

Environmental Education

Md. Meftaur Rahman

IT is now widely thought that, a good environment is good economics. For development, it is essential to protect as well as improve the environment. Good environmental management is essential to ensure sustainable development.

Sustainable development means growth with the rational, non-wasteful and sustainable uses of natural resources. An appropriate environmental management is achieved when resources are used efficiently. Inappropriate environmental management adversely affects the quality of the environment and its functions as resource supplier and life-support system. With a view to attain better resource management and sustainable development various mechanisms have been applied. Environmental education (EE) is one of the mechanisms.

Development of EE: EE is a recent phenomena. It has evolved gradually since the Stockholm conference on Human Environment (1972) which for the first time highlighted the degradation of world environment as well as stressed the need of EE as a mechanism for better environmental management.

The first International Conference on EE was held in Belgrade in 1975 which provided a framework for detailing objectives and guiding principles of EE. The next inter-governmental conference was held in Tbilisi of Georgia in October 1977, which recommended measures relating to promote EE. After this conference, a regional workshop on EE was held in Bangkok in September 1980 which made specific recommendations for implementing EE programmes in the Asian region.

In August 1987, the UNESCO-UNEP international congress on EE and Training was held in Moscow, Russia. An important aspect of this congress was outlining an international strategy for action in the field of EE & Training for the 1990's.

The government of Bangladesh recognised the crucial role of environmental education in environmental management. The country's first education commission led by Dr Quadrat-i-Khuda was set up in 1973. The commission recommended setting up a national curriculum and text book committee with a view to introducing a new syllabus. In line with the commission's recommendation the committee introduced environmental studies at the primary and junior secondary level. With this, environmental related courses are also being offered at the graduate and post graduate levels at the University of Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi, private universities, BUET and the four BITs. A number of ministries and organisations in the country are also providing environmental engineering education and training. For example, the Ministry of Education is responsible for the education and training of professional environmental engineers and tech-

nologists.

It is interesting to note that though the concern for environmental protection has been expressed in the country's development plans, promotion of EE has received little importance in the country's fourth five year plan. EE is defined neither in the fourth five year plan nor in the basic educational laws or environmental policies. No special section was reserved for EE in the country's development plans, including the fourth five year plan as well as the country's environmental policies of 1986 and 1992 respectively.

To know EE, first it is essential to define the term Environment. Jose de Castro (1974) defined environment as a system of mutual relations between living creatures and their natural environment. The US Environmental Pollution Panel defined it as: the sum of all social, biological and physical or chemical factors which compose the surroundings of men. Environment can be broadly classified into two — natural environment and built environment. The first includes the flora and fauna, soil, air, water, rocks etc and the second is related to settlements in which human activities are concentrated. EE means education for the environmental concern which is directed towards environmental protection and improvement. By EE we mean: education of the people of our country about environmental problems/issues.

The aim of EE is to raise the consciousness of the people about environment and its problems and to provide knowledge, skills and trained manpower to deal with environmental issues. It also deals with the problems of management, conservation and preservation of natural resources.

Environment, People, Education linkages: Environment, people and education are interlinked. People are not only the consumers of environment but also the bearers of adverse impacts of environment mostly created by human activities. On the other hand they also play an influential role as environment carers/savers and environment educators for society. So people are the central to EE.

Over 120 million people live in Bangladesh. Most of them are illiterate and are consequently not aware of the adverse consequences of degradation which mainly occur because of their activities. This environmental degradation can be reduced with the education of people about environment. Without this Bangladesh can never be able to solve its environmental problem in order to implement its sustainable development strategy.

Now, development is often defined as development of, by and for the people. Therefore, it is the people who have to be motivated to take active part in improving their own environment, which is crucial for

sustainable development. It is seen that a country's economy can only survive and be sustainable when it is environmentally sound/friendly. An environmentally friendly and responsible development would suggest uses of natural resources in a sustainable way and protection of the environment by avoiding quick and accelerated gains in the short run which depletes the resource use beyond operation.

Importance of EE: EE can change people's misconception and change people's attitude which often have a negative impact on the environment. That is, EE can change what people know and think about environment. People may think that nobody plants tree. They grow naturally. EE is a means which enables people to attain a degree of control over some aspects of their environment and over the environmental factors which affect their lives.

EE helps create experienced, well-educated people and experts to evaluate environmental impacts. This helps in the development of systems most suited to environmental issues. In the case of industry, environmental consciousness not only helps the modern industrial manager to play an important role in industrial development and making profit by learning environmental management techniques such as non-waste technology, environmental impact assess-

ment and participatory planning etc. EE can strengthen the management's capability of people and organisations in order to respond adequately to the critical deterioration of environments both in rural and urban areas. Besides these, EE— a) enhances public knowledge in environmental legislation. b) Improves natural resource management for sustainable development by enhancing better understanding of natural resource loss, wastage and needed responses. c) Eliminates shortage of environmental personnel which improves management of environmental programmes and agencies. d) Raises awareness about recycling of wastes and ecological restoration of mangrove sites. e) Increases citizens capability to understand the role of properly managed environment in economic development. f) Motivates people to participate in development programmes in efficient and profitable ways. g) Above all, it not only helps development of the environment but also contributes significantly in the alleviation of poverty through reducing misuse of natural resources.

EE is therefore the key to environmental protection and natural resource management. In other words it is the most important long-term strategy to bring about the sustainable use of natural resources in Bangladesh.