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SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN INDIA: CHALLENGES AND APPROACHES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract: In the beginning of 21st century, the international community recognized the value of education for sustainable development. It now firmly feels that we need to foster through education the values, behaviour and lifestyles required for a sustainable future. Education for sustainable development has a significant role to play in our lifestyles and behaviour. Education is seen as a process of learning as to how to make decisions that affect us. It is concerned with the future of the economy, environment and social well-being of all communities. Building the capacity for such future-oriented thinking is a key task of education. The present paper gives an idea of how education is important for achieving Sustainable Development along with the challenges and approaches for Sustainable development in higher education.

Keywords: Sustainable Development, Research, Higher Education, Challenges, Approaches, India.

Introduction

Education is comprehended as a great force; a force that not only contributes to national development, but also sustainable development. It is a key to development, be it social, economic, political or environmental. Education helps development of knowledge and skills essential to attain sustainable development (SD). It inspires promotion of economic well-being, social equity, democratic values and much more. Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) empowers people and citizens to learn as to how to preserve earth resources which are limited in availability. The ESD has the objective of permitting present and future generations to meet their needs using a balanced and integrated approach to the economic, social and environmental dimensions of SD. The concept of SD has been broadly defined by the World Commission on Environment and Development (1987) as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. The definition acknowledges that while development may be obligatory to meet human needs and progress the quality of life, it must happen without depleting the capacity of the earth’s resources to meet the current and future wants.

The SD drive has grown on the root of a concept of sustainability that guards both the interests of future generations and the capacity of the planet earth to regenerate. In the 21st century, sustainability refers generally to the capacity of the biosphere and human civilization to co-exist. The Rio Declaration on Environment and Development (1992) laid down 27 principles of sustainability. One such principle is the Declaration that says: “In order to achieve sustainable development, environmental protection shall constitute an integral part of the development process, and cannot be considered in isolation from it. Eradicating disparities in living standards in different parts of the world is essential to achieve sustainable development and meet the needs of majority of people.”

Sustainable development can be defined as those developmental activities that do not degrade the environment and can be carried on for a long period of time. One of the central principles of sustainable development is living within the limits of consumption of natural resources. Therefore, the goals of economic and social development must be defined in terms of sustainability in all countries, developed or developing, market-oriented or centrally planned.

The UN Conference on Environment and Development (Earth Summit) also debated in 1992 and confirmed its resolve to promote the 3 pillars of SD, namely Economy, Society and Environment, as interdependent and mutually reinforcing concepts. To achieve SD, these pillars need to come together. The economic, social or societal and environmental sectors are all critically important and interdependent. A healthy prosperous society relies on a healthy environment to provide food and resources, safe drinking water and clean air for its citizens.

Importance of Education in Sustainable Development

‘Sustainable development’ was a chief attention of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) held in Brazil in June 1992. The attainment of sustainable development globally is likely to prove as one of the utmost challenges to the world community in light of the continued population growth and rising levels of consumption per capita. As the World Commission on Environment and Development observed, efforts to attain sustainable development are being carried out amidst the additional pressure of such global difficulties as “climate change, ozone depletion, and species loss” (WCED, 1987)



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The legacy of the concept of sustainable development is ascribed to the Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development ‘Our Common Future’. In this framework, sustainable development secures a balance between economic development and ecological sustainability. Together economic and environmental systems need a certain minimum threshold value to survive. Sustainable development is a process of change in which the exploitation of resources, direction of investments, orientation of technological development, and institutional change, are all in harmony and increase both current and future potential to meet human desires and aspirations.

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) has been defined as “education that allows every human being to acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values necessary to shape a sustainable future. In other words, ‘the ESD is the process of equipping students with the knowledge, skills and attributes needed to work and live in a way that safeguards environmental, social and economic well-being, both in the present and for future generations.’ The key ESD issues relate to climate change, disaster risk reduction, biodiversity, poverty reduction, and sustainable consumption. Education for SD consequently encourages competencies like critical thinking, imagining future scenarios and making decisions in a collaborative way. So, education for SD requires far-reaching changes in the way education is often practiced today. The ESD would be meaningful when it is linked with issues that the world is facing today. It must be given a global outlook. So, Education plays an important and decisive role in sustainable development.

Education for SD should include the following thrusts:

- Upgrade and development of basic education related to SD;
- Reorientation of existing education at all levels- primary (basic), secondary, higher in order to address SD.
- Development of public awareness and understanding of sustainability.
- Learning and development of training methods in the world of sustainable development. Thus, SD depends upon the provision of specialised training programmes to ensure that all sectors of society have the necessary skills to perform their work in a sustainable manner.

Dimensions of Sustainable Development

The concept of sustainable development can be classified into three dimensions: Environmental, Social and economic sustainability. There is need to balance these dimensions to attain sustainable development.

- **Environment sustainability** is concerned with environment protection, preserving environmental resources and maintaining environmental quality to ensure that they continue to be available for upcoming generations.
- **Social sustainability** includes preserving social equity, maintaining cultural identity, equality in human rights and ensuring social well-being of the people and social inclusion.
- **Economic sustainability** is the ability of the economy to support people economically and support economic production.





