Promoting Environmental Sustainability Leadership in Schools: Green Minds for a Sustainable Tomorrow

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In an era marked by unprecedented environmental challenges, the imperative to instil - a sense of environmental responsibility in future generations becomes paramount. "Promoting Environmental Sustainability Leadership in Schools" stands as a comprehensive module, illuminating the path towards fostering a generation of environmentally conscious leaders. Rooted in the understanding that schools play a pivotal role in shaping the attitudes and behaviours of young minds, this module delves into diverse strategies and initiatives aimed at integrating environmental sustainability into the very fabric of educational institutions.

Defining Environmental Sustainability: At the heart of this module lies a fundamental understanding of environmental sustainability. It is not merely a buzzword but a profound commitment to maintaining an ecological balance and conserving natural resources to safeguard all living beings. As schools serve as the cradle of knowledge and values, integrating this definition into the educational ethos becomes the first step towards nurturing environmentally responsible citizens.

Education and Sustainability: Echoing the sentiments of Mahatma Gandhi, who envisioned education as the drawing out of the best in a child—body, mind, and spirit—this module emphasizes the intrinsic connection between education and sustainability. Physical, mental, and spiritual development, crucial components of a child's growth, are intricately linked to the environment. Thus, a peaceful and well-planned educational environment becomes the canvas upon which the physical, mental, and spiritual exercises are painted.

Sustainability Vitality in School: A school is more than just a place of learning; it is a vibrant community centre where environmental sustainability can flourish. From the formation of eco clubs to the preservation of school gardens, the module outlines various initiatives that can transform schools into hubs of environmental consciousness. With eco-friendly teaching-learning processes and student involvement in green initiatives, schools become laboratories for sustainability.

Eco-friendly Infrastructure: Beyond the classroom, the physical environment surrounding students plays a crucial role. This section explores the importance of eco-friendly infrastructure, advocating for the incorporation of natural elements like tree shades, hills, and seashores. By giving the class and the

garden to the children, schools can create an atmosphere where students feel a sense of ownership and responsibility for the environment.

Ensuring Evergreen Environment: Inspired by literary works such as Vaikom Muhammed Basheer's "The Rightful Inheritors of the Earth," this module underscores the need for perpetuating an evergreen environment. Community gardens and the integration of agriculture as a cultural lesson from a young age ensure that sustainability is woven into the very fabric of students' lives.

Awareness Programmes: Environmental activists' life experiences and dedication come alive in this section, urging schools to conduct awareness programs. Expert classes, impactful videos, and pledging ceremonies are explored as means to engrain the importance of environmental sustainability in students' minds.

Formation of Eco Clubs: Empowering students to take the lead, the module advocates for the formation of eco clubs in schools. With guidance from teachers, these clubs become the breeding ground for future environmental leaders, with adequate funding and media coverage ensuring the success of their initiatives.

The following sections will explore specific strategies, initiatives, and collaborations that can be embraced by schools to foster a generation that not only understands the importance of environmental sustainability but actively contributes to creating a greener, more sustainable world. This module serves as a guiding light, illuminating the path towards a future where our youth emerges as stewards of the environment, ready to face the challenges of the ever-evolving world with resilience, awareness, and a commitment to sustainability.

OBJECTIVES

a. **Empower Schools to Integrate Environmental Sustainability into Curricula:** Provide actionable strategies for schools to seamlessly incorporate environmental sustainability concepts across subjects, ensuring a holistic and comprehensive educational approach.
b. **Facilitate the Establishment of Robust Eco Clubs and Initiatives:** Guide schools in creating effective eco clubs, offering insights on leadership, funding, and media engagement to empower students as catalysts for environmental change within their school communities.
c. **Promote Eco-friendly Infrastructure Development in Educational Institutions:** Advocate for the transformation of school spaces into eco-friendly environments, emphasizing the

importance of natural elements and sustainable practices to create conducive learning atmospheres.

d. **Encourage Collaborations with External Organizations for Holistic Impact:** Highlight the significance of partnerships with external entities, such as environmental organizations and community groups, to leverage collective expertise, resources, and support for comprehensive sustainability initiatives.
e. **Establish Monitoring Metrics for Sustainable Progress:** Introduce a systematic approach to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of sustainability initiatives within schools, incorporating metrics for measuring environmental impacts, waste reduction, and overall progress towards a sustainable future.

STRATEGIES FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY LEADERSHIP IN SCHOOLS

a. Integration of Environmental Sustainability in Curricula:

The integration of environmental sustainability into school curricula is a transformative strategy that shapes the educational landscape towards a greener future. Guiding schools in embedding sustainability themes across subjects ensures that concepts related to ecological balance and resource conservation seamlessly become an integral part of the curriculum.

