

## **International Symposium on Lifelong Learning 2011**

Panel Session 4 – Lifelong Learning for Sustainable Development

Keynote Presentation by Prof. Shyamal Majumdar

### **Keynote Presentation Synopsis**

#### **Lifelong Learning for Sustainable Development**

**Prof. Shyamal Majumdar, Ph.D.**, *Director General, Colombo Plan Staff College for Technician Education (CPSC)*

#### **DESD Review**

Five years since UNESCO has launched the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD), strategic directions and framework have been laid out to increase awareness, engagement and wider participation at the global, regional and national levels. DESD promotes the formulation of the blueprint for a dynamic and long-term solutions to a low-carbon and sustainable world through education. Education at all levels has the cross-cutting concern in achieving sustainable development. Thus, ESD is the cornerstone of the UNESCO strategy which seeks to support member states and other stakeholders in addressing global sustainable development challenges.

Midway to the realization of the goals of DESD, UNESCO, during the review of the second half of the DESD, has identified the key areas that would serve as the focus of strategic actions from 2010 to 2015. These include (1) enhancing synergies with different education and development initiatives and strengthening ESD partnerships, (2) developing and strengthening capacities for ESD, (3) building, sharing and applying ESD-related knowledge, and (4) advocating for ESD, and increasing awareness and understanding of sustainability.

Based on these areas, a clear appreciation of the principal role of Lifelong Learning could be drawn keeping in mind that actions to make significant link with these areas to fully realize DESD converge to the appreciation that learning on sustainable development appeals on all learning domains (cognitive, as well as psychomotor and affective) and to the assertion of the skills and competencies required at certain age and stage of life of a learner to fully understand the complexities of human activities, technological innovations and the lack of skills, knowledge and fundamental attributes to cope with the complexities. Such skills and competencies within all types of the learning domains need to be cultivated in a continuous and progressive pattern

## **Role of lifelong learning**

The occurrence of lifelong learning is evidenced by the continuous process of learning, re-learning, skilling and acquisition of new knowledge, competencies and skills that usually enhance their occurrence. Different forms and settings of learning are just as important as the breadth and content of learning that can occur. Be it in school setting, work-based, community-based, formal or non-formal experience learning, a variety of learning opportunities is available for learners at varying stages of life.

In particular, issues that have cross-cutting impact on the economic, social, environmental and political dimensions of life make use of the assertion of skills, knowledge and competencies that makes lifelong learning functional.

Sustainable development has become the secondary layer ignored in the prolific but often unsustainable process of socio-economic development. New productions and discoveries have amassed a wealth of new materials, new technologies, modern sciences and processes, work routines, values, lifestyles and structures that predominantly ignored the needs of the future generations. The gravity of the problems attached to climate change has, unfortunately, drowned the potentials of indigenous practices to maintain a balanced world. Thus, it has been said that humankind will not solve the problems it faces today with the same values and approaches that created them.

What, then, are the skills, competencies and knowledge that need to be learned or re-learned to make an effective approach to sustainable development? What extent of changes (structural, attitudinal, cultural or communal) need to be addressed and effected? What else could serve as exemplars of promoting ESD in addition to the present demonstrations of ESD practices and frameworks. The paper will seek to answer these few questions.

It is the presentor's intent to emphasize that Lifelong Learning plays a very important role and map it across the achievement of sustainable development. Coming from TVET sector, the presentor will relevantly take up TVET as a sub-component of education and a composite of lifelong learning frameworks.

## **TVET and Lifelong Learning**

TVET, as a composite of lifelong learning, provides an enabling environment to learn and re-learn habit-forming practices and capitalize on knowledge and skills to create, maintain and achieve a sustainable future. In a broader sense, education and all the learning processes associated with it, need to be immersed in understanding practices oriented to sustainable development. The changing nature of the world of work, especially due to globalization and technological changes, widens the scope of responsibility and impact in which education at all levels, must act upon. The

challenge is to re-orient and re-direct curricula and learning opportunities to the conservation and sustainable use of resources, social equity and appropriate development, and additionally with the competencies to implement sustainable practices in the workplaces.

Integral to the process of cultivating knowledge and skills for ESD are the specific values that motivate towards participation, taking responsibility, reflecting upon practices and work processes linked with the preservation and protection of the ecological resources, with the protection of indigenous practices, with the upholding of policies and patterns of sustainable livelihoods and the sustained transfer of knowledge, values and practices.

Significant change of mindsets and beliefs needs learning throughout life. It is not a one-time shot and can be sustained through a constant process of understanding and experience acquisition and sharing.

Promoting research and disseminating knowledge including traditional and indigenous are central activities within DESD. It is a part of lifelong learning.

TVET as a sub-component of education system is enriched by the potential to share knowledge, skills and competencies particularly those that impact industries and the work place. TVET produces the largest contingent of potential workforce. For this reason, curricula of TVET need to reflect key generic skills as well as domain-independent that would equip the learners throughout life and throughout his learning experience (*while domain-dependent generic skills would play an important role in vertical learning*).

Moreover, TVET curricula need to anticipate rapid technological changes that would not limit the skills and competencies of the learners to present technologies but make him understand their greater impact on ecological life and learn how to appreciate indigenous practices and technologies and initiate system-oriented thinking when all these technologies do not work to the advantage of the future.

TVET curricula need to teach adaptability and learning to learn skills oriented to ESD that would pass for portable skills that can be used as passport for moving across borders with the right kind of attitudes, values and subject domain expertise.

### **Lifelong Learning Opportunities**

Attempts have been made to connect the dots towards mapping the role of TVET institutions in fostering sustainable development principles in the world of work through a critical mass of technical workforce trained under TVET systems. At the core of this process of creation of a critical mass lies obvious lifelong opportunities that equip learners with skills for sustainability, green skills and TVET skills for sustainable development.