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LIVING SUSTAINABLY FOR A BETTER FUTURE

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ABSTRACT

One often attributes sustainable development as a responsibility or a goal set by the government or the state for the better future of its citizens. Whether at the global front or in the home ground, there is a long list of plans and policies that highlight the need for achieving sustainable goals. In the present times, some of these challenges posed by the modern world have created a divided society caught between pleasure and justful existence. This division is not about caste, race or religion. It is about the role played by individuals and families in creating sustainable future for their children. Can one really deny how these same citizens with their ever-increasing aspirations for better lifestyles often behave irresponsibly. Every individual with their highly demanding resource and other needs have forgotten their own role in their sustainable future. The youth is constantly struggling to look for the right direction so that they remain happy and contended. In pursuit of this happiness, they are easily misled into big income, unsustainable means to attain them and consumerist lifestyle. While the society is ridiculously entangled in debates that are mindless and does not benefit in any manner, the world is continuously getting complex amid its changing environment. They have become pawns for polity, industry and other interest groups. The industrial lifestyle only brings more distractions and does not meaningfully address the stressful life of these individuals who are continuously trying to keep up with the modernised upbringing. No one teaches them the real value of their actions and to owe up their responsibility for a secured future. This paper reflects on the need for creating self-awareness about living sustainably, a social experiment and awakening amongst the youth

INTRODUCTION

The biggest crisis today is not just an unsustainable environment but the unsustainable behaviour of the people. Most regions and countries today are concerned with their deteriorating environment and are trying to resolve ever-increasing problems related to it yet the netizens are still in deep slumber and continue to demand for an affluent lifestyle. It is highly unreasonable and least to say an unrealistic goal. Every year developing economies like India, are enhancing their ecological footprints and thus facing multitudes of difficulties that seems to shorten the lifespan of both nature and people. In fact, modern medicines have helped in increasing life expectancy but at the cost of the physical quality of life. Community is drifting away from this harsh reality despite being more aware and educated than before. Although one appreciates the various global level movements related to climate change and other grave issues, yet locally it has not made enough impact in the lives of the common masses who cannot associate it with their future worries. The youth is often confused whether to choose a high paying job accompanied by lifestyle changes or follow a simple living and nature loving economy that may be more sustainable in future. The community or civil society needs to ponder and debate on these issues and create an environment for academic and practical understanding of the future problems. Forget about the sustainability of the future generations, the

present generation will be highly impacted in their lifetime too. In a globalised world, every action somewhere has an unparalleled reaction elsewhere. Even today, capitalistic lifestyles have great influences on the minds of young and adult population. Thus, environmental disturbances and global ecological imbalances are leading to societal collapses. In such an interconnected world, there is a need for measuring each one's sustainability thresholds. The young population has the strength to both destroy the societal fabric as well as bring meaningful interventions. Keeping this in mind the youth can be mobilised to create a world that is just and workable. This paper emphasises on the need to involve the young population to act as mediators for social and behavioural change. The focus was to initiate a *green campus movement* by sensitising the youth to act and live responsibly. Taking this as an opportunity to undertake a social experiment, a clearcut strategy was worked out with the help of team of student volunteers. The volunteering team was asked by the researcher to devise a plan that required them to evaluate their local footprints. The controlled group was assisted with tools for conducting this social experiment by the researcher. Constant interaction and assistance were provided to assess their progress and helping in documenting the issues. At the end of the programme, they were asked to submit their self-assessment proforma. The researcher also helped the team to prepare a set of best practices that can be followed and replicated by others. Presently the team has been asked to use these same experiments at their local and neighbourhood level with their peer groups so that it prepares a ground for a green campus

movement at a later stage. These recommendations can be submitted to higher authorities in the second phase of the experiment for motivating everyone to join this green movement with modifications from the researcher wherever needed. The team would be asked to conduct workshops with other student-based community members for dissemination and outreach activities. In a relay of events these will be conveyed to them as a medium for community enrichment activity within the Delhi University North Campus.

