Invited Article

Learning from Small States for Post-2015 Educational and International Development

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Drawing upon recent work for the Commonwealth Secretariat and our ongoing comparative research, this article focuses upon the nature, impact and implications of contemporary development challenges for education in small states. It is argued that the post-Jomtien era has been dominated by international goals and targets that have focussed predominantly upon basic education, an area of strength for many small states. During this era, many small states found themselves ahead of other nations in terms of access to basic education. They were, therefore, extending the boundaries and parameters of many international educational agendas, pressing ahead and often challenging the focus of international development trajectories. In this article we argue that, because of this, small states have much innovative and pioneering experience to share with those who are now considering the possible nature and direction of post-2015 global education agendas. This includes a rationale for the strengthening of educational research capacity within small states, and an acknowledgement of the fact that small states have much to share with each other, and to contribute to wider development discourse and educational policy deliberations worldwide.

Introduction

This article draws upon research recently completed for the Commonwealth Secretariat designed to identify educational policy priorities that are currently emerging within small states across, and beyond, the Commonwealth (Crossley, Bray, & Packer, 2011). In doing so, it draws upon consultations with Ministers of Education and Senior Officials from small states at the 17th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (CCEM), held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in June 2009 (Crossley, Bray, & Packer, 2009) and participation at the 18th CCEM held in Mauritius during August 2012 (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2012b). This is combined with original and ongoing theoretical research, statistical material derived from a range of international databases, interviews and discussions with a wide range of personnel working within small states and related international development agencies, research being carried out by doctoral scholars from small states working with the authors, and contributions to a Special Issue of *Comparative Education* (Mayo, 2008), and to the 2009 UNESCO-IIEP Policy Forum and related activities that led to the publication of the book *Tertiary Education in Small States Planning in the Context of Globalisation* (Martin & Bray, 2011). Extensive research and consultancy work carried out in the small states of the Caribbean and the South Pacific – in collaboration with local research teams – underpins much of the analysis; and it is to this long-term collective experience, and our research partners, that we owe much gratitude.

The opening sections of the article revisit familiar literature on the nature of small states, and the origins and evolution of a distinctive body of work on education in such contexts. This is followed by an overview of the impact of the international Education for All (EFA) agenda, and education-related Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), upon educational policy and practice in small states. The main body of the article focuses on the nature, impact and implications of contemporary development challenges upon education in small states around the world. In doing so, attention

is given to what the global community may learn from the experience of small sates for the Post-2015 era of international development, particularly in the areas of the quality of teaching and learning, boys' education and flexible/distance learning, and wider issues relating to the politics and future trajectories for international development cooperation, and the importance of contextual sensitivity in educational policy research, development and implementation.

Throughout the article, the analysis is grounded in theoretical and epistemological traditions and perspectives derived from socio-cultural and post-colonial approaches to comparative and international research in education, in particular the traditions inspired by the work of Sir Michael Sadler (see Higginson, 1979) and Isaac Kandel (1933), combined with more recent theoretical work by authors such as Loomba (1998), Tuhiwai-Smith (1999), and Tikly (2001). This intellectual position is articulated at greater length in an earlier article for CICE (Crossley, 2002) in the book *Comparative and International Research in Education: Globalisation, Context and Difference* (Crossley & Watson, 2003), and in a Special Issue of the journal *Comparative Education* on the theme of Postcolonialism (Crossley & Tikly, 2004). However, it is pertinent here to note how this draws attention to the importance of local voice and context sensitivity in both educational research and international development (Crossley, 2010).

Conceptualizing Small States

As discussed elsewhere in the current volume, conceptualisations and definitions of small states have varied widely over time and continue to be debated. Population size remains the favoured indicator in measuring state smallness. The Commonwealth, for example, which has long pioneered support for education in small states, recognises that 32 of its member countries fall into its broad definition of nations with less than 1.5 million people, in addition to six larger Commonwealth states that share similar characteristics: Botswana, The Gambia, Jamaica, Lesotho, Namibia and Papua New Guinea. Our own work with the Commonwealth aligns with this conceptualisation, but also recognises an increasingly accepted threshold of five million within some small states studies, and points out that:

> Of the 80 sovereign countries with populations below five million, 32 (40%) are full members of the Commonwealth (Table 1). Twenty-three are island states, 15 of which are multi-island countries. When 1.5 million people are used as the benchmark, 25 fully independent Commonwealth countries comprise 53 per cent of the total of 47 small states globally. (Crossley et al., 2011, p. 8)

It remains important to point out that while many small states share similar characteristics, there is also great diversity between them, particularly concerning income and levels of development, as defined by the Human Development Index (HDI) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (see Crossley et al., 2011, for further discussion).

