

The Establishment of a Primary Level Ocean Science Curriculum in Small Island Developing States: Vanuatu Example

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Many difficulties arise when discussing the role of ocean education in the field of marine policy. At the highest levels in the large international organizations, UNESCO, WSSD, the Millennium Development Goals, and others, there is an urgent call for the establishment of universal primary education emphasizing the participation of youth in local conditions with local problems. If one of the foundations of sustainable development is the need to take action now in order to extend the life of our resources for future generations, then the education of our youth must emphasize the importance of the ocean in all of their lives. How then can we implement this when faced with vastly different local conditions all over the world?

To look at the problems facing the small island nation of Vanuatu in the South Pacific is useful because Vanuatu provides a wide variety of specific local challenges. With the establishment of archipelagic baselines in Section IV of UNCLOS, the nation of Vanuatu becomes a large ocean state with extended jurisdiction over ocean waters. The new internal and external waters have the potential to be large areas of high biodiversity, home to many coral reef systems, expansive fishing grounds, attractive tourist areas, and possibly rich areas for deep sea bed mining. How then will the people of Vanuatu tend to manage these resources?

The main problem facing the education system in Vanuatu is the dual-linguistic approach of both French and English schools. Since the break-up of the colonial French/English "Condominium" of the New Hebrides in the 1980's the independent nation has struggled to work within the reality of this situation. One recommendation suggested in various readings on the topic is the use of Bislama, a native Pidgin English, spoken by the majority of islanders as a universal vernacular in primary education. Although this is the main problem, in the current education system other problems discussed include; teacher competence, community involvement, faulty evaluation systems, remote and rural populations, mutable political will, and the need for lasting foreign aid and regular assessment.

With continued support for changes to the primary science system from the large international organizations, SIDS regional aid opportunities and implementation of the goals established in the Mauritius strategy, as well as a strong commitment from the government, the resources under Vanuatu jurisdiction have the potential to be properly managed across space and time.