

## Exploring the potentials of Intercultural Education in sustaining Social Cohesion in Small Island Developing States

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**Abstract.** The process of globalisation has made the world increasingly intertwined. Diversity in term of cultures, nationalities, faiths and ethnic backgrounds has become an intrinsic characteristic of all societies. Furthermore, most countries around the globe share concerns about social cohesion and stability. Small Island Developing States (SIDS) which has 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. A system of education for a sustainable society has a pivotal role to play to support a cohesive society. Fostering social cohesion 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. This section is trying to answer the crucial question of: Why social cohesion is vital to SIDS more than other countries? In section two, the emergence of interculturalism and intercultural education in multicultural societies will be discussed. While section 3 will be focusing on the possibilities of implementing intercultural education in the educational systems of SIDS.

**Keywords:** Intercultural Education; Social Cohesion; Small Island Developing States

### Introduction

The process of globalization has changed the world into an increasingly diversified one. That diversity - in term of cultures, nationalities, faiths and ethnic backgrounds - has become a remarkable characteristic of almost all societies around the world, and this diversity has led to the rise of multiculturalism as a key factor to understanding and addressing any societal problem facing any country.

Social cohesion is an essential foundation for cohabitation in this era of multiculturalism. Durkheim (1893) called the social ties that unite a society as the "social solidarity" which bond individual together. However, violence, social tensions, migration, and the current global economic recession have brought to the forefront a crisis in various social domains. Brigg and Bleiker (2011) have argued that cultural difference is invoked in conflicts that beset today's world. Sen (2006) stressed out that due to the illusion of the predominance of a unique identity, conflicts and violence are sustained today. Eventually over the past two decades, the role of education in promoting social cohesion has been in the spotlight. Policymakers and educationalists are pre-occupied to find solution to address the various threats to social integration. The cognitive development is a very crucial in a child and will eventually reflect in his or her adult's development. In order, to sustain the social fabrics, learning about social relationships, interaction and respect for individual must be an important part of every young child's development. For a future with social cohesion, it is crucial to begin by working with young children. In this proces, Intercultural Education can be used as a powerful mechanism to strengthen the social cohesion and to build the peace foundation in the society, and to promote respect for and acceptance of diversity in today's multicultural societies. Intercultural Education is defined as "applied social science promoting the dialogue between cultures and civilizations, as well as supporting the development of democratic multicultural societies"<sup>1</sup>.The distinctive advantage of the intercultural education lies in the fact that it allows the individual to go beyond passive coexistence, to achieve a developing and sustainable way of living together in multicultural societies. In a recent report, UNESCO<sup>2</sup> had emphasized the importance of the intercultural education as a vital factor leading to social cohesion and to maintain social peace. Intercultural education alone cannot achieve social cohesion, but, it can play an important role to strengthen the social fabrics in a multicultural society.

Small island developing states (SIDS) are a particular case in this regards, as their societies are mainly built on multicultural pillars. The multiculturalism 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. Multicultural policies have been introduced in the late years of the

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<sup>1</sup> Bleszynska, Krystyna. "Contracting intercultural education." *Intercultural Education, Vol. 19, No.6*, December 2008: 542.

<sup>2</sup> Intercultural education is proposed by UNESCO(2006)as a response to the challenged offered by the rapid changing world leading to multicultural societies.  
Available at:<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001478/147878e.pdf>

colonial periods and during the early stages of the independent, to conciliate with the diversified society to ensure social cohesion and stability. 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 particular importance for small states to ensure peace and progression.

This research paper will focus on and develop the current interest to work towards the integration of intercultural education within SIDS educational system. There is little discussion within the social science literature, on the effects of intercultural education in sustaining social cohesion in SIDS. However, there exists an abundant amount of literature based on intercultural education in multicultural societies aside of SIDS (Portera,1998; Gundara,2000 and Coulby,2006), which can provide a framework for this research paper. In other words, examining the application of intercultural education in the educational field can provide the ground and rationale upon which this research will be based. The fact that this paper is exploring new grounds, namely the potentials of intercultural education in sustaining social cohesion in SIDS, the methodology for this study will be based on a desk review of the academic literature, policy documents and reports which are related to this research topic.

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 emergence of interculturalism and intercultural education in multicultural societies will be discussed. While the third section will be focusing on the possibilities of implementing intercultural education in the educational system of SIDS. The paper will conclude with the discussion of the centrality of the social cohesion in SIDS to build their resilience in response to “their vulnerabilities.” And intercultural education has the potentials of fostering sustainable social cohesion in SIDS.

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.

## **1. The vulnerabilities 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 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 highlighted.

The 52 small islands states are mainly located in two regions, 23 in the Caribbean Ocean and 20 in the Pacific Ocean. While 9 are scattered across Africa, Indian

Ocean, Mediterranean and the South China Sea. Small islands states are described as low-lying coastal countries that generally share similar sustainable development challenges namely; small but growing population with limited resources, remoteness, prone to natural disasters, high dependency on international trade and a fragile ecosystem. Indeed the future of Islanders is insecure due to several factors like the climatic threats, threats of coastal erosion, the economic decline in the world upon which small island states depend on and their dependence resulting from the interconnections of the world.