This strategy emphasizes the need for a holistic approach, where sustainability is not confined to a specific subject but interwoven throughout the educational journey. Science classes may explore climate change and its impact on ecosystems, while literature classes delve into environmental ethics and human-nature relationships. By doing so, students not only acquire knowledge but also develop a profound understanding of the interconnectedness between human actions and the environment.

Moreover, fostering teacher training programs becomes crucial for the successful implementation of this strategy. Educators need to be equipped with the knowledge and tools to incorporate sustainability seamlessly into their teaching methods. These programs should empower teachers to create engaging lessons, utilizing case studies, interactive activities, and discussions that inspire a sense of environmental stewardship among students.

Integration of environmental sustainability into curricula becomes a dynamic and evolving process. It lays the groundwork for subsequent initiatives, fostering a mindset that transcends the classroom and

permeates every aspect of students' lives. As students graduate, they carry with them not only academic knowledge but also a deep-seated commitment to environmental responsibility.

b. Establishment and Empowerment of Eco Clubs:

Encouraging the formation of robust eco clubs within schools is a pivotal strategy to translate environmental awareness into tangible actions. These clubs become catalysts for change, empowering students as active contributors to environmental initiatives.

Effective leadership within eco clubs is paramount. Guidance on selecting leaders and providing them with the necessary skills to inspire and mobilize their peers is crucial for the success of these clubs. It involves cultivating qualities like communication, organization, and a passion for environmental sustainability.

Securing funding for eco clubs ensures that they can implement meaningful projects and initiatives. This may involve seeking support from school administrations, community sponsors, or even engaging in fundraising activities within the school community. Financial backing enhances the club's capacity to bring their ideas to fruition and make a tangible impact.

Assuring media engagement is another vital aspect. Eco clubs can utilize various media platforms to showcase their initiatives, raise awareness, and inspire broader community involvement. This could include creating social media campaigns, organizing events covered by local media, or even establishing a school environmental newsletter.

Establishment and empowerment of eco clubs within schools create a dynamic space for students to channel their environmental passion into actionable change. It transforms awareness into concrete initiatives, fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility for the environment within the student body.

c. Development of Eco-friendly School Infrastructure:

Advocating for the creation of eco-friendly learning environments within schools represents a visionary strategy. This involves not only incorporating natural elements like tree shades, hills, and seashores into school spaces but also emphasizing sustainable practices in school architecture and infrastructure development.

The integration of natural elements into school environments provides tangible benefits for students. Tree shades offer a refreshing outdoor learning space, hills provide opportunities for nature walks and exploration, and seashores create a unique setting for educational activities. These elements not only

enhance the learning experience but also foster a deep connection between students and the natural world.

Sustainable practices in school architecture and infrastructure development play a crucial role in reducing the environmental footprint of educational institutions. This may involve incorporating energy-efficient designs, utilizing renewable energy sources, and implementing waste reduction measures. Schools can also explore the use of eco-friendly building materials and sustainable landscaping practices.

Educating stakeholders, including school administrators, teachers, and students, about the importance of eco-friendly infrastructure is a key component of this strategy. This awareness ensures a collective commitment to creating and maintaining sustainable learning environments. Additionally, involving students in the planning and development process can instil a sense of ownership and pride in their eco-friendly school spaces.

Development of eco-friendly school infrastructure is a proactive step towards creating educational environments that not only teach about sustainability but embody it in their very structure. It sets a precedent for responsible and eco-conscious practices, shaping the mindset of students and fostering a commitment to a greener future.

d. Collaboration with External Environmental Organizations:

Promoting collaborations between schools and external environmental organizations signifies a strategic approach to harness collective expertise, resources, and support for comprehensive sustainability projects and initiatives. This collaborative effort extends the impact of sustainability initiatives beyond the confines of the school and integrates broader community and organizational perspectives.

Establishing partnerships with environmental non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community groups allows schools to tap into a wealth of knowledge and experience. These external entities often have a specialized understanding of environmental issues, access to research and data, and established networks that can enrich the educational experience for students.

Moreover, external organizations can provide valuable resources, ranging from financial support to access to experts and mentors. This infusion of resources enhances the capacity of schools to implement ambitious sustainability projects and initiatives, ensuring a more significant and lasting impact.

Collaborative efforts also create opportunities for community engagement and involvement. By connecting with local environmental groups, schools can initiate community-wide projects, awareness campaigns, and events that amplify the reach and influence of sustainability initiatives. This fosters a sense of collective responsibility for environmental stewardship.

