

THE ROLE OF UNIVERSITIES IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT WITH SPECIAL FOCUS ON PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

Certainly, sustainable development has to be an essential part of strategy for the future development of the education sector in Pakistan. The main objective of this concept is to make the higher education to be recognized as the foremost contributor to society's efforts to achieve sustainability. Acquiring sustainable development needs cooperation among sectors and institutions, and the involvement of all the concerned partners and individuals. Nevertheless, there are a lot of diverse ways people and institutions can work together to share knowledge, to advocate and to take action. These consist of campaigning networks, communities of practice, knowledge networks, public-private partnerships, multi-stakeholder partnerships and strategic alliances. These have all become vital mechanisms for pin pointing priorities, conducting combined research and for appealing other stakeholders in initiating practicable solutions. By means of combining their efforts, members of networks and partnerships are able to have a bigger impact on policy and practice than they would have on their own.

An infrastructure building is one of the meager elements of sustainable development and engineering universities play vital role to spread it inconsonance with the social needs. There is great need to establish practical liaison between the engineering sector and the social development sector, it is important for the establishment and maintenance of social cohesion for building the infrastructure for the well being of the masses. This paper highlights the reasons which make the institutions of higher education in Pakistan suitable contenders to lead the notion of Education for Sustainable Development. There is no reason that the achievement of this objective cannot be assured exclusively and without proper linkages with government, communities, NGOs and private sector.

INTRODUCTION

Sustainable development is not a latest notion in the world any longer. There have been years of discussing and elucidating the meaning of this concept in nearly every academic and non-academic atmosphere. After the creation of the “United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (UNDESD)”, central attention of the movement on sustainable development has been shifted to the techniques and different ways for achieving this idea. One central theme which has been well declared and emphasized in the key purposes of the UNDESD is the idea of joint venture. UNDESD undoubtedly places its major aim as: “to smooth the progress of set of connections, connections, replace and communication in the various concerned sections in Education for Sustainable Development”.

Whereas, in accordance with Agenda 21 (Chapter 8.7), the key strategy to make use of education for the sustainable development is to make education viable by interconnecting social, economic, and environmental issues by harmonizing the current plans and actions.

Above description shows the holistic nature of sustainable development and in accomplishing this holistic nature, a joint attempt among various sectors is well expressive. This issue leads to the core and basic concepts of continuous growth which is the concept of partnership.

As UNDESA, 2001b, paragraph 3 indicates; “synchronized, combined, harmonized and recurring development of contemplations and acts attaining financial, ecological and communal purposes in an impartial and incorporated way” is essential getting the objects of continuous growth.

Keeping in mind this present situation and type of the troubles which now face up to as a community of nations and peoples, everybody is currently more than ever bound collectively by a universal future. This general fate and its mechanisms of accomplishment can be well described in the local and national level first and then being developed to the international scale. Nonetheless, in view of the important function of education as core of UNDESD in addition to its combination with the concept of partnership can guarantee on achieving the selected goals of sustainable development.

This paper discusses the reasons which make an institution of higher education a suitable contender to lead the perception of learning for continuous growth and why the success of this management cannot be certain exclusively and devoid of suitable linkages with the government, communities, NGOs, individuals and private sector.

EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

In accordance with UNESCO's definition; 'Objective of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014, DESD), aims to incorporate the various sets of values, principles, and goals for the purpose of learning and continuous growth'. The enlightening endeavor can promote alterations in attitude and perceptions. It can produce new sustainable opportunity regarding the ecological reliability, financial feasibility, and the creation of the ideal society.

Rio Summit declares that the purpose of education should be for the socio-economic betterment of the society on the whole. The 21st century has witnessed the technological changes, ushering a new era for the educational planners and practitioners.

The notion of education for continuous growth also facilitates the masses expanding comprehension, standards and expertise to take part in different mechanisms, independently and jointly at local level or at the global level.

INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The function of the higher educational institutions is to prepare the future managers, doctors, engineers, and social scientists to serve the people at larger level. They have a responsibility of taking care of the society and getting rid of the all the hurdles in the way of sustainable socio-economic development. They are the role models and the public is largely looking forward to these enlightened segments of society to overcome the issues.

