

Education for Sustainable Development

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I. INTRODUCTION

"Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

Sustainable development has been defined in many ways, but the most frequently quoted definition is from the Brundtland Report:

"Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It contains within it two key concepts:

- the concept of **needs**, in particular the essential needs of the world's poor, to which overriding priority should be given; and
- the idea of **limitations** imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment's ability to meet present and future needs."

Sustainable development is the organizing principle for meeting human development goals while at the same time sustaining the ability of natural systems to provide the natural resources and ecosystem services upon which the economy and society depends. The desirable end result is a state of society where living conditions and resource use continue to meet human needs without undermining the integrity and stability of the natural systems.

Living within our environmental limits is one of the central principles of sustainable development. One implication of not doing so is climate change. But the focus of sustainable development is far broader than just the environment. It's also about ensuring a strong, healthy and just society. This means meeting the diverse needs of all people in existing and future communities, promoting personal wellbeing, social cohesion and inclusion, and creating equal opportunity. Not necessarily, Sustainable development is about finding better ways of doing things, both for the future and the present. We might need to change the way we work and live now, but this doesn't mean our quality of life will be reduced.

History

The concept of sustainable development, although had appeared in the 1970s, was widely disseminated in the early 1980s by the 'World Conservation Strategy' (IUCN, UNEP and WWF, 1980), which called for the maintenance of essential ecological processes; the preservation of biodiversity; and sustainable use of species and ecosystems.

The Brundtland Report, *Our Common Future* (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987), placed it on the world's political agenda and helped re-kindle public interest in the environment. It also spread the message that global environmental management was needed; and that without a reduction of poverty, ecosystem damage would be difficult to counter. Twenty years after the 'World Conservation Strategy' the same three bodies published 'Caring for the Earth' (IUCN, UNEP and WWF, 1991), which proposed principles intended to help move from theory to practice. The concept of sustainable development was introduced in early 1980's (in particular through the publication of the World Conservation Strategy by IUCN, UNEP and WWF, 1980), in order to reconcile conservation and development objectives. Since then, it has evoked much discussion.

The aim of sustainable development is to balance our economic, environmental and social needs, allowing prosperity for now and future generations. Sustainable development consists of a long-term, integrated approach to developing and achieving a healthy community by jointly addressing economic, environmental, and social issues, whilst avoiding the over consumption of key natural resources. Sustainable development cannot be achieved by technological solutions, political regulation or financial instruments alone. We need to change the way we think and act. This requires quality education and learning for sustainable development at all levels and in all social contexts.

Role of Education in Sustainable Development

"Education is a fundamental right and the basis for progress in every country. Parents need information about health and nutrition if they are to give their children the start in life they deserve. Prosperous countries depend on skilled and educated workers. The challenges of conquering poverty, combating climate change and achieving truly sustainable development in the coming decades compel us to work together. With partnership, leadership and wise investments in education, we can transform individual lives, national economies and our world."

— Ban Ki-Moon, United Nations Secretary-General

Education encompasses teaching and learning specific skills, imparting of knowledge, positive judgment and well developed wisdom. It has one of its fundamental aspects of imparting culture from generation to generation. It is an application of pedagogy, a body of theoretical and applied research related to teaching and learning. The basic aim of the education system for sustainable development is 'education of a new man', a man of a sustainable type of thinking' a man of Cosmo-planetary consciousness with a holistic world outlook, who has a culture of sustainability, high socio-cultural needs and deep moral ethical values, who is capable to solve global tasks facing by the mankind and to promote the forming of sustainable society.

Education in its contemporary development should be aimed at the future, should "foresee" and form in a certain way and satisfy needs of future generations of people. That means that education should be anticipatory to social, economic and cultural life, it should form desirable sustainable future.. "Education is critical for promoting sustainable development and improving the capacity of people to address environment and development issues...It is critical for achieving environmental and ethical awareness, values and attitudes, skills and behavior consistent with sustainable development and for effective public participation in decision making" (Chapter 36 of Agenda 21, Rio Declaration 1992).

