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STUDY OF RECENTLY ACCREDITED COLLEGES IN TERMS OF THEIR CONTRIBUTION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT THROUGH VALUES AND BEST PRACTICES

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Abstract:

The National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) is an autonomous body established by the University Grants Commission (UGC) of India to assess and accredit higher education institutions in India. NAAC has developed a set of criteria and metrics for accreditation that focus on various aspects of institutional quality and excellence. In the context of sustainable development, the seven criteria of NAAC can be aligned to highlight their relevance and contribution to sustainable development goals. In this present study the focus is on the seventh criteria: "Institutional values and Best Practices", whose primary intent is to evaluate the ethical and value-based practices of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), and it inherently aligns with the principles and goals of sustainable development. Conclusions are drawn upon a comprehensive analysis of contemporary literature & Self-Study Reports of the Institutions, this study elucidates how institutional values shape sustainability practices and vice versa. The paper uncovers the synergies, challenges, and transformative potential inherent in aligning institutional values with sustainable development goals. Ultimately, this paper contributes to the academic discourse by offering insights, frameworks, and recommendations to facilitate a harmonious integration of institutional values and best practices in advancing sustainable development agendas within HEIs.

Keywords: *Institutional Values, Best Practices, Sustainable Development, Higher Education Institute.*

Introduction:

Sustainable Development: Meaning & Concept:

Sustainable development is the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (United Nations, 1987). In the academic literature, sustainable development is defined as the process of improving the quality of human life while living within the carrying capacity of supporting ecosystems (Willers,1994). Pearce, Atkinson, and Dubourg (1994) defines sustainable development in terms of a per capita consumption path that is constant or rising over time.

Pillars of Sustainable Development:

According to Taylor (2016), the three main issues of sustainable development are economic growth, environmental protection and social equality. Based on this, it can be argued that the concept of SD rests, fundamentally, on three conceptual pillars. These pillars are "economic sustainability", "social sustainability", and 'environmental sustainability.

Goals of Sustainable Development: As part of the new development roadmap, the UN approved the

2030 Agenda (SDGs), which are a call to action to protect the planet, end poverty and guarantee the well-being of people (Taylor, Citation2016). In all there are 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) and these 17 SDGs primarily seek to achieve the following summarised objectives.

- Eradicate poverty and hunger, guaranteeing a healthy life
- Universalize access to basic services such as water, sanitation and sustainable energy
- Support the generation of development opportunities through inclusive education and decent work
- Foster innovation and resilient infrastructure, creating communities and cities able to produce and consume sustainably
- Reduce inequality in the world, especially that concerning gender
- Care for the environmental integrity through combatting climate change and protecting the oceans and land ecosystems
- Promote collaboration between different social agents to create an environment of peace and ensure responsible consumption and production

(Hylton, 2019; Saner et al., 2019; UN, p. 2017).

Sustainable development and higher education are interconnected domains that share a common purpose of fostering knowledge, innovation, collaboration, and action towards creating a more equitable, resilient, and sustainable world. To ensure quality of higher education in the country University Grant Commission has established an autonomous institution called NAAC (National Assessment and Accreditation Council). National Assessment and Accreditation Council or NAAC certification can be defined as a measure to evaluate and then guarantee a standard of education provided in higher institutions across the nation. The vision statement of NAAC goes like this-

"To make quality the defining element of higher education in India through a combination of self and external quality evaluation, promotion, and sustenance initiatives."

NAAC's accreditation process is more about Quality Assurance (QA). The Revised Assessment & Accreditation Framework of NAAC reflects the paradigm shift in the evaluation of the educational core values. Out of the seven NAAC criteria, the seventh criterion emphasizes the importance of integrating sustainable development principles into the core values and operational practices of institutions. It assesses the extent to which institutions recognize, adopt, and implement sustainable practices in alignment with global sustainability goals. Hence the researcher has focused on the seventh criterion for study. For the present study following 5 Colleges in PCMC (Pimpri Chinchwad Municipal Corporation) area were selected.

