



# Empowering Individuals for a Sustainable Tomorrow: Role of Life Skills Development

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## Abstract

Prioritizing a sustainable future is paramount in global energy planning and development. Sustainable development, per the Brundtland Report, involves meeting current needs while safeguarding the ability of future generations to meet their own. Life skills, as defined by WHO, encompass positive abilities that empower individuals to tackle life's challenges effectively. This paper delves into the role of life skills in shaping a sustainable future, informed by a systematic review of pertinent studies. It underscores the importance of integrating economic, environmental, and social factors into decision-making for enduring economic and environmental stability. Given that human actions profoundly impact all systems, including the economy, environment, and society, the focus on life skills becomes pivotal in achieving sustainability. Life skills bridge the gap between capabilities and essential functioning, enhancing individuals' capacity to meet contemporary societal expectations and address social, economic, and environmental issues. Ultimately, sustainable development hinges on human actions guided by life skills, highlighting their pivotal role in securing a sustainable future.

**Keywords:** Life Skills Education, Sustainable Development, Sustainable Future

## 1. Introduction

As the future of any nation depends on the growth and development of its people, which can only be accomplished by making the best use of and investing in human resources, a nation must develop sustainably if it is to have a sustainable future. Utilizing human resources requires knowledge, which can only be shared through the educational process. This was the pivotal moment when we realised how important literacy and education are in assisting people in improving their quality of life and means of subsistence.

### 1.1 Objectives

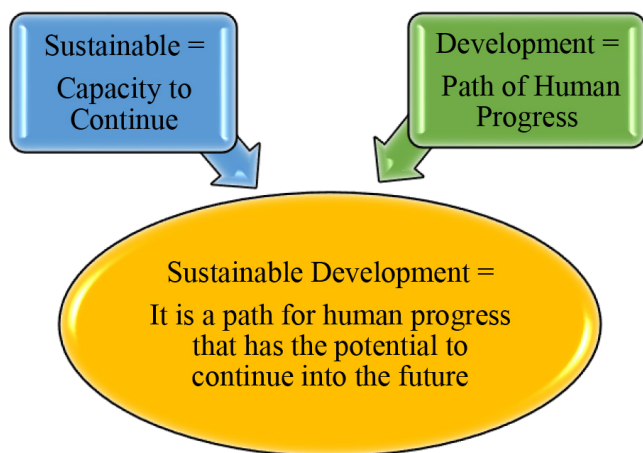
The purpose of this chapter is to examine how life skills are important for a sustainable future in our society.

## 2. Sustainable Future

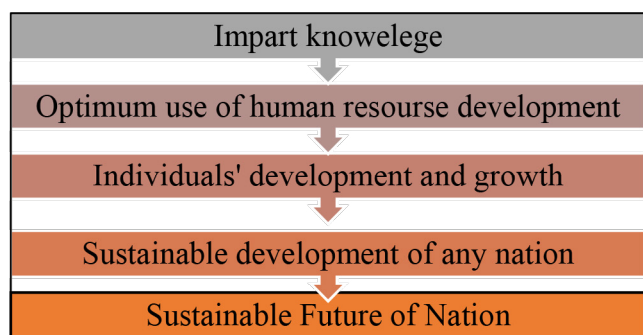
When recommending or carrying out global energy planning and development, a sustainable future must be ensured and given top priority. The nation must develop sustainably if it is to have a sustainable future. According to the Brundtland Report, the definition of sustainable development is “fulfilling the demands of the present without sacrificing the capacity of future generations to meet their own needs”. The United Nations General Assembly's definition of sustainable development from 1987 provides a framework for integrating environmental policies and development objectives while retaining economic progress.

The Sustainable Development Goals were first presented and adopted at the United Nations General Assembly in September 2015, and they are as follows: ‘no

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**Figure 1.** The interplay of education, knowledge, human resource development, and sustainable future.