In more recent conceptual work on Small States, the classification of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) has emerged. While there is not yet any formally agreed-upon definition of SIDS, UNESCO does maintain a list of 52 such states, which were officially recognised as a formalised group at a 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development. Neither is this sub-group of small states homogeneous. Many of them do, however, face similar challenges related to sustainable development, including remoteness, susceptibility to natural disaster, and external shock vulnerability. This newer and more specific categorisation is particularly relevant to work on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), as briefly discussed in the section on contemporary challenges, below. Before addressing this further, it is helpful to first consider the influence of the post-Jomtien era on the development of education in small states.

Table 1. *Small States by Region and Population Size*

Region	Population < 1.5 million	Population, 1.5 – 5 million
Africa	**Cape Verde; Equatorial Guinea; Gabon; São Tomé & Príncipe;** *Swaziland*	*Botswana*; Central African Republic; **Congo (Republic of);** Eritrea; *The Gambia*; **Guinea Bissau;** *Lesotho*; **Liberia;** *Namibia*
Americas	French Guiana (FRORD); **Suriname**	**Costa Rica; Panama; Uruguay**
Arab States	**Bahrain; Djibouti ; Qatar**	**Lebanon; Mauritania; Oman; United Arab Emirates; West Bank and Gaza**
Atlantic	Bermuda (BROT); Falkland Islands (BROT); Faroe Islands (DENSG); Greenland (DENSG); **Iceland;** St Helena (BROT); St Pierre & Miquelon (FRTC)	
Asia	**Bhutan;** *Brunei Darussalam*; Macao-China (SAR)**; Timor Leste**	**Georgia; Mongolia,** *Singapore*
Caribbean	Anguilla (BROT); *Antigua & Barbuda*; Aruba (NETHFA) *The Bahamas*; *Barbados*; *Belize*; British Virgin Islands (BROT); Cayman Islands (BROT); *Dominica*; *Grenada*; Guadeloupe (FRORD); *Guyana*; Martinique (FRORD); Montserrat (BROT); Netherlands Antilles (NETHFA); St Barthelemy (FROC); *St Kitts & Nevis*; *St Lucia*; St Martin (FROC); *St Vincent & the Grenadines*; *Trinidad & Tobago*; Turks & Caicos (BROT); US Virgin Isl**ands (UST)**	*Jamaica*; Puerto Rico (SGUT)
Europe	**Andorra;** *Cyprus*; **Estonia;** Gibraltar (BROT); Guernsey (UKCD); Isle of Man (UKCD); Jersey (UKCD); **Liechtenstein; Luxembourg;** *Malta*; **Monaco; Montenegro**; San Marino; The Vatican	**Albania; Armenia; Bosnia & Herzogovina; Croatia; Ireland; Latvia; Lithuania; Macedonia FYR; Moldova; Norway; Slovenia**
Indian Ocean	Christmas Island (AUST); Cocos Islands (AUST); **Comoros;** Mayotte (FROC); *Maldives*; *Mauritius*; Réunion (FRORD)**;** *Seychell***es**	
Pacific	American Samoa (UST); Cook Islands (SGNZ); **Federated States of Micronesia; Fiji Islands;** French Polynesia; Guam (SGUT); *Kiribati*; **Marshall Islands;** *Nauru*; New Caledonia (FRORD); Niue (SGNZ); Norfolk Island (AUST); Northern Marianas (SGCUS); **Palau;** *Samoa*; **Solomon Islands**; Tokelau (NZSAT); *Tonga*; *Tuvalu*; *Vanuatu*; Wallis & Futuna **(FROC)**	*New Zealand*

