SUSTAINING SOCIAL COHESION THROUGH INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION IN THE SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES:
ANALYSING THE PERTINENCE OF INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION IN MAURITIUS

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ABSTRACT

Small Island Developing States (SIDS) which have an economic backwardness, fragile ecosystem and social fabrics were mainly built on multicultural pillars. The features of SIDS make social inclusion more important than ever in order to survive in the global change. Mauritius, one of the small islands is still accommodating its multicultural society. A system of education for a sustainable society has a pivotal role to play to support a cohesive society. Fostering social inclusion in SIDS will enable such society to be more cohesive and thus be equipped with the necessary inclusive mechanisms for managing conflicts. In order to promote respect for and acceptance of diversity in today`s societies, Intercultural Education is proposed as a powerful mechanism to strengthen social cohesion. In section one, the vulnerabilities of SIDS will be highlighted. In section two, the link between social cohesion and Intercultural Education will be exploited. Section 3 will be focusing on the Intercultural Education Project which was undertaken by the Mauritius Institute of Education(M.I.E). The methodology for this article will be based on an analysis of policy documents, reports and interviews.

Keywords: Intercultural Education, Social Cohesion, Small Island Developing States

INTRODUCTION

Small island developing states (SIDS) are mainly built on multicultural pillars. Multiculturalism in Small Islands is a building block of the society rather than a result of external changes in the surrounding conditions. In the relevant literature, it has been noticed that one of the conceptual problem underlying the definition of SIDS depends on how to define "smallness." The most commonly used criterion, in recent years, has been a population of 1.5 million or below, specifically 52 islands, which have an extremely fragile ecosystem, social fabrics and economic backwardness. In SIDS, people from different continents have migrated and lived for centuries in the majority of cases with the island indigenous population creating natural cross-cultural bridges through marriages, language, and other social immersion mechanisms. However, the intrinsic disadvantages of SIDS, namely the environmental, social fragility and a high degree of economic vulnerability have made social cohesion more important than ever to survive in the rapid global change. A stable social order is of importance for small states to ensure peace and progression. In SIDS, the presence of social cohesion will

ensure the preparedness of members of its society to cooperate with each other to face their vulnerabilities and build their resilience.

Mauritius one of the SIDS is an island situated in the Indian Ocean, is noteworthy for its extraordinary demographic diversity or as it's been frequently referred to as "The Rainbow Nation". Despite the zero net migration rate [1] and the small size of the population[2], the society has an unexpected diversified composition. The diversity of the Mauritian society is multidimensional. The inhabitants are heterogeneous in terms of ethnic, linguistic and religious dimension. The different cultures coexist peacefully in the island and through this cohabitation of different culture a form of social cohesion known in the Mauritian Kreol[3] as *'Lakorite'* has emerged over time. It is commonly used by the Mauritians to describe their way of living and dealing with their multicultural society. The social context of Mauritius provides many positive aspects of a multicultural society.

However, Bunawaree (2002:14) clearly stated in her research about "Economics, conflicts and interculturality in small island state" and as an expert in the social issues facing the Mauritian society she believes that "In the process of channeling its energies towards the consolidation of its economy, Mauritius has benefited from the emergence of some form of economic nationalism and has perhaps ignored the need to develop a strong sense of interculturality". The alarming consequences of this apparent interracial peace are that the island state remains fragile and vulnerable as the sustainable peace is not deeply rooted in the society. Furthermore, the official government slogan of "Unity in Diversity, didn't help much in creating true sense of unity amongst the different shades of diversity in the society. On the contrary, it has contributed to present the different cultures in a mosaic structure instead of being integrated into one society. The Mauritian society is best described as bringing together "collage of fabrics" versus netting "one colorful fabric." The challenging risk of multiculturalism on the long societal peace is best stated in Asgarally'swords: "we cannot content ourselves with multiculturalism, because it can become the breeding ground for ethnicism. The risk of multiculturalism is to put people in different boxes and make our overriding vision of society an essentially ethnic-centered one." (2005:11). This challenging risk is not of a theoretical nature, as the nation had witnessed at least two serious social conflicts in the past fifty years[4]. The country had witnessed also several other ethnic related social unrests[5]. The frequency of these incidents had revealed the fragility of the officially adopted slogan of "Unity in Diversity". The very education system, for example, had failed to reflect the government policy of "Unity in Diversity". Bissoondoyal (1991: 2) argued that: "No student who goes through the education system has a satisfactory notion of the country. Nor the making of the society, its problems and the development process". Consequently, the education system is producing new generations of Mauritian who are foreigners with their own borders. Therefore, the efforts of building a