Collaboration with external environmental organizations transforms sustainability initiatives into dynamic, community-wide endeavours. It capitalizes on shared expertise, leverages additional resources, and creates a network of support that extends the influence of schools beyond their immediate boundaries, contributing to a more sustainable and interconnected future.

e. **Implementation of Monitoring Metrics for Sustainable Progress:** Introducing systematic monitoring and evaluation processes within schools is a critical strategy for establishing a robust framework to measure the impact of sustainability initiatives. By establishing metrics, schools can effectively track progress in waste reduction, assess the overall effectiveness of environmentally conscious practices, and demonstrate tangible outcomes of their sustainability efforts.

This strategy involves setting clear objectives and key performance indicators (KPIs) that align with the school's sustainability goals. These objectives could include targets related to waste reduction, energy conservation, and the implementation of eco-friendly practices. Defining these metrics creates a roadmap for schools to measure their progress and continually improve their sustainability initiatives.

Implementing regular evaluations ensures that schools stay accountable and responsive to the evolving needs of their sustainability programs. This involves conducting periodic assessments, gathering feedback from stakeholders, and adjusting strategies based on the outcomes. It creates a culture of continuous improvement and adaptability within the school community.

Additionally, involving students in the monitoring and evaluation process can be an educational opportunity in itself. By engaging students in data collection, analysis, and reporting, schools can instil a sense of responsibility and ownership in the sustainability journey. Students become active participants in shaping the direction of environmental initiatives.

Implementation of monitoring metrics for sustainable progress is a strategic step towards creating a transparent and accountable framework for sustainability within schools. It ensures that sustainability efforts are not just symbolic gestures but tangible, measurable actions contributing to a greener and more environmentally conscious future.

SUGGESTED INITIATIVES:

1. Comprehensive Environmental Education Programmes:

Implementing a comprehensive environmental education program is fundamental to cultivating environmental sustainability leadership in schools. This initiative goes beyond the conventional classroom teaching and aims to create an immersive and holistic learning experience for students.

The curriculum should cover a range of topics, including climate change, biodiversity, water and energy conservation, and waste management. To enhance engagement, incorporate interactive learning methods such as hands-on experiments, field trips to eco-friendly facilities, and guest lectures from environmental experts. Consider establishing partnerships with local environmental organizations to bring real-world perspectives into the classroom.

For instance, a module on waste management could involve a visit to a recycling facility, allowing students to witness firsthand the journey of recyclables. Additionally, organizing environmental fairs or expos within the school can showcase student projects, host guest speakers, and involve the broader community in discussions on sustainable practices.

Suggestions

Eco-Exploration Field Trips:

Organize field trips to local eco-friendly facilities, such as recycling centres, renewable energy installations, or sustainable farms. Allow students to witness sustainable practices in action, fostering a direct connection between classroom learning and real-world applications. Encourage interactive sessions where students can engage with professionals and ask questions about the environmental impact of these facilities.

Environmental Fair and Expo:

Host an annual Environmental Fair or Expo within the school premises. This event can showcase student projects related to climate change, biodiversity, water and energy conservation, and waste management. Invite guest speakers, including local environmentalists, scientists, or representatives from eco-friendly businesses, to share insights. Create interactive booths where students can present their projects to the broader school community, fostering awareness and discussions on sustainable practices.

Community Outreach Projects:

Engage students in community outreach projects related to environmental sustainability. Collaborate with local environmental organizations to identify community needs and develop projects that address them. This could include tree-planting initiatives, community clean-ups, or educational workshops for

the local community. These projects not only provide practical application of environmental knowledge but also instil a sense of social responsibility in students.

Hands-on Sustainable Living Workshops:

Conduct hands-on workshops that focus on sustainable living practices. Cover topics such as composting, water conservation, and energy-efficient habits. Allow students to actively participate in creating compost bins, installing water-saving devices, or designing energy-efficient models. These workshops empower students to implement sustainable practices in their daily lives and become ambassadors for eco-friendly living within their communities.

Guest Lecture Series on Environmental Perspectives:

Establish a Guest Lecture Series where professionals from diverse environmental fields deliver talks on their experiences and perspectives. Invite experts in climate science, biodiversity conservation, renewable energy, and waste management to share their insights. This provides students with a broader understanding of environmental issues and solutions. Encourage open discussions and Q&A sessions to promote critical thinking and engagement with varying viewpoints.

2. Student-Led Eco Projects and Initiatives:

Empowering students to take the lead in planning and executing eco-friendly projects fosters a sense of responsibility and leadership. Provide opportunities for students to propose and implement initiatives that align with sustainability goals.