Since the 1970`s there has been a remarkable interest in small island developing states. The broad focus of the SIDS literature<sup>3</sup> according to Crosslay and Sprague (2013) can be presented in three stages: First in the 1970s, the focus was on the socio-economic development (Benedict 1967; Selwyn 1975; Shand 1980; Dommen 1980; Jalan 1982;). Secondly in the 1980s there is an emerging concern with SIDS geopolitical security (Cohen 1983b; Commonwealth 1985; Harden 1985; Clarke and Payne 1987). Thirdly, in the 1990`s the main focus has been on the vulnerability of SIDS economies and environment (Atkins et al; 2000; Biagini and Hoyle 1999; Briguglio 1995; Commonwealth Secretariat-World Bank 2000). However, It was at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED)<sup>4</sup>, where SIDS were recognized as a special case both for their environment and development. This was the beginning of acknowledging the threats faced by SIDS related to current global environmental and development challenges.

### 1.1 Economic vulnerabilities

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. Seychelles, for example, has a non-diversified economy. Its economy is heavily reliant on international trade. It imports around 90 percent of its population`s and tourist's consumption. Consequently, the island has gone through the negative balance of trade. A report<sup>5</sup> shows that in the ten year period 1992–2001 Seychelles had an average annual balance of trade deficit of Seychelles Rupees (SR) 976 million. Therefore, the international fluctuation in

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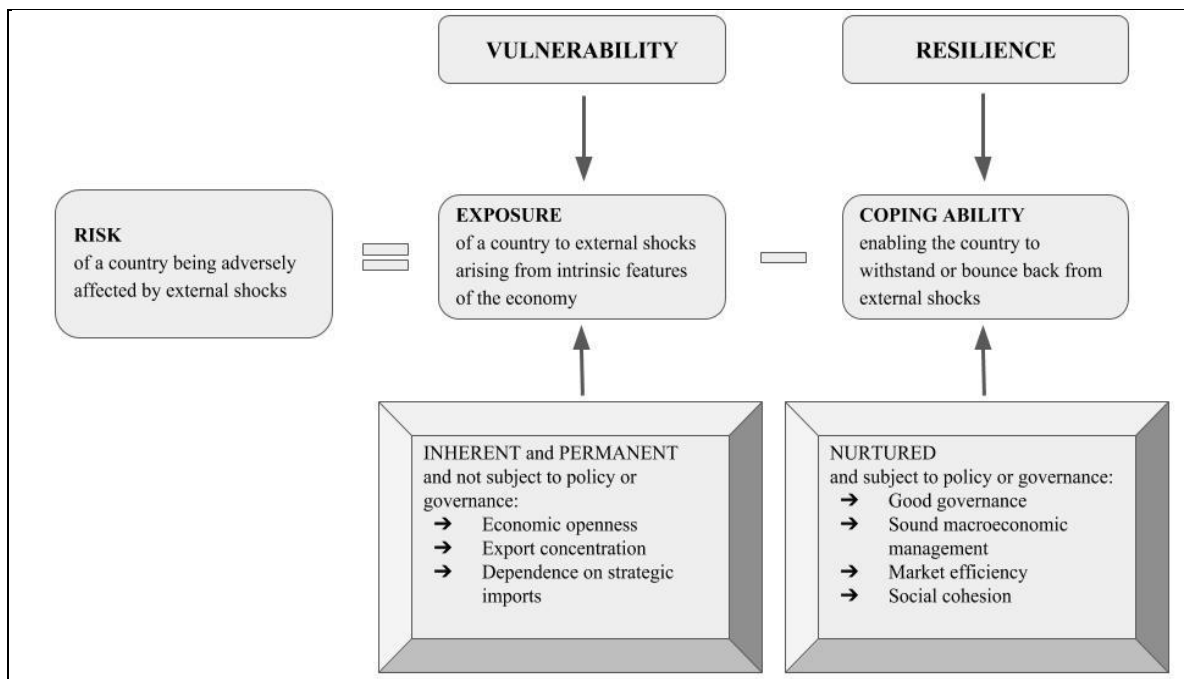
<sup>3</sup> From the outset, it is important to point out that SIDS literature have been promoted by international institutions like UNESCO, UN and Commonwealth Secretariat. Such institutions have brought experts in economic, social, governance and environment field to raise international awareness of SIDS vulnerabilities and their sustainable development needs. There is a limited literature on SIDS which is not part of the above mentioned institutions. SIDS are extremely reliable on these institutions.

