

Environmental Literacy in Sikkim

Background

The accelerating rate of environmental degradation accompanied by climate change concerns has led to the quest for sustainable development. The realisation that the natural resource base is finite and that we need to work towards using it judiciously so as to secure our future generations has assumed immense significance. However achieving this is no mean task. One of the key drivers of change is “human attitude”. By bringing about a change in the way we deal with our surrounding environment, a lot can be accomplished. However this requires a planned and directed effort to inculcate a pro-environment behaviour. Environmental Education is considered as a powerful tool in influencing and developing responsible environmental behaviour.

Government of India launched the programme of National Environmental Awareness Campaign since 1986 for creating environmental awareness. The mandate of the programme is to build partnerships with other organizations for awareness creation that is followed by field action at the local, regional and national level. By embedding the core principles of pro-environment behaviour and by creating sensitivity towards environmental issues through knowledge, information and activities, it is desired to create citizens with higher levels of environment awareness leading to environment responsible behaviour.

Policy Context

One of the goals under the Chief Minister’s Forestry and Environment Mission is to achieve “100 % environment conscious citizens in Sikkim by 2020”. This is humungous task and children aged 6-16 have been identified as the predominant ‘agents of change’. Moreover, various target groups including taxi drivers, government employees, school teachers have been identified as the predominant ‘agents of change’. To attain this mission various schemes and awareness campaigns under the National Environment Awareness Campaign are being implemented across the state to create awareness amongst various target groups including taxi drivers, government employees, school teachers. In addition to this the Government of Sikkim has come up with innovative schemes like 10 Minutes to Earth, Smriti Van, State Green Mission, and Chief Minister’s Green School Rolling Trophy to encourage pro environmental conservation behaviour of citizens.

In order to achieve the above stated objective, it is imperative to understand the concept of environment conscious citizen. The first step towards this should be defining what we mean by environment conscious citizen. Consequently there is a need to identify the factors

that compose environmentally conscious behaviour & attitude. In this context, it is proposed to perform a study that would serve as a reference point for the mission by capturing the baseline information on environmental awareness amongst citizens.

Study Goals & Objectives

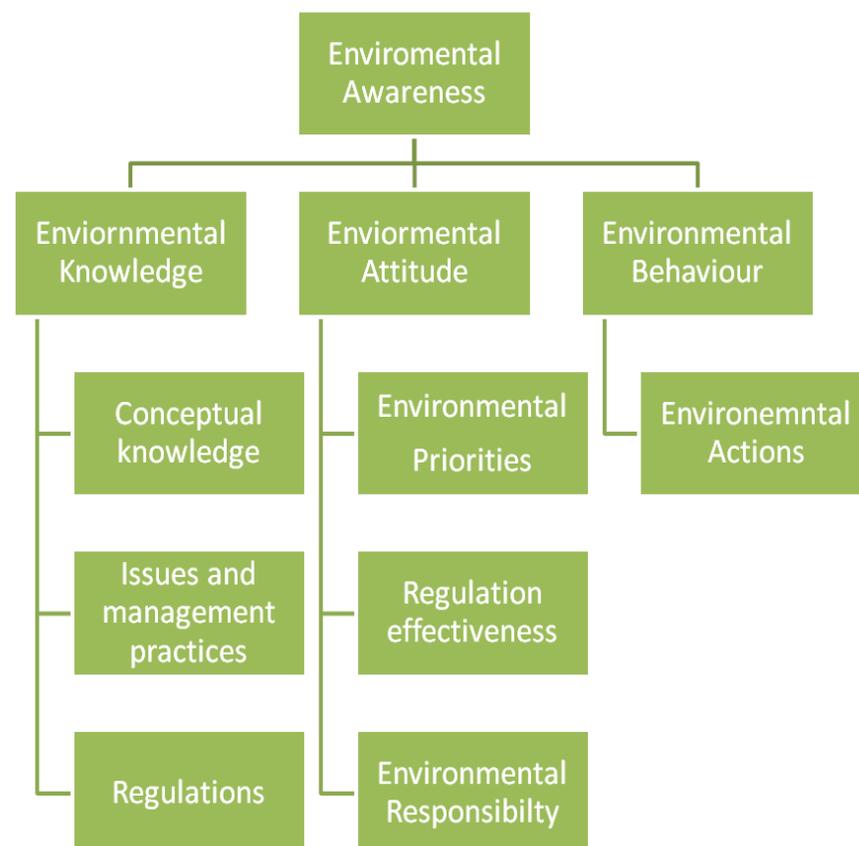
The primary goal of the study is to establish baseline information on environmental literacy (knowledge, attitude, awareness and perception) in the State of Sikkim.

Specific Objectives

1. To identify the parameters that captures the concept of environmental consciousness and to develop a methodology for measuring it
2. To conduct a baseline survey to understand the perspectives of citizens on environmental consciousness
3. To provide suggestions on developing a evaluation and monitoring mechanism for the programme in the future

Study Design

The study would include three main components: Environmental Knowledge, Attitude and Behaviour.



Brief description of components comprising Environmental Knowledge is depicted in the figure below.

Environmental Knowledge		
Conceptual issues <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Biodiversity • Climate Change • Sustainability 	Environmental Issues and management practices <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Soild waste • Water • Forest • Energy • Agriculture 	Environmental regulation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Waste • Water • Forest • Agriculture

Brief description of components comprising Environmental Attitude is depicted in the figure below.

Environmental Attitude		
Regulation effectiveness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Biodiversity • Climate Change • Sustainability 	Environmental Responsibilities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Soild waste • Water • Forest • Energy 	Environmental Priorities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Waste • Water • Forest • Agriculture

Brief description of components comprising Environmental Behaviour is depicted in the figure below.



Methodology

The notion of 'environment consciousness' has two main parts to it. One is constituted by the awareness levels of an individual regarding the existence of environmental issues developed upon by his/her understanding of nature-human interactions and the other is constituted by his/her willingness to actively participate in individual or group actions as a step towards environment responsible behaviour. The study would develop a scale to quantify the levels of environmental awareness amongst the target stakeholders. The scale would be composed of the following main components:

1. Knowledge of citizens about state, national and global level environmental issues
2. Attitude of citizens towards environmental regulations and environmental responsibilities
3. Environmentally responsible behaviour

This scale would be developed based upon literature review of similar studies done across the globe and discussions with relevant experts. An outline of the tasks to be done is as below:

1. Identify key stakeholder groups for environmental awareness
2. Literature review and information gathering for Framework Development for set of criteria and indicators
3. Creating formats for collecting data
4. Preliminary survey for verifying the data tools
5. Refining study framework based upon feedback
6. Conducting field survey for current levels of environmental awareness among targeted stakeholders.

7. Data entry & analysis using appropriate valuation technique
8. Preparation of draft report followed by review and finalizing report

The ongoing study is proposed to complete in all four districts of Sikkim and is expected to be complete by June, 2012.