Notes: Countries in bold are members of the United Nations. Countries in italics are members of the Commonwealth. Data refer to 2008. Abbreviations: AUST – Australian Territory Administered from Canberra; BROT – British Overseas Territory; DENSG – Self-governing Overseas Administrative Division of Denmark; FROC – French Overseas Collectivity; FRORD – French Overseas Regions and Departments; NETHFA – Part of the Kingdom of The Netherlands with Full Autonomy in Internal Affairs; NZSAT – New Zealand Administering Territory; SAR – Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China; SGCUS – Commonwealth in Political Union with USA; SGNZ – Self Governing in Association with New Zealand; SGUT - Self-Governing Unincorporated Territory of the USA; UKCD – United Kingdom Crown Dependency; UST – Unincorporated territory administered by USA Office of Insular Affairs.

Education in Small States in the Post-Jomtien Era

In the immediate post-Jomtien era, the potential significance of the small states framework, for education and for international development more generally, became increasingly clear in our own work. The Jomtien Declaration (UNESCO, 1990) and related initiatives did much to co-ordinate and focus the work of international education agencies, national governments, NGOs and other stakeholders from the early 1990s onwards. While this can be seen to have had many beneficial effects, coherent global attention to the EFA agenda prioritised investment and international support for basic education, as translated further in practice, to primary schooling. But, in the

context of many small nation states, primary schooling was, at that time, not their own, or only, key educational priority.

Belize, a Central American small state, provides an example of this tension. The Belize Primary Education Development Project (BPEDP) was the most prominent educational initiative undertaken in the country throughout the 1990s. This national project was supported by a combination of government, British and World Bank development funds with a notable degree of success (Van Der Eyken, Goulden, & Crossley, 1995). Within Belize, however, tensions were reflected by the fact that international financial and technical support was also being sought – with less success – for secondary and tertiary level educational development. Indeed, for many local stakeholders, the development of these post-basic education sectors was a greater priority at that point in time. Primary education sector development was already well advanced, and national education planning priorities had moved on to issues within other education sectors. Belize thus felt out of step with the global priorities of the day, or, like many other small states who had also done well in terms of internationally-agreed primary education enrolment targets, it was pressing ahead and pioneering other agendas to better meet its own felt needs.

Contextual differences lie at the heart of this dilemma, for even in the 1990s many small states had already achieved considerable success in providing widespread access to primary education, partly because of the advantages of small scale that made universal provision more easily achievable. This can be seen in the contemporary enrolment data, presented in Table 2, for primary education in small states.

The 2010 Global Monitoring Report (UNESCO, 2009) also indicates that:

> 18 of 24 Commonwealth countries with populations under five million for which data were available have reached an 80 percent primary net enrolment rate (NER) or better, with 11 of these having reached 90 per cent. (cited in Crossley et al., 2011, p. 26)

Following Jomtien, many small states were thus pressing against the prevailing currents, and looking for initiatives designed to improve the relevance and quality of basic education (Thaman, 1993), to reach out to marginalised groups through non formal projects (Crossley, Sukwianomb, & Weeks, 1987), and to make the most of their scarce human resources through the expansion of the secondary sector and the local provision of tertiary education and related professional opportunities (Crocombe & Crocombe, 1994). In many ways, small states were thus pressing at the boundaries of increasingly firm parameters that were integral to the internationally 'agreed' development agendas of the 1990s.

By coming together, and sharing educational experience under the small states' banner, it can be argued that the distinctive needs and priorities of small states could receive more nuanced and contextually sensitive attention. The emergence of a distinctive literature also generated increased opportunities for local 'voice', critique and leadership to emerge. Following a highly influential pan-Commonwealth meeting on education in small states that was held in Mauritius during 1985 (Commonwealth Secretariat, 1985), and Bacchus and Brock's (1987) seminal publication *The Challenge of Scale: Educational Development in the Small States of the Commonwealth*, the Commonwealth Secretariat played a lead role in supporting regional workshops, consultancies and publications focused directly upon small state priorities in education. These activities ran throughout the 1990s and included initiatives relating to the quality of education, teacher education, post-secondary