Discussion on the contribution of selected colleges as per the key indicators of 7th criterion

1. Institutional Values

Institutional values are fundamental in guiding Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in India towards sustainable development. These values shape the ethos of an institution and influence its policies, practices, and actions. Here are some institutional values in terms of sustainable development by HEIs, identified in the study.

- Integrity
- Excellence
- Responsibility
- Accountability
- Collaboration
- Innovation
- Inclusivity

2. Institutional Responsibilities and Best Practices

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) play a pivotal role in promoting sustainable development in India. Adopting best practices in this context can create a ripple effect, influencing not only students and faculty but also the wider community. Here are some best practices of HEIs in PCMC (Pimpri-Chinchwad Municipal Corporation) area to promote sustainable development.

Curriculum Integration:

Institutions are integrating sustainability principles, concepts, and practices into the curriculum across disciplines. By offering specialized courses, programs, and research opportunities in sustainable development through various courses such as Certificate course in Development of Scientific Attitude, Guidance and Counselling, Advanced digital Teaching and Learning strategies etc.

Research and Innovation:

Higher Education institutions are encouraging research on sustainable technologies, solutions for environmental challenges, and socio-economic sustainable models by facilitating collaborations between academia, industries, and communities to develop sustainable solutions through various activities such as internship, field visits, inter-collegiate competitions etc. One of the examples of innovative and unique practice is "Excellent Lesson Performance Trophy" - An intercollegiate competition where student teachers get an opportunity to observe, participate and demonstrate best lessons. This competition is organized by one of the teachers- training institute every year.

Community Engagement:

Community engagement involves engaging with local communities to understand their sustainability needs and

co-developing solutions. Various outreach programs, capacity-building workshops, and community development projects are initiated by the HEIs. Higher Education Institutions are collaborating with local governments and NGOs for community development projects. One of such initiatives is "Vilay". It is a program, under which one of the HEIs and Urja Pratishthan Prakasalay (NGO), collaboratively and mutually organize various programs to enhance the academic standard, professional, social skills and intellectual life of students.

Policy Advocacy and Collaboration:

HEIs are advocating policies that support sustainable development at local, regional, and national levels; their collaboration with government agencies, industries, and civil society organizations addresses sustainability challenges like unemployment, water scarcity etc,. Various national, international workshops, seminars and conferences on the theme of sustainable development, are organized by the HEIs. "Pratibha Job Fair" is an example of such practice which provides a platform for students to understand skills required to meet global competencies and to find suitable jobs and also for the employers to select deserving candidates for their job profile.

Ethical and Responsible Practices: Promote ethical practices, including fair trade, responsible consumption, and ethical sourcing. Foster a culture of integrity, responsibility, and social consciousness among students, faculty, and staff. "NO CRACKERS PLEASE: A Crackers Free Diwali Campaign" is an example of best practice done by one of the HEIs to inculcate social values and environmental awareness among students.

Sustainable Transportation: HEIs are promoting the use of public transport, cycling, and carpooling among students and staff and developing pedestrian-friendly campuses with green spaces. Initiatives like celebration of "No-Vehicle Day", World Cycle Day, Awareness Rallies, Street plays for Environment Conservation, Water Conservation.

Biodiversity Conservation: All the HEIs have created and maintained green spaces, gardens, and botanical gardens in their campus. They have preserved native plant species and promoted biodiversity. One of the HEIs is practicing "Conservation of Biodiversity" through various activities such as State level Biodiversity Camp, Medicinal Plant Nursery Development, Tree Plantation Programme, Wildlife Census etc,. One of the institutions has participated and won 3rd prize in the Majhi Vasundhara Competition organized by Pimpri-Chinchwad Municipal Corporation. In this competition, the college has done a lot of activities, such as planting more than 5000 saplings, conducting awareness rallies etc.

