

## SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT : A CONTEXT FOR EDUCATION REFORM

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### ABSTRACT

*Education for sustainable development is a dynamic & expansive undertaking that envisions a world where every person has the chance to benefit from educational opportunities and to learn the lifestyles, behaviours & values necessary to create a sustainable future and for positive societal transformation. Education for sustainable development can be understood using a tree as a metaphor; it grows its roots deep into the soil and its branches extend wide and high toward the sky. It is a concept, which is attached to an enlarging sphere with some of its branches withering. Education for sustainable development is a vision of education that seeks to balance human and economic well being with cultural traditions and respect for the earth's natural resources. Education has a critical role to play in both raising awareness among young people of sustainable development, giving them the skills they need to put sustainable development into practice in later life, but also in framing good habits at an early age. There is a two way benefit from embedding sustainable development in the education system. By linking teaching to issues of direct concern to young people their personal quality of life and well being of the communities and environment around them- their learning becomes more relevant and compelling, with positive impacts on standards of achievement & behaviour. Education for sustainable development is an approach to the whole curriculum & management of an institution. ESD is also about helping pupils to develop knowledge, understanding values & skills. As such, the curriculum approaches to teaching and the learning experiences that students have are all key elements of effective education for sustainable development.*

**Keywords:** Sustainable Development,

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### INTRODUCTION

Education for sustainable development (ESD) is a recent innovation in educational reform that has evolved from the better known environmental education (EE) movement. Sustainable development has become an important issue on internal, regional & national agendas concerning education policy over the past few years. ESD is a lifewide and life long

endeavour which challenges individuals, institutions and societies to view tomorrow a day that belongs to all of us.

Education for sustainable development is not just a new feature of education, but a completely new type of education. Its implementation into all programmes at all levels places considerable demands on education system.

The national policy on education 1986, is formulated on the fundamental principle that “Education is a unique investment in the present & future”.

This implies that education is for all & it must promote the goals of socialism, secularism & democracy enshrined in our constitution and that education develops manpower for different levels of economy. Accordingly curriculum is to be formulated.

This paper deals with the concept of education for sustainable development, characteristics of ESD, why curriculum reforms in India & structuring & placing curriculum in ESD, conclusion etc.

### **Concept of ESD**

Sustainable development was discussed for the first time on a global level at the UN conference on the human environment, held in Stockholm in 1972. Now ESD is recognized as important and central to the success of sustainable development around the world.

“The goal of sustainable development is to enable all people through out the world to satisfy their basic needs and enjoy a better quality of life, without compromising the quality of life of future generations”.

Education for sustainable development implies a quality and practice that is not simple to capture in a single definition. The following is the overarching definition for education for sustainable development.

“ESD is about the learning needed to maintain and improve our quality of life of generations to

come. It is about equipping individuals, communities, groups, business and government to live and act sustainably; as well as giving them an understanding of the environmental, social & economic issues involved.” It is about preparing for the world in which we will live in the next century and making sure that we are not found wanting.

“ESD enables people to develop the knowledge, values and skills to participate in decisions about the way we do things individually and collectively, both locally and globally, that improve the quality of life now without damaging the planet for the future.” In a nut shell, Sustainable development means “Living well within the means of Nature.” The decade of education for Sustainable Development pursues a global vision.

According to UNESCO “The vision of education for sustainable development is a world to benefit from quality education and learn the values, behaviour and lifestyles required for a sustainable future and for positive societal transformation.”

“Sustainable development is an approach to daily decisions that integrates probable consequences to the environment, the economy and human health and well being. It is a way of making decisions that balances the needs of today without sacrificing the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

“Sustainable development is development that meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own need.”

- World Commission on Environment and

Development 1997

### **Characteristics of ESD**

Sustainable development should be at the heart of all learning and education is an excellent vehicle to achieve sustainability. There are certain features that are generally agreed to be important to successful education for sustainable development:

- Interdisciplinary working methods.
- Addressing conflicting objectives & synergies between different needs & interests.
- Content which has a long term perspective: past to future; local to global;
- Democratic and student- participatory working methods which give students the opportunity to influence the design & the content of educational programmes.
- Reality based learning, with close and frequent contact with nature & society.
- Learning which focuses on problem-solving & which stimulates critical thinking & readiness to act.
- Both the process & product of education being important.

The above mentioned characteristics of education for sustainable development must take its starting point from the cultural & social situation in a country. However, much must be left to the educator & the learners to make decisions concerning the content & methods to be used in the classroom or other educational system.

### **Why curriculum reforms in India?**

The term “Curriculum” is generally understood as the course or programmes of study offered by an educational institution. Curriculum is more than just a body of knowledge, a list of subjects to be studied. It is all the planned experiences which learners may be exposed to in order to achieve the learning goals.

Education for sustainable development has a distinct contribution to make to the curriculum & pedagogy. But the school curriculum in India found very narrowly conceived and largely out of date (Alberty & Alberty, 1962). Education is a three fold process of imparting knowledge, developing skills and inculcating proper interests, attitudes and values. Our schools are mostly concerned with the first part of the process – the imparting the knowledge and carry out even this in an unsatisfactory way. The curriculum places a premium on bookish knowledge and rote learning makes inadequate provision for practical activities and experience and is dominated by examinations, external & internal. Moreover, as the development of useful skills and inculcation of the right kind of interests, attitudes and values are not given sufficient emphasis, the curriculum becomes not only out of step with modern knowledge, but also out of tune, with the life of people.