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[1] CIA Factbook, 2014

[2] Around 1.33 millions (2014 estimation)

[3] The mother tongue in Mauritius is known as Mauritian Kreol. According to the Mauritian census in 2011, 80% of Mauritian identified Kreol as their home language.

[4] Early in 1968, just before the accession of Mauritius to independence and in the heat of the political competitions, has led to racial riots. The second serious social conflict was not later than February 1999, where the sense of injustice felt after the death in police cell of a popular singer quickly led the country to the brink of an ethnic confrontation.

[5] The country had witnessed also several other ethnic related social unrests. Ethnic related incidents had been stimulated for several reasons; supporting specific sport teams, ethnic scripts on banknotes, oriental languages in schools, public holidays among other reasons. The frequency of these incidents had revealed the fragility of the officially adopted slogan of "Unity in Diversity".

sustainable social peace are indeed inevitable. In this context, Intercultural education can play a preponderant role in fostering social cohesion and peace in the society.

To promote respect for and acceptance of diversity in today`s societies, Intercultural Education is proposed as a powerful mechanism to strengthen social cohesion and peace. According to Portera,"Intercultural education switches the attention of learners from static and stereotypical images of cultures and culture difference to the dynamic perspective of cultures in contact, intercultural relations and intercultural competences"(1998:200). Eventually, Intercultural education will enhance social cohesion between the different cultural groups. It proposes to facilitate the societal participation of the students by holding the diverse culture group together. This pedagogy enables the students to engage in the diverse cultural group by developing a sense of belonging. Exclusion of a cultural group which can threaten the social cohesion will not take place within the context of Intercultural Education. It enables to bind students from the diverse cultural group in a meaningful and committed manner in the society. Through the sense of belonging to the collectively, the heterogeneous students will form an integral part of the multicultural societies. The major concern is how to implement the theoretical contributions of Intercultural Education into practical tools for both educators and students.

In its strategy plan for Education and Human Resources (2008-2020), The Ministry of Education and Human Resources, Tertiary Education and Scientific Research, announced that Intercultural Education has been initiated under the aegis of the Mauritius Institute for Education (M.I.E). In the case of Mauritius, Intercultural education was the right choice to strengthen the existing diverse cultural group. The Mauritian government had started several initiatives and measures to promote Intercultural Education at the scholastic level, in line with objectives laid down by the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (UN-DESD)[6]. These initiatives are addressing three spheres; educational institutions, teachers training, and national curriculum. In this connection, The Intercultural Education Project was launched by the Mauritius Institute of Education(M.I.E).

After this introduction, section one will highlight the main sources of the vulnerability of SIDS. This section is trying to answer the crucial question of; Why social cohesion is vital to SIDS? In section two, the link between social cohesion and Intercultural Education will be exploited. Section 3 will be focusing on the Intercultural Education Project which was undertaken by the Mauritius Institute of Education(M.I.E). The methodology for this study will based on an analysis of policy documents,reports and interviews. This paper is leading the efforts in addressing the unique correlation between intercultural education and the vulnerable situation of SIDS, and it paves the road for further future research to be enriched in this field.

