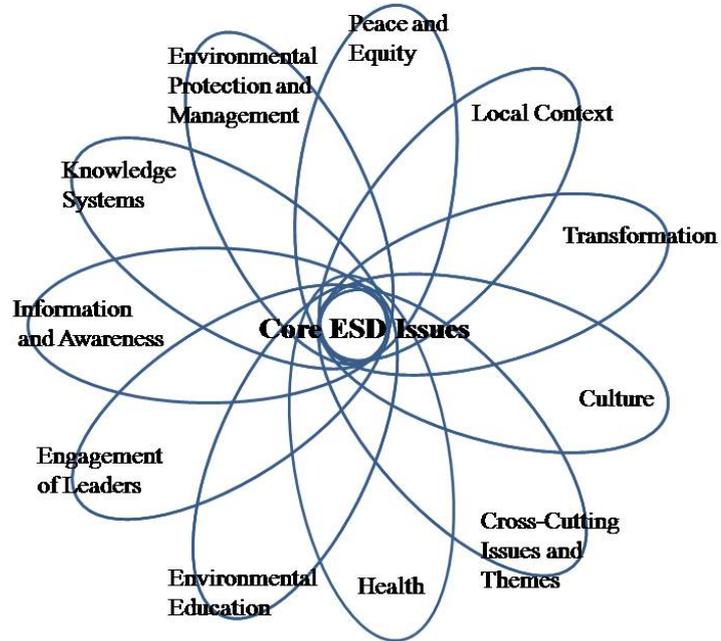
Figure 1. Concept of human security

Figure 2. Concept of ESD

Although ESD contents are mainly based on three sustainable development pillars,

the environment, society and economy, other areas such as culture, health, peace and

equity are also integrated as UNESCO Bangkok suggested "Core ESD Issues" and its

examples (UNESCO Bangkok, 2005, p.2) in Figure 2. Comparing the key concepts in

Figure 1 and 2, they overlap and link in many points as we can see in Table 1. Health and

Environmental issues are obviously overlapping. However, other components are also

closely intertwined. Economic security can be boosted by transformation and

engagement of leaders. Biodiversity and climate change greatly affect food security.

Personal security relate to engagement of leaders, information and awareness, as well as

many issues in cross-cutting issues and themes, including human rights and gender equity.

Intercultural understanding and community empowerment can be considered as a key

component to community security. Human rights, governance and peace issues also

closely link with political security.

Table 1. *Core ESD issues with examples and human security key components*

Core ESD issues	Example of the issues	Related human security components
Information and Awareness	Eco-media, media literacy, ICT	Economic and personal Security
Knowledge Systems	Learning for local and indigenous knowledge, integrating traditional and modern technologies	Community Security
Environmental Protection and Management	Biodiversity, climate change, natural resources, conservation	Food and Environmental Security
Peace and Equity	Conflict resolution, peace, equity, appropriate development, democracy	Community and political community
Local Context	Community Development, empowerment	Community Security
Transformation	Rural transformation, urbanization, sustainable habitat, water, sanitation public infrastructure	Economic and Health Security
Culture	Diversity and intercultural/interfaith understanding	Community Security
Cross-Cutting Issues and Themes	Human rights, citizenship, gender equality, sustainable future, holistic approaches, innovation, partnerships, sustainable production and consumption, governance	Environmental, Personal and Political Security
Health	HIV/AIDS, malaria	Health Security
Environmental Education	Integrated pest management, environmental awareness, community recycling programs	Environmental Security
Engagement of Leaders	Professional training courses, executive education, partnerships, networking	Economic and personal security

Note: The data from column 1 and 2 are from *Promotion of global partnership for the UN decade of ESD: The international implementation scheme for the decade in brief (p.2),* by UNESCO Bangkok, 2005.

According to the report entitled *Our Common Future* that was launched by the World Commission on Environment and Development or the Brundtland Committee in 1987, sustainable development is widely accepted as "development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs" (p. 54). In this regard, sustainable development concept also reflects human

security since it is ensuring "freedom from want" of present and future generations (Good Governance for Social Development and Environment Institution, 2003, p.247). Meanwhile, as a large number of global security issues, such as terrorism, climate change and natural disasters, including the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and Hurricane Katrina in 2005, have highlighted the fragility and sensitivity of human security, ESD can be also a vital tool to ensure "freedom from fear".

