

Sustainable Development Goals: Contribution of Higher Education

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Abstract— Sustainable development is a momentous term. It is crucial for the development of positive change in people's attitude, skill and knowledge. It emphasizes on the progress of health, agriculture, tourism, social reforms, and education for the development of human beings. UNDP promotes Sustainable development as an ambitious, universal and holistic agenda. One of the major goals is to develop a sense of sustainability in the young learners. At all levels, education proves to be germane in promoting sustainable development and therefore the United Nations has put forward the proposal of integrating the postulates and essentials of sustainable development in all aspects of education. The higher education institutions in an effort to reinforce sustainable development in campus operations have introduced new programs and courses in the curriculum and are extending the value and impact of their teaching and research to their respective communities. But there is lack of surveys done to evaluate the outcomes of these initiatives. The objective of the present study is to take the review of these initiatives taken in higher education in Jaipur region on 150 respondents comprising students from management and engineering from three Universities. The major finding of the study shares that the students are not aware about these goals and most importantly it was observed that even at the crucial stage of the completion of their degrees they are not sufficiently equipped to launch ideas and projects in the direction of achieving Sustainable Development Goals

Keywords—Sustainable development; Sustainable Development Goals; Higher education

I. INTRODUCTION

The legitimate definition so far coined for sustainable development was published by the World Commission on Environment and Development in its report, "Our Common World" popularly known as the Brundtland Commission. Sustainable development as stated by the commission is "*the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising with the ability of the future generation to meet their own needs.*" The denotation of the term focuses on two essentials. Firstly, to meet the needs of the ones who are deprived of the benefits of development? Secondly, is to be watchful of resource depletion, which can hamper the genuine needs

of the future generations. Sustainable development is a broad concept and so is the Agenda 2030 for sustainable development. It is an ambitious, universal and holistic agenda that promotes an integrated approach that tackles the connected issues of multidimensional poverty, inequality and exclusion, and sustainability while enhancing knowledge, skills and production technologies to enlarge people's choices, reduce risks and sustain development gains. In 2015, all the United Nations member States adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Agenda focuses on some crucial goals that are to be accomplished efficiently. Out of the 17 SDGs and 169 associated targets of the United Nations, the major target is towards the higher education. The focus is on providing a good quality education to all the learners and making them capable so that, on one hand they can contribute to a peaceful and democratic society and on the other hand can be economically productive, develop sustainable livelihoods and enhance individual wellbeing. It is a firm belief that inculcating sustainable development concepts in the curriculum and its practical implications in the daily lives would aid in achieving the desired goals. Moreover, according to UNICEF, education is important for sustainable development as it enables judgments in favor of sustainable development goals. The teachings include the key sustainable development issues; for example, food security, poverty reduction, biodiversity etc. Education for sustainable development promotes competencies in learners. The key competencies involve critical thinking, imagining future scenario and making decisions in a collaborative way. As an initiative towards achieving this objective of the sustainable development goals, Sustainable development content has been inculcated as activities in the university curriculum. It has been accepted and signed by over 250 Universities across the globe. In India, several principles of sustainable development are embedded in the education policy. It is perhaps the only country where the highest court has mandated environmental education at all levels of formal education, which includes a compulsory undergraduate course as environmental education is considered as the fundamental education to further study sustainable development. However, there are many challenges that hamper the attainment of this goal in our country, India.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

UNDP is of the opinion that sustainable development is something that "leaves no one behind". The goal of UNDP is to strengthen capacities and provide an enabling environment for access to opportunities, focusing on the most vulnerable and excluded population groups, in ways

