



Environmental Awareness Education and Communication

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ABSTRACT

Environmental education is now being seen as an instrument and a process that enables participation and learning by people of all ages. Today when environmental conditions are changing adversely and all living beings are suffering from the negative consequences of environmental pollution. Reorienting education as a whole towards sustainability involves the various levels of formal, non-formal and informal education at all levels of society. The pursuit of sustainable development and environmental conservation policies, objectives and targets requires the public to be sufficiently sensitized about the multiple dimensions of environment and development. Environmental communication has now emerged as strong complementary practice to environmental education. This Paper provides an overview of developments in environmental education, information, awareness and training is very much essential.

Keywords: environment education, challenges, opportunities, India, curriculum

Preamble

Awareness and understanding of environmental issues provide the basis and rationale for commitment and meaningful action towards environmentally sound and sustainable development.

A broad definition of environmental communication would be, "the sharing of information, insights and opinions on environmental issues, trends, conditions and solutions using any means of communications, ranging from inter-personal methods to means of mass communication using the modern as well as traditional media. Today when environmental conditions are changing adversely

and all living beings are suffering from the negative consequences of environmental pollution and climate changes, there is a need to reorient the curriculum of environment education for making it more attractive and responsive to the local environmental issues. Recognizing the importance and need of environment education, India has initiated several efforts including making the environment education compulsory at all level of education. Environment Education (EE) is a rapidly emerging and dynamic concept of education, which requires a new vision of empowering people about their nature and their role in conservation initiatives.

Public Health: Public health is one of the most important sectors in which government can invest adequately. Early prevention can prevent dire and expensive health care problems later in life. There is a need for orientating health systems to primary health care in order to and strengthen emergency risk management. The primary health care is needs to be recognized as a vital contributor to all aspects of emergencies by the health care authorities. The global and national health security activities focus mainly on national and central-level structural and institutional arrangements but, the primary health is neither care under represented nor absent. There is a need to recognize the primary health areas an important aspect of national health emergency management policies, plans and programmes. At the regional, district and community levels, primary care needs to have well-defined and recognized role. Primary care professionals must be included in the planning and coordination mechanisms in order to ensure effective health emergency management at the grassroots levels. There should be a focal point on improving financial investment, infrastructure, information and supply networks. Health care financing mechanisms should ensure adequate funding to strengthen capacities for emergency risk management. Primary health care is highly essential to healthy to build the society and the adverse health effects associated with climate change will likely fall disproportionately on their populations.(Bush et.al.2011)

Sustainable development: The pursuit of sustainable development and environmental conservation policies, objectives and targets requires the public to be sufficiently sensitized about the multiple dimensions of environment and development. Awareness and understanding of environmental issues provide the basis and rationale for commitment and meaningful action towards environmentally sound and sustainable development. One possible outcome could be the development of an integrated early warning system, emergency response plans, and refugee management plans, along with increased capacity to provide shelter, drinking water, sanitation, and sustainable agricultural products to the most vulnerable populations. (Kathleen et.al 2011) The trends and patterns in environmental education in formal and non-formal sectors, and initiatives and programmes that have been undertaken by governments, non-governmental organizations, communities and by regional and international organizations are also identified. The underlying needs for environmental education, information and communication are also discussed with a particular emphasis on the constraints and key issues that need attention. There is greater recognition of the role of NGOs and civil society organizations, and the need for meaningful community participation in debates and action programmes aimed at education and training for sustainable development.

Environmental education is now being seen as an instrument and a process that enables participation and learning by people of all ages, based on two-way communication rather than the old paradigm of a one-way flow of information, from teachers to pupils. The content and substance of environmental education is also undergoing review and change. Reorienting education as a whole towards sustainability involves the various levels of formal, non-formal and informal education at all levels of society. Environmental education has developed within the conceptual framework that emerged from the first international conference in Tbilisi, 1977 and is now seen as education for sustainability.

Activities like Eco Club and Plant Club: In addition countries in the region recognize the immensity of the challenges they face, and of the vital role that environmental education can play in meeting these

challenges. There is a growing perception by governments of the need to integrate environmental education information and communication into the country's on-going programmes. In many countries environmental topics have been included in education courses, through integrating environmental concerns in other subjects and through specific courses for the environment.

Government, NGOs, educational institutions and media have undertaken some serious efforts to meet the growing environmental challenges by promoting environmental education, information and communication in their respective countries. Activities such as green bank, green press, eco-clubs, Plant club, eco-polies, eco-farming and eco-harvesting; are emerging in the region. Special economic incentives such as subsidy, tax-exemption and other incentives are provided to schools in some countries where environmental education courses are offered.

NGOs and governments are increasingly working together, reinforcing each other's strengths and outreach. Environmental education is increasingly a prominent part of primary, secondary and tertiary education. The formal education sector plays a vital role in environmental education and awareness by exposing the younger generation to the information, issues, analyses and interpretations on environment and development. A number of factors have influenced the development of environmental education in the region. The two over-arching factors are national education policy and national environment and population policy. These policies are a reflection of national cultural values, priorities and socio-economic goals in most countries. Rather than establishing a new subject, most countries have opted to infuse environmental education objectives and strategies into the existing curricula, while some other countries practice both options. In addition, the focus on practical learning in the real world in environmental education helps schools to address important general educational objectives related to values and to skills development.

