

Press release, 30.10.2015

Maharashtra Vikalp Sangam Concludes with Resolve to Promote Development Alternatives

Sevagram, Wardha

The Maharashtra Vikalp Sangam (27-30 October 2015), a gathering of civil society organisations and individuals working on alternative development practices and concepts, concluded its discussion sessions today at Sevagram, Wardha, with a **strong message and resolve to further promote practices and concepts that help achieve human well-being based on ecological sustainability and socio-economic equity and justice.**

The Sangam started on 27th October, and included about 120 people working on agriculture and food, water, social justice, community rights, environment, media, arts, livelihoods, energy, child and women's rights, education, waste, forests, urban and rural issues, and others. More than 25 organisations from various parts of Maharashtra, and some from Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, and Delhi also took part. The Sangam was co-hosted by 18 organisations: Dharamitra, SOPPECOM, Centre for Environment Education, Vrukshamitra, National Alliance of People's Movements, Amhi Amchya Arogyasathi, Narmada Navnirman Abhiyan, Chetana Vikas, Jagrut Mahila Samaj, Gramin Yuva Praagatik Mandal (GYPM), Bhandara Nisararg, Vidarbha Nature Conservation Society, Khoj, Samvedna, Prayas Energy Group, KKPKP, SWaCH, and Kalpavriksh.

The Sangam had representation from local tribal and other communities and panchayats from Gadchiroli, Chandrapur, Pune, Amravati and other districts. NGOs from these and several other districts were present. Participation of women and youth was prominent.

The three days of discussion included introductions to the process and objectives of Vikalp Sangams across India. Hundreds of organisations across the country are raising questions about the current model of development, pointing to how it is violent against nature, against cultures, and against communities. It is making some people richer and richer while the poor remain poor, and it is destroying the natural resource base on which we all survive. The Vikalp Sangam process aims to bring together people working on alternatives to this model of development. It provides a platform to exchange experience and learn from each other, to build collaborations for joint work, and to collectively evolve a vision of an India that is based on ecological sustainability, social justice and equity.

The discussion included problems and solutions in the following areas: farming, forestry, fisheries, animal husbandry, food sovereignty and consumer issues, lifestyles, media, water, energy, education, economic systems, and livelihoods. In each of these areas, both the problems of the current approach, and examples and prospects of alternative approaches were discussed. Several examples where communities and individuals are doing sustainable agriculture and fisheries, decentralized governance, water harvesting, forest conservation and sustainable use of forest produce, alternative media including community radio, participatory budgeting,

ecofriendly lifestyles, waste management, and decent livelihoods for the poor, were brought up from both Maharashtra and other states.

Participants strongly felt that rural and urban communities need to move towards greater self-reliance in basic needs through economic localization, more direct and participatory forms of democracy in which each person is involved in decision-making, much greater empowerment of women, dalits, adivasis and other disprivileged sections, recognition and central role of peoples and traditional knowledge, respect for ecological limits, locally relevant learning and education that combines hands, head and heart. They also committed to intensifying the struggle against forcible land acquisition, destructive 'development' projects like mining and big dams, spread of communal forces and monoculture approaches, excessive urbanization, privatization and individualization that our current system is promoting.

Since the Vikalp Sangam process is not only about discussion but also about practical action, the participants also took part in pottery, spinning, art, dance, music, and other activities. Some of these were taught by young students of Anand Niketan, the school in Sewagram that is run on the Nai Taleem principles of Gandhiji. Participants also visited some sustainable agriculture and alternative education initiatives in and around Wardha.

The Maharashtra Vikalp Sangam is the fourth in a series of gatherings being organized in various parts of India (the first three were organized for Telangana/Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and Ladakh). **Participants of the Sangam resolved to join hands with groups and individuals in other states to make stronger the search for a future in which we can live in harmony with nature and each other, in which no-one is deprived of basic needs and we strive towards equality and justice for all.**

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