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Challenges for Sustainable Development

At present sustainable development has become a key issue at state, national and international level regarding education policy since last decade. Various stakeholders identify the sustainable development in diverse ways and search for its outcomes. Some specific challenges in the implementation of sustainable development in higher education are:

- **Financial Challenges:** For economic growth and development of the country, industrialization is increasing at accelerating rate thereby ignoring nature, people, resources and environment. There is prerequisite to spread awareness and make people realize that economy is part of environment and economic development cannot be accomplished on the cost of environment.
- **Research Challenges:** Lack of research in the area of sustainable development and higher education. It is essential to inspire research on environment sustainability, higher education and economic growth and development to resolve problems of the society as a whole by establishing relation between economy and research institutions.
- **Cultural Challenges:** It is impossible to achieve the goal of sustainable development without the support of the community. Only efforts of Government and policy formulation cannot help unless public also participates. Initiatives must be taken to inspire the public about sustainability through higher education.
- **Social Challenges:** Growing population, wasteful use of natural resources and lack of awareness about sustainable development act as social challenge which hamper in realizing goal of sustainable development. Through higher education public needs to be made aware of the scientific basis for sustainability and its benefits.
- **Political Challenges:** Inadequate implementation of policies, conflict between parties, poor evaluation system, lack of information, lack of financial resources, absence of relevant data, focus only on economic growth, lack of conservation of resources are the major challenges against successful implementation of sustainable efforts.

Higher Education and Sustainable Development

Higher education institutions have the accountability to share the challenging global responsibility and promote Sustainable Development. It is the responsibility of educators to propagate new way of thinking, inspire the human development, collaborate ideas for sustainable development, stimulate value education and deliver economical, ecological and other benefits to people. Higher education can play a significant role in promoting sustainable development and this can be highlighted through following points.

- Universities all over the world can act as an influential agent to create and disseminate the basic understanding of sustainable development and urge people at local as well as global level to adopt policies and principles which are consistent to achieve their goal and education for sustainable development.
- Education can boost to use the resources efficiently and to address the primary issues faced by the public by emphasizing on the interdependence of dimensions of sustainable development.
- With the help of Higher education people can develop the attitude concerned with sustainable development by prompting the moral obligation of the present generation to use the resources effectively and carefully to eliminate the discrepancies of non-sustainability.
- Higher education empowers the people to initiate research in relation to society and sustainable development issues and enhance the understanding of ethics of the environment.
- Higher education attempts basic understanding and knowledge to the people to consider the world as a whole and safeguard the interests of the future generations, thus influencing the direction of the society towards sustainable development.
- Universities should implement practices and policies that inspire pledge to sustainable development.
- Higher education must lay stress on difficulties faced by India due to uncontrolled industrialization; steps taken so far and highlight the relationship among three dimensions of sustainable development in order to emphasize the responsibility of universities in this regard.
- Special institutions for education of sustainable development should be established and sustainable development subject must be made compulsory at higher education level in all the courses.
- Capacity building programmes, workshops, seminars must be organized to promote sustainable development and national and international collaborations between universities must be increased to support sustainable development.
- Higher education institutions should enter into partnership with non-governmental organisations (NGOs), industry and government in order to coordinate the efforts of university and bring change at various other levels.

Approaches for Sustainable development in Higher Education

Some important approaches are necessary which should be adopted for the promotion of education of Sustainable Development in Higher Education system and can be described as below:

- Implementation of ICT to expand the access to quality education:** In order to enlarge the access to quality education to the masses, particularly in the areas where there is absence of specialized knowledge providers, ICT can act as cost-efficient tool to



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achieve the desired goal of knowledge dissemination to all socio-economic backgrounds. ICT helps in international collaborations thus enhancing virtual learning spaces and improving quality of education to achieve the goal of sustainable development.

- b) **Execution of transformative education:** Attempt must be made to accomplish transformative education replacing transmissive education in order to make the students to address the complex sustainability threat. Rather - than learning being a one- way process, it should be made more interactive facilitating learner centeredness with an objective of developing critical thinking skill.
- c) **Strategy of curriculum greening:** Due to growing industrialization, it becomes the responsibility of the universities for obligation to environmental protection and comprises action plans in their campus, education curriculum, research and other activities. To accomplish the mission of integrating environmental sustainability with all its activities initiative must be taken to introduce specific optional courses on sustainability of environment.
- d) **Emphasis more on research-orientedness:** Universities must stress to focus on the fundamental areas of sustainability such as biosciences, energy conservation, environment, infrastructure management, natural resources, policy studies etc. Policies and academic programmes must be especially planned with the objective to generate social awareness of career options related to unconventional areas of education. Further inter-disciplinary programs must be introduced in theory and practice so that students are made aware of the real-life problems.
- e) **Encouraging thematic research:** For supporting sustainability, the university needs to encourage thematic research. Thematic research aims to promote interdisciplinary research and address societal problems. The idea is to promote students from various disciplines to collaborate and focus on grave issues and form linkages with community at large to solve societal problems.
- f) **Financial resources for sustainability:** To realize national objectives of sustainability and higher education, there must be adequate accessibility of resource base. Resources should be allocated in order of precedence which yields highest return in terms of social and economic context. Higher education institutes have to create more revenue and pursue cost efficiency. It can be expected that through higher education, a positive change shall take place on reference to sustainable development.

Conclusion

The concept of Sustainable development has become crucial for world's future. There are numerous challenges to achieve sustainable development. The major challenges that India faces comprising rising population and the rapidly changing urban lifestyle, which pose serious environmental and social problems to the citizens. Due to growing environmental problems and rising threat to well-being of the future generations, it is true that higher education is the powerful tool for encouraging sustainable development. Higher education will help to highlight societal problems and enable to address them through interdisciplinary research. There is need to develop empowering curriculum that would help in bringing transformation for sustainable future. Numerous approaches can be applied by Indian Universities to bring paradigm shift in higher education. Efforts in higher education are required to make sustainable development a reality.

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