



Non-governmental organisations and Education for Sustainable Development: two case studies in Iceland

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Foreword

This thesis is a 40 credits final project for an MA degree in International studies in education, at the School of Education at the University of Iceland. It is my hope that this thesis further increases peoples interest in sustainable development and its multifaceted possibilities.

I would like to give my appreciation to the Red Cross in Iceland and the Icelandic Church Aid for quick responses and their gentle approach. I want to thank the people I interviewed for their contribution to this study.

I give my gratitude to my supervisors Allyson Macdonald and Auður Pálsdóttir for good instructions and collaboration with this thesis.

I thank all my friends who stood by me and last but most importantly I thank my wonderful parents who always believe in me.

Abstract

Non-governmental organisations and education for sustainable development: two case studies in Iceland

The subject of this study is the role of two non- governmental organisations (NGOs), the Red Cross in Iceland and the Icelandic Church Aid, in promoting education for sustainable development. It is an exploration of whether, and how, the work of NGOs facilitates learning for sustainability.

The research framework was developed by consulting theories and research literature on education, human rights, sustainable development, the work of NGOs and evidence of educational actions for sustainable development in the work done by NGOs.

The aim of the research project was to explore the way these NGOs work, to consider whether they support bottom-up or top-down development, whether learning is promoted, and what might be learnt from them with regard to UNESCOs' ideas of education for sustainable development.

A qualitative approach was used, drawing on interview data and document analysis. Four individuals were interviewed, two employees and two volunteers from each NGO. The NGO specialist reports and annual reports were analysed.

The main findings of the study are that life-long learning and formal, non-formal and informal education is sustained by the NGOs which prompt cooperation among people and organisations. The NGOs promote democratic behaviour and have a transformative influence on participants, including volunteers and the environment. The findings from the study also show that these two NGOs strengthen the voice of minority groups, influence authorities and promote bottom up development and learning.

Key words: Education for sustainable development; NGOs; international education; sustainable development.

Útdráttur

Frjáls félagasamtök og menntun til sjálfbærrar þróunar:

tvö íslensk dæmi

Rannsókn þessi fjallar um hlutverk frjálsra félagasamtaka í ferli menntunar til sjálfbærrar þróunar á Íslandi, nánar til tekið Rauða Kross Íslands og Hjálparstarfs kirkjunnar.

Rannsóknin byggir á fræðum og rannsóknnum um frjáls félagasamtök og menntun til sjálfbærrar þróunar, sem er ekki innan hefðbundins ramma skóla.

Leitast var við að kanna á hvaða hátt þessi félagasamtök vinna, hvort frekar sé unnið frá grasrótinni og upp eða ofan frá og niður, og hvaða lærdóm megi draga af starfsemi þeirra og vinnulagi með hliðsjón af áherslum UNESCO um menntun til sjálfbærrar þróunar.

Aðferð rannsóknarinnar er eigindleg. Viðtöl voru tekin við fjóra einstaklinga, tvo starfsmenn og tvo sjálfbóðaliða úr hvorum samtökum fyrir sig. Einnig voru greindar ársskýrslur og samantektarskýrslur félagasamtakanna.

Helstu niðurstöður benda til að menntun eigi sér bæði formlegan og óformlegan stað í samskiptum fólks og stofnana og að verklag innan samtakanna stuðli að samvirkni og lýðræðislegri hegðun fólks í umhverfi sínu.

Samkvæmt niðurstöðum vinna félögin í meira mæli frá grasrótinni þar sem fólk er hvatt til að vera virkir þátttakendur með áherslu á þjálfun í að greina vanda og finna lausnir. Niðurstöðurnar benda einnig til þess að sjálfbóðaliðar í samtökunum geti haft bæði áhrif og borið ábyrgð á hvernig hjálparstarf þróast. Þá virðist sem minnihlutahópum sé gefin rödd í samfélaginu og starf frjálsra félagasamtaka hafi áhrif á stefnu og aðgerðir stjórnvalda.

Lykilorð: Alþjóðleg menntunarfræði; frjáls félagasamtök; menntun til sjálfbærrar þróunar; sjálfbær þróun.

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List of acronyms

CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CSD	Convention on Sustainable Development
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
ESD	Education for Sustainable Development
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNP	Gross National Product
ICA	Icelandic Church Aid
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent Movement
IISD	International Institution of Sustainable Development
MDG	Millennium Developmental Goals
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
RCI	Red Cross in Iceland
SD	Sustainable Development
UN	The United Nations
UNFCC	UN Convention on Climate change
UNDP	UN Development programme
UNEP	UN Environmental Programme
UNESCO	UN Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organisation
USED	United Nations Conference on Environment and Development
WCED	World Commission on Environment and Development
WSSD	World Summit on Sustainable Development

1 Introduction

In recent years it has become clear that sustainable development is vital to human kind. States and governments all over the world are realising the importance of sustainability and many are making laws related to it and plans for implementation. At a global level the UN has played an important role in promoting understanding and analysis of sustainable development through several declarations and conventions and through agencies such as UNEP and UNDP.

Understanding sustainable development focuses on the ability of humans to have a long term view, to dedicate themselves to equity and fairness and to understand the importance to harmonise society, economy and environment in a way that the rights of future generations of all species are protected.

Implementing the theory and its key concepts has proven difficult for different reasons but from the author's point of view the biggest challenge of sustainable development is that it demands a mentality shift. To encourage this shift the World Decade of Education for Sustainable Development 2005-2014 was announced by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 2002. The main goal of the decade is to incorporate the principles, values and practices of sustainable development into all aspects of education and learning. It is assumed that education for sustainable development is for everyone and can be formal (in a formal setting), non-formal (outside formal setting) or informal (learning from life).

In this study a close look is taken at the role of NGOs in sustainable development and how it is possible to relate UNESCO's five pillars of learning (learning to know, do, be, live together and transform oneself and society) to sustainable development in NGO work (UNESCO, 2002). NGOs play a big part in distributing information and in building up knowledge thereby creating awareness and changes in behaviour (Helgason, 2011). The role of NGOs in society is multifaceted and has many features and perspectives that must be considered. NGOs often provide services the state handle alone but may do so in collaboration with the NGOs; NGOs often spot issues that need further research and solutions; NGOs often put pressure on governments giving a voice to people that otherwise are not heard; they encourage people's participation and also encourage connections between individuals and nations; and NGOs promote reciprocity and trust and thereby build up a feeling for a society. Trust

sustains democratic values and in NGOs people learn democratic practices (Salamon, 2001 in Hrafnisdóttir, 2008).

NGOs around the world have an important role to play in sustainable development because of the vast experience and knowledge they have of the needs of people in diverse social contexts. Therefore, it is of value to dig deeper into the wells of wisdom of these organisations to gain insight into their experiences and thereby create evidence-based knowledge of sustainable development implementation.

The purpose of this study is to explore in what ways two NGOs, The Red Cross in Iceland (RCI) and The Icelandic Church Aid (ICA), contribute to sustainability and education for sustainable development in Iceland. These questions were put forth:

- In what ways do the RCI and the ICA promote civic driven change with regarding bottom up development *vís-a-vís* aid oriented top down development?
- How do they promote learning?

The value of this study is that it adds to theoretical knowledge. It may help NGOs in general to realise the depth of sustainable procedures in their work and it could help them improve their practices and see them from a different point of view. The study could also helps to give educators, teachers, natural scientists, politicians and others a different perspective on education and sustainable development by looking at how they can be promoted outside of formal settings.

The thesis is divided into two parts. First, the theoretical background and the conceptual framework are discussed, after that, the findings of the qualitative research project are considered. The first chapter is the introduction of the study where the genesis of the study is explained, and its value and research questions are put forth. The first chapter ends with an introduction of the structure of the thesis.

In the second chapter a review of literature is introduced. It begins with a short history of the concept of sustainable development and the important role the United Nations has played in it. Different definitions of the concept are put forth and different theories of the use of education for sustainable development are discussed. Then NGOs are defined in general terms and their role in sustainable development and in society is highlighted. At the end of the chapter there is a short introduction of the NGOs involved in this study, the RCI and the ICA.

The third chapter, the conceptual framework, is divided into three sections: agency, shared values and action competence. *Agency* focuses on the importance of people's empowerment in a functional society, *shared value* emphasises the importance of cooperation and long term solutions to further sustainable development, and *action competence* promotes the importance of learning in critical action where people are given and use tools to develop their capacities, urges and the will to actively find democratic solutions to problems.

The second part of the study presents the empirical research and is divided into several chapters. The chapter on methods (Chap. 4) contains the research questions, sections discussing design and ethics, data collection, participants and limitations and the strengths of the study. In the beginning of chapter five the data from the interviews are introduced followed by data from different reports. In the sixth chapter the findings are discussed and the research questions answered with respect to the data from the qualitative research, reports discussed as well as the theoretical background. Chapter seven includes reflections on the findings and suggestions for further studies as well as questions that arise from the findings. Chapter eight contains the final conclusions.

2 Literature review

2.1 The Background of Sustainable Development

The International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) (2010) covers states where the concept of sustainable development has been an evolving one over the past two to three decades. By and large it is agreed that sustainable development emphasises the need for harmony across economic development, social equity, and environmental protection. All over the world governments, businesses and NGOs have agreed that sustainable development should serve as a guiding principle and have worked with the aim to improve the practices of businesses and NGOs and enhance general participation in the sustainable development process. Even so, unsustainable actions continue and the way to make real progress in sustainable development is still intangible. For example climate change has become a common cause for implementing sustainable development agendas, but actions do not encompass all three areas. Implementation has proven to be the biggest obstacle as well as difficulty in loosening the tension between economy, society and environment areas (IISD, 2010). The fact that people tend to look at or measure development as economic growth has also hindered sustainable development and led to over flowing consumerism.

Between 1972 and 1992 the principles for sustainable development were emerging through different international gatherings. The United Nation's Conference on the Human Environment held in Stockholm in 1972 was the first to discuss sustainability on a worldwide scale. This conference led to the founding of the UN Environmental Programme (UNEP) (IISD, 2010), whose mission is to provide leadership and encourage partnership in caring for the environment by inspiring, informing, and enabling nations and peoples to improve their quality of life without compromising that of future generations (UNEP, 2013).

The UN World Commission on Environment and Development in 1983 was chaired by the Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland. In 1987 the Brundtland Commission Report on *Our Common Future* was published. It contained an important analysis of the status of the environment and put the matter on the political agenda of international organisations and national governments. The Report emphasised that economic growth, poverty eradication and protecting the environment are all part of sustainability and are not opposing forces (Zoeteman, 2012). The two do not oppose each other and there is a need to combine them. The

Brundtland report puts forth the most commonly used definition of sustainable development: “development that meets the needs of current generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED, 1987, p. 45). Among the reasons why the Brundtland Report was well received was that it was optimistic about the future as the global crisis would be surmountable if people decided to work together (Tavenier & Zoeteman, 2012).

The Brundtland report paved the way for the Rio Summit in 1992, also called the Earth Summit, a milestone in the history of sustainable development because it “laid the foundations for the global institutionalization of sustainable development” (IISD, 2010, p. 8). At the conference The Rio Declaration on Environment and Development and Agenda 21 were embraced. The Rio Declaration contained 27 principles of sustainable development and Agenda 21 had 40 separate chapters about actions or implementation for the social, economic and environmental sides of sustainable development.

Through actions taken for Agenda 21, developed countries reconfirmed their former commitments to the UN goal of giving 0.7 % of their GNP to official development assistance. Three seminal instruments of environmental governance were established at the Rio Summit: the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and following a recommendation in Agenda 21, the UN General Assembly officially created the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) that would meet yearly to follow up on the Agenda. The sum of the Rio agreements covered all aspects of sustainable development relevant at the time and committed nations to be more sustainable and to evolve practices at the local, national and global level for a sustainable future. The Rio agreements have influenced and still influence political and business decisions worldwide (Tavenier & Zoeteman, 2012; IISD, 2010).

There have been many international meetings on sustainable development since The Rio Summit, such as the Earth Summit+5 in New York in 1997 and The Millennium Summit in 2000 where the UN Millennium Development Goals were adopted. In the Millennium Declaration 189 countries promised to reduce poverty and increase justice in the world. The Millennium Forum, then gathered representatives from more than 1000 NGOs and CSOs (civil society organisations) from more than 100 countries (Tavenier & Zoeteman, 2012).

An agreement was reached at the forum on the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDG) to be achieved before the year 2015:

- 1) Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- 2) Achieve universal primary education
- 3) Promote gender equality and empower women
- 4) Reduce child mortality
- 5) Improve maternal health
- 6) Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other diseases
- 7) Ensure environmental sustainability
- 8) Develop global partnership for development

It is interesting to notice that sustainable development as an issue is not mentioned in the MDG. According to Tavenier and Zoeteman (2012), only environmental sustainability in goal 7 shows that sustainable development as discussed in Rio had reached this sector of the UN. But later goal 7 was changed into: Combine sustainable development into Country Policies. Today the Stockholm Resilience Centre is working on changing the eight Millennium Goals into six Sustainable Development Goals (Gaffney et al., 2013).

An important milestone reached at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg 2002 was that The Plan of Implementation was adopted which assigned a larger role to NGOs and international businesses. At the latest conference on sustainable development, the RIO+20 held in Rio de Janeiro 2012, it was clear that NGOs have become, and maybe always were, influential in transforming societies towards sustainable development. The Rio+20 conventions focussed on the green economy for poverty eradication and sustainable development. Ideally green economy thinking eliminates the economic models of the 20th century and promotes growth by generating green and fairly paid jobs and eradicates poverty by investing and preserving natural capital that is essential for biodiversity and continuance of life (Tavenier & Zoeteman, 2012. p.46).

