

Forum on alternatives, Pune

As we try to confront various aspects of ecological unsustainability and social inequity rampant around us, we also ask ourselves: what are the alternatives? If 'development' in its current form has not truly benefited a vast section of India's population, and if it is clearly taking us on a path of ecological suicide, do we have other means to provide for well-being? Are there other models and pathways of providing for water, energy, food, housing, learning, health, and socio-cultural security that do not destroy nature, do not leave half of humanity behind, and help tackle inequities and injustices based on caste, gender, class, etc?

Late last year on the occasion of the release of the book *Churning the Earth: The Making of Global India*, a number of people suggested that we initiate a forum in Pune on the broad subject of alternatives. In April a small group met to discuss the idea further, and decided to initiate a forum to deepen and broaden our understanding of alternatives. This forum could take up the following:

- Presentation of various alternative practices and ideas/concepts/visions, and dialogue on their strengths and weaknesses;
- Networking amongst groups and individuals working on such alternatives, especially cutting across sectors.

Part of the motivation of this forum is to bridge the gap between sectors and movements that often work in silos, exploring the linkages that can be crucial to success of alternatives. We hope that through this process (and of course linking also with others in India), a more integrated alternative framework can emerge. A critique of the present system would not be a central focus of the discussions, though of course it would come up as a natural part of exploring alternatives.

Initially meeting monthly, the Forum's discussions could be based on the following: (a) current news and issues of relevance to alternatives; (b) papers and reports laying out conceptual and visionary alternatives; and (c) actual on-ground or policy alternatives in practice.

Between meetings, there could also be ongoing discussions, exchange of experiences and documents, and so on ... provided the frequency is moderated, given that we all suffer from information (and email!) overload. Such a Forum will only work if it truly adds value to our work and thinking.



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(Note: the above are ideas that came up at a preliminary meeting of these organizations, and are put out as suggestions for discussion at the first full meeting of the Forum, proposed to be held on 13th May, 2013).