

Education for Sustainable Development: Need of the Hour

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The importance of Education for ensuring equity, equality and an egalitarian society cannot be overemphasized. Nelson Mandela, the late South African President and Nobel Peace Prize winner had declared Education as the most powerful weapon which can be used to change the world. Years later, Pakistan born Malala Yousafzai, also a Nobel Peace Prize winner echoed the sentiments of Nelson Mandela and stated, "One child, one teacher, one book, one pen can change the world." The importance of Education can also be understood by the fact that the United Nations has included the Right to Education in its Universal Declaration of Human Rights document (UN, 1948). Prior to this, Mahatma Gandhi, the strongest symbol of peace and non-violence, though never awarded with the Nobel Peace Prize, also highlighted the importance of Education for growth and prosperity. A sustainable development pioneer himself, Mahatma Gandhi believed that true education must correspond to the surrounding circumstances or it will not lead to healthy growth.

From the above it is clear that Education is indeed the solution to all problems, be it social, economic or environmental. Interestingly, the latter are also the three cornerstones on which the concept of sustainable development rests. The three main pillars of sustainable development are social equality, economic growth and environmental protection. Sustainable development can be achieved by creating a balance between these three factors. Thus, Education is an essential pre-requisite for ensuring sustainability and Education for Sustainable Development is the need of the hour. Fortunately, the United Nations realizes this well so much so that the 2005-2015 decade was declared as the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD). The vision behind DESD was mainly to emphasize to the

world and to world leaders that education is an indispensable element for achieving sustainable development. The post-DESD Report lauds the initiative for bringing increased recognition at the international policy level that education is essential to the advancement of sustainable development (UNESCO, 2014). However, there is enough literature to show that post-DESD, at the end it was business as usual (Huckle and Wals, 2015). It is perhaps this reason why Quality Education has been listed as the one among the 17 Sustainable Development Goals which needs to be achieved between 2016 and 2030 (Singh, 2016).

Education for Sustainable Development may be interpreted in two very different ways. First, it implies that all individuals, from all sections of the society, - irrespective of their caste, class, gender - are provided with basic and quality education. Providing quality education to all citizens would mean creating a thoughtful, responsible society which would then be careful about its present and future. Large number of educated citizens would mean greater protection and preservation of environment and judicious use of natural resources. It is also hoped that Quality Education will accompany better livelihood opportunities for all resulting in an increase in the average per capita income of respective nation states. This may further help respective nation states by pushing them down the Environmental Kuznets curve on the right side of the graph (Stern et al., 1996).

The second inference of Education for Sustainable Development focuses more on the transformative role education needs to play for achieving sustainable development. This also includes the promotion of transformative learning and research at all levels of education. This may require developing of learning resource materials, creating innovative pedagogy, - introducing research based teaching and taking the class

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out of the classroom. An important point that needs to be kept in mind here is that Education for Sustainable Development must not be seen as similar to Environmental Education. Indeed that has been the case more often than not and is perhaps the reason why the entire burden of ensuring sustainable development has fallen only on the subject of Environmental Studies. The Environmental Education sector may at best spearhead the shift to Education for Sustainable Development. It has, in fact, already taken the lead. What needs to be reiterated is that it should not be isolated by the two other pillars of sustainability, viz. economic growth and social equality.

Much needs to be done today for augmenting the existing education system to accommodate the teaching of the principles of sustainable development. While on the one hand, existing syllabi have to be retrofitted; on the other, new literature and study material needs to be prepared at all levels of education. Since sustainable development is an emerging and dynamic field, its educators will have to make consistent efforts for keeping themselves and their teaching materials updated. Education for Sustainable Development would also mean policy level changes in terms of what to teach and how to teach, which may require considerable consultation and advocacy. Targeted strategies will need to be formulated to ensure adoption and implementation of Education for Sustainable Development lessons at all levels of education, right from primary to higher education. While at the school level, sustainable development lessons may be amalgamated with existing and ongoing teaching, higher education institutions may consider designing courses for teaching sustainability.

Irrespective of the interpretation or the method followed, what is important is that centres of all learning adopt and shift to Education for Sustainable Development as soon as possible. It is only in making this shift that the world can achieve the Education for Sustainable Development milestone, as envisioned by UNESCO. That is, creating a world where everyone has the opportunity to benefit from quality education and learn the values, behaviour and lifestyles required for a sustainable future and for positive societal transformation. The Journal of Innovation for Inclusive Development (JIID) remains dedicated towards furthering our understanding for achieving the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, of which Quality Education is one.

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