**Figure 2.** Defining sustainable development as the capacity for continuing human progress.

poverty, zero hunger, good health and wellbeing, quality education, gender equality, cleaning and sanitation, education that can ensure intergenerational equity, poverty alleviation, environmental preservation and restoration, conservation of natural resources, justice, and a peaceful society'. No one organisation can successfully build a sustainable future, which includes halting habitat loss and tackling climate change, by itself. It necessitates thoughtful decision-making and involvement in challenging social, economic, and environmental issues. They demonstrate how a just, safe, and sustainable world can only exist if both people and nature prosper. They do this by bringing the social, environmental, and economic components of development together in a unified agenda. People must now cooperate to build a better future.

### 3. Life Skills

The WHO defines life skills as “the abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal

effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life”. A person who is “adaptive” has a flexible mindset and can change their behaviour depending on the situation.

“Life skills” can be defined according to Powell<sup>1</sup> as “life-coping life skills consistent with the development tasks of the basic human development processes, namely those life skills necessary for a given age and gender to perform the following tasks: psychosocial, physical-sexual, vocational, cognitive, moral, ego, and emotional”<sup>2</sup>. The goal is to increase life skills and “the abilities people can learn that will assist them to succeed in living a productive and satisfying life” overall<sup>2,3</sup>. According to Miller<sup>4</sup>, the “development of life skills necessary to perform leadership functions in real life” is self-assessed and organization-specific. According to his research, life skills are the key components and indications for the development of youth leadership life skills<sup>2</sup>. The WHO has outlined ten essential life skills. These abilities are all connected and complement one another.

### 3.1 Novel Perspective and Contribution to the Field

Introducing the “Eco-Social Competence Model”, our exploration into life skills development for sustainability unveils a paradigm shift. Synthesizing insights from psychology, education, and environmental science, this groundbreaking framework transcends traditional approaches. Comprising three interconnected layers, it fosters a holistic understanding of sustainable living.

#### 3.1.1 Individual Competence

This layer concentrates on honing conventional life skills alongside nurturing an ecological mindset. It underscores an individual’s awareness of their impact on the environment and social systems.

#### 3.1.1 Social Interconnectedness

Recognizing the intrinsic link between sustainability and social dynamics, this layer delves into interpersonal skills, collaboration, and cultural competence. The model emphasizes the significance of robust social connections and a shared responsibility for sustainable living.

#### 3.1.3 Ecosystemic Awareness

Extending beyond the individual and social realms, this layer addresses the intricate interplay among individuals,

communities, and broader ecological systems. Skills like systems thinking, environmental literacy, and ethical decision-making are emphasized, fostering a comprehensive understanding of interconnected challenges in sustainability.

The Eco-Social Competence Model stands as a comprehensive approach to life skills development for sustainability, offering a structured pathway for individuals to navigate and contribute to a more sustainable future. It goes beyond individual behaviour, addressing the broader socio-ecological context, making it a novel and valuable contribution to the field.

## 4. Role of Life Skills for Holistic Well-being

The term “holistic development” refers to a person’s complete physical, mental, and spiritual growth. This encompasses the growth of the body, mind, emotions, and social interactions. In his educational philosophy, Mahatma Gandhi also discusses holistic development. He believes that education is all-encompassing. It involves bringing out the best in both a man and a child. The major goal of education, according to him, is the development of a person’s personality, which includes character development, discipline, achieving peace, self-sufficiency, and self-reliance. He also believed that there is a clear correlation between socioeconomic advancement and education<sup>5</sup>.

The development of our psychosocial competence, self-efficacy, and self-esteem are all results of our life skills. It is obvious from the findings of the studies listed above that life skills are essential for the growth of teenagers’ critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making abilities, as well as their coping mechanisms, emotional intelligence, and self-confidence. Young people will be better able to adapt to shifts in the labour market and new technology, as well as succeed as entrepreneurs in the unorganised sector if there is a stronger emphasis on transferrable skills (such as problem-solving, communication, creativity, and leadership)<sup>6</sup>.

