

**AN IMPLEMENTATIONAL STRATEGY TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTES OF INDIA :
DRIVING SOCIAL CHANGE**

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Abstract

Plato says “if you want the child to appreciate and create beautiful things surround him with beautiful things”. This statement reveals the potential of the young generation to create a beautiful world when provided with a beautiful and healthy environment. The environment both physical and cultural is a necessary component of human personality building and eventually a healthy society. The interaction between human society and the environment is constantly changing. Severe environmental pollution and degradation are not only affecting our lives today but also threatening our tomorrow. Environmental degradation not only hampers personality development but also affects the quality of life. Thus, the development of human society cannot be done by ignoring our environment. The concept of Sustainable development aims to protect our environment so that future generations need not compromise with its necessities.

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Introduction

Plato says “if you want the child to appreciate and create beautiful things surround him with beautiful things”. This statement reveals the potential of the young generation to create a beautiful world when provided with a beautiful and healthy environment. The environment both physical and cultural is a necessary component of human personality building and eventually a healthy society. The interaction between human society and the environment is constantly changing. Severe environmental pollution and degradation are not only affecting our lives today but also threatening our tomorrow. Environmental degradation not only hampers personality development but also affects the quality of life. Thus, the development of human society cannot be done by ignoring our environment. The concept of Sustainable development aims to protect our environment so that future generations need not compromise with its necessities.

Thus Sustainable development encompasses the future, along with its present. In this context, the role of educational institutions becomes very important because not only they are centers of education but also centers of transmission of cultural heritage. By building up the right attitude among students and cultivating the spirit of complicity among them, education institutions contribute to making capable and responsible citizens of the country.

Thus, the need for hours is development without destruction. This idea is inherent in the concept of Sustainable Development. Sustainable development is the principle for meeting human development goals while simultaneously sustaining our natural environment. The concept of sustainable development was introduced in its true sense after the World Commission on Environment and Development published The Brundtland report, “Our common future” in 1987. It defined Sustainable development as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the need of future generations to meet their own needs (The World Commission of Environment and Development, 1987).

Afterward, the next significant conference was held in 1992, in Rio-de-Janeiro, Brazil which was called “The Earth Summit” or “The Rio conference”. It witnessed participation from 178 countries. The conference aimed at solving problems of environmental degradation through the concept of Sustainable Development. The Earth Summit resulted in the adoption of several principles and agendas, out of which two are of major importance. First, Rio Declaration and second, Agenda 21. Rio Declaration contains 27 principles of sustainable development regarding rights and duties of the United Nations, concerning future policy and decision making related to

environment and economic development. Agenda 21 is a global program with objectives of sustainable development and action plans and resources for their implementation set in 40 chapters (UN DST, 1992.) Agenda 21 aims for the protection and rational use of natural resources. At the same time, it emphasizes the necessity to strive for human development and remove poverty, gender inequality, health problems, etc. Chapter 36 of Agenda 21, titled “Education, awareness, and training” laid the foundation of Education for sustainable development (ESD). It highlights the importance of educational programs in building awareness of sustainable development. Agenda 21 highlights the importance of educational programs focused on raising awareness and promotion of sustainable development which are necessary for its implementation (UNSD, 1992).

In 2002, The World Summit on Sustainable Development was held in Johannesburg, South Africa. At this summit, the report of the result achieved from the time of the Rio conference was discussed and the previous obligations were reaffirmed. The summit recommended the United Nations General Assembly consider adopting a Decade of Education for Sustainable development. As a result of which, UNGA declared 2005- 2014 as the Decade of Education for Sustainable development (DESD). UNESCO was designated as the lead agency to promote it. UNESCO identified some essential characteristics of ESD (UNESCO, 2005). It states that ESD promotes lifelong learning. It is locally relevant and culturally appropriate. It is based on local needs, perceptions and conditions acknowledging that fulfilling local needs often have International effects and consequences. It also states that ESD engages in formal, non-formal and informal education. It is interdisciplinary and uses a variety of pedagogical techniques.

In recent years, marking the 20th anniversary of the world summit in Rio, a conference from Rio to Rio+ 20 was held in Rio-de-Janeiro adopting the resolution “the future we want” (UN, 2012, UNEP, 2012). In this conference progress and problems of the past efforts in implementing sustainable development were discussed and new goals were set for sustainable development. (UNEP, 2012).

Thus, ESD is an important pedagogical tool in transforming the prevalent perception and attitude of people towards the environment and society. It is based on principles that underlie sustainable development and all three realms of sustainability that is environment, society and economy are dealt with ESD. Lack of awareness and neglect towards the environment leads to degradation and deterioration of the environment. Environmental awareness is related to environment management, treatment, conservation, etc. Environment awareness brings about

attitudinal change in the students who contribute towards environmental sustainability and this helps in sustainable development. Thus, building environmental awareness is key to sustainable development. Here, the role of education and educational institutions becomes important. Countries throughout the world gave extra attention towards sustainable development by introducing the concept of environment and sustainable development in their national curriculum to ensure that the younger generation gets the message and understands the need of making sustainable choices for a better and healthy future. In India, the UN country team carried out the joint advocacy month to promote the “education first” initiative, led by UNESCO and UNICEF in September 2015. It was done under the slogan “Sustainable development begins with education”. After the judgment of the Honourable Supreme Court, all educational boards have included Environmental education in the formal education system at all levels.