Table 2. *Education Data for Select Small States*

	GER in pre-primary education % (2007 or latest year)	NER in primary education % (2007 or latest year)	Gender parity in secondary education GPI (F/M): gross enrolment (2007)	Adult literacy % 15+ Latest year (2002-2007)	Total public expenditure on education % GNP (2007)	Total aid to education constant US$m (2007)
Below 100,000						
Tuvalu	106	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	3
Nauru	79	72	1.19	n.a.	n.a.	1
St Kitts & Nevis	117	96	0.91	n.a	10.9	7
Dominica	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	5.5	3
Antigua & Barbuda	102	74	0.96	99	n.a.	-
Seychelles	125	n.a.	1.13	92	4.9	1
Kiribati	113	n.a.	1.14	n.a.	n.a.	2
100,000 - 250,000						
Tonga	113	96	1.04	99	4.9	3
Grenada	81	76	0.99	n.a.	n.a.	4
St Vincent & the Grenadines	102	91	1.24	n.a.	7.5	17
St Lucia	94	87	1.13	n.a.	6.9	3
Samoa	95	n.a.	1.13	99	n.a.	4
Vanuatu	108	87	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	9
250,000 - 1million						
Barbados	105	97	1.03	n.a.	6.7	-
Maldives	111	96	1.07	97	8.3	8
Belize	123	97	1.07	n.a.	5.8	1
The Bahamas	103	89	1.09	n.a.	n.a.	-
Brunei Darussalam	106	93	1.04	95	n.a.	-
Malta	100	91	1.00	92	4.9	-
Solomon Islands	101	62	0.84	n.a.	n.a.	44
Guyana	112	n.a.	0.93	n.a.	6.5	8
Cyprus	102	99	1.02	98	7.3	-
1 - 1.5 million						
Swaziland	113	87	0.89	84	7.9	5
Mauritius	101	95	0.99	87	3.9	47
Trinidad & Tobago	100	94	1.07	99	n.a.	1

Above 1.5 million						
The Gambia	83 (2008)	67 (2008)	0.96 (2008)	n.a	2.1	6
Botswana	107	84	1.05	83	8.8	3
Lesotho	114	72	1.27	82	11.00	18
Namibia	109	87	1.17	88	n.a.	14
Jamaica	91	86	1.05	86	7.0	11
Papua New Guinea	55	n.a.	n.a.	58	n.a.	40

Source: UNESCO (2009). Notes: GER = Gross Enrolment Rate; NER = Net Enrolment Rate; GPI = Gender Parity Index; GNP = Gross National Product

colleges/tertiary education, and comparative perspectives on examination systems in small states. The achievement and limitations of this work were reviewed in 1999 (Crossley & Holmes, 1999) where it is argued that, despite a need to challenge an overemphasis on perceived vulnerabilities and problems, there was much to be gained from collaboration in education between small states and from "increased efforts to promote…more substantial partnerships with non-Commonwealth agencies concerned with small states" (1999, p. 64).

The politics of international development cooperation, nevertheless, inevitably continued to impact upon national education policy trajectories in ways that generated tensions between the international agendas that shaped the nature of development assistance, and the local needs that inspired educational priorities within small states. The post-Jomtien era was, therefore, a difficult time for many small states to engage whole-heartedly with what were increasingly becoming accepted as international development agendas, goals and targets. Maintaining international engagement was crucial to secure ongoing development assistance and support, but the terms of engagement with many international agencies often failed to relate as closely as local stakeholders would have wished to local small states needs.

Contemporary Challenges and Achievements
While many of the educational and wider developmental challenges faced by small states in the post-Jomtien era continue today, it is important to recognise how, in recent decades, writers from small states have actively challenged the preoccupation of external researchers and the international community with what they perceive as small states' problems, limitations and vulnerabilities (Baldacchino & Bray, 2001). To some extent, this led some critics to challenge the very concept of 'small states,' seeing it as a negative or belittling term. This can certainly be so, depending upon the nature and origins of the analyses being undertaken – but this need not always be the case, and, on the contrary, there are many compelling advantages for small states to come together under this collective banner. Nevertheless, it is for these reasons that in this article we have deliberately chosen to focus upon the positive experience of educational development in small states, upon what others could learn from this experience, and upon the implications of this for post-2015 educational and international development.