<sup>4</sup> Also known as the Earth Summit, held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (3-14 June 1992),

<sup>5</sup> Reported by the Central Bank of Seychelles

the world economic can have drastic adverse effects on a non-diversified economy like Seychelles. Campling and Rosalie (2006,119) describes this peculiar situation of the economic vulnerabilities of Seychelles by stating: “Like all SIDS, Seychelles is a ‘price-taker’ in the world economy and is thus structurally vulnerable to external shocks and the vagaries of global capitalism”.

On the other side, a few SIDS like Singapore have managed to generate high income per capita in spite of its vulnerability. In the related literature, Singapore is referred to as the “Singapore Paradox” (Briguglio:1995) which indicates a small island state like Singapore can be exposed to economic vulnerabilities but yet manage to attain high level of capital. The reason for this is that it is possible for SIDS, under specific conditions, to build up their resilience to improve their ability to cope with vulnerability. Professor Briguglio has explained through the illustration below (Table 1) how small state when exposed to external shocks is able to absorb, meet or bounce back from adverse shocks. For instance, Singapore through a good governance, sound macroeconomic management, market efficiency and social cohesion have made use of its strategic geographic position within the global trading system to build its resilience.



**Table 1: Juxtaposing Vulnerability and Resilience in SIDS (Briguglio:2004)**

## 1.2 Environmental vulnerabilities

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 development 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)

One of the major environmental problems facing SIDS - being island states by definition - is the threatening rise of sea level due to the global warming. Maldives, for example, located to the west of India, consisting of over 1,100 islands is considered by experts as the world's lowest-lying nation (Ghina:2003). On average the islands are only 1.3 meters above sea level. As indicated by Ghina's research, the situation in the country is very alarming. Due to significant beach erosion and its low-lying elevation, a rise of just three feet in sea level would submerge Maldives and make the island uninhabitable<sup>6</sup>. Other island states in the Pacific Ocean, like Kiribati and Tuvalu, are also at the risk to disappear due to rising sea levels.

In addition, what makes the environmental vulnerabilities of SIDS having a catastrophic impact on people's lives, is the lack of sufficient disaster mitigation capabilities like hazard forecasting ability, laxity in the enforcement of procedures and inefficient insurance system. Once again, Singapore stands out as a distinctive exception among SIDS reflecting its relatively high levels of economic development and infrastructural capabilities (Mark Pelling and Uitto:2001). After joining the Kyoto Protocol in 2006, Singapore has formed the National Climate Change Committee, which focused on five areas: mitigation, public awareness, competency building, vulnerability, and adaptation. The island has taken initiatives to foster its understanding of climate change and its repercussions. However, the majority of SIDS are not equipped to face disasters.

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<sup>6</sup> Ministry of Home Affairs, Hus.&Env't, Republic of Maldives, First National Communication of the Republic of Maldives to the United Nations framework Convention on Climate Change 2(2001), available at <http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/natc/maldnc1.pdf>.

### 1.3 Social vulnerabilities

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. Mauritius serves as a very demonstrative example of this social vulnerability and its tight correlation with the economic situation of the country, which worth a brief highlighting of this case.

Mauritius is an island situated in the Indian Ocean east of Madagascar and is noteworthy for its extraordinary demographic diversity or as it's been frequently referred to by the Mauritian community as “The Rainbow Nation”. The Mauritian society is heterogeneous in terms of ethnic, linguistic and religious dimensions. As for the ethnic dimension, Mauritian society consists of four main ethnic groups: 1) Indo-Mauritians, around 67% of the population and they are the descend of migrants from the Indian subcontinent, came as endangered laborers mainly during the British and or French colonial periods. 2) Afro-Mauritians, who are the descendants slaves brought to the island by both French and British to work in the sugar production, and they are representing now around 28% of the population. 3) Sino-Mauritians, around 3%, and consists of the Chinese traders who moved to the island basically for the economic reasons during the colonial periods. 4) The remaining 2% are called Franco-Mauritians, and they are the descendants of the European sailors, colonial's staff and colonial landlords. Furthermore, the diversification gets deeper as in each of the four main ethnic groups mentioned above, a religious and linguistic diversification level appears. As the Indo-Mauritian group ,for example, is divided among several religious groups (Hindus,Tamil, Telegu, Marathi, Muslims, Christians and Buddhists) and numerous linguistic affiliations (Creole, Hindi, Urdu, Arabic, Tamil, Chinese, Marathi, Telegu, French, English). As of today, despite the zero net migration rate and the small size of the population, the society has an unexpected diversified composition. The island has been identified as amongst the most peaceful and stable democratic in the African continent<sup>7</sup>. Its success story is based primarily on its good economic performance and on the apparent interracial peace and harmony. However, as some researchers noticed that an important social issue is being undermined and went unnoticed during focus on the economic development, that's the building of sustainable intercultural bridges amongst all these levels and sublevels of diversified social structure has been neglected. Bunawaree (2002)<sup>8</sup> stated that clearly 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

<sup>7</sup> The Institute for economics and growth has rated, Mauritius, according to the Global Peace Index(2014) as the “the most peaceful African country” in 2014 and it ranked 24<sup>th</sup> globally

<sup>8</sup> Bunawaree, S. "Economics, Conflicts and Interculturality in a Small Island State: The case of Mauritius." *Polis/R.C.S.P.?C.P.S.R. Vol.9,Numero Special*, 2002: 1.

