

Introduction

A two-day “Seminar on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) in Nepal” was organized by the Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES) in collaboration with the School of Environmental Management and Sustainable Development (SchEMS) of Pokhara University at Kathmandu, Nepal from 27-28 August 2003. Approximately, 58 resource persons attended the Seminar.

The Seminar is the series of advocacy efforts initiated by IGES in cooperation with partners to raise the profile of ESD in the region. The main concern is not on sustainable development as such but on the role of education as a process to contribute meaningfully to achieve the goal of sustainable development in Nepal. Thus, its objective is to share experiences and then identify knowledge gaps and prospects on ESD in Nepal. In order to stimulate discussion, 20 papers were presented on different aspects of ESD, followed by bouts of questions and answers after each presentation and an intensive discussion at the end of the Seminar.

Octogenarian educationist Dr. Trailokya Nath Upraity kicked off the seminar by lightening the traditional Nepali Panas lamp, ensued by his thought-provoking opening remark on education and development in Nepal. The Seminar was closed with an open-ended discussion session on the topic “*What are the means and ways of promoting ESD in Nepal?*” The discussion boiled down to the point that if ESD is to succeed, then the stakeholder dialogue and their responsible participation should receive the topmost priority.



The report is the collection of these papers. The administrator, the academician, the researcher, the practitioner and the free-lance consultant each have written papers representing diverse fields such as hard-core science, education, sociology, political science, economics, etc. This diversity is reflected in the papers written in different styles representing the various fields. The styles range from technical to general to feature styles, hence also the different styles of citations and references, a diversity which is retained in the report to reiterate the point that ESD is interdisciplinary in nature and no single method or approach would possibly be appropriate to its wide scope. This also may be regarded as the uniqueness of the report.

The report also includes a special paper “*Emerging Issues in ESD*” by Dr. Daniella Tilbury, Chair in Education for Sustainable Development of the IUCN Commission on Education and Communication. With a view to gather comments and suggestions from around the world the compilers have also included the proposed “Framework for a Draft International Implementation Scheme” prepared by UNESCO for the United Nations Decade on Education for Sustainable Development (DESD) along with an annexation of the opening address of Mr. Koichiro Matsuura, Director of UNESCO given at the interagency meeting on the UN Decade on Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014) on 5th September 2003. These two contributions provide the reader with the latest development and international efforts in advancing the cause of ESD globally.

We sincerely hope and believe that the report will be useful to raise the profile of ESD as well as to integrate the concept of ESD into the educational policy, action plan, and program of activities at the national, district and village levels in Nepal.

Lastly, we would like to offer our deepest gratitude to our co-organizer, SchEMS, authors, and resource persons of the workshop, particularly Dr. Trailokya Nath Upraity, ex-vice chancellor and ex-ambassador for his kind consent to deliver the opening remarks to this seminar. We also like to offer a big “thank you” to authors who rendered their kind help and assistance to the seminar.

Finally, it will be our remiss if we do not mention the names of Mr. P. C. Shrestha, Mr. Suman Piya and Mr. Binod Basnet of SchEMS; and Mr. M. Takahashi

and Mr. A. Nakahata of IGES. Without their untiring supports, this seminar would not have been possible at all. However, we are solely responsible for any errors and shortcomings in the report.

The compilers will appreciate receiving any comments or suggestions from the reader.

The compilers
Hayama
30 October 2003

Opening Remarks

Dr. Trailokya Nath Upraity¹

Dear Friends,

First of all I would like to thank the organizers of the seminar for inviting me to share my thinking on the subject, education for sustainable development. Before proceeding further, it is advisable to recall that in 1987 the United Nations Commission on Environment and Development (UNCED) concluded that today's generations need to "meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". Sustainable development, in a nutshell, is "living well within the means of nature" or, living in a way to create lasting economic prosperity, environmental health, and social justice for current and future generations. Hence, its goal is to develop a society in balance and improve the quality of human life. The focus of this seminar is not on development as such but the role that education has to play in making the development activities sustainable in terms of the resources available in the country.

The concept of sustainability, in short, envisages the use of resources that replenish themselves over a certain period of time. This term has a popular usage in environmental science; use of mineral, forest, other resources, etc. in that these be used in such a way that they may be available to coming generations. For example, the yield of a forest product i.e. the volume of wood used for development purpose would grow back to the normal level in due course of time.

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Environmental scientists made this term a catchword in advocating the sustainable use of resources. In the field of education, this suggests that education is to be treated as a means to gain this end and to make the development process a viable and feasible undertaking. The resources required for the development of countries have to be utilized in such a manner that over a period of time they would recover to the balanced level. In other words, undertaking the task of development of a country aiming to provide a better standard of living, providing better homes, roads, education and health facilities, recreation facilities, safe drinking water, etc. is a long-term affair, making heavy demand on its natural resources; physical, natural, environmental. In this process, such resources are usually over exploited, leaving behind a trail of suffering for our posterity and coming generation. This applies to the developed as well as to the developing countries, more so in the developing countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. As such, one needs to be careful to safe keeping of the natural resources for their benefit of the coming generations.

In search of a balanced and sustainable view of development in any country, education has to play a major role to impress the minds of growing generation that all efforts and measures undertaken for development are to be sustainable. This concept has to be deeply impressed in young minds through medium of education-curriculum, reading materials, teacher training and other related activities of the education sector of a country. Civic education has indeed an important role to play in this regard. Simply having legislations or bureaucratic directives cannot attain the protection against the undesirable model of development in any country. Some people may be concerned that this sustainable approach might slow down the pace of development, especially in the developing countries. It is perhaps true. However, having no easy alternative in sight, planners need to learn to go in a steady way.

