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Review Article



Child Prosperity - Towards Sustainability

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ABSTRACT

Children are the treasure of our nation. Their wellbeing is the most important for the growth and sustainability of the country. All of us let be in various profession, we work for the children who are the future. Children suffer in the clutches of poverty, physical abuses, child marriages, and many more if identified. Though they can be classified under the social and psychological causes yet the reasons at the grass root level creating a volatile situation in the childhood requires attention. These could be one of the reasons creating a vacuum to reach the nation's sustainable growth and development. Hence, the article encompasses these variables that determine the stunted growth disabling the prospects of the children.

Keywords: Sustainability, safeguard, protection, rights

1. Introduction

Childhood is a phase in the human life wherein the children are being brought up with love and confidence. Their social and emotional wellbeing depends on the amount of encouragement they receive and how well they are safe and secured. "Childhood means much more than just the space between birth and the attainment of adulthood. It refers to the state and condition of a child's life, to the quality of those years. The Convention is the first international human rights treaty to bring together the universal set of standards concerning children in a unique instrument, and the first to present child rights as a legally binding imperative. The Convention defined childhood as a separate space from adulthood and recognized that what is appropriate for an adult may not be suitable for a child. It called on governments to provide material assistance and support to families and to prevent children from being separated from their parents. The Convention recognized that children are the holders of their own rights and are therefore not passive recipients of charity but empowered actors in their own development."

2. Sustainable Development

We strive for the developments that can be sustained for the future while the challenges faced in the development of the children requires attention. It is known that *sustainable development is the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*. Development becomes meaningful only when there prevails an economic and social progression in the society irrespective of developing or developed. We do have the "Concept of needs" but that actually overrides the actual needs of the people.

India is the second populous country in the world where 13.12 % of the population lies in the age group of 0-6years according to Census 2011. The decline in total child population since Census 2001 stands at 5,030,327

where the decline in rural child population is 8885 which is in contrast to the increase in urban child population reported as 3855ⁱⁱ. This drastic diminish must actually must be a concern for the country.

3. Six Challenges threatening sustainability

An economical or physical sustainability cannot be pursued unless the distribution of costs and benefits are focussed. Social equity among the generations can be attained if the six challenges are addressed.

3.1 Social: Social challenge comprises of the environment wherein the children are brought up, and the environment that transforms their growth, like home, school, peer group, etc. Adequate parenting is necessary to foster a child's growth. Child's emotional and psychological needs are to be met to enable them to understand the good and the bad prevailing in the society. Currently, there are many stumbling issues that spoil this phase of childhood. Schools are the institutions that must focus on the individual growth depending on the mindset of each unique child. Education must provide more moral supplements. Parents must also be the root cause for the overall development of the children.

3.2 Political: Political challenges include the role of the executives in framing the policies. Framing the policies is just not sufficient but their implementation matters. We frame many policies but fail to frame policies based on the following factors:

1. The actual needs
2. Planned timeframe
3. Economical
4. Inducting proper facilitators (administrators) right from the grass root level
5. Necessary upgrading based on five year and financial plans

3.3 Technological: Technology has created a boom and a bang in the world itself. Social media is creating waves everywhere. Children below the age of 6years are becoming gadget freaks such that they are aware of various search engines such as Google, you tube, etc. The children are addicted to a lot of aspects in the media and they are able to gather any kind of information they desire at a faster pace. However, technological development cannot be stopped but can be controlled.

3.4 Poverty: India is a developing nation and anything planned and implemented must be economical. There are a number of destitute and children on the streets. *India accounted for the largest number of people living below international poverty line in 2013, with 30 per cent of its population under the \$1.90-a- day poverty measure, the World Bank said. India accounts for one in three of the poor population worldwide, the world body said in its inaugural edition of the report 'Poverty and Shared Prosperity', according to which extreme poverty worldwide continued to fall despite the global economy's "under-performance"*ⁱⁱⁱ. This has to be addressed in the coming years as it is a threat in the future.

3.5 Developmental Issues: The government is the representative of the people and they work for the development of the people. Major crisis that can have an impact in the country could be health and education. From "Health for All" it has to progress towards "Good health for all". India has inclined in the medical field and has exceptionally good medical doctors for research and cure too but do they extend their hands to the poor and the needy? India is a prey to adulteration. The mortality rate was higher among our ancestors when compared to the youngsters, today. Agricultural sustenance has minimised and many have moved to urban areas for their daily bread.