In *Human Development Report 1994*, UNDP revealed that "the real threats to human security in the next century will arise more from the actions of millions of people than from aggression by a few nations" (p.32). The report also indentified many forms of threats in the next century including environmental degradation and international terrorism (UNDP, 1994, p.32). To prevent the threat of human security and ensure global sustainable future, only to achieve the universal basic education might not be enough. ESD should be integrated to ensure that individuals are empowered to contribute to global human security and sustainable development.

Choices and challenges

Although ESD and human security are the concepts that emerged within the same period and are both being propelled by states and various organizations especially UN

agencies, surprisingly, ESD documents almost never mentioned about human security and vice versa. As the two concepts share several components in similar, they should be linked or integrated to support each other. ESD can be employed as a tool to ensure human security. At the same time, human security can be viewed as one of ESD's goals. However, the vagueness in the definition and concept of ESD and human security seems to be a handicap. There is no single universal definition for both concepts. This may be a big burden given that definitions do count when consensus is sought for cooperation.

An examination of the root of ESD's definitional problem requires the examination of the definition of sustainable development. Although the most recognized definition of "sustainable development" seems to be the one that was defined in *Our Common Future*, it is still difficult to understand. It can be interpreted and recreated differently, which can lead to confusion and contradiction. Fien & Tilbury (2002) even consider sustainable development as a concept that " imprecisely defined, ambiguous, socially and culturally contested, and therefore subject to both a wide range of interpretations" (as cited in Stevenson, 2006, p.278).

As a result of difficulties in defining "sustainable development" and the lack of a single universal meaning, it is difficult to place sustainable development as the center of any conceptualization. When the hollow concept of sustainable development is placed at

the core of ESD, unsurprisingly, there is the same hollowness in the concept of ESD as well.

Although human security might not need to directly deal with the terminological ambiguity of "sustainable development" like ESD since it does not put the term as its core, the lexicological vagueness is still unavoidable. At the present, UNDP's 1994 definition of human security remains to be the most widely cited and "most authoritative" (Cockell, 2000). However, Paris (2001) acknowledged that the conceptualization of human security is still "sweeping and open-ended" (p.91). He also argued that different organizations and states defined human security differently even the leading states in this area like Japan and Canada (Paris, 2001, p.90-91). However, even if UNDP's definition and conceptualization of human security is adopted to mitigate the present terminological problem, it still contains other conceptual confusions. King and Murray (2001-2002) suggested that although the seven components of human security "imply a number of potential interrelated and overlapping dimensions centered on human dignity, but do not provide a coherent framework for integrating them into a single concept" (p.591).

Besides the definitional and conceptual ambiguity, another problem that ESD and human security share is the confusion of paradigm shift. Since they are both emerging concepts, people tend to confuse them with more conventional concepts. As

there is a massive confusion between ESD and environmental education, there is also the

same problems distinguishing between human security and national or state security. It is

very important to work out carefully the relationships between the traditional concepts

and the newcomers.

If all this vagueness and confusion are clarified, will ESD and human security be

mainstreamed? The answer might not be as easy as it seems. Originally, both concepts

were introduced and propelled by the developed world. In this regard, the gap between

North and South as well as their varied political agendas might be a barrier. For example,

although employing ESD as a tool to achieve human security is promising, it would be

impossible if the goal of universal primary education still unachieved. For human security,

Tadjbakhsh (2005, p.2) mentioned that the countries like China and India might not

support the concept due to the fear that human security might introduce new

conditionalities or excuses for unwarranted intervention and violation on state

sovereignty. Therefore, making sure that all states and parties are in agreement and ready

to propel ESD and human security mechanism is another big challenge that is needed to

be taken into account.

Conclusion

To summarize, through this comparative study, I found that besides being an emerging concept, ESD and human security link and share some common ground, including conceptual similarities and problems. For the conceptual similarities, I found that multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary are a common characteristic of the two concepts. Comparing the key components, ESD and human security relate in many points. Health and Environmental issues are obviously overlapping. However, other components, economic, food, personal, community and political security, are also closely intertwined. Moreover, sustainable development can also ensure "freedom from fear" and "freedom from want".

For choices and challenges, I found that ESD and human security share following three pointes. The first one is terminological and conceptual vagueness. The second point is confusion of paradigm shift. And the last one is the problem on international consensus and disparity to promote both concepts. The study reaffirms that ESD and human security are interdependent. The two concepts should be linked and promoted together. To prevent the threat of human security and ensure global sustainable future, only to achieve the universal basic education might not enough. ESD should be integrated to empower individuals to contribute to global human security and sustainable

development. In the future, how ESD and human security can be integrated and supported

each other and how to overcome the marked challenges and problem should be studied.

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