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”. In other words, social stability is not well established in the island. 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 have 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. Besides, dispute and discord can quickly spread throughout the small island states and become amplified into major conflicts.

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. Strenten (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, the islanders 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<sup>9</sup> 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 integration of social fabrics in SIDS is crucial.

#### **1.4 The importance of social cohesion to SIDS**

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's why in SIDS, more than other nations, 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

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<sup>9</sup> Commonwealth Advisory Group. "A future for small states: Overcoming vulnerability." Commonwealth Secretariat, London, 1997.P133



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 create 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. Taking the case of Mauritius as an example, the interculturality among the different ethnic groups has not been given enough attention and instead there has been a “collage” of cultures that in many ways prevented the emergence of social inclusiveness. The alarming consequences of this apparent interracial peace are that Mauritius remains fragile and vulnerable on the long term, especially if the economic position of any of the social fabric has changed. Which indicates that a genuinely sustainable peace is not deeply rooted in the society. This challenging risk is not of a theoretical nature, as the island, has witnessed at least two serious social conflicts in about thirty years<sup>10</sup> despite the general peace and harmony which is at the surface of the social structure. Furthermore, the official Mauritian government slogan of “Unity in Diversity” didn’t help much in creating a true sense of unity amongst the different shades of diversity in the society. On the contrary, it has contributed to present the various cultures in a mosaic structure instead of being integrated into one society. 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 objective of the intercultural education is 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.

In the light of the vulnerabilities being faced by SIDS, it is apparently clear that they will have to depend on their resources to build their resilience. The most valuable resource that SIDS possess is its human capital. This made both researchers and policy makers to draw particular attention to education and training of population in accordance with the national goals for sustainable development. And intercultural education plays a significant role in the overall

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<sup>10</sup> Early in 1968, just before the accession of Mauritius to independence and in the heat of the political competitions, a serious tension between Muslims and Christians had emerged which led to racial riots. As the country was still under the British authority, British troops had to enforce law and order again. 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 between Hindus and Christians. 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”.

success of this process. As Professor Baccus<sup>11</sup> (2008) explicitly states that : "The success of small states, in coping with the economic and social challenges that they are likely to face in the twenty-first century, will, to a large extent, depend on the quality of their human resources." Moreover, If the society in SIDS is well united, believed in "togetherness" rather than "otherness," they will be able to build their resilience together as one nation to face any challenges. Social cohesiveness will play a vital role to ensure social stability and enable social development in the face of the vulnerabilities.

In the next section, the focus will be on the contribution of intercultural education in promoting social cohesion in multicultural societies that can be used as a framework in SIDS. The fact that small island states are built on multicultural pillars, they can adopt and infuse intercultural education within their educational field through examples of practical experiences and insights from elsewhere.

## **2. The emergence of Interculturalism and Intercultural Education**

In an effort to understand the contribution of Intercultural Education in sustaining social cohesion, the development of interculturalism and intercultural education in multicultural societies will be discussed. In this section, examples of how Intercultural education has been initiated and implemented to the benefits of students, schools and communities will be analyzed. The literature mainly focused on the development of intercultural education primarily in Europe and North America. The European Commission <sup>12</sup> has greatly emphasized the importance of intercultural education in the European Union(EU) countries. In many EU countries like Italy, Spain, Greece and Portugal, intercultural education is part of the general school set up, and their curriculum does include provisions for intercultural education

One of the evident results of globalization is that many societies have become more diverse and dynamic. Migration for a better employment prospects and a better standard of living has increased drastically. Nowadays cities like London, Stockholm, Toronto, New York and Amsterdam are becoming increasingly diversified. Thus, multicultural societies have become a complex reality. The new changes in these newly diversified societies are far beyond being adequately addressed by proper multicultural policies, and in this new dynamic society tensions and conflicts are inevitable as many cultures faith, value and global forces interacts, to use the wording of Professor Cante (2012), who has been involved in crafting these policies and he is the author of a series of reports on Britain's ability to deal with its growing diversity. He further believed that the multicultural policies that governments have been applying are no more appropriate to mediate this new era and are not sufficient enough to promote community cohesion. This is reflected very often in the current political and

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<sup>11</sup> Bacchus, M.K. "The education challenges facing small nation states in the increasingly competitive global economy of the twenty-first century." *Comparative Education* 44, 2008: 139.

