

Reinventing Higher Education: Toward Participatory and Sustainable Development

Meera Dahal

*Department of Education Cluny Women's College Kalimpong
E-mail: meeradahal22@gmail.com*

1. INTRODUCTION

Environmental conservation and protection has become such an important issue that there is an increasing interest amongst the human resources in different arenas right from the educators, the researchers to the decision-makers in the public policies. During the last three decades, the environmental policies and the effective process of environmental education at all educational levels, in any teaching structure - schools, universities, human communities – and for different age periods, focused first on the consciousness, information and training, awareness, ecological and related different sciences learning. The national or international environmental education of all types, shapes, and levels, are integrated into the sustainable development in order to restore, maintain and consolidate a long-term rational balance of the economic growth and the natural environment integrity for the benefit of future generations to develop an ecologically viable society. The concept of sustainable development, which become well known through the now famous 1987 '**Brundtland Report**', from the United Nations, entitled "Our Common Future", recognized that the natural resources are exhaustible and the development process should be aimed to meet the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their needs. According to '**Brundtland Report**' sustainable development is a process of developing (land, cities, business, communities, etc) that "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs".(4) Sustainable development demands ways of living, working and enabling people of the world to lead healthy, fulfilling and economically secure lives without destroying the environment and without endangering the future welfare of people and the planet. Its strength is that it acknowledges the interdependence of human needs and environmental requirements. To ensure sustainable development, any activity that is expected to bring about economic growth must also consider its environmental impacts so that it is more consistent with long-term growth and development.

Today, the whole world is passing through the knowledge revolution. Education is the gateway from which road to all-round development of human being begins and leads to a blissful state of sustained growth, peace and prosperity. These elements of environmental issues have impacted significantly the education sector in general and higher education in particular. Higher education refers to the stage of learning that occurs at academies, universities, colleges, seminaries and institutes of technology. Higher education also includes certain collegiate-level institutions, such as vocational schools, trade schools, and career colleges, which award degrees, diplomas and certificates. Higher education not only means the formal higher education rewarded by the certified degrees but also the perpetual learning and ever-developing knowledge.

2. INCULCATION OF PARTICIPATORY PROCESSES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher education is at an important crossroad. While universities have to produce graduates who have skills to operate effectively in a globally competitive environment, it is also widely recognized that their fundamental challenge is to provide an ethical knowledge base responsive to societal needs, and contribute to the common wealth (not just financial or economic wealth) and well-being of its entire people. We need to take stock of the role of universities and re-vision what is being taught, how our teaching and learning approaches have produced non-thinking, non-critical graduates who are only good at following instructions mechanically. If higher studies are to engage responsibility and thrive within contemporary realities, a basic shift needs to be made from relying exclusively on neutral curriculum content and approaches designed to develop market-oriented competencies and values of competition and power, to developing an educational practice that exemplifies and engenders the valorization of commitment, compassion, responsibility and service.

The role of higher education needs to be re-vision to help universities return to their humanistic roots and open up "spaces of hope". Engaging in participatory processes will

help restore universities as civil and innovative spaces where students may develop as discerning citizens who can reflect on and interact with their world with integrity, understanding and committed action. Participatory processes in its various forms, if taught and practiced critically and reflexively, can offer universities the opportunity to restore their socially relevant role in society. The Talloires Declaration on the Civic Roles and Social Responsibilities of Higher Education (2005) asserts that institutions of higher education “do not exist in isolation from society, nor from the communities in which (they) are located. Instead, (they) carry a unique obligation to listen, understand, and contribute to social transformation and development”. Likewise, the Global Alliance on Community engaged Research (2008) calls for developing new generations of community-engaged scholars and community-based researchers to support communities and groups to co-create healthier societies and environment.

These involvements bring two key elements in teaching:

- 1) Relevant content knowledge from various disciplines that go beyond textbook knowledge and knowing how to elicit and affirm perspectives and knowledge of the common people.
- 2) The use of participatory training especially popular education and experiential-based participatory learning including spaces for reflection and reflexivity.

3. REINVENTING THE FRAME OF CURRICULUM IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Sustainable development has expanded the scope in an inter/trans-disciplinary perspective, becoming more consistent and being guided by a comprehensive eco- philosophy and a moral-civic values system. Nowadays, the environmental issues has become a complex system of moral, civic and aesthetic values oriented activities and an education that promotes human rights and values, centered on man and the benefit of mankind. Taking initiatives and decisions in this area, organizing the activities, evaluating the results required higher skills in environmental protection, as well as a long-term responsibility and vision, oriented by the sustainable development values, humanity and environmental ethics. All education efforts aim directly to protect and preserve the habitats, to maintain the ecological balance and circuit, and indirectly, to ensure the quality of human life, the society health and sustainability, guaranteeing the fundamental human right to a clean and well preserved environment for today’s and future generations. the environmental education has been redefined as: “being oriented towards preserving the biosphere, and within the biosphere protecting and maintaining human life, while the goal represents the emotional, rational, aesthetic and moral foundation of the human habits system showing respect for nature, the man-built environment, the social background and for people, by imposing awareness towards the environment and a lifestyle

characterized by environmental responsibility” (Toth, M., 2002).

The society’s sustainable development and the achievement of the green economy include the general recognition of human rights, and in particular, the right to the environment, which fundamentally guarantees the human first right - the right to life. The environmental behavior of people, of social groups and human communities can be appreciated in ethical terms, from the moral values point of view. The ecological morality emerged on this background contains the people’s values, principles, rules and guidelines in interaction with nature, with different entities of the environment, which are meant to be defended and protected for the benefit of people and happiness of mankind. The ecological ethics “deals with the moral principles and rules that should govern the human relations with their environment and, especially, with the vast and complex process of biodiversity” (Puia, et al., 2001).

