

Environment Education And Economic Growth

That the environment can be both friend and foe is not readily comprehended even by the educated. Yet the environment holds the key to our survival. Fortunately in recent years there has been a growing awareness by people and governments that the relationship between the environment and the economy is important and is a precondition for sustainable development. This means that the environment must be protected but how to go about this is not always clear as this is by no means easy in a country where people, especially women are largely illiterate. Women are by tradition, the protectors of the environment which means that for any programme to be successful, it must include women.

Studies have demonstrated that the higher the standard of education of a mother, the greater her influence over her children's development and understanding of the environment so obviously we must build on this. Therefore the need for imparting education on the environment to all is transparently clear, but where to begin this process may not always be so clear. Of course many countries today include environment education in the school curriculum as a separate compulsory subject but in the case of Bangladesh this is not so, for environment is taught only as part of other subjects. It is therefore essential to streamline this by upgrading the school curriculum to include environmental studies as a separate subject.

Although this is essentially the responsibility of the government, who must provide the primers, teachers, guides and training programmes for both the formal and informal systems of education, it is also the responsibility of every citizen to advocate for its inclusion in the school curriculums. After all, Bangladesh is committed to attaining sustainable development, which by definition means the long-term management of natural resources, so that we get the best out without destroying them in the bargain.

To achieve this, an increased understanding of the environment and how it affects our lives is essential which means promoting environment education at all levels. But with environment education relatively new, its importance is not always fully comprehended, even by governments.

The Stockholm Conference on Human Environment (1972) highlighted what degradation of the world environment is doing. Although this conference was followed by others including workshops, and congresses it was not until 1987 that an international strategy for action in the field of environment education for the 1990s was outlined at the Moscow Congress.

Environment education contributes significantly to changing attitudes that have a negative impact on the environment. In theory environment education at higher levels of education creates a pool of experts among the better-educated. This can operate as a brain bank for evaluating environmental hazards and their impacts which in the case of industry helps managers to learn environmental management techniques such as non-waste technology, environmental impact assessment and participatory planning etc. All these are no doubt very important but the most important aspect of environment education is in enhancing public knowledge. If environment education enhances the capacity of the public to play a role in a managed environment, then we can expect a more sustainable development, according to a recent study by the World Bank. It is not practical to implement such programmes everywhere and there are many specific problems in different countries.

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