

World Environmental Health Day: Green issues need to be actively taught in schools, universities

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Pollution

Supreme Court in 1991 had directed environment be taught compulsorily at every level of education

By Pratik Phadkule

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As the world celebrates World Environmental Health Day on September 26, we must remind ourselves of the need for environmental awareness in all ages and in every section of society.

The Supreme Court of India, while hearing MC Mehta vs Union of India case in 1991, had given directions that environment should be taught as a compulsory subject at every level of education. It had also directed University Grants Commission to “prescribe a course on the environment as a compulsory subject in college education.”

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After its directions in 1991, the Supreme Court exhorted multiple times to implement its directions across the country, but its implementation remains uneven and inconsistent throughout the country.

In its judgment, the SC had taken cognisance of the rising population and pollution. Since 1991, pollution has worsened in India and reached levels of a public health emergency.



India's sacred rivers, Ganga and Yamuna, are getting polluted at an alarming rate as well as other rivers in urban areas such as Mithi (in Mumbai) are dying due to pollution and urbanisation.

It is also important to look at India's ranking in the environmental performance index (EPI) released in 2022 by Yale University. Of 180 countries ranked in the EPI, India stands at the bottom. Against this backdrop, the need for environmental awareness and education for all the population has become more necessary than ever.

The role of school-going children and university students is more significant as they are future policymakers and professionals in different fields who can find sustainable solutions to overcome these issues.

It is pertinent to see what steps are being taken in order to make the school and university students aware and seek their participation in protecting our environment.

The National Policy on Education of 1986 explicitly talks about the 'paramount need to create a consciousness of the environment, which must permeate all ages and all sections of society beginning with the child'. It recommends integrating environmental consciousness into the entire educational process.

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According to the National Policy on Education of 1986, National Council for Educational Research and Training acknowledges that environmental studies has been inducted into primary, secondary and higher secondary stages.

However, even if environmental studies has been included in the syllabus at the school level, the reality is that there is no active learning in the classrooms. The subject is taught as a set material to be memorised through teaching in the classroom instead of being pursued by students on their own with an open mind.

Protection and conservation of the environment is our collective responsibility. Children and youth today have an important role to play in it.

Also, because children and youth spend most of their time in the classrooms, school and college campuses, teachers, school and college administrators have a major role to play in making students aware of their role in protecting and conserving the environment.

It is important that the schools and universities in the country should implement the directions of the honourable Supreme Court in letter and spirit.

The subject should be incorporated into the syllabus in the schools, but it also should be taught so that students could be exposed to their social and natural environment, could analyse and draw inferences about environmental problems and also they could take environmentally positive actions, however small.

The schools and universities should facilitate learning by doing for students by allowing/encouraging students to undertake practical projects to learn about the environment.

The school and university administrators should also encourage teachers to undertake such projects with students so that students could learn by doing actual tasks rather than listening to classroom lectures and memorising textbooks.

Schools and universities should also seek the help of organisations/experts working in this area such as the Centre for Environment Education under the Union environment ministry and non-profit Centre for Science and Environment (CSE).

In this context, it will be pertinent to look at the initiatives such as Green School Program by CSE. This is an environmental education program for school children through which it conducts an audit of the school campuses for natural resource consumption and helps schools adopt good practices to reduce the wastage of natural resources.

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School children play an active role in conducting this audit by conducting hands-on activities.

The colleges and university campuses should also play their part in adopting sustainable practices by auditing the campus buildings and infrastructure for its resource consumption. Green Campus Initiative by CSE is one such initiative, which aims at developing sustainable practices among students and teachers on university campuses.

Considering that there are 993 universities, 39931 colleges and 10725 stand-alone institutions in India, the scale of positive change that the educational campuses can bring is enormous.

Further, it is also important to note that the draft National Education Policy, 2019 will be a guiding document for education in the country. Unlike the previous education policy, it does not make explicit reference to environmental education/consciousness, though it talks about Sustainable Development Goal 4 and the objective to align the education policy with it.