The curriculum should be centered on man, on the formation of intrinsic motivation, on favorable attitudes towards the environment, on will and character, on the ecological personality profile - guided by the ethical duty and responsibility for the environment. Any grown-up –perceived as a result of the environmental education, will behave in an environmentally ethical manner in its relations with the others when he/she will put above all the triumph of good for his peers and the community in spite of some momentary satisfactions, or when taking genuine ecological decisions, even these are against to his/hers interests or desires, when he/she integrates and harmonizes the environmental behavior within the complex process of building a “sustainable economy”, a “green society”. The prototype of such a personality, formed by the process of eco-education, can be identified today in an early stage, embodying the members of environmental groups who volunteer to solve the environmental problems.

4. CAPTURIZATION OF THE SYNTHETIC, INTEGRAL, HOLISTIC, LIME-TESTED SYNOPTIC VISION THAT WILL INVADE ENVIRONMENT FOR A BETTER LIVING

Universities and other higher education institutions are knowledge-producing institutions and the link between knowledge and development (both social and economic). The vision of advocating the role of higher education in furthering participatory sustainable development is one of a world “in which all individuals are recognized both as productive, educated citizens and as potential agents of change.” They see “universities embodying democratic values, making strong connections between head, heart and hands, and recognizing that their institutional goals go beyond the generation of wealth and the advancement of self-recognition” (Taylor, 2007, p. 1).

Higher education institutions can better train scholars to achieve the goals of participatory development, becoming

themselves sites of resistance to social inequalities through strengthening their own democratic decision-making processes, making knowledge accessible to all, and exercising responsibility. Some of the concrete actions higher education institutions may engage in to further the goals of participatory sustainable development are to advocate for outreach projects or programmes highlighting innovative and good practice, support and engage in processes whereby priorities of participatory development are generated by communities, are informed by local voices and knowledge, and where research protocols are developed by indigenous communities for people who want to work with them.

As creators, transmitters, preservers and receivers of knowledge, higher education institutions can play a unique role in advancing the goals of participatory sustainable development. Higher education institutions need to be more active in strengthening social networks, particularly at the grassroots level. Many of their own processes and procedures require democratization. They can do much more by making new technologies accessible to a much broader range of the community. More community groups, particularly the less powerful ones, should play a more significant role in the research process, particularly with respect to research questions that directly affect them.

5. CONCLUSION

There has been a qualitative enhancement and development in environment by implementing interdisciplinary in new and various educational practices at all ages, in formal and non-formal education, in national and international activities. If at the initial stages, it focused on the transmission of natural sciences knowledge, in the recent decades, it has broadened the general objectives focusing on developing the environmentally friendly personality. The goals of environmental education have been redefined beginning with the reassessment of the environment concept focusing on the nature's scientific knowledge and training the ecological consciousness resulting from the acquisition of environmental scientific information. The national education system's curricula have been reformed with an increasingly contribution of social sciences and humanities, the arts, ethics, legal rules to protect the environment, or environmental aesthetics. In addition to the biosphere and the abiotic environment, man-made environment, material civilization, social and economic life, legal and moral system, culture, collective mind, aesthetics of biotic and abiotic environment have been introduced in the dimensions of environment education.

There has been a gradual process of democratization of the environment through the exponential growth of all ages and introduction in all levels of education - from pre-school to university and post-graduate, due to broadening and intensifying communication in the mass - media, especially the internet and also due to the increasing number of environmental organizations. Currently, the world population is aware of the importance of sustainable development for building a green society. The ideals of sustainability; as a reference guide for shaping the environmental policies, improving the environmental activities, choosing the appropriate methods, procedures and techniques for training and modeling the ecological personality; must be expanded by focusing on the personality of the educated. The essentials for shaping and defining the sustainable developmental goals are environmental awareness training, development of the axiological dimensions of personality, the internalization of moral and civic values, feelings and beliefs connecting to the environment and the rejection of any individual or group behavior that can harm the environment.

REFERENCES

- [1] Bharucha Erach (2005) Textbook of Environmental Studies, University Press, Hyderabad.
- [2] Dhaliwal, G. S., Sangha G. S., Ralhan P. K. (2000) Fundamentals of Environmental Science, Kalyani Publishers, New Delhi.
- [3] Englerom, D. & Yockers, D. (1994) A Guide to Curriculum Planning Environmental Education: http://ec.europa.eu/publicopinion/archives/ebs/295_en.pdf.
- [4] Kumar Arvind (2004) A Textbook of Environmental Science; A P H Publishing Corporation, New Delhi.
- [5] Johnston Andy (2006), Higher Education for Sustainable Development <https://www.un.org/ecosoc/en/sustainable-development>: Retrieved at 12.04.2017.
- [6] Martian Iovan (2015) The Environmental Education Dimensions for Sustainable Development; Journal of legal studies Volume 16 Issue 30, pp 18 – 30 <http://www.publicatii.uvvg.ro/index.php/jls>: Retrieved at 12.04.2017, 08:01:20AM
- [7] Speth James Gustave (2010) Global Environmental Challenges: Transitions to a Sustainable World, Orient Longman.
- [8] Suresh Gouri (2007) Environmental Studies and Ethics; I. K. International Publishing House, New Delhi.
- [9] Tiwari M., Khulbe K. & Tiwari A. (2007) Environmental Education; I. K. International Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi.
- [10] UNESCO (1987). International Strategy for Action in the field of Environmental Education and Training for the 1990 s. 1987: Nairobi/Paris, UNESCO. http://www.repf.ro/uploaded/files/file_a9f19a36a6.pdf: Retrieved at 12.04.2017.