Higher education institutes in India can contribute to increasing environmental awareness in youths by incorporating content related to the environment and sustainable development in their curriculum. However, meeting the essential demands regarding sustainable development needs a multidimensional strategy because sustainable development is not limited to environmental preservation only. Apart from preservation, sustainable development demands maintenance, restoration, long and prolific use, effective and inclusive policies, etc. Higher education Institutes can play an important role in the sustainable development of any country for which a multidimensional well-built strategy is essential. Higher education in India needs to practice implementational strategies at two levels viz informational strategy and institutional organization.

Informational Strategy

The informational strategy helps in reducing awareness- behavior gap. It acknowledges the fact that the dissemination of knowledge and awareness is indispensable for environmental sustainability and sustainable development. This strategy can be divided into two parts- content and learning. Content deals with topics that need to be taught to the students whereas learning refers to the process and techniques to be adopted in higher education institutes for encouraging pro-environment behavior in students.

(a) Content

Academicians and teachers need to include various topics related to the environment and sustainable development in the syllabus of every course. Environment studies should compulsorily be made part of the syllabus of courses of UG and PG of

every stream. Issues such as pollution, urbanization, imbalance of socio-economic development, renewable and non-renewable resources (conservation and alternatives), population studies and ecological balance, etc. should be made an essential part of the syllabus. Significant issues such as environmental inequality, environmental racism, and environmental management must be taught to the youth in colleges and universities of India. The syllabus concerning environmental studies should be regularly updated with the world's initiatives and efforts for sustainable development, with a special focus on India's climate commitment. Government programs related to the environment as Namami Gange, Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, etc. should find special mention in the syllabus for increasing awareness among students and making them sensitive towards the environment.

(b) Learning

Content building in isolation is not sufficient. Innovative and multi-dimensional learning strategies, along with carefully designed content are imperative for ensuring student's contribution towards sustainable development. Various innovative learning methods can be adopted in higher education institutes to make students more responsive and sensitive towards environment protection and conservation. Universities and colleges foster researches. Researches should be encouraged for inventing eco-friendly technologies and machines. Sustainable building designs should be promoted in the field of architecture. Seminars, lectures, talks, competitions, etc. should be organized on the campus on regular basis. An environmental club or committee for promoting environmentally sustainable attitudes in students should be constituted. The 'Remove, Reuse and Recycle' formula should be encouraged on the campus. Reusing study materials such as books can be increased by motivating students to donate and use books from the Book Bank. To change youth actions and choices towards sustainability, normative suggestions should be provided to them. The desired change can also be promoted by awarding grades or numbers in internal examinations to the students for following pro-environmental practices on the campus.

Structural Organizational Strategy

Structural organizational strategy concerns the institutional structure and its organization facilitating environmental sustainability efforts. More green areas should be maintained on the campus. Landscaping on the campus should be planned carefully and priority should be given to native plants and trees. More oxygen-giving and pollution-reducing plants should be planted on the campus. Proper disposal of green waste through composting be practiced and only green manure should be used. The green building concept can be followed in higher education institutes with the installation

of solar power panels for uninterrupted power supply. Sustainability grants can be sought by the institutions in this regard. Automatic lights and water taps should be used instead of normal light and taps. Bulbs and tube lights should be replaced by LED bulbs. Water conservation practices as rainwater harvesting methods should be practiced. For sufficient light and air supply, proper ventilation of classrooms must be ensured.

The college canteen/ cafeteria is the hotspot of any college or university. Sustainable food practices should be followed in the cafeteria /canteen such as using organic staples replacing plastic utensils with paper or other environmentally friendly alternatives. Pest management on the campus should also be done by using non-harmful chemicals. Following 5 days a week campus concept will also be an efficient sustainable practice. Increasing working hours per day and closing on weekend days will contribute towards sustainability efforts. By adopting some practical measures students can be encouraged to adopt Pro-environmental practices, for example charging less for double-side printing, charging fine for throwing garbage apart from dustbins, encouraging bicycles on the campus, etc. Waste minimization should be encouraged by paper-free registration, online syllabus, etc. Vehicle pooling should be practiced by both staff and students. In this way, by providing attention to such small practical measures a big change can be brought about.

Apart from informational and structural organizational strategies, some other measures can also be adopted in the higher education institutes of India which are related to the wider community and society. It is a fact that peer group pressure is a major influencing factor in affecting youth behavior. Youth tend to flaunt their possessions like cars, bikes, etc. in their age. Thus, providing normative suggestions and image building of the students (e.g. by providing stars or batch, signifying his or her special status) will prove effective in removing group pressure among the students. In this way, there are some cultural hindrances in our society that make the goal of sustainability hard to achieve. Encouraging 'active citizenship' in the students and making them realize their responsibilities as a citizen will help in solving such hindrances. Similarly, institutions can perform various extension activities including community education in spreading awareness regarding sustainable practices and sustainable development. Institutions can also work in collaboration with NGOs working in this area, by providing their network system, research data, etc.

Change in practices, social institutions and social structure over some time brings about social change. Thus, education is an important agency of social change. It brings a change in society by influencing human thoughts, activities, and decision-making capabilities. Advancing pro-environmental culture in higher education institutes

will bring about change in practices and decision-making of youths of India, which will eventually contribute towards sustainable development. This change cannot take place overnight rather it is a gradual process requiring commitment and serious efforts. Thus, both public and private higher education institutions need to implement such strategies and encourage pro-environmental practices by bringing about careful changes in teaching and learning practices, structural organization and management, consumption pattern of the institution, etc. To make these strategies and planning effective, it is imperative to understand the factors and conditions which promote or inhibit sustainable development. Due attention needs to be paid to the resolution of local problems and issues related to the environment. Last but not the least, planning and strategy implementation should be community-focused, inclusive and holistic. As new challenges will continue to threaten environmental sustainability, the possible implementational strategies for education need to be explored in the future.

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