

## **Promoting Dialogue for Sustainable Development on a Planet of Finite Resources**

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### **Introduction**

Increasing studies and research point out that the present form of industrialization, economy and consumption patterns will not be able to sustain the future of humanity for a long time. The increasing natural hazards and inequality between the rich and poor indicate that the world requires a new paradigm or an utopia to sustain itself for the future. Several world Organizations and Religious Leaders have raised their concern on the importance of "Sustainable Development".

According to the World Commission on Environment and Development (1987), sustainable development is a people centred development process that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Consequently, the concepts, "environmental sustainability" cannot be reduced as self-styled philosophy or recent trendy notions, but as a logical solution to the evil problem industrialisation brought, namely environmental pollution, housing problems, child labour, and poor working conditions, to name a few. To save the world, we need a multilateral dialogue with many stockholders who are the decision makers of the development projects in the world today.

In this short paper, we propose to analyse the existing development model which excludes a lot of simple people. If we want to promote a sustainable model of development, it requires new vision or utopia which translates into the education policies which are inclusive rather than exclusive.

## **Awareness of the Problem**

The processes of globalization reveal the unprecedented integration of the world, having economic, social, political, cultural, religious and legal dimensions, all interlinked in a complex fashion. Though, globalization induced development, wherein the majority is excluded from the development orbit. This is not merely a contradiction between ‘modernity’ and ‘backwardness’ but a documentation of the innumerable lived experiences that reflect heightening inequalities where new economic spaces such as agricultural areas, forest lands, mining areas, fishing zones, peripheries of metropolitan regions, villages are being ravaged to carry out modern, hi-tech corporatized activities.

Globalization process is also intimately linked to economic processes. With advent of globalization, capital has increasingly moved from state control to that of market forces. The State has backtracked from its assumed role of being an agency of development to becoming a vociferous facilitator of private global capital.

The liberalization of the economy, growing needs of infrastructure in fast-growing cities and new partnerships in industrial/economic sectors have threatened traditional sources of sustenance of people. More and more agricultural lands are being displaced for setting up industrial/infrastructure projects. The situation is aggravated due to major conversion of agricultural lands voluntarily or involuntarily into urban lands. All this has unleashed a situation where more and more people are being displaced from their communities and traditional ways of life. This acquisition of productive land by corporate and government has been called as “the biggest land grab since Columbus”, in the controversial draft report of the Ministry of Rural Development.<sup>1</sup>

The rapid economic growth encouraged by globalization causing an acute ecological crisis and believes that capitalist firms have to continue to generate profit through a combination of continuous intensification of

exploitation and sale to newer markets. Capitalism, cannot overcome the dangers posed by the reckless behaviour as it is based on short-term rationality. It therefore reinforces the hierarchical monopolies of already developed countries. This endless drive to further and further accumulate capital makes capitalism also “eco-destructive”. The crisis inevitably emerges as production is never geared to satisfy need, but rather to produce profit. This means that capitalism, to exist, must grow indefinitely - an impossibility on a planet of finite resources.

The life threatening and the on-going Covid 19 epidemic has demonstrated the vulnerability of the present model of development. The migrant crisis and the subsequent sufferings of millions of people in India and around the world is an indication of the unjust world. There is a systematic bias against the marginalized. It has created a world of “we” and “them”. In spite of the all media abuzz with the images of the suffering of migrant workers, there was no public outcry over this human tragedy and the victims themselves chose to mostly suffer in silence. Not just migrants, minorities too have been subjected to the untold misery of being excluded from the idea of the public. And more routinely, women, rural poor, Dalits and Adivasis have been objects of humiliation. This trend is increasing in the present predicaments of the world.

Hence, we need a new vision of development, a new vision of land and people and education.