Capacity Building: By organizing workshops, seminars, and training programs on sustainable practices. Developing partnerships with international institutions for knowledge exchange and collaboration. One of the HEI has the best practice called "Forging Bonds: through networking with other institutions", where it collaborates with various institutions like IISER, NCL, ICSSR, Pune & Nashik Divisional Wildlife Department etc. for collaboration & knowledge sharing in the form of Guest-Lecture, Faculty exchange programme, Conferences, visits and training programmes.

3. Institutional Distinctiveness: Distinctiveness in the context of sustainable development by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) refers to unique approaches, strategies, and contributions that set them apart from others. This

distinctiveness can be derived from the institution's vision, mission, geographical location, cultural context, resources, and innovative practices. Following are some of the aspects that are identified in the study, and which contribute to the distinctiveness of HEIs aligning with sustainable development:

Cultural Context and Local Wisdom: Integrating traditional knowledge, indigenous practices, and local wisdom into sustainability initiatives. Collaborating with local communities and indigenous groups to co-create sustainable solutions. "Beyond Boundaries: Exploring the Wonders of Biodiversity Preservation and conservation" is one of the distinctive practices by one of the selected HEIs, in which students of the HEI are encouraged and motivated to participate in the activities which are laid down by the college for "Conservation of Biodiversity", such as "Vruksha Rakshabandhan", Vasant Mahotsav (Spring Festival), Van Chetana etc.

Interdisciplinary Approach:

Fostering interdisciplinary collaboration among faculties, departments, and research centres to address complex sustainability challenges. Integrating arts, humanities, and sciences in sustainability education and research. HEIs promote Human Values Community Outreach (HVCO) activities like health camps, blood donation camps, awareness program on various social issues like swatchtha Abhiyan, Van Mahotsav, national integration, patriotism, etc. in and outside the college campus.

Community-Centric Initiatives: Prioritizing community engagement, participatory approaches, and inclusive development in sustainable projects. Empowering marginalized and vulnerable communities through education, skill development, and capacity-building programs. "Vilay" is one of the community-centric practices where HEI and an NGO works together to enhance the academic standard, professional, social skills and intellectual life of students.

Cultural and Social Sustainability: Promoting cultural sustainability by preserving cultural heritage, promoting traditional arts, crafts, and practices. Addressing social issues such as gender equality, social justice, and inclusivity through education, research, and advocacy. One of the examples of social sustainability is **"Dikshant Samaroh"** practiced by one of the HEIs, in this activity student-teachers take oath of serving the community, before entering into their professional life.

Global Partnerships and Collaboration: Establishing international collaborations, partnerships, and exchange programs focused on sustainable development. Contributing to global knowledge networks, sharing best practices, and learning from international experiences. One of the HEIs is running "Finishing School" under its placement cell where they collaborate with many organizations of Master Trainers such as FUEL, HR Worldwide-ITES, ETHNUS, Mahindra Pride School-Naandi Foundation and Global Talent Track etc. with a mission 'to inculcate skills valued by industry and leading to graduate employability'.

Holistic Education and Leadership Development: HEIs are offering holistic education that emphasizes values, ethics, sustainability, and leadership development. For nurturing future leaders, change-makers, and innovators committed to sustainable development, institutions are practicing Outcome based Education by considering the vision & mission of the institute, inputs from the stakeholders and affiliating university.

Conclusion: From the above discussion and observation of the study, some areas of conclusion, such as

Uniqueness, Environment Initiatives, Developed System and contribution of HEIs towards sustainable development are observed through various practices. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) wield significant in cascading down sustainable practices amongst all stakeholders through their values and best practices, which depicts process of creation of sustainable society. By fostering a culture rooted in ethical values, responsible governance, and inclusive principles, HEIs serve as catalysts for societal transformation. Their commitment to innovative research, interdisciplinary collaboration, and community engagement enables the co-creation of sustainable solutions tailored to local contexts and global challenges. Thus, the collective contributions of HEIs, characterized by their distinctive values and best practices, are instrumental in shaping a more sustainable, equitable, and resilient world for present and future generations.

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