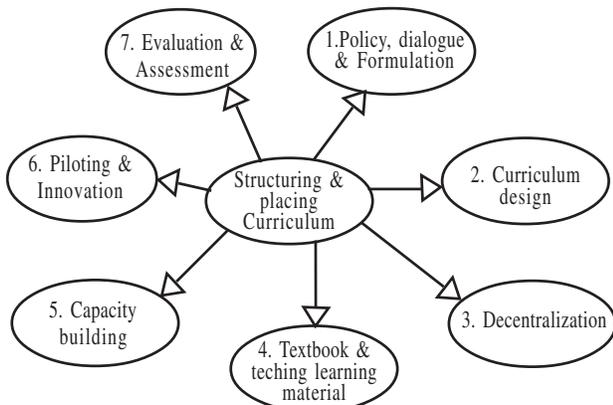
Curriculum is not a fixed product but a dynamic process-it is an ongoing process that responds to changes in society and to changes in the educational institution itself (Das et al., 1984). There is thus, urgent need to raise, upgrade & improve the school curriculum.

### Structuring & Placing Curriculum in ESD

It is surely through the education system that we have the best possible opportunity to educate today's children & future generations, about the need for sustainable development and more importantly how to achieve it. It is difficult to envision large scale changes in educational practice & content at the classroom level without first seeing those changes in place in curriculum policy. It is important that educators not view ESD as another subject to add to a crowded curriculum plate, but one of several initiatives acknowledging deficiencies in current practice and supporting broad based educational reform leading to youth being active & effective members of their communities.

Education related to sustainable development will be implemented in a wide range in both depth & breadth (Prakash, 2001).

Curriculum is taken as the totality of the experiences students acquire under the guidance of the school, such experiences could be distilled into three: (1) Program of studies, (2) Program of guidance & (3) Program of activities. The program of studies essentially focuses on the basic academic



learning (involving school subject contents packaged as social sciences, humanities, science etc). The program of guidance involves things like remedial support for weak students and counseling in career choice (e.g. choice of school subjects). Activities involved in the third component are projects, games & sports & such other events that were traditionally termed "extra-curricular". Curriculum, therefore transcends the conventional compartmentalized school subjects listed on the school time table & calls for the integration of theoretical & practical experience of learners all through school life (Robinson, 1980).

The main issues about curriculum building revolve around four basic elements. These are (1) Statement of objectives. (2) Selection & organization of content. (3) Identification of materials and method and (4) Evaluation of effectiveness. Applying these elements to curriculum there are a number of strategies & activities which include the following.

#### (1) Revising the Objectives & Policies of Education

Two aspects of education are often cited in various documents. First is: primary schooling should be for all children everywhere boy & girl alike. The second aspect is, education for sustainable development should be strengthened & included directly & indirectly in school curricula & at all levels of formal, non formal & in-formal education.

#### (2) Selection & organization of content

Introducing ESD issues into school programs as "new" content materials presupposes at least three

activities: Analysis of existing subject contents, decision on mode of integration & active involvement of stakeholders to guarantee acceptability & continuity, moreover a lot of inspiration could be drawn from examples of informal approaches like story telling & religious or cultural festivals to motivate people, connect with them & share ideas. This could be followed by content analysis of existing school subjects to identify needs and gaps for plugging in the issues they think are practical relevance within a synergy of global, regional, national and local perspectives.

### **(3) Methods & Materials**

The peculiar requirements of ESD call for innovative methods in view of our emerging information society. For that the sourcing of information on environmental problems through local newspapers, magazines, field trips, video taps, radio programmes & action research is likely to drive home the messages faster & deeper than the traditional teacher dominated classroom teaching. Approaches like value clarification & problem solving that present learners with options & critical thinking for action are also likely to be more successful in promoting sustainable living. Such strategies help teachers to construct knowledge collaboratively to solve problems including environmental problems.

### **(4) Evaluation of Effectiveness**

Sustainability principles emphasize immediate application of knowledge to demonstrate gains rather than the traditional pencil & paper achievement tests.

Even where test of information acquisition is involved, the weight allotted to the recall domain would certainly be less than that of students demonstrated ability to solve practical problems within their local. How many issues of population, environmental sanitation, use of water resource, etc. has a student addressed in the last one week, month, term or year within & outside the school? How often do students draw correlations between certain school activities like sports, agriculture & sustainable development? Students anecdotal records, direct observation & responses to questionnaires are some of the techniques which could produce clear indicators of effectiveness of an ESD strategy in school curricula. Initial problems associated with these & other innovative evaluation techniques could be minimized with a wellthought collaborative curriculum framework within & outside the school system.

In short, structuring and placing curriculum for ESD will not just be a subject in the classroom, it will be in its bricks and mortar and way the school uses & even generates its own power (Zais, 1976).

### **CONCLUSION**

Education for sustainable development is the use of education as a tool to achieve sustainability. Giving students knowledge & skills for lifelong learning to help them find new solutions to their environmental economic & social issues. It is through the education system that we have the best possible opportunity to educate today's children and future generations about the need for sustainable development & more importantly how to achieve it. Because education is our great hope for a sustainable future.

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