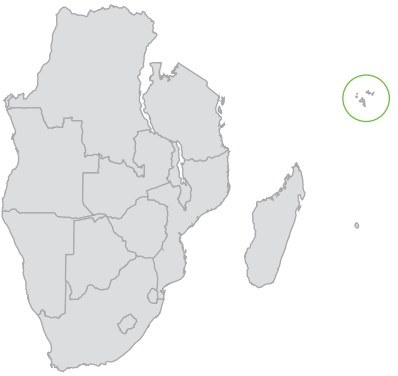


11 Seychelles

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COUNTRY CONTEXT STATISTICS	
	<p>Population: 0.9 million (2006) GDP per capita: US\$11 451(2006) Human development index: 0.773 Unemployment: 2% (2006 est.) Key economic sectors: fishing, tourism, agriculture, beverages Principal exports: canned tuna, frozen fish, cinnamon bark, copra, petroleum products HIV and AIDS prevalence: not available Gross primary enrolment ratio: 117% (2006) Gross secondary enrolment ratio: 119% (2010) Gross tertiary enrolment ratio: not available</p>
<small>Country context data were obtained from a variety of sources: CIA (2012), UNDP (2011), UNESCO (2011), UNAIDS (2011).</small>	

Seychelles is an island country located in the Indian Ocean, approximately 1 600 kilometres east of Kenya. The previously uninhabited island was discovered by Arab traders, by the Portuguese, and then by the French who ruled the country for 40 years. Between 1794 and 1811 the island changed hands seven times between the French and British, before finally being ruled by the British after a protracted war. The location of the island made it a suitable transit port for slaves from mainland Africa, Madagascar, India and elsewhere.

In 1976 Seychelles gained independence as a republic. This was followed three years later by the establishment of a one-party system, a period that has been referred to as the second republic. In 1992 democracy gained ground with the introduction of a multi-party system, and since 1993 Seychelles has entered the period known as the third republic¹⁵.

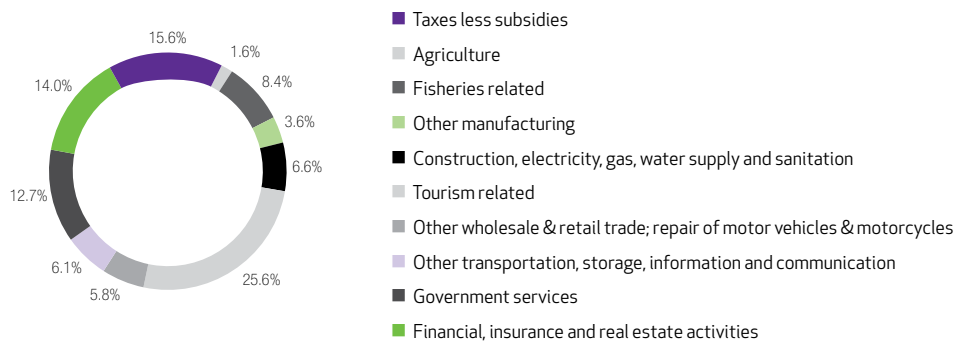
The majority of the people in Seychelles (75 per cent) live on Mahe Island, while 15 per cent live on the Praslin and La Digue islands. Most Seychellois are descendants of early French settlers and African slaves who were freed from slave ships on the East African coast by the British in the 19th century. As a result, Seychelles culture is a mixture of French and African influence. The native language is Kreol, but English and French are commonly used. English is the official language¹⁶.

The Seychelles economy relies mainly on tourism, tuna fish production and foreign direct investment. The service sector in Seychelles, which is heavily dependent on tourism, accounts for 70 per cent of GDP. In the last few years the government has emphasised the need to diversify the economy, and there has been a growing focus on farming and small-scale manufacturing¹⁷. As per the 2011–2015 strategic paper, tourism remains the major source of GDP in Seychelles, followed by services, with manufacturing and agriculture contributing just above 5 per cent.

¹⁵ www.nation.sc

¹⁶ www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/se.html

¹⁷ www.economywatch.com/world_economy/seychelles/

Figure 1: GDP at market prices by sector

Sources: Seychelles National Bureau of Statistics (2009), African Development Bank (2011)

Higher education landscape

In the years following independence, education discourse evolved in the context of a broad political vision of the social, economic and educational transformation considered necessary for the creation of a post-colonial society which would, among other things, redress discrimination and inherited inequalities (Education Act 1982). This was aimed at building national unity and promoting cultural identity. In the process, higher education did not get the necessary emphasis.

It was not until the late 1990s that higher education in Seychelles began to receive greater attention. Public higher education in Seychelles is still therefore in its infancy, defining and positioning itself in the national and regional socio-economic and political development discourse (Ministry of Education and Youth 2004).

Seychelles witnessed the establishment of its first public university in 2009. Being the first university in a country with a population of less than 90 000, the university brings with it aspirations and expectations from all sectors of society. The University of Seychelles (UniSey) has its main campus at Anse Royale, and the School of Education is located at Mont Fleuri (Seychelles Nation Online, 3 August 2012). Formally inaugurated in late 2010, and with a 2012 intake of about 300 students in twelve degree programmes, UniSey is hoping to turn the island tourist destination into a knowledge centre for the region (Fine 2011). As a new university, UniSey offers degree programmes through the University of London International Programme. Students who enrol with UniSey receive course materials from the University of London International Programme Colleges and, on completion of their study programmes, graduating students are awarded a degree from the University of London as well as the University of Seychelles. The vice-chancellor of the University of London is a member of the UniSey Board. UniSey has formalised partnerships with other international universities, including Université Paris-1 Panthéon-Sorbonne in France, University of Edith Cowan in Australia, TERI University in India and China Ocean University (Fine 2011). The government of Seychelles offers scholarships for students studying at UniSey, and the university itself has a scholarship scheme that is funded by donations from individuals and the private sector¹⁸.

