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## Role of higher education in sustainable development in Indian perspectives

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### Abstract

Higher Educational Institutions must play a role in identifying and addressing the issues that affect the well-being of nations and global society. Mobilisation for this purpose needs public awareness and involvement of private sector of the economy. Educational institutions, public and private both, will have to redefine their missions and goals, and establish the priorities as per the needs of the sustainable society. If the goals of Sustainable Development are to be realized, the attitudes of all the stakeholders of Higher Education in particular and of education at all the levels in general with regard to our current lifestyles and the impact they have on the environment will need to change. Seminars, conferences, workshops etc. are fine and important but it is vital that these must result into some concrete actions and deeds. Education is the fundamental pillar of human rights, democracy, peace and sustainable development. Development of sustainable individuals and thereafter sustainable communities should be one of the major goals of Higher Education system both nationally and globally.

**Keywords:** education, human right, society, institution, sustainable development

### Introduction

There is no doubt that Higher Education must be among the most prominent players in moving society to a more sustainable path. The academics have in the past played a pivotal role in the theoretical debates and practical experimentations concerning the best route towards Sustainable Development. Higher Education is vested by society with the mission of discerning truth, imparting knowledge, skills and values and preparing responsible citizens and competent workers who will contribute to a sustainable world. Through their learning experiences, future graduates would embrace interdisciplinary strategies and system thinking approach to address sustainability issues. Indian higher education system is growing very fast irrespective of various challenges but there is no reason that these challenges cannot be overcome. With the help of new-age learning tools, it is easy for country like India to overcome these problems and bring a paradigm shift in the country's higher education sector. With such a vibrant country with huge population properly educated, the possibilities are endless. If knowledge is imparted using advanced digital teaching and learning tools, and society is made aware of where we are currently lagging behind, our country can easily emerge as one of the most developed nations in the world.

Indian Higher Education is at a crossroad and must change if it has to contribute more effectively in support of the public good, and in doing so, helps to alleviate many of the inequalities and inequities in the society. Re-visioning the role of Higher Education for Sustainable Development involves changing the means and processes of knowledge production and the way in which students are trained, making students more socially responsible, critical and sensitive towards sustainability issues life-long.

Education is the fundamental pillar of human rights, democracy, peace and Sustainable Development. Higher Educational Institutions must play a role in identifying and addressing the issues that affect the well-being of nations and global society. Mobilisation for this purpose needs public awareness and involvement of private sector of the economy. Educational institutions, public and private both, will have to redefine their missions and goals, and establish the priorities as per the needs of the sustainable society. If the goals of Sustainable Development are to be realized, the attitudes of all the stakeholders of Higher Education in particular and of education at all the levels in general with regard to our current lifestyles and the impact they have on the environment will need to change.

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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. Therefore, so far its major field of concern has been for the environment, but its applicability has been extended to wrap almost each human attempt. The discussion is a principal element in education for sustainable development. Environmental education is the fundamental education to study the sustainable development. In other words environmental education can be able to make a path for education for sustainable development. Any researcher who is working for education for sustainable development can support the mode of life explained by value based interpretation of sustainable development. In the last decade, the education for sustainable development has been accepted as a main policy which is the utmost need of the day for each state or country. Moreover, the sustainable development has gained the due attention on international forum not only by researchers or environmentalists but also by the chiefs of several countries.

Sustainable development is a pattern of using natural resources in such a way which provides regular individual requirements considering the preservation of the environment for coming generations. Sustainable development is the development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Sustainable Development is not a latest notion in the world any longer. There have been years of discussing and elucidating the meaning of this concept in nearly every academic and non-academic atmosphere. After the creation of the "United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (UNDESD)", central attention of the movement on Sustainable Development has been shifted to the techniques and different ways for achieving this idea. One central theme which has been well declared and emphasized in the key purposes of the UNDESD is the idea of joint venture. UNDESD undoubtedly places its major aim as: "to smooth the progress of set of connections, replace and communication in the various concerned sections in Education for Sustainable Development". The key strategy to make use of education for the Sustainable Development is to make education viable by interconnecting social, economic, and environmental issues by harmonizing the current plans and actions.

