



International Conference on Sustainability Education

## ICSE FORUM



### World Environment Day 2020

### International Webinar and Principal's Conclave on

# Sustainability Education in COVID Era

June 4 & 5, 2020, 17:30 to 19:30 hrs IST (GMT + 5:30)

The two day International Webinar was organized as part of the ICSE Forum to commemorate the World Environment Day, by Mobius Foundation, UNESCO New Delhi The Climate Reality Project India and other eminent partners. The webinar deliberated on the inter-linkages between COVID-19 pandemic, biodiversity and how sustainability education can be a strategic asset to address both the environment and pandemic challenge. The objective was to sensitize teachers, principals and educators about sustainability concerns and provide an opportunity for partnership between schools and research networks in ESD. The webinar was conducted over two days so as to accommodate the wider views from stakeholders and represent them holistically.

- **DAY I: Opening of the International Webinar and Principals' Conclave**
- **DAY II: International Webinar and the world environment day event**

ICSE Forum was created as a follow up of the recommendations of the 4th Technical Advisory Committee of the ICSE, held on 31st October 2019. The objective of the Forum is to provide a platform for continuous exchange of ideas, networking and for providing strategic direction and leadership to strengthen sustainability education with national, regional and international professionals and development of future activities in this domain.

### **Day 1: 4<sup>th</sup> June 2020**

The webinar was chaired by **Dr. Ram Boojh, CEO Mobius Foundation**. It was attended by 160 + participants. The online broadcast was further viewed by 6000+ viewers from all across the globe on through social media. Speaking on the occasion, Dr. Boojh emphasized on the awareness of environmental actions and interlinkage of biodiversity, COVID 19 and education. He stated that COVID-19 is the greatest disruption in reshaping educational system. Quoting the latest UNESCO figures, he mentioned that around 1.3 billion learners are not able to attend schools/colleges or





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universities due to the pandemic. He emphasized that the pandemic is also bringing up new trends in our lifestyles such as virtual meetings, informal learning, and sustainability values, including Yoga, Namaste, social distancing, work from home virtual offices and teaching learning spaces which are becoming the new normal. While highlighting the role of technology as a great equalizer and multiplier, he cautioned about its limitations such as internet access lack of proper devices and new challenges that have emerged for evaluation and examinations.

The webinar was inaugurated by **Mr. Atul Bagai, Director, UNEP India office**. He gave a comparative evaluation on how sustainability education and bio-diversity are inversely proportional. Sustainability Education grows at an arithmetic rate; however owing to climate changes, species extinction is increasing at a geometric rate. If we are making the communities aware about environment degradation, how it is that education is leading us to “want based lifestyle” instead of living more sustainably we are harming the environment to its extreme levels. Talking about biodiversity, he declared that 1<sup>st</sup> Jan 2021 will mark the starting of “**Decade of Ecosystem Restoration**”. In the same context he added that no other incident has brought forward the importance of biodiversity and ecosystem, as this pandemic crisis has done. He stated that Humans have always exploited the environment and eco-system and this current crisis has opened new horizons for us humans to work towards more balanced and sustainable lifestyle, where we create an equilibrium between human activities and the environmental activities through sustainability education.

**Mr. Kartikeya V Sarabhai, Founder and Director, Centre for Environment Education (CEE)** gave key note address saying that sustainability education should take into consideration the social, economic and environment as pillars. The implications of COVID 19 can be seen through change in pollution levels and carbon levels which indicates that human activities contribute huge amount in polluting the environment and it has also shown how resilient the nature is. COVID 19 has taught us that we seldom looked upon the threats and their scale. We tend to see and evaluate the effect on 9 million of species but we overlook trillion of microbes. He announced the launch of “**Mighty Microbes**” program by CEE and UNEP to make people understand the concept of microbes and its impact on immunity and human body. He concluded by adding that the way forward for sustainability education is to involve people of diverse functions like civil society, NGOs and educational institutions.

To involve people and students, Denmark based Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE) has a program called Eco Schools that engage youth of today to protect the planet of tomorrow. **Dr. Pramod Sharma, Senior Director of Education, FEE** talked about how FEE responded to COVID 19 challenge and is trying to bridge the digital divide. COVID 19 has shifted the schools to home which allowed the students to appreciate the change and understand the nature. FEE has also initiated different programs like “Look out of window” and “Learning about forests (LEAF)” customized specially for COVID Era. He also threw light on the concept of inter-generational education; where a child gets to spend time with their family. Programme like “Care and Share” initiated talks with grandparents and brought out suggestions and solutions from home environment itself. FEE is



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supporting organizations which are focused on education. He said education has shifted from content to skill and suggested that a lot of these skills can be developed at home. On e-learning, he shared that FEE published free articles and resources for the schools on topics like energy conservation, water, biodiversity, litter, transport and health management through Handprint initiative.

