The Interdependencies between Education and Sustainable Development

Sombath Somphone

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Introduction:

My presentation aims to explore the inter-relationship and inter-dependency between education and sustainable development. From a developmental perspective, education and development are mutually reinforcing and supportive and complementary, with education promoting and supporting sustainable livelihoods for people, and with societies evolving and changing but at the same time maintaining social, economic and political and environmental balance and stability.

A model of sustainable development, in the context of human resource development, should have education at its centre, with education and development interacting and reinforcing each other in a mutually positive and complementary manner. The goal is to have societies in which people have sustainable livelihoods which afford them dignified lifestyles and capacities to raise their families, develop and maintain respectful relationships between fellow human beings, between human and nature, and between their physical, emotional and their spiritual wellbeing.
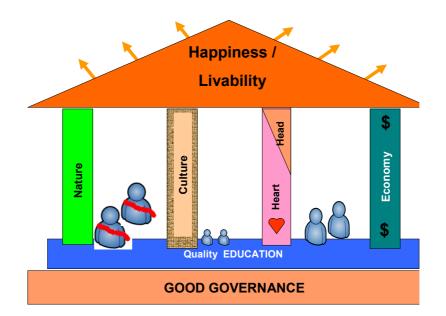
MODEL OF DEVELOPMENT

Now let's look at the relationship between education and sustainable development.

On a larger picture, education can be sustainable only if it is operated inside a development model that is also sustainable.

Conversely, for development to be sustainable it has to be continuously nurtured and contextualized by real life experiences of sustainable development activities.

Let us visualize what a SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT MODEL looks like.

A sustainable development model is a model that has a balance between the four dimensions/ pillars of development, mainly economic development, environmental harmony, promotion and preservation of culture, and spiritual well-being (or the HEART and HEAD). Spiritual well-being is represented here as the "HEART". The dominant development models we see today tend to under-emphasize the "HEART", i.e. the spiritual or psychosocial wellbeing of people, and tend to over-emphasize the material aspects of life.

The model of development I propose is one that stresses human dignity and "happiness" which cannot be measured only in terms of GNP (common measure of development) but must take into consideration "happiness" or "well-being". Many countries are now seriously looking into developing indicators that can measure, apart from GNP, Gross National Happiness, or GNH as part of the goal for development. Balancing the four pillars of development is the key in setting us toward that goal. Whether we can actually reach that goal is not as important as whether we are committed to set the direction of our development towards that goal.

In such a model of development, education is conceptualized as the foundation for development. The four pillars representing the different dimensions of development are anchored and are part of the education process.

In such a model, children and young people are at the centre of the model of sustainable development. They are taking part in the development process also. They are active in education of themselves as well as of their peers. Parents and grandparents are just as active in being part of the development process and the education process. Parents are between the pillars of the "HEART" and economic and cultural development for their children. Grandparents are symbols of wisdom. They are the holders/preservers of practical knowledge
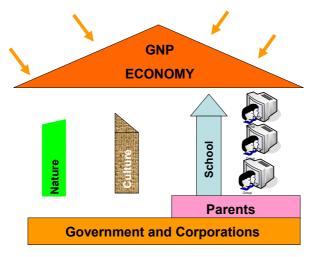
and experience on sustainable use of nature, and a link for the preservation and promotion of culture.

At the base of the model is "good governance", which supports and promotes what are represented in the entire model.

Thus, selection and prioritization of development priorities are critical in implementing the sustainable development model. One simple rule is that top priorities are given to activities that benefit all four pillars at the same time; or more importantly, not damaging any of the pillars. Next priority is given to activities that give benefits to at least three pillars. And there must be enough benefits gained from the three to compensate for the loss in the fourth one. One should avoid a development model that stressing a single pillar to the detriment of the other pillars because that would undermine the balance and sustainability of the entire society.

Let's look at our model of development as it exists today. The development model that is widely practiced today is not very sustainable. So many things do not fit, thus so many "failures" just like in our "schooling". For example, the world is so rich and yet there is widespread poverty. Unprecedented advances have been made in agriculture and aquaculture, yet more people go to bed hungry each day than ever before. Some nations have become so powerful, but the world has become ever more insecure. One can be so rich in materials but yet so poor emotionally and spiritually. And the list goes on.

