The Role of Student Activism in Progressing Sustainability Goals in University Campuses

Dr. Ashu Sinha
Assistant Professor
Kanoria PG Mahila Mahavidyalaya, Jaipur

Abstract: *For better, peaceful, and good living conditions for each and every living being, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are much needed for all countries, whether they are developed or developing, in a manner of global partnership. Major challenges like poverty, malnutrition, unemployment, etc., and other deprivations should be dealt with with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth, climatic conditions, and so on.*

A major question arises: how can we take part in all these... and what part has been chosen by students, colleges, and universities to achieve these goals locally and globally? Higher education institutions are the key agents in nurturing the future minds, and they have an indispensable role in achieving sustainability that will further contribute to the successful implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In this context, this research is an initiative to explore how student activism could play a pivotal role in driving sustainability initiatives and shaping campus sustainability policies.

This paper aims to examine the effectiveness of student-led movements, campaigns, and organizations in influencing university administration and the broader community to adopt green practices and policies. It would explore:

• The evolution over various periods of student activism in environmental causes.

• Successful sustainability initiatives by student's activism challenge traditional university practices, thus creating space for innovation in sustainability.

• Common issues in attaining sustainability with social justice, including efforts to make it accessible and inclusive for all.

• Exploring the social media and digital platforms to spread awareness and drive students' campaigns and hence to motivate students to raise voices and concerns refraining sustainability..

Keywords: Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Global Partnership, Student Activism, Deprivations, Economic Spur, etc

I. INTRODUCTION

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are the way or hope to resolve and focus on different issues and various social, economic, and environmental challenges and problems stated by the United Nations. These goals are grouped under 17 defined objectives to fight globally to make a better world by 2030.

These goals are a vital part in the journey of India's development and a way to achieve the status of a developed nation along with maintaining smooth international relations.

With her policies, India is handling every crisis, including the world economy, pandemics, and other significant problems and elements like regionalism and communalism. Although it has had some hurdles in accomplishing these objectives, it has largely succeeded in overcoming these obstacles and is dedicated to giving the most advancement to those who are most in need.

These 17 SDGs are the necessary steps to maintain social, economic, and environmentally sustainable balance and to bring the globe together in addressing these issues. In order to alleviate poverty, safeguard the environment, promote social welfare, and ensure environmental sustainability, the United Nations approved the Sustainable Development

Goals (SDGs) in 2015 as a global call to action. As a result, the framework establishes targets for 231 distinct indicators. And to safeguard that it is to be ensued by 2030, so that everyone can enjoy peace and prosperity.

Higher education institutions can play a crucial role by implementing such policies for long-term sustainability with small startups from their campuses. Therefore, it is imperative to use and collaborate the creative minds in order to achieve these aspects.

Research Objectives

- To examine the scope of student activism related to sustainability on university campuses.
- Examine the influential power of student activism in the implementation of sustainability goals.
- Identification of the challenges and opportunities faced by students while promoting sustainability on campuses.
- To explore effective strategies for support mechanisms in student activism.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

As the reference of the study, a secondary data collection source is used, from different various reputed journals available, referring to information available on the World Wide Web, to analyse, review, and arrive at a conclusion. Prime documents, which are referred to, are the details available on the official website of the government of India. The sources for reference are listed and have been provided at the end of the study.

Objective of the study

The objective of the study, as explained above in the abstract and introduction, is to identify how students could shape the future of this nation by participating in various self-motivated drives.

For countries like India, where we fight for removing backwardness, poverty, hunger, malnutrition, and whatnot. Politics is another word that worries us. It all starts from the university campus, where students have new ideas, groups, afresh energy, youth, adolescence, and "josh" to win over.

It is definitely an opportunity to adopt models from other countries all around who are including these SDG issues in their university courses.

This paper aims to identify such opportunities and hence to establish the old bond between university campuses and students to bring the goal achievement even closer.

If we look back in 2015, the UN General Assembly adopted seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to be achieved by 2030.

According to the United Nations (2015), the purpose of these seventeen objectives is "to secure a sustainable, peaceful, prosperous, and equitable life on earth for everyone now and in the future."

Four "critical shifts" that distinguished the fifteen-year Millennial Development Goals {MDGs} phase from the present SDGs period are highlighted in the Open Working Group Proposal for Sustainable Development Goals report:

a much greater human influence on the physical planet; rapid technology advancements; growing disparities; and an increase in governance's complexity and dissemination (United Nations, 2015). Education is the "key instrument" in accomplishing the SDGs, according to UNESCO, which aims to address these problems by enhancing students' knowledge, abilities, values, attitudes, critical thinking, competences, systemic thinking, and responsibility, and provide future generations the resources that they require to effectively bring about the dramatic shift that our planet demands (United Nations, 2015; UNESCO, 2018).[1]

Important Takeaways from the Sustainable Development Goals Report for India in 2023-2024

According to NITI Aayog, the primary instrument for evaluating progress initiatives on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) at both the national and state levels is the fourth edition of the SDG Index 2023–2024.