To inculcate the sense of conservation of energy, water and other aspects of environment it is required that the campus in which students learn should be green and sustainable. **Ms. Seema Bali, Vice Principal, St. Mary's School, Dwarka, New Delhi** focused on the importance on how green campus helps in sustainability education. She mentioned that the impact of COVID 19 in education is as serious as the impact on economy of the country. The problems in post COVID 19 era would be right from sanitizing the pencil to the bus in schools. The IGBC GOLD rated building of his school focused on green campus activities which have turned sustainable, healthy and happy. School can be turned into live green labs by taking care of the air, water, energy & biodiversity and integrating them into curriculum consciously. The schools have to reorient their SOPs post lockdown era, she concluded.

The challenges and solutions are different in different regions. After the Indian perspective of education, the webinar moved to international perspective of sustainability education. **Mr. Ben Green, Geography Teacher and Head of Outdoor Education Whitgift School, London** talked on introducing Global Citizenship into the curriculum. He shared that students have a lot of responsibility; we have offloaded them with, till this time. They will be tackling with the problems like carbon levels, marine and air pollution and will be asked for solutions. It is our responsibility to prepare them for this challenge and work towards offering them a better future. By introducing Global Citizen Stewardship into the curriculum and strategies like traditional knowledge from each location, we can teach them to be more prepared and have a broader outlook for global environment protection. This can be taught from practical actions that too from a very young age/class. He gave insight on another important aspect, i.e. to identify what the students like to do, and observe when they turn rebellious. He quoted that this very observation made Greta, the voice of millions as she has elevated by her rebellious nature though for a larger good. The way forward, according to him is that students should be allocated focused domains of sustainable education as per his/her liking.

**Ms. Sumedha Jayaweera, Principal, St. Paul's Girls' School, Colombo, Sri Lanka** shared her thoughts from our neighboring country Sri Lanka. There, the general education system initiated first curriculum report of new millennium to prepare the young minds of the nation for an emerging complex and dynamic future while resolving a host of other problems. The new learning and teaching environment is coming together to allow them to move in a new role altogether. She added, as one is adapting through new conditions, it is essential to have the technology integrated knowledge and skills among the students. She shared that teachers are also facing lot of challenges like, their reluctance to use the technology in the teaching process (due to lack of experience), inadequate computer integration etc. In E-learning, one of the challenges with weak students is that

they cannot cope up with online teaching; they need personal guidance and real classroom environment to generate interest to learn. The possible solution she suggested was to have more knowledge exchange among the students, so they learn from each other. The web based online lectures should be used more in the learning process which are freely available.

To start the Principals' Conclave and breaking out in the smaller groups, **Mr. Aditya Pundir, Country Manager, Climate Reality India**, gave a whole new perspective of the impact of COVID 19. The three main challenges he put forward were:

- 1) COVID
- 2) Global Recession and
- 3) Climate Change.

He threw light on threats greater than COVID 19, as we might have vaccine for the COVID 19 but not for climate change. He suggested that use of technology to create a solution for any kind of change is the one and common solution at any level and it can be done only through education. We have to focus to educate the young minds to use technology with minimum damage caused to nature.

After this, the participants were divided in to 10 groups of 7 members each to discuss the challenges, solutions of education in COVID era and why inculcation of sustainability education is important. These groups had an open, free flowing discussion taking views from principals and stakeholders from the education sector with a moderator and volunteer to note their views. Key points on thematic areas were shared by each principal, which later helped the wider audience to have an insight of the education system in the COVID 19 era.

### **Day 2: 5th June 2020**

The Webinar was chaired by Mr Prdip Burman, Chairman, Mobius Foundation and Trustee Climate Reality Project India. **Dr Ram Boojh, CEO, Mobius Foundation** started the programme moderated the Day 2 event by a brief recap of the proceedings of the Day 1 of the webinar. He highlighted the significance of observing the world environment day during the unprecedented covid pandemic by celebrating biodiversity and nature.

**Mr. Ashok Pandey Chairperson Council for Global Citizenship Education** presented the proceedings of breakout sessions held on the 4th June 2020. He talked about the themes discussed during breakout sessions and how COVID and post COVID would impact education in times to come and what should be the way forward? He shared the collective wisdom given by all the breakout group participants. Teachers from across the world especially developing countries had serious concern on digital infrastructure (internet and electricity availability etc.) to have the new normal of 'Online Education'. 1.7 billion People all over the world have been sitting at home for more than 70 days and reaching out to each one of them has been a challenge. 90 % students have not gone to campuses



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since COVID Breakdown and they are missing social and emotional learning. Further, he added that shift is towards hybrid education and infrastructure has to be build up to support blended learning which is a challenge for policy makers and other stakeholders.