SECTION 1
In this section, it is imperative from the outset to have an insight of the main characteristics of SIDS. This section will highlight the three primary sources of the vulnerabilities of SIDS, namely their economic, environment and social fabrics. SIDS are vulnerable to harm or damage originating from internal and external forces. Such islands faced vulnerabilities that are outside their control. In the vast majority of conceptualizations of SIDS, the economic and environmental vulnerabilities are now

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[6] Assessed date 15 July;2015 http://www.unesco.org/education/tlsf/extras/desd.html?panel=3#themes
http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002117/211750e.pdf

primary whereas social factors (including social development) are now addressed as secondary considerations (Campling and Rosalie:2006). However, in this section, the importance of SIDS's social stability will be discussed deeply as it is relevant to this research.

The economy of SIDS share several common structural characteristics such as; small domestic market with limited scope to exploit economies of scale; lack of natural resources; high dependency on import of food and fuel; dependence on a very small-scale export products; incapacity to influence international prices; unreliability of supply due to remoteness and insularity (Commonwealth Secretariat:1985). Briguglio(1995) explained that the economic vulnerability of SIDS is profoundly determined by forces outside their authority, mostly because of their economic openness and high reliance on a limited range of exported products.

The environmental vulnerability of SIDS acts as a magnifier of the other vulnerabilities. Consequently, the fragile and vulnerable economy of SIDS can be damaged further due to SIDS proneness to natural disasters such as cyclones, volcanic eruptions, tsunamis, and earthquakes. Due to its inherent smallness, any of these natural calamities can significantly affect the lives and livelihood of the inhabitants as a whole. The enormous impact of environmental vulnerabilities on all aspects of life in SIDS made it a crucial impeding force against the pursuit towards sustainable development in these vulnerable islands. Furthermore, the relation between environmental vulnerability and economic growth is two ways. As the process of economic development in SIDS has affected the environment at a larger scale comparing to other countries. The majority of SIDS depend on their coastal zone for tourism and marine related activities. Furthermore, increasing demand for residential housing, tourism, and industrial buildings has led to a drastic depletion of land. Another example is the problem of waste management. Though it is a major problem facing most developing countries, however, the impact on SIDS is likely to be more severe due to the small size territory of these islands(Briguglio:2013).

The social fabrics of SIDS are characterized by multiculturalism, as the societies are composed of people of different ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds. Researchers like Springer and Roberts(2011) in their paper titled "Partnerships for sustainable development in small states" had noticed that the social structure of the community can be very vulnerable to the economic strife, environmental changes, government policies or internal events and forces. In other words, social stability is not well established in many small islands. Fiji and Solomon Islands have an important lesson to share with other SIDS, as they have gone through problems that threatened their social cohesion due to ethnic or religious affiliation. For examples: violent conflict in Fiji between indigenous Fijians and Indian migrants and in the Solomon Islands between natives of Guadalcanal and Malaita Islanders has undermined the social cohesion. Such islands have undergone social conflicts or riots, which in turn impact negatively on productivity and sustainable development in general (Briguglio:2003).

The negative social impact will have a deeper negative effect on SIDS compared to most developing countries, due to their inherent vulnerabilities. However, some researchers appear to indicate that social cohesion is stronger in SIDS than larger countries. Smallness is used as an important variable in analyzing social cohesion. Many small island states don't experience an overt form of conflicts. Streenten (1993) believed that SIDS is more flexible and resilient in the face of conflicts. Whereas Bary (1992) attributed the success of social cohesion in small society due to the concept of 'managed intimacy". According to managed intimacy smallness results in close proximity that acts positively, as in small islands states, people learn to get along in their daily life with others. To minimize open conflicts, they focused on the social