IDENTIFYING THE EMERGING PROBLEMS

On the basis of a rigorous feedback system a set of problems associated with unsustainable behaviour was identified. The core group was also shown documentaries, ted talks and literature to make them aware of many of the hidden issues. All these issues were highlighted on the basis of the likely negative impacts on the ecological and socio-economic system in the neighbourhood and an equally significant rippling effect in larger milieus over time. Following issues were identified based on the knowledge and awareness of the core team, and through counselling provided by the researcher.

a) ***Energy Audit-*** It has been commonly observed that most people in the urban settings have high energy intensive habits. Most of the behaviours that has been inculcated since early childhood are unsustainable with unlimited use of energy. The modern gadgets although claiming to be energy efficient by the industry also make people dependent on such items for everyday comfort. Whether it is air conditioner or other appliances, everyday comfort cannot be compromised. Today the number of per capita private mode of transportation is also increasing in every household which is dependent on fossil fuels. The family energy audit showed increasing consumption in almost all households.

b) ***Unsustainable Use of Consumer Products-*** The path of affluenza is not only observed in rich households but the middle-class population are one of the biggest consumers of industrial products. Besides energy, demands for most goods are increasing in an unrestricted manner. Houses today are almost like a retail display unit with multiple consumer products half of which are not even used on an everyday basis. There is no full stop to such ever-growing demands and supply. If one starts questioning and differentiating the needs from wants, there is a huge gap. Along with high consumption, the use and throw technology has increased the number of wastes of all kinds. The stock of wasteful resources that is generated due to such usage is overwhelming. Also there is no suitable disposal mechanism in place.

c) ***Increasing Personal/Family Expenses-*** Individual and family expenses have increased manyfold times due to multiplied desires. The present generation also end up saving less compared to their parent's generation which is a compromise to their future securities. As seen from the globalised downturns there may be many recessions and job insecurities in future clubbed with economic crisis both due to unsustainable practices and eco-political instabilities. In a joint family system, there were more judicial use of resources. Individualistic expenditure was low and the family support was a key to sustainability. However, the present generation is drifting away from the values set by its predecessors.

d) ***Difficulty in Sustaining Good and Healthy Practices-*** Industrial food has created an unhealthy life. As a result, lifestyle diseases like obesity, diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular diseases and even cancer has become very common. The health costs have phenomenally gone up and taking a toll on the health of the netizens. No doubt, the life expectancy is also increasing due to modern medicines, yet there is compromise to the health situation in the urban spaces. Rural population is also catching up and loosing on its healthy lifestyle. During the Covid period many of the untimely deaths were due to lowered immunity and co morbidities.

e) ***Social and Behavioural Subversions-*** It is just not about unhealthy food and accumulation of loads of consumeristic products; it is also about a behavioural change that is fast catching up especially among youth. Fashion, glamour and in order to look cool, youth today is severely affected becoming unsatisfied maniacs. This lifestyle change is driving them to a point of frustration which is also affecting their mental health. They are confused and easily misled into wrong doings which may involve subjecting themselves to different types of abuses.

f) ***Local Ecological Footprint-*** With the help of ecological footprint calculator, every member was asked to calculate their local footprints. This helps in social awakening and self-consciousness about their lifestyle. It is often pointed out that what gets measured will finally be managed. It is also an indicator of their life being determined by meaningless goals that may be unmanageable both with respect to sustainability and satiability.

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GOOD LIVING AND EXTRAVAGANT LIFESTYLE: A SOCIAL AWAKENING

The biggest drawback of public acceptance of such view is to first differentiate between good living from extravagant lifestyle. Although the team agreed that there is a cause for worry and concern but serious disagreements arose when it came to individual threats to the type of lifestyles they were used to. Another round of discussions was held to apprise them about the role of influencers which causes an uproar in the unsustainable behaviour of the present generation. Most of them are artificial demands due to aggressive marketing and advertising which is increasing the footprint of a common person even in developing economies. India is fast catching up with the west as their percapita desires are geometrically swelling. India has become one of the biggest markets for not only the domestic products but also international buying has risen substantially. Although one really understands that more buying means more outbursts of industry, wholesale and retail businesses; yet mindless expenditure of resources is not reasonable. The linear growth that emerged from the western models can never be sustainable. India always thrived on circular economies which still works for many in most parts of the country even in present times. Indian family system too valued on sustainable living.

The big industry of the west due to their vested interest have been trying to lure developing economies into buying and disposing more. Whether it is the food industry or other consumer products, it only looked for short to medium term profit without realising the long-term interest of the planet. Despite global realisation of these issues since the early 1990's it is still a far-fetched goal to instil a sense of sustainable approach among most people. The comparative advantage in trade suited the industry more than the country in question. *Self-sufficiency was not an accepted norm anymore* in the globalised and capitalised world. This destroyed the local industry and the whole world started to move towards cultural homogenisation with respect to production, demand and longings. Even small kids and infants are lured into it through strategic marketing system. According to Samuel Alexander, Capitalism is not in crisis, it is the crisis.