The index was unveiled by NITI Aayog Vice Chairperson Shri Suman Bery in front of NITI Aayog CEO Shri B. V. R. Subrahmanyam, UN Resident Coordinator in India Shri Shombi, NITI Aayog Senior Advisor Dr. Yogesh Suri, and

UNDP Deputy Resident Representative Ms. Isabelle Tschan Harada.
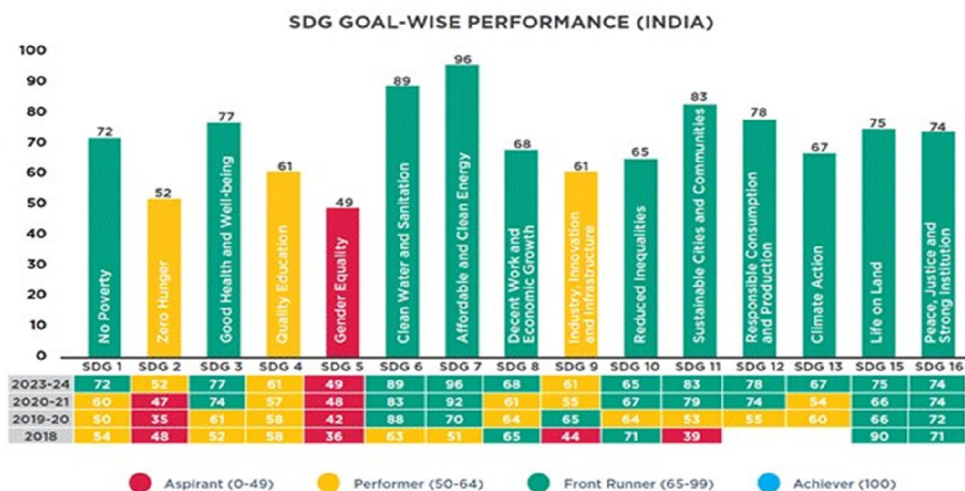
The panel emphasizes and acknowledges:

Notable advancements in the objectives of eradicating poverty, ensuring decent working conditions, economic expansion, addressing climate change, and laying some significant level groundwork.

• Prompt and thorough government audits and evaluations, as well as the implementation of programs like the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, initiatives that would influence and drive improvement, such as Ujjwala, Swachh Bharat, Jan Dhan, Ayushman Bharat-PMJAY, Ayushman Arogya Mandir, PM-Mudra Yojana, Saubhgaya, Start-up India, etc., with the assistance and participation of youth energy, as also intended and envisioned in "Viksit Bharat 2.47."

• All states should demonstrate an improvement in their overall scores, including those for Make in India, PM Jan Dhan Yojna, PM Jan Awas Yojna, and Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan. As part of the global endeavour, our nation scored an overall SDG score of 71 for 2023-2024, a notable improvement over the baseline reports' scores of 57 in 2018 and 66 in 2020–21.The ratings for the states falling in years 2023–24 range from 57 to 79, seems like a greater advancement from the range of 42 to 69 for 2018. Goals 1 (No Poverty), 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), 13 (Climate Action), and 15 (Life on Land) have all undergone significant advancements. The greatest score gain in this case is for Goal #1 (No poverty), which went from 60 to 72, and Goal #13 (climate action), which went from 54 in 2020-21 to 67 in 2023-24.

A few highlights are shown below in the graphical representation: -

Source- https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2032857

Source- https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2032857

(*Release of SDG India Index 2023-24*, n.d.)

Talking about education, it is the backbone of the "sustainability mindset" as well as one of the primary forces behind the growth of sustainability. In addition to utilizing technical knowledge, this idea entails making the most of the social instruments at one's disposal, occasionally comprehending the fundamentals of one's surroundings, and researching the practices of thriving and healthy cultures. Students are encouraged to deviate from conventional management theories by fostering a sustainable mindset through the cultivation of best practices, entrepreneurship, environmental studies, analytical thinking, and self-awareness. Systems thinking, for instance, is frequently cited as one of the abilities required to comprehend sustainability more fully. This is due to the fact that sustainability embraces the environmental, social, and economic aspects equally. The economies that sustain people's livelihoods and improve their general quality of life are shaped by and influence the people and the character of the society in which they live, according to UNESCAP (2015). Environments offer people and economies valuable and economically relevant services. In this instance, fostering a comprehensive approach to problem analysis requires the application of systems thinking (UNESCAP, 2015).[1]

The inclusion of these SDG issues in academic curriculum worldwide has aided in the development of numerous theories. In fact, these theories represent the difficulties and benefits of incorporating ESDG through various efforts and actions (SDSN, 2021; Greenland et al., 2023). Using a selection of teaching and learning approaches, the majority of the initiatives in Spain have concentrated on student training within the scope of official degrees (Miñano and García, 2020) (Climent et al., 2020, UPM, 2021, UP Comillas, 2023).