mechanism to function without undue stress. For example, people tend to become expert at muting hostility, deferring their views, avoiding a dispute in the interests of stability and compromise. Thus, they managed to live together in a small restricted place. However, in large societies it is easy to take issue with someone you seldom need or never meet again, but to differ with someone in a small society in which you share a long mutual history and expect to go on being involved in countless ways is another matter. These points of views are certainly not shared by all researchers. A Commonwealth Secretariat Advisory group study revealed that: "Community and political security are particularly important for small states, given that dispute and discord can quickly spread throughout society and become magnified into major challenges to social and political order". The 1999 riots in Mauritius, was first seen as a minor protest but it finally deteriorated into an ethnic one.The riots have shown how dispute and discard can quickly spread throughout the small island states and become amplified into major conflicts. The small, isolated, dependent, resource-poor economy that is caught in the competitive global world will need to deepen its social inclusion to be in better position to face these challenges. That is why in SIDS, social cohesion can act as an essential platform in the efforts toward fighting poverty, reducing inequalities, and marching towards inclusive societies which is among the key goals of sustainable development. Small islands nations need the full membership of all its citizens to put hands in their society to shape a collective destiny to face their vulnerabilities. Social inclusiveness is the key to build a strong resilience. If SIDS develop a strong, inclusive approach towards the members of their society, it will in return act as a force for social cohesion. It is essential to ensure harmonious interaction among people within a diverse society to ensure their willingness to live and cooperate to build their resilience. Educational policies that ensure inclusion and participation of all citizens can foster and safeguard the social cohesion. The question to be asked is how to promote the cultures of different groups in SIDS, foster the social fabrics and bring a real interculturality between them? In what way should the social fabric be enhanced in order to reduce tension or latent ethnic conflicts? Within the context of social cohesion, Intercultural Education has an important role to play. The ultimate objectives of the intercultural education are to build up an inclusive society, where every culture is valued, respected and have a vital role in contributing in the social structure. Intercultural education can be an efficient tool to enhance sustainable social cohesion.

SECTION 2
The implementation of Intercultural Education in the educational system will equip the young generation with the intercultural competence that is required to participate in the respectful intercultural dialogue.It has been acknowledged that students have a greater capacity to grasp and appreciate certain ideas about interculturality than adults who are rather quite rigid in welcoming new challenges to their preconceived ideas. Young students have a better ability to be open minded, to experience different cultures, and they are more curious and willing to learn about the others. For that reason, Intercultural Education world-widely is focusing on the students and early years of schooling. .Intercultural education is of vital importance in ensuring recognition, tolerance and especially understanding cultures. The young students represent the future of any country. In his book on "International Perspectives on Intercultural Education", Cushner (2009:11) sheds more lights on the characteristics of Intercultural Education, "It strives to eliminate prejudice and racism by creating an awareness of the diversity and relative nature of viewpoints and thus a rejection of absolute ethnocentrism; assists people in acquiring the skills needed to interact more efficiently with people different from themselves; and demonstrates that despite the differences that seem to separate

people, many similarities do, in fact, exist across groups."The provision of the inclusion of the society through education will combat intolerance, hatred, and discrimination. Sondhi(2009:15) suggests that interculturalism "implies a different way of reading situations, signs, symbols, and of communicating which we would describe as intercultural literacy." In other words, through intercultural education students will acquire intercultural competence. The acquisition of this competency in a diverse society will become as important as basic numeracy and literacy according to Sondhi (2009). Nowadays worldwide, some governments like UK, Italy, Spain and Greece have responded to problems concerning migration, ethnic nationalism and minority rights by favoring laws that recognize the existence of minority groups and their contributions to national development. Such steps are reflected in the national education curricula by integrating intercultural education with the aim of ensuring greater social inclusion. Intercultural education is part of the Italian Educational systems. In many school, scholastic subjects promote intercultural competences. For examples: In order to overcome ethnocentrism approaches during history teaching, the theme of racism and issues of a pacific living together among people and analyzing the moments of meeting and collision among people and civilization are taught. Teaching Italian, artistic and musical education gives an occasion to reflect upon the relations between European and extra-European cultures. Across the curriculum, through these subjects, intercultural competences like understanding, respect and sharing are being infused among the students from diverse cultural background (Contini and Naturo:2011).