Boom: Unbalance growth and development is unstable and under stress

A common model of today's development stresses GNP or economic growth as its ultimate goal. This growth comes from the over-taxing our environmental capital, human capital, and cultural capital. Everything is monetized, including "Schooling". The media takes over the
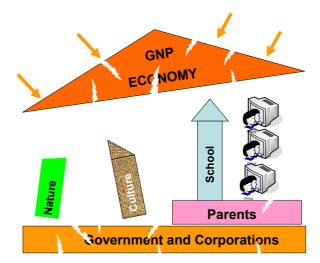
time parents and grandparents normally spend with the kids. We hand over the intergenerational and societal transfer of knowledge, history, and wisdom to our young to the media. But we know, the media is supported by business corporations whose interest is in promoting their bottom-line – hence the media promotes and shapes the viewers either towards mindless consumption or reduces the notions of greed and violence as entertainment. The media has become a very powerful instrument for shaping societal values.

And how can we blame the parents. They have little time for their children. They have to work very hard to support the kids through school as well as to satisfy their material needs.

The government too joins hands with the corporations to make sure there are enough business activities to create jobs and incomes. And that is not to say that creating employment and opportunities for livelihood is not an important function of government. However, oftentimes corporate interests are given higher priorities to other areas, such as ensuring adequate environmental protection, and investments in social development, including investment in education, especially quality and relevance of education.

Without safeguards for balance in the development system, development processes will put stress on the system, leading to imbalance and instability, which may not be apparent in the short-term but certainly will lead to systems failure in the long-run. Imbalances are often witnessed in the form of cycles of boom and bust - a way for the system to re-adjust itself. Development systemic stresses sometimes lead to political changes, including changes in political leadership and even political systems. This cycle of boom and bust has been very prominent in our recent human history.

Bust : Collapsing to readjust

EDUCATION

Increasingly, people are demanding that education cannot just focus on learning of content, but also stresses learning of context and building of relevant skills for sustainable and viable livelihoods for its citizens. For education to be of useful it has to be of good quality, gives joy, and relevant to real needs in content and context. While most education systems recognize this, the focus of the delivery of education is still dependent on teachers and by extension – officials of the Ministry of Education. But, this is a burden too great, and too extensive a social responsibility for just teachers, educators, and ministry of education officials to bear. We need to recognize and bring in the potential of the very people, or "clients" of the education system itself. Who are the clients of education? Obviously the main clients are the children and young people in and out of school, and parents and members of the community for which the education system is expected to serve. Hence we need to unleash the potential of children and youth, and the members of the community themselves to a take greater role and responsibility in both education and development into their own hands.

First let us look critically at the word EDUCATION. I strongly believe that we seldom practice "REAL" education. We mainly practice SCHOOLING. There is a big difference between "Education" and "Schooling". Real EDUCATION should make people smarter, but bad SCHOOLING actually makes people "dumber."

To begin with schooling is mostly <u>BORING</u> and <u>STRESSFUL</u>. Teachers usually dominate rather than stimulate the learning process, with a common practice of "teachers talk, students listen; teachers write, students copy". It contributes to a "dumbing down" process.

On the other hand SCHOOLING need not be all bad. It can be made better, more participatory, more activity-based, creative, fun, and stimulating for the brain and interesting to children and young people.

For example, story telling can be done by kids and it greatly improves their reading skills because it is fun and it involves them. But story-telling can also promote teamwork, leadership skills, speaking skills, confidence and much more.

Another example - Aerobic dance – it can be fun and enjoyable and normally conducted in a large group. It also benefits those who participate physically, socially, and mentally.

But you may wonder, **how can a teacher do all of this?** The answer is "NO", he or she does not have to do it alone! The teacher can enlist the help and the participation from the students themselves – and promote what every educator knows, but may not practice enough – "peer to peer education".

