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Education

The Un Decade on Education for Sustainable Development: Implications for Environment Conservation

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ABSTRACT

Sincere thanks are due to Professor Abdur Raheem Kidwai, Director UGC Human Resource Development Centre, AMU for his comments on the draft and improvisations in the structure of this paper. The idea of this work draws upon the initiatives of the UGC HRDC, AMU in environmental education for higher education teachers. The Centre also contributes to environmental awareness amongst students of all age groups

KEYWORDS :

Sustainable Development

The idea of sustainable development was mooted to enable economic and industrial growth the world over to keep in tandem with the environmental concerns. In the new era of globalization, countries have evolved technologically and have entered into fierce competition with one another to increase their economic growth and maintain their market performance (Sachs and Ban 2015). It is envisaged that this kind of growth on economic and industrial fronts will bring a perilous situation for the planet in future.

Given the finite nature of resources found in the earth on which growth depends, it is impossible to continue to grow at an exponential rate without exhausting the earth's natural resources in a non-renewable manner. Several International conferences were held and multilateral treaties were signed to bring the global leaders on one platform to take steps to regulate the use of natural resources and impart consciousness on caring for earth so that the benefits of development are enjoyed by humanity in an equitable fashion. The narrative on sustainable development grew from one event of the United Nations to another in the last half a century. Some of the important United Nations initiatives to save the planet from peril yet maintain development and economic growth at a steady pace are listed below:

- United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, held at Stockholm in 1972
- United Nations Conference on the Human Environment also known as the Earth Summit, held at Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 1992
- World Summit on Sustainable Development also known as Rio + 10, held at Johannesburg, South Africa in 2002
- United Nation's Conference on Sustainable Development Rio + 20held at Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 2012

Deliberations in these high level conferences and summits underscored the necessity for action across borders to preserve the environment and maintain the ecosystem services as life support systems. These are such pressing needs of human ecosystem that if processes such as the life support systems are not maintained in their natural form, survival of life on earth will be jeopardized (Giddings *et al* 2002). To maintain the ecosystem services provided by nature which are vital for sustenance of life on earth the pressing need for sustainable development was felt. Many definitions of sustainable development were proposed by various think tanks, research organizations and policy making bodies.

Going by the dictionary meaning of the phrase it simply reads 'Economic development that does not cause depletion of natural resources.' Hence all international policies should support sustainable development.

According to the Wellbeing Index (2001), Sustainability is "a condition in which the ecosystem maintains its diversity and quality—and thus its capacity to support people and the rest of life—and its potential to adapt to change and provide a wide range of choices and opportunities for the future" while development is "a condition in which all members of society are able to determine and meet their needs and have a large range of choices to meet their potential."

The Environment Sustainability Index states that in development that is sustainable vital environment systems are maintained at healthy levels and to the extent to which levels are improving rather than deteriorating and levels of anthropogenic stress are low enough to engender no demonstrable harm to its environmental systems. Resilience to environmental disturbances (People and social systems are not vulnerable (in the way of basic needs such as health and nutrition) to environmental disturbances; becoming less vulnerable is a sign that a society is on a track to greater sustainability") Institutions and underlying social patterns of skills, attitudes, and networks that foster effective responses to environmental challenges"; and cooperation among countries "to manage common environmental problems".

However so far the most widely accepted definition of sustainable has been proposed by the World Resource Institute. The crux of this criteria for sustainable development is to maintain the same quality of resources for the future generations as they are available for the present generation. Not only quality with resources such as water going scarce day by day, the concern on quantity is also a discernible factor. This acclaimed definition is the most frequently quoted one and is from *Our Common Future*, which is also known as the Brundtland Report (1987):

"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.»

The over-riding factors for this important concept are:
1. Intergenerational equity
2. Intragenerational equity.

Hence at the conceptual level sustainable development is enmeshed in all aspects of the social and institutional fabric and articulates the way forward to achieving the aims of development projects for the society.

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)

With the growing environmental consciousness environment education specially at the school and graduate levels has been

introduced by many countries. In India too EVS is a compulsory subject in all schools and recently the UGC has introduced a compulsory paper on Environmental Studies for all undergraduate courses in Indian Higher education Institutions (Universities and Colleges) across discipline. However, "Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)" is a concept that goes far beyond environmental education merely. It is one such holistic process of education that is oriented towards achieving complete human development comprising its three pillars as proposed by UNDP being economic development, societal well being and environment protection, in an inclusive, equitable and secure manner.