<sup>12</sup> Interculturalism represents the direction towards which Europe is moving. In 2008, EU proclaimed 'European year for cross-cultural dialogue'

international context. Cantle(2012) has pointed out that many politicians in Europe, for instance, The UK Prime Minister Cameron and the Chancellor of Germany, Angel Merkel have stressed that there is a failure in the practice of multicultural policies in their respective countries. Many western countries have undergone race-related disturbances for example Bradford riots in 2001 in the UK and a series of riots in the suburbs of Paris and other French cities in 2005. The main criticism of multicultural policies is based on the fact that multiculturalism has encouraged the members of different cultures to live separately in parallel communities that have only minimal contact and interaction with one another, generating mutual ignorance and mistrust. Thus, multicultural policies had its limitation. Furthermore in many countries like in the case of Britain and France, multiculturalism has weakened collective identities and shared values and undermined the national identity and loyalty to the state (Cantle,2012). Intercultural theorists proposed interculturalism as a new approach to overcoming these limitations and take the issue of societal cohesion into a higher level. Bouchard (2011) rejected multiculturalism, which was associated with fragmentation of the social cohesion and proposed the choice of Interculturalism as a middle path, as a model of balance and equity.Cantle (2013) further described interculturalism as a broad program of change in which majority and minority communities think of themselves as dynamic and outward looking, sharing a common objective of growing together and overcoming institutional and relational barriers in the process. Intercultural policies within multicultural societies will enable to promote dialogue and exchange between people of different cultures. The fact that diversity tends to lead to segregation and exclusion, interculturalism, as a strategic policy of intervention, will seek to restore social cohesion, trust, and a feeling of belonging (Barrero:2013). An intercultural program like “community cohesion<sup>13</sup>” has been developed and applied in many cities in Europe to promote trust and understanding in the societies by breaking stereotypes and misconceptions about the “other”. The success and impacts of such program have been measured based upon an attitudinal and behavioral change in the participants or the wider local community. Interculturalism is used as a tool to build and strengthen mutual trust and respect between different groups in the society. Eventually, interculturalism is implemented as a reaction against social exclusion and as a primary tool for restoring social cohesion.

## 2.1 Infusing intercultural competence

Another way to promote interculturalism is through education. 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.

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<sup>13</sup> The Council of Europe and the European Union have adopted a range of standards and initiatives in order to combat racism and xenophobia and promote intercultural dialogue. Through the Intercultural Cities programme, they are supporting the emergence of local strategies for diversity management that focus on diversity as an opportunity.

Available

at:<https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/cultureheritage/culture/Cities/ICCstepbystepAugust2012.pdf>

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, the 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<sup>14</sup> 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 substantial literature on intercultural education can be divided into four groups according to Tupas(2014): a) Intellectual and conceptual roadmaps for Interculturalism (Gundara 2000; Cantele 2002; Coulby 2006; Bleszynska 2008); b) Intercultural incorporation into national curricula (Portera, 1998, 2005; Tratas, 2010; Tupas 2014); c) Practical road maps for the classroom (leRoux, 2001; Mushi, 2004; Perry, 2011) d) Intercultural Education and training program (Bennett, 2004; Cushner, 2009; Stephan and Stephan 2013).

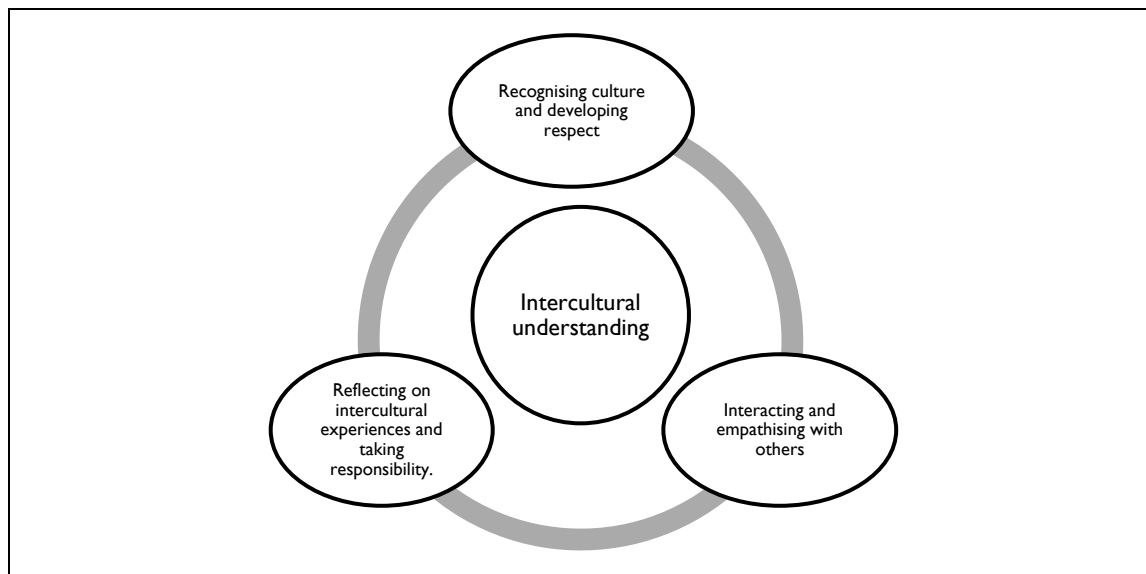
The provision of the inclusion of the society through education will combat intolerance, hatred, and discrimination. Sondhi(2009) suggests that interculturalism "implies a different way of reading situations, signs, symbols, and of communicating which we would describe as intercultural literacy." In other words, through intercultural education students will acquire intercultural competence<sup>15</sup>. 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 Canada, Italy, and even Australia 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. Recently, Australia has included intercultural understanding as a general capability in its national curriculum.