In a world of 7 billion people, with limited natural resources, individuals and societies have to learn to live together and take responsible actions based on the understanding that actions here and today can have implications for the lives and livelihoods of people in other parts of the world, as well as for future generations. Empowering learners to live responsible lives and to address complex global challenges means that education has to promote competencies like critical thinking, imagining future scenarios and making decisions in a collaborative way. This calls for new approaches to learning, the development of vibrant green economies and societies, and the emergence of a "global citizenship".

II. EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (ESD)

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is simultaneously a sub-field of education and a conceptual tool to aid policy makers in authoring educational policies that take into account the present environmental, societal and economic challenges. According to the UNESCO, it is based on all levels and types of learning - learning to know, learning to be, learning to live together, learning to do and learning to transform oneself and society."

It further says that, "Perhaps ESD can be seen as the total sum of diverse ways to arrive at a 'learning society' in which people learn from and with one another and collectively become more capable of withstanding setbacks and dealing with sustainability-induced insecurity, complexity and risks. From this vantage point, ESD is about - through education and learning - engaging people in sustainable development issues, developing their capacities to give meaning to SD and to contribute to its development and utilizing the diversity represented by all people - including those who have been or feel marginalized - in generating innovative solutions to SD challenges and crises."

Pacific Education for sustainable development framework (2006) have identified a priority area in formal education and training which focused on structured learning initiatives for improved knowledge and understanding to support implementation of sustainable practices where the objectives of promoting quality education in all member countries was given focus. It will be through development of education policies and strategies research and development of innovative models and resources that support ESD in pacific contexts, inclusion of learning outcomes that focus on sustainability, development of strategies to assess student understanding of sustainability, development and identification of appropriate ESD resources to support this priority area using appropriate information and communication technology tools.

Since ESD involves a comprehensive approach to educational reform, it should extend beyond the boundaries of individual school subjects and requires the attention of teachers, educational administrators, planners and curriculum agencies. Integrating the objectives, concepts and learning experiences of education for a sustainable future into syllabuses and teaching programmes is an important part of such reform, indeed: "A basic premise of education for sustainability is that just as there is a wholeness and interdependence to life in all its forms, so must there be a unity and wholeness to efforts to understand it and ensure its continuation. This calls for both interdisciplinary inquiry and action. It does not, of course, imply an end to work within traditional disciplines. A disciplinary focus is often helpful, even necessary, in allowing the depth of inquiry needed for major breakthroughs and discoveries"

Source: UNESCO (1997) Educating for a Sustainable Future: A Transdisciplinary Vision for Concerted Action, paragraph 89.

Inclusion of materials and experiences to develop a conceptual understanding of the phenomenon of change and the problems related to Sustainable development and to develop minds that cope with change and reasonable techniques for doing so is required. Content and outcomes needs to be in tune with the social and cultural realities of the times. Orientation to cultural and social realities also involves value bearing concepts and experiences which encourage examination of value and value conflicts. Hence ESD should be incorporated in

the entire curriculum starting from pre-schooling to higher education which should be transacted in a meaningful manner.

According to the 2010 State of the World Report (published by The Worldwatch Institute), the Ecological Footprint Indicator, which compares impact of human actions on the ecology with natural resources available to supply key ecosystem services, shows that humanity now uses the resources and services of 1.3 Earths (isn't it 1.5 earths?). In other words, if humanity continues living the way it is, it would require a third more of Earth's capacity than is available to sustain itself.

In the coming years, the number of consumers is only going to increase. This would have a direct impact on the current resource base of the world which is already under tremendous stress and depleting at a faster rate than ever before because of the growing world population and ever expanding human aspirations. It is estimated that by 2050, the human population will be 9.07 billion of which 62 per cent of the people will live in Africa, Southern and Eastern Asia.

The state of the environment is a reminder of what we as humans are capable of inflicting on nature, which by itself, is in perfect harmony with its elements. However, it also highlights the opportunities at hand to reverse the process of environmental decline and work for a present and future built on the principles of environmental justice, equity and humane development. In this regard, the role of education is critical as it is the cornerstone of a modern society. It not only determines the present level of progress of people of a society but also charts out the future course of advancement of the civilization. Therefore, in view of the current environmental crisis, the content of education requires restructuring. This would mean that education systems across the world would be required not only to make a person employment worthy, it would have to capacitate people with values that would help them understand their relationship with the society and environment and empower a person lead a life of contentment and satisfaction. In this context, education will have to go beyond mere transfer of information.