So there are a lot more of examples we can give for which all that the teacher needs to do is to make better use of the resources around them to achieve the goals of education.

However, I would like to stress that the "dumbing-down" process unfortunately does not only take place in schools only. It takes place in our very own homes, especially in our living rooms. The mass media, especially the TV, also plays a "dumbing-down" role, perhaps even more powerful than our schooling system. The mass media as it is today is a one way communication tool. It can literally be weapon of mass destruction of the brain. And it is done in the living rooms of most families throughout the world.

But we can make the media a tool for education by engaging the young to produce their own radio and TV programs. Let our children and young people regain and re-own the air waves.

We, the educators and the development workers, do not know how and do not use the media very well. The commercial people and the entertainers enrich themselves from it. They make billions of dollars. It is time for us to wake up to this fact and do some thing about it.

So far we have been talking about the methodology of teaching and learning. Now, let us look critically at the CONTENT of what we teach in schools. The school curriculum generally does not respond very effectively to needs of the families and the community. No wonder so many parents in places where education is of poor quality, do not want to send their kids to school. Schooling gives certificates as false rewards, just like the mass media gives the false sense of needs which drive us into indebtedness and unsustainable materialistic life style.

There is no reason as to why we cannot include sustainable ideas and life style into the curriculum. Wouldn't that make it more relevant? We can and we must start including relevant content and ideas at very young age – right from pre-school and primary school. We know very well that children can learn from what they see, hear, and do faster than we think. We should get them out of schooling and give them real education by including more life skills, and survival skills relevant to their social and environmental contexts.

Throughout the world, education systems in its desire to transfer "modern" or "scientific" knowledge often forget about the relevance and scientific basis of "indigenous knowledge". This body of critical knowledge is seldom taught in school and is at best left to what is called the "local curriculum". I suggest that we should pay greater emphasis to the development of such local curriculum and draw extensively to this body of indigenous knowledge to transfer to our young. It is only through consciously rooting our young to their culture, traditions, and wisdom of our society through transfer of indigenous knowledge can we expect them to know and respect their past, and hence understand the present, and value and protect the future.

We can include indigenous knowledge into learning by making it fun. We should use more EDUC-TAINMENT. First we identify what young people are interested in. Then we use their interests to teach as many skills as possible.
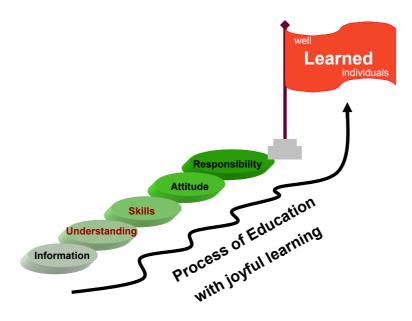
For example, through raising earthworms with kitchen waste, kids learn about biology, the environment, the discipline of taking care of another life form. See how interested they are. And they are learning, and lots of it is on their own.

Young people love to experiment and love to discover. We only need to provide them such opportunities.

Through organic gardening kids can learn mathematics, science, economics, culture, health and so on… Here there is an opportunity to bring in parents and/or the community to take part in identifying the skills that they would like their sons and daughters to learn. This is the way to motivate parents to participate. We can go as far as asking them to help teach some skills, and assess teacher's performances.

Education should not be only from books and teachers. Real education takes place anywhere, any time, and available to everyone. There should be no walls separating learning in classrooms from learning in school yards. There should be no school fences separating learning in school from in the community. Similarly, there should be no roofs and ceilings to block children's imagination beyond what they can see and hear.
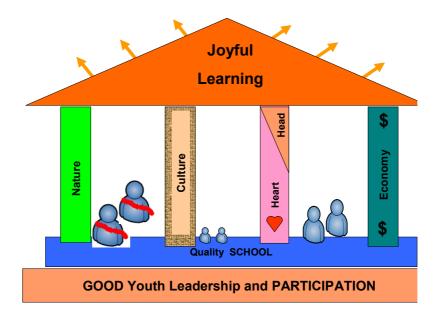
Process of learning:

INTERACTION

How to marry education and sustainable development so that the two become "mutually supportive and reinforcing", such that education will promote sustainable development and sustainable development will reinforce quality education?