From this introduction, it is obvious that sustainable development has to be an essential component of the policy for the future development of the education sector. The decisive purpose of this concept is to make the higher education to be accepted as a chief provider to the demands and challenges of the modern technological era - in the course of the proficiencies and

acquaintance of the degree holders to be taught in that way that they meet challenges of the world at large.

Keeping this in view, it is obvious that the function of academic circles is very important to the accomplishment of any arrangement or policy for sustainably developed society. Then again, it is furthermore widely recognized that there are still many barriers in the communication between academia and society. Over and over again, academic institutions have been in conflict with their societies over their missions and responsibilities.

On the threshold of the 21st century, many universities in the world are reassessing their available resources to equip their students with the best technological learning. They are trying to meet the economic challenges and capacity building measures are on the way to make the education more viable to the community on the whole. They are functioning to make easy economic development, provide much-needed social services, support public, offer technical assistance to community-based organizations, target research that provides guidance for community problem solving, and create opportunities for faculty, students, and community residents to learn from one another.

This matter generates an exceptional place for an institution of higher education to operate as the meeting point of the society's different groups, NGOs, individual, etc. and a place for different ideas and prospective to meet and share the experiences. Nevertheless, with the purpose of understanding the degree in which an institute of higher education can give to the concept of sustainable development, some critical issues have to be addressed and considered.

LEADERSHIP

Leadership has a critical sensible role to play in sustaining the transition to sustainable development, by directing institutions' strategic planning, organizing main capital programmes and leading the institutions' interactions with external stakeholders. Leadership also has a figurative role in manipulating the vision of staff and students about sustainable development. As a result, it is enormously imperative that leaders have the skills to take decisions which are in agreement with this plan.

However, can institutes of higher education take the lead in sustainable development? Answering to this question can make easy the approach towards different features of sustainability. Higher educational institutions have a prime responsibility helping a long lasting sustainability. This is rooted in the fact that sustainable development is considered as the technique of living long with greater chances of sustainability. Fundamentally, it is a process in which everyone needs to participate to fulfill the dream to come out true. Likewise, the functioning of higher education is vital because it has to produce the man infrastructure who will take managerial posts and have to redirect the available resources.

Based on what it has been said, universities seem to be more appropriate places to take the lead in sustainable development. What makes this idea more acceptable is that this role is recognized by many people in the higher education community and reflected by several international agreements between institutions to pursue growth related issues. Those agreements include the Copernicus University Charter for Sustainable Development (1993); the Kyoto Declaration on Sustainable Development issued by the International Association of Universities (1993); and the UNESCO World Declaration on Higher Education (1998).

The accords which have been stated above identify that the role of higher education can be mostly categorized in three groups. First, higher education has a role in helping students to gain awareness of the world in which they live in. It also helps to understand that how the various processes interact and come closer to each other.

The second reason can be viewed that the higher education is supposed to help the society at large to make familiar with the various challenges of continuous development processes. It also helps the get abreast of the various social and economic aspects of human life. In this case one can look at different examples in which universities play a vital role in finding solutions through academic researches and experiences. These on campus practices in many cases can be transformed to the heart of the society and be used there.

The third central reason to make universities a suitable option for taking the leadership in sustainable development is that each university is a combination of a number of different centres and organizations in which any of these centres or organizations can add a significant amount of knowledge and practices to the sectors of the society they are in touch with.

The third reason will lead us to yet another very important factor in relation between the academic world and the people in general which is the concept of partnership. However, to make this train moves, there need to be a well defined way of networking and partnership strategies.

PARTNERSHIP AND NETWORKING

The Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities, in a report titled *The Engaged Institution: Returning to Our Roots*, urges university ties to reconfigure teaching, research, extension, and service activities and become “more sympathetically and productively involved with their communities”. In the absence of a clear networking and partnership structure and strategies, efforts to create new relationships are likely to be unfocused and therefore less effective than they might otherwise be. Hence, academia’s main objective in this matter should be to define the networking structure in a way that gives direction and purpose to the engagement agenda. Following this, the academia should design a model of engagement and describe how it is related to the practice of community development.

The combined efforts of various sectors are pre-requisite for the durable development. There are diverse ways in which the different stakeholders can work together. Those channels include public private partnership and many other ways can be used to motive the various sectoral changes. They can identify the venues of joint venture by engaging in research and developing practical resolutions. Only combined joint efforts can put greater impact on the policy and practice than the vice versa.

