



## Collaborative Solutions for Promoting Environment Ethos in **Schools and Society**

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An interdisciplinary approach balanced on western and traditional viewpoints is a basic prerequisite for a clearer understanding of environment issues. This is more evident when we take the case of Climate Change Education (CCE), since this field simultaneously takes into account, diverse issues such as natural systems and resources, anthropogenic influences and dynamic interactions between these. The impact of climate change is evident across the world, and the time to act is now or never.

India is more vulnerable to changes in the climate due to an extensive coastline and tropical conditions. Indian agriculture is highly dependent on monsoon conditions and will be directly impacted by climatic conditions. Other impacts include changes in occurrence of pests, insects, and diseases. Mountainous regions, with receding glaciers and melting ice caps, are feeling direct pressure of changes in climatic conditions. Along the coastal regions, changes in impacts and frequency of cyclones are evident. These not just anecdotal observations but are based on scientific evidence.

Humans are an integral part of the environment. In a quest to derive maximum benefits, we are neglecting our environment. In order to make a meaningful change in society we need to systematically orient children and youth towards an environment friendly behaviour. A step in this direction is to design Environment Education (EE) programs that not only create awareness but also inspire our young citizenry towards a lifelong practice of sustainability. EE is not about books and boards, but it is about social ethos, cultural vibes, and economic linkages. School

campuses are hence ecosystems of learning, and a living laboratory for implementation of systemic changes. Schools are in fact the earliest experiments of resource efficiency measures that a child can learn from. Schools as sustainability labs, make our young citizenry aware of issues related to campus greening, natural lighting, zero waste zones, energy smart structures, biodiversity awareness, etc. The world is talking of sustainable development goals and 2030 agenda. Education is thankfully a part of these global developments and has been enshrined as *SDG4-Quality education*. The SDG 4 goal states: *Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all*. Targets under this goal cover aspects of effective learning outcomes, quality early childhood development, access to technical, vocational and higher education, youth education and adult literacy, imparting of skills to learners to promote sustainable development, through a culture of peace, and global citizenship, provision of inclusive education, increase in opportunities for education especially for marginalized sections. A holistic EE therefore attempts to impart knowledge, create awareness, develop skills, and promote environment friendly behaviour in thoughts and action. Our home too reinforces these learnings' through intergenerational exchanges between grandparents and grandchildren. A regular dialogue needs to be encouraged so that children can relate to nature and environment through incidents and stories told by their parents and grandparents. Our rich Indian heritage has several examples of environment friendly approaches. They, in one form or the other, have advocated that God, the Supreme Power, has created this world with five basic,

components- Space, Water, Air, Fire and Earth. Several stories woven around these concepts find a place either in textbooks or are embedded in minds of our grandparents. It is therefore a sacred duty to interact with our elderly so that this wealth of information is not lost but is transmitted and preserved for infinity.

**Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) approach for lifelong learning on climate change:** Embarking on a journey of learning about climate change and bringing a paradigm shift in the behavior of individuals, it is pertinent that we work towards creating right values and attitudes to empower our target groups to contribute to sustainable development. In practical terms, an integration of climate knowledge and skills into existing education systems represents both immediate and longer-term challenges to be overcome for an effective response to climate change. An immediate task is to climate proof education systems (adaptation), while the longer term call is to develop education systems that equip learners with the requisite skills, knowledge and attributes to deal with future challenges. While policy frameworks (curriculum) are final outcomes, immediate activities like training programmes, capacity building of students through experiential learning, digital support, are envisaged as effective strategies to create a Climate Right environment for effective learning.

The Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) approach enables learners to take informed decisions and responsible actions for environmental integrity, economic viability and a just society for present and future generations. ESD has to be understood as an integral part of quality education, inherent in a concept of lifelong learning. All educational institutions should consider it their responsibility to deal intensively with matters of sustainable development and to encourage development of sustainability competencies. However, to effectively mainstream ESD for learning about climate change and contributing towards mitigation and adaptation strategies, there ought to be convergence between policies and capacity building of stakeholders, who are our future change makers. There is a need to revisit the content and methodologies of classroom teaching that should be coupled with skill sets such as problem solving, critical thinking, creativity, innovation and adaptability. Governments and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) have started paying attention on imbedding ESD in the national plans and policies and a hope is that there will be more congruence between policies and practice.