Education, on the other hand must be given utmost importance. Government promotes the "Sarva Siksha Abhiyan" but do we provide quality education? Policies change off and now with the shift in people's representatives every five years and the schools get its portion of pinch. School drop outs are ample with varied reasons.

3.6 Crimes: If children are not holistically developed they would fall into the so called ditch - crimes. Female infanticide, female foeticide, and the child marriages do happen in the rural areas. Exposure to the network media also plays a vital role in the commission of crimes. Moneyless, family pressure,

are also the factors to be taken into consideration when children voluntarily jump into such crimes. Child trafficking, flesh trade, organ trade and forced prostitution are also the major concerns.

4. Cure For a Sustainable Future

Human Behaviour is a complex aspect but this complexity can be broken if they are brought up in a simple and proper manner right from their childhood.

Children often develop not only physical development but also social, emotional and intellectual development. This is the reason why a balance has to be maintained in the progression of these. Children do experience hardness, pain, happiness, sensation of sound and smell, etc., at this age. Parents are the first teachers of the child and it is necessary that they pay special attention to all these developments. Teachers are the next whom the children follow emotionally but within themselves. So, a maladjusted or a strict and unsympathetic teacher tends to produce bad effects in the minds of the students^{iv}.

Presently, there are many schools sprouting in every nook and corner but many lack quality teachers. Shaping the minds of the children is no easy and it requires a lot of patience and tolerance. The "Sarva Siksha Abhyan" has brought changes in the Government run schools too. The aim of the government is to provide education for all. With respect to that, infrastructure facilities have been advanced too but still there are many school drop outs. The idea of education must reach the children at large. Many drop out from school due to poverty or disinterest but these children are the ones who become criminals in the future. In spite of various missions of education policy, certain appropriate goals of the Education policy^v of 2016 that gain relevancy here are:

1. *To foster quality and relevance of education and raise the credibility of India's education system,*
2. *Improve the employability of the products of school and higher education system, ensure equitable access to education, from early childhood education to tertiary education, including technical and vocational education and training (TVET) as well as lifelong learning opportunities, and ensure that educational opportunities are available to all segments of the society.*
3. *Expand early childhood education services to ensure that all pre-school age children aged 4-5 years attain the learning and developmental readiness required for smooth transition to primary education, with particular attention to children belonging to disadvantaged population groups and achieving universal elementary and secondary education .*
4. *To ensure that all secondary education graduates have access to higher secondary education and all higher secondary education graduates have equitable access to higher education and that all enrolled students are supported to successfully complete their education with all of them achieving expected learning outcomes .*

Education system must not be complicated but must be simple, motivating the intellect of the children through scientific implications, and aid in emotional and social development through inculcating good values and life based skills. Assessments and evaluations are necessary but must be fair. Teachers must bring in professionalism; ensure integration of information and communication technologies, in teaching methods. We reap what we sow.

Political challenges are next in the row to be discussed. There are ample policies that are being framed but policies should be the ones which suffice the actual needs of the citizens. Policy focus should be more in promoting self-employment for the individuals. "Start- up", "Make in India" programmes initiated by the Government are good schemes as they tend to encourage the youth to develop and create their ideas and in turn avoid brain drain. More skill based programmes must develop wherein vocational training must be initiated at a minimum cost or cost-free for the unaffordable ones and encourage them to be self-sustained. By initiating such developments, children would be assured and confident about self-employment in future and dropout rates would diminish. Awareness campaigns on government schemes must reach the people at large.

India is a composition of three sects of the society- Lower Income group, Middle Income Group and Higher Income Group. If the nation focuses on improving the economy of the lower strata of people, one is assured that India is prospering. Why the lower strata of the society? This is because

we are basically marked to suffer under poverty, and so, equitable distribution of wealth is necessary. Demonetisation and cashless society are ways which controls the outflow of black money. Moreover, linking of aadhar cards to the bank accounts are another way to curb the flow of black money in the society. This not only hinders unnecessary flow of money but also pushes the unemployed and the lethargic people to work. Higher income strata of the society on the other hand must adopt villages and find ways and means to provide education and other amenities to people and scholarships for children to learn, must be initiated as a part of corporate social responsibility. Completion of tasks within the time frame is another constraint. Many projects are laid off; some have begun but not progressed owing to improper fund management while some are continually happening without adhering to any stipulated time. Administrative systems at the grass root must also be active. District collectors must take regular but surprise visits to schools to check on the quality of education and the infrastructural facilities. Government provides more amenities but maintenance of the same is a tedious task. So, that must be a concern too.