UNIVERSITIES AS THE CENTRE POINT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

It is imperative to understand that selecting university as a suitable leader for sustainable development cannot promise the triumph of the project exclusively. Another crucial issue in this matter is to have a strong coordinator within university for sustainable development affairs to direct the researches and execution activities of the other stakeholders.

With the intention of achieving such status, the need for having a strong coordinator and secretariat in each university to hold, systematize and harmonize sustainable development related issues seems imperative.

HIGHER EDUCATION IN PAKISTAN

Universities play the leading role in the development sector all over the world. Pakistan in the fifties was far behind in the field of higher education. At that time the number of universities was not only inadequate but also less equipped with the up to date research sources owing to the political confrontation inside the educational institutions (Hussain, 1956).

Problems of higher education in Pakistan may be complicated to some extent. There are two main factors that are to be first documented and to be dealt with. The first is the increasing demand for higher education and proportionately fewer facilities available in public universities. The second factor relates to the low standard of the faculty especially in public universities. The remedies are yet to be discovered (Abdullah, 1992).

It is also a fact that various governments announced various plans for uplifting the standard of education in the country. In Pakistan three initiatives are considered in redirecting the prevalent educational system. They are the privatization of schools in the seventies. English as the medium of instruction was preferred in those private schools where the children of elite class got an easy access. The third initiative is the inclusion of Pakistan studies and Islamic studies as a compulsory subject in the curriculum (Ahmad, 1988).

An inadequate budget was reserved for the primary and secondary education till the late seventies. In fact, the educational system of that time suited to clerical and civil service of jobs. As a result educational system produced such people who were loyal to the British rulers. In fact, the same policies and programmes have been retained by the various governments in Pakistan. The statement is supported by the comparison between public and private schools. The government nationalized the private schools with the intention of providing equal education to all citizens of the country. The children of well-to-do families prefer to opt for the higher education from foreign countries with the intention of maintaining their class (Ahmed, 1971).

In very recent years due to the educational reforms and the provision of huge funding to higher education sector the situation has somewhat improved. The creation of Higher Education Commission under the leadership of Dr Atta-u-Rehman is a good step. Some drastic measures have been initiated. The number of PhDs has jumped. Nevertheless, it has been generally perceived that the institutions of the higher education especially the public universities in the

country are devoid of the urgent demands of other stakeholders like community, industry, NGOs, and the private sector. The huge vacuum exists between the policies and its outcome for the end users. Research seems devoid of its utility. Nepotism, corruption and misuse of the funds are noted everywhere. The outcome of PhD degrees has yet to show the positive effect on the growth of the society on the whole.

In spite of the all the efforts it has been it is generally believed in the academic sections that the various policies announced in various governments are the well worded document falling short of the ground realities. As a result, teacher community as well as the parents and students are found unsatisfactory on the present status quo of the education in Pakistan (Mukhtar, 2005). Pakistan needs a sound and even dynamic educational policy at all levels of education. We have to meet the challenges of 21st century with missionary zeal. We need qualified, skilled and trained human resources in all the areas. In this regard, on the top of every thing, we have to build a strong and sound foundation of primary and secondary education in order to achieve the goal of inducting students in higher technical and professional education.

CONCLUSION

As it has been explained theoretically and also through the experience, the institutions of higher education in Pakistan especially the public universities appear to be less equipped with taking the leadership role in term of sustainable development and become the centre point of coordination between different actors and members of the society (NGOs, individuals, private sector, etc) in achieving sustainable development goals.

It is interesting and important to notice that in order to adjust the universities with sustainable development standards, there is no need to change or revolute the whole existing system. As the nature of sustainable development is very integrated and as many universities in Pakistan have yet to adopt some elements of sustainable development, a smooth transition from the existing system to a system which accommodates more of development standards seems to be a very practical and promising solution ahead of the universities in Pakistan. To make this transition happen, one need a balanced and harmonious translation of the existing system into a more coherent action plan. This transition, adjustment and re-orientation need to be coordinated properly to have its maximum impact on the education system to have higher degrees of sustainability.

At the same time, the role of partnership with relevant sectors of the community to ensure the holistic nature this transition seems vital. As it is mentioned in the body of the paper, this partnership can be achieved by the coordinating role of the universities in sustainable development related strategies and practices.

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