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<sup>14</sup> Cushner, K. *International Perspectives on Intercultural Education*. Mahwah: NJ:Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2009.P2

<sup>15</sup> 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)

The following diagram is reflecting part of the Australian Curriculum model. It focuses on three aspects of intercultural understanding in the scholastic field

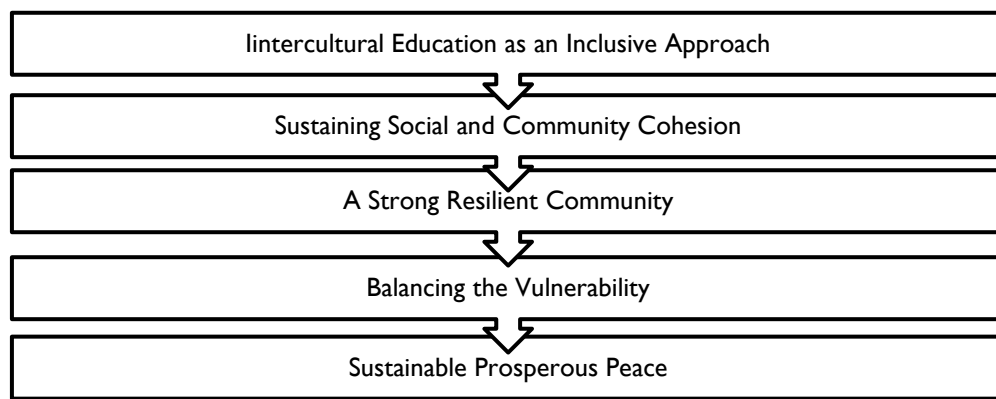


**Table 2: Intercultural understanding in the Australian Curriculum Model**

The diagram above focuses on three major characteristics of intercultural understanding. The first is to recognize the culture and to develop respect, secondly is to interact with others and finally to reflect on intercultural experiences and taking responsibility. Intercultural Education will enable the development and implementation of inclusive practice in the education system among students from different cultures. Such practices in the Australian curriculum 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. Intercultural education is a dynamic way of learning which developed from the principle that the 'other' should not only be respected but that people from different cultural background should share the same rights. Therefore the educational aim is not only to tolerate the 'other' but also to co-exist in peace, eliminate discrimination, prejudice, inequalities and awareness of other's values feeling, belief and attitudes.

In 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. There is a growing concern to adopt intercultural education in the curriculum in order to develop cultural navigational skills and competences in students in order to relate to those who are different to themselves and to see `others` as an opportunity rather than a threat. 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.

In the context of SIDS, interculturalism will strengthen the existing social fabrics. Multiculturalism in SIDS is well established compared to the western exposure to multiculturalism. In the West, the society is still undergoing change through diversity dynamic because the door of migration is opened whereas, in the majority of SIDS, the society is well established on multicultural pillars with zero or few migration. However in SIDS the potential towards the consolidation of social cohesion through intercultural education have not been exploited. Within the context of sustainable development of small states, intercultural education has a crucial role to play. Education with an intercultural dimension holds a key place in endeavors to foster the social fabrics and to maintain peace. The table below illustrates the effect of intercultural education as an inclusive approach will enhance the social fragility of the society, thus building a strong, resilient community in SIDS.



**Table 4: The potential effect of Intercultural Education in SIDS**

### **Section 3: The possibility of implementing Intercultural Education in SIDS**

The third section of this paper will be focusing on the position of intercultural education in SIDS educational system while trying to answer these crucial questions; what are the educational priorities in SIDS? What is the possibility of implementing intercultural education in SIDS? Particular attention will be paid to two cases; Mauritius and Solomon Islands.

Surveying the literature regarding the SIDS and sustainable developments, one can easily notice a gap in the literature in terms of the role of education in the sustainable development and particularly in SIDS. Crossley and Sprague<sup>16</sup> stating this fact plainly: "Until recently, very little attention has been placed upon the role that education can play in reaching the goals of global sustainable development in SIDS". One possible reason for that SIDS priorities were topped by facing environmental threats and achieving economic objectives, (Sem, 2007).