Learning new things is never simple and does not happen to us all at once. The formal degree programs' already hectic timetables and quickly evolving curricula, together with the deluge of information that both professors and students must consume, are among the biggest problems. Lotz-Sisitka et al., 2015; Wankat and Oreovicz, 2015). Implementing transdisciplinary or interdisciplinary learning interventions (González et al., 2019) is one possible remedy. In these interventions, courses are designed with a common aim in mind, and each one devotes a small portion of its time to this purpose. wherein classes are designed with a common objective in mind, and each devotes a little portion of their time to this goal. However, there may be some difficulties in promoting coordination between different courses. This study embraces an alternate option that uses an interdisciplinary approach. Each course retains its independence within this framework, but all take part in the careful building of brief interventions (less than two hours) that meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).[2]

Education 2030 is a Framework for Action (EFA) by design, and as such, it calls for international agreements to set up and oversee teaching and learning activities in higher education sectors in order to align them into the framework of sustainable development (SD). Also, this roadmap intends to leverage the power of digital tools, open educational resources, and online learning to promote access, equity, quality, and relevance. Education for sustainable development (ESD) is specifically mentioned in SDG goals as a sort of education that may equip students with critical information, abilities, and attitudes to seek sustainability. [3]SDG goal #13 research indicates that climate change does not only threaten countries' economic bases but also would impact agricultural and tourism developments.[4]

Some suggestions to align Higher Educational Institutions with UN's SDGs to achieve its objectives

- Universities and colleges can fortify new innovative methods in teaching; a blended model of learning can be used. [5]
- New multi-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary courses are introduced by the New NEP 2020; they can help in achieving the motives of SDGs. (SDG 4). The emphasis should be on quality education rather than just basic education. People with a higher education degree earn 54% more on average and are less likely to be unemployed than those who merely completed upper secondary school, in accordance with recent OECD estimates.
- It should be mandatory for students to take part in research and to identify the problems of society and prepare a model to solve them.
- Apart from all this gender disparities should be treated strongly to cure mental illness regarding gender inequalities (SDG5)

- Higher educational institutions with their innovations and research could help in endorsing development-oriented policies and creation of decent jobs based in skills. It will help to grow small scale industries to foster economic growth (SDG 8Target8.3) [6]
- Climate change and environment related issues must be studied as a part of curriculum of every stream to face issues like disaster management, global warming etc.
- Universities and colleges should be ranked for the attainment of SDG goals and it will make an important criterion.[7]
- Higher Educational Institutions must offer one compulsory SDG in curriculum to ensure knowledge of all SDGs.
- Establishment of food banks and pantries on campus, which are easily accessible to all members of the university community should be made must for all.

III. CONCLUSION

Institutions of higher learning have the power to change society. Through their educational programs, they can guide the next generation of citizens, professionals, and leaders toward sustainability. Therefore, HE's contribution to the revolutionary shift to sustainability is what makes the SDGs a reality. According to the SDGs, sustainability is a system state that our society is continuously working to articulate and accomplish. Education's role is to foster the conditions necessary for this vision to materialize. Before creating the curriculum, pedagogies, educator training programs, and learning environments at each level of their educational offerings, it will be necessary to define the competencies—that is, the knowledge, abilities, behaviours, and attitudes—that learners must acquire in order to achieve such a state.[8]

For universities to have a substantial and multifaceted impact on the SDGs, they must establish a connection with socioeconomic development. Every citizen has to think that universities enhance their lives and help the nation progress.

Hence, it becomes imperative for educational institutions have to rethink their approach so that it is in line with the NEP 2030 which will be crucial in realising the 2030 deadline for SDGs.

REFERENCES

[1]. Žalėnienė I, Pereira P. Higher Education For Sustainability: A Global Perspective. *Geography and Sustainability*. 2021;2(2):99-106. doi:10.1016/J.GEOSUS.2021.05.001

[2]. Cachero C, Grao-Gil O, Pérez-delHoyo R, et al. Perception of the Sustainable Development Goals among university students: A multidisciplinary perspective. *J Clean Prod*. 2023;429:139682. doi:10.1016/J.JCLEPRO.2023.139682

[3]. Kioupi V, Voulvoulis N. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): Assessing the Contribution of Higher Education Programmes. doi:10.3390/su12176701

[4]. Demaidi MN, Al-Sahili K. Integrating SDGs in Higher Education—Case of Climate Change Awareness and Gender Equality in a Developing Country According to RMEI-TARGET Strategy. *Sustainability*. 2021;13(6). doi:10.3390/SU13063101

[5]. Leal Filho W, Salvia AL, Eustachio JHPP. An overview of the engagement of higher education institutions in the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. *J Clean Prod*. 2023;386:135694. doi:10.1016/J.JCLEPRO.2022.135694

[6]. Aligning Higher Education with the United Nations SDGs. Accessed January 8, 2025. https://vajiramandravi.com/upsc-daily-current-affairs/editorial-analysis/higher-education-sdg/

[7]. Universities can play a key role in reaching the UN SDGs | World Economic Forum. Accessed January 8, 2025. https://www.weforum.org/stories/2022/09/university-hubs-sustainable-development-goals/

[8]. Kioupi V, Voulvoulis N. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): Assessing the Contribution of Higher Education Programmes. *Sustainability 2020, Vol 12, Page 6701*. 2020;12(17):6701. doi:10.3390/SU12176701