

## **ENVIRONMENT – EDUCATION: AN INTERFACE FOR RESPONSIBLE SOCIETIES – PERSPECTIVES FROM MEGHALAYA**

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### ***ABSTRACT***

Environmental education is challenged with the stipulation of regurgitating and redefining its aim and ascertain its forte in a macro educational endeavor, whose practicalities have to be refurbished in the contextual ties of the progression and of being accountable to the populace.

Sustainable Development (SD) necessitates an amalgamation of economic, social and environmental attitude and consideration towards development and enhancement of human civilization. In this entire process, education, dispersal of awareness and relevant info has always played a positively developmental and integrating role.

This paper attempts to explore the “Education-Environment Interface” in the SD paradigm and it also aims at presenting the current context in Meghalaya whose capital Shillong is still known as the “Scotland of the East”.

What is required are regular deliberations and continuous dialogue leading to the generation of awareness, development of an integrated knowledge base on environment, mobilization of communities and also developing a viable roadmap en route for utilizing education as a potent instrument regarding protecting environment and ultimately working towards issues of SD in Meghalaya.

The paper is based on available literature and secondary data. The paper is divided in four parts.

- I. Introduction is the first part that deals with the concept of sustainable development, its core principles and its implications for the communities and the socio – political arrangement in general.
- II. Education as an Integrative Variable in Global Environmental Edification is discussed in the second part of the paper.
- III. The third part of the paper provides a state specific perspective and a ringside view of the current environmental issues in Meghalaya.
- IV. The fourth part of the paper attempts a suggestion for Integrating education and environment for responsible living and societies with seats of higher learning as the focal point in collaboration with other stake - holders.

**Key words:**

Education,  
Environment,  
Integrated Education,  
Sustainable Development,  
Meghalaya

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“This earth provides enough to satisfy every man’s need not every man’s greed”.....M. K. Gandhi

**I. THE INTRODUCTION:****CONCEPT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

In the last half of the twentieth century, four key themes emerged from the collective concerns and aspirations of the world’s peoples: peace, freedom, development, and environment<sup>1</sup>.

UN General Assembly convened a conference on the “human environment” at Stockholm in June 1972, which came out with guiding principles on “human environment”. It emphasized that human beings have the essential right to environment of quality and also that every human has an accountability towards defending the environment for the contemporary and yet to come generations. It also upheld that natural resources of the earth have got to be protected and fortified for the advantage of existing and forthcoming generations.

About a decade afterwards, to focus on the matters a propos the ongoing diminution of natural resources and unsustainable development, the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) which was commonly known as Brundtland Commission (1987) was created. Sustainable development was given a expansive social meaning in *Our Common Future*, published by WCED, and is universally known as the Brundtland Report in 1987<sup>2</sup>, which described sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. After twenty years of Stockholm Declaration, the UN Conference on ‘Environment and Development’ (also known as ‘Earth Summit’) was held at Rio-de Janeiro in 1992 that espoused an Action Plan, popularly known as ‘Agenda 21’ that pledged to trim down deprivation, make available clean water, health care, and safeguard the natural resources and so on.

Also to be taken note of that a number of the Millennium Development Goals<sup>3</sup> (see UNDP) have pushed for guaranteeing environmental sustainability and drop of the percentage of the population under extreme indigence. Similarly, amplifying the repercussions of climate change for sustainable development the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change notes (IPCC)<sup>4</sup> stressed upon the significance of social and environmental equity or evenhandedness in

<sup>1</sup> National Research Council, Policy Division, Board on Sustainable Development, *Our Common Journey: A Transition toward Sustainability* (Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 1999), 22

<sup>2</sup> World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) known by the name of its Chair Gro Harlem Brundtland was convened by the United Nations in 1987.

<sup>3</sup> Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are eight goals to be achieved by 2015 that responds to the world’s main development challenges. These are drawn from the targets and actions contained in the Millennium Declarations in the UN Millennium Summit in September 2000.

<sup>4</sup> For detailed discussion on climate change see the report of Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the

development. Thus all the major world conferences and programs taken up hitherto on environment and development have emphasized on economically feasible improvement, socially just development and defense and fortification of the environment for accomplishing sustainable development.



The phrase “SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT” has an edifying narration. It formerly was drawn to mean in basic terms that the present generation has a responsibility to utilize natural reserves and resources in ways that would not mortify and fragment the lives of its descendants. On the contrary that whacked a nerve, since one obvious way to save resources is to slow the industrialization of developing countries. Another is to reduce the current consumption levels of rich countries. The architects of sustainable development immediately agreed that the term had to incorporate economic growth. If it incorporated economic growth, sustainable development so had to mean improving education and health. It had to include access for poor countries’ exports in rich countries’ markets. It had to mean aid to the poor countries, both financial and technical. As this conversation went on, the definition of sustainable development came to cover the whole agenda for worldwide social equity.