Key trends have been observed across the region in relation to environmental education at tertiary level these include:

- Basic environmental concepts and elements added to existing courses at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, for all students irrespective of their courses;
- New environmental units or modules introduced into a large number of courses at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, thus increasing the depth and detail of environmental study.
- New non-degree programmes and courses at foundation, certificate or diploma levels introduced by tertiary education institutions to cater to the demand for in-service training and upgrading of knowledge and understanding on environmental issues and practices;
- An increase in the publication of relevant textbooks and audio visual material;
- Greater emphasis on training the trainers, and in strengthening the tertiary education system and research capabilities;
- More research on environmental education policies and practices;
- A greater dialogue and information exchange between the users of environmental skills and talent, in government, private and NGO sectors etc., and the institutions of tertiary education, ensuring, education and training address prevailing practical needs; and
- Increasing emphasis placed on adult and community education, using both formal and non-formal methods to raise the overall environmental literacy levels. Increase

in environmental studies has been a response to the market realities, and also to the growing recognition of the environmental crisis and the management options available. Countries have adopted different mechanisms to cater to their specific needs in tertiary education

- “Each country has already initiated a number of education and training programmes at the tertiary or higher level of education that are related to aspects of the environment. In various ways and to varying degrees, each of the countries has responded to the problems of the environment with environmental laws and regulations, and with associated political and institutional initiatives. However, in all countries, the development of persons with the conceptual understandings and skills that these regulatory intentions require for implementation and management lags well behind what is needed”

Environmental education: Materials and Study Aids in line with the growing interest and activity in environmental education, awareness and training, the demand for educational materials and study aids has also increased. However, the limited availability of materials may not meet individual country requirements in terms of local language and in coverage of the most relevant issues to the country. Many government and non-government institutions have risen to this challenge. There are many constraints and barriers to the widespread adoption and practice of environmental education in the region

1. Learning by Doing In several countries, there are efforts to get students to relate to local problems, while understanding their global implications.
2. Outdoor Activities Government agencies as well as NGOs have developed a wide array of outdoor activities that expose youth and adults to different aspects of environmental awareness, action and understanding.
3. Innovative Approaches New strategies and innovations for environmental education have been developed and applied throughout the region. For example, in Singapore, the Ministry of Environment in 1996 published the „Fun and Discovery through Environmental Clubs“, outlining environmental activities and clubs.

Environmental training: Types of Training:

- Teachers in Formal Education In a large number of countries in the region, teacher-training programmes at both pre-service and in-service levels have incorporated elements of environmental education.
- Practitioners of Non-Formal Education, Training for the practitioners of non-formal education is less systematic in most countries, and on the whole fewer opportunities exist. This is partly due to the enormous diversity of professional backgrounds of the individuals engaged in non-formal environmental education activities
- Training Media Professionals Training and sensitising journalists on different aspects of the environment remain urgent needs in most countries of the region where the standards of environmental reporting are low. Even journalists and broadcast producers who are well trained in their craft face new challenges in reporting on issues related to environment and sustainable development. The technical nature of most environmental issues requires the ability to grasp these technicalities and then to interpret these in layman’s terms. Many environmental stories involve the assessment of risks and the weighing of costs and benefits, all of which require experience, skill and a strong sense of balance in journalists.

- The number of specialized training programmes at country and regional levels has increased since the 1990s, Relatively new areas of training include, environmental economics, environmental impact assessment (EIA) and in the adoption and implementation of environmental standards, especially the ISO 14000 series.
- A variety of training and skills development activities are being pursued at local, national, sub regional and regional levels by governments, NGOs as well as by international and intergovernmental organizations in the region. In terms of content, duration, methodology, instruction mechanisms, types of participants and other factors, there is great diversity, but the end result is an overall strengthening of skills and capacity to better manage the environment and natural resources.

For Environmental Training National level networks of tertiary level institutions have been formed in several countries of the region to share resources and efforts in providing environmental training. Recognition is growing that many environmental issues and challenges are common to more than one country in the region, and that countries and communities can learn from each other in their responses to similar situations and problems.

Information and awareness: A. Monitoring Assessment and Reporting Environmental monitoring by government agencies and institutions in many countries has focused on certain environmental concerns, such as the quality of air, water and other natural resources. Monitored data are transformed into information that shows environmental trends and effectiveness of past mitigation measure which are vital for environmental management.

Environmental communication: Environmental communication has now emerged as strong complementary practice to environmental education. A broad definition of environmental communication would be, the sharing of information, insights and opinions on environmental issues, trends, conditions and solutions using any means of communications, ranging from inter-personal methods to means of mass communication using the modern as well as traditional media. In this sense, environmental educators constantly engage in environmental communication. However, an important distinction is that, while all environmental educators are communicators.