National higher education policy context

Higher education in Seychelles has been undergoing significant policy transformation in the last couple of years. With major impact starting in 1999, recent reforms have provided the impetus needed for the establishment of a promising higher education system.

UNESCO and the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) have helped UniSey prioritise quality assurance. With training and support from the South African Quality Authority (SAQA), the Seychelles Quality Assurance (SQA) established its NQF regulations through a consultative process¹⁹. SQA is responsible for assuring the quality and standards of education and training in Seychelles and protecting the interests of learners enrolled in education and training programmes (Republic of Seychelles 2005). The main purpose of the quality assurance system is to assure stakeholders that the registered institution is providing good quality education. Stakeholders of tertiary education in Seychelles include learners and their families, local and international communities, teachers and researchers, employers and professional bodies, partner institutions, and funders of tertiary education.

As mentioned earlier, a number of key policy documents have been enacted to provide a environment conducive to higher education management and effectiveness.

The Draft Higher Education Act of Seychelles²⁰ sets out to provide a higher education system able to cover the three-fold mission of higher education as argued worldwide: teaching, research, and community engagement. The act states that ‘the objective of higher education is to develop in life-long learners the critical skills, knowledge, values and attitudes that will enable them to move confidently within academic or vocational traditions, engage in research, and serve the community as responsible citizens’.

The Seychelles Qualifications Authority Act of 2005 is mandated to develop and implement a National Qualifications Framework (NQF). This includes the establishment of a qualifications structure, setting standards for academic and professional training, ensuring quality in line with the SQA, providing recognition of foreign qualifications, recognising prior learning, ensuring an information management system and developing rules to govern access and quality in higher education.

The Education Reform Action Plan 2009–2010 emerged from the National Education and Training Strategic Committee set up by the president in August 2008. Based on recommendations from the committee, five priority areas were identified for action. While the detailed themes that emerged from the priority areas are not discussed here, the key areas were:

- providing for the diversity of educational needs and national development priorities;
- guaranteeing quality education;
- improving the quality of teachers in the context of UniSey;
- improving the governance of educational institutions; and
- creating responsible and empowered students.

The implementation of these action areas were to be monitored and reported upon periodically by a secretariat at the Ministry of Education.

The Tertiary Education Act of 2011 provides for the harmonious and rationalised development of quality education and training. It covers six key areas relating to tertiary education management at national and institutional level:

1. Provision for a Tertiary Education Commission (TEC): The TEC is conceived as the main legal instrument to advise the minister and co-ordinate sustainable development of tertiary education at the national level.
2. Institutional governance and charter: Under this component, the act provides for two kinds of tertiary education institutions – universities and professional centres.
3. University governance: Using guidance from international experiences, the act provides a legal framework for university governance.
4. Governance of professional centres: Besides consolidating and enhancing the current status of governance in professional centres, the act seeks to reinforce the link between professional centres and industry.

19 www.saqa.org.za/docs/reports/annual08/eor5.pdf

20 http://www.sufoundation.sc/Resources/Seychelles_Higher_Education_Act_Draft_1.pdf

- Rights and duties of learners: The act enforces government's commitment to increase access to tertiary education, while also reinforcing the need for learners to adhere to their duties and responsibilities within their academic programmes and institutional codes of conduct.
- Autonomy and accountability: The act takes into account other important values of institutional management, such as the need for autonomy and responsible accountability.

Regionalisation

Seychelles is a relatively new member of SADC, and even though the UniSey is a very new university, it has already fixed its sights on international and regional co-operation and collaboration. In the questionnaire response submitted by the Ministry of Education, it was noted that collaboration within SADC was considered to be of importance to the Seychelles, and UniSey has aligned its work with the SADC Protocol on Education and Training.

UniSey is a university built on strategic partnerships with other universities. At present, there do not seem to be formal partnerships in place between UniSey and other SADC universities, although there have been initial reports of possible partnerships with South African universities. The earlier collaboration between the SAQA and SQA has been a good indication of UniSey's willingness to partner with other SADC countries in order to learn from each other.

In the longer term, the vice-chancellor of UniSey has noted the intention of this new university to contribute to tertiary education development in Africa (Fine 2011). A strong, healthy collaboration and partnership network with higher education systems and institutions in the region will go a long way to supporting the development and growth of the higher education sector in Seychelles.

Conclusions

Despite the newness of the emerging public higher education sector, the government of the Seychelles has made significant progress in developing a higher education policy environment. The newly established University of Seychelles has been breaking new ground in the formation of partnerships with international universities, and student enrolment (although still small) has shown growth in the three years of operation. The international partnership model of UniSey is likely to provide an important case study for understanding the possibilities and pitfalls that this approach to higher education might hold for other countries in the SADC region. A rich horizon of future research lies ahead, focused on exploring the role UniSey plays in the social, economic and political development of the Seychelles.