CCE needs to start with a primer approach. A basic differentiation between natural and anthropogenic causes of Climate Change should be introduced to students so that sceptic attitude towards the entire debate of Climate Change is avoided. Concepts like continental drift, volcanic eruptions, and ocean current systems are existing in school textbooks. Need of the hour is to link these with global environmental changes and steps required to minimise disruptive practices. Contribution of various

Greenhouse Gases (GHGs) to climate change, and specific role of CO<sub>2</sub> in this regard needs to be a topic of every class room debate. Concern about health issues related with Climate Change and vulnerability of children and elderly needs to be highlighted so that a direct linkage is created between personal wellbeing and environment sustainability. These will further serve as a trigger to create a Climate sensitive audience. Youth also needs to be sensitized towards policy dialogues and global resolutions in the space of climate change. Personal responsibility through a change in lifestyle should be a major focus of all efforts taken in the sphere of CCE. The manner in which we buy / use things, use our energy sources and our choices of transport can make a huge difference.

In an effort to generate awareness on issues of climate change amongst young people, we need to:

1. Create awareness on climate change issues, both local and global with a strong connect between social, cultural and political conditions
2. Encourage a knowledge based approach to understanding climate change impacts
3. Engage students in constructive dialogues to create awareness about climate change through hands on activities
4. Highlight roles of countries in creating carbon neutral solutions

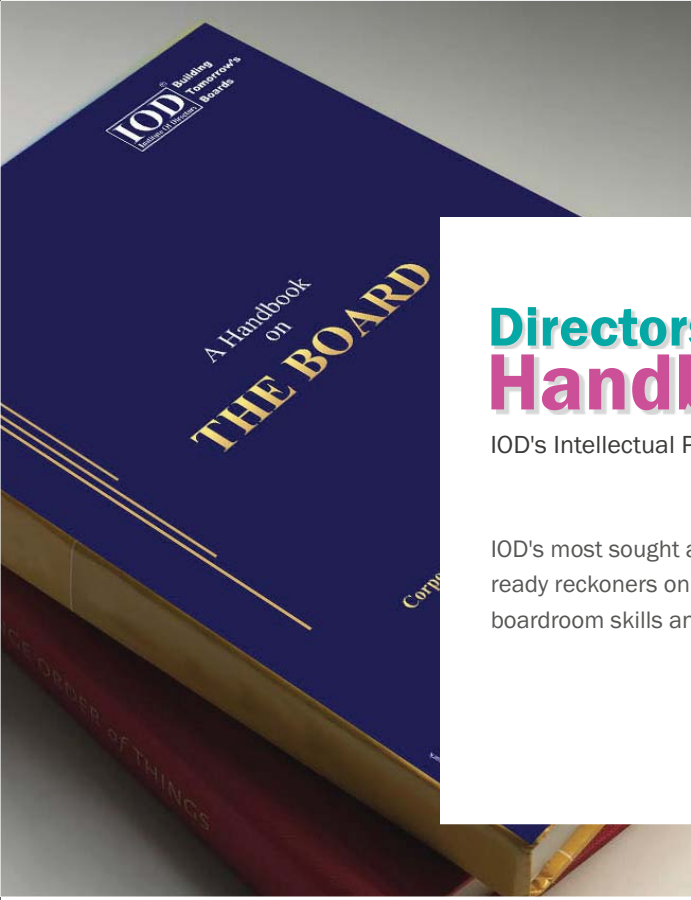
At society, community and individual level: Energy efficiency, sustainable transport choices, waste management, increase in green cover, and decisive policy interventions will surely help in creating sustainability at various levels. TERI has adopted several such programs that aim to transform youth into ESD practitioners ([www.teriin.org/olympiad](http://www.teriin.org/olympiad)). The Environment Education and Awareness Area (EEA) at The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI), New Delhi was established in the year 2002 in view of the growing need for Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) at the institutional level as well as for communities in general. A just and an environmentally-conscious society can be created only if youth are empowered with sufficient knowledge, enabling skills, and appropriate attitude and values. Hence focus of EEA group is to create awareness and enable young people to comprehend their relationship with natural environment and make concerted efforts to conserve it with improved standards of living. The projects and programs implemented by the team engage students, teachers, and youth in promoting environmental sustainability and support them in value-based learning. The vision is to empower them to influence and catalyze environmental improvement through effective resource management initiatives at the local, national, and global levels. TERI has reached out to thousands of schools and colleges in India, through various programmes on environmental sustainability.

My faith in role of *Environment Education* is immense. Every small step that we take contributes towards a sustainable pathway that society as a whole needs to tread upon to be able to meet the goal of sustainable development. Some areas of immediate action can be evolved after collective dialogues amongst stakeholders to strengthen:

ü Effective print media tie ups to showcase impacts of Climate Change on food, water, bio-diversity and health sectors

- Role of educational institutes to identify innovative ideas /steps that can foster education for sustainable development (ESD) in schools
- Mainstreaming of ESD in the school curriculum
- Combining ESD and digital literacy
- Institutional capacity building

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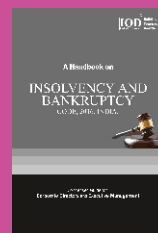


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