It is important that NEP should include a section on Environment Education with special emphasis on the role of schools and universities.

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World Environmental Health Day: Let's strengthen environmental health to implement SDGs

Restoring our contaminated ecosystem and biodiversity will help to brush off poverty

By [Tanaz Buhariwalla](#)

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📷 We owe our existence to this planet and must work together to protect its environment. Photo: iStock

Climate change is moving the entire planet to an alarming tipping point, with its patterns changing trends during the past few decades.

Today everyone is getting a first-hand experience of climate change and its drastic ramification on the environment.

While the world is gradually recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic, scientists and environmentalists continue to focus on climate change.

We owe our existence to this planet and must work together to protect its environment. The healthier our ecosystems are, the healthier the planet and its population.

Restoring our contaminated ecosystem and biodiversity will help to brush off poverty, withstand climate change and prevent mass extinction.

Countries are finally calibrating their policies with the larger goals for a sustainable tomorrow. The European Union (EU) is working towards creating sustainable jobs through its green growth initiatives.

EU member states are publicly committed to the European Green Deal, but are divided over the details of its implementation.

The EU needs a robust foreign policy strategy to manage the deal's geopolitical dimension and generate the political resolve to drive climate action.

The EU has adopted ambitious legislation across multiple policy areas to implement its international commitments on climate change. EU countries have set binding emission targets for critical sectors of the economy to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The countries successfully reduced their emissions and increased their GDP, albeit with varying efficiency. Ireland, in 2021, for example, signed its Climate Action Act into law, making it legally binding and providing a frame of reference for achieving international and EU climate targets.

This law intends to demonstrate a path to net-zero emissions by 2050 and a 51 per cent contraction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030.

Ireland also published The Circular Economy Bill in March 2022. The bill shows Ireland's transformation from a 'take-make-waste economy' model to a greener and more sustainable model of production and consumption.

Irish circular green economy is in its germinal stage. However, everyone from small start-ups to esteemed corporations supports this sustainable move.

Ozone-depletion is another important topic that started to gain momentum during the late 80s with the Montreal Protocol. Montreal protocol is an international treaty aimed at phasing out Ozone-depleting substances.

The systematisation of the Montreal Protocol advanced well in developed and developing countries. All phase-out schedules were adhered to, mostly, some even ahead of their schedules.

Most ozone-depleting substances emitted by anthropological activities remain in the stratosphere for decades. It indicates that ozone layer recovery is a long process.

Routine launches by a rapidly increasing space tourism industry may also sabotage the progress made by the Montreal Protocol in reversing ozone layer depletion, a recent study pointed out.

The space industry is one of the world's fastest-growing sectors. The industry is forecasted to grow to more than \$1 trillion by 2040 from \$350 million in 2019.

Ozone regulation imposes several requirements across the EU to minimise ozone-depleting substances' emissions. Ministers will be responsible for achieving the legally-binding emission targets for their sectoral area, according to the new Sustainability Bill of Ireland.

India stands prominently among nations making efforts in planning adaptation and mitigation strategies to respond to climate change. The strategy is inclined towards — the sustainable use of land and water resources, enhancing the quality of forest cover and improving ecosystem services.

As a country, it has enacted comprehensive regulations to control the usage of ozone-depleting substances in industries. It has been re-established to the United Nation's Executive Committee of the multilateral fund for the world program to protect the ozone cover in recognition of its efforts.

The sustainable transition will only occur through the creation of environment and climate literacy. There is a need to take global action by changing lifestyles that can lead to a reduction in carbon emissions to combat climate change and global warming.

Organisations have also started to realign their policies and move towards a sustainable tomorrow. Let's strengthen environmental health systems to implement sustainable development goals on this Environmental Health Day.

Tanaz Buhariwalla is India Director, IDA Ireland

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