## CORE PRINCIPLES OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

### EQUITY:

Our inability to promote the common interest in sustainable development is often a product of the relative neglect of economic and social justice within and amongst nations. (World Commission on the Environment and Development, *Our Common Future*, 1987, p.49)

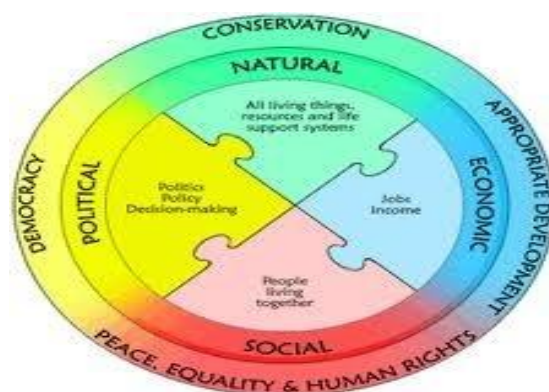
Equity is a central feature of environmental policy. Governments always consider the distributional implications of any measure to prevent or alleviate environmental degradation.

### DEMOCRACY:

SD requires a political system that secures effective citizen participation in decision making ... (WCED, *Our Common Future*, 1987, p.65)

SD emphasizes the importance of democracy in solving environmental problems. The time-honored model saw no undeviating linkage between democracy and environmental harms, whereas SD maintains that the realization of intra-generational evenhandedness will necessitate actions to lend a hand to the poor and the disadvantaged assemblages, and that these groups should have the prospects to delineate their own basic wants. If information is extensively accessible and people can play a part in decision-making, they may see the requirement for engagement and be more willing to acknowledge forgo in their material quality of life.

source can be found under Cruz et al. (2007) in the reference.



### POLICY INTEGRATION:

The objective of sustainable development and the integrated nature of the global environment/development challenges pose problems for institutions ... that were recognized on the basis of narrow preoccupations and water – tight concerns. (WCED, *Our Common Future*, 1987, p.9)

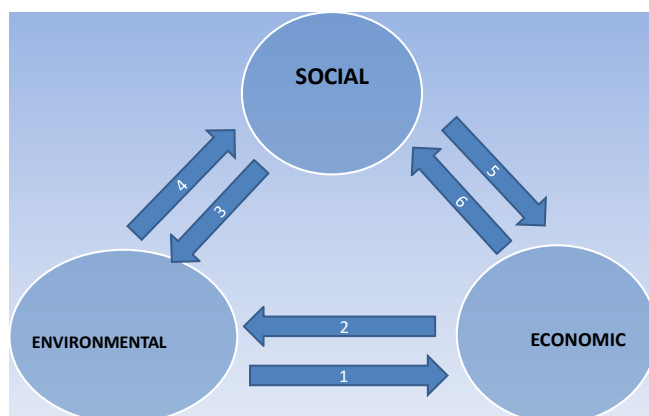
There are troubles for the environment posed by the segregation of the policy process into divergent sectors such as industry, agriculture, transport and energy. Integration involves the creation of new structures, the reform of existing institutions and the transformation of established policy-making processes. In short, it requires an administrative revolution. However, there are many sticking points encumbering assimilation.

### PLANNING:

The issues related to SD must be premeditatedly pored over. There are multifarious interdependencies stuck between political, social and economic factors; equally, those complexities set limits as to what can be achieved by planning. States and Governments have to engage with various non-state actors to attain SD. As *Agenda 21* makes clear, every level of government has to graph out SD plan.

### KEY DIMENSIONS OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT:

1. Effects of **Economic Activity** on the **Environment** (e.g., resource use, pollutant discharges, waste).
2. **Environmental Services** to the **Economy** (e.g., natural resources, sink functions, contributions to economic efficiency and employment).
3. **Environmental Services** to **Society** (e.g., access to resources and amenities, contributions to health, living and working conditions).
4. Effects of **Social Variables** on the **Environment** (e.g., demographic changes, consumption patterns, environmental education and information, institutional and legal frameworks).



5. Effects of **Social Variables** on the **Economy** (e.g., labour force, population and household structure, education and training; consumption levels, institutional and legal frameworks).
6. Effects of **Economic Activity** on **Society** (e.g., income levels, equity, employment).

## II. Education as an Integrative Variable in Global Environmental Edification:

The current Century provides immense possibilities however the sphere of education and the academics fluctuate between the epoch of modernity and that of post-modernity, many countries have embarked on, or are in the process of commencing, reorganizing and remodeling of their educational arrangements and working on their techniques and practices.