Unfortunately, the role that education is supposed to play in this regard has not been effectively designed in several countries- especially in countries of South East Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Take Nepal as a test case. It is a country with a long history of education with the Hindu and Buddhist traditions. The people until recent past lived in isolated villages, leading a simple life within a framework of self-sufficient economic and sustainable development. Introduction of English education by Jung Bahadur in the middle of the eighteen century brought a turning

point in the lifestyle of Nepalese people. The education that was introduced by the first Rana Prime Minister was a copy of the education system that a colonial power- East India Company- had imposed on India. McCauley (1800-1859), the architect of this colonial system, advocated this system of education for upper classes in India and made a vigorous plea for spreading western learning through the medium of English. He said “*It was possible through English education to bring about a class of person, Indian in blood and color, English in test, in opinions, in morals and intellectuals*”. The introduction of this system of education in Nepal was definitely a wrong start. The negative impacts of this system have gradually surfaced in larger dimension as time passed by.

Politically speaking Nepal was never colonized but in terms of education development it has been bearing, all the dire consequences brought to India by the British colonial power. In India, however, towards the end of the nineteenth century, national leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Bal Gungadhar Tilak, Jawahar Lal Nehru, Madan Mohan Malaviya, in the course of their struggle against the colonial British regime, raised voices against the prevailing system of education. They pointed the need for gradual replacement of it by a system, which would help to produce a new generation of young people with a more balanced view of development of the country. These initiatives gradually gained speed and contributed to bring a new face of development in India which has been acclaimed as one of the successful models of sustainable development for imparting, scientific, professional, technical education to younger generation to harness the resources of the country for betterment of the present generation as well as to meet the needs of the posterity.

Nepal, however, had to continue bearing the evils of colonized system of education until the middle of the twentieth century. Towards the end of the autocratic Rana regime feeble attempts were made to introduce the basic education “*Adhar Shikshya*” modeled after the Indian educational thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi. But it could not take roots and was gradually assimilated in the prevailing system of education of Nepal.

After the political change of 1950, which ushered a new chapter in the democratic movement in the country, there were opportunities to redress the ills of the earlier system of education. Late king Mahendra was aware of the need to bring reforms in the prevailing system of education and with this end in

view he formed the First National Commission on Education (1954). This august body had made a series of recommendations to help development in education as well as in other sectors. In successive years there were other opportunities - Nepal USA Joint Education Project (1954-60), the New Education plan (1972), the Commission on Higher Education (1987), Second National Commission on Education (1990) and a Higher Level Education Commission (1997). These efforts had made a series of recommendations to do away with the old system of education and replace it with progressive ideas on educational development. However, the political parties and its leaders of the country showed no intention to implement the recommendations; instead, they were mostly circumvented to meet their own narrow political ends. The idea of sustainable development did not get much strength; it is very sad indeed.

If Nepal is to make a headway in its effort for development, use of resources of the country needs to be given a new direction; development resources and eco-system, agriculture, forest, water resources, wild life, etc. should be used in a sustainable method. It may, however, be mentioned here the assertion of some people that all the development activities of the past five decades have been a total failure. This needs to be judged rather carefully. I do not subscribe fully to this view. If we look at the progress made in communication, construction of roads linking the remote parts of the country and, yields from horticultural orchards, poultry, fisheries etc. we have definitely posted some growth. Nepal has tremendous water resources and its landscape has attracted millions of tourists; we are lucky that these resources are self-sustaining. We have seen that our experiment in community forest development has been a show piece of success. We need to sustain such approaches in other areas of development too.

You are all aware that after a spell of three decades of “Panchayat” system a political movement resurfaced to revitalize democracy in Nepal. The political parties were allowed to function once again and form an elected government. This development, however, did not contribute much to bring changes in the behavior of the political leaders. The political evils of the past decades surfaced again and the situation turned from bad to worse making room for the rise of Maoist movement, which is now destabilizing the country and all development efforts including the education front. It has hit-hard at the very foundation of the

sustainable concept of development. The situation is so complex that no prediction as to its course in coming days is possible at present.

There are several causes, which contribute to bring the prevailing pitiable state of education in the country; one of these and perhaps the most important is the prevailing system of the School Leaving Certificate (SLC) examination. This system set up in 1934 has now become obsolete and gone out of gear. Every year in this examination system- labeled as 'Iron Gate'- more than 50% fail to pass the examination. This is a big loss to the nation and the country can no longer bear it. So the time has come to take out this examination system from the control of the government, combine it with a higher secondary education board, and decentralize it in such a way that private initiatives come forward to organize the examination system in a more flexible pattern. This definitely would help to bring improvement in the existing school level education bringing consequential changes in higher education by introducing courses in the system of higher education- to plan courses in support of the concept of sustainable development in the country.

In the foregoing paragraphs attempt has been made to portray a sad picture of educational development in Nepal. Nevertheless, the picture outlined here applies to many other countries aspiring for rapid development. If countries like Nepal aspire for better standard of living, they have to be very sure that this is not at the cost of blind use of our resources. At every step, it demands to be very judicious to make use of our existing resources and keep it sustainable.

Before concluding, I would like to add few words on humane aspects of development. The country is in need of growing number of technical and professional hands- doctors, engineers, scientists, technical hands and professionals. But just the production of such hands is not enough. In the process of their training and education it is important that they are imbued with humane spirit of truth, compassion, right conduct, peace, non-violence and love to humanity.

Thank you
August 28, 2003