

Western Himalaya Mini-Vikalp Sangam Report

Jagori Grameen, Deer Park and Sambhaavnaa Institute, Palampur, Himachal Pradesh

20th to 22nd August, 2016



Vikalp Sangam¹ is an ongoing process of bringing together practitioners, thinkers, researchers, and others working on alternatives to currently dominant forms of economic development and political governance. It aims to create a space to come together, dream and deliberate towards an alternative future. While resistance efforts are underway, and need to be supported, we also need to create a cross sectoral platform on alternatives (or constructive work) to share, learn, build hope, and collaboration.

The Process

Sambhaavnaa Institute, Palampur, Jagori Grameen, Deer Park, Bir and Kalpavriksh, Pune had started the process of planning for a Himachal Pradesh Vikalp Sangam this year. But we increasingly felt that the process would be more meaningful if more states of the Himalayan region, specifically the Western Himalaya came together for the cross learning. However, planning of a Western Himalaya Vikalp Sangam 2017(if at all we decide to have one), we felt a need of an exercise whereby representatives from all three states, that is Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand come together to actually envisage