Education as it is considered as a never ending course of action and is action packed procedure from “cradle to the grave”, and it now generally leaves more room for consideration of present and evolving realities (Delors, 1996). Especially, most modernization packages recommend the curricular prefacing of an assortment of facets of education interconnected to present – day collective and environmental apprehensions: environmental education is frequently and has been officially legitimized, along with other socially variable values and thought processes as peace and conflict resolution, human rights, humanitarian laws, democracy, multi-cultural and inter-cultural associations, international shared aims and development education. Undoubtedly integrating Education with Environment can engage in large scale involvement of communities and leading to the creation of a sustainable agenda for future.

The problem is that any such new agenda or up-to-the-minute order is not agreed across nations. The basic political and economic changes and alterations that are required have not received support across the world and there is indeed a long way ahead. That is why the climate change negotiations have been very difficult as different groups of countries and nations have different perspectives, not agreeing on what the world at large needs to do to over the challenge.

So as to steer clear of a another division and further crumbling of educational goals and objectives and to amalgamate the diverse unease and trepidations with one another, several across – the – board integrative contexts have been proposed, including Citizenship Education, Education in a Planetary Perspective, Education in a World Perspective (Dionne, 1995), Global Education (GPE, 1987), Education for the Development of Sustainable Societies and Global Responsibility (Council for the Earth, 1993), Education for Sustainable Development (UNESCO, 1992), Education for a Sustainable Future, Education for Sustainability (UNESCO, 1997), Education for World Responsibility and Solidarity (Foundation Charles Léopold Mayer [FPH], 1997) and some others. Each of these international and comprehensive proposals may be considered so that an integrative and assimilative framework apposite to fundamental educational arrangement can be espoused or rationalized such that it will embrace the deliberations, critique and alteration of our modern-day actualities. Such a framework should not be considered as a straight jacket but as a suggestion for the investigation of connotations, uniformity, and significance based on a principled reflection with local adaptations but with global and a truly international outlook towards making environment and education integrative and multidisciplinary.

The UNESCO has projected formulating Education for SD and its further development under the more topical title of “Education for a Sustainable Future or Education for Sustainability” which considers an integrative and multi and inter-disciplinary approach. According to the proponents of these integrating frameworks, there is a worldwide universal accord on the importance and consequence of or the essentiality for “reshaping education” for SD. Without further interruption, and at great expense, UNESCO is has now placed SD at the focus of the Project of Planetary Education, bearing in mind to be the eventual and decisive “goal” of human development (UNESCO, 1988).

On the other end of this debate and grand plan Environmental Education is here reduced to being an instrumental tool in a long list of other types of “education for . . . ,” all intended to serve such finality. The stakes, we know are generous. The significant task at hand is the matter of positioning the nitty-gritty of contemporary education. Also at the core of the matter is the issue of locating an apt position for environmental education within the sphere of the edifice of a global educational project, of expounding and consolidating the associations and linkages between and amongst environmental education and other aspects of education and making it genuinely integrative.



However such an arrangement if not guarded against can become an instrumental approach for putting into operation SD which till date is not an agreed upon issue among many nations and countries. Conversely, environmental education is an indispensable constituent, and not a sheer fashion accessory or a cog in the edifice of education. Undeniably, it engrosses nothing less than the renovation of arrangements of associations and dealings among individuals, humanity and the nature. It is imperative to incorporate environmental education in an all – embracing educational agenda that is not reductive or belittling; that it is allocated to take its accurate spot to facilitate its fitting role towards its own purposes and objectives, and that amalgamates it in the most advantageous way with additional components of existing education.

Because of the conceptual, ethical, and cultural problems associated with sustainable development, many criticisms have been made, specifically by those involved in the world of education. In reaction to these criticisms, a new expression has come into being: Education for a sustainable future also referred to as Education for a sustainable world or Education for sustain-ability.

The idea of sustainable future appears less problematic (less economicist) than the one of sustainable development. It refers to a type of development which provides food and health, so as to sustain human life.

### III. A Perspective from Meghalaya:

**The Current Situation:** According to the 2009 Forest Survey of India of the Union ministry of environment and forests, based on interpretation of satellite data of the period between October 2006 and March 2007, Meghalaya’s forest cover is 17,321 square km or 77.23 per cent of the state’s geographical area<sup>5</sup>.

The major environmental problems in Meghalaya result from population pressure, conversion of forestland into agricultural fields, deforestation, urbanization, mining and industrialization. In the entire state, water scarcity is perceived as the most important problem, followed by biodiversity loss, jhum/deforestation, urbanization, water pollution, population explosion and coal mining.

Water pollution, population explosion and deforestation/jhum are the three top problems in Jaintia Hills, while water scarcity, biodiversity loss and water pollution are the major problems in Garo hills. In Khasi Hills, the four most important environmental problems were water scarcity, biodiversity loss, soil erosion and urbanization.

Only 1 per cent of state’s sacred groves had been left undisturbed. “The increase in ferroalloy industries and the rampant mining of limestone and other minerals are major concerns for the state”, all this has compounded the development model in Meghalaya as exploitative instead of being sustainable<sup>6</sup>.