Examples of student-led projects include establishing a school garden to promote organic farming practices, implementing a recycling program within the school, organizing awareness campaigns on energy conservation, or initiating a plastic-free campus movement. Encourage creativity and innovation by hosting competitions for the most impactful sustainability projects.

To amplify the impact of student-led initiatives, consider incorporating these projects into the curriculum. This could involve creating project-based assessments or integrating sustainability projects into extracurricular activities.

Suggestions

Sustainable School Garden Project:

Initiate a student-led school garden project focused on promoting organic farming practices. Students can be involved in planning, planting, and maintaining the garden. This project not only enhances environmental awareness but also provides a hands-on learning experience in sustainable agriculture. Consider integrating the garden into biology or environmental science classes for a holistic educational approach.

Recycling and Waste Reduction Campaign:

Empower students to lead a recycling program within the school, targeting waste reduction and proper recycling practices. Develop awareness campaigns to educate the school community on the importance of waste management. Students can create recycling bins, organize collection drives, and monitor the impact of the program. Incorporate this initiative into the school's curriculum, linking it with subjects like environmental studies or citizenship education.

Energy Conservation Awareness Week:

Designate a week focused on energy conservation where students take the lead in organizing awareness campaigns and initiatives. This could include turning off unnecessary lights and electronics, promoting energy-efficient practices, and conducting energy audits within the school. Encourage students to develop creative campaigns, such as energy-saving competitions or educational workshops. Link these activities to subjects like physics or environmental studies.

Plastic-Free Campus Movement:

Mobilize students to lead a plastic-free campus movement, aiming to reduce single-use plastic within the school premises. Students can conduct audits to identify areas of plastic use, propose alternatives, and organize awareness drives. Implement a plastic-free policy with the involvement of students, staff, and administrators. Connect this initiative to the curriculum by exploring the environmental impact of plastics in biology or chemistry classes.

3. Green Infrastructure Development:

Investing in green infrastructure within the school not only contributes to environmental sustainability but also serves as a visible commitment to eco-friendly practices. Develop a green infrastructure plan that aligns with the school's long-term sustainability goals.

Examples of green infrastructure projects include installing solar panels to harness renewable energy, creating green roofs to enhance energy efficiency, implementing rainwater harvesting systems to conserve water, and using eco-friendly building materials in construction and renovation projects.

These initiatives not only reduce the school's environmental impact but also provide valuable educational opportunities for students.

Involve students in the planning and execution of green infrastructure projects. This hands-on involvement can range from participating in tree-planting initiatives to monitoring energy consumption and conducting audits on the school's environmental performance. Additionally, consider incorporating green building principles into architectural and design elements within the school.

Suggestions:

Green Innovation Challenge:

Launch a school-wide competition challenging students to propose innovative eco-friendly projects. Encourage them to think outside the box and come up with solutions to address specific sustainability challenges within the school or local community. Provide resources and mentorship to support the development and implementation of winning projects. This activity promotes creativity, problem-solving, and teamwork among students.

Solar Power Showcase:

Organize an event or exhibition to showcase the benefits of solar power by installing solar panels on a specific area of the school premises. Involve students in the planning and setup of the solar panels, explaining the science behind solar energy and its positive impact on the environment. This activity not only promotes renewable energy awareness but also provides students with practical insights into sustainable technology.

Green Roof Garden Project:

Implement a green roof initiative where students actively participate in creating and maintaining a green space on the school's roof. This project enhances energy efficiency, promotes biodiversity, and provides students with hands-on experience in sustainable landscaping. Integrate the project into biology or environmental science classes, emphasizing the ecological benefits of green roofs.

Rainwater Harvesting Workshop:

Conduct a workshop on rainwater harvesting, educating students about the importance of conserving water and implementing rainwater harvesting systems. Allow students to design and install rainwater harvesting structures within the school premises. This activity not only addresses water conservation but also instils a sense of responsibility for resource management among students. Connect the workshop to geography or environmental studies classes.

Eco-friendly Construction Challenge:

Engage students in an eco-friendly construction challenge where they explore and propose the use of sustainable building materials in construction and renovation projects. Encourage them to research and present innovative materials with lower environmental impact. Collaborate with local architects or environmental experts to provide guidance and evaluate proposed solutions. This activity combines research, critical thinking, and practical application of sustainable construction principles.

Architectural Eco-Audit:

Enlist students to conduct an eco-audit of the school's existing architecture and design elements. Develop a checklist focusing on energy efficiency, waste reduction, and eco-friendly features. Students can analyse the school's infrastructure, identify areas for improvement, and propose sustainable modifications. This activity promotes critical thinking, research skills, and a proactive approach to environmental sustainability. Integrate the eco-audit into subjects like architecture, design, or environmental studies.