The agreements at the WSSD in 2002 showed that the understanding of sustainable development had shifted from environmental issues toward social and economic development. This important shift reflected the needs of the developing countries and was strongly influenced by the Millennium Development Goals (IISD, 2010) but it has proven difficult to link theory to practice. Among the reasons are the dominance of economic growth, human greed and competition. All developed countries, except Sweden, Norway, Luxembourg, Denmark, and the Netherlands, have failed to contribute 0.7% of their GNP to international development assistance. It seems that international commitments do not recognise the realities in

nations, with different stakeholders, such as government, businesses, and NGOs need to be more involved. Often these stakeholders only see part the concept of sustainable development “More sustainable development pathways are needed in both developed and developing countries; which require a level of dialogue, cooperation and, most importantly, trust that simply is not reflected in today’s multilateral institutions or regimes” (IISD, 2010, p.7).

2.2 So, what is sustainable development?

Sustainable development relies on the ability of humans to have a long term view, to dedicate themselves to equity and fairness and to understand the importance of harmonising society, economy and environment in a way that the rights of future generations of all species are protected. Sustainable development is “a concept aiming at acting in a way that reflexively includes all types of consequences for all affected – now and later” (Mommaas & Zoeteman, 2012, p. 55). This definition highlights how broadly ideas on sustainable development can be interpreted. Supporting sustainable approaches is a complex task as parameters of time (past present and future) interlock with parameters of space (local and global).

Sustainable development needs to be interwoven in every little thing human beings think of and act on. It might sound extreme to say that it has to be included in everything but thinking is one of the things that distinguish people from other beings and also one of the main reasons for the unsustainable development facing humankind. Thus sustainable development will not result from the power of the market alone; it cannot be commanded by law. The core of sustainable development must be found within people, in their minds and hearts. It must become part of the mind-set pioneers, investors, politicians, administrators, board members, educators - that come up with new solutions and have the will and courage to work jointly towards ambitious goals. People so that they are ready to dig deep for motivations that make sustainable development an increasing option for change (Zoeteman, 2012).

Because there is no “once and for all’ solution: sustainable development is an on-going and comprehensive social process of change and transformation. At the same time, the urgent challenge of responsibly dealing with our planet’s resources and ecological capacity is connected with the need to help

improve living conditions in poorer countries and take local responsibility for global developments. (German Commission for UNESCO, 2011. p. 7)

There are many interpretations of sustainable development. It is important to realise that cultural and socio-economic context is fundamental to understanding the concept as a whole. Different nations focus on different aspects of sustainability, the developing countries might focus more on securing basic needs and developed countries on issues such as the problem of consumption, biodiversity, improving options in education, green economy and so on. The mission of justice and fairness is also interwoven in the issue of sustainability thus global responsibility, cultural diversity and political participation, are key achieving the agenda (German Commission for UNESCO, 2011)

Achieving sustainable development in the interests of future generations and global justice requires taking a balanced environmental, economic and social approach to managing our dynamically changing world, and involving all people(s) in the political decision making processes. (German Commission for UNESCO, 2011, p. 8)

Sustainable development is a global mentality shift that reduces, or in an ideal world eliminates, short term thinking and short term solutions, and requires us to act on knowledge. For this education is important.

2.3 Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)

The first reflections on education and sustainability were presented in chapter 36 in Agenda 21 as an enabling implementation strategy. At the World Summit in Johannesburg in 2002 the Decade for Sustainable Development was proposed (UNESCO, 2005). The General Assembly of the United Nations announced in December 2002 that the decade 2005-2014 would be the World Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (German Commission for UNESCO, 2011). The main goal of the decade is to incorporate the principles, values and practices of sustainable development into all aspects of education and learning. It is assumed that education for sustainable development is for everyone and can be formal or informal. This type of education can be encouraged anywhere, for example

in schools, courses and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). NGOs play a big part in distributing information and building up knowledge, creating awareness and changes in behaviour (Helgason, 2011).

UNESCO defines education for sustainable development as an education that strives to empower people to take responsibility for a sustainable future. Its purpose is to improve access to a good basic education, improve education curricula and practice and awaken public awareness including helping people to improve their behaviours, abilities and knowledge they need now and in the future (UNESCO, 2002).

The main characteristic of ESD is based on the principles and values that stress sustainable development. It strives for understanding of the three spheres of economic, environmental and social activity that need to be connected and become a part of a holistic view. Education for sustainable development is interdisciplinary; it wishes to be a part of all kinds of learning and education, be it formal or informal and emphasises the importance of life-long learning (UNESCO, 2005). Most of all ESD aims at enabling people to acquire values, knowledge and skills

Box 1. (from Macdonald et al., 2012)

UNESCO's Five learning pillars

Learning to know recognises the challenges of sustainability with an emphasis on acquiring and building knowledge. That includes recognising the evolving nature of the concept of sustainability, reflecting on the growing needs of societies, acknowledging that fulfilling local needs often has international effects and consequences and includes an emphasis on addressing content, context, global issues and local priorities.

Learning to do focuses on the ability to put what is learned into practice. Working towards sustainability requires acting with determination on a daily basis. That includes knowledge, values, practical skills and knowing how to act for active engagement in productive employment and recreation.

Learning to be assumes the indivisibility of human dignity and contributes to a person's complete development: mind, body, soul, intelligence and sensitivity. That includes that the goal of education is not just for purposes of serving the society, responding to globalization or for moulding thinking, but for enabling individuals to learn, and to seek, build, and use knowledge to address problems on a scale that ranges from the minute to the global and beyond.

Learning to live together addresses the critical skills that are essential for a collective responsibility and constructive cooperation.

This includes the capacity of the citizens to take part in society's decision making, social tolerance, environmental stewardship, adaptable workforce and quality of life. Such capacity excludes discrimination but provides individuals equal opportunity to develop themselves and to contribute to the wellbeing of the families and communities.

Learning to transform oneself and society

requires individual and collective actions recognising that individuals working separately and together can change the world. The focus is on the values inherent in sustainable development encouraging people to reflect on their own communities in order to make changes creating a more viable and fairer society for everyone. The path to changed behaviour is through changed attitudes.

required from their life and society in a sustainable way. ESD draws on five essential types of learning (Box 1) to promote quality education and nurture sustainable development (UNESCO, 2005).

Mijung and Roth (2008) point out that knowing doesn't necessarily lead to effort, actions or behavioural changes. They argue that there is a need to rethink scientific literacy in that it should involve ethics as its core element. They say that in modern society knowledge is generally separated from action and thus from the responsibility of knowing.

McKeown (2006) notes that population growth and resource consumption are two of the biggest concerns in the global discussion on sustainability because both jeopardise a sustainable future. Population growth and consumption are, in her opinion, linked to education in a paradoxical way. She points out that "by reducing fertility rates and the threat of overpopulation a country also facilitates progress toward sustainability" (2006, p. 12).

The other side of the coin, though, is that highly educated people that gain more also consume more than people with less education and lower salaries. Education is not enough to pave the way towards a sustainable world. What matters is the type, quality and method of education, "education for sustainable development calls for giving people knowledge and skills for lifelong learning to help them find new solutions to their environmental, economic and social issues" (McKeown, 2006, p. 9). The most educated nations have the highest per capita rates of consumption. McKeown interestingly points out that more than 80% of people from the USA have some kind of post-secondary education and 25% have a four year university degree but still statistics show that energy use and waste generation in the United States per capita are almost the highest in the world. Thus clearly there is a need for a change in the educational system (McKeown, 2006).

To reach local sustainability goals access to education for girls and women has to be extended world-wide. Educated women often know and exercise their rights in society, their economic status rises, decision power increases and they often marry later and have fewer and healthier children (McKeown, 2006). More education for women also requires education for men as they begin to face a different set of gender issues.

One of the biggest problems in schools is that students often do not really know why they are doing different tasks and just do them to pass an exam. Teachers often claim that students are not interested or curious

enough but Roth (2009) points out that it is difficult to be curious about something that you know nothing about or understand. In his paper *On Activism and Teaching*, Roth gives a clear example of this. One teacher teaches about a device and then tests a boy's knowledge of it with poor results. Then Roth gives an example of a biologist that gets students to use a device before teaching the theory behind it, ending up with good results. Once the children had used the device it was interesting for them to learn more about it because they understood and had a feeling for how it works and therefore it was easier to remember new terms and names related to it. Roth (2009) says in his paper:

As students become familiar with a particular activity, they can learn new discourses and material practice, because there is already a web of significations in which the new and heretofore unknown discourse and practice takes its sense. (p. 45)

Therefore there is a need to teach in a way that makes learners put their knowledge into action. Activism or active participation and sustainability are closely related because both include "transforming the world and making it a better place" (Roth, 2009, p. 46). Through an activism approach in education, people learn how to take responsibility, work together and see themselves as someone that can make a difference in their society and therefore the world.

Through action educators and learners will learn jointly what should be obvious but has become so distant to us, that "[...] human beings are part of an interdependent system of plants, animals, hills, forests, oceans and air that require our respect and care. This system is what we call Mother Earth. Earth does not belong to man, but man belongs to earth" (*Universal Declaration of Mother Earth Rights* in Cullinan, 2011, p. 192). According to Sterling (2001), humans are educated to compete and consume instead of learning to care and conserve, but through the right kind of education and life-long learning people learn to work together, act responsibly and care for nature and other living beings. As it says in the *Universal Declaration of Mother Earth Rights*:

In the 21st Century it is impossible to achieve full human rights protection if at the same time we do not recognise and defend the rights of the planet earth and nature. Only by guaranteeing the rights of Mother Earth we can guarantee the protection of

human rights. The planet earth can exist without human life, but humans cannot exist without planet earth.

Moore (2005, p. 78) believes that sustainability education “must be interdisciplinary, collaborative, experiential, and potentially transformative. Sustainability education is also a process of creating a space for inquiry, dialogue, reflection, and action about the concept and goals of sustainability”. This means that people have to learn to collaborate, be humble, creative and respectful. As Moore points out, teachers and educators need to become collaborators and co-creators of knowledge as an alternative to experts and non-experts. In this process learners learn to collaborate, and in collaboration the “learning processes emphasise questioning, negotiating and creating a shared understanding of alternative ways of knowing” (Moore, 2005, p. 81).

2.4 Sustainable Development in Iceland

Although the concept of sustainable development is fairly young in Iceland a national strategy for sustainable development was approved by the Icelandic Government in 2002. The strategic report *Welfare for the Future* is reviewed every four years. In the most recent report *Welfare for the Future Iceland's National Strategy for Sustainable Development Priorities 2010-2013* two issues are discussed in depth: sustainable production and consumption, and education in sustainable development (Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources, 2010).

As mentioned above the UN has designated the decade from 2005 to 2014 as the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development. Governments in UN member states are expected to promote raised awareness and participation for measures for sustainable development, including collaboration with schools, NGOs, and other stakeholders. The purpose of the decade is to work towards sustainable development and increase the general understanding of what sustainability actually means.

The priority objectives in Iceland for sustainable production and consumption are: to promote more environment-friendly purchasing; Icelandic firms and institutions are to adopt the Swan eco-label or comparable eco-labelling for their goods and services; consumers shall have a greater choice of eco-labelled goods and services; information on the value of sustainable day-to-day consumption is to be increased and awareness of environment-friendly physical planning and man-made

structures shall be raised among stakeholders and the public (Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources, 2010).

The Icelandic Government purchases goods, services, and projects for over 100 billion Icelandic kr. per year, which is one-fourth of Iceland's total government expenses. It can therefore contribute considerably to environmental improvements by using environmental visions as a guideline in public sector purchasing and in using and disposing of supplies. The government strategy on environment-friendly purchasing was formulated in April 2009, and is a very important example for all Icelanders to follow (Ministry for the Environment and Natural Resources in Iceland, 2010). Priority objectives for education for sustainable development in Iceland are to promote a society characterised by solidarity. In the report six categories of education for sustainability are put forward but it is made clear that the objectives are different and may differ depending on whether the focus is on the school system, associations and NGOs, continuing education centres, or the general economy. Education should help each individual to become an effective citizen who is connected with and conscious of his or her values, attitudes, and feelings about: 1) the global impact of human beings and the equal status of Earth's inhabitants; 2) nature and environment; 3) democracy, human rights, and justice; 4) equal rights and multiculturalism; 5) welfare and public health, economic development and 6) vision for the future (Ministry for the Environment and Natural Resources in Iceland, 2010).

Iceland 2020 is a policy statement from the Office of the Prime Minister (2011) which includes 15 measurable social objectives and 5 economic and development objectives that are to be achieved by the year 2020, with emphasis on social knowledge, welfare and sustainability. The policies are about how to strengthen education and culture, innovation and development, the environment and social infrastructure in Iceland (Box 2).

Recently, in connection to policy discussions on 2008, the terminology 'green economy' has emerged. Its definition has been a matter for debate (EEA, 2011). According to UNEP (2011) a *green economy* is an economy that improves human wellbeing and social equity, and while significantly decreasing environmental hazards and ecological insufficiencies. The focus is on economic activity rising from public and private endowment which

decreases pollution and the ejection of greenhouse gases, encourages more competent use of energy and impedes degradation of biodiversity and ecosystem services.

The Parliamentary Committee on the Strengthening of the Green Economy in Iceland published a report in September 2011 about the implementation, vision and policy of a green economy proposing 48 actions in order to strengthening this type of economy in Iceland (Helgason, 2011). The report states that a green economy improves quality of life in Iceland for both future and present generations. This serves not only to prevent the degeneration of ecosystems but also to maintain and to strengthen the competitive basis of Iceland: “We envisage that Iceland can become an international leader as a green economy, focusing on a clean natural environment, sustainable use of energy and education towards sustainability” (Helgason, 2011, p. 5).

