

Panel Discussions on Making Sustainability a Reality and the Role of Education and Skills Development

Amrita University, Amritapuri Campus, 25th September 2016

A high-level panel discussion titled “Making Sustainability a Reality: from Policy to Successful Practice” was held at the Amrita University’s Amritapuri campus on September 25th, 2016, attended by Dr. Thomas Isaac, Finance Minister, Kerala, and Sunita Sanghi, Advisor, NITI Aayog, among others.

Said Dr. Thomas Isaac: “The idea that development means only increasing GDP and per capita income has come into question due to its heavy toll on nature. Rapid growth based on finite resources is bound to hit a roadblock. It is not sufficient just to have maximum output. Many economic processes today are unsustainable and present path of global development cannot be sustained. Climate change has emerged as a huge challenge, and by 2050 we may be looking at an environmental disaster. Policy-makers have to search for sustainable path to development. There is a lot to learn from Kerala in sustainability. Kerala’s HDI index remains higher than warranted by its per capita income. It has shown a possible way in improving the quality of life in a manner that is sustainable.” Dr. Isaac complimented Amrita University for leading the sustainability initiatives in various forums and facilitating such events.

Added Srimati Sunita Sanghi: “India has a 500 million-strong workforce but 93% of it works in the informal sector. These workers are vulnerable and keep floating in and out of poverty. It is important for economic growth to be sustainable and enhance their capacity to earn. Our goal is to ensure decent employment for all men and women by 2030. The Government of India has taken many initiatives for job creation. There are 58 million micro-sector enterprises operations in India. About 76% of those in the labour force work in enterprises, which employ less than five people. Only 2.5% of enterprises in India employ more than 10 workers. These people don’t have any safety net and no employer-employee relationship. The Make in India program of Government of India is a step forward in increasing employment opportunities and earning potential of Indian workers further. It has identified 25 sectors with large employment potential and is scouting for FDI all over the world.”

After the high level session a second panel discussion took place focusing on the specific theme of “Towards inclusive sustainable development: The case for Education and Skills Development in relation to Employment” The panel, moderated by Dr. Joost Monks, Managing Director of NORRAG in Geneva, focused on the role of education and skills development as foundational sectors for sustainable development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Agenda 2030. The sectors often are considered vital for sustainable and inclusive development since they enable individuals to escape from poverty, to live and aspire to healthy lives, to empower women, to increase environmental awareness and provide knowledge and skills for the labor market, and hence contribute to more equitable economic and social development.

Srimati Sunita Sanghi stressed the important challenges and ambitions India has for education and skills development and provided an overview of mayor policies and instruments for skills development in India. By 2022 400 million people are intended to be skilled or reskilled and issues around the quality, relevance, standardization and coordination of policies, as well as the public perception around vocational training and collaboration with the private sector will be essential. Dr. Prema Nedungadi, Director, Center for Research in Advanced Technologies for Education (CREATE), Amrita University then focused on practical experience in supplementing the education of children in rural India through their group’s tablet based educational-tutoring packages and programs. Prof. Rao R. Bhavani, Director, Ammachilabs & MA Math UN Team spoke on their experience in empowering women through vocational skills development programs that integrate ICT in the teaching and learning process, and the need to continuously assess the effective use of technology in creating optimal learning environments. Clement Gevaudan, Senior Programme Associate at the Global Development Network, a public International Organization that builds research capacity in development globally, spoke on the

value of locally driven social science research as the missing link in successful SDG implementation and introduced a framework that will help assess research environments and accordingly provide direction and guidance. Dr. Sidney Strauss, Professor (Emeritus), Branco Weiss Chair for Research in Child Development and Education, Tel Aviv University, delivered concluding remarks and synthesized how each of the speakers' presentations addressed areas of sustainable development, that effectively serve as "levers" in triggering impacts in educational development far beyond the point of direct contact. A lively question and answer session then followed with the audience and concluding remarks were offered stressing the importance of multi-stakeholder dialogues to advance the cause of education and skills development in India.