## 5. Role of Life Skills in Health Promotion and Healthy Future

The physical, mental and emotional health of today’s citizens determines the overall health of tomorrow’s future

of the nation. Adolescents, the citizens of tomorrow need to be educated for effective facilitation of LS development among them. This LS ensures the optimum contribution of the individual in the holistic development of any country.

The teaching of life skills appears in a wide variety of educational programmes with demonstrable effectiveness, including programmes for the prevention of substance abuse<sup>7</sup> and adolescent pregnancy<sup>8</sup>, primary prevention<sup>9</sup>, promotion of intelligence<sup>10</sup>, and the prevention of bullying<sup>11</sup>. Educational programmes teaching these skills have also been developed for the prevention of AIDS<sup>12</sup>; for peace education<sup>13</sup>, and the promotion of self-confidence and self-esteem<sup>14</sup>. There are research indications that teaching skills in this way, as part of broad-based life skills programmes, is an effective approach for primary prevention education<sup>15-17</sup>.

To have a healthy, fulfilling, and productive life, one must develop the fundamental behaviours that make life skills<sup>18</sup>. Developing life skills makes it easier to deal with different people and situations and promotes living a happy, healthy life<sup>2</sup>. An individual needs life skills as a continuum of knowledge and abilities to live independently in life<sup>19-21</sup>. According to a different complementary viewpoint, a person needs life skills daily to succeed in managing their lives<sup>21</sup>. Life skills are necessary for children and adolescents to acquire knowledge, a good outlook, and values that will help them lead healthy lives in the future<sup>22</sup>. Rural adolescent girls can benefit from life skill instruction by responding positively and improving their capacity to handle stress and solve issues<sup>18</sup>.

### 5.1 Life Skill Approach for a Sustainable Future

One needs life skills to make decisions, communicate coherently, and develop coping and self-management abilities that may help them lead a healthy and productive life. Life skills help 21st-century adolescents achieve their objectives by enhancing their capacities to meet the needs and demands of contemporary society and to succeed in their chosen fields of endeavour and life. Moreover, life skills improve communication, problem-solving, leadership, interpersonal and social abilities, and critical thinking<sup>23</sup>. To accomplish sustainable development, life skills education is a crucial instrument for empowering youth to act morally, bolstering and upgrading the workforce, and promoting social tolerance<sup>24</sup>.

Today's adolescents need to possess the skills necessary to adapt to changes throughout their lives. Education for All's four pillars-learning to know, learning to do, learning to live with others and oneself-all call for particular skills<sup>25</sup>. People may connect what they already know and are capable of with what they will be able to know and be capable of in the future by employing life skills<sup>26</sup>. Someone who can support their family and show others how-to live-in peace is a responsible citizen. Thus, life skills are essential to developing a decent citizen and a balanced personality<sup>24</sup>.

If people acquire a variety of talents, they will be more prepared for a successful existence at home, in their communities, and the workforce. The full range of human activities requires the use of a variety of skills, such as interacting with family, and neighbours, acting alone or in a group, working for someone else, or beginning your own business. Instead of just allowing people to pick up new talents by observing how other people behave and live, education systems intentionally teach a variety of skills. When learning with a life skills approach, young children discover, acquire, use, and put into practice a variety of abilities in a safe learning environment<sup>27</sup>.