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) therefore is an important pedagogical tool as it is based on the fundamental principle of making an individual see and recognize the interdependence between human beings and each and every unit of ecology. The Brundtland Report of 1987 also made a very important point in this context stating, "Sustainable development requires meeting the basic needs of all and extending to all the opportunity to fulfil their aspirations for a better life." The role of ESD, which is based on the three pillars of economy, society and environment, is critical in changing prevalent perceptions and attitudes of people towards self, society and environment ESD in India

III. INDIAN SCENARIO

In India, since the mid 1980s efforts have been on to bring Environmental education (EE) in formal education at all levels. In 2003, the Honorable Supreme court of India directed that EE should be a compulsory subject at all levels of education. It further directed that the NCERT should prepare a model syllabus for class I to XII, which shall be adopted by every state in their respective schools

If government officials or school district administrators are unaware of the linkage between Education and Sustainable development, re-orienting education to attain sustainable development will not occur. When people realize that education can improve the likelihood of implementing national policies, regional land and resource management programs, then education is in a position to be reoriented to help achieve sustainability. This awareness forms the first step in the reorienting process. Thus the importance of ESD must reach beyond the delegations and permeate the educational community and general public.

Traditionally India has been a sustainable society. A large part of the Indian population still has a lifestyle that is based on the principle of reuse, reduce and recycle. In some cases it is a matter of personal choice but for a large majority, it is necessitated by economic compulsions.

The Government of India (GOI) has integrated the principle of 'sustainability' in its various policies and developmental programmes. India's developmental strategic framework is based on a five year planning system. The first five year plan was rolled out in 1951. Presently, the soon-to-be concluded eleventh plan is underway which focuses in a big way on education.

In order to promote the value of sustainable development in education, the Indian government directed its various education departments to actively work on an Environment Education (EE) component as part of the curriculum. This strategy was adopted post Stockholm conference in 1972 by setting up Centres of Excellence for Environment Education under Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) in the early 1980s. For a very long time, most of these activities were restricted to the MoEF but gradually the government realized that the purview of education is very broad in a developing country like India and cannot be limited to the workings of one single ministry. As a result, the GOI recommended Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) to integrate environmental concerns into all aspects and levels of education.

India is the only country to have passed one of the landmark judgments passed by the Supreme Court of the country directing all education boards to include environmental education (EE) as part of the formal education system at all levels.

Besides the different ministries of the GOI, a large number of government and non-government organizations are diligently working to promote ESD. Most notable amongst them are Centre for Environment Education (CEE) which is the nodal agency for implementing UNDESD in India; The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI); Bharati Vidya Peeth (BVP); Centre for Science and Environment (CSE); World Wide fund (WWF); National Council for Science Museums (NSCM) and National Council of Education, Research and Training (NCERT). These organizations work with schools, colleges, youth groups on ESD and conduct training programmes not just for students but teachers, principals, school administrators and policy makers. What is heartening is the fact that the ESD field in India is also occupied by young and passionate professionals who are working across the country to raise awareness on sustainable development issues. These professionals come from different walks of life like media, architecture, medicine, education, social work, alternative art and literature. A lot of work is being done at the grassroots level involving local communities. The latest ICT (Information, Communication, Technology) tools are being employed to connect with the upwardly mobile urban youth and to reach out to a larger audience. The Multi-national corporations are also contributing by funding projects on ESD as part of their CSR strategy. The last five years have seen a notable increase in corporate spending on CSR in India and it has slowly but certainly helped the cause of developmental initiatives in the country.

IV. CONCLUSION

The mandate of ESD is very broad. Therefore it simultaneously becomes a challenge and an opportunity. ESD provides an excellent doorway to the social, economic and environmental spheres of India and societies elsewhere to trigger awareness, analysis and action on sustainable development.

The path to ESD is an important one and countries that tread it carefully and use it to their advantage would provide its present populace and bequeath its future generations an environment that would empower them to fulfil their needs and aspirations by striking a balance between economy and ecology. Otherwise, the consequences can be mildly termed disastrous. As the noted Indian Economist and scholar, Amartya Sen points out,

“a fouled environment in which future generations are denied the presence of fresh air....will remain foul even if future generations are so very rich.”

V. REFERENCES

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