The forest administrative department in the state face a quagmire of problems, the situation is further complicated by the presence of several “authorities” — the state government, autonomous district councils and local traditional heads like the Syiems, Dolois and Nokmas. The clans, communities and individuals did whatever they wished on the land they possessed. “The ownership rights over land and resources are further protected by the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. The acts and rules framed by the state and national governments are therefore not applicable to such forests”.<sup>7</sup>

Meghalaya has already woken up to issues of Climate Change and its adverse effects. In its bid to address the problem of Climatic change, the state government has created the Meghalaya State Council on Climate Change and Sustainable Development (MSCCCSD) in 2011<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> The Telegraph, Saturday , April 23 , 2011, Meghalaya rues loss of forest on Earth Day

<sup>6</sup> The Telegraph, Saturday , April 23 , 2011, Meghalaya rues loss of forest on Earth Day

<sup>7</sup> The Telegraph, Saturday , April 23 , 2011, Meghalaya rues loss of forest on Earth Day

<sup>8</sup> Meghalaya Times, August 2, 2011

The Council has been constituted in order to ensure that the state is in line with the National Action Plan for Climatic Change missions, which were earlier spelled by the Prime Minister of India to adopt and mitigate the adverse impact of climatic change.

“The council will build up an action plan for the State of Meghalaya which lays emphasis on the research studies and surveys towards data generation for understanding local climatic pattern, vulnerabilities and all that is linked to the issue of mitigating climate change and issue of adopting climatic change. Research activities pertaining to various livelihood activities, which has an impact on the climate change will be carried out under the Council. All issues pertaining to livelihood activities of the people are to be structured in a manner to create an enabling environment to mitigate climatic changes.

The government approved the Meghalaya Bio-diversity Rules, 2010, in 2010 paving the way for preserving the rich biodiversity in the state. The same has also been notified. The government had said co-ordination with those who own private forestlands was needed to preserve the state’s bio-diversity. It had also said a Meghalaya Bio-diversity Board would be formed, and the board would offer suggestions to the government in matters related to the conservation, promotion and sustainable use of biological diversity as well as equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the realization of biological resources. There was a need to work out a regulatory mechanism to control over-exploitation of forests, where the landowners themselves would be legally bound to carry out sustainable harvest and manage their own forests. Co-ordination with those who own private forestlands was needed to preserve the state’s bio-diversity. Hence what is required is not a myopic but an astute political will, policy integration and involvement of higher seats of learning and education for a strong policy on sustainable development for the State of Meghalaya to protect its rich bio diversity.

#### **IV. INTEGRATING EDUCATION AND ENVIRONMENT FOR RESPONSIBLE LIVING AND SOCIETIES:**

In the above context of deteriorating environmental standards, in Meghalaya let us take into consideration an integrating framework for the various contemporary dimensions of education in which environmental education could find an adequate niche.

In the all round decaying of environment and the rampant plunder of its resources the proposal for designing education for the development of responsible societies can be of noteworthy interest. It is based on two sources, the first being the Non – Governmental Organization Treaty (Council of the Earth, 1993) which was shaped analogous to Chapter 36 of the Agenda 21 during the Earth Summit in Rio: Environmental Education for the Development of Sustainable Societies and Global Responsibility. The second source is the platform proposed by the Fondation pour le Progrès de l’Homme (FPH, 1997) for a world of responsibility and solidarity. What these proposals have in common is that they adopt an ethic of responsibility; there is an ethical dimension to them that appeal to the individual. They bear in mind one of the underlying issues in the current crisis, which is clear in Meghalaya and for that matter in major portions of the North East India, namely the gash between human being and nature.

The proposal includes all three interconnected pieces of this predicament: the interactions of humans with one another, the relationships intra – societies and inter – societies, and as a final point the associations between humans and ecology. Thus solutions to the issues can be comprehended only with regards to the dynamics amongst these three types of relationships. Environmental education here forms part of education for global responsibility and with local adaptations we can adopt it to Universities as higher seats of learning. The whole proposal needs to be hammered into for further details with various stakeholders – the State, seats of higher learning, the Universities, the communities and their representatives to ascertain their call on this.

Hence the concern is the exploration for a all – inclusive educational scaffold in which we may perhaps incorporate and assimilate, in the most advantageous approach, distinctive component of modern-day education that play a role towards the upshot of the principal social and environmental tribulations of our globe and structure epoch – making projects. The trial before us all is to discover the core of an education competent enough to endorse

authentic human development, towards which environmental education contributes very significantly and essentially keeping in mind an ethical framework towards progress. At long last, from a reconstructive standpoint for Meghalaya and for our beautiful country at large, it is a hunt for good judgment combined with ethics and for substance in a meaningful journey called good life.

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