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This is **United Nation's Decade of Education for Sustainable Development**. The United Nations proclaimed the decade from 2005- 2014, emphasizing that education is an indispensable element for achieving sustainable development. As we are in an era when the whole world is strictly concerned about the implementations of education for sustainable development, let me make this an opportunity to express my idea about the Education on for Sustainable Development of Sri Lanka.

By the way, what's so special in sustainable development? In brief, sustainable development refers to a mode of human development that meets the needs of the present generation, without compromising the ability to the future generations to meet there own needs. The fact can be described basing on the economic growth, social development and the environmental protection of the country.

Moving towards sustainable development is a tremendous challenge. Specific structural changes are needed in the education systems to manage economic, cultural, political and environmental affairs of the society. Different countries may settle for different solutions and strategies on education for sustainable development. But it's important to make sure whether these solutions are realistic, effective, long lasting and suitable for the status of the particular country.

So, if we consider about our country, Sri Lanka is a diverse country, home to people of many religions, ethnicities, cultures and languages. We should understand that these divisions are major obstacles for the social sustainability of the country. Let me draw back your mind to the era, when the war took place in Sri Lanka. We all know that, it was due to these divisions between ethnicities and the war became a great barrier to the development of Sri Lanka. Not only the war, just think about the crimes, violations, bribery and corruption incidents that take place every day in the country. This shows that the present education system lacks something very important. So what do you think it is? In my opinion, I think, especially in a country like ours, the education system should include the education on ethics, inter-cultural education, political education and social education in order to build up understanding between ethnicities, to respect others, to protect human rights, to live in peace, to hold and corporate social responsibilities, to ensure gender equality

and also the health and well being of citizens. In the other hand, the fast moving society, which runs after money with selfishness and greed, has made the way to most of these problems. So I think, conceptual development in citizen should be done along with the education to build up the lost connectedness between citizens and to build up a socially sustainable country.

And at the same time, Sri Lanka is a developing country. So education can play a great role to up lift the economy of the country. Illiteracy and unskilled work forces have fewer development options. So education for poverty alleviation, to build up skilled personnel, to increase the rate of employment and the productivity, to up lift the quality of goods and services in the country, to wealth creation, to strengthen the trade capacity and to maintain financial stability in the changing economy might be important in building up an economically sustainable country.

And also Sri Lanka is a country full of natural resources, and vast bio diversity. So it's essential to include environmental education in our education system in order to conserve the natural resources, decrease environmental pollution and protect the eco systems. As an example, we know that the Tsunami disaster in the recent history taught us the harmful effects of environmental pollution. Awareness would have prevented the damage due to the catastrophe.

So this shows that education is the key to a nation's ability to develop and achieve sustainability targets.

Here we should not forget that education is just the formal education gained in schools, universities and other institutions. But also the knowledge and awareness gained through non formal education and the informal education; from the family background, the society, the environment, through media, awareness programs and training programs conducted by the governmental organizations, NGOs and other communities. The formal education cannot carry the responsibility alone itself to build up a sustainably developed country. The informal and non formal education sectors must work in tandem with the formal education sector to educate people of all generations and all walks of life .In these, the citizens should be made aware about the importance of sustainable development to them and to the country, the importance of education for sustainable development and their role in it.

Sustainable development requires better scientific understanding of problems. So, guiding the community towards this vision and giving them proper education and awareness to improve their knowledge, skills, attitudes and values is a must. And also we should share knowledge and innovative suitable technologies globally to support and achieve the goals of sustainability.

I believe what we really need today is not teaching, but proper guiding. Sometimes teaching will destruct the creativity while guiding enhances it. So every child should be guided not to fill their brains with all the theories and concepts, just to pass the examinations, but to apply and make use of everything they learn, for the betterment of the country. From the very young age every child should be guided to think of their own. The education system should include more activities & experiments, for them to think of something new and proceed with it, to make choices, to explain the reasons for the choices, to self learn, to do experiments and come to conclusions, hold responsibilities, to share work & resources, to get the team spirit, to experience leadership, to manage the time, to move and interact with the environment and the society without limiting to the classroom or the lecture theatre, to use the modern technology in work and most importantly to link their visions, activities and the technology towards the development of the country.

We all have our own capabilities, inborn talents and skills. So the education system should be diverse to make use of these diverse talents in every citizen to create new job opportunities. A truly educated citizen would always have a better choice for him and the society. If the education system provides space for every citizen to improve their inborn talents, then he'll choose and get involved in a field in which he feels comfortable and worthwhile to make the living. This would create more skilled, dedicated personnel to the country who would ensure the sustainability of the country.

We should not forget that we possess all these things around us today, because our past generations conserved, secured and spared these for us. But, if we don't do the same, what will happen to our future generations? This shows that building up a sustainably developed country is a responsibility that we can't get rid of. But, we should corporate in this, not just because we have to, but because we feel for. And it's education's role to guide the society in to it.

Once Nelson Mandela said, education is a powerful weapon that can change the world. An educated citizenry is vital for implementing sustainable development of the country. So, reorienting education towards sustainable development has become a critical issue. Responsible authorities should make sure that our education system is appropriate to make wiser, educated, practical people who can lead the country to the top.

Sustainability is a journey, which we cannot go all alone, in which the whole society should accompany. And also, the whole society should have the same intention to get involved in it. So as the products of free education in Sri Lanka, time has come for us to pay back. For the sake of the free education which brought us up to this place, let us get together to make our country a better place, a secure place for the present generation and for many other generations to come.

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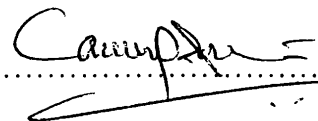
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