### **Sustainable Development on a Planet of Finite Resources**

There are only limited resources on the earth. Since most of the resources are finite, we cannot imagine a vision of unlimited growth. The more we exploit the natural resources the more we destroy the ecological balance of the earth, which will affect the long-term sustainability of this earth and human life. The Encyclical Letter of Pope Francis, “Laudato Si” (“Praise be to you”), also reiterates similar sentiments, “Caring for ecosystems demands far-sightedness, since no one looking for quick

and easy profit is truly interested in their preservation. But the cost of the damage caused by such selfish lack of concern is much greater than the economic benefits to be obtained.”<sup>2</sup>

Many other indicators of the health of the earth point out that the natural world is being degraded “at a rate unprecedented in human history”. Resources are being consumed faster than the planet can replace them. The greatest challenge will be to meet the threat posed by the shortage of water. Experts predict that half the world’s population will be affected by water shortage in just 20 years. Already 2.8 billion people live in areas of high-water stress.

In this context, taking necessary policy steps towards sustainable development is very vital for the survival of the human race. Now we know that items produced from fossil fuels, plastics, crude oil, coal natural gas cannot be renewed or there is no mechanism exists to replenish them. Hence, all our development planning has to be linked to harnessing renewable energy such as wind power and solar power.

### **A New Vision of Education to Meet the Challenge**

The challenge of facing the future is great. The educational policies should be tuned to meet this challenge. Today’s education should equip the students to understand the push and pull of the emerging world. The students should be made aware of the processes and consequences of the processes of globalization.

Globalization today has to be seen in terms of the unprecedented mobility of Capital associated with communication revolution and financial deregulation, increased labour migration, and transformed national and local States responding more to the priorities of the market. Systems of production that were previously local and territorialised have become increasingly dislocated from the national context resulting in larger economic restructuring of scale hierarchies. Destroying the previous social relations, the above reorganization is seen building newer socio-economic

and cultural landscapes in its own image for the purpose of a newer kind of capital accumulation.

The displacement of people is an important attribute and consequence of globalization. Most of the globalization driven projects affect the lives of people in two ways – by directly appropriating the land, water and forests on which they are dependent or by polluting these resources of nature in a manner that their capacity to generate livelihoods is diminished or exhausted.

So, preventing impoverishment must be the central issue of education policy today. The future of sustainable human development will depend up on reducing the gap between the rich and poor, the privileged and the underprivileged. This means, the educational policy should be to provide cultural and social analysis from the very young age of education. The educational policy should be aimed at people-centric-development wherein development should not be defined in terms of accumulation of capital but of sustainable environment.

The development debate in the context of globalization is related to safeguarding environment and sustainability of resources. All our educational programmes should concentrate on this. Our education should promote people-centric-development. In the present world of liberalisation, modernization, and globalization, the indigenous people are becoming victims in the name of development. Hugh Brody, in his foreword to the book “*Sacrificing People*” by Felix Padel, writes: “the sacrifice to development is a human sacrifice. The Adivasi peoples of India, who, despite special recognition in the Indian Constitution and its Fifth Schedule, have so often had to pay the price for developments that are in the interest of others.”<sup>3</sup> The indigenous people have been struggling to save their identity. For, as an Adivasi from Wayanad district (Kerala) said: “Unless we affirm our culture and right and language, we won’t live. We have to say, by ourselves at least, ours is good; our colour is good, our language is good, our art is good, our way of living is good. If we can

respect your religion and your practices, why can't you respect ours?"<sup>4</sup> But, 'modern education' is leading the younger generation of indigenous people away from such thoughts.

But, while attempts to bring socio-economic progress among the indigenous people are laudable, trying to 'assimilate' them in the mainstream society is disturbing; because, the indigenous people feel that they are entitled to live their own lives. Article 2 of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* adopted by the UN General Assembly on 13 September 2007 affirms: "Individuals are free and equal to all other peoples and individuals and have the right to be free from any kind of discrimination, in the exercise of their rights, in particular that based on their indigenous origin or identity."

Our study on the indigenous people of India has revealed that the community which was once simple-living, selfless, innocent, content, communitarian, classless, egalitarian, poor, and self-dignified, has acquired a number of negative characters including shyness to use its own mother tongue, and failure to appreciate its own history. Unlike earlier, inequality between sexes has emerged among the indigenous people. Among the youngsters, influence of modernity has led to alcoholism, and show of disrespect to parents and elders. They no longer like the traditional rice beer and opt for IMFL (Indian Made Foreign Liquor) instead. The educated and even the uneducated youngsters are moving away from their indigenous communities, migrating to different urban areas in search of jobs. This has resulted in their unwillingness to work in the fields along with their parents. The educated no longer are willing to help their parents. Modernisation has also led to changing dance and song styles which borders on vulgarity.