Box 2. Objectives of Iceland 2020

Social objectives: Welfare, knowledge, sustainability:

1. To reduce the percentage of people (aged 18-66) with disability from 7.3% of the population to 5.7% by 2020.
2. To reduce the unemployment rate from 7% in 2010 to 3% by 2020. To achieve greater equality in Iceland, by lowering the Gini coefficient for disposable income to around 23 by 2020.
4. To narrow the gender gap in order to bring the Global Gender Gap Index close to 0.9 by 2020.
5. To improve well-being and sound mental health so that the average measurements on the well-being index rise from 26,6 in 2009 to 28 in 2020.
6. To reduce the percentage of Icelanders aged between 25-64, who have not received any formal secondary education, from 30% to 10% by 2020.
7. That 4% of the GDP shall be allocated to research, development and innovation. The investment by the private sector shall be 70% against a 30% contribution from the public sector through contributions to competitive funds and research programs.
8. That by 2020, Iceland be in the top 10 nations on the E-government development index and E-participation Index measured by the United Nations.
9. That by 2020, the high-tech industry will account for 10% of the GDP and 15% of the value of exports.
10. That a minimum of 10% of the fuels used in the fisheries industry will be eco-friendly by 2020 and that 10% of all fuels used in transport will be eco-friendly.
11. That by 2020 Iceland shall have made commitments comparable to those of other European nations with regard to the United Nations' Framework Convention on Climate Change and that net emissions excluding ETS will decline by 38% from the year 2008.
12. That eco-innovation and its products be the main growth sector of this decade, with an annual growth in turnover of 20%, which will double between 2011 and 2015.
13. That by 2020, 75% of new vehicles weighing less than five tons will run on renewable energy.
14. That the percentage of domestic food consumed by Icelanders will have increased by 10% by 2020.
15. That by 2020, the skills of Icelandic elementary school pupils be comparable to those of the top 10 nations classified by the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in the domains of reading and mathematical and scientific literacy. (Iceland 2020, p. 10-11)

The economic and development objectives are:

1. That public debt shall not exceed 60% of the GDP by 2020.
2. That, by 2020, inflation shall be no more than the Central bank's target rate, which is now 2,5%.
3. That, by 2020, interest rates (long-term interest rates) shall be no more than two percent higher than the interest rates in the three EU member states with the lowest interest rates.
4. That the UN's Human Development Index (HDI) for Iceland shall be comparable to those of the top five nations on the index.
5. That the Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI) shall always remain

2.5 Education for Sustainable Development in Iceland

The ActionESD group was a university based research- and development project that worked with schools to promote and strengthen education for sustainable development. The main objective was to strengthen understanding and discussion on ESD and find ways for its implementation in Icelandic schools. (Björnsdóttir, 2008)

In September 2011 the Green Economy Committee emphasised that the educational system plays an important role in introducing a green economy. Not only is the traditional school system important but also other fields of education and learning, formal and non-formal, including NGOs. The committee suggested four actions to promote the system of education in planning education for sustainable development. Among those was revision of courses for teacher training in order to incorporate education towards sustainability. The committee also proposed a special, “Sustainability Education Fund” to provide grants for institutions and projects that support education towards sustainable development (Helgason, 2011).

2.6 Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)

There are diverse non-governmental organisations all over the world and their number increases every day. Commonly, what lies behind NGOs is their will to make the world a better place. Many of these organisations play an important role in society, often providing various services, promoting democracy and striving for better rights for people (Hrafnisdóttir, 2008; UNCED, 1992).

It is difficult to provide a definition of NGOs because of their vast number and type. Generally NGOs are private organisations acting globally, nationally or locally. They are commonly made up of groups of people and institutions with a common humanitarian or environmental purpose and are partially or completely independent from a government. To attract private funds NGOs often have religious or charitable associations (Akdannova et al., 2012). NGOs belong to the so-called third sector in addition to the public and private sectors. The term Non-Governmental Organisation lacks a legal definition but the one most commonly used refers to “a legally constituted, non-business organisation created by natural or legal persons with no participation or representation of any government” (Akdannova et al., 2012, p. 230-231). Some of these

organisations are often called civil society organisations (CSO) because of their socially oriented goals. According to Bauer et al. (2012) civil society is “neither initiated nor founded. It is a common place in all societies as an emergent property of any society with more than a minimum level of complexity and space for individualism. Humans with similar interests get together, organise and become active to promote their common interest” (Bauer et al., 2012, p. 5) “Civil society is the multitude of associations around which society voluntarily organises itself and which represents a wide range of interests and ties” (OECD, 2012). In this thesis the general term NGO is used to cover both NGOs and CSOs

2.7 NGOs and their role in SD

The role of NGOs in society is multifaceted and has many features and perspectives to be considered. It can be narrowed down to five main features (box 3), according to Lester Salamon (in Hrafnisdóttir, 2008):

Box 3. Five main features of NGOs	
Service	NGOs often provide services the state cannot or has not provided and sometimes do so in collaboration with the state
Initiative	NGOs often spot issues that need further research and find solutions
Advocacy	NGOs often put pressure on governments giving a voice to people that are otherwise not heard
Participation	NGOs encourage people’s participation
Connection and democracy	Encouraging connection between people NGOs promote reciprocity and trust and thereby build up a feeling for a society. Trust sustains democratic values and in NGOs people learn democratic practices

In Agenda 21 it is emphasised that NGOs are essential in forming and implementing a participatory democracy and therefore play an important role in sustainable development. It is recognised in the agenda that NGOs are vital, trustworthy and constructive in a society because of the transparency and responsibility they show. Because of the independent role these organisations play, they call for an actual participation from the people (UCED, 1992).

Mainly, NGOs are vital for sustainable development because the issues addressed lie at heart of what numerous NGOs do. The majority of these organisations have something to do with sustainability issues without maybe realising it, they make an effort to protect nature and wild life; strive for fairness and justice in the world bridging the gap between the rich and the poor; work hard to modify unsustainable behaviour patterns; and are the voice of the people. Some look at international NGOs as one whole, as *the global civil society* (Seters, 2012; Walker & Thompson, 2008). A much more recent term and maybe not well known is *the sustainability movement* (Seters, 2012). In *Blessed Unrest: How the Largest Movement in the World Came into Being, and Why No One Saw it Coming* Paul Hawken's describes how he started to estimate the numbers of NGOs and when he had estimated more than one maybe even two million organisations striving for ecological sustainability and social justice he became convinced that it can be referred to as a movement. And "no-one saw it coming" because there is no one leader but the organisations are all globally connected with the same goals at heart. Hawken (in Seters, 2012) describes it as a humanitarian movement rising from the bottom up, and Seters (2012) calls it 'the sustainability movement' because all these organisations are working to make the world more sustainable.

NGOs can make mistakes. Alan Fowler (2000) argues that often NGOs fall into the trap of creating dependency or disempowerment and often something goes wrong before the effects of lobbying and advocacy are felt by those who receive assistance from the NGO.

How NGOs work can be just as important as what they actually do. Often a so-called "tactic" is used, defined as a way to resolve a problem without addressing the underlying cause, which is often necessary especially when natural hazards or plagues hit us (Macdonald, 2013). Many NGOs, for example, collect clothes and give to the poor and/or send food to the third world countries. This is helping, fixing the problem and is vital to people in need, it fills a gap, but it is not a sustainable way of helping. It does not promote sustainable development but rather it creates dependency on others (Gaventa, 2010).

In Mamphela Ramphele's words "Development can't be done to people. People have to become the agents of their own development" (in Boyte, 2010, p. 81). NGOs can provide the tools, the guidance necessary for development but the people need to feel the urge and strive for change if development is to take place.

Boyte (2010) talks about civic driven change i.e. a bottom up development model in which people are agents of their own development, contrasted with top down development in which people are aided or rescued by others, “often with the best of progressive and redistributive intentions” (Boyte, 2010, p. 83). For sustainable development there is a need for a change of mentality, a social change. This change will not depend on the initiatives of aid agencies or NGOs. “It is civic actors who decide about structural and enduring change in their society, aided change is the less sustainable type of social change” (Biekart & Fowler, 2010, p. 77).

Gaventa (2010) indicates that by acting and mobilizing on key issues and identities, people learn and acquire new identities and as political actors, they become aware of their rights, as well as their rights to actually have rights. Therefore, they themselves, provided with the right tools, “build the alliances and solidarities which allow them to exercise power” (Gaventa, 2010, p. 65).

2.7.1 Locating NGOs

In order to locate NGOs in a global perspective of sustainability Fowler (2000) promotes a systems approach to sustainable development that he describes as an economic, ecological and social system:

- In the economic system NGOs use strategies that:
 - Reduce economic vulnerability of households and their livelihoods
 - Increase assets and equity
 - Increase access to appropriate economic goods and services
- In the ecological systems they employ strategies that:
 - Ensure that natural stocks of plants and animals are strengthened and not degraded
 - Reduce or counter act environmental hazards
 - Increase biological productivity
 - Retain genetic diversity
- In the social system they use strategies that:
 - Advance social justice
 - Promote participation and inclusiveness in social and political institutions
 - Enhance mediating institutions that bridge gaps between groups based on trust and reciprocity
 - Respect cultural and human diversity.

Fowler points out the fact that NGOs ought to be both conscious of and able to deal with ambiguity because authorities, political agents and people with self-interest will try to twist and turn situations to their own benefit.

It is acknowledged that it is difficult to measure progress in sustainable development because of its multifaceted procedures and ever transformative nature. Nevertheless many sustainability indices have been created, such as the Human Development Index, the Ecological Footprint, Environmental performance Index, Corporate Sustainability Index and Sustainability Attitude Index to name but a few.

Because this thesis is socially and educationally oriented it was deemed most appropriate to use this Sustainability Attitude Index as a directional indicator of the interviews. This Index has a five level scale of attitude, where 1 is *very unsustainable* and 5 is *super-sustainable*. These five attitude levels (Box 4) are related to the concepts discussed in the Brundtland Report: growing integration in societies, responsibilities, present and future needs of all (Zoeteman, 2012). The Sustainability Attitude Index deals with beliefs, opinions and behavioural patterns of people and organisations. It helps understanding the underlying thoughts that influence behaviour and performance. The index assumes that the attitudes of NGOs reflect the effects and demonstrate their willingness to take responsibility for the outcome. This index requires the consideration of the three dimensions/indicators of People (social-cultural), Planet (environmental) and Profit (economic) (Zoeteman, 2012):

- Planet includes: environmental footprint, evolution of issues, pro-activeness of the NGO,
- People includes: cooperation with other organisations and internal and external social policy.
- Profit includes: financial dependency, type of action, financial transparency and broadness of action issues.

Box 4. Sustainability Attitude Index (Zoeteman, 2012, p. 233)	
1. Very unsustainable	NGOs only try to achieve their own goals, have little financial support and do not provide transparency
2. Unsustainable	Methods revolve around demonstration and political protests, no cooperation with stakeholders
3. Nearly sustainable	Existence of an internal environmental and social policy, proven willingness to talk with others
4. Sustainable	Showing broadness and proactiveness of action, willingness to join stakeholders to reach common goals
5. Beyond sustainability	Dynamic evolution of issues depending on social needs, optimal transparency including donor, as well as taking initiatives for cooperation and partnership and collaboration with local communities. A focus on “creating abundance” instead of “dividing scarcity”

In the article *Curriculum analysis and education for sustainable development in Iceland* Jóhannesson et al. (2011) it is explained how the ActionESD group created a tool to analyse the Icelandic curriculum for early childhood-, compulsory- and upper secondary school in order to see if the curriculum provides time and space for education for sustainable development. Knowing they wouldn't find the terms sustainability and sustainable development frequently in the school curricula the ActionESD group created a tool they called *a key*, which they believed "... [could] connect the policies of the government and the United Nations and other relevant agencies and organisations with school curricula and research knowledge" (Jóhannesson et al., 2011, p. 378). The curriculum analysis key includes seven features which reflect the interconnected perspectives of sustainable development: economy, environment and society, in addition to the themes of the United Nations, in its guidelines for the decade of education for sustainable development. The ActionESD curriculum key was defined as follows:

- (1) Indications of values, opinions and feelings about nature and environment
- (2) Identification of knowledge contributing to a sensible use of nature
- (3) Statements about welfare and public health
- (4) Indications of democracy, participation and action competence
- (5) Recognition of equality and multicultural issues
- (6) Indications of awareness and understanding of global issues
- (7) References to economic development and future prospects (Jóhannesson et al., 2011).

Fowler's (2000) system, Jóhannesson et al. (2011) keys and Zoeteman's (2012) Sustainable Attitude Index could provide NGOs key issues to work with in order to advance and assess sustainable development within their organisation.

These key issues are useful in forming guidelines to measure education for sustainability within NGOs where the term sustainability and sustainable development might not be known or frequently used.

2.8 NGOs in Iceland

Since the 18th century numerous NGOs in Iceland have worked with humanitarian, ecological, cultural and disaster management issues

(Hrafnisdóttir, 2008). NGOs and volunteer work have historical roots in the welfare system in Iceland; it is because of their voice and work, for example, that women can vote and that there is a welfare state healthcare in the country. Non-governmental organisations have played an important role in building up the Icelandic society. Public participation is quite high; it is equal between the genders and most common among adults between 35 and 44 years of age. Despite the increasing importance of NGOs world-wide research info of their role is lacking in Iceland (Hrafnisdóttir, 2008).

This study examines two of the best known humanitarian NGOs in Iceland - the Red Cross in Iceland, and the Icelandic Church Aid. These specific NGOs are respected among the public in Iceland and both strive for humanitarian aid internationally and locally.

2.8.1 The Red Cross in Iceland

The Red Cross is an international movement founded in 1863 after the first Geneva Convention in Switzerland which later led to the foundation of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent Movement or the ICRC in 1919. Under the ICRC there are 188 national societies, the Red Cross in Iceland being one of them. The Red Cross in Iceland (RCI), as in every society within the movement, shares and follows common principles, but the national societies are not hierarchically connected. The common principles that each unit of the movement need to respect are: humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntary service, unity and universality (ICRC, 2013; Rauði Kross Íslands, 2012; Sturluson, 2008; Guðmundsdóttir, 2000).