TYPE OF COMMUNITY BASED SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES

The first and foremost concern should be to raise a question about how much is sustainable and who decides it?

Till the time one starts defining the thresholds of how much one can take from nature, the crisis shall remain. At the present pace at which growth continues, inspiring this generation to live sustainably may take umpteen years. Thus, one needs radical changes to create a *de growth movement* at the earliest. But will it be acceptable?

Based on the feedbacks from the core group, it was realised that most urban dwellers demonstrate certain common traits — *there is awareness but not consciousness; there is information but no implementation; and there is expectation from the political system but no willingness to change their own behaviour.* And the more elitist ones are even more slipshod. To start with, internalising a systematic change within the student community, certain processes were catalyst in starting this drive.

a) *Self-reflection*- The first step was to acknowledge the problem and understand one's role in the increasing footprint

b) *Mapping Wastefulness*- Mapping and tracking all the activities which can generate wastes will help in bringing sustainable behaviour.

c) *Calculating Socio-economic and Health Impacts*- Since the society is already aware of the impacts of each and every activity from production stage to consumption and finally disposal, it was good measure to define where we had gone wrong

d) *Perception of the Future*: A Reality Check- Does the future seems to be bright due to high scientific achievements or doomed with despair and irreversible ecological circumstances beyond repair. It was understood to be a wake-up call for the youth.

e) *Innovate and Apply the Best Practices*- They were asked to come up with innovative solutions. This can have a dual effect of ownership and responsibility along with multitude ideas about real-world problem-solving decisions.

f) *Community Outreach*- Finally, the real success could be measured from its outreach among their peers, and be local ambassadors of change. Further scaffolding can bridge the gap between the easier solutions and those that had more resistance to change.

APPLYING THE BEST PRACTICES

Out of a long list, certain best practices were chosen which can positively affect their own choices that are sustainable and this sustainable behaviour can also bring wider policy changes in future. It would be the right time to move away from materialised society and bring in many of the best practices from the past. Since India still lives in two segments of dualistic lifestyle between rural and urban, poor and rich, old and young among its heterogenous cultural identities, it can easily leapfrog into the transition movement. The 1972 Limits to growth have to be revisited with focus on energy descent and building greater resilience among humanity. Some of these easy to adopt sustainable methods can be followed in the campus on a regular basis. Students and staff can be educated and trained on these aspects:

i) *Define your Needs*- Before any good practice is applied it is important first to acknowledge it and then gradually bring a shift in the lifestyle. By reducing one's wants and applying conscious buying one can achieve a lot. Lifestyle changes are often very slow and at times difficult to achieve. One needs to set small targets and create a log book of the achievements. This can be shared among peers to learn from each other so that adopting to such change also becomes easier (as it becomes a common norm).

ii) *Applying design principles*- It involves an overall adaptation towards regenerative lifestyle. It applies to food, fuel and fashion becoming a part of new and modern thinking. It talks about improving the soil, enhance the quality of food and increasing biodiversity along with means to save resource use and process of giving back to nature. One has to understand the complex web of life and respect all creatures and elements of nature and contribute to its health and not burden it with problems. Converting trash into treasure is one such buzzword in recent times, yet no substantial achievements have been made that counts for, in our ecosystems.

iii) *Energy and Water Budget*- Most of the understanding about the dilemma related to these resources should come from preparing a descent budget related to energy and water use. Urban India contributes to such a large extent to wastefulness and negligence of these precious resources. It should be mandatory exercise in the college and University campus to have energy checks and also impart training for the same. Rain water harvesting must be the most mandated list of activity. During each monsoon, huge amount of water gets wasted and also create problem of water logging in the area. It can have positive outcome in saving water for dry season and at the same time minimise the danger of flooding as well as diseases that usually occur as an aftermath of such recurring incidents.

