

Sustainable Development through Higher Education in India

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Abstract:

Sustainable development has become an important concept for a viable future of the world. India's ever increasing population and the rapidly changing urban lifestyle, are posing critical environmental and social problems. Sustainable development at its core tries to balance different and frequently competing needs against an awareness of the environmental, social and economic limitations that a society faces. Higher educational institutions can be the best solution to solve this situation. Higher education can play a crucial role in sustainable development of any nation. As environmental sustainability is becoming an increasingly important issue for the world, the role of higher educational institutions in relation to environmental sustainability is more prevalent. Universities are the apex bodies in higher education system and can provide environmental education through its curricular design, research and collaborative efforts with NGO's working in those areas. They can provide trained manpower and knowledgeable expertise to solve critical environmental problems. The present paper examines the concept of sustainability and discusses the role of higher education system in promoting sustainable development

Key words: Higher education, Environment, sustainable development.

Introduction:

Sustainable development is a process which involves human's intelligence, decision making efficiency, planning and management skills, power of imagination, entrepreneurship, development and production with environmental safety etc. Usually, sustainable development is a human subject. The issue associated with sustainable development can be seen as one of the basics of any society. 'Sustainability' being the concept of paramount importance for survival and development of any country; proper understanding and application of the same could make all the difference. This is where the concept of Education for Sustainable Development comes in picture. It could hold the key of empowering the individuals to assume responsibility to build a sustainable future. Education becomes the short cut to bring awareness about environment protection and social transformation among the students, researchers, teachers and communities at large. Higher education is the aspect of education that is acquired by students after the completion of their secondary education. Here, the persons are organized for building upon their knowledge and skills which can be applied to solve different problems in human life. Higher educational institutions have the capacity to give quick responses to different societal problems specially related to environment. At the same time sustainable development through higher education provides a pivotal role in nations building. Sustainable development remains barely a significant social, economic or environmental challenge for any country

Goals of Sustainable Development:

India has, over the past years, directed its development pathway to meet its priorities of employment, economic growth, food, water and energy security, disaster resilience and poverty alleviation. India has also aimed to restore its natural capital and adopt transparent and robust governance along democratic lines. However, emerging challenges of climate change impacts, increasing inequities, and lagging human development indices are well recognized by both the citizens as well as the government. The post 2015 UN Sustainable

Development Agenda framework provides an opportunity to renew and integrate efforts in order to meet, to a significant degree, national and global aspirations in a defined time frame. Sustainable Development is officially known as transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development are an intergovernmental set of aspiration Goals with 169 targets.

Environmental Education:

The Kothari commission (1964-66) suggested that basic education had to offer Environmental Education and relate it to the life needs and aspirations of the people and the nation. The report recommended that the aims of teaching science should develop proper understanding of the facts, concepts, principles and processes in physical biological environment. Environmental education at Higher secondary level helps to encourage awareness of the environment, leading to informed concern for and active participation in resolving environmental problems. Recognizing the importance of environmental education at all levels, the Supreme Court of India ruled that a course on Environment be made mandatory at the undergraduate level to sensitize the youth to environmental issues and concerns. As per the Supreme Court direction, the University Grants Commission introduced six months of compulsory environmental course in all the universities and colleges during the academic year 2004-05.(Late, 2011)

Open and Distance Education System-

The distance education system has been started in the country with the establishment of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar Open University, Hyderabad in 1982. In the 14 ODL universities throughout the country the total enrollment of students and various Distance Education Institutions (DEIs) in dual mode Universities in academic years. Various courses including Environmental Sciences have been started by these Universities which will ultimately be served with the concept of sustainability. IGNOU, New Delhi and some state open universities have started the Research Programme in various disciplines.) The YCMOU (Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University) has made „Environmental Education“ as a compulsory subject even for the PGRP (Post Graduate Research Programme).

Role of Universities and colleges in Environmental Education:

As environmental sustainability is becoming an increasingly important issue for the world, the role of institutions of higher education in relation to environmental sustainability initiatives is becoming more and more prevalent. If it is the role of colleges and universities to educate members of society, then they must be actively instrumental in the sustainability movement. Every university is in specific geographical area and these are familiar with their surroundings. They can use their existing knowledge and trained man power to address problems and issues concerned at the local level, as well as related to the national and global community. Universities and Colleges can exchange the information by establishing a strong regional information network. Universities and Colleges can lead in promoting environmental equilibrium. They have a right and a duty to indicate where problems exist. Universities and Colleges can help to establish the sustainable development through following aspects:

1. Teaching.
2. Research.
3. Outreach

1. Teaching:

The UGC framework of the curricula environmental issues and it is compulsory implemented in teaching programme. The students should get acquainted with all the skills and information related to environment. The curriculum should motivate the students to participate and solve the environmental problems. Not only formal but informal education is also one of the important part of environmental education. Researches in the field of Environmental Education

(EE) have shown that teaching and learning outside the classroom as a part of extracurricular activities. Besides the classroom studies, the young students have the greatest potential to aware the people about the present status of environment through street plays, rallies, exhibitions at the grass root level. The teaching & learning process for environmental awareness includes applied research projects, lecture series; documentary shows celebration of environmental days, competitions, exhibitions, nature visits, nature clubs, seminars and conferences.

2. Research:

Research is one of the integral part of higher education. It is an investigative parameter of getting new information or looking for new ideas for the development of man and the society. Higher education research is seen all over the world as one of the most powerful instruments known for environmental development. There are many research funding agencies, not only Universities but different National level Research Institutes in India like UGC, NEERI, NCL, NIO, IIT, DST, DBT, DRDO, etc. are working to solve many environmental problems as well as some of them work as funding agencies to give funds for such projects.

3. Outreach:

The purpose of outreach program is to create enduring partnerships between academic institutions and communities in order to build capacity to solve a suitable solution of the problem in society and to enhance the research and teaching capacity of participating colleges and universities. It is necessary for higher education institutions to involve themselves in community outreach-based research to contribute to a strong knowledge-based economy in their country. The National Service Scheme (NSS) unit and other Departments of Universities and Colleges are plan and implemented the outreach programme in society. NGO's are non-governmental organizations working in the field of environment. Higher educational institutes as well as NGO's can jointly work together in environmental protection and awareness. At the same time the NGO's can spread the information about the solution to the needed society.

Conclusion

Higher Education is the backbone of any knowledge society. In India HE has taken great strides to support, spread and practice 'Sustainable Development' to encourage wholesome development of the country. The higher education institutions can use their infrastructure and expertise in a positive way to achieve sustainable development. In the collaborative work with NGOs, higher education institutes can help to spread the message at grass root level of the society and put pressure on the stakeholders. Higher education can play a crucial role in sustainable development.

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