

## Sustainable Development and Education: The International Initiatives



### Education

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### ABSTRACT

*It has been globally realized that the development paradigm that ignores the environment has proven to be a disaster. There is an international recognition of not only the fact that we need to change the paradigm of our development but also of the role that education is expected to play in that transformation. As human beings started to think that they will have to relearn to live in harmony with nature, the need for corresponding education was also felt. The paper seeks to understand major international initiatives related to sustainable development and their reflection in the domain of education.*

In last century the global economy expanded fourteen times, energy use increased thirteen times, industrial output expanded forty times and world population increased four times, but at the same time carbon dioxide emissions also went up thirteen times, water use rose nine times and energy consumption increased thirteen times. McNeil (2001) has put it rather elegantly that humankind began to play dice with the planet without knowing all the rules of the game. This gave rise to several local and global environmental problems that have adversely affected the ecological balance of the planet earth, thereby raising environmental concerns.

Today the planet earth along with all its life forms is under great stress as its ecological health is deteriorating rather fast. There has been a growing realization that the environmental problems of the world are largely a result of the flawed course of development and non sustainable life styles of the people. The fast paced but directionless development that caters to ever growing desire of the increasing population has resulted in more problems than solutions. Pachauri (2013) puts it rather elegantly that the speed is irrelevant if we are going in the wrong direction.

#### Sustainable Development

The severity of environmental problems has disturbed the natural equilibrium, giving rise to the ecological crisis. The environmental concerns have compelled us to think if phenomena considered to be constituting progress are taking us forward, or the path ultimately leads to destruction. This has necessitated a rethinking about the concept of development. Sharma (2014) pointed out that during the second half of last century when environmental problems were first recognized, they were identified as problems having local significance only, but later it was realized that these are global problems and at stake is the future of our planet as well as species. It has been recognized that the model of development that does not addresses environmental concerns cannot be sustained. This compelled mankind to think about an alternative model of development which is known as the model of sustainable development. Trivedi (2013) rightly pointed out that sustainable development is a continually developing concept which aims at development that ensures a systematic relationship between society, environment and economy. These three dimensions are considered to be inseparably connected to one another and the well being of any one dimension is also considered to be interlinked to the well being of the other dimensions. The concept of sustainable development rejects the idea that environmental degradation is a necessary and acceptable consequence of development. It visualizes a future that balances the pursuit of economic development with social and environmental concerns thereby improving the quality of human life.

Several UN initiatives at global level have played a very significant role in the emergence and development of the concept of sustainable development. The United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, Stockholm, 1972 is considered to be the

first such initiative that focused on relation between environment and the development. It emphasized that the protection and improvement of the human environment is a major issue which affects the well-being of people and economic development throughout the world.

The Brundtland Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (1987) introduced the idea of sustainable development in which environmental protection and economic growth are viewed as interdependent concepts. The report titled 'Our Common Future' defined sustainable development as the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (1992) held in Rio-de-janeiro pointed out that in order to achieve sustainable development, environmental protection shall constitute an integral part of the development. This summit also known as the 'Earth Summit' listed principles of sustainable development.

The sustainability concerns also informed the deliberations of the UN Millennium Summit of 2000 held in New York. The goals set by the conference in new millennium popularly known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) also reflect the idea of alternative human development as the seventh MDG stresses on ensuring environmental sustainability.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has the task of promoting the sustainable skill and behaviors, inspired by creative and critical ways of thinking in order to encourage the resolution and management of problems that stand in the way of sustainable development. From the ecological point of view a cautious behavior leading to minimization of ecological disruption would be the essential requisite for sustainable development. It has been emphasized that for developing environment friendly behavior among the future generations the role of environmental education is of paramount importance.

#### Sustainable Development and Education

It would be pertinent to note that as human beings started to think that they will have to relearn to live in harmony with nature, the need for environmental education was also felt. United Nations Conference on Human Environment (1972) in its recommendation 96 calls for the provision of Environmental Education as a means to address the environmental concerns. It was in this background that UNESCO- UNEP launched the international Environmental Education program IEEP in 1975 with the objective to promote exchange of information, experience, research curricula and international cooperation in the area of Environmental Education. Following this an international workshop was held in Belgrade, Yugoslavia in 1975. The workshop proposed a global framework for environmental education, re-

ferred to as the Belgrade Charter. The Charter states that Environmental education should constitute a comprehensive lifelong education, one responsive to changes in a rapidly changing world. It should prepare the individual for life through an understanding of the major problems of the contemporary world, and the provision of skills and attributes needed to play a productive role towards improving life and protecting the environment with due regard given to ethical values. According to the charter the goal of environmental education is to develop a world population that is aware of, and concerned about, the environment and its associated problems, and which has the knowledge, skills, attitudes, motivations, and commitment to work individually and collectively toward solutions of current problems and the prevention of new ones.