Sustainable Development is a higher-order social goal that challenges the growth ethics and increasing inequity of modern life. Education, especially Higher Education is a powerful policy instrument for social change. Higher Education is a most powerful and strategic tool not only to create new knowledge but also a very important sector for the growth and development of human resource which can take responsibility for economic, social, and scientific growth and Sustainable Development of the country. The

socio-economic changes in the World and developing information and knowledge society have emphasized the importance of Higher Education and research in the whole World. There is a well-known quote "education is an ornament in prosperity and a refuge in adversity". With the liberalization resulting into quality education, the role of Higher Education in the future economic, societal, and cultural development of the World has become an issue of paramount significance. The World Declaration on Higher Education for the 21st Century.

### **Higher Education and Sustainable Development**

It is a historical fact that education plays a necessary and decisive role in the economic, social and political development of a country and impacts each area to a significant degree. Similar to the case for development, education plays a crucial role in Sustainable Development because intelligent and technical development and behavioural changes through education are recognized as necessary means and ways for Sustainable Development. Education forms an important ingredient of Sustainable Development, and Higher Education an important instrument of achieving Sustainable Development. However, we will have to question the type of education that can bring about such changes that are needed for Sustainable Development and also the agenda and means by which to teach sustainability. However, in order to drive our education more towards Sustainable Development, we have to provide quality education that is oriented towards the values and skills of sustainability.

Sustainable Development is becoming high on the political agenda due to global warming and climate change concerns. If we are to meet environmental and social challenges of this century, we must deepen sustainability awareness across the globe. The most effective way for promoting Sustainable Development is by developing the capacity of all stakeholders through education. Under these requirements, universities and colleges seem to be in a unique position to take a leadership role on Sustainable Development. As leaders, they can envision and strategize towards a global and successful solution; as centers for learning, they can educate and empower students to address issues related to climate change, energy efficiency, as well as sustainability in its broader definition. Higher Education with the development of technologies in every field can easily take this responsibility and thereby prove its relevance to the needs and requirements of the society. Higher Education, therefore, must play a fundamental role by placing all its resources and its spirit of independence in the service of what is relevant and what is needed by the humanity and society in general.

On the basis of this perception and orientation, the present situation of Higher Education should be reviewed and critically questioned as to how much our universities are responsible and responding to the Sustainable Development goals and how Higher Education can be reformed and innovated in order to meet the needs for Sustainable Development.

Sustainability is about sustaining our society and its people. It is therefore logical to consider that the challenge of sustainability is all about human beings. There is a growing acceptance that for positive and ongoing sustainable change to occur among economically marginalized groups or nations, development has to be participatory, locally driven

and culturally specific. If universities were to contribute positively towards this goal, the biggest challenge would involve the acceptance of alternative ways of seeing problems and solutions under various local contexts or cultures. For academics, it would mean a paradigm shift and the acceptance of systemic, yet local, ways of analyzing a problem, identifying a solution, and helping implementing it. It means lending support to efforts to reclaim local knowledge and philosophies that are culturally inclusive and sustainable. Advocates for sustainability in Higher Education are increasingly demanding radical changes in colleges and universities. To reach a sustainable future, institutions of Higher Education must provide the awareness, knowledge, skills, and values that equip individuals to pursue life goals in a manner that enhances and sustains human and non-human well-being. Simply adding a few courses on environmental issues and sustainability as UGC has been made at graduation level, is not enough for a paradigm shift to happen. There is an urgent need to take a drastic step by all the regulatory agencies of Higher Education in this regard.

Perspectives, Sage Publications, New Delhi 2013, 62-63.

### **Conclusion**

From the present study it has been found that Indian Higher Education is at a crossroad and must change if it has to contribute more effectively in support of the public good, and in doing so, helps to alleviate many of the inequalities and inequities in the society. Re-visioning the role of Higher Education for Sustainable Development involves changing the means and processes of knowledge production and the way in which students are trained, making students more socially responsible, critical and sensitive towards sustainability issues life-long. Higher education is the fast growing service industry exposed to the 'liberalization, privatization and globalization' processes in recent times. In order to attract students and cater to their needs aspirations higher education providers have been actively involved in the process of understanding students' expectations and their perceptions about quality in the system. They are expected to adopt techniques of measuring quality of the inputs and process of education just like any other business sector. Measuring quality of the services is, therefore, an important task to provide feedback on the dimensions of quality that needs to be taken care of in the future.

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