There ought to be more case studies on Green Schools, how blend between human beings and nature can be reinvented? Skill building will be a new initiative once social distancing is over and students can be empowered with the theme of one people one planet, that encompass 'Vasudhev Kutumbukam', the underlying philosophy of Indian Vedas.

He concluded with emphasis on collective action so as to produce a new design of learning, commitment to SDGs, fostering beautiful relationship between human and nature. Lastly, came the words of wisdom that this period will also pass and there will be a rainbow after the rain.

**Dr Huma Masood National Programme Officer Gender and Education, UNESCO New Delhi** formally opened the technical session of the programme. She said that we should address collectively the implications of COVID 19 on education for sustainable development. "We are literally consuming the mother earth that sustains us and the only positive thing of this pandemic is that the environment has improved drastically". Further, she posed a question that reduced human activities has had such large and immediate impact on planet and how do we maintain it?

However transformation of the education system in COVID Era should look at pedagogical revolution in sustainability education. Quality teaching is a pre requisite for quality education and pivotal role of teacher would be in bridging gaps between education and environment. Online teaching brings prominent, excellent visuals like documentaries; 3D artifices which can enhance the understanding of the students. Apart from this, the ground reality of India and socio economic factor should also be taken into consideration, alternate method to online learning to be identified and explored for the students that may include broadcasting method on television or on radio, align school to operate in areas for social distancing, pre-recorded lessons through ICT with full consideration for children marked with disability as internet penetration is still an issue. Lifestyle adopted during the lockdown should be continued after the lockdown to lower the impact on the environment. She concluded by saying that on the brighter side, the pandemic has forced many changes and this crisis must be viewed as an opportunity to save our mother earth.

**Ms. Donna Goodman Founder and Executive Director, Earth Child Institute (ECI)** talked on how to learn and live in a more sustainable way thus fulfilling the vision of a new, brighter future. She emphasized on the need to have changes in the curriculum around the world aided by effective tools like Zoom and Google classrooms, compounded with values based education that aids in self-learning. She spoke about various domains such as reading, writing, physical fitness, human values and respect for all forms of life. She gave a new perspective on technical subjects like math and science and how they can be taught in a more fun and stimulating way. Green Jobs should be a part of mid-senior curriculum encompassing future trends like disasters, risk management, renewable



energy that may be aided by global collaborations in the curriculum. She mentioned about her upcoming book ECOMASTERS: A Planet in Peril which has superheroes adventure stories and training centers for students and parent at different locations.

**Ms. Gayatri Raghwa Environment Education Consultant, UNEP** shared her views on Education: Building back better. She added that one should take whatever topic is trending in his/her mind as a student and have a more holistic approach for it with environment theme added to it. We need to deliver concrete deliverables on ground as far as sustainability is concerned. While the COVID gives the golden opportunity to talk about the clean environment but we have to connect all the dots. She spoke about Tide turner's plastic challenge which has three levels of engagement with the lower ones having a lot of on ground practical learning. Owing to lockdown, whole approach has been changed and still they are received good response. They have developed largest online programme 'Earth School Adventure' where 70 environmental professionals shared their resources designed for children who are under lockdown at home. Indian Children had shown great response to the programme and were the second largest in number after USA. There is one disadvantage that online learning is generating 'divide between haves and have not's'. There ought to be public private model devised out so this gap can be bridged as soon as possible. In conclusion, she mentioned on how one can balance between online and on ground efforts once the lockdown is over.

**Mr. Pradip Burman Chairman, Mobius Foundation**, chair of the webinar talked about his views reflecting insights from both the days. He said that one should not forget what COVID 19 has taught us and we should take forward the learning, once the situation is normal. One should have the concept of global citizenship that actually propagates good practices on sustainability amongst other schools beyond boundaries of nations. Natural immunity is important and should be emphasized, teachers are the best medium to pass on the information. He also added that Population explosion is also one of the domains to be looked at and shared how his team is working on the subject of population stabilization through project "Aakar". He concluded by saying that change has to be adapted and we have to bring change in the way teachers have to teach in COVID Era.

The session was concluded with a vote of thanks from **Mr. Aditya Pundir, Country Manager, Climate Reality Project India**. He mentioned about efforts of their organization in this domain and promised to take forward these learning's through future ICSE Forums.