Whereas the Belgrade charter outlined the basic structure of environmental education, the Tbilisi declaration 1977 was indeed the most significant landmark in so far as formulating the goals, objectives and guiding principles for environmental education are concerned. The goals of environmental education endorsed by the Conference are:

- To foster clear awareness of, and concern about, economic, social, political, and ecological interdependence in urban and rural areas;
- To provide every person with opportunities to acquire the knowledge, values, attitudes, commitment, and skills needed to protect and improve the environment;
- To create new patterns of behavior of individuals, groups, and society as a whole towards the environment.

The objectives of environmental education endorsed by the conference are:

- Awareness - to help social groups and individuals acquire an awareness and sensitivity to the total environment and its allied problems.
- Knowledge - to help social groups and individuals gain a variety of experience in, and acquire a basic understanding of, the environment and its associated problems.
- Attitudes - to help social groups and individuals acquire a set of values and feelings of concern for the environment and the motivation for actively participating in environmental improvement and protection.
- Skills - to help social groups and individuals acquire the skills for identifying and solving environmental problems.
- Participation - to provide social groups and individuals with an opportunity to be actively involved at all levels in working toward resolution of environmental problems.

Enlisting the guiding principles of environmental education, the Tbilisi Conference pointed out that environmental education should:

- Consider the environment in its totality—natural and built, technological and social (economic, political, cultural-historical, ethical, and aesthetic).
- Be a continuous lifelong process, beginning at the preschool level and continuing through all formal and nonformal stages.
- Be interdisciplinary in its approach, drawing on the specific content of each discipline in making possible a holistic and balanced perspective.

- Examine major environmental issues from local, national, regional, and international points of view so that students receive insights into environmental conditions in other geographical areas.
- Focus on current and potential environmental situations while taking into account the historical perspective.
- Promote the value and necessity of local, national, and international cooperation in the prevention and solution of environmental problems.
- Explicitly consider environmental aspects in plans for development and growth.
- Enable learners to have a role in planning their learning experiences and provide an opportunity for making decisions and accepting their consequences.
- Relate environmental sensitivity, knowledge, problem-solving skills, and values clarification to every age, but with special emphasis on environmental sensitivity to the learner's own community in early years.
- Help learners discover the symptoms and real causes of environmental problems.
- Emphasize the complexity of environmental problems and thus the need to develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills.
- Utilize diverse learning environments and a broad array of educational approaches to teaching, learning about and from the environment with due stress on practical activities and first-hand experience.

The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development -popularly known as The Earth Summit- held at Rio de Janeiro in 1992 agreed to a global environment and development agenda for the 21<sup>st</sup> century called Agenda 21. Chapter 36 of Agenda 21 dedicated to "promoting education, Public awareness and Training" stresses the importance of education for sustainability. The chapter emphasizes that education, including formal education, public awareness and training should be recognized as a process by which human beings and societies can reach their fullest potential. It stresses that education is critical for promoting sustainable development and improving the capacity of the people to address environment and development issues. Both formal and non-formal education are indispensable to changing people's attitudes so that they have the capacity to assess and address their sustainable development concerns. It is also critical for achieving environmental and ethical awareness, values and attitudes, skills and behaviour consistent with sustainable development and for effective public participation in decision-making. To be effective, environment and development education should deal with the dynamics of both the physical/biological and socio-economic environment and human (which may include spiritual) development, should be integrated in all disciplines, and should employ formal and non-formal methods and effective means of communication.

In order to emphasize the role of education for sustainable development, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution in December 2002 to put in place a United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD) spanning 2005-2014. The relation between environmental education and education for sustainable development is synergetic and they have strengthened each other towards building sustainable future and lifestyles.

## REFERENCE

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