Having said this, given these aspirations, it is first necessary to identify the very significant global challenges currently facing all nations and development agencies as they look beyond 2015. Firstly, many 'donor' countries can be seen to be cutting their development aid, including aid for education, in the face of the current global economic crisis. At this level, the challenge is to find

ways of maintaining global interest and investments in education when economic and politically oriented priorities are increasingly gaining prominence. To cite the former Assistant Director-General for Education at UNESCO:

> Investing in people is no longer considered as overriding as it was. The human development paradigm that characterised the late 1990s and was reflected in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) goals of 1996 (and that formed the basis for the MDGs) is no longer dominant. Instead, there is intense attention and focus in the broad international community on jobs and growth on the one hand, and on sustainable development on the other, especially climate change. Such foci, whether correct or not, clearly also require significant attention to education (education is essential to acquire employment skills; education is a prerequisite for climate change mitigation). Yet this attention is simply not there. This is not especially a matter of declining interest by rich countries, though there is some of that. Rather, other issues receive more global attention by both developing and high-income countries. Neither the recent G8 meeting in Chicago nor the recent G20 meeting in Mexico paid attention to education; yet it is only a few years since education was an important G8 topic, notably at the St Petersburg summit in 2006. (Burnett, 2012, pp. 25-26)

Such trends, moreover, can be seen to be influencing agencies that work closely with small states – most notably the Commonwealth itself. Thus, the most pressing and politically sensitive debates faced by ministers of education at the 2012 CCEM, pertinently held in the small state of Mauritius, focussed upon (1) the need for 'robust advocacy' to ensure that Commonwealth education priorities remain central to post-2015 international development planning, and (2) the need to ensure that ongoing strategic planning for the Commonwealth recognised the importance of maintaining funding, staffing and support for the education section and function within the Secretariat – in the face of proposed cuts and reorganisation (see the 18th CCEM Mauritius Communiqué, Commonwealth Secretariat, 2012b; Williams & Urwick, 2012).

The significance of these contemporary trends and developments for the future of education in small states within and beyond the Commonwealth cannot be overstated. Ministers from small states certainly came together at the Mauritius CCEM in recognition of the potential of the Commonwealth to support their collective interests in educational development – and to resist the perceived marginalisation of education in both the Commonwealth Secretariat and post-2015 development planning. As the Mauritius Communiqué testifies, the CCEM also called for greater flexibility in the framing of future international development goals and targets, recognising the diversity of needs and priorities held by member states.

Returning to the distinctive challenges faced by small states, the Mauritius Communiqué also prioritised the quality of teaching and learning, teacher education and mobility, school leadership and education for sustainable development – all of which emerge strongly in our own research as key priorities for future attention. Moreover:

> Ministers reiterated that Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) was not only about climate change but also about other environmental, social, economic and political factors, and it was an issue requiring global action and not only by small states. (18th CCEM Mauritius Communiqué, point 15)

Such challenges are clearly multi-sectoral, but education is widely recognised as having an important role to play. The impact of global factors upon changing educational priorities is similarly reflected in our own research. In the period between the publication of the 1999 review of Commonwealth work on education in small states and the completion of our recent research, much has changed. Most significantly, our 2011 publication argues that contemporary priorities emerging within small states:

> …are especially concerned with how small states can respond to major external shocks and challenges within the environmental, economic, cultural and political domains. (Crossley et al., 2011, p. xviii)

In the light of this, much attention is now being given to ways in which education can help to combat the potentially devastating impact of climate change and associated rises in sea level. This draws specific attention to the contemporary significance of the SIDS categorisation and the pertinence of international research on education for sustainable development, and of the lead small states can make and are making in this respect (Crossley & Sprague, 2011; Furivai, 2009; Koya, Nabobo-Baba, & Teadero, 2010; Nabobo-Baba, Koya, & Teadero, 2007). Education, for example, is being used in the Pacific to sensitise communities to the dangers of a rise in sea level, and of ways in which children can help to prepare for environmental emergencies. Ways of learning about economically sustainable development strategies by drawing from Pacific cultures and indigenous knowledge are also being integrated into school curricula and teaching materials.

