

Alternatives Forum, Pune

Brief report of the 2nd meeting, 14/06/2013

Venue: Lokayat, Law College Road

Present: Sujit Patwardhan (Parisar), KJ Joy & Seema Kultarni (SOPPECOM), Suhas Kolhekar (NAPM/Mahila Arogya Hakka Parishad/Jeevanshala), Aparna Susarla (SWaCH/KKPKP), Shripad Dharmadhikary (Manthan), Sharmila Deo, Pradeep Chavan, Neema Pathak, Anuradha Arjunwadar, Meenal Tatpati & Ashish Kothari (all Kalpavriksh), Aditya Vikram (freelance writer), Nagmani Rao (Karve Institute)

Key points

Ashish presented the key points from his paper “Development and Ecological Sustainability in India: Possibilities for the Post-2015 Framework”, which had also been circulated in advance. This included:

- Current crisis of unsustainability, inequity, and suffering, and their roots in faulty model of ‘development’ and centralized governance
- An alternative framework of well-being based on a set of values and principles (e.g. ecological limits, equity, justice, participation, diversity, commons, rights and responsibilities)
- Key goals for a sustainable and equitable society
- Targets and indicators for these goals
- Key challenges: political hostility and inertia, corporate power, inequalities and tensions, public apathy
- Signs of hope and opportunities: people’s resistance, grassroots alternative initiatives, policy alternatives, political mobilization ... and need to synergise all this

The following discussion, in which most participants spoke, brought out the following points:

1. The paper is a good first try at developing a sustainability framework, and posing key questions fairly sharply; its strength is that it attempts to deviate from elite environmentalism, and integrates issues of rights and justice. It needs to be circulated widely, with addition of actual examples of where alternative initiatives are working.
2. However it needs to be taken to different sectors and accordingly modified/developed more. There need to be focus group meetings with waste workers, students, *dalit* groups, among others, since aspects like ‘well-being’ would look different from different perspectives.
3. It is also important to discuss this framework with political and ideological movements/groups such as politicians in Parliamentary Standing Committees, new Left groups, trade/worker unions, etc ... examples included KSSP, KPPKP/SWaCH, Shramik Mukti Dal (Democratic).
4. Also may be useful to make presentations of this framework to Planning Commission, NAC.
5. Is there a danger of this being caught in the same dominant paradigm that it is trying to provide an alternative to? Is there a need to define alternative to what? For instance, can eco-tourism initiatives nested in dominant economic paradigm be considered alternatives?
6. This could perhaps be a step towards developing a framework for the state but can this also become an agenda for political movements? Who would be the social and political carriers of this framework? In what ways can it be used by activists?
7. Talking about sustainability leads to talking about basic needs; such needs are not necessarily the same across all sectors, they are determined also by the livelihoods that are being pursued such as farmers, fishermen, etc. all may have different definitions for basic needs. Also changing rural aspirations are important to bear in mind.

8. There is a need to take this as it is also to the middle class and others for exchange of ideas and creating awareness.
9. Alternatives need to be seen a little more critically and deeply. Sometimes alternatives appear and then disappear over a period of time. Does this mean that they have no value? They need to be judged for their historic role in initiating certain intellectual, social and political processes, even where they may fail eventually. It should be understood that in the current paradigm all alternatives are nested in an environment which would not support their survival for long.
10. Alternatives can also be short-term or interim (e.g. smokeless chullahs) and ultimate or long-term (e.g. LPG); they should not be 2nd best in the long run. For this, it is also important that with genuine decentralization, people/communities will have negotiating powers to make appropriate choices.
11. Instead of trying to replicate a successful initiative as a solution for all areas, it is important to look at the principles that it is pointing towards, and use these to devise distinct solutions for each area.
12. The idea of a 'sustainable consumption line' mentioned in the paper is worth developing, though difficult. Can there be a policy limiting per capita resource use such as energy/water/infrastructure, etc?

Next meeting

Date: 26 July, 4-6 pm

Venue: Lokayat

Agenda:

1) Maharashtra's drought and water security alternatives (SOPECCOM to present)

2) The report of Post MDG 2015 submitted by High Level Panel of Eminent Persons (HLP-EP) to the Secretary General-UN