The purpose of the Red Cross is to protect life and health and to guarantee respect for human lives. The Red Cross strives towards mutual understanding, friendship, peace and collaboration among all nations. It does not distinguish among people based on nationality, gender, origin, religious beliefs, social class or political opinion; it strives to lessen individual difficulties and gives priority to those that need it the most (Rauði Kross Íslands, 2012).

The Red Cross in Iceland (RCI) was founded in 1924 by a group of medical doctors and the first president of Iceland, Sveinn Björnsson. Today there are 50 departments in Iceland and at the end of the year 2011 there were 20.500 members and registered volunteers were 3.792.

The Red Cross in Iceland reacts to emergencies both in Iceland and abroad, protects human rights and respects the individual. Among its main

goals are to reduce social isolation and enforce collaboration with developing countries (Rauði Kross Íslands, 2012; Sturluson, 2008). Every year the Red Cross sends 20 volunteers to assist abroad as well as reacting to emergency situations by providing emergency funds. The Red Cross in Iceland offers various services led by volunteers such as a shelter for homeless women and a variety of programs for women and female immigrants; language courses; homework assistance and tutors for immigrant children and social activities for children and adolescents; assistance and shelters for people that suffer from a mental illness; home visits for the elderly and socially isolated people; a help-line open 24/7; second hand clothing stores, and many other activities, such as the administration of all ambulances in the country. The Red Cross in Iceland has also been developing an efficiency index to monitor for example if people are content with their service and how well projects are going. The Red Cross in Iceland also cooperates with a few high-schools and the University of Iceland where students can get their volunteer work evaluated as credits (Sturluson, 2008).

2.8.2 The Icelandic Church Aid

The Icelandic Church Aid (Hjálparstarf Kirkjunnar) was founded in 1970 by the National Church of Iceland. The initiative started in 1969 with a campaign to aid starving people in Nigeria. After that an aid organisation was founded and has been working ever since, combating hunger and poverty in many parts of the world by participating in emergency and development aid. To begin with there was only one employee but today there are seven employees and numerous volunteers (Ólafsdóttir, 2008).

The purpose and the priority of the Icelandic Church Aid is to protect human rights and human development both in Iceland and abroad, where help is needed, regardless of religion, ethnicity, gender or beliefs. The main projects in Iceland are: to provide first aid in emergencies; to assist relief associations; and to provide people with the tools necessary to help themselves through difficult times. To reach its goals the Icelandic Church Aid runs an office under the leadership of a social worker and those who seek help do so, for example, through priests, deacons or social workers. The Icelandic Church Aid puts an emphasis on good record-keeping and can therefore contribute valuable information to the government and others, with details of situations in which recipients of aid find themselves in and can raise awareness of what needs to be done to improve their conditions.

The main issues the Icelandic Church Aid is concerned with on an international level include assistance to other churches in difficulties and to help sustain their activities; to provide the poor with developmental and first aid; to help refugees; to promote human rights. Strengthening the ability to help oneself is the core of all assistance the Icelandic Church Aid provides, both in Iceland and abroad and to work with people in a bottom up fashion, beginning with ideas of improvements and working on the projects themselves with the training and knowledge they have already gained (Hjálparstarf kirkjunnar, 2012; Ólafsdóttir, 2008).

3 Conceptual framework

In this chapter three key concepts related to developing capacity for sustainability: agency, shared value and action competence are discussed.

ESD is based on the principles and on values that stress sustainable development. ESD strives to promote the understanding of interconnectedness of the three spheres of economic, environmental and social activity. It is interdisciplinary and to be effective it needs to be a part of all kinds of learning and education, be it formal, informal or non-formal. It requires life-long learning and has as its aim to enable all to acquire values, knowledge and skills required to form their life and society in a sustainable way.

NGOs can play an important role in implementing ESD as these organisations are often based on the wish to make the world a better place. Commonly, interacting with different people is necessary in NGOs and that often helps in acquiring new values, knowledge and skills for adaptation. Some NGOs provide services the state cannot provide, they collaborate with authorities, other NGOs and different stakeholders. During their work, NGOs often see issues that need further research and finding solutions and they often put pressure on governments by giving a voice to minority groups. For the organisation to work they need to encourage people's participation and NGOs promote reciprocity and trust and thereby build up people's feeling of belonging somewhere. Trust paves the way for democratic values and in NGOs people can learn democratic practices. However, some argue that NGOs create dependency through top down development (Biekart & Fowler, 2010; Boyte, 2010; Gaventa, 2010).

Agency (3.1) focuses on people's empowerment to sustain a functional society. Developmental agency needs capacities of local people to define together problems of development, generate programs that accommodate a diversity of local interests, and together mobilize resources for implementation. Developmental agency could be an outcome of a partnership of diverse stakeholders and NGOs. This is linked to *shared value* (3.2) that emphasises the importance of cooperation among different stakeholders (governments, businesses NGOs and citizens) and long term solutions to further sustainable development. The third *action competence* (3.3) underlines the importance of learning in a critical action oriented manner where people are given the tools to develop their capacities, and the will to actively find democratic solutions to problems. Action competence requires organising learning situations that make it possible for

people to transform themselves into critical, democratic and political human beings. With action competence people learn how to spot a problem and find a solution. This all goes in line with ESD and can be related to what the literature refers to as some of NGOs common features.

3.1 Agency

Bruszt and Vedres (2013, p. 1) claim that “the success of development from *without* is more likely if it generates domestic developmental agency”. What does development from without mean? And what is developmental agency?

In their research Bruszt and Vedres assessed the post-accession position of organisations that took a part in the EU’s pre-accession position programs. They investigated the connection between patterns of “pre-accession involvement and post-accession developmental agency” (Bruszt & Vedres, 2013, p. 1). The number of aid and developmental programs has sky-rocketed in the last twenty years. Some have criticized many of these support programs because they often fail to reduce the need for external help (Stiglitz, Edwards and Hulme, Moss et al., in Bruszt & Vedres, 2013) and therefore do not solve the problem at hand but instead create a dependency. A common difficulty of external support programs are limited resources about the target field (Evans, 2004; Tallberg 2002; Jacoby 2004, 2008; in Bruszt & Vedres, 2013). The prosperity of external aid organisations is the capacity of the external aid agents to provoke local actors to evolve capacities for cooperative problem solving. “External interventions, to be successful, have to nurture the capacities of local public and private actors to learn about, to adapt to, and to change the institutional framework of development”(Bruszt & Vedres, 2013, p. 2).

In the EU’s pre-accession program the “key role for external actors is to set clearly defined framework goals, benchmarks, and procedural rules for local search and to help to activate local public and private actors who can co-define what the developmental problems are, co-design programs to solve them and monitor their execution” (Bruszt & Vedres, 2013, p. 3).

Moss et al. and Edwards and Hulme (in Bruszt & Vedres, 2013, p. 4) indicate that “aid might function as a rent, neutralizing the incentives to build domestic institutions. It might distort accountability, discourage building capacities for endogenous problem-solving, and contribute in the end to sustained learned helplessness”. Some find fault with external actors giving too much consideration to getting the stimulus of domestic actors’ right; it

is difficult to control if domestic actors follow the rules. Thus the external needs to become more domestic or, in other words, the need for external help can only diminish side by side with the rise of domestic capacities of collective problem-solving (Bruszt & Vedres, 2013).

What are domestic capacities? According to Bruszt and Vedres (2013, p. 4) there are two types: “the capacities of local actors to generate demands on power-holders, mobilize resources, and to form developmental alliances” and the “capacities of domestic states to create, administer, monitor, enforce, and adjust public rules and policies that can further development”. The sustainability of externally established rules and policies is intimately connected to the ability of external actors to promote domestic alliances that give strength to new institutions (Jacoby, 2008 in Bruszt & Vedres, 2013).

Developmental agency includes the capacity of local people to define together problems of development, generate programs that accommodate a diversity of local interests, and together mobilize resources for implementation. “At the level of local actors this means a capability to organise cross-sectoral developmental projects, to mobilize resources outside the framework of the external support programs, and to politicize issues of local development” (Bruszt & Vedres, 2013, p.4). To sum up, Bruszt and Vedres (2013, p. 4) identified “three interrelated dimensions of local developmental agency: associating, mobilizing, and politicizing”.

To be effective NGOs need both lobby and advocacy skills, where advocacy means to give a voice to people that otherwise are not heard and lobbying is a very well-organised informal effort to influence decision makers. Thus, together, lobbying and advocacy are used as means to influence decision makers in a systematic and informal way by giving a voice to people that otherwise would not be heard (BBO, 2003).

Bruszt and Vedres (2013) point out that developmental agency can be explained by different factors other than participation in pre-accession programs. They indicate that developmental agency could be an outcome of a partnership with organisations such as national and international developmental NGOs. Partnerships with domestic NGOs can represent peer pressure to take on developmental goals. NGOs can also function as bridges across organisational fields, fostering the formation of developmental associations. The presence of volunteers in the life of an organisation also makes it more likely that there is a bottom-up push towards developmental agency. A developmental agency can be a result of diffusion and learning from transnational civic actors. “Having a foreign NGO as a partner in on-

going activities of an organisation might increase the propensity to embrace developmental goals” (Bruszt & Vedres 2013, p. 15).

3.2 Shared Value

Like McKeown (2006) reckons, it is interesting to realise the difficulty we have to foresee in a sustainable world while we have no trouble at all defining what is unsustainable in our homes and nations from environmental, social and economic perspectives.

Miller et al. use the theory of resilience as a metaphor for their purposes because they say that systems always face perturbations. They say that institutions must work and change with these perturbations rather than work against them, “seeking opportunities for positive transformation and continual flexibility” (Miller et al. 2010, p. 182).

In their article *Creating Shared Value* Porter and Kramer (2011) discuss the importance of creating shared value in business corporations to make connections between progress both in society and in the economy. They stress that business is caught in a vicious cycle, that companies are blamed for gain at the expense of others and the more they try to show corporate responsibility the more they are accused of society’s malfunctions. “The apparent economic success of the dominant culture is built on consuming and wasting the natural capital [...] and on increasing the inequalities between people and the other members of the Earth community” (Cullinan, 2011, p. 170). There can be no solution to the current situation until sustainable conceptions of the “good life” are developed (Sampford, 2010). It is a ridiculous misunderstanding that humans are separate from this planet, every aspect of our well-being is derived from Earth to begin with. Humans are an integral and inseparable part of the Earth system. Therefore, our politics and businesses must be consistent within this context and must have as its purpose to ensure that seeking human well-being does not undermine the integrity of Earth, which is the actual source of well-being. Cullinan says that human fulfilment is impossible to reach without being a part of the wider community of life on Earth (Cullinan, 2011).

The problem lies in a narrow view in business of value creation where short term financial plans are promoted and there is a failure to see costumer’s needs that in the long-term are the key to the company success.

The solution, according to Porter and Kramer, is found in the *principle of shared value* that implicates doing business by addressing society’s needs and challenges and therefore creating values both for the society and the

economy. A business needs a successful community and a community needs a successful business. Business creates job opportunities and wealth for its community and the community creates a supportive environment for the business and its product. Denying this interconnected relationship can be fatal for societies especially because in today's economy it is easy for companies to move elsewhere. In Porter and Kramer's opinion NGOs and governments often undermine this connection and they suggest three key ways for companies to create these value opportunities: A) Conceiving products and markets; B) Redefining productivity in the value chain; C) Enabling cluster development at the company's location.

A) Conceiving products and markets:

Companies have to be sure that their products are good for their customers. For example food companies that earlier on focused on taste and quantity in order to fuel consumption are now focusing on the importance of quality and nutrition. There are companies that develop tools to help customers budget and manage their finances in order to pay their debts. In this way a shared value is created, society's needs are met and businesses can often be more efficient in marketing than government and NGOs are and encourage customers to use products and services that are good for them and therefore benefit the whole community.

B) Redefining productivity in the value chain:

In rising "awareness of the fallacy of short-term cost reductions is giving rise to new approaches" (Porter & Kramer, 2011, p. 9). Many societal factors like health and safety, natural resources and water use, working conditions and equal treatment at work inescapably affect a business value chain. "Opportunities to create shared value arise because societal problems can create economic costs in the firms' value chain" (Porter & Kramer, 2011, p. 8). Factors that seem to only affect the external affect business or companies, for example, don't take into account the plethora of packaging of products that doesn't only harm the environment causing pollution and excessive resource use but is very expensive for the company as well. Thus by reducing packaging companies serve society and gain value for them. Use of energy is important in the value chain, people realise that shipping is costly; it adds time, management and inventory costs, to say nothing of energy costs and pollution. Improving technology leads to a better resource use that should be interwoven through the whole value chain. The realisation that

marginalized suppliers cannot improve their quality nor remain productive is emerging. To ensure their growing volume businesses share technology and provide financing to their suppliers and ensuring better health among employees has proven less expensive than the lost workdays and diminished productivity caused by poor conditions.

C) Enabling cluster development at the company's location.

The cluster is the whole surrounding of the firm, other companies, institutions, schools, and legal environment. Without clusters productivity fades. Poor education, poor transportation, gender discrimination and poverty all impact companies negatively impeding productivity, raising costs, increasing environmental degradation and making capable employees more difficult to find. Porter and Kramer (2011) find the building of an open, fair and transparent market a key factor in cluster building. They come up with the example of Nestlé that decided to build clusters. In each of their coffee regions, to improve efficacy and local production, Nestlé put up firms and facilities for agriculture, technology and finance. The firm improved access to important agricultural inputs like plant stock, fertilizers and extension programs on growing techniques for farmers. Nestlé also cooperated with The Rainforest Alliance an international NGO in teaching farmers sustainable practices that makes harvest more stable.

Though their focus is on companies, Porter and Kramer (2011) point out that the principle of shared value can equally be applied to NGOs if they focus on the benefits achieved rather than on the funds and expansion of efforts, understand the significance of productivity and of value creation.