iv) *Recycling and Upscaling*- Indian way of life was always about conserving nature and follow a circular economic model. It emphasises on no wastage and recycling of products whenever possible. The community members can be taught to reduce their wastes and also use and make items that can recycled or upcycled. Also avoid disposable items that may be harmful to the health as well as to the environment. Based on some of the daily and frequently needed items they can recycle old clothes into designer bags, paper recycling from paper waste, also using one sided discarded printed paper into writing pads, create variety of gift-wrapping items, reuse old posters to recreate new ones, and many others. The focus should be on use of eco-friendly material. Another innovative idea is to create a library for each product that can be shared. It may include not only old books but fashion items too. They can start donating to this library which may be picked up by another person. Some of the faculty members in the geography department had already shared apparels and books with each other.

v) *From Growing Gardens to Food*- With increasing burden on limited land and relatively dwindling farmer population it is advised to grow organic food wherever possible. Each and every open space can be used in such manner, a practice learnt from Cuba. Instead of artificial gardens use the open spaces for growing vegetables and fruits. This will not only help in getting natural material free of chemicals but also reduce pressure on our rural hinterlands. The emphasis should be on growing perennials rather than just seasonal crops due to its longer shelf life and better resistance.

vi) *Promote Healthy Lifestyle for Healthy Mind and Body*- Everyone needs clean air, water and healthy food to survive. Lifestyle diseases are reaching epidemic levels. The youth who are very easily lured into wrong eating habits have to be positively engaged in discussions related to health and fitness. Just hitting the gym is not the solution but healthy food habits have to be inculcated. One must also promote yoga and ayurvedic way of life. This will reduce the disease burden and the health cost of each individual. Also, efforts have to be made to educate the small kids too who may be in kinder garden but make consumeristic choices.

vii) *Learning skills*- Skill development should be promoted as much as possible. Just having theoretical knowledge is not enough. Skills like composting, growing food, cooking, first aid, rescue training and recycling may be some of them. A list of such activities has to be prepared and provisions for training has to be made from time to time. Some of these practical training can also be used as credit-based learning for fulfilling academic requirements.

viii) *Resource Management and Understanding Fragility*-Studying about resources and understanding their values are equally important. Right from our households to community to large scale economies, resources have to be very cautiously used. Also, the lack of knowledge to understand the repercussion of over use as well as misuse can have severe impact on our sustainability. The fragility related to resource acquisition to resource use have to be spelt out and alternatives have to be thought about. But blindly relying on alternatives that have not been time tested can be foolhardy decisions. Thus, subject of resource management may need more in-depth study.

ix) *Adaptation Amid Crisis*- The present generation of people are subject to variety of crisis at local and global level. It is affecting their health, livelihood and mental peace. Our ancestors had great capacity for adjustment that led to long term adaptation. With enhanced degradation, pollution and food insecurities especially in urban settings, the community must learn to adapt otherwise future survival may be hugely threatened.

x) *Risk Management*- The college students are already working on risk awareness and sensitising and preparing the community about Disaster Risk Reduction. It has been almost ten years in this direction. They have also made Disaster Management Plan for the college. These initiatives have already been shared with the

college and expert opinions have been sought from Disaster Management Agencies. Some work has also been done at the neighbourhood level for raising awareness as part of the college cluster initiatives supported by Special Centre for Disaster Management, Jawahar Lal University.

xi) *Saving for Future*- Although our country is doing quite well economically yet preparing for economic uncertainties are an important step towards resilience. The students should be taught micro economics and also encouraged to have more saving over expenditures. In such a large country providing social security to everyone may not be feasible and thus it is important to save for future.

xii) *Community Learning/Experience Sharing*- Like individual logbooks or report cards, each institute can be asked as to prepare the best tool that can used to mitigate many of the problems. It can be a part of the experiential learning process that strengthen their commitments. A discussion on indigenous practices of different regions can also be shared with the peers who can benefit from the multi-cultural background of the students. An ethno-ecological approach can enhance their learning capabilities. The students can actively engage the entire community through their outreach abilities both physically and through social media platforms. Dissemination programmes can be designed and in campus activities like workshops, focus group discussions, poster making competitions, documentaries and street plays can upsurge their reach.

CONCLUSION

This programme can have a high success rate if awareness is raised in terms of appreciating the value of sustainability. Although only partial responses are recorded with respect to real-life practices, as it is very difficult to bring a positive change when it comes to their own lives. Yet it is achievable. This would need radical interventions by the controlled group before it can be applied in the campus as a green social movement. Peer learning and appreciating intercultural practices in college can be a community learning process. They can influence the youth by experience sharing among their peer groups. The vision should be to move towards a dematerialised society in the next few years before we start rejecting the usefulness of the objectives of Sustainable Development Goals.

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