Let's re-visit our sustainable development model and look at it from the point of view of quality education.

The ultimate goal of the model of quality education is "Joyful Learning". The four pillars of balance development become the four pillars of balance subject areas of the curriculum. They are anchored in the curriculum of the "Quality School", which forms the foundation of the education model. In the "Quality Schools" the hidden innate multiple intelligences of the young students are stimulated and encouraged to develop and grow. Teachers chip away all the inhibitions so the young person's intelligence(s) can be discovered. There is no barrier of learning. Young people not only learn from schools but also from parents, community members, their peers as well as learning on their own. The Child remains at the centre of the model of quality education.

At the base of the system and supporting it is the participation of children and young people themselves, represented in the model as "Youth Leadership and PARTICIPATION". It is the foundation of the model. Young people learn to lead and take care of themselves through organizing and practicing their own governance. Thus, from the onset, young people are trained to be leaders, not only as followers. They are prepared to be better and more responsible adults. From this pool of quality adults we can then select or elect our leaders.

SUGGESTIONS:

The question is: "How do we get out of the boom-bust model to a sustainable model?"

I think there are so many entry points. We have to start with ourselves, the educators. We adults/educators need to listen to and include the young people more so that they are at the centre of education; and the central client of our development model. As they are curious, full

of energy, willing to try out new things, we can make them agents of change for both education and development. We can make them peer educators, teacher assistants, community development volunteers, youth leaders, edu-tainers etc… The roles of educators are to be coaches and facilitators of learning. By giving the young the opportunity to participate, in both the process of education and the process of development we are in fact preparing them to be better and more responsible adults.

Another entry point is to improve the pedagogy. We as educators can certainly do that. We can make learning more joyful and the teaching more stimulating to focus in developing the innate intelligences and potential of the young. We can adopt child-centered approaches, and activity-based, discovery and participatory learning.

A third entry point is inclusion of the four pillars as cross-cutting (learning and development) issues in all subjects that are being taught in the curriculum. We may not even need to do major changes in the curriculum. We only need to enrich the content of the existing textbooks so that the four issues of the four pillars are referred to for students in every session.

For example, the HEART can be integrated in all other subjects such as language, history, science, and even mathematics. The spiritual leaders/teachers and philosophers are specialists of the HEART. All religions try to promote spiritual growth and personal and societal wellbeing. For example, followers of Buddhism can mobilize the wisdom and knowledge of the monks and enlist them to inculcate in the young a good "HEART" using existing Buddhist texts and stories. Specialists from the community can also contribute. We need to search them out and ask for their cooperation for the future of the next generation.

Best practices are very useful. Surely among us there are many good people doing very good work. These best practices should be documented and compiled in a database to be shared and to be disseminated using simple or modern electronic communication tools. They will help new learners as well as helping other educators to improve their approaches, thus, giving a faster multiplying effect.

We can also employ creative use of the media and take advantage of digital technologies. We can use the electronic media more creatively to promote teaching and learning in a positive way. They can be used in formal, informal, and non-formal settings. Real life experiences can be brought into classroom through the use of clips of video films. Complicated process can be illustrated for easy understanding though animation. By allowing the young people to take part in creating these tools we improve their confidence, enjoyment, and give them sense of belonging. By allowing teachers to participate in the creation and sharing of knowledge and experiences we create a dynamic learning society. These are essential components of a self-reinforcing feed-back mechanism of education and development.

Let's plant the seeds of good leadership and quality education among our new generation, starting right from birth and through the various stages of education, in and out of school environment. If we do this right, we will be contributing to molding a generation who will be physically, emotionally, and spiritually healthy, creative and dynamic, take pride in their culture and history, respectful of diversity, protective of the environment, and ensure a sustainable and peaceful future for the generations to come.

Let's go beyond the first two steps of this process!

well **Learned** individuals

Responsibility

Attitude

2

Skills

1 Understanding

Information

Process of Education with joyful learning