4. Establishment of Environmental Clubs and Leadership Positions:

Creating environmental clubs within the school allows students to actively engage in sustainability initiatives. These clubs provide a platform for students to explore their interests, share ideas, and collectively work towards a greener school environment. To enhance the impact of these clubs, establish leadership positions that students can aspire to.

For example, students could take on roles such as President, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer within the environmental club. These positions can rotate, allowing different students to assume leadership roles over time. Provide leadership training and mentorship opportunities for these student leaders to enhance their organizational and communication skills.

Environmental clubs can organize and lead various activities, such as awareness campaigns, tree-planting events, and eco-friendly initiatives within the school. Collaborate with other school clubs or organizations to create interdisciplinary projects that address sustainability from different angles. This initiative not only fosters leadership skills but also encourages teamwork and collaboration among students.

Suggestions

Eco-Leadership Training Workshop:

Conduct an eco-leadership training workshop for members of the environmental club. Provide insights into effective leadership, communication, and organizational skills specific to sustainability initiatives.

Invite guest speakers, including environmental experts or local leaders, to share their experiences and mentor students in their leadership roles. This workshop sets the foundation for empowered and well-equipped environmental club leaders.

Interclub Collaboration Symposium:

Organize a symposium that brings together members from various school clubs and organizations. Collaborate with environmental clubs to showcase their initiatives, achievements, and ongoing projects. Facilitate discussions on potential interdisciplinary projects that address sustainability. This activity promotes cross-club collaboration, fostering a sense of unity and shared responsibility for environmental stewardship.

Green Innovation Challenge:

Launch a green innovation challenge where environmental club members propose and implement creative eco-friendly projects within the school. Encourage them to think innovatively about addressing specific sustainability challenges or introducing new green practices. Provide a platform for students to present their ideas, and allocate resources or support for the most impactful projects. This challenge stimulates creativity, problem-solving, and practical application of sustainable solutions.

Environmental Film Festival:

Host an environmental film festival organized by the environmental club. Curate a selection of documentaries or films focused on environmental issues, conservation, and sustainability. Use this event as an opportunity to raise awareness among students and the broader school community. The environmental club can take the lead in organizing screenings, discussions, and related activities to encourage meaningful conversations about environmental topics.

Tree-Planting and Biodiversity Day:

Designate a day for a school-wide tree-planting and biodiversity event led by the environmental club. Collaborate with biology or science classes to educate students about the importance of biodiversity. Plan tree-planting activities, guided nature walks, and discussions on local flora and fauna. This initiative not only contributes to the school's greenery but also emphasizes the role of environmental clubs in hands-on, impactful projects**.**

5. Collaboration with Local Environmental Organizations:

Forging partnerships with local environmental organizations brings external expertise into the school environment. Collaborate with NGOs, environmental experts, and community groups to conduct workshops, seminars, and interactive sessions within the school.

Invite guest speakers to share their experiences and insights on environmental challenges and solutions. This can include professionals working in environmental conservation, climate scientists, or representatives from local sustainability initiatives. These interactions provide students with valuable perspectives and real-world applications of environmental sustainability.

Environmental Workshop Series:

Establish a series of environmental workshops in collaboration with local environmental organizations. These workshops can cover various topics such as sustainable living, conservation practices, and the impact of climate change. Involve professionals from NGOs or community groups to lead these sessions, providing students with practical insights and hands-on learning experiences.

Sustainability Symposium:

Organize a sustainability symposium where representatives from local environmental organizations participate in panel discussions, presentations, and interactive sessions. This symposium can serve as a platform for students to engage with experts, ask questions, and gain a deeper understanding of current environmental challenges and solutions. Encourage dialogue between students and professionals to foster a sense of community engagement.

Field Visits to Environmental Projects:

Arrange field visits to local environmental projects or initiatives led by partnering organizations. This hands-on experience allows students to witness the real-world impact of sustainability efforts. It could include visits to recycling facilities, conservation areas, or community-led eco-friendly projects. These field trips provide a tangible connection to classroom learning and inspire students to actively participate in environmental initiatives.

Guest Speaker Series:

Initiate a guest speaker series featuring professionals and experts from local environmental organizations. These speakers can share their journeys, expertise, and success stories related to environmental sustainability. Arrange regular sessions where different experts address students, providing diverse perspectives on topics such as renewable energy, biodiversity conservation, or sustainable agriculture.

