

CONTRIBUTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS TOWARDS PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH

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Abstract

The United Nations' Transforming Our World: The SDG 2030 Agenda is very ambitious global agreement in recent history which is highly dependent on overall balanced systems of higher education. Knowledge, skills, values and attitudes actually empower the learners to contribute towards sustainable development. Only the well-established approach of Education for Sustainable Development(ESD) empowers learners to take informed decisions and responsible actions for environmental integrity, economic viability and a just society for the present and future society. The importance of education in contributing to the sustainable growth of the economy cannot be overstated. The initiatives of higher education institutions contribute to the attainment of sustainable economic growth on a world-wide scale. Though today's higher education system has witnessed significant transformations; however, the impact of HEIs efforts and initiatives on sustainable economic growth and high –quality employment is a gradual process that requires time, in comparison to the impact of economic policies. The present article focusses on the role of higher education institutions in promoting sustainable, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full employment and decent work for all.

Keywords: Higher Education Institutions, Development, Sustainable Economic Growth, Full Employment, Environmental Integrity



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Introduction

Man's interference with environment started as soon as the civilization started. Possession of natural assets like land, cattle and agricultural produce began with origin of agriculture and the social system. From the first agricultural settlements, we traversed through agricultural era, industrial era, and at present we are in knowledge era moving towards

entrepreneurship era. To accelerate the development, both in agriculture as well as industry, we spawned several revolutions. For food, we gave rise to green, grey, white, blue, yellow, golden, and such other revolutions. For energy and industry, we procreated three industrial revolutions viz, first, second third, and now we are realizing the fourth industrial revolution i.e. Industry 4.0. In the first industrial revolution mechanization was the key feature. Industry became the backbone of the societal economy. Massive extraction of coal and invention of steam as type of energy accelerated the manufacturing vis a vis economy during the first industrial revolution. The second industrial revolution is known for massive technological advancements in industries; emergence of a new source of energy— electricity, gas, and oil; and inventions of the automobile particularly, the aeroplane. The third revolution marked the rise of electronics, telecommunications and computers. It opened the doors to space expeditions, research, biotechnology, etc. Industry 4.0 is internet revolution that led to virtual reality worlds allowing us to bend the laws of physics. These revolutions are nothing but evidence of becoming more materialistic and consumerist than naturalistic and humanistic. The stark reality is that the resource intensity of global production and consumption has gone far beyond sustainable level.

We have been exploiting and transforming the environment for thousands of years in this pretext of development. Of course, development is a process that can't be stopped and should not be stopped. It only needs to be channelized. It is development without direction that is leading to disasters. Climate change and global warming are the alarming consequences of this development race. This kind of development has put a question mark on our sustainability. Now, when we are reaching the verge of no return, we are talking about Sustainable Development. Better late than never! United Nations through its Agenda 2030 has put all of us to the task of attaining 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2033.

Obviously, the concern is towards deteriorating environmental conditions and depleting life supporting natural resources which may lead towards greater crises to our future generations. The beautiful blue-green planet Earth which was full of greenery once upon a time is undergoing several major environmental disruptions. In Indian tradition, though the concern for environment has been there since time immemorial, it is in the third quarter of 20th century that we have become activated towards our interactions with the environment and started internalizing the fact that there are going to be threatening consequences for the life on the earth if we do not put ourselves on right track. It took over 2 million years of history for the

world's population to reach 1 billion and only 200 years more to grow to 7 billion. This has caused tremendous pressure on our natural resources. For example, every day on earth, we lose over 100 square miles of forest and about 70 square miles of productive land, and at the same time, we add quarter of a million people to the world population. Land mismanagement and habitat destruction has caused extinction of about 70- 100 plant and animal species (GEO, UNEP, 1999). In his Foreword of the Global Environment Outlook 3 (GEO 3) on Past, Present and Future Perspectives, Kofi Annan (2002) stated that during the last 100 years, the natural environment has borne the stresses imposed by a fourfold increase in human numbers and an 18-fold growth in world economic output. Despite the wealth of technologies, human resources, policy options and technical and scientific information at our disposal, humankind has yet to break decisively with unsustainable and environmentally unsound policies and practices. What emerges from the data analysis and forecasts, is the compelling need to go beyond taking stock to taking action. Despite the clarion calls given by the UN we are too busy with our attention focused on race to be super powers, globalization, international conflicts, terrorism, etc. and in the process we are losing the sense of momentum set for sustainable development.

The concept of sustainable development was emerged in Brundtland Commission in 1987 and popularized in the United Nations Earth Summit in Rio-de-Janerio in 1992. In earlier thinking there was emphasis on environmental conservation and sustainable development, However, the United Nations General Assembly, in 2015 broadened the idea of sustainable development by covering various social and economic development issues like poverty, hunger, health, education, global warming, gender equality, water, sanitation, energy, urbanization, environment and social justice. It set 17 global goals which are known as sustainable development goals. These sustainable development goals are central to millennium goals to development. These goals and targets of sustainable development envisaged a society free from poverty and economic dependence on others, free from prejudice and traditional thinking, free from fear discrimination, injustice, intolerance and violence and also free from insensitivity towards different forms of life and environment. It calls for a society where economic, academic, social and environmental needs of the future generation could be met successfully. Now the question arises how the higher education of India can play an important role in achieving the sustainable development goals.