While the detailed findings of our recent research can be read elsewhere (Crossley et al., 2011), it is also pertinent to reiterate here that, consistent with our earlier argument, many small states, "are relatively advanced in their progress towards basic education global goals and targets" (2011, p. xiii). Most have already achieved almost universal access to basic education and may have either achieved or are close to achieving gender parity in primary and secondary schooling. The distinctive advantages of small scale have done much to make this possible, and to reinforce the commitment of many small states to 'extending the boundaries' of international development targets and goals. As we have already argued, they were among the first to move their attention, and that of the international development community, beyond simple access to basic education, and into the arenas of educational quality, retention, equity and inclusion.

Within small states there is, therefore, much successful experience from which others can learn. It is to this that we now turn in dealing with, for example, the factors influencing pupil retention in marginalised communities, as the case study extract relating to Botswana illustrates below.

Case Study Box 1: Factors Influencing School Retention in Botswana

A 2008 study in the isolated Ngamiland North West District in Botswana contributes to the research on basic school retention. It argues that factors leading to the poor retention of rural ethnic minority children include policy decisions that fail to recognise the impact of language and identity differences; in-school factors such as infrastructure, the language of instruction, and corporal punishment; and out-of-school factors including community poverty, cultural traditions, illiteracy, school-entry age, and early pregnancy (Pansiri, 2008).

Source: Crossley et al., (2011), p. 28

A second example drawn from our recent research draws upon the distinctive experience of many small states in relation to gender, and insights into the educational problems encountered by boys.

Case Study Box 2: The Gender Challenge in Jamaica

Jamaica has been the focus of much research on boys' educational participation, drop-out and achievement (CCYD, 2010; Jha & Kelleher, 2006). Indicators of both enrolment and achievement favour girls, particularly at the secondary and tertiary levels (Jha & Kelleher, 2006).

The Ministry of Education, Youth and Culture (MOEYC), along with Jamaican sociologists (see Bailey 2003; Chevannes 2002; Evans 1999; Beckles 1996), have identified this gender inequality as based on academic under-participation, leading to poorer performance. Research has identified boys' survival rates from enrolment to the end of secondary schooling as almost 50% lower than girls. According to CARICOM's Commission on Youth Development (2010), there is a much higher percentage of boys dropping out of the school system than girls, with 'drop-out' youths (ages 15-24) – mainly boys - making up 30% of the total youth population (GOJ, 2009). Of this youth population, 26.2% of males (only 7.9% for females) are considered illiterate and 25% of those who have dropped out of secondary schooling have only a grade 9 or less of education (GOJ, 2009).

Studies have identified a number of underlying social themes feeding into the problem, including a historical hegemony of black Caribbean masculinity; a culture of male marginalisation linked to curriculum and student-teacher interactions; absenteeism leading to underperformance; boys' participation in crime and violence linked to socio-economic background; and perceptions of self, connected to gendered values of education.

Source: Crossley et al., (2011), p. 36

Linking with our work on tertiary education in small states in collaboration with UNESCO/IIEP, we also emphasise that challenges relating to the development of tertiary education continue to command increased attention within small states. Much has also been achieved in recent decades, and in ways that consistently questioned the trajectory of international agendas--and helped to pioneer the extension of boundaries once again. Demand for the increased tertiary provision was also generated by the expansion of secondary education in small states, and our findings now reveal a complex architecture of tertiary education that includes a combination of post-secondary institutions, multipurpose community colleges, local universities, regional universities and large numbers of international collaborations, cross-border providers and distance learning initiatives (Chandra, 2011; Louisy & Crossley, 2011; Tewarie, 2011). Box 3 reproduced below also points to the application of new technologies and the emergent potential of the Virtual University for the Small States of the Commonwealth.

Case Study Box 3: The Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth

The establishment and growth of the VUSSC as a global network for higher education is based on principles of working together for the common good with few external resources. The structure complements the regional education networks (such as the Caribbean Knowledge and Learning Network) through which countries cooperate to develop their human resources within a traditional political framework with support from international donor/lending agencies.

Facilitated by the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), the VUSSC rests on the work of individuals in small universities and colleges around the world who share their knowledge and learning materials about common issues such as teacher professional development, fisheries, construction, and disaster recovery. The internet is an essential tool (West & Daniel, 2009).