Thus ESD aims at holistic education to achieve the goals of:
• Poverty alleviation
• Human rights
• Gender equality
• Cultural diversity
• International understanding
• Peace

Education plays a critical role in achieving sustainability in production as well as consumption because these patterns depend upon the attitudes and behaviors of people as consumers, producers, individuals and future responsible citizens. Chapter 36 of the *Agenda 21* which was an outcome of the Earth Summit in 1992 stresses upon re-orientation of education towards sustainable development encompassing all streams being formal and non-formal basic and higher. It is different from other international global initiatives for education which focus on education being a basic human right and eradicating illiteracy. ESD looks at the values covered through education and its content and purpose for a sustained human future on planet earth.

In spite of multiple efforts to strengthen ESD, many challenges remain. In particular, there is a need:

• to integrate sustainable science and education;
• to strengthen co-ordination and collaboration between different levels of education for sustainable development
• to mitigate information and knowledge gaps between different parts of the world.

Hence ESD has been integrated with the other international initiatives already in place such as:
1. Millennium Development Goals
2. Education for All
3. United Nations Literacy Decade

Sustainable development seems to be enshrined in the masthead of all public aspirations being high on the world political agenda. The global community is gearing up for promoting education, public awareness and training in order to reorient education towards sustainable development, increase public awareness and promote training and capacity building.

During the World Conference on Higher Education in 1998, a thematic debate was organised, by the UN at the request of UNESCO, on "sustainable (human) development," which brought fourteen different organizations together. This was the first major step towards uniting educators as a major stakeholder group.The following year the first discussions were held to form the Global Higher Education for Sustainability Partnership. In 2000 the Agreement was signed and during the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg in 2002, the International Association of Universities (IAU), the Association of University Leaders for a Sustainable Future (ULSF), Copernicus Campus and UNESCO launched the Global Higher Education for Sustainability Partnership (GHESP) as a Type II Partnership to promote education for sustainable development in particular among higher education institutions. The Japanese as well as Swedish Governments chose education for sustainable development as the focus of their contributions.

Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD)
The United Nations General Assembly in its 57th meeting held in December 2002, declared the period between AD 2005 to 2014 as the Decade of Education for Sustainable the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development. The main emphasis of this proclamation is that *'education is an indispensable element for achieving sustainable development'.* Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) envisions a future world that ensures equal access and opportunities for all to the benefits of quality education.

This quality education is envisaged to included the learning of values, behaviour and lifestyles that would make the students citizens of a sustainable future. Overall the aims of ESD are a complete positive societal transformation. UNESCO was designated in this meeting of the UN General Assembly as the lead agency to execute the decade long activities of the DESD and its worldwide promotion.It was also entrusted with the preparation of a Draft International Scheme for ESD. According to UNESCO:

"ESD is for everyone, at all stages of life and in all possible learning contexts. ESD employs a partnership approach that engages multiple sectors and stakeholders – including media agencies and the private sector – and utilizes all forms and methods of public awareness raising, education and training to promote a broad understanding of sustainable development."

By embracing these elements in a holistic and integrated manner, ESD enables all individuals to fully develop the knowledge, perspectives, values and skills necessary to take part in decisions to improve the quality of life both locally and globally on terms which are most relevant to their daily lives.

Conclusion
Humanity is faced with the challenges of global warming, climate change, water scarcity and resource crunch like never before. The ill conceived development policies primarily aimed at improving the lives of human beings caused the destruction of natural resources, extinction of biodiversity and imbalance in ecosystem services beyond any rationalization. While development is fruit of human endeavor that can not bedewed to any country or people it is important that such limits to development are recognised that keep it sustainable in the wake of the finite nature of earth's resources. Education has a profound impact on the behavior, actions, life styles and attitudes of citizens. These are the very factors which make an impact on the environemnt as the immediate surroundings of people and communities. Sustainable development can be achieved by responsible actions of future policy makers, decision takers and active citizens whose young and impressionable minds are framed by education today. Education for sustainable development is a worthwhile initiative taken by the international community to inculcate the values of environment protection and keeping life sustained on planet earth. The various programs and initiatives of the higher education sector in India have taken an effective step forward in the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development 2005-15. It is required to support these higher education institutions and their aspirations for ESD to go from strength to strength and expand their network to penetrate into the public psyche.

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