A literate person will have access to a wide range of useful and thought-provoking tools that enable them to make decisions and take actions that are likely to be advantageous to sustainable development. The "at the same time" rule, which calls for considering environmental, social, and economic considerations jointly rather than separately, will enable them to make decisions on specific issues<sup>28</sup>. To support learners' education in sustainable development, the following should be prioritised: The development of respect for the values outlined in the United Nations Charter as well as for fundamental freedoms and human rights; the improvement of the learner's personality, talents, and mental and physical capacities; the growth of respect for the learner's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language, and values; as well as the national values of the country in which the child is living and any country from which he or she may have come. Environmentalism; preparing students for a responsible life in a free society, with a commitment to gender equality and goodwill towards all peoples, ethnic, national, and religious groups, as well as those of indigenous ancestry<sup>29</sup>. The planet's long-term well-being depends on developing essential life skills. These skills enable us to overcome obstacles, effect positive change, and build a more sustainable world. Critical

thinking supports sustainable development, effective communication fosters relationships, collaboration amplifies impact, creativity addresses complex challenges, and adaptability ensures enduring solutions. Education and training programs are effective in fostering these skills, empowering people to make a positive impact on their communities and secure a sustainable future for generations to come.

## 5.2 Education and Life Skills Approach to Sustainable Development: An Educational Approach for Sustainable Development

The acquisition of life skills is crucial if everyone is to receive a top-notch education<sup>30</sup>. Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) makes the case for including skills in reorienting education to meet sustainability, contending that a life skills approach is required for high-quality education. People will be more equipped for a successful existence at home, in their communities, and the workforce if they have a diversity of talents. To engage in the full spectrum of human activities, including engaging with family, friends, and neighbours as well as functioning individually, as a member of a group, and as an employee or company owner, people use a variety of abilities. Education systems purposefully teach a variety of skills, as opposed to just enabling people to pick up new skills by observing how other people behave and live. Students who study utilising a life skills approach learn about, pick up, use, and practise a variety of skills in the comfort of the classroom. Today's youth must be able to adjust to changes as they occur in their life. Each of the four pillars of Education for All-learning to know, learning to do, learning to live with others and oneself-must be mastered by them<sup>30</sup>. Cognitive, introspective, self-management, and social abilities are necessary for everyone. By using life skills, people may make the connection between what they already know and are capable of and what they will be able to know and be capable of in the future<sup>25</sup>. The life skills approach must be culturally acceptable, appropriate for a particular geographic and cultural area, and regionally relevant, much like outstanding education and ESD. Since cultural practices and the skills that go along with them differ greatly from place to place, local life-skills programmes must be devised.

### 5.3 An Opportunity for a Quality Education and Life Skills Approach: An Opportunity for the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development

ESD, high-quality education, and a life-skills approach are all related. Both high-quality education and ESD include the teaching and instruction of life skills. A top-notch ESD serves as an illustration of successful instruction. In the end, achieving the goals of global development requires outstanding education that also supports sustainability. The concept of “quality education” is open-ended and can be used to describe a broad range of disciplinary and pedagogical improvements in a variety of educational situations. Furthermore, by emphasising quality as a crucial component of ESD, formal education can embrace ESD more widely. Administrators and educators may be able to address problems in their countries and educational systems by focusing on quality. Gaining and keeping girls in school can be a serious issue in some communities. Contrarily, these programmes work well in other nations, yet it is still extremely difficult to keep male youth in secondary education. These ministries can combine characteristics of effective education including participatory learning, life skills, and human rights. The DESD enables countries, provinces, communities, and educational institutions to provide top-quality sustainable development education to all residents<sup>30</sup>.

## 6. Concrete Evidence and Case Studies

In this segment, we present compelling evidence through real-world examples and case studies, showcasing the tangible influence of life skills on sustainability. From community-driven projects to individual success stories, these instances highlight the crucial role life skills play in addressing environmental and social challenges. One case study features the “Green Villages” initiative, where imparting life skills like teamwork and leadership empowered a rural community to develop sustainable agricultural practices, enhancing economic resilience and environmental stewardship.

In another example, an entrepreneur, equipped with adaptability and creativity, established a zero-waste packaging company, disrupting industry norms and showcasing how life skills drive innovative, sustainable

business models. These cases go beyond illustration; they serve as guiding lights, revealing practical pathways toward a resilient future. By emphasizing the transformative impact of life skills at both community and individual levels, this section underscores the practicality and applicability of these skills in real-world scenarios. These concrete examples provide a solid foundation, validating the notion that life skills are not just theoretical concepts but potent tools for navigating and addressing complex sustainability challenges.