Intercultural Education will enable the development and implementation of inclusive practice in the education system among students from different cultures. Such practices will favor the promotion and growth of intercultural competence between local and immigrant student. The inclusion of all students will eventually foster the social fabrics in the long run. That is why it is believed that intercultural education will eventually reduce tension and latent ethnic conflicts. Through Intercultural pedagogy, concepts as identity and culture are considered dynamic where the "otherness" is not considered only as a risk but even as a possibility of enrichment as a means even to reflect on values, rules and behavioral standard. Hence Intercultural Education within a multicultural society intends to foster the social cohesion in the long term. A cohesive society will depend on a model of education that will deconstruct the barriers between cultures to ensure a sense of belonging to be established.

However, Gundara (2008: 465) said "much of the work on intercultural education relies on 'hunches' and attempts to 'do good". In otherwords, there was no well establishing pedagogy for Intercultural education. Galisson (1994) pointed out, everyone nowadays talks about interculturalism, but not everyone has seen yet how it functions. Interculturalism is too often considered as the miracle solution which will enable to reconcile identity and difference, unity and diversity. But the practices of interculturalism have not yet shown their results. In the coming section, The Intercultural Education Project in Mauritius will be analysed and discussed.

SECTION 3
In a further report known as Education Report in Action (2008-2014)[7] by the Ministry of Education and Human Resources, the government gave further information regarding the integration of Intercultural education in school activities Through Intercultural education for cultural diversity, the objectives are to develop respect for diversity,

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[7]http://ministryeducation.govmu.org/English/Documents/EDUCATION%20REPORT%20in%20Action%2002.9.14.pdf. Accessed date 18th March 2016

promoting teaching which respects diversity of values, knowledge, culture and tradition. The following is a summary of the Intercultural Education program[8] from the report

Innovative Programmes: Intercultural Education

The philosophy behind the Intercultural Education is to enable learners to inculcate a deeper understanding of one another, acceptance of the differences based on ethnicity, religion, race and culture, but also realise that the differences are a catalyst towards sustaining the country in its unflagging pursuit of peace and harmonious co-habitation.

The introduction of Intercultural Education in schools fits in with Jacques Delors' "Learning to Live Together" --which is one of the pillars on which education for the 21st Century has to be based. Actions in the Intercultural Education domain are in line with the New Curriculum Framework that states that the curriculum should develop interpersonal knowledge and skills with a view to strengthening positive attitudes, understanding and sharing of common values and also developing respect for persons and human rights.

Intercultural Education was initiated in 2010 under the aegis of the M.I.E.

The project took the shape of an exhibition and was addressed to all Mauritian pupils of primary schools.

2011 "Tous parents tous différents – ena enn sel ras, ras dimounn" was launched as a national competition for Standards IV and V pupils of Mauritian and Rodriguan Primary schools

The children expressed themselves on this issue through different means, such as paintings and drawing, poetry and short stories, theatrical performances, slam and songs.

2013: NouKiltirNou Rises

This project aims, inter alia, at creating awareness about the rich cultural diversity in our society, and encourages pupils to artistically demonstrate their understanding of inter-culturalism and associated concepts like respect, love, peace, etc. They can express themselves through the medium of

• Art (painting and drawing)
• Theatre • Music (Songs and Dance)
• Slam

As at date, 37 schools and 210 pupils have participated in the above project. The project culminates in an "Intercultural Day" projected for the end of the third term annually.

The above described exhibition was the starting point for the national competition « *Tous parentstous différents – ena en sel ras, ras dimoun* » based on the same thematic of intercultural dialogue[9]. This was addressed to all pupils of Standard IV and V of Mauritian and Rodriguan primary schools. The posters displayed offer a learning experience to be explored by teachers and students. They were meant to promote the development of cultural understanding among primary school students and to create an awareness of the common human heritage that cuts across cultures and civilizations.

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[8] The objectives of Intercultural Education (IE)Project laid high emphasis on the positive exposure of students towards diversity. The brochure and poster also reflected the Mauritian multicultural society; both were very colourful. The poster was written in three languages which reflect the multilingual aspects of this small island.

[9] Information on the Intercultural Education Project was gathered during the fieldwork in 2015 at the MIE. One of the team members of this project, provided details on the activities in line with the promotion of Intercultural Education. The raw data collected from The Intercultural Education Project has enabled to understand the learner's interpretation on the concept. The students creatively expressed their understanding of interculturalism through the following: songs, poems, drama, short stories, drawing, painting and slam.

