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**Manu Sehgal**

Assistant Professor  
Post Graduate Department of  
Commerce, Khalsa College for  
Women, Ludhiana, India

**Priyaka Khanna**

Head, Post Graduate  
Department of Commerce  
Khalsa College for Women,  
Ludhiana, India

## Sustainable Development in India: The Need for Paradigm Shift in Higher Education

**Manu Sehgal, Priyaka Khanna**

### Abstract

Sustainable development has become indispensable for world's future. There are numerous challenges that act as a hurdle for sustainable development. Major challenges that India faces include rising population and the rapidly altering urban lifestyle, which pose grave environmental and social problems to the people. To tackle these challenges and ensure well-being of the future generations, there is need to shift the goal of education to sustainable development. As education is one of the basic factors of human development, its interface with sustainable development acts as means of empowerment. The idea is to use higher education as a powerful tool for achieving sustainable development and imbibe the values of responsible citizenship. It requires innovation in the teaching learning process in higher education by adopting policies and strategies for promoting social sustainability and healthy environment. It is the responsibility of all the stakeholders in higher education to uphold the basic tenets of equality, dignity and equity at the global level by promoting sustainable development in order to meet the needs of its existing people by integrating social, economic and environmental concerns. This paper suggests that there is need for paradigm shift in higher education in India for achieving sustainability.

**Keywords:** Sustainable Development, Higher Education, India

### Introduction

As per the universal declaration of Human Rights it is stated that it is the right of everyone to a standard of living which is adequate for their health and well-being". Sustainable development is concerned with development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to satisfy their own needs. The philosophy of sustainable development can be explained as balancing different aspects of environmental, social and economic resources of the society. Sustainable development is a dynamic, pervasive and incessant process that requires creative talent, intelligence, attitude, aptitude in order to deliver economical, ecological and other benefits to people.

### Dimensions of Sustainable Development

The concept of sustainable development can be categorised into three dimensions: Environmental, Social and economic sustainability. There is need to balance these dimensions to achieve sustainable development.

- **Environment sustainability** is concerned with environment protection, preserving environmental resources and maintaining environmental quality to ensure that they continue to be available for upcoming generations.
- **Social sustainability** includes preserving social equity, maintaining cultural identity, equality in human rights and ensuring social well-being of the people and social inclusion.
- **Economic sustainability** is the ability of the economy to support people economically and support economic production.

**Correspondence:**

**Manu Sehgal**

Assistant Professor  
Post Graduate Department of  
Commerce, Khalsa College for  
Women, Ludhiana, India



### Challenges in Sustainable Development and Higher Education

It is not easy to implement sustainability. There are many challenges and uncertainties involved which needs to be identified and addressed. Various challenges can be explained as follows:

- **Financial Challenges:** For economic growth and development of the country, industrialization is increasing at accelerating rate thereby ignoring nature, people, resources and environment. There is need to spread awareness and make people understand that economy is part of environment and economic development cannot be achieved on the cost of environment.
- **Research Challenges:** There is lack of research in the area of sustainable development and higher education. There is need to encourage research on environment sustainability, higher education and economic growth and development to solve problems of the society as a whole by establishing linkage between economy and research institutions.
- **Cultural Challenges:** It is impossible to achieve the goal of sustainable development without the support of the public. Only efforts of Government and policy formulation cannot help unless public also participates. Initiatives must be taken to inspire the public about sustainability through higher education.
- **Social Challenges:** Rising population, inefficient use of natural resources and lack of awareness about sustainable development act as social challenge which hinder in achieving goal of sustainable development. Through higher education public needs to be made aware of the scientific basis for sustainability and its benefits.
- **Political Challenges:** Inadequate implementation of policies, conflict between parties, poor evaluation system, lack of information, lack of financial resources, absence of relevant data, focus only on economic growth, lack of conservation of resources are the major challenges against successful implementation of sustainable efforts.

### Higher Education and Sustainable Development

**Kyoto Declaration** emphasized on the bonding between higher education and sustainable development. It emphasized that it is the responsibility of the higher education institutions to share the challenging global responsibility and promote Sustainable Development. It is the duty of educators to propagate new way of thinking, encourage the human development, collaborate ideas for sustainable development, stimulate value education and deliver economical, ecological and other benefits to people. Higher education can play a significant role in promoting sustainable development and this can be highlighted through following points.

