

Leadership for Sustainability

Teachers' Day, 05 September 2012

General

I wish to reiterate the **purpose of education** at Indus. We believe that the purpose of education is to prepare a student for a life that is becoming increasingly un-sustainable, and not merely to succeed in examination or prepare for a career. Although success in examination is important, but by itself it does not ensure that a child is prepared to face the challenges of life that lie ahead, or to be happy.

A student cannot be ready to face the challenges that lie ahead unless s/he is an engaged citizen. So, the purpose of education is twofold: preparation for life and being an engaged citizen.

I take this opportunity on Teachers' day to recommend a giant leap forward in our leadership journey – leaders of tomorrow will have to be Green Leaders. Likewise, schools of tomorrow will also have to be Green Schools.

Increasing Threats to a Sustainable Society

Tomorrow is unknown; there is uncertainty, and there is chaos. There is also high-speed rapid change most of us are unable to cope with. Uncertainty, chaos and change are key features of tomorrow characterized by:

Social and economic inequalities arising from globalization and market economy

Complexity because of growing inter-dependence and multi-disciplinary nature of life

Climate change

Poverty and malnutrition. Gender equality and women's empowerment is a precondition for reducing poverty

Conflict: religion, migration, climate change, and rising intolerance

Sharing of scarce resources of the planet in a scenario wherein 6.2 billion people are consuming five planets worth of resources already. North America alone, which constitutes just 5 percent of the world's population, consumes 40 percent of the planet's resources. It is, therefore, unthinkable what will happen by 2030 when the world's population will be above 8 billion?

Spiritual emptiness

Of all the threats I have described, there is one threat that has already arrived at our doorstep and we are doing nothing, absolutely nothing about it. I will label it as the gravest danger to humanity, the threat of **sustainability**.

Challenges in Education for Sustainable Development

We need **Green Leaders and Green Schools**.

The concept of sustainable development was popularized at the Earth Summit in 1992. One decade later, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a consensus resolution on 20 December 2002, to establish a UN **Decade of Education for Sustainable Development** or ESD. The primary objective of this resolution was to promote education as the basis of sustainable development by 2014. Undeniably, education will always remain the golden key for change and reform.

India's educational **leadership in schools, colleges and universities are not sensitized or unduly concerned about the challenge the planet is facing**. How many of us are even remotely aware of the provisions and educational strategies for the **Decade of Education for Sustainable Development**? I do not see any concrete evidence in this regard. For the very few who do know, I would like to know what concrete steps have they taken to ensure that the United Nations' sustainability goals are being achieved? How are the outcomes being measured?

The **Indian system does not prepare students to cope with the challenges of sustainability**. Even most international schools do not do so. Our education system is based on rote-memorization, and aims at preparing students for success in examinations for specific careers. Whole-education and sustainability just do not feature in their scheme of things even in most international schools. So, on what basis can we say we are engaged citizens?

Themes like poverty, peace, democracy, human rights, human security, gender equity, natural resource management, and consumption patterns, are taught skin-deep only in specific subjects like social science and geography. For example, a student in the science stream will not study any of these topics. Further, the method of teaching is very theoretical and not experiential, and lacks relevance and sensitivity.

Having examined all the major school curriculums in India – the International Baccalaureate, CBSE, ICSE, IGCSE, it is regrettable that they have largely failed to address the vital subject of sustainability. Until sustainability becomes a major curriculum issue in schools, the objective of the UN General Assembly will never be achieved.

Even the **International Baccalaureate**, the world's only true international curriculum, is evasive and a clear defaulter. In the Diploma Programme, students are expected to write a 4000 word extended essay and a 2500 words paper on the Theory of Knowledge. Most of the topics I have seen are abstract with no relevance to either the present or the future, and do not address topics connected with sustainability.

An Agenda for Sustainable Leadership

The Sustainable School Model

The foundation of a Sustainable School should be based on three strong pillars. This is shown schematically.