3.3 Action Competence

Mogensen and Schanck (2010) argue that as a concept 'action competence' is an educational ideal and therefore it is not a reachable goal but rather a notion that corresponds or goes hand in hand with concepts like sustainable development, democracy and human rights. The consequences of the action are thought to resolve a problem thus the action is not supposed to be just an activity to uplift academic tuition. Action competence is an approach that underlines that action-oriented learning or teaching has a particular, important learning power. It goes parallel with

sustainable development in the sense that an end-stage is not reachable; it is a never ending process.

This approach promotes inclusive, democratic and action-oriented teaching/learning that gives students the tools to evolve their capacities, desires to do and the will to actively find democratic solutions to problems. “The action competence approach calls particular attention to self-evaluation, which provides an opportunity for the participants in the education process [...] to assess their own strengths and weaknesses” (Mogensen & Schnack, 2010, p. 69).

The ideas behind ESD and action competence are in line with each other as both concepts treat health and environmental as strongly connected and interrelated to economic and socio-cultural issues. ESD would probably not be effective without democratic action competence. Action competence requires organising learning situations to make it possible for people to transform themselves into critical, democratic and political human beings. Instead of focusing on individualistic decisions and options, action competence approach requires a collective dialogue and knowing how to spot a problem and being able to solve it. The above can be related to some NGOs where people mature and learn to learn and to become conscious of democratic values.

4 Research project

4.1 Research questions

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the ways in which NGOs contribute to sustainable development in Iceland. Data is gathered using reports and interviews with employees and volunteers from the Red Cross and the Icelandic Church Aid.

To examine how these NGOs contribute to sustainable development the following research questions were posed:

- A. In what ways do the Red Cross in Iceland and the Icelandic Church Aid promote civic driven change: with bottom up development or aid oriented top down development?
- B. How do they promote learning?

4.2 Design and ethics

Qualitative research methods were employed because of the explorative nature of the study and the constantly evolving concept of sustainable development. This study was built upon individual interviews to extract individual knowledge, outlook, experience and emotions about the subject matter. Four people were interviewees.

Qualitative research methods require special attention to personal and confidential privacy and so do ethical issues. In this study the author was respectful of individual interviewees and the research sites, showing reciprocity, maintaining confidentiality and collaborated with participants. The author made it clear to the participants that they had the full right to refuse to participate and that they could withdraw from the interview at any time. All the participants were guaranteed a complete and protected anonymity. In this research all identifications were directly eradicated after transcription and no record of personal data such as age, gender or race were demonstrated or kept.

4.3 Data collection

Theoretical data collection started in libraries and by searching the World Wide Web. The author used the services at the National Library of Iceland that offers help with detailed data searches. When all the theoretical data was collected a questionnaire framework was formed and also a formal introduction letter.

The research was registered at the Data Protection Authority in Iceland but special permission wasn't needed because no delicate personal or private questions were asked.

Once the study was registered a formal introduction letter was sent via e-mail to the organisations with information of the purpose of the study and they were asked for permission for a visit to collect data, such as reports, and asked for indications of a gatekeeper. The organisations both replied positively and at the end of February 2013 the author visited the Red Cross in Iceland and the Icelandic Church Aid and had an informal chat with the information officers.

Annual reports from 2006 -2012 were analysed as well as two additional reports: *Who are the most vulnerable* 2006 and 2010 (Rauði Kross Íslands, 2006, 2010) and the report *Welfare, a battle against poverty in Iceland* from 2012 published by the ICA and the RCI (Samstarfshópur um enn betra samfélag, 2012).

The interviews, were recorded and permission was given before the interview was performed. The interviews were one on one and open ended questions were asked; the interviews were all conducted in Icelandic. The author then transcribed the interviews and translated them into English, read through them several times and marked 50-60 codes in each interview. These codes were narrowed down to five themes by colour coding, finding similarities and differences between the two organisations. Data from interviews and annual reports were analysed and compared to the literature and different documents and to have a clear overview tables with the findings were made.

4.4 Participants

For the interviews the author used purposeful sampling intentionally choosing to study The Red Cross and The Icelandic Church Aid in Reykjavík, Iceland. The so called snowball-exampling (Creswell, 2010) was used, where an interviewee can indicate another person to explore further issues that arise. Four people were interviewed for this research project: One employee and one volunteer from the Red Cross and the Icelandic Church Aid. The author audio taped all of the interviews with the interviewees' permission.

The author went to the headquarters of the Red Cross in Efstaleiti in Reykjavík to interview the employee and met the volunteer of the Red Cross at a coffeehouse in the centre of Reykjavík. The volunteer has taken part in projects with children and teenagers, both Icelandic and foreigners

with the aim to better Icelandic society, and the volunteer is a member of one of the organisation's boards.

The author went to Háaleitisbraut where the Icelandic Church Aid headquarters to interview the employee and the volunteer was interviewed at home. The volunteer assists with different tasks at the Icelandic Church Aid.

4.5 Limitations of the study

The study is limited by the small sample of interviewees thus the findings may not give a comprehensive picture of the NGOs. The interviews were conducted in Icelandic and translated into English and nuances may have been lost in translation. The author did not verify the NGOs employees' ideas or experience with influence on authorities by looking for evidence of this issue from the government.

4.6 Strength of the study

One of the strengths of this study is the wide range of theoretical backgrounds and the openness and willingness of the interviewees to discuss their experiences. There is a triangular perspective, from volunteers, employees and reports that strengthens the reliability of the findings of the study.

5 Findings

In this chapter findings from the data collection are presented, first, the findings from the four interviews with reference to the data are demonstrated and summarised in tables. Secondly findings from surveys and reports are discussed and summarized in tables with the findings from the annual reports.

5.1 Findings from interviews

In this section the findings from the four interviews are discussed. In the analyses these had been grouped into five main themes:

- Cooperation and contribution
- Development
- Responsibility and trust
- Influence and advocacy
- Learning

Findings from annual reports from the years 2006 -2012 from both the Red Cross (RCI) and the Icelandic Church Aid (ICA) are interwoven in the themes and are discussed later in the chapter.

5.1.1 Cooperation and Contribution

There was a clear line through all the interviews about the importance of working together, cooperating and communicating. All the four interviewees felt that there was a willingness to listen and take other people's ideas into consideration. Both the RCI and the ICA staff members emphasised that their organisations would not be what they are without the collaboration with their volunteers:

... mostly, we compete for volunteers, because they are what our work is completely built on. The Red Cross wouldn't be anything if we didn't have the volunteers

... we [ICA] couldn't do half of what we do if we had no volunteers; they are a very important part of our work

The employees were of the opinion that the volunteers' experience is of value and their knowledge fundamental for their organisation to function and grow in the society, therefore their involvement, observations and opinions are desirable:

We [RCI] have meetings where we get together and the volunteers tell us about their experiences.

In a meeting one volunteer said that he would prefer to get more training, maybe a course about the Icelandic Church Aid and the philosophy in more detail ... and we said yes that is a good point, so we are going to do that this fall and make a bigger program than we have had, a real education about what we are doing and our vision for the future and so on, after they indicated this. The volunteers have a lot of good ideas that we had not thought of.

The volunteers have a positive experience working with the staff and feel as if they are listened to. They felt that they were an important part of the whole:

I think that the staff of the Red Cross in Iceland, and the boards, is in a very good communication. [...] I've been twice to an annual meeting [...] and there is a continuous discussion there and monthly meetings are about, hm, the director is always there and he checks out how projects are proceeding.

Maybe you were getting a heap of documents [from the people who needed to have the food aid and financial assistance or consultation and wondering how to get it all together [...] and sometimes you notice, and tell the staff, that maybe the person just needs financial consultation, they were simply just spending too much and the ICA staff take you seriously.

[ICA] is open for everything, if you have an opinion about something, if there is something that needs consideration, then they are always ready to listen and take you seriously in a positive way, and if you comment on something or think something might be done in a different way, then they either use it at once or take it into consideration. I just feel good with the staff.

NGOs that depend this much on the volunteers, like the Red Cross, all the boards, everyone is a volunteer [...] when you

become a part of a project and you are satisfied, and you get to know a lot of people, that is when your work becomes your social activity. I enjoy working with the people [...] this is what I have chosen for myself. It is also good to be able to withdraw for a while and then come back [...] and when you come back ... you create some kind of bond ... my experience is that you also develop socially.

When the employees of the Red Cross in Iceland and of the Icelandic Church Aid were asked if there was an active collaboration between NGOs and if they felt that the authorities listened to them, their answers were positive:

We [RCI] collaborate a lot with authorities both in developing assistance and other similar things and of course we run the ambulances together with the state, just to name a few. We are supposed to be the voice of the minority groups [...] and here they use our knowledge and without us the system wouldn't work, so they listen.

Wherever we [ICA] work we cooperate with the authorities.

We collaborate with other NGOs but we have our prerequisites and terms, the others know our terms and we know theirs.

There is often collaboration with other NGOs, for example we [ICA] did a report together with the Red Cross and others, called *Welfare*, it is about poor people, and this report came before the national government.

Wherever we [ICA] have projects we work in collaboration with local associations or organisations, people from the area or the country.

In projects and programs collaboration, participation and communication was something everyone was concerned about. The Red Cross volunteer felt that it was good that the volunteers collaborated from the beginning with students and experts forming the project that the volunteer took a part in for children and teenagers.

Three students from a university in Aarhus worked on this project as an assignment, working with us [the RCI volunteers] on the ideology and a base made for the project before it started. The purpose of the project was to improve society and to reduce prejudice in the society, so there was a specific goal and ideas about what to do with them. So we all participated from the beginning with someone who was thinking about this in a scholarly way. [...] All goals were defined and the volunteers collaborated from the start.

The Red Cross employee mentioned how important communication and relationships are for people to feel as participants in the society, they contribute these important needs to socially isolated people in their Visit Program:

The home visiting program is for the elderly, lonely and socially isolated people [...] this might be the only diversion they get [...] maybe they also meet relatives but this program is about socializing with someone outside that framework and therefore it may open a different world for them to take part in. [...] Sometimes the hosts have been waiting the whole week to meet their visitor and if the visitor calls in sick the hosts often prefer waiting until he or she gets better instead of receiving someone else. [...] They do something together [...] go to the cinema, talk together [...] it depends on interests, we try to match people that go well together [...] this creates friendship, a basis for friendship.

The Icelandic Church Aid employee underpinned the importance of participation and communication with local people in their projects in the developing countries:

The starting point is always the people; they tell us what they need and what is socially acceptable in their situation. Collaboration and communication is the key to realise how to behave socially in a situation. We are always in close communication with the people. They [the people] are with us in the projects from the beginning.

... and then also conversation, not just us and our project, here we come and now you have to do what we want you to do ... not this kind of communication and way of thinking but more like cooperation and conversation between equals.

In all the yearly reports of the Red Cross in Iceland from 2006-2011 there is evidence of teamwork where volunteers of the Red Cross work jointly in different programs: disaster management, social projects with socially isolated people, with children and teenagers, with immigrants and the elderly.

Cooperation with other NGOs, students and the authorities is very well emphasised in all of the Icelandic Church Aid annual reports from 2006-2012. A special chapter is in all of the reports where the co-operators are mentioned followed by a discussion about the projects.

All the interviewees and reports emphasised cooperation in various forms. They were all of the opinion that they cooperated well with other actors involved with the organisation.

5.1.2 Development

The continuous evolvement of programs, projects and ways of thinking stood out in the interviews. The Red Cross employee talked about project developing:

All these projects develop, and all these projects develop because of the volunteer's experience, because they tell us, employees [...], and we use their experience.

The Icelandic Church Aid put emphasis on helping people to help themselves, changing mentality and putting pressure on authorities for further development.

We [ICA] want to help people to help themselves [...] there is no result if you have to come back again and again [...], like, with our food assistance, it has developed from food in a bag to these cards and finance courses.

We are the voice of these people [...] we are continuously giving information to authorities so they can make change happen.

As I said before, together with the Red Cross, last year, we published a report called *Welfare*. There is a little bit of a new way of thinking [...] the name of the report is Welfare but it is about poverty and poor people but we want to underline what people can do and help people to shine where they can instead of focusing on that they are disabled and cannot do this and cannot do that. [The question is] What CAN you do? The society requires everyone to contribute and we can't afford that you don't, disabled or not, you can still do this and that. Thus, we as a community need to open up for this instead of keeping people down and not use what they can offer... you see... it is a different attitude.

We are working with the people and striving to improve their situation and they contribute a lot and then together we improve things if something is missing and the outcome is something that changes their life permanently [...] we want to do something that lasts and changes the society for good.

We are trying to empower people, we are trying, let's say, to awaken inactive people to become active.

The Red Cross volunteer appreciates the evaluation process at the Red Cross and the knowledge the projects are built on:

I also think the Red Cross is successful in evaluating the need for projects and how we [volunteers] are proceeding, and then we change, what to say, direction or something, but the ideology that first created the project is still there even though the project has changed.

Both volunteers thought this experience healthy and mind-opening because one goes out of one's protected environment and encounters new and challenging situations. The Red Cross volunteer commented:

I think it is healthy for you, you normally follow a course in life where you are always focusing on the same things, or specialising in something, and you are always a little bit in your own things, have your own family for example, then this [the volunteer work] is something that enriches you, you are always

developing. This is an organisation that is not stagnant; it is always evolving and develops with the society.

The Icelandic Church Aid volunteer:

Normally I'm in a protected environment with friends and family, but in this I need to deal with whomever, smelly people, smelling of alcohol or completely doped up or something. A situation I wouldn't normally be in and that is a challenge and I think I learn from that.

I can just see that one's vision changes or something like that ... develops, not to have prejudice against anyone, of course it is difficult and sometimes you judge people [...] but then you have to push these prejudices aside and show them the same respect as you show the others [...] it is an introspection as well.

In the annual reports of the ICA 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 there is a good example of new projects develop: The food assistance was changed from giving recipients food in a bag to handing them prepaid cards usable at the supermarket. The cards have no labels of the Icelandic Church Aid and look just like normal credit-cards. To receive assistance all recipients need to bring their financial documents and proof the need for help. The Icelandic Church Aid offers financial assistance along with the credit-cards. In this way recipients don't have to experience the humiliation of standing in a line waiting for food and feel more as a functional part of the community.