Collaborative Sustainability Projects:

Encourage collaborative sustainability projects between the school and local environmental organizations. This could involve joint initiatives such as community clean-up events, tree-planting campaigns, or awareness programs. By actively participating in these projects, students gain practical

experience, contribute to community well-being, and establish meaningful connections with external organizations.

These initiatives collectively contribute to the development of environmental sustainability leadership within schools. By combining comprehensive education programs, student-led projects, green infrastructure development, establishment of environmental clubs, and collaborations with external organizations, schools can create a dynamic and immersive environment that nurtures responsible and forward-thinking leaders committed to environmental stewardship.

KEY POINTS:

Defining Environmental Sustainability:

- Emphasizes the commitment to maintaining ecological balance and conserving natural resources.
- Integration of this definition into the educational ethos for nurturing responsible citizens.

Education and Sustainability:

- Highlights the connection between education and sustainability.
- Mahatma Gandhi's vision of education as the development of body, mind, and spirit.
- The role of a peaceful and well-planned educational environment.

Sustainability Vitality in School:

- Schools as vibrant community centres for environmental consciousness.
- Initiatives like eco clubs and preservation of school gardens.
- Schools as laboratories for sustainability with eco-friendly teaching-learning processes.

Eco-friendly Infrastructure:

- Importance of the physical environment, including eco-friendly infrastructure.
- Incorporation of natural elements like tree shades, hills, and seashores.
- Creating an atmosphere of ownership and responsibility for the environment.

Ensuring Evergreen Environment:

- Perpetuating an evergreen environment inspired by literary works.
- Integration of agriculture as a cultural lesson.
- Fostering sustainability woven into students' lives.

Awareness Programmes:

- Conducting awareness programs inspired by environmental activists.
- Use of expert classes, impactful videos, and pledging ceremonies.
- Engraining the importance of environmental sustainability in students' minds.

Formation of Eco Clubs:

- Advocacy for the formation of eco clubs in schools.
- Empowering students to lead and take environmental initiatives.
- Achieving success through adequate funding and media coverage.

Strategies for Implementation:

- Integration of environmental sustainability in curricula.
- Establishment and empowerment of eco clubs.
- Development of eco-friendly school infrastructure.
- Collaboration with external environmental organizations.
- Implementation of monitoring metrics for sustainable progress.

Suggested Initiatives:

- Comprehensive environmental education programs.
- Student-led eco projects and initiatives.
- Green infrastructure development.
- Establishment of environmental clubs and leadership positions.
- Collaboration with local environmental organizations.

ASSESSMENT:

Read this story from ***Good practice stories on education for sustainable development in India*** by Tomar, Alka, published by UNESCO Office in New Delhi

"She was never the one to conform," says Harshita's mother, Vandana. A sunshine child who always knew how to look at the lighter side of life in situations where others would be perplexed, Harshita Saxena once surprised her teacher by answering a simple situation in a manner not quite so simple. The situation put forth by the teacher was this: A man quits his job. Share reasons why he would have quit his job.

Some children said the low salary, perhaps; others said maybe the boss was not good. Harshita said, "Because of poor hygiene." The teacher called for her mother in school, an educationist herself, and said the answer reeked of attitude. Her mother just let it be. That is Harshita, she says. Always with an out-of-the-box idea. Always happy when seized with a new thought. And always the one who would carry the idea to its logical end, never leave it midway.

The ideas, her father Navneet says, were always very simple, very doable. She would go and discuss it with her friends, and lo behold! they would all be raring to go! A born leader, Harshita?

She has attended two exchange programs: a Scholarship AFS Exchange in Malaysia and a Round Square Exchange to Chadwick, Los Angeles, USA. Recently, she was part of a Global Social Leadership conference held in August 2014, at Wellington College, Berkshire. But one of the most cherished and valuable experiences for Harshita has been her participation in STEP, a one-of-its-kind initiative for school students under The Energy Research Institute's (TERI) Project SEARCH. She was the first student from Vivek High School, Chandigarh, Punjab, to be selected for the STEP Programme when she was in Grade 9.

Harshita recalls her EVS classes from Grade 3. The classes perhaps did not hold much meaning for her then, but the learnings seemed to have seeped in subconsciously. As she grew up, EVS became not a subject to mug up but one that offered infinite scope for analysis, a subject that empowered her to make a difference in her surroundings. Harshita was hooked to it.