Higher Education, as a source of knowledge, can help in the creation of a more sustainable future. With increasing globalisation and interdependence, Higher Education Institutions' (HEIs) role in fostering a sustainable economic growth becomes more critical. Thus, 'Education for Sustainable Economic Growth' has recently emerged as a key educational initiative to address many of the challenges such as per capita GDP growth, new economic development and labor market policies, improved resource efficiency, migrant worker protection, youth employment, and child labor eradication, etc. At its core is the great challenge of achieving economic growth without compromising the environment or human rights, particularly labor rights. HEIs are accountable for academic and professional education that develops the human capital required to support sustainable economic growth on national and global scale. This article discusses how Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) can promote SDG No. 8.

How HEIs can Promote SDG 8?

Driving Innovation

The larger economies benefit from the research conducted by the Universities and innovation because it promotes investment, exports, and a more balanced economy. Assisting in the growth of the knowledge-based economy, research-friendly environments allow students to develop transferable competencies. Innovation is required to update traditional university curricula to address current environmental, economic, and social issues. Curriculum innovation should be developed in all fields of expertise to prepare future professionals to face daily challenges holistically. Curricula must be revised to promote greater innovation initiatives that can be applied regionally and globally, thereby promoting sustainable economic growth. A modern education that can cover innovative solutions for a sustainable existence helps to rectify the routes that have been taken so far, so that economic balance can be attained while environment and social progress are met. One of the strategies to foster innovation and enhance entrepreneur skills in order to participate in economic activity is to teach and raise awareness among the masses. Students should be prepared with case studies and mentored on innovative start-ups. This involves reorienting education at all levels to create the future entrepreneurs to achieve the sustainable economic growth across the wide range of sectors. Universities can help to improve human capital quality and provide the economy with new technology and organisational solutions (Ejdys, 2021). HEIs can equip the students with the requirements of knowledge, skills, and values to participate in the workforce to achieve economic growth and to get decent jobs.

Curricula and Lifelong Learning Approach

It is vital to ensure that the Sustainable Development Goals are included in university curricula, so that students are equipped with the knowledge, skillsets, and culture to deal with the complex problems of sustainable development throughout their professional lives. Developing the knowledge and skillsets of the students must aim to promote economic, social, and individual development, according to critical philosophy (Owusu-Agyeman, 2017). Lifelong learning is discussed with respect to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to further illuminate the goal of learning and education that has long-term growth impact. The SDG 8 can be more reasonably achieved when learning is for lifetime. Learning is not limited to a specific time period or to campus. It happens everywhere: at home, in the community, at work, through debate, reading, writing, problem-solving, social participation, etc. (Torres, 2011). Progressivism emphasises building on students' prior knowledge and engaging problem-solving and stimulation activities which help the economy to achieve the full employment level. In general, those with a higher degree education have decent work opportunities (OECD, 2012).

Implementation Oriented Research and Interdisciplinary Approach

Research significantly influences an economy's prosperity. British universities generate £95 billion, Australian universities produce \$25 billion, and Canadian institutions produce £55 (AGB, 2019). Policy research should also be encouraged by HEIs for the government to encourage knowledge transfer linked with social and economic growth through international partnership. Implementation oriented research shall be carried out in order to determine acceptability, reliability, adoption, scale-up, and impact on the targets of SGD 8. For answers to SDG 8, HEIs should focus on implementation-oriented research. When the SDGs are backed up by robust research, they may show gaps in the existing domain of research and aid in identifying future paths of exploration. The SDG objectives for academic research include interdisciplinary research in the physical, social, biological, engineering, and humanities disciplines. Certain efforts must be made, such as: (a) emphasizing SDG-related research and hiring suitable academic and research staff; (b) regularly reporting on how academic research supports towards the SDG 8. Additionally, publishing research articles enables the dissemination of an effective sustainability initiatives as well as the challenges experienced during the execution of SDGs. Research in targeted areas of SDG 8 at HEIs fosters the high-impact technological innovations. Research funding is a significant strategy for

pursuing research and transfer of knowledge with other international universities, especially HEIs of developing countries. Interdisciplinary research can be encouraged by the HEIs in the areas of targets of SDG 8 which can solve the challenges of poverty, unemployment, environment, education, finance, education, migration etc. When students are exposed to an interdisciplinary approach, they should be taught how to process knowledge more effectively. Students should be cultivated with creativity and critical thinking skills, engage in interdisciplinary research and learning process. Interdisciplinary learning allows students to go out of their comfort zone and make connections that are required to solve sustainability issues.

Conclusion

The importance of education in contributing to the sustainable growth of the economy cannot be overstated. In summary, the initiatives of higher education institutions (HEIs) contribute to the attainment of sustainable economic growth (SDG 8) on a world - wide scale. Though today's higher education system has witnessed significant transformations; however, the impact of HEIs efforts and initiatives on sustainable economic growth and high-quality employment is a gradual process that requires time, in comparison to the impact of economic policies.

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