It can also be seen in the Red Cross in Iceland's annual reports that projects develop, influenced both by the surveys and volunteers' experience. In the results from the survey *Who are the most vulnerable?* In 2006 it was clear that social isolation was an issue that needed to be addressed. Therefore the social projects were strengthened, including the home visiting programs and at the end of the year 60% of all the Red Cross affiliations around Iceland had started a home visiting program. In 2007 The Red Cross put an emphasis on activating socially isolated people in a different way; people were encouraged to become volunteers. A publicizing campaign was started to inform people about the projects the Red Cross has in Iceland and the number of volunteers increased from 1.500 in the year 2006 to 3.792 at the end of 2011.

The Red Cross in Iceland and Icelandic Church Aid evolve with the society, they spot problems that need attention and inform authorities. The Red Cross often initiates important projects to raise awareness and then hands the project on to the community or others. People working for these organisations both as volunteers or employees further develop their social skills, understanding of community, democratic values and their vision of life.

5.1.3 Influence and activation

Sustainable development requires equity between the rich and the poor and people's participation in political decision making. From the interviews and from different reports it seems that the Red Cross in Iceland and the Icelandic Church Aid exercise influence on individuals, their employees and volunteers, authorities and the government, with pressure and actions. They promote people's critical thinking and social activation.

The employee at the Icelandic Church Aid mentioned that by giving people more choice they consequently come up with requirements, wishes and thoughts about things that they would like to do:

We try to activate them [the volunteers], have them take responsibility and encourage that each finds his or her role.

We [ICA] give information about what recipients can do, maybe they have rights to a compensation or benefits from the state and then we help people ... we tell them ... there is a course there in collaboration with the Red Cross, why don't you do that? Or there is an empowering course at the church [...] so we are putting a pressure on the people to get back on track.[...] People are sometimes a little numb because of their difficult circumstances and then we encourage them or push them to others.

According to the Icelandic Church Aid employee there has been a mentality change in recent years:

For the last few years we have put more emphasis on ... not on what people can't do and lack or don't have, but on their strengths and abilities and if people have lost the sight of that we help them find it again.

The Icelandic Church Aid volunteer comments that people might realise that they can do more than they thought:

I think, it has been tried to help people to get out of this [negative] thinking ... and they start to think, yes I can do this [...] I can do something on my own, I can learn to save money for food and clothes ... and value that, you know.

I have heard that people open their eyes with the assistance of the finance consultant, the consultant does not judge anyone he is just trying to guide you [...] and people are often, just, wow, I didn't think of that, you know... and this inspires people.

Both the Red Cross in Iceland and the Icelandic Church Aid employees feel that authorities listen to them and even seek information from their organisation. The ICA registers all important information about recipients:

We are the voice of these people [...] we are continuously informing authorities about what needs to change. Often when information is needed about the real situation and background of those who are in the worst conditions, the information comes from us. We have registered all the information in computer programs so we can find this information, even how many of these people that come to us rent an apartment, how many are unemployed, invalid, what nationalities and so on. The authorities get this information from us.

We feel as if authorities listen to us. This report [Welfare] was introduced into a government meeting.

The Red Cross employee indicated how they prioritise projects:

We publish reports *Who are the most vulnerable?* [made from results of surveys] regularly, every five, six years, and from those reports we find a focus for new project. [...] We push it [the report] forward, we hand it over to the government and we try, with pressure, to speak for these minority groups, both by being their voice and by taking actions.

The RCI employee also mentioned how they try to have an influence and empower people:

We are trying to empower people in these shelters [the recipients] to become volunteers, [...] we have worked with the employment agency after the economic crisis [...] we try to encourage people that come to us to become volunteers for projects, both with us and with others, we also inform them if there are some job advertisements and point them to where they need to go. We are encouraging people on the market and try to teach them that they need to show up at this time and that and so on, so they are able to continue their lives.

Their work influences the welfare system and the RCI starts important projects to create awareness:

We [RCI] have put up many shelters around the country for people with mental disabilities [...] and it is, I think, a complete breakthrough in some places for these people. [...] The focus in these shelters is mostly on that people can come together [not the fact that they are/ might be mentally ill]. In some places this has relieved pressure off to the health care and social services. [...] we are now slowly withdrawing from this, the Red Cross works normally in a way that we explore where the need is greatest, then we start projects and then we try to withdraw and slowly hand it on to others.

When asked how they attract volunteers, the Red Cross employee replied that their projects were important:

Our projects, if they appeal to the people, then the people come to us and we also try to introduce our projects, we have introduction weeks every other year, [...] we have courses about the projects that we have each time, there we introduce the Red Cross in general as well, so the people know what they are getting themselves into and if the project suits them or not.

The Red Cross volunteer confirmed:

I think this is exactly what drives you. That you find yourself a project that suits you that you want to know more about.

One clear example of creating awareness is in the Red Cross annual report from 2011. It was a successful project called the Rights-keepers (Réttindagæslan). The Rights-keepers worked as spokesmen for refugees in Iceland and have done a work of value and influence because in 2012 a law was passed stating that asylum seekers have the right to a spokesman. Consequently the project was successfully started in the beginning of the year 2012.

The Icelandic Church Aid annual reports reflects the important work the organisation is doing for minority groups in Icelandic society and the developing countries.

The results from the reports and interviews are that the Red Cross and the Icelandic Church Aid promote a bottom up approach where all people involved are encouraged to become active in the society, learn and discover new ways of resolving and spotting problems and give a voice to minority groups in order to put pressure for a change on authorities. However, there is also some evidence of top down approach in the interviews and reports.

5.1.4 Responsibility and trust

Both for the RCI and the ICA the outer image is important to gain trust in the society and to attract donors and volunteers. Showing responsibility was a recurrent theme where both the employees and the volunteers were aware of the important role they play in society. Showing respect seemed to be the classic way everyone goes about gaining trust and taking responsibility for ones actions. The Red Cross employee talked about how carefully they train their volunteers and they have follow-ups during their programs:

We talk thoroughly with the volunteers to see if they are trustworthy and then of course we have courses where we can see that and then again we have interviews so you see we try to filter everything.

Our image is good and is a key to our work and trust. In the visit program, to begin with, the leader of the project (a volunteer) goes with the visit-friend (a volunteer) to the first

visit, then some time passes, maybe a month or six weeks to see if people fit together and then the project leader visits again ... meets and talks to both individuals, to see if this works.

The Icelandic Church Aid employee talked about the importance of involving the people and treating them as equals. He took examples from both developing countries and Iceland:

Participation and collaboration lead to trust. If there are customs they [people in the developing countries] think are important then we just follow those customs.

[In Iceland] we help people to start somewhere. Our expert in finance talks about taking away fear that comes with the household accounting, by starting somewhere, open the bills and see what is possible to do to pay those bills, do something [...] small steps to take responsibility of what is happening just by taking little steps.

The Red Cross volunteer found it inspiring that the Red Cross in Iceland conducts surveys called *Who are most vulnerable in Icelandic Society?* Every five –six years to develop new projects and prioritize new ways of working:

You feel like this is done with ambition, you have something concrete in your hands. Theoretical and academic procedures are used no less in companies and the role of the Red Cross is taken very seriously in the society by everyone, which is encouraging, everyone gives his or her time.

The volunteer felt important:

The volunteers' experiences are always taken into consideration and they are followed up by the staff, I think that there is, without exception, an interest for our opinions.

When asked how the Red Cross Volunteer earned trust the volunteer replied:

I think in the traditional way with respect and positive relations [...] of course there is a need to be careful when you're working with this kind of group [children and teenagers].

When asked if the volunteer felt responsible in any way the volunteer of the RCI stated that without a doubt it did, volunteers go into volunteer work because of the urge to share something and because of some kind of feeling responsibility. The RCI volunteer said that being in one of the boards carries a lot of responsibility, where they need to handle the management, finances, making decisions and dividing projects.

When the volunteer of the ICA was asked how they go about earning trust the reply was that the key lies in showing respect and that people are equals, that everyone is a part of the society.

With evidence of successful projects and programs in the annual reports, the Red Cross in Iceland and the Icelandic Church Aid gain trust from Icelanders and show responsible procedures and gratitude to the volunteers

5.1.5 Learning

Throughout the interviews the theme of learning came up in the form of formal, informal and non-formal education and life-long learning. It can be seen that learning takes place under many conditions in these two non-governmental organisations. Learning is fundamental for sustainable development where people need to know how to react to different situations and to adapt to an ever changing world. From the interviews and the reports it can be seen that formal, informal, non-formal and life-long learning takes place in the NGOs. Both the volunteers and employees learn from their experiences, they learn to act on their knowledge, learn to change their behaviour, learn to listen to others, and learn that diversity is important. Authorities and stakeholders learn about issues that need to be addressed from the RCI and the ICA.

The RCI volunteer learned about the importance of diversity, about managing and decision making, both through working in the project with children and teenagers and working with the board:

We come together with very different backgrounds [...] even though we are all from the same country [...] and in some way we build on the same values. They are important, these

different points of view, to resolve problems that come up or to make a vision.

The RCI volunteer learned about different processes in communication, collaboration and how decisions are made:

... there are a lot of different projects that the Red Cross manages. [...] [Being a member of the board] you learn how to run things, it is of course management, like running a company or a community, [...] you learn much about managing, you see how decisions are made and [you see how] different points of view are important.

When asked why the ICR volunteer became a volunteer this person said:

This [volunteer work] gives me a lot and you learn about life and you start to reflect on a lot of things related to yourself, home and work in a different way. You put your soul into many practical things so while you give something away, this work also empowers you.

When asked what the volunteer learned in the basic course with the Red Cross, the volunteer said that it was about getting to know what the Red Cross is all about and there are certain values that are in common [...] for example how complete neutrality is required and that one can't take a stand with anyone.

The RCI volunteer was of the opinion that volunteers and people that take part in activities with the Red Cross learn a lot and gave an example of this when working in the project for children and teenagers:

mainly the work builds upon people being together, well, sometimes there was some kind of education but that education was more, maybe, like more informal, like just being in the society, trips where we visited the radio, the national theatre and some other interesting places where they [the children and teenagers] went together. [...] This has helped them to adapt and socialize with people. [...] You [as a volunteer] have to take pains with what you are doing, it was very challenging, I hadn't worked with children and adolescents in that way for a long time.

The ICA volunteer felt that as a person the volunteer had learned not to be judgmental and how to behave in different situations even though, as pointed out, the volunteers didn't get any specific training even though they were informed about the general rules and privacy.

The ICA volunteer also noticed that some people had learned to use the system:

Sometimes you notice that some people are clever in using the system. We can't know if they are working on the black market or not, but sometimes you get suspicious. [...] When we had the food bags, I met the people more often because I actually handed them the bags. Then sometimes I felt as if the third generation of benefit receivers was coming there, you know, the mother and the grandmother had often come to this place, and they just thought that was normal.

The RCI employee underlined life-long learning:

Lifelong learning is very important in the society in general and not less within this organisation than any other [...] in general we are even losing the wide individual knowledge of the many factors of existence. I think if our knowledge and skills are wide then our adaptability is greater.

The ICA employee said that they had learned a lot from their experiences in the developing countries that can be applied also in Iceland as well:

We have become more conscious here in Iceland ,[...] we need to listen more to our recipients [...] we could say things have come full circle in a way, we have realised that we can use the method we use abroad more here as well so those who receive assistance here can have something to say about it as well. An example is the creating a process of complaining about the services.

The ICA offers different courses to their recipients abroad and in Iceland such as *Life Skills*, *Finance Assistance* and *Self-Empowerment* but they don't have specific courses for their volunteers or employees:

In Iceland we have courses for women that are maybe isolated and in a vicious circle of being poor and they just need some empowerment. We encourage people as individuals to rediscover their abilities and sometimes build up new abilities

When asked if employees and volunteers attend courses, the ICA employee replied:

It is an open option, but it isn't necessarily a yearly event, we might say or inform them there is a course there... or something [...] it is not fixed. [The volunteers] need to sign a silence oath, they are handling delicate information and people are coming to get help, volunteers are helping us giving clothes and sort specific documents, so we can say they get basic information and basic training.

The ICA employee talked about how activation is important, and if people get responsibility for and have a say in what they do, everything works smoother and better:

We have learned to activate our volunteers [...] we have learned this and that, it is helpful if the volunteers can decide a little bit on their own.

In the Red Cross annual reports it can be spotted how different projects are evaluated with time, both with help from the surveys the Red Cross conducts and from people's experience. Projects that are going well are continued or handed on to other associations; other projects are evolved and improved while some don't seem to function as expected and are terminated. An example is The Red Cross House which opened in Reykjavík in 2008, following the economic crisis. It was to meet the needs of people who lost their jobs but it was closed again in the beginning of the year 2012 because it was not working as expected and few people actually visited the house.

The annual reports show examples of how the ICA learns from experience both abroad and in Iceland, including the results of a study by a student at the University of Iceland about the usefulness of the Future Fund of the Icelandic Church Aid (Framtíðarsjóður) 2007 – 2008. The report 2008-2009 contains the results of a study about the recipients' feelings, situation and reaction to the economic crisis and the latest report, 2011-2012

shows from a study made by a student from the University of Iceland on changed procedures of the food assistance.

5.1.6 Overview of the themes

Table 1 demonstrates the themes from the interviews. In the cooperation and learning columns the findings are demonstrated in the order in which they appeared empirically order. For example the Red Cross employee puts more emphasis on cooperation with volunteers while the Icelandic Church Aid employee stresses the cooperation with recipients.