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that are sustainable from economic, social and environmental standpoints. To achieve this goal, it works with different countries to build their capacity to integrate environmental considerations into development plans and strategies, to manage and sustainably use natural resources; ensure that natural wealth is used to promote economic recovery and livelihoods, and effectively target policies to reduce poverty and provide social protection for those in need. Not only UNDP, but many others around the globe are doing their bits towards the fulfillment of this objective. For an instance, in the Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), Higher Education Sustainability Initiative (HESI) was created; along with partners such as UN-DESA, UNESCO, UNEP, UN Global Compact's Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME) initiative, UNU and UN-Habitat took initiatives in the direction. Subsequently, Universities around the globe have incorporated sustainable development contents, focus on research activities during the subjects, and promote the development of reports of sustainable research on the end of the semester. The institutions also encourage trainings and workshops of teachers about sustainability in order to be ready for teaching their contents with sustainability orientation. As a matter of fact, it is evident that environmental education for sustainable development in higher educational institutes is fruitful. It encourages the formation of a team of environmentalists who can promote it further by post graduate and research scholars and finally output may be useful for the government. Reports of the Census 2011, indicate that the literacy rate is constantly going up and is estimated 82.14% for men and 65.46% for women. Apart from the challenges towards accomplishment of quality education among the SDGs, several other environmental challenges like deterioration of environmental quality, climate change and depletion of natural resources are emerging rapidly. India is however devoted to recognize the global development goals. The country became a signatory to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in 1993 and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). India also endorsed the Kyoto Protocol in 2002. Moreover, India has been designated as a host under Thematic Program Network (TPN) for the Asian Regional Action Program on "Agro forestry and Soil Conservation" by United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). In India, the higher education institutes are helping achieve the major goals. In the direction we have to adopt novel approaches for environmental regulation and principles for sustainable development considering the institutional role in critical areas. More decentralized approaches are required. It must be mentioned that most faculties are working within four regulatory bodies under MHRD. They are the UGC, AICTE, Distance Education Council (DEC) and Council of Architecture (CoA), which are also dedicated for the sustainable development through higher education courses. To check upon the standards of education provided in the Universities, the University Grants Commissions has been established. The distance learning programs offer various courses including environmental science that are served with the concepts of sustainability. IGNOU, a distance learning program along

with some other state open Universities have started Research Programs in various disciplines. India ranks 3rd in the world when it comes to higher education system. But despite of this fact, full economic benefits could not be achieved due to mismatch between skill base and market needs. With the establishment of NAAC, it is ensured to provide correct and positive symbols that can generate and promote awareness for the up gradation of quality of educational institutes, colleges and universities in India. Many initiatives have been taken by the institutes and the government of India to promote research and higher education standards in an attempt to its ction towards the sustainable development.

III. RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

The review of the literature suggests that the objective to amalgamate Sustainable development in higher education is to inculcate intentions among students so that they can practically implement the knowledge to launch ideas and work on projects towards the accomplishment of SDGs. It also focuses on the increasing importance of sustainable development in all areas of work and life. It describes the various initiatives taken by Indian institutes and the government to promote the contents of sustainable development in the higher education curriculum.

IV. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To describe the importance of inculcating sustainable development goals in higher education
- To determine the various initiatives taken by the government and Universities towards the fulfillment of these goals.
- To review the practical implications of this knowledge by students in generating ideas and projects towards achieving SDGs.

V. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

For the accomplishment of the objectives stated, a survey was conducted on 150 respondents from three Universities, in the Jaipur region. The data is collected through a questionnaire, which focus on the sampling of a smaller population of students who statistically are the representatives of the wider population in question. Most of the questions in the questionnaire are dichotomous, where the respondents need to choose among the given two responses. The analysis of the responses attempt to seek answers about the awareness of SDGs among students. The survey attempts to find out which types of courses are offered in the Universities that relate to the sustainable development learning's.

VI. RESULT ANALYSIS

The responses divulge that 73.6 % of the students are aware about the concepts of sustainable development but only a few of them are exposed to the sustainable development goals as proposed by the United Nations. The survey also reveal that despite of a positive inclination, and a strong support towards the idea of inculcating sustainable development in higher education; there are not many

initiatives that have been undertaken by the Universities for the same. None of the responses provided by the respondents talk about any course or internship programs that they have undergone which included the sustainable development concepts. However, they perform activities and tasks which introduce them to the concepts of sustainable development and its importance in the present and coming future. Below is the question wise analysis of the survey taken from respondents from different colleges?