Source: Crossley et al., (2011), p. 47

This innovative network illustrates what can be gained from collaboration between tertiary organisations in small states – in terms of course sharing, collective development and teaching,

cost-effectiveness, the benefits of scale and research potential – at the same time as it demonstrates the benefits to be gained from the small states concept and terminology, and joint endeavour.

For those interested in learning more about the development of tertiary education in small states, Martin and Bray's (2011) collection of papers is a timely, helpful resource. We now wish to conclude this section by highlighting the fact that by extending the boundaries of dominant interpretations of international development targets and goals, many small states have pioneered innovative developments in education, across all sectors, from which others – in small states and beyond – have much to learn.

Learning from Small States for the Post-2015 Era
The year 2015 has long been set as a key benchmark for educational development in the post-Jomtien era. The series of UNESCO Global Monitoring Reports (for reports, see UNESCO, 2011) has repeatedly marked the significance of this, and as the deadline approaches, minds are now increasingly focussing upon what lies beyond (Barrett, 2012; Burnett, 2012), including international consultation processes and conferences to discuss post-2015 development priorities and the role that education may have (UKFIET, 2012; World We Want, 2012). Our own research on education in small states reveals how much experience in these contexts has already moved ahead and, anticipating a new era, has extended boundaries – often generating innovative educational and development experience from which others can learn with a view to the future.

By way of example, it is argued that the pioneering experience and achievements of small states in dealing with issues relating to the quality and cultural relevance of education has much to offer not only those in other small states, but also the wider international community. This is perhaps especially pertinent with regard to growing international concern with the progress of boys in schooling. Here, the experience and research base of Caribbean small states certainly has much to offer. Similarly, as new technologies are increasingly harnessed to support the expansion of higher education worldwide, the extensive and long-term experience of the small states of the South Pacific has much to contribute to the international literature and policy deliberations relating to distance and flexible learning (Chandra, Koroivulaono, & Hazelman, 2011).

At the broadest conceptual level, however, it is argued that the international community can learn much from the small states literature about the importance of contextual differences in educational policy research, development and implementation. The question of scale – the "challenge of scale" as seen by Bacchus and Brock (1987) – helps greatly to highlight how one size does not fit all, and how what might be 'best practice' in one context may not be appropriate elsewhere – even between small states. Indeed, from this perspective, the wisdom of the 'best practice' discourse is severely challenged in principle. Research on education in small states, perhaps more clearly than any other related work, helps to demonstrate how and why contextual factors deserve much greater attention by all engaged in international development co-operation. This also shows how small states themselves differ, how context sensitive international collaboration can be helpful, and why the strengthening of locally grounded research capacity within small states (and elsewhere) should be a future priority for development in the post-2015 era of international development.

The latter theme emerges most strongly from our long term work, and we argue here that this deserves greater attention today and in the post-2015 era. International and cross-regional collaboration that is supportive of this can do much to strengthen the impact of small state voice and influence in the international arena (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999); it can facilitate learning from and between small states in the spirit of South-South collaboration (Chisholm & Steiner-Khamsi,

2009); and it can play a strategic role in challenging global tendencies towards the uncritical international transfer of educational policy, practice and development modalities – while contributing innovative and pioneering experience from which others can learn as they move beyond the parameters of the Jomtien era.

As researchers in the field of comparative education have long pointed out we can learn much from each other, and from elsewhere, but in doing so we should look for insight and inspiration, and not seek universal blueprints and simplistic knowledge or policy transfer (Crossley & Watson, 2009, 2011). While the politics of international development will continue to shape policy priorities, increased context sensitivity and mutual respect and understanding (Sen 2007) is vital if sustainable economic, human and social development is to be more successful in practice than it has in the past. We therefore conclude with the words of Dame Pearlette Louisy, the Governor General of the small state of St Lucia in the Caribbean who argues that:

> …while [small states] must continue to seek external assistance to implement their development strategies, they know best what their own needs are and what their priorities should be. They have much to contribute to international discourse and to policy deliberations worldwide. (Louisy, 2011, p. xv)

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