Table 1. Themes from interviews

	Cooperation with:	Learning from:	Show responsibility and gain trust by:	Development	Influence and activation
Red Cross employee	-Volunteers -Recipients -Authorities -Other organisations	-Volunteers -Experience -Surveys -Recipients	-Courses -Communication	-Projects develop	-Pressure on authorities -Activating -Creates awareness
Red Cross volunteer	-Volunteers -Recipients -Employees	-Volunteers -Recipients -Courses -Experience -Cooperation with experts	-Showing respect -Positive attitude -Reliability	-Understanding of importance -Diversity develops	-Mind opening -Encouraging -Up lifting -Activating -Giving
Icelandic Church aid employee	-Recipients -Other organisations -Authorities -Volunteers	-Recipients -Experience -Volunteers	-Listening -Conversation -Positive attitude -Giving choice	-Mentality shift -Projects develop	-Creates awareness -Pressure on different groups including authorities -Activating
Icelandic Church aid volunteer	-Employees	-Experience -Recipients	-By being there -Respect -Equity -Reliability	-State of mind develops-	-Mind opening -Giving

5.2 Findings from reports and surveys

In this chapter the findings from the *Welfare* report published by the ICA and the RCI are introduced and findings from the surveys *Who are the Most Vulnerable* RCI reports from 2006 and 2010. At the end of section 5.2.2 and 5.2.3 the findings are summarised in tables.

5.2.1 *Welfare: A battle against poverty in Iceland*

Welfare, a battle against poverty is a report from meetings organised by the Red Cross and the Icelandic Church Aid with representatives from: the Ministry of Welfare, the Welfare Council of Reykjavík, Department of Social studies of the University in Iceland and European-Anti-Poverty Network (EPAN). The report sheds light on common concerns of these different organisations about the welfare of the poorest people in Iceland and puts pressure on authorities to improve the situation. The main concerns were: the need to widen the understanding of human rights, human capital and empowerment; the poverty traps that have proven difficult to resolve and the need for the welfare-service to build upon changed perspectives, focusing on strengths and quality instead of impotence, deficiency and charity (Samstarfshópur um enn betra samfélag, 2012).

5.2.2 *Who are most vulnerable?*

The Icelandic Red Cross has conducted surveys called “Who are most vulnerable in Icelandic Society?” four times (1994, 2000, 2006 and 2010). The results have guided the Icelandic Red Cross in developing new projects and prioritise new procedures. The results have created awareness and put pressure on authorities. In table 2 it can be seen what minority groups are the most vulnerable in 2006b and 2010. The results of the most recent survey were published in May 2010. The report is based on interviews with 69 professionals in various parts of the country. Among people interviewed were priests, school principals, student advisors, physicians, police officers, social workers, representatives of municipalities, NGO’s and relief organisations, as well as specialists on immigration issues, affairs of disabled people and the welfare of children. Beneficiaries of social services were also interviewed. This latest report from 2010 shows how people’s situation has changed in the last four years.

Table 2. Comparison on who are the most vulnerable groups in Iceland 2006 & 2010

Year 2006 (Red Cross in Iceland, 2006.p.5)	Year 2010 (Rauði Kross Íslands, 2010b.p.12)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disabled and socially isolated people who are recipients of welfare benefits. Also people who fall outside the social security network and do not receive the benefits that they may be entitled to according to Icelandic law. • Single mothers with limited incomes who lack education or social support. This group also includes single mothers who have limited ability to work. • Immigrants on low salaries, who do not speak Icelandic, particularly people from countries that are culturally very different from Iceland. This also includes spouses who do not work outside the home. • Elderly welfare recipients who are socially isolated as well as older adults with mental disorders. • Men who live alone who have lost contact with their children or other relatives. Also those who are socially isolated, unemployed or have badly paid jobs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People that seek jobs that lack education and those who are not entitled to welfare benefits. Young job seekers from 18-25 years old. • Families with children and single parents with low salaries who receive unemployment benefits or are supported by the community. • Immigrants who speak little or no Icelandic and those who are socially isolated and lack a social support net. Foreign women that are abused physically and mentally. • Invalid people who have children to provide for and socially isolated people. • Children and teenagers who lack opportunities for example because they live in poverty; of their background and/or because of parents'/custodian's position

According to the 2006 report the five most vulnerable groups in Iceland (Table 2) are: socially isolated people, single mothers, immigrants on low salaries, elderly welfare beneficiaries and men who lived alone. While in 2010 (Table 2) the most vulnerable groups were: people seeking jobs; families with children and single parents; immigrants; disabled people with children and young people lacking opportunities (Red Cross in Iceland, 2006; Rauði Kross Íslands; 2010b). With this kind of survey one can see the changes in Icelandic society during a turbulent financial time and it encourages different stakeholders to explore the reasons why those particular groups are more vulnerable than other groups at the time.

5.3 Summary of findings from reports

The findings from the survey *Who are the Most Vulnerable* and the *Welfare: A battle against poverty in Iceland* report are demonstrated together with the findings from annual reports (table 3). Interviews and reports were cross-checked and indicators in the reports were found that reflect what the interviewees underpinned. The themes extracted from the interviews occur throughout these reports.

Table 3. Annual-, the survey Who are the Most Vulnerable- and the Welfare: A battle against poverty in Iceland reports

	Cooperation and contribution	Development	Influence and advocacy	Responsibility and trust	Learning
Annual reports Red Cross 2006-2011	-Emphasise teamwork	-Projects develop; -Make surveys to spot new issues	-Create awareness	-Successful projects; -show gratitude to the volunteers	-Learn from experience
Annual reports Icelandic Church Aid 2006 -2011	-Emphasise cooperation with other NGOs, students and the state	-Projects develop; -Participate in different surveys	-Create awareness	-Successful projects; -Show gratitude to the volunteers	-Learn from experience
Who are the most vulnerable reports 2006 and 2010	-Cooperation between professionals all over Iceland	-Using the findings it is possible to further develop programmes and projects for those in need	-Create awareness; -Put pressure on authorities	-Professional procedures	-The survey is repeated every five-six years; -Possible to compare and spot the most vulnerable groups in Iceland
Welfare: A battle against poverty in Iceland report	-The Icelandic Church Aid and the Red Cross published the report in collaboration and worked jointly with different humanitarian organisations in the project	-Puts a move on the situation in which poor people in Iceland find themselves; -React preventively	-Create awareness; -Put pressure on authorities; change of vision	-Professional procedures	-Sheds light on common concerns from different people in different organisations

Cooperation and contribution: From the annual reports it emerges that the RCI emphasises teamwork within its own organisation while the ICA emphasises cooperation with external organisations. The *Who are the Most Vulnerable* reports are based on collaboration between the RCI and many professionals and NGOs all over Iceland. The *Welfare* report is a result of collaboration between the RCI and ICA and others. In fact the RCI does collaborate with various stakeholders

Development: The reports show that projects evolve over time.

Influence and advocacy: All the reports show that both NGOs work on creating awareness and putting pressure on authorities to improve the situations of the most vulnerable in society.

Responsibility and trust: The annual reports highlight successful projects and show gratitude towards volunteers and everyone they work with. At the same time the *Welfare* and *Who are the Most Vulnerable* reports demonstrate professional procedures with collaboration between various professionals.

Learning: Annual reports show learning from experience and the *Welfare* and *Who are the Most Vulnerable* reports indicate learning about different groups of people in Iceland and show that there is a common concern among stakeholders.

6 Discussion

In this chapter the main findings from the data analysis are discussed. The research questions are answered with reference to the theoretical resources, the information gathered from interviews with the employees and volunteers from the two NGOs and from the different reports discussed in the previous chapters.

The aim of this qualitative study was to explore the ways in which the two NGOs, the Red Cross in Iceland and the Icelandic Church Aid, contribute to education for sustainable development in Icelandic society and thereby add to evidence-based knowledge. The guiding research questions were

- In what ways do the Red Cross and the Icelandic Church Aid promote civic driven change with bottom up development or aid oriented top down development?
- How do they promote learning?

The results from the reports and interviews indicate that the Red Cross in Iceland and the Icelandic Church Aid promote to a greater extent a **bottom up** development or a civic driven change than aid-oriented top down development. In these NGOs all people involved are encouraged to become active in the society, learn and discover new ways of resolving and spotting problems and a voice is given to minority groups with a pressure for a change to authorities.

There was some evidence of **top down** development in the interviews and reports. The Icelandic Church Aid has developed its food assistance in the last two years. Before that people had to stand in line and get a bag with food which is aid oriented top down procedure. Today recipients receive pre-paid cards, after a thorough financial consultation, so they can go shop on their own and therefore are more active in the society and at the same time they follow a financial consultation course which can be seen as a bottom up method. The Red Cross's home visiting program is aid oriented with a top down development.

As has already been disclosed in the previous chapter the main findings or themes that appeared from the data were: **cooperation and contribution; development; responsibility and trust; influence and, learning.**

Sustainable development demands a wide set of **cooperation** because it is based on comprehensive connections of actors and values. All four interviews and reports stress cooperation in different forms. All the four

interviewees were of the opinion that they cooperated well with other actors involved with the organisation: volunteers, employees and recipients. Collaboration between volunteers is ample and a willingness to listen and take other people's ideas into consideration, no matter their status, seems to be common in both NGOs. This behaviour is indicative of UNESCO's pillar of learning to live together where the stress is on a collective responsibility and constructive cooperation (Macdonald, Pálsdóttir & Vol, 2012). This is also in accordance with level three of the Zoeteman's (2012) sustainability attitude index, where in his research the International Red Cross scores 3.53 total scores of profit, planet and people, but 4.0 on the people dimension score.

The volunteers' experience and knowledge is thoroughly evaluated by the employees and they recognise that the volunteers' role is fundamental for both the RCI and ICA to function and grow in the community. This reflects in the volunteers' positive experience of working with the personnel, they feel that their ideas are taken into consideration and are an important part of the whole where bonds between people come into being. This is an example of two of the three dimensions of a local developmental agency (Bruszt & Vedres, 2013).

The RCI and the ICA cooperate and collaborate with other NGOs; this is reflected both in the interviews and the reports. There is a shared value between these two NGOs, often they send their recipients to the other NGO if they see that the recipient benefits from it and they collaborate in projects, like the Welfare project, in order to achieve the same purpose. This shared value supports progress in the society and working together on a broad-based long-term project is a key to success. This differs from many companies that fail to see this and rather tend to promote short term plans (Porter and Kramer, 2011).

As can be seen from the interviews, in projects and programs, collaboration, participation and communication were key for all of those working together and created a shared awareness. The Red Cross volunteer mentioned that it is of value to collaborate from the beginning with other actors. The Red Cross employee underpinned how important communication and relationships are for people to feel as participants in the society and the need to improve the situation of socially isolated people. The Icelandic Church Aid employee stressed the importance of participation and communication with local people in their projects in the developing countries. This reflects the idea of Bruszt and Vedres (2013) about how successful external aid helps to activate local actors. This

behaviour scores four out of five on the sustainability attitude level (Zoeteman, 2012). Thus the demands for a wide set of cooperation, that sustainable development requires, exists within the RCI and the ICA.

It is important that society **develops**, transforms and adapts to different situations since sustainable development is a continuous transformative ever evolving process. In the interviews the continuous evolvement of programs, projects and ways of thinking of these two NGOs became clear and it can also be seen in the annual reports. The employees evaluate projects based on the volunteers' experience as well as surveys, and then the projects are further developed or terminated, depending on people's and society's needs. Helping people help themselves, change of mentality and pressure on authorities for further development is a daily task in these organisations. They are aiming at what people can actually do; their abilities and strengths (Salamon, 2001 in Hrafnisdóttir, 2008). Society requires that everyone contributes to it. That is what the Red Cross in Iceland and the Icelandic Church Aid are doing with their different attitude, awaking inactive people, reminding them of their strengths and to help them to become active citizens. The people working for these organisations both as volunteers and as employees further develop social skills, understanding of community, democratic values and their vision of life.

The RCI and ICA evolve with the society; they find issues of concern in society and put pressure on authorities to do something about it (BBO, 2003). The Red Cross often initiates important projects to raise awareness and then hands the project on to the community or others. Because these organisations are continuously involved with reality at each time, they are often one step ahead of the authorities in sustainable development.

Taking **responsibility** for individual and collective actions is one of the most important steps in sustainable development. By showing responsibility in their actions the NGOs earn trust among individual recipients and larger communities. **Trust** is a deeply needed ingredient when educating one-self and others because with trust responses awaken and the possibility of "give and take" opens up. Sustainable development cannot function without trust and the possibility of discussion, of exchanging views and emotions. Taking responsibility is trustworthy and fundamental for sustainable development.

Both the employees and the volunteers were aware of the important role they play in society and the responsibility that comes with it. The ICA emphasises involving the people and treating them with respect and as equals. When people feel listened to and their opinions are taken into

consideration they start trusting (Salamon, 2001 in Hrafnisdóttir, 2008). The key to the RCI work, according to the RCI employee, is their image and the people's trust in it. Therefore volunteers are carefully trained in courses and interviews where they learn to act responsibly. In fact when the RCI volunteer was asked how the volunteer earned trust the volunteer's reply was: "The traditional way, with respect and positive relations" like that was common knowledge. The interviews show that the RCI volunteers choose to become volunteers because of a special task that attracts their interest and, according to the employee and the volunteer, it needs to be that way because of the time and responsibility that follows the task, it is more like a life-experience (Table 4).

With evidence of successful projects and programs in the annual reports, the Red Cross and the Icelandic Church Aid add to the trust from stakeholders and authorities were responsible procedures and gratitude to the volunteers is demonstrated. By showing and acting responsibly these two NGOs have gained an important status in Icelandic society.

One wonders if the RC's freedom is impaired because of this good reputation: they always have to live up to former standards. In the same way one also wonders how their ideas of shared value and human rights can be consistent with their praxis of using gambling machines to raise money for funds that they use to help, for example, gambling addicts.

To promote sustainable development NGOs need to have the skill of lobbying and advocacy to encouraging people's participation (BBO, 2003). From the interviews and different reports it is clear that the Red Cross and the Icelandic Church Aid exercise **influence**, with pressure and actions on individuals; their employees and volunteers; authorities and the government. They promote people's critical thinking and social activation.