## 7. Addressing Current Debates, Challenges, or Gaps

### 7.1 Challenges

#### 7.1.1 Diverse Interpretations of Sustainability

Defining universally applicable life skills is hindered by varied interpretations of sustainability- debates arise on focusing skills on environmental stewardship, social justice, or economic resilience.

#### 7.1.2 Integration into Educational Systems

Significant challenges exist in seamlessly incorporating life skills for sustainability into formal educational curricula due to competing priorities and rigid structures within educational systems.

#### 7.1.3 Measuring Impact

Quantifying the impact of life skills on sustainable behaviours poses a challenge, with ongoing debates on establishing clear metrics for assessing the effectiveness of life skills programs.

### 7.2 Debates

#### 7.2.1 Individual vs. Systemic Change

Ongoing debate surrounds whether the emphasis should be on individual behaviour change or systemic transformations for sustainability, with arguments for empowering individuals and advocating broader structural changes.

#### 7.2.2 Universal vs. Contextual Life Skills

Debates arise over whether life skills for sustainability should be universal or tailored to specific cultural nuances,

necessitating a balance between global applicability and local relevance.

## 7.3 Gaps

### 7.3.1 Inclusivity and Equity

A notable gap exists in ensuring that life skills programs address diverse socio-economic backgrounds and cultural contexts, requiring strategies promoting inclusivity and equity in delivering sustainable life skills.

### 7.3.2 Interdisciplinary Collaboration

Challenges persist in fostering collaboration among educators, psychologists, environmental scientists, and policymakers, creating communication gaps that hinder the development of comprehensive life skills programs.

## 7.4 Pragmatic Solutions

### 7.4.1 Curricular Integration and Teacher Training

Advocating for the integration of life skills into educational curricula requires comprehensive teacher training programs to empower educators in effectively imparting these skills.

### 7.4.2 Community Engagement and Partnerships

Bridging gaps necessitates active community engagement and collaborations with diverse stakeholders, enhancing the relevance and impact of sustainable life skills programs.

### 7.4.3 Research and Continuous Evaluation

Addressing challenges involves ongoing research for evidence-based practices. Continuous evaluation and adaptation of life skills programs are crucial for ensuring their effectiveness in addressing evolving sustainability challenges.

In navigating these challenges, debates, and gaps, the aim is to propel the discourse forward, fostering a nuanced understanding of life skills development for sustainability and contributing to the development of effective and inclusive strategies for a sustainable future.

## 8. Insights with Practical Relevance or Impact

This section translates theoretical insights into actionable strategies, emphasizing the practical implications

of life skills development for tangible sustainability improvements. The intentional cultivation of life skills serves as a powerful catalyst for positive change, and we offer concise recommendations for educators, policymakers, and individuals.

## 8.1 Educators

### 8.1.1 Integrated Curriculum Design

Embed life skills seamlessly into curricula, fostering critical thinking, problem-solving, and environmental consciousness.

### 8.1.2 Experiential Learning Opportunities

Introduce real-world applications through field trips and hands-on activities to enhance practical understanding.

### 8.1.3 Teacher Training Programs

Implement comprehensive training for educators, emphasizing the interconnectedness of life skills with environmental awareness and societal responsibilities.

## 8.2 Policymakers

### 8.2.1 Incorporate Life Skills in Educational Policies

Advocate for integrating life skills into educational policies at national and regional levels.

### 8.2.2 Foster Interdisciplinary Collaboration

Encourage collaboration among ministries for integrated policies in life skills development.

### 8.2.3 Invest in Research and Development

Allocate resources for research on effective life skills programs, supporting innovation in sustainable education practices.