So when TERI's STEP Programme II came to her school, she was all charged up. Her mind was flooded with ideas which she discussed with her teacher-in-charge, Farah Shamsi. A practical proposition was required. STEP (Sensitizing, Training, and Empowering Peers) is a leadership development program for school students. Initiated in 2011, the program caters to a very important target group – school students. An activity of the Project SEARCH (A TERI-Tetra Pak Initiative), the STEP Programme is fuelled by the desire to create a generation of informed and thinking youth who understand themselves and their relationship with their family, society, and environment and can rise above their nationality, class, and "isms" to work as citizens of the Earth. Until now, 200 students have successfully completed this program. The project has received UNESCO-(APEID) and the National Commission of China for UNESCO, the prestigious Wenhul Award 2012 for Education Innovation.

Harshita's first idea was to make whiteboards out of husk and adhesive but it was turning out to be a very expensive undertaking. She turned to her sister for guidance, and the two soon came up with a viable project idea: Recycling paper to make diaries out of it. This seemed very doable. Harshita's parents supported her idea, and Farah Shamsi guided her throughout. Effective mentoring from TERI and Tetra Pak helped Harshita birth the Revamping Papyrus Project.

STEP has a two-camp training format which is residential and is held in ecologically-sensitive zones. For Harshita, it was the TERI Himalayan Centre in Mukteshwar, Uttarakhand, which largely runs on renewable energy. It was on April 30, 2012, when after a 12-hour long journey, with 33 new faces from geographically and culturally diverse locations in India, Harshita entered a world of endless possibilities.

"At the camp, each one of us was given our own space to think the way we wanted to," says Harshita. "The mentors only guided us in the right direction," she adds. STEP is based on the belief that in order to be in harmony with nature, one needs to be in harmony with oneself. So, at the camp, each student underwent an intensive training with sessions on self-exploration, identity, stereotypes, SD challenges, project ideation and management, and leadership.

After the training program, and back at school, Harshita formed a core team and delegated duties to the different team members to launch the Project financially supported by Tetra Pak. The goal was to create diaries using recycled paper; the team started the collection of scrap paper such as cardboards, old answer sheets, cartons, extra circulars etc. to create the recycled pages. The scrap was then processed at the papier-mâché department in school; that done, the team designed the cover page of the diaries and finally, sent it for binding.

So where or who would the diaries go to? Harshita had an idea. Instead of selling these diaries to generate funds, she thought: Why not distribute the diaries to the youth residing in the semi-urban areas? And why? She says: "We wanted to show them the end product of recycled paper to motivate them to collect scrap paper, recycle it to fashion products and create livelihood opportunities for themselves." This was very much in line with the ethos of Project SEARCH that emphasizes on the 4Rs – Refuse, Reuse, Recycle, and Reduce.

Harshita says: "I reasoned that there was no point in simply explaining to them until and unless we showed them the final product." For this, they contacted the Pustak School (NGO centre),

where they distributed these diaries. Harshita recalls the moment when one of the girls took the diary and sat in a corner to flip through the pages with a beautiful smile on her face. After a while, she came up to Harshita to ask: "Didi (elder sister), itni sundar cheezen aap gandi cheezon se kaise banate ho?' (Didi, how do you make such pretty things out of garbage). That the idea had fetched Harshita a positive response was for her the biggest reward.

To accelerate collection of waste paper by the NGO, innovative competitions such as who could collect the maximum quantity of waste paper and who could collect it the fastest were held. The winner was rewarded with a small prize such as sweets or crayons. Harshita was also keen to sensitize the children at the NGO towards environment conservation. She designed games and activities to introduce the idea of conservation and made it a part of their daily routine. In school and at home, the core team members of Revamping Papyrus put up Tetra Pak dustbins and also encouraged the other students to do the same. Students were also asked to bring the used Tetra Pak cartons from home for recycling. Marketing skills, time management, public interaction, teamwork — the STEP project has put Harshita through all the paces en route to becoming a leader.

Looking back at the journey of STEP, Ranjana Saikia, Director, Educating Youth for Sustainable Development says: "When we started STEP as part of Project SEARCH in 2011, we were gripped by a strong desire to empower young people with the right values and attitudes to make the right choices as individuals and consumers. We have seen students transform over the one year that we work with them. We are preparing sustainability champions for tomorrow – young people who will be able to integrate sustainability in whatever they do. It is also excellent thought leadership shown by Tetra Pak to support programs like Project SEARCH." Harshita has learned her lessons well. She has realized that what is needed is to dream big and have a bigger vision — one STEP at a time, and every challenge is scalable.