- Universities throughout the world can act as a powerful agent to establish and disseminate the basic understanding of sustainable development and urge people at local as well as global level to adopt policies and principles which are consistent to achieve their goal and education for sustainable development.
- Education can encourage to use the resources efficiently and to address the primary issues faced by the public by emphasizing on the interdependence of dimensions of sustainable development.
- Higher education can help in developing attitude concerned with sustainable development by reminding that it is the moral obligation of the present generation to use the resources effectively and cautiously to remove the disparities of non-sustainability.
- Higher education enables the people to undertake research in relation to society and sustainable development issues and enhance the understanding of ethics of the environment.
- Higher education offers basic understanding and knowledge to the people to consider the world as a whole and safeguard the interests of the future generations, thereby influencing the direction of the society towards sustainable development.
- Universities should adopt practices and policies that encourage commitment to sustainable development.
- Higher education must lay stress on difficulties faced by India due to uncontrolled industrialization, steps taken so far and highlight the relationship among three

dimensions of sustainable development in order to emphasize the responsibility of universities in this regard.

- Special institutions for education of sustainable development should be established and sustainable development subject must be made mandatory at higher education level in all the courses. Universities should also promote transdisciplinarity among courses.
- Capacity building programmes, workshops, seminars must be organized to promote sustainable development and national and international collaborations between universities must be increased to support sustainable development.
- Higher education institutions should enter into partnership with non-governmental organisations (NGOs), industry and government in order to coordinate the efforts of university and bring change at various other levels.

### **Approaches for the Paradigm Shift in Higher Education in India**

There is urgent need for bringing the change in the system of higher education and through committed and strong approaches in order to save our country's resources for the future.

#### **a) Adoption of ICT to expand the access to quality education:**

In order to expand the access to quality education to the masses, especially in the areas where there is lack of specialized knowledge providers, ICT can act as the most promising and cost efficient tool to achieve the desired goal of knowledge dissemination to all socio economic backgrounds. ICT not only ensures high quality and globally accredited information but also helps in international collaborations thereby enhancing virtual learning spaces and improving quality of education to achieve the goal of sustainable development.

#### **b) Implementation of transformative education:**

Efforts must be made to implement transformative education replacing transmissive education in order to prepare the students to address the complex sustainability challenges. Instead of learning being a one-way process, it should be made more interactive facilitating learner centeredness with an objective of developing critical thinking skill.

#### **c) Initiative of curriculum greening:**

Due to rising industrialization, it becomes the obligation of the universities for commitment to environmental protection and includes action plans in their campus, education curriculum, research and other activities. Initiative must be taken to introduce specific optional courses on sustainability of environment to achieve the mission of integrating environmental sustainability with all its activities.

#### **d) Focus more on research-orientedness**

Efforts must be made by big universities to focus on the fundamental areas of sustainability like biosciences, energy conservation, environment, infrastructure management, natural resources, policy studies etc. Policies and academic programmes must be specially designed with the objective

to create social awareness of career options related to unconventional areas of education. More of interdisciplinary programs must be introduced in theory and practice such that students are made aware of the real life problems.

#### **e) Encouraging thematic research**

For supporting sustainability, the university needs to encourage thematic research. Thematic research aims to promote interdisciplinary research and address societal problems. The idea is to promote students from various disciplines to collaborate and focus on grave issues and form linkages with community at large to solve societal problems.

#### **f) Financial resources for sustainability**

In order to achieve national objectives of sustainability and higher education, there must be sufficient availability of resource base. Resources should be allocated in order of priority which yields highest return in terms of social and economic context. Higher education institutes have to generate more revenue and pursue cost efficiency.

Through higher education, it can be expected that a positive change shall take place on reference to sustainable development.

### **Conclusion**

Due to ever-increasing environmental problems and rising threat to well-being of the future generations, it is true that higher education is the powerful tool for promoting sustainable development. Higher education will help to highlight societal problems and enable to address them through interdisciplinary research. There is need to develop empowering curriculum that would help in bringing change for sustainable future. Various approaches can be implemented by Indian Universities to bring paradigm shift in higher education. Efforts in higher education are required to make sustainable development a reality.

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