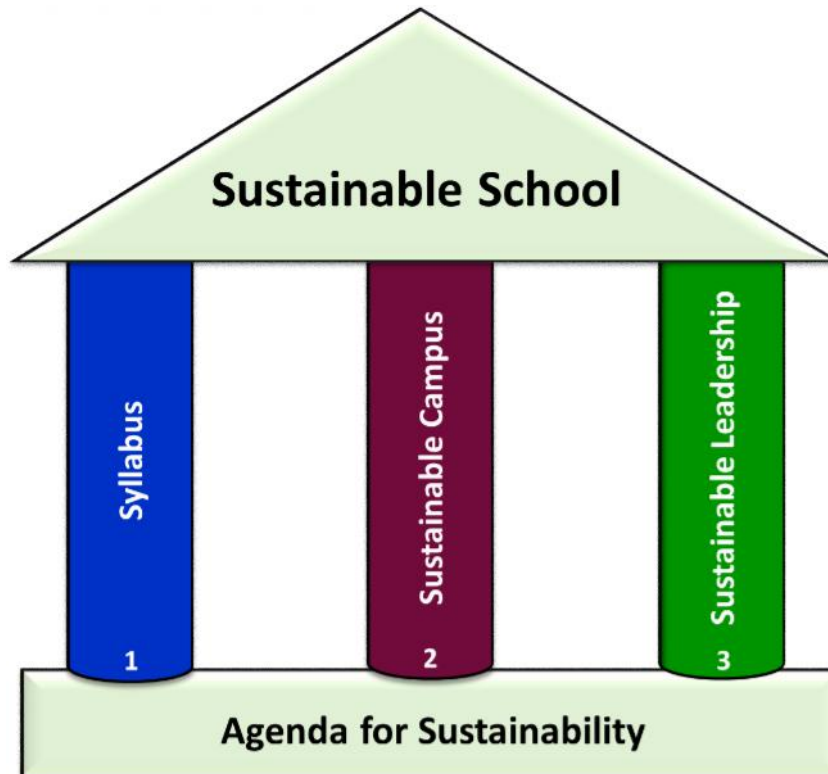


Figure 1: The Sustainable School Model for an International School

The first pillar for sustainability is **syllabus**, and is best taught as under:

- As a **stand-alone age-appropriate multidiscipline subject** from K to 12, namely, sustainability should be a compulsory subject like English, Mathematics, and Physics.
- Alternatively, sustainability topics can be **taught in an integrated manner** within each subject. This is extremely difficult for an average teacher to deliver in the classroom; and let us not forget that schools comprise of average teachers.
- To ease out the problem of time, I suggest that the syllabus be more experiential than theoretical with a weightage of **30 theory and 70 practical**.

- The **International Baccalaureate** extended essays and Theory of Knowledge should have a heavy component of topics related to sustainability.

The second pillar for sustainability is to practise what we preach; only then will children learn and take us seriously. We must transform the school into a **Sustainable School**. Only then will sensitization take place, because for durability, sustainability must be experiential. Or else, the student's transformation will never happen. Students and teachers should be involved in the following school-related projects and activities:

- Reduce the present carbon footprint because of greenhouse gas emissions in school.
- Reduce use of electricity and water usage.
- Reduce waste food, paper, and packaging by re-using, re-cycling, and reducing photocopying.
- Reduce purchasing of text books, worksheets, and paper by reading documents digitally.
- Engage with bio-diversity. I would like to see the entire campus transformed into a bio-diversity park.
- Community projects should preferably aim at those aspects that improve sustainability.

The third pillar for sustainability is to create teachers and students as **Sustainable Leaders** as part of our leadership syllabus. From a leadership perspective I would like all Indus schools, including the Community School and IELCs, to become **Sustainable Schools by 15 August 2015**. I request the Principal to work out a three-year plan accordingly, and make recommendations on syllabus, on making the schools sustainable, and leadership training for teachers and students.

Conclusion

There are many definitions of sustainable development, but the one that is simple and expressive is how **Brundtland** described it as:

“... development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations.”

This will only be possible if leadership and school curriculum is based on the following formula: **3 Rs + 5 Cs + S**.

Education has immense power to save the world, only if education is given a human face. I have no doubts that given our **quality of leadership**, we will bequeath a better future to our children. We have another advantage; the overwhelming **majority of teachers are women**. Their innate strengths enable sustainability: empathy, nurturing and caring, abhorrence of violence, ability to prevent conflict, and a better understanding of conservation. Emerson once said that, "*Women are the best index of the coming hour.*"