Now answer the following questions

MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS:

1. What motivated Harshita Saxena to participate in the STEP Programme under The Energy Research Institute's (TERI) Project SEARCH?
    a. Desire for academic excellence
    b. Passion for environmental sustainability

c. A competitive spirit
d. External pressure from her school

2. How did Harshita's early exposure to Environmental Studies (EVS) classes contribute to her involvement in sustainability initiatives?
    a. EVS classes were irrelevant to her
    b. EVS classes fuelled her passion for environmental issues
    c. EVS classes discouraged her from environmental engagement
    d. EVS classes focused solely on theoretical knowledge
3. What was the primary goal of Harshita's "Revamping Papyrus Project" initiated under the STEP Programme?
    a. Creating whiteboards from husk and adhesive
    b. Recycling paper to make diaries
    c. Establishing eco clubs in schools
    d. Organizing a Global Social Leadership conference
4. Why did Harshita choose to distribute the recycled paper diaries to youth in semi-urban areas instead of selling them?
    a. To generate funds for her school
    b. To motivate youth to collect scrap paper and create livelihood opportunities
    c. To compete with other environmental projects
    d. To impose strict environmental regulations on semi-urban areas
5. How did Harshita engage with the Pustak School (NGO center) to accelerate the collection of waste paper for her project?
    a. By ignoring the NGO's role in waste paper collection
    b. Through organizing competitions and introducing environmental conservation activities
    c. By imposing strict rules on waste paper collection
    d. By focusing solely on theoretical knowledge
6. What was the most rewarding moment for Harshita during the implementation of the Revamping Papyrus Project?
    a. Achieving high sales for the recycled paper diaries
    b. Receiving a prestigious award for environmental innovation
    c. Witnessing a positive response from a girl at the Pustak School
    d. Imposing strict environmental regulations on the youth
7. How did Harshita envision the impact of her project on the youth in semi-urban areas?

a. Strictly enforcing environmental rules on them
b. Showing them the final product of recycled paper to motivate them in environmental activities
c. Discouraging them from engaging in environmental initiatives
d. Focusing solely on theoretical knowledge

8. What skills did the STEP Programme provide to Harshita and other participants during the camp held in Mukteshwar, Uttarakhand?
    a. Imposing strict environmental regulations
    b. Intensive training on self-exploration, identity, and stereotypes
    c. Fostering competition among participants
    d. Discouraging them from taking the lead in environmental initiatives
9. What transformation did Harshita undergo during the STEP Programme, according to her reflection on the camp experience?
    a. Imposing strict environmental regulations on herself
    b. Realizing the need to be in harmony with nature
    c. Focusing solely on theoretical knowledge
    d. Ignoring the guidance from mentors
10. How did Harshita and her team process the collected scrap paper for the Revamping Papyrus Project?
    a. Ignored the processing step as it was time-consuming
    b. Processed it at the papier mâché department in school
    c. Sold the scrap paper to generate funds
    d. Discouraged the use of recycled paper in the project
11. What role did Tetra Pak play in supporting Harshita's project financially?
    a. Imposing strict rules on the financial support
    b. Providing mentorship and guidance
    c. Discouraging the use of Tetra Pak materials
    d. Focusing solely on academic achievements
12. What is the significance of introducing competitions to accelerate the collection of waste paper by the NGO involved in Harshita's project?
    a. Imposing strict regulations on waste paper collection
    b. Encouraging a sense of competition among the youth
    c. Discouraging the involvement of the NGO in environmental initiatives
    d. Focusing solely on theoretical knowledge

13. How did Harshita incorporate environmental awareness into her project at the Pustak School?
    a. By discouraging environmental conservation activities
    b. By imposing strict rules on waste paper collection
    c. By designing games and activities to introduce the idea of conservation
    d. By focusing solely on theoretical knowledge
14. What leadership qualities did Harshita demonstrate during the implementation of the Revamping Papyrus Project?
    a. Imposing strict rules on her team
    b. Fostering a sense of responsibility and innovation
    c. Discouraging team members from taking the lead
    d. Focusing solely on academic achievements
15. In the context of the module's objectives, which aspect of Harshita's story aligns with fostering a generation of environmentally responsible citizens?
    a. Imposing strict environmental regulations
    b. Ignoring the guidance from mentors
    c. Fostering a sense of responsibility and leadership
    d. Focusing solely on theoretical knowledge

ASSIGNMENT

1. ***"Let your life lightly dance on the edges of time like dew on the tip of a leaf."***

Reflect on the significance of integrating environmental sustainability into the educational ethos, considering Tagore's metaphor. How can education act as the dew that delicately dances on the tip of a leaf, nurturing a commitment to ecological balance and the conservation of natural resources?

2. ***"Look to this day, for it is life, the very life of life."***

Drawing inspiration from Kalidasa's perspective on the essence of life, reflect on the role of a peaceful and well-planned educational environment in fostering sustainability vitality in schools. How does the school environment contribute to shaping responsible citizens who understand the interconnectedness of life, education, and environmental consciousness?