

Education: A Key Mechanism for Sustainable Development in New Current Generation

Deepika

Assistant Professor of S.St D.H Lawrence College of Education for Women, Jhajjar

ABSTRACT

The term “Sustainable Development” became prominent after the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 which prioritised global environmental discussions and improved upon the initial framework introduced at the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, Stockholm in 1972. There are many definitions of the term, but the most widely accepted is the one used in the publication “Our Common Future”, sometimes referred to as the Brundtland definition: **“Development which meets the needs of the current generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs”** (UN, 1989). In order to implement sustainable development, it became necessary to develop the ideas further in terms of defining what sustainable means and the relevance of development and distinguishing it from education. The resulting Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, however, advocated the role of education in preventing ecological degradation (Cleveland & Kubiszewski, 2007). Education which promotes functional literacy, livelihood skills, understanding of the immediate environment and values of responsible citizenship is a precondition for sustainable development. Such education must be available to every child as a fundamental right, without discrimination on the basis of economic class, geographic allocation or cultural identity. Aim of this research is to understanding the potential of education to promote sustainability, reduce poverty, train people for sustainable livelihoods and catalyze necessary public support for sustainable development initiatives.

Keywords: Sustainable development, Education, Rio Earth Summit and Fundamental Right etc.

INTRODUCTION

The Earth Summit (The UN Conference on Environment and Development in 1992) in its Agenda 21 also emphasized the role of education in creating and nurturing sustainable communities. The Johannesburg Summit in 2002 re-affirmed the importance of education in achieving the Millennium Development Goal of international co-operation to promote strategies for Sustainable Development (SD). Then in December 2002, the United Nations General Assembly declared the period from 2005 to 2014 the decade of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). ESD envisions a world where everyone has the opportunity to benefit from education, and learn the values, behavior and lifestyles essential for a sustainable future and for positive societal transformation.

The five major components of ESD that guide and motivate people to seek sustainable livelihoods, participate in a democratic society, and live in a sustainable manner are as follows:

1. **Knowledge:** People need basic knowledge from the natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities to understand the principles of SD. Knowledge based on traditional disciplines supports ESD.
2. **Values:** They are an integral part of ESD, with respect at the centre: respect for present and future generations, respect for cultural difference and diversity and respect for the natural environment. Values taught in school need to reflect the larger values of the society that surrounds the school. Social justice is also a central part of ESD, since it includes respect for the traditions and religions of other communities, meeting basic human needs, and concern for the rights, dignity, and welfare of all people.
3. **Issues:** Teachers should be equipped to help students identify and think about the complexities of issues from the perspectives of many stakeholders. Older pupils and university students need to acquire skills to analyze issues and the proposed solutions to them, understand the values underlying opposing positions, and analyze conflicts arising from those issues and proposed solutions.

4. **Perspective:** The ability to consider an issue from the view of different stakeholders is essential to ESD. Every issue has a history and a future. Looking at the roots of an issue and forecasting possible futures based on different scenarios are part of ESD, as is understanding that many global issues are linked. For example, over-consumption of such consumer goods as paper leads to deforestation, which is thought to be related to global climate change.
5. **Skills:** ESD must give people practical skills that will enable them to continue learning after they leave school, to have a sustainable livelihood, and to live sustainable lives.

Education and sustainable development

UNESCO (2004) identifies two unique opportunities for Educational Institutes (EIs) to engage in sustainable development. Universities form a link between knowledge generation and transfer of knowledge to society for their entry into the labour market. Such preparation includes education of teachers, who play the most important role in providing education at both primary and secondary levels. They actively contribute to the societal development through outreach and service to society. Cortese (2003) stated “Higher education institutions bear a profound, moral responsibility to increase the awareness, knowledge, skills and values needed to create a just for sustainable future. Higher education often plays a critical but often overlooked role in making this vision a reality. It prepares most of the professionals who develop, lead, manage, teach, work in and influence society institutions.” Thus, EIs have a critical and tangible role in developing the principles, qualities and awareness not only needed to perpetuate the sustainable development philosophy, but to improve upon its delivery.

The American College & University Presidents Climate Commitment asks individual presidents to take steps toward institutional plans to reduce carbon emissions and adopt energy efficient policies, as well as report their progress (ACUPCC, 2007). Other programmes include the International Sustainable Campus Network and the Global Higher Education Sustainability Partnership (GHESP), which provide forums for institutions to exchange good practices and improve current practices (ISCN, 2007; GHESP, 2004). The Baltic 21 has also highlighted the role of education as a means to achieve broader objectives on sustainable development (Baltic 21, 2004). While these are positive steps to creating green campuses, curriculums and communities, what is absent is a systematic approach to embedding sustainability.

It will demonstrate that by examining the various functions and operations of a university, EIs can develop far-reaching policies that give consideration to teaching and research, infrastructure, course content, biodiversity, the local and regional community, purchasing practices and waste management.