<sup>16</sup> Crossley, M. and Sprague, T. "Education for sustainable development: implications for small island developing states (SIDS)." *International Journal of Educational Development*, 2013: 90

Besides it has been noticed that international educational agendas often fail to match up closely with some of SIDS educational priorities. For example, back to the Jomtien era<sup>17</sup>, the key international priority was access to primary education. However, at that time, many small states were already moving ahead to prioritize their tertiary education needs (Crossley and Holmes 1999). Thus, the global educational agendas are not in many cases portraying the educational needs of SIDS. SIDS would like to move beyond the international agendas. However, they have difficulty to access international funds and support for their educational priorities (Crossley and Sprague:2013). It is crucial that the international agencies and analysts identified the educational priorities in SIDS. Education for sustainable development in SIDS must be in the light of their experiences and needs. UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (UN-DESD 2005-2014) which was the most important international benchmark in ESD, did stress the importance of intercultural education in its agenda. However, recent research before even reaching the end of the UN-DESD (Crossley and Sprague:2013) has argued that in general, the educational priorities in SIDS have not been put into practice. The international community recognizes the exceptional vulnerabilities island societies face, but it has failed to translate this recognition into island-specific support. The vulnerability of SIDS to external factors is not disregarded, but the modest element, more specifically by sustaining their social cohesion through intercultural education that would help them become more resilient are not being made available to these islands.

### **3.1 Can social cohesion be fostered in SIDS through Intercultural Education?**

The rigid educational system in SIDS does not address sufficiently the cultural diversity that is present in the schools. The educational system in most of the SIDS is more oriented towards competitions. In the small interethnic state like Mauritius, their system of education fails to develop a sense of cohesiveness and a truly multicultural society. In every school, the diverse communities are reflected through the students. The government policy to promote multiculturalism is to offer 'oriental languages' to the students coming from different ethnic groups. In both primary and secondary schools, students can choose one of the following oriental languages: Arabic, Hindi, Mandarin, Marathi, Tamil, Telegu, and Urdu. The student's choice of the oriental language will be largely influenced by his or her ethnicity (Moorghen and Domingue,1982). However, schooling has not contributed to strengthen the social cohesion by inculcating students with a certain degree of nationalism as well as understanding and appreciation of the diversified community. The educational system in Mauritius succeeded in bringing students from diverse backgrounds in the same classroom, but it didn't achieve similar level of success in constructing new curriculum, syllabi, and teaching in order to make

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<sup>17</sup> In 1990, it was agreed at the World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand (5-9 March 1990) to make primary education accessible to all children and to massively reduce illiteracy before the end of the decade

interculturalism real. Bunwaree<sup>18</sup> believed that the Mauritian educational system “ accepts people from diverse backgrounds on the same premises; it gives them a chance to rub shoulders but it has a long way to go in teacher training, devising new curricula and syllabi and most important of all in bridging the gap between intent and reality in order to make interculturality real”.

Consequently, the education system is producing new generations of Mauritian, who are foreigners with their borders. Mauritius has the scope to promote interculturality but to do so it requires a new educational policy, which promotes and develops intercultural competence across the curriculum. The education system in Mauritius has been adapting the relativistic approach also known as multicultural education; that is primarily based on promoting neutrality, tolerance and accepting the various elements of the multicultural society. Asgarally<sup>19</sup>(2005) believed that the Mauritian educational system cannot content itself with multicultural education because it is the breeding ground for ethnicism. He further explained that the risk of multicultural education is to favor a society with an essentially ethnic-centered one. However, the Mauritian government has started several initiatives and measures to promote intercultural education at the scholastic level, in line with the objectives laid down by the UN-DESD. These efforts are addressing three spheres; educational institutions, teachers training, and the national curriculum.

Examining the effectiveness of the efforts in these three spheres is essential in achieving progressive steps toward building sustainable social cohesion in the small island state of Mauritius. Notwithstanding governmental policies to implement intercultural education, the situation in the field may be different. The potentials of intercultural education have not been exploited fully in the educational system. It is still at an initial stage. Further research is required to examine the shift in the students’ intercultural understanding and sensitivity after an in-depth implementation of the new measures pertaining to intercultural education. Intercultural education can contribute to promote further active participation in the classroom among the diverse students that will propagate to active citizenship in the local and global community in the future. The Mauritian educational system has already paved the way to multiculturalism by accepting students from diverse background and by supporting the spread of each ethnic group language affiliation. By adopting the intercultural approach in their education system, it can contribute to foster their social cohesion further. Thus building a strong, resilient society as a small state.

Compare to Mauritius, Solomon Islands, a former British protectorate in the Pacific, is struggling to recover from a five years civil conflicts(1999-2003) that have brought it to the verge of collapse. The post-election riots in April 2006 further affected the social stability on the island and peace remains elusive.

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<sup>18</sup> Bunwaree, S. "Economics, Conflicts and Interculturality in a Small Island State: The case of Mauritius." *Polis/R.C.S.P.?C.P.S.R. Vol.9,Numero Special*, 2002: 15.

<sup>19</sup> Asgarally.I and J.M.G. le Clezio, Nobel Prize Winner of literature(2008) are the co-founder of The Federation for Interculturality in Mauritius.