## 8.3 Individuals

### 8.3.1 Lifelong Learning Initiatives

Embrace ongoing learning through workshops, online courses, and community initiatives for continuous life skills development.

### 8.3.2 *Community Engagement and Advocacy*

Actively engage in sustainability projects, advocating for life skills integration in community programs.

### 8.3.3 *Behavioural Change Strategies*

Implement behavioural changes informed by life skills, fostering sustainable habits and community involvement.

## 8.4 *Cross-Cutting Recommendations*

### 8.4.1 *Measurement and Evaluation*

Develop standardized metrics for assessing the impact of life skills programs, ensuring continuous improvement.

### 8.4.2 *Technology Integration*

Utilize technology for disseminating life skills education through online platforms for wider accessibility.

### 8.4.3 *Public Awareness Campaigns*

Launch campaigns to highlight the importance of life skills for sustainability, fostering a collective understanding of individual roles in building a sustainable future.

## 9. *Engagement with Recent Research and Policy Developments*

In this section, we navigate the current landscape of research studies and policy documents, seamlessly integrating our findings into the dynamic sphere of sustainable education. Remaining abreast of the latest developments, we enhance the understanding of recent research and policy advancements, offering insights that illuminate potential pathways for future exploration and initiatives.

### 9.1 *Recent Research Studies*

#### 9.1.1 *Behavioural Insights for Sustainability*

Exploring the intersection of psychology and behavioural economics in informing sustainable behaviour change through life skills programs, this study reveals crucial factors guiding effective interventions.

#### 9.1.2 *Impact of Technology on Life Skills Acquisition*

Investigating the effectiveness of technology, especially online platforms and virtual reality simulations, in

life skills acquisition, the research sheds light on their potential reach across diverse demographics.

#### 9.1.3 *Longitudinal Studies on Lifelong Learning*

Assessing the enduring impact of lifelong learning initiatives on life skills development, longitudinal studies track individuals across demographics, providing insights into sustained effectiveness.

## 9.2 *Policy Developments*

### 9.2.1 *National Frameworks for Sustainable Education*

Progressive national frameworks seamlessly integrate sustainability into education policies, aligning with development goals and emphasizing the infusion of life skills.

### 9.2.2 *Global Collaboration for Sustainable Learning*

Policymakers emphasize international collaboration for sustainable learning through partnerships, collaborative research, and shared resources, fostering a cohesive global approach.

### 9.2.3 *Inclusive Policies for Diverse Populations*

Recent policies address inclusivity and equity in life skills education, tailoring programs to diverse populations, and ensuring accessibility across socio-economic backgrounds and cultural contexts.

## 9.3 *Insights and Contributions*

### 9.3.1 *Intersectionality of Life Skills and Environmental Justice*

Recent developments underscore the intersectionality of life skills and environmental justice, guiding the design of inclusive programs.

### 9.3.2 *Policy Integration Across Sectors*

Emerging policies showcase integration across sectors, recognizing that sustainable education extends beyond traditional institutions, necessitating collaboration for comprehensive impact.

### 9.3.3 Technology-Driven Inclusivity

Recent policies incorporate technology to enhance inclusivity, emphasizing accessible solutions for diverse populations.

## 10. Conclusion

The long-term stability of the economy and environment is the main objective of sustainable development. At every stage of the decision-making process, economic, environmental, and social variables are taken into account to achieve this. We must concentrate on how life skills affect human behaviour if we want a sustainable future. A higher quality of life requires education in life skills. The closing of the accomplishment gap between fundamental skills and functioning is the aim of life skills education. It enhances a person's capacity to meet the demands and expectations of modern society and assists in overcoming difficulties related to the social, economic, and environmental sectors. Sustainable development is necessary for a sustainable future. Depending on each person's life skills, human behaviour's impact on sustainable development will vary. As life skills are crucial for a sustainable future, teaching LSE should be a part of extracurricular activities aimed at helping the nation achieve its sustainable development goals.

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