The employee at the Icelandic Church Aid mentioned that when people are given more choice, they come up with requirements, wishes and thoughts about things that they would like to be done and ideas on how they should be done. Consequently they take greater responsibility for their actions. In recent years the way of thinking has changed according to the Icelandic Church Aid employee, and shifted from emphasising what people cannot do to figuring out what they can actually do, and how they **learn to do**. The volunteers have noticed that this leads to realising that they can do more than they thought. This again suggests that the UNESCO's learning pillars, learning to be and learning to live together are in practice in the NGOs, in and out.

The Red Cross and the Icelandic Church Aid influence authorities in a sustainable way. The authorities sometimes even seek information from their organisation. The ICA registers all important information about recipients and therefore keeps a record of valuable information for the government. Surveys and reports are made about the most vulnerable in Icelandic society and projects prioritised according to these reports. In this way a voice is given to minority groups that otherwise are not heard. In the projects people are empowered and in the case of the Red Cross, encouraged to become volunteers themselves. Their work even influences the welfare system giving a relief to social services and health care. The RCI starts important projects to create awareness and when the purpose is reached they hand the project to others and continue their research for new projects to better improve society.

NGOs play a big part in distributing important information and in building up knowledge and thereby create awareness and often changes in behaviour (Helgason, 2011). As expected, the theme of learning arose from the interviews where it became clear that all kinds of education take place: formal, informal and non-formal education and life-long learning. Both volunteers and employees learn from their experiences, they learn to act on their knowledge, learn to change their behaviour and they learn that diversity and listening to others is important. Sustainable development needs a global mentality shift that reduces, or in an ideal world, eliminates short term thinking and short term solutions, and requires us to act on knowledge, therefore education is important. But knowing doesn't necessarily lead to effort, actions or behavioural changes (Mijung & Roth, 2008). In the author's opinion there is an action competence approach (Morgensen & Schnak, 2010) in the two NGOs discussed (Fig. 1.). Through action competence approach in education and learning, people learn how to take responsibility, work together and see themselves as someone that can make a difference in their life, society and therefore in the world. The author believes that this is what happens in the RCI and the ICA. Sustainability and participation go hand in hand (Roth, 2009).

UNESCO's five pillars of learning (Box1) (UNESCO in Macdonald, Pálsdóttir & Vol, 2012) are promoted in the two NGOs to some extent. The Icelandic Church Aid offers various courses to their recipients in Iceland such as *Life Skills*, *Finance Assistance* and *Self-Empowerment* but they don't have specific courses for their volunteers or employees. Even though the ICA volunteer didn't get any specific training, the volunteer had learned not to be judgmental and also how to behave in different situations: The

volunteer learned to do and through the action the volunteer learned to know. It might indicate that the volunteer used the method of trial and error and that way knowledge was built.

At the basic courses with the Red Cross the volunteers learn all about the values common with the International Red Cross Movement. In the courses communication is emphasised and learning to read and reflect oneself in others and recognise one's limits, seeing how far one can push and to show reciprocal respect and know where the limits are: they **learn to know** whereas they reflect on the growing needs of the society.

The ICA employee noticed that things had come full circle; they had learned much from their experience in the developing countries and have realised that using the same method they used over there leads to success in Iceland as well. Today those who receive assistance in Iceland can have something to say about it as well and volunteers can decide how they proceed with their work and therefore learn to make decisions and act responsibly. Activation is important, and if people have a say in what they do and pertains to them, that everything works smoother and better. The ICA has learned to activate their volunteers and realised that if the volunteers have more decision-making power and take on more responsibility everything becomes more efficient and even more fun; then the volunteers themselves come up with requirements, wishes and thoughts about things. **They learn to be and to live together.**

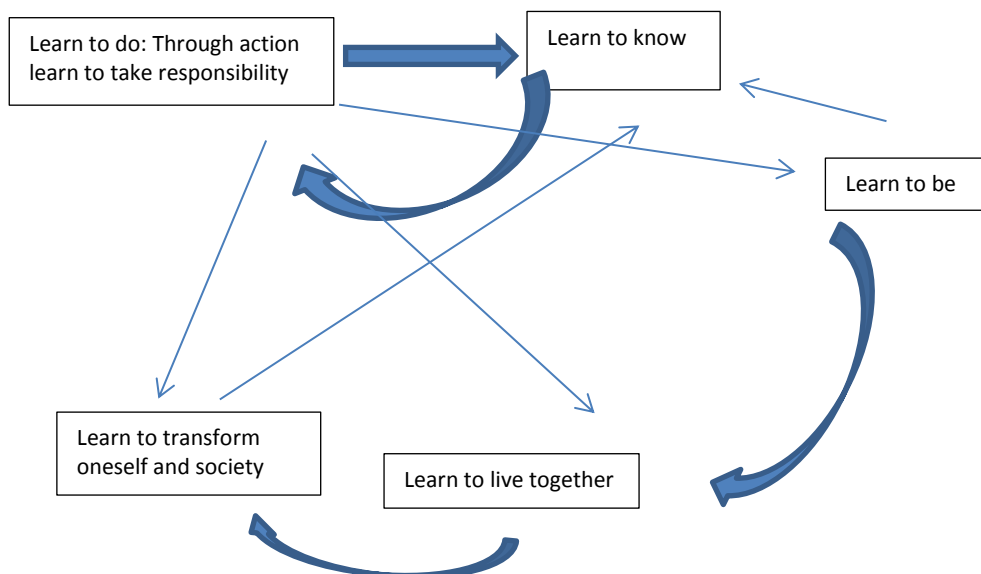
The improvement of the Icelandic Church Aid food assistance has come about because of changed attitude, from learning from experience and communication with recipients. Engaging in activities with the Red Cross, volunteers and recipients learn to take pains with what they do and how to act socially: they learn to live together.

The RCI volunteer learned about different processes in communication, collaboration and how decisions are made. While the volunteer work demands a great deal of time from people it also empowers them. The importance of diversity is learned where different people with different backgrounds come together and need to collaborate. With collaboration they learn to question, negotiate and create a shared understanding of creative ways of knowing (Moore, 2005). They learn that this diversity is important to resolve problems and to plan: they **learn to transform themselves and others.**

From the above it can be seen that the RCI and ICA's procedures are in accordance with UNESCO's definition of education for sustainable development because the two NGOs strive to empower people through participation to take responsibility, they practice and awake public awareness and help people to improve and expand their behaviours. They also help people exercise abilities and knowledge they need, now and in the future (UNESCO, 2002).

The model of learning based on the findings from the two NGOs (Fig. 1.) shows that people learn to know through action, they interact with people and they learn from life. Employees and volunteers learn to know and do at the same time. Then through these interactions they learn to be, while learning to be they learn to live together. By learning to live together they learn to transform themselves at the same time they are always learning to know.

Figure 1. Model of learning in the RCI and ICA



Reflections

Although it was not the intention to compare the two NGOs it is of interest to speculate on the views of the four people interviewed in this study. In Table 4 it can be seen that the four interviewees have different views on sustainable development. The question arises whether it is important for these two NGOs that the employees and volunteers embrace more profoundly the concept of education for sustainable development. In many ways the practice is already in action: could more knowledge of the concept improve the work of the NGOs and the effect on the recipients?

The RCI and the ICA view their work differently (Table 4). The Red Cross in Iceland underlined the work of the volunteers, how they encourage people that seek help to become volunteers and help them in that manner to become active in society. The Icelandic Church Aid on the other hand underlined the people, the recipients and the ways in which the ICA listens to them and gives them guidance, indicating courses and different solutions and in that manner pushing them and putting pressure on them to do something, to act on their problems and thus become active in society as well.

It was also interesting to notice both in the annual reports and in the interviews how cooperation with external organisations are reported. The RCI doesn't seem underline that they work with others while the ICA has a special chapter in their annual reports called Co-Work. The Red Cross does on the other hand collaborate with multiple stakeholders, but one wonders why it isn't emphasised. One speculates that this might be because of RCI's deeply rooted status in Iceland while the ICA emphasises co-work to show transparency and gain trust.

Also of interest was noticing how both the Red Cross volunteer and the employee underpin the importance of choosing a project that suits each volunteer.

These two NGOs feel they have influence on the government: It could be interesting to conduct research on how important NGOs are to the authorities, whether authorities recognise the NGOs important role in Icelandic society and in what ways. Furthermore it was of interest to notice that in Iceland the term charity isn't used a lot, it has a negative connotation – see also the Welfare report (Samstarfshópur um enn betra samfélag, 2012). Is this a common factor among other nations as well?

Table 4. Factors affecting learning in NGOs

	Red Cross employee	Icelandic church aid employee	Red Cross Volunteer	Icelandic church aid volunteer
Put importance	On the volunteers	On the people	On learning and experience	On giving and receiving
Different view point	In competition for volunteers	In competition for funds	Hobby – pleasure. Choose their activities or projects, that feels more like jobs	Job – obligation. Don't choose activities but can choose how to resolve the task. Feels more like assistants
Courses	No courses or lifelong learning but the organisation is open for it if employees themselves want to	No courses or lifelong learning but the organisation is open for it if employees themselves want to	All volunteers have a basic course and then a specific course or training for a specific project	All volunteers are informed about people's privacy
Their idea of sustainability or sustainable development	"Reusing comes to my mind, modern recycling and interaction with nature"	"It depends how people define it, for me it is doing something that has a lasting impact and changes something in a good way permanently"	"I think it might have a different meaning depending on the context [...] something that works on its own"	"I know that nations that are sustainable do everything on their own, like Turkey [...] they produce their own food, do their clothes, meet, wood and everything so they don't depend on anyone else"

The Icelandic Church Aid volunteer noted that some people learn to use the system. The volunteer noticed that some people go to all the places where they can get beneficiary food and observed that it was the third generation of benefit receivers came there to get food in a bag. The receivers thought that this was normal behaviour- they had grown up with that kind of aid. This is a clear sign of learned helplessness (Bruszt & Vedres,

2013), disempowerment or created dependency (Fowler, 2000) a top down development. Another sign of top down development can be seen in the Red Cross' Home Visiting Program. In these programs it is easy to fall into the trap of learned helplessness because people bond with their visit friend, a volunteer, where the recipients often sit and wait for their volunteer and if the volunteer encounters difficulties and cannot come, often the recipients prefer waiting for another week instead of receiving a new volunteer. One could ask if one kind of development is better or worse than the other (bottom-up /top-down) or if perhaps there is need of both. From this study it would seem that both could function well as conscious methods in different aid settings, one completes the other.

One can agree that NGOs sometimes create a learned helplessness, as can be seen above, but the author has drawn the conclusion that these two NGOs actually strive for things to evolve and develop, they spot a problem and try to learn from it. Learning from mistakes is often the most effective way of learning, in fact now the Icelandic Church Aid has evolved their food assistance and tries to help people help themselves. The author agrees with Mamphela (in Boyte, 2010) that NGOs can't make change happen on its own, it is the people themselves, the civic actors that need to do that. The NGOs on the other hand can put pressure on authorities and people and encourage action, to do something, start somewhere, because every little step counts.

7 Conclusion

As thoroughly discussed in the literature, education through various types of learning is of utmost importance in the implementation of the sustainable development agenda. As has been highlighted before it is assumed that education for sustainable development is for everyone everywhere. Education for sustainable development is a continuous transformative ever evolving process – it is a never ending story, and therefore there is a continuous need for research and evaluation.

A key purpose of this research project was to add to evidence based knowledge of education for sustainable development implementation in our society and outside schools.

To this end the research questions were put forth. It is safe to say that there are clear indicators that learning that promotes sustainable development takes place in these NGOs. It is not as clear whether there is a deeper consciousness of the concept as a whole even though there is an indication in that direction. This shows that a need for further research on education for sustainable development in organisations. It could be interesting, because it is achievable with the small population in Iceland to develop and apply the sustainability development index to all NGOs in the country. Even though this study is not conducted following the three dimensions of the sustainability attitude index (Box 4) evidence from this study points to that both the ICA and the RC would score high.

According to this study the two NGOs clearly strive to fulfil the goals stated in the report *Welfare for the future Iceland's national strategy for sustainable development priorities 2010-2023* (Ministry for the Environment and Natural Resources in Iceland, 2010). Their methods of implementation empower people, promote democracy, human rights and justice.

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Appendix I – Guiding questions for interviews

Questions for employees

- Can you tell me about a project you think has been successful lately?
- Do you think that people that seek your assistance feel as if they are participants in the community, have responsibilities and are respected?
- In what ways do you help people so they can help themselves?
- How do you promote social balance?
- How do you earn trust?
- Do you collaborate with other NGOs? How does that
- Do you collaborate with the government/authorities? How?
- Do you feel as if you have some impact on the government/authorities? In what ways?
- How is your organisation fund-raised?
- Where do ideas for new projects come from?
- How are projects prioritised?
- What opportunities are there of staff development?
- Do employees get training? How? When? Why?
- Do your volunteers get training? How? When? Why?
- How do you attract people to the organisation?
- How do you keep them committed?
- How do you find out how to behave socially in different cultural settings?
- Do you think continuing education is important? Why?
- What is your understanding of sustainability?

Questions for volunteers

- Can you tell me about your work in general as a volunteer?
- Do you think that people that seek assistance feel as if they are participants in the community, have responsibilities and are respected?
- In your opinion, do you have any responsibilities as a volunteer?
How? Why
- Do you feel as if the staff listens to you? Does your opinion matter?
- In what ways do you help people so they can help themselves?
- Do you feel as a part of a team? Why? / Why not?
- How do you earn trust?
- Do you feel as if you have learned something as a volunteer?
- Did you get training? How? Why? Important?
- How do you find out how to behave socially in different cultural settings?
- Do you think continuing education is important? Why?/Why not?
- What is your understanding of sustainability?