Besides the island is facing serious economic and environmental problems. According to the World Bank<sup>20</sup>, the Solomon Islands is one of the poorest countries in the Pacific. This small state is facing a successive economic crisis like global food, fuel, and financial crisis. The environment<sup>21</sup> has deteriorated drastically for example most of the coral reefs surrounding the islands are dead or dying. Besides in the Solomon Islands the major conflicts between the ethnic groups have created social instabilities. The economic, environmental and social vulnerabilities have weakened the prosperity and stability of this small island. There is an urgent need to build the resilience; to reconstruct this multicultural society to stand up as one force against the vulnerabilities. Education can take the number one position in the battle against the vulnerabilities in this small state. In the multiethnic of Solomon Islands, the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development has put forward policies and planning related to peacebuilding and social cohesion. According to a recent report<sup>22</sup> "Solomon Islands Case Study in education, conflict, and social cohesion" before the conflicts, a mostly western-curriculum predominated; which didn't inculcate a sense of cohesiveness but instead contributed to create friction between traditional and non-traditional systems and structures. The major obstacles of the western-curriculum are that it didn't take into consideration the enormous diversity of the island; each tribe or clan has his languages, traditional or religious beliefs, laws, and culture. Another major problem is the limited access to relevant quality education across all levels and in particular for secondary school-aged children have led to a largely uneducated and unskilled youth population. Over the last decade, there have been significant gains in education provision, including an increase in primary school enrolment from 60 per cent to 90 per cent of children and an expansion from 27 to over 200 secondary schools. It shows the government willingness to provide access to education.

According to the report, many young people in the Solomon Islands have the motivation and willingness to engage positively in society, but limited education and skills have led to a lack of opportunities to enhance the social cohesion. While government policies, frameworks, and strategic plans have been elaborated to promote social cohesion interventions, these have not been incorporated or linked explicitly to ministries and department. In other words, the implementation of policy and planning of peacebuilding and social cohesion at school level is limited. However, many NGOs have initiated short-term projects to enhance the social cohesion in the educational systems, but there is little evidence of long-term strategic approaches. The report<sup>23</sup> pointed out the following: "The potential to support real social cohesion interventions that empower people and create opportunities to heal past conflicts and open doors for economic and social reform are present, but a concerted effort by the government, parties and communities is needed to work across sectors in a

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<sup>20</sup> Available at: <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/pacificislands/overview>

<sup>21</sup> Available at: <http://www.nationsencyclopedia.com/Asia-and-Oceania/Solomon-Islands-ENVIRONMENT.html>

<sup>22</sup> Solomon Islands case study in education, conflict and social cohesion was commissioned as part of UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional office's (EAPRO) contribution towards the 4 year global 'Peacebuilding, education and Advocacy (PBEA) Programme'(2012-2015)

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.,85

coordinated and transparent way to achieve these goals". One of the recommendations of the report is that the educational system should expand access to quality secondary education, and promote quality, relevant education that embraces social cohesion approaches. The past ethnic conflicts have created immense friction in the society. The diversified Islanders in Solomon face barriers between each tribe. There must be a significant push towards a new approach in their educational system to breach such obstacles. Intercultural education can be implemented to promote understanding and respect between the different ethnic groups. The infusion of intercultural competence can heal past conflicts and bring a sense of understanding, cooperation and respect for in the new generation. The distance between the ethnic groups can be improved, in the long run, thus sustaining social cohesion. A cohesive society in Solomon Islands will strengthen their resilience. The Solomon Islanders will have to understand and cooperate with each others to face their vulnerabilities, for examples to stop the alarming rate of destruction of their forests and marine life or rebuild their economy. Social cohesion is crucial for the survival of the Solomon Islanders.

The two cases of Mauritius and Solomon Islands are reflecting the fragility of social cohesion in most of the SIDS. There is a pressing need to implement intercultural education in SIDS. The small island states need to move ahead towards an intercultural approach in their educational system. The different cultural and ethnic groups through their intercultural competence will manage to live together peacefully and build their resilience when facing their vulnerabilities.

## **Conclusion**

Complex reality of the world today presents diverse and an interrelated portfolio of challenges for all the countries around the world; challenges that include social, economic, ecological, political and cultural dimensions. While recognizing that all countries are facing these challenges with a different level of vulnerabilities, nevertheless SIDS has peculiar situation that amplifies their economic, environmental and social vulnerabilities in the face of these challenges.

One of the crucial issues to override these vulnerabilities is the building a long-term societal cohesion in the society. And one of the best ways to do that is through the educational system. The case of SIDS demonstrates that, while acknowledging the economic and environmental vulnerabilities of SIDS are of fundamental importance, reaffirming the 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 two brief cases of Mauritius and Solomon Islands. These cases 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.

Social cohesion can be promoted if in the education system the conditions for the development of intercultural competence is created. 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 education can play to strengthen the social fabrics in SIDS.

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