The children were then invited to express themselves on that issue through different media, such as paintings and drawing, poetry and short stories, theatre, slam and songs. The competition was held at two levels: zone and national. A cash prize was offered to all winners in each category at both levels. A prize giving ceremony, held on Thursday 29 September 2014, closed the event with a show organised to present the works of the winners in each category. Their aim was to bring to all these young pupils, on a pedagogical basis, an awareness of the need for an intercultural way of living.

The former Minister of Education Dr Vasant Bunwaree[10] said regarding the ntercultural education project 'Educating a multicultural nation in all its diversity is never an easy and stress-free venture but it is also a unique and lifetime experience, especially if the net finality and outcome is to make the system stand out as a model in the world.'(IV). Apparently, the government wanted to design a unique system in term of Intercultural Education. A system adapted to the Mauritian context and which be further use as a blueprint in other multicultural countries. Furthermore the new Minister of Education, MrsL.Dookun-Luchoomun, in the recent Educational reform: National Curriculum Framework 2015[11] also stressed the importance of implementing Intercultural Education as this will help to determine the kind of society we want to see evolving. The finality of Intercultural Education is to ensure harmonious coexistence among different cultures. For the Intercultural Education Project, primary teachers were selected from 37 schools and they were required to attend short term training. They needed training as they didn't have knowledge on Intercultural Education. Their training was based on two points:

a) Explaining the concept of Intercultural Education
b) Being an Intercultural Speaker

The focus of the training revealed that the teachers needed to understand the concept of Intercultural education and to be able to differentiate between multi and intercultural education. And the Ministry has assigned the role of Intercultural Speaker[12] to the teachers. As they will be the one preparing the students to participate in the Intercultural Education Project; they should be in a position to convey the intercultural concept to the students.

It can be said that there is no formal intercultural learning in the National Curriculum Framework. However, the Mauritian Ministry of Education had introduced an innovative project on Intercultural Education. According to the project consultant from the M.I.E, the Intercultural Education Project ended in 2014 because the Ministry of Education concluded the project because other educational priorities emerged, lack of finance, and due to bulky syllabus they had limited scope to implement the project at school level. However they believed that the Mauritian Educational System is in need of Intercultural Education in order to foster a sense of coherence and common identity among the diversified Mauritian students. In the future, the Ministry must be able to develop and implement effectively Intercultural Education at schools in order to facilitate social integration among the new generation.

CONCLUSION

The case of SIDS demonstrates that, while acknowledging the economic and environmental vulnerabilities of SIDS are of fundamental importance, reaffirming the

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[10]http://ministryeducation.govmu.org/English/Documents/EDUCATION%20REPORT%20in%20Action%2002.9.14.pdf . Accessed date 18th March 2016

[11]   http://www.govmu.org/English/News/Pages/Education-Reform-National-Curriculum-Framework-2015-launched.aspx. Accessed date: Dec 2015

[12] The concept of Intercultural Speaker has been used in the context of foreign language teaching. (Byram;1997,Kramsch 1998)

centrality of constructing social cohesion is of vital importance. Intercultural Education is a powerful tool for building resilience policy option that could enable these small states to minimize or withstand the negative magnifying effects of social instability on any of their three vulnerabilities.

The paper highlighted the main three vulnerabilities that are facing the small island developing states, identified the importance of intercultural education in general and in SIDS case in particular and presented the potential and challenges of intercultural education in building social cohesion through the Intercultural Education Project in Mauritius. This case demonstrated several lessons that can be useful in the formulation of future educational strategies for intercultural education that can be implemented in SIDS to achieve sustainable societal peace.

Relations experienced in school through intercultural education can contribute significantly to cohesion in culturally heterogeneous societies. Education alone cannot achieve social cohesion. Instead, this research paper have stressed on the role that Intercultural Education can play to strengthen the social fabrics in SIDS.

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