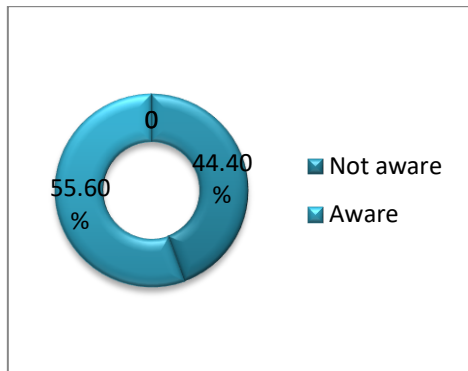


Fig. 1 Awareness about the Sustainable Development Goals as proposed by the Unites Nation

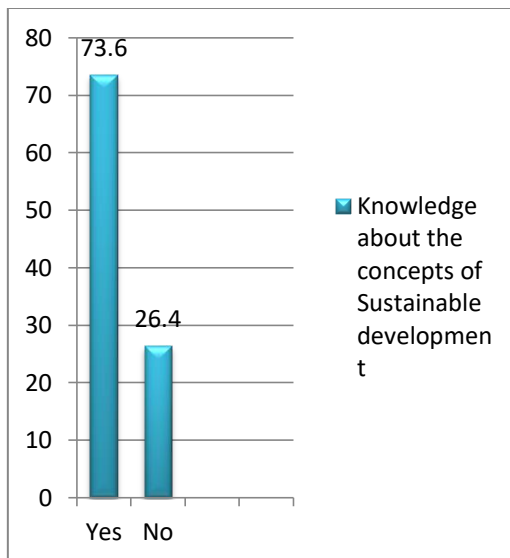


Fig. 2 Awareness about the concepts of sustainable development among the students

- ✓ 64.6% of the students are aware about the concepts and the SDGs.
- ✓ 35.4% of the students are either not aware of the term itself or about the sustainable development goals.

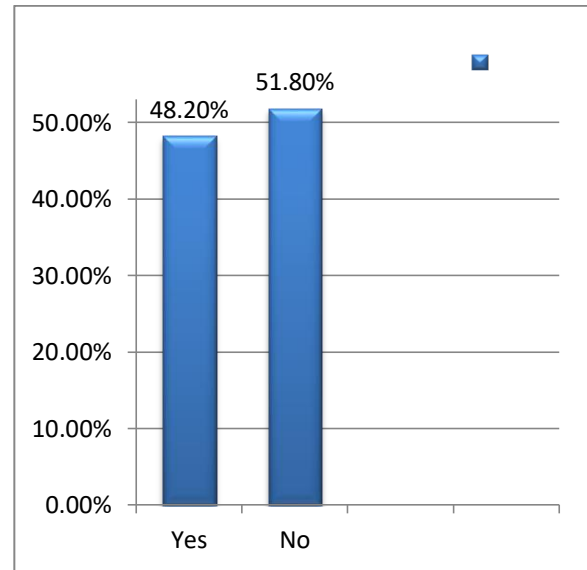


Fig. 3 Courses related to these concepts that are included in the curriculum by the University

Table-1 Aspects of SDGs implementation					
	Very important	Important	Neutral	Unimportant	Very Unimportant
Credit courses on the issues of SDGs	35	53	16	34	12
Internship	37	52	12	20	29
Workshops	28	35	23	41	23
Collaborative field work	43	41	11	38	17
Concept of handbook	12	26	29	74	9
Indulge in projects with the application of SDGs	73	56	0	19	2

The 5 points Likert scale is used: Very important, Important, Neutral, Unimportant, Very unimportant, to assess the various aspects regarding SDGs. The following conclusions have been drawn out:

- It can be seen that students prefer to be indulged in projects and internships more than they think that through these ways they could get to learn more.
- On the other hand, workshops and credit courses should not being a compulsion, as not gather students' interest into the sustainable development concepts and the purpose of introducing students with the idea would fail.
- Collaborative field work would develop competencies and creative thinking to solve various issues related to SDG's.

VII. SUGGESTIONS

- Students can be given projects that focus on solving the SDG challenges.
- A quality assurance handbook can be developed to check upon the quality of teachings and learning provided, in the similar way as done by the African continent to check upon the quality of off-site education provide by the Liverpool school of Tropical Education.
- Workshops and training can be provided to develop capacity in teaching professionals and students.
- Steps to develop inter-disciplinary competence should be taken with some government interventions governing the same.
- Technology and economic development should be interrelated. There should be more field based researches in higher educational institutes. Workshops, seminars and training programs on sustainable development can be conducted in the colleges and it must be ensured that faculties be a part of it along with the students.
- Teachers being the drivers of the teaching and learning process can emphasis on the successful implementation of the initiatives undertaken to include the sustainable development concepts in the higher education curriculum.
- Sustainability aspect should be included in all possible courses across different streams.

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