Technology today has leaped no bounds but proper and safe usage of the same is a matter of concern. Internet is available in our palms in the form of smart phones and so accessibility is higher. Children today however get addicted to the same. A wise usage of the same must be encouraged than misusal. Social media affects the wellbeing of the child in a way where they get fall as a prey to abuses and also get into unwanted trouble. Movies today must also avoid indecent exposures and must be children friendly too. Parents, working or non-working, in this context have an important role to play wherein a constant watch is necessary. Children must know the dos and don'ts and must strictly adhere the same. Crimes today mainly happen due to social media. Child trafficking, forced child prostitution, child abuses, etc., are few to be named dungeons where children fall into unknowingly. It is mandatory that not alone children must be taught of the dangers but also the parents, especially in the rural areas. Situation today is such that people in the rural areas are unaware of perverts, homosexuals existing and young girls bear the brunt of it. Young girls and boys fall a victim to these even in schools and coaching classes too. Awareness is the need of the hour in these areas. Crimes can be surely curbed to a certain extent.

Education and health go hand in hand in policy making. The National Health Policy of 2017 aims to provide *"healthcare in an assured manner to all addressing current and emerging challenges arising from the ever-changing socio-economic, technological and epidemiological scenarios. The policy envisages assured comprehensive primary health care through the 'Health and Wellness Centres" and denotes important change from very selective to comprehensive primary health care package which includes care for non-communicable diseases, mental health, geriatric health care and rehabilitative services. The policy proposes free drugs, free diagnostics and emergency and essential health care services in all public hospitals^{vi}.*

The impact of health on Gross Domestic Product is proposed to be a rise in public health expenditure to 2.5 percent of the GDP which would be met by 2025. The policy also intends to increase life expectancy at birth from 67.5 to 70 by 2025 and reduce infant mortality rate to 28 by 2019. It also aims to reduce under "less than five" mortality to 23 by the year 2025. Hence this health policy would adopt an "assurance-based approach".

Though there prevails a coverage of economic sustainability, socio political sustainability, a new form of sustainability has erupted which is the environmental sustainability. Environmental sustainability refers to; disaster risk reduction, combating climate change and protecting the biodiversity apart from many others. Indeed there is a nexus between children and sustainable development through environmental factors which includes the living conditions such as, polluted air, supply of dirty water, poor sanitation facilities, etc. The government is in the process of curbing open defecation and initiates and offers fund to construct a toilet in every house. It has also introduced the "Swachh Bharat Scheme".

5. Progressive or Regressive Child Sustainability?

Why are we focussing on all these aspects today?

Are the children safe today? We reiterate on the overall development of the children but how are we going to safeguard these children from getting into the clutches of perverts and brutal murderers. UN Convention on Child Rights enshrines every aspect of the rights of the child irrespective of their self-dignity and fulfilment. Article 4 of the UN Convention on rights of children states that *“the governments have a responsibility to take all available measures to make sure children’s rights are respected, protected and fulfilled.”*The child population is in fact diminishing factors being female foeticide, female infanticide, child molestation, rape and killing. *As stated by Agenda 21, the plan of action of the United Nations for organizations of the UN System, Governments, and Major Groups in every area in which human impacts on the environment, ‘youth comprise nearly 30 per cent of the world’s population and their involvement in environment and development decision-making and in the implementation of programmes is critical to the long-term success of Agenda 21 and ultimately in achieving sustainable development^{vii}.*

Conclusion

In a nutshell, it is the need of the hour to protect and provide the children of the future through their rights and framing policies to transform and give them a good sustainable future and frame, implement laws to penalise the offenders who crush the lives of the children. If these volatile situations are taken care of, this would enable India to progress towards a sustainable growth and development. After all, *“a sustainable world means working together to create prosperity for all”*.

Endnotes

ⁱ www.unicef.org

ⁱⁱ www.mospi.nic.in/publication_reports/children_in_india 2012

ⁱⁱⁱ www.worldbank.org, www.data.gov.in

^{iv} Dr. J.S. Walia *“Foundations of Educational Psychology”*, , Ahim Paul Publishers, 2014-15, pp. 25 – 65 Sarmila Banerjee, Anjan Chakrabarti, *“Development and Sustainability – India in a Global Perspective”*, Springer India, 2013, pp. 32-42

^v MHRDNEP AzimPremjiFoundationresponsepdf

^{vi} *“What is National Health Policy 2017: Everything you need to know”*, The Indian Express, March 22, 2017.

^{vii} www.un.org/sustainable-development