The challenges and opportunities for implementing sustainable development

The lists of challenges to implementing sustainable development in EIs were analysed to identify common themes. The most frequently cited challenges can be summarised as:

- Lack of strategic leadership in EIs and government.
- Low demand from most internal and external stakeholders, including students and employers.
- Academic and professional silos which inhibit cooperative efforts across disciplines and institutions.
- Poor communication within the EI regarding the meaning and concept of sustainable development and how it applies.

Whereas the list of challenges seems to focus on what might be considered traditional challenges to organizational change (such as funding, time and capacity), the opportunities listed capture a range of innovative and creative opportunities for education. These opportunities are a mixture of local connections and concerns and larger global issues such as the global significance of climate change. The opportunities include:

- Inter-disciplinary nature of research in sustainable development.
- Demand from internal and external stakeholders, including students and employers.
- Zeitgeist – primarily attributed to climate change, but also progressive awareness of other sustainability issues.
- Collaborations/partnerships to work together.
- Networks to learn from each other.
- A proactive unit or an individual within the EIs driving sustainable development with a clear plan.

SUGGESTIONS

- ❖ **For the legislature:** It is also important to establish clear links with local communities. Doing so may elevate the local and regional role of EIs in delivering sustainable development and help to increase demand from employers to emulate certain practices. Three suggestions that might warrant further investigation are directed at the role of the national government. These include: Endorse supra national initiatives such as the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable

Development and EU sustainability policy; put a commitment to support education for sustainable development in core strategic documents such as budgets; and integrate education for sustainable development in other related legislations such as Overseas Development Assistance.

❖ **For the executive:** government can work with EIs in a range of areas to develop policies, research agendas and regional commitments, but also to provide incentives and apply political pressure. The suggestions that this report specifically identified include:

- Providing national coordination and support networks will help to overcome academic silos and communicate learning, and hopefully encourage co-operation within and between EIs. It will also ensure that conflicting regulations or policies do not exist.
- Financing pilot projects was seen as important, though interestingly lack of finance was not a highly prioritised barrier to achieving sustainable development.
- Improving dissemination by initiating a public awareness raising campaign and evaluating a EIs contribution to sustainable development were both ways to increase communication and understanding and complement other campaigns on issues such as climate change.
- Requiring EIs to develop sustainable development implementation plans was seen as a good way of demonstrating leadership by government and would hasten the establishment of proactive units in the EIs responsible for their delivery.
- Building the capacity of civil servants and university leaders, for example putting sustainable development into government contracts would ensure that EIs leadership was fully engaged. Although quite how this should be inserted into contracts needs further exploration.
- Rewarding good practice especially amongst academics would help to erode the academic silos and put a high value on interdisciplinary research.

❖ **For higher education institutions (HEIs):** a clear, established concept of sustainable development and a vision implemented by senior management will demonstrate the strategic leadership needed. This includes developing measurable and quantifiable features of sustainable development and then using these instruments to report back to shareholders in order to demonstrate the progress in economic, environmental and social development. There are three types of actions that might prompt the HEIs to be proactive in sustainable development. These actions and their advantages include:

- Engaging in peer review will help build strong mutually beneficial collaborations, start to share learning across networks and hold HEIs to account. Establishing guidelines and targets, and then periodically reviewing them will ensure policies are implemented and progress being made. Publishing reviews outcomes will also increase transparency and accountability, as well as promote broader adoption of good practices.
- Establishing professional recognition for staff engaged in sustainable development research, teaching or managing and valuing inter-disciplinary research will help to break down the academic silos. Engaging staff will help develop internal advocates who place pressure on higher-level administrators to act, and also to create a culture of sustainability.
- Building the capacity of university leadership from the principal to heads of departments and then staff and students will ensure that strategic initiatives are implemented and that demand for sustainability from students is well informed and positive. Presidents and deans should commit their institutions to a set of tangible objectives, and these objectives should be clearly announced to students, staff and faculty in order to develop multi-level commitment to the ideas.

CONCLUSION

ESD is transformative education, which calls for transformational motivators or educators who can understand its continuously evolving nature. The challenge today before teachers is to integrate ESD in the formal structured curriculum by addressing all the above components in it (i.e., knowledge, values, issues, perspectives, skills and strategies). Simply adding more to the curriculum will not be feasible in most schools; they already have a full curriculum. Deciding what to leave out that does not contribute to sustainability or is obsolete. It is an integral part of the reorienting process. By accepting the three principles of access, equity and quality, the education would be used as an agent of basic change in developing all individuals to be fully functioning, actively interacting with the condition, process and stimuli in environment. This would also ensure that they would grow to be happily and contented individuals and not disgruntled and disappointed and would radiate this happiness at home, in work place and society and build a healthy, congenial environment to live in and think for better future.

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