Environmental communication was to inspire positive behaviour, on the part of individuals, communities, corporate and industrial bodies and others, to help conserve the environment and achieve sustainable development. A key issue for many countries in the region is to integrate environment into development policy, and to use communication and education in an integrated way as an instrument of policy. There is, however, a tendency to focus on formal school education target groups, both by governments and NGOs, rather than addressing other. One of the major channels through which environmental communication is practised is the mass media, which includes both print and electronic sections. The communication media in with liberalization of media policies allowing private sector involvement spread of global media networks owned by trans-national companies and the proliferation of new communication technologies which have removed the barrier of large investments required to enter the media field. Trans-national television is the most prominent example of the changes taking place in the region's communications scenes.

Print Media Environmental reporting is now well-established within the region's print media, newspapers and magazines. Investigative journalism on environmental issues has resulted in exposing environmentally damaging plans, policies or practices. Newspaper exposures and subsequent public pressure have forced governments, local authorities, industries and others to change their plans, to tighten laws and regulations, and to abandon certain development projects whose environmental and social costs outweighed any benefits The last few years has also seen the rapid expansion in the use of the Internet, with most countries in the region already connected to the global information

superhighway. Cellular phones, faxes, email, electronic networks and cable are also expanding countries' outreach, often at unprecedented growth rates. Producing special publications for children is another important strategy. Many conservation organizations produce material meant for children and young adults.

Mass communication is vital in modern human culture. Various interest groups share information and perspectives to understand one another better. The mass media contribute significantly to global communication. (Dinesh & Sudhashan 2022)

The Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) in India, for instance, has published the science and environment fortnightly *Down to Earth* since 1992 and launched a children's supplement in 1998, called *Gobar Times*. It aims to stimulate young minds to question prevailing development patterns, lifestyles and governance systems. The supplement carries news and views on the environment, science and technology, stories from various traditions including environmental movements and inventions, and highlights of social implications of the issues. It uses comic strips, cartoons, quizzes, essay competitions and interactive pages to engage children's minds. The broadcast media, radio and television, in all their variations A wide range of activist groups and media organizations also produce television and radio programmes on environmental issues, using the media as a means to raise awareness.

Major Constraints and Responses Even though the quantity of environmental coverage in the region's media has continued to increase several constraints and drawbacks remain. Reliable sources of information and having the technical information interpreted by experts. Although identified some time ago, the response to this constraint has been slow. The restriction of access to information by the public and media still prevails in some countries and inhibits open coverage, discussion and debate of issues that are of public interest. In other cases where information is available, journalists lack credible means of interpreting technical issues and explaining them in layman's terms.

The Internet and World Wide Web Recent years have seen the extremely rapid growth and development of the Internet as an information provider. Although the number of websites with a strong environmental content originating from the region is still numerically low, the quality and scope of some of the currently available sites are impressive.

Traditional Media For many years, environmental communicators have recognized the value and power of using folklore and traditional media, such as, dance, songs, drama, puppetry and miming, to take environment and development messages to the public. Historically, traditional or folk media have often played a role in the communication and promotion of new ideas, apart from its traditional role of preserving and teaching established values. Today, in spite of advances in the modern forms of mass media, many people still relate more readily and easily to traditional media, which are closer to their local cultures, and are often more interactive and participatory than the regular forms of mass media. Environmental communication and awareness rising is also taking place through citizen volunteers, through the efforts of the corporate sector, and through law and faith-based approaches. Each of these approaches has wide ranging applications across the region. **Working with the Corporate Sector** Today, environmental communication initiatives often work closely with the corporate sector.

Increasingly, the corporate sector is initiating environmental awareness, communications and education activities on its own, as part of their community outreach or service programmes. In some cases, large corporations underwrite the cost of environmental communications activities initiated by inter-governmental organizations.

Environmental education and the promotion of environmentally friendly life-styles can also be carried out through faith groups. Having found a considerable amount of common ground among all religions

on this subject, it was adopted as a strategy to enlist the support of religious leaders and groups to promote environmental awareness and, in particular, environmentally friendly lifestyles

Summary:

The new millennium, it is clear that a new surge of interest, enthusiasm and activity is underway on many fronts to place environmental education, training and communication higher on the public agenda in countries of the region. The social, economic and cultural barriers placed on them by poverty and underdevelopment, and at the same time face up to the new challenges of economic globalization, the priority assigned to environmental issues and conservation is at risk of being overlooked or traded off for more immediate benefits, and for survival needs. Environmental communication has now emerged as strong complementary practice to environmental education.

In 2020, India passed the National Education Policy (NEP), finally addressing the pressing need for environmental education in schools. Through the policy, the government has successfully incorporated initiatives to ensure that students receive a comprehensive education that increases environmental awareness and encourages practical action. It actively encourages educators to integrate hands-on pedagogy that enables students to actively engage with real-world environmental challenges. The policy enriches school curricula with ecological principles, resource management, and sustainable practices with the aim to equip students with the knowledge and skills to become conscientious guardians of the planet, laying the foundation for an environmentally conscious and sustainable future.

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