Parents of the indigenous children say that there is a lack of understanding of native culture in the educational institutions. Many indigenous leaders and education experts say that there is overt discrimination against the indigenous children. Even the indigenous children feel alienation in the

school system that has few indigenous teachers as well as limited lesson on indigenous people's history and culture. Such alienation, discrimination and ridicule over indigenous language, traditions and customs make the students of indigenous people to give up their native language and culture.

One's language is the fundamental way in which one expresses oneself; one's thoughts, feelings, opinions and ideas. It is essential for understanding the people, and the world, around one. For the indigenous people, their languages connect them to their history, culture and identity in ways that other languages cannot express. The languages of the indigenous people are irreplaceable.

Keeping the problems of educating the indigenous children aside, it cannot be denied that contemporary education has its own advantages. It widens the knowledge of the students, provides them an opportunity to exhibit their skills and prepares them for better positions in life than being mired in their traditional occupations. However, if the indigenous students have to avail the educational opportunities, the schools and other institutions of learning should offer them congenial atmosphere and a curriculum that suits the indigenous children. In the absence of such atmosphere and curriculum, the wisdom of the indigenous people will be lost. The education policies of different countries must ensure that their culture and language are preserved.

### **Our Efforts**

Keeping the above concerns, the UNESCO Cardinal Paul Poupard Foundation Chair of Inter-Religious and Inter-Cultural dialogue at St. Andrew's College, Mumbai, India, apart from many academic activities, has been teaching and training the Post-graduate students on "*Water and Sustainability in Inter-Religious collaboration for sustainable development for a humane society*". Apart from innovative lectures and class work, the students need to visit the areas of indigenous people,

interact with them, inquire about their problems so that we can incorporate their needs and suggestions in our educational policies.

In order to create a culture of life which will lead to ‘Sustainable Development’, we need a new understanding of the relationship between ‘Humans-Nature-Spirit’. As the Encyclical Letter of Pope Francis, ‘Laudato Si’ (‘Praise be to you’), states, ‘Modern anthropocentrism has paradoxically ended up prizing technical thought over reality, since ‘the technological mind sees nature as an insensate order, as a cold body of facts, as a mere ‘given’, as an object of utility, as raw material to be hammered into useful shape; it views the cosmos similarly as a mere ‘space’ into which objects can be thrown with complete indifference’. The intrinsic dignity of the world is thus compromised. When human beings fail to find their true place in this world, they misunderstand themselves and end up acting against themselves’.<sup>5</sup>

Therefore, there is an urgent need for dialogue about ‘how we are shaping the future of our planet with a new understanding ‘Anthropos’. Blind confidence in technical solutions will not solve the problem. All these indicate that we need to evolve a new policy on education which is inclusive and integrating.

## **Conclusion**

The present education policies in several countries are tuned towards maximizing economic development on the expense of ecological depletion. We know that the earth does not have unlimited resources. Global warming, climate change, rise of sea level, environmental pollution is reality of our times. Water scarcity will be the biggest problem of the coming years. Indigenous people are the worst victim of the present form of development. In this context, our development should be sustainable one, safe guarding the environment and the creative wisdom of people including the indigenous people. This needs a new vision of education. We have suggested a few measures towards this vision of

education. It is hoped that pooling of various creative ideas to face the future may be the way to save our planet.

### **Footnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Draft report of the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India, New Delhi, 2009.

<sup>2</sup>The Encyclical Letter of Pope Francis, “

*Laudato Si*” (“*Praise be to you*”), *On Care of Our Common Home*, Vatican, 2015, No.36.

<sup>3</sup>2 Padel, Felix. (2015), *Sacrificing People: Invasions of an Adivasi Landscape*, New Delhi, OrientBlack Swan, pp.XIV .

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.survivalinternational.org/about/mainstreaming>.

<sup>5</sup>The Encyclical Letter of Pope Francis, “*Laudato Si*” (“*Praise be to you*”), *On Care of Our Common Home*, Vatican, 2015, No.115.