



## Concept for International Symposium

on

### ***Global Initiative for Sustainability and Human Development: Envisioning the Planetary Future***

According to UNDP, Human Development is defined as “a process of enlarging people’s choices”. The three essential choices for people are: to live a long and healthy life, to acquire better knowledge, and to have access to resources needed for a decent standard of living. It has four basic elements: i) Equality, defined as equal access to opportunities; ii) Productivity, as the contention that economic growth and improved output can be achieved through development of human resources and creation of a conducive environment where people can make use of their capabilities optimally; iii) Empowerment and participation, implying provision of an adequate social environment in which people participate for achievement of a better life; and (iv) Sustainability, which is to ensure sustenance of choices in order to accommodate the needs of future generations.<sup>1</sup>

The discourse of sustainability primarily gained significance out of a universal concern to improve human life and wellbeing. That the debate is strongly grounded in academia and intelligentsia somehow makes it appear exclusive and elitist. If we are to make any concrete progress towards social change and a shift towards a new society that ensures a sustainable way of life on earth, we have to ensure dissemination of its broader tenets through education and outreach.

We are at a transition of the making of the first universal society; creation of ‘One World’ where human wellbeing can no longer be separated from the planetary welfare. That this society is heavily driven by technology, both at a human and social consciousness level, is both good and bad news. Technology dependence can be bad when we lose human connections with nature and other human beings and confront its glooming consequences in toxic wastes, bio-degradation, wasteful consumption, livelihood depletion, etc. On the other hand, technology and its neutrality can be a huge boon for societies at both ends of the economic hierarchy. At the lower end, it can ensure egalitarianism and democratic justice when it is groomed as social technology for services such as education, health, justice, fighting corruption, etc. At the higher end, the same neutrality can transcend narrow market interests to reach for global humanism, set up an economic value system that is not just market centric but truly benefits human sustenance and freedom; a technology driven by a powerful value-system that orients innovations and economy within the limitations of

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.undp.org.sa/sa/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=18&Itemid=7&lang=ar#top](http://www.undp.org.sa/sa/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=18&Itemid=7&lang=ar#top)

our bio-physical constraints for restoration of natural and social capital. For example, innovations for lower carbon footprint and resource consumption, clean technologies minimizing waste and toxic emissions, green manufacturing initiatives for internalizing aspects of product life cycle management such as Cradle-to-Cradle, Design for Serviceability and Recyclability, etc. are all issues that point towards a paradigm shift in the values that have conventionally driven Business as Usual (BAU) practices.

The North Eastern part of India situated in her extreme east is a land of wonders for many. Comprising of eight states and having geographical proximity to a number of South East Asian countries, this sprawling region is conspicuous by verdant hilly terrains, scenic natural beauty, hospitable people with enduring expression in art and culture, quaint historic and Vedic shrines, and habitats of endangered species. However, it is very unfortunate that the rest of the world apparently knows this region more for its insurgency than anything else. North East India owing to its geo-political location and unique bio-cultural archive is a significant global destination. How can we both utilize and develop its resources in a diversified and balanced manner through a viable development model of Sustainability? While it is necessary to expose North East India to global discourses, initiatives and experiences of models implemented in the West; it is also equally vital to allow the outside world a glimpse into the historical and traditional interventions of sustainable living in North East India through indigenous knowledge, local resource management and distribution, community assets, etc.

To be able to merge the multi-faceted tenets of sustainability from both the developed and the developing world is not only an important perspective, but also is loaded with urgency as the world tries to grapple with issues such as population explosion, poverty, environmental degradation, human health challenges, and climate change. While the West engages in somewhat silent atonement because of overconsumption, toxicity, and breakdown of community life; East tries to meet the challenges of livelihood destruction, democratic deficit, breakdown of traditional institutions, and conflict. The location of the voices varies but the essence of depravity and despair is the same. What appears to the West as an ideological worldview and a political agenda grounded in corporate interest and fund politics spearheaded by sophisticated Western science and technology and backed by research based on documentation of logical data, is seen by the East as a proposed model for development.

The primary vision of this Symposium is to engage in a global dialogue for envisioning solutions that can unite universal dichotomies such as human vs. nature, developing vs. developed world, etc. to address challenges of Sustainability. This we believe is not impossible and can be achieved by a gradual reorientation of our value system that locates the ultimate purpose of happiness, prosperity and growth in the proliferation of a universal and sustainable social order. The task can nevertheless be quite challenging, because we are in reality trying to decipher the effect of a fundamental set of interlocking problems. In order to limit our scope, we will focus on four main dimensions that can effectively influence and be influenced by efforts of value reorientation. They are **Education, Civil Society, Industry and Business, and Governance and Public Policy.**

**Education** is one of the primary agents of socialization. It is believed that most of the larger issues and solutions are in reality embedded in individual choices. For example, whether we are

committed to reducing our individual carbon footprint or collectively of a region or a country through waste management and recycling, adoption of renewable energy sources, green technology and manufacturing, locomotive substitution and resource sharing, etc. is ultimately governed by choices made at an individual level. Thus, human choices are driven by a value system embedded in our collective conscience, more significantly in our social collectivity and its socialization process.

**Civil Society** is the intersection of community, consumer, and citizen. It is a powerful dynamic force that steers the underlying values driving the changing consciousness. It motivates individuals to enact their roles as a consumer or citizen through choices that promote sustainable ways of living.

**Industry and Business** are the primary drivers of economic value system underlying global capitalism. They have been instrumental in designing some of our most dominant values pertaining to growth, prosperity, consumption, profitability, etc. Every initiative made by them towards adoption of clean technology, visibility improvement of their sustainability index, refrainment from green washing, advertisement-based responsible product endorsements, support of initiatives through corporate social responsibility programs, etc. helps to redefine the parameters of prosperity and profit in Business and promotes the goals towards social and global sustainability.

Intervention for **Good Governance and Public Policy** can address short-term thinking at the highest political levels in order to change the rules and frameworks of local and global governance. Implementation of long-term policies to secure the rights of future generations to inhabit a healthy world, and ensure democratic justice and peace are issues that need to be addressed.

In this context, the proposed Symposium will address the *following questions*:

- A. What are the underlying implications of connecting the concept of Sustainability with Human Development? Can we use sustainability as a tool that can create long lasting solutions for the challenges faced by our world today?
- B. Is it possible to see technology and education as both drivers of reorienting our existing value system to create a sustainable social order that is respectful of interconnections of natural and human world?
- C. What are the possible ways of engaging in the interconnections of economy, environment and society, and decipher ways to redefine global economy and entrepreneurship through categories of human development rather than market and consumption?
- D. How can we possibly create a global vision of universalism that transcends existing polarities of nature vs. culture, bio-centrism vs. anthropocentrism, developing vs. developed countries in the discourse of sustainability?
- E. How can we engage governance, political decision making, public policy and civil society interventions to contribute effectively in the creation of a human culture of sustainability?
- F. In what ways can we make a society that is local in action but global in vision? What are the institutions that support local intervention and how can we merge the outcomes for a more globally just and peaceful society?

## **Objectives**

1. Promote Sustainability as the primary tool for Human Development in creating a planetary social order based on equity, justice and universalism.
2. Examine Sustainability as an inclusive concept in our day-to-day practices and disseminate the view that global issues of climate change, species depletion, bio-diversity loss, toxicity and its impact on health are in reality choices made by individuals.
3. Explore the possibility of creating a global think-tank by creating a common platform for dialogue, exchange and collaboration between like-minded partners and affiliates with globally diverse experiences and expertise to channelize the global paradigm shift that defines prosperity, growth and business competitiveness within the realms of our biophysical constraints.
4. Identifying areas of active interventions and locally implementable policies to collaborate on workable projects in North East India.
5. Promote interdisciplinary exchange in debates of Natural Science, Social Science, Humanities, Technology and Business about sustainable way of life on earth.
6. Explore the possibility of forming a Consortium 'Global Initiative for Sustainable Development and Planning' (GISDP) in order to exchange information, knowledge and expertise for implementable projects in North East India that can address challenges of Human Development such as poverty, conflict, population explosion, environmental degradation, etc.

## **Themes**

- De-constructing Sustainability: Envisioning a human culture of sustainable values
- Technology mediated consciousness as a driver for global sustainability
- Sustainability and Indigenous Knowledge: Indigenous Technology, Livelihood Options, Habitat utilization, etc.
- The 'New Industrial Revolution': Waste Management, Renewable Sources of Energy, Toxicity and Locomotive substitution
- Sustainability, Profitability and Corporate Competitiveness in Business
- Sustainability and Governance: Public Policy and Democratic Justice
- Sustainability and North East India: Balancing Trium of Environment, Society, and Economy
- Resource Mapping of North East India: Case Studies and New Initiatives

**Venue: Guwahati, India**

**Date: 1<sup>st</sup> - 3<sup>rd</sup> October, 2012**

**Academic Advisory Committee**

Prof. M. Aslam, Hon'ble Vice Chancellor (Chairperson), IGNOU

Prof. Martin Sanchez-Jankowski, Director, ISSI, UC Berkeley

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Saurabh Garg (Applied Materials, CA, US) and Dr. Sujata Dutta Hazarika, Deputy Director, NECRD (Convenors)

**Collaborations**

- Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Institute of Asian Studies, Department of culture, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India
- Indian Council of World Affairs, Government of India, New Delhi
- Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Guwahati, India
- Institute for the Study of Societal Issues, University of California, Berkeley, USA

## **Expected Outcomes**

- Creation of Consortium 'Global Initiative for Sustainable Development and Planning' for exchange of knowledge, expertise and institutional networking for implementation of action-oriented projects.
- Establish North East India as a stakeholder in the global discourse of Sustainability and steer development of this region towards a paradigm shift that seeks to redefine growth, prosperity, human development within our bio-physical and cultural limitations.
- Opening up possibilities of international exposure for North-East India to some of the world's leading organizations and institutions specializing in Sustainable Development and use their expertise to carry out action based workable projects for the development of the region.