

Development Studies as A Way Of Life

Study of developing societies, which was once considered only a social cause, has now evolved into a more specialised and rewarding career option, writes Ashok Sircar.

It's been nearly three months since the world promised itself a fresh set of development goals to be achieved in the next 15 years. **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** as these are now called, replaced the Millennium Development Goals, which the world worked towards for the last 15 years. As many as 190 countries took oath on September 25, 2015, to achieve 17 goals, for which, 169 targets have been fixed. Presently, the indicators of these targets are being negotiated. The goals cover poverty, hunger, gender equality, quality education, clean water, sanitation, clean energy, responsible consumption, climate action etc.

The natural question to ask, therefore, is how these ambitious goals and targets will be achieved in 190 countries? Are the countries ready for it? The answer lies primarily in four inter-related commitments — financial resources, human resources, technological resources and building inclusive institutions.

International aid, governmental and corporate financial commitments can help in finance, as well as bringing in technologies. But nothing can progress unless there are enough human resources committed to harness the power of technology and finance through inclusive institutions.

Looking at the 17 goals and 169 targets in the Indian context, one can't help but notice the enormity of the task. **Poverty, hunger, sanitation, water, health and wellbeing, clean cities etc. are daunting challenges in India.** Equally daunting is the challenge when one looks at the supply side, namely the production of capable human resources to take up these challenges in scale. And this is where development education comes into the picture.

Development education has come a long way in the last two decades. A number of technical disciplines were born spanning from development studies and rural development to development management. And then, there are new variants called sustainable development, sustainable rural management etc. **Development education is now offered in many Indian universities with various foci. One might ask why?**

Reasons

- Firstly, **development understanding and interventions** have now become a wide field where knowledge of **various branches of disciplines such as economics, sociology, ecology and politics** have become central to analyse barriers to, and alternative possibilities of development.
1. A number of development domains such as health and nutrition, microfinance, gender, livelihoods, sustainability and governance have become vital in advocating, planning and

designing development interventions. Incidentally, many of the SDGs relate to these specific domains.

2. Finally, if concerted state and non-state action are to succeed in reaching these goals, then knowledge and skills of management science are vital in efficient and planned use of resources.
- Secondly, **development interventions** now take place in multiple sites and scales — local, national and international, **in the shape and form of policy, programmes, movements, campaigns, institution, model buildings etc.**
 1. Development professionals are recruited by local NGOs, CBOs, national level CSOs, national and international campaigns, social movements, banks, philanthropic foundations, CSR units of corporate bodies and of course, government missions and UN organisations.
 2. Their roles vary from directly mobilising communities for behaviour change, building lasting community institutions, district level programme oversight, to policy analysis, programme design, evaluation or creating a social enterprise.
 3. It is now increasingly recognised that many development goals and SDGs are no exception and are inter-related to each other, which have to be comprehended in a holistic way within the educational curricula.
 - Thirdly, the **sector became more professional, from being only a job provider to being the provider of a fulfilling career**, where people see themselves moving up in roles and responsibilities. Truly, **the development sector can offer students a meaningful life choice where wellbeing of the self is coupled with wellbeing of so many people, who otherwise would never have the opportunity.** Achieving SDGs in India, and for that matter in many countries, would require thousands of such development professionals.

There are many development education programmes today in Indian universities. Some programmes focus on specific skill sets and knowledge that has immediate use in the sector. The **MA-Development programme** on the other hand, **offers the students a broad understanding of the inter-related nature of the development challenges and critical abilities to engage with these challenges at the level of theory, policy, programme and social actions.** This kind of engagement prepares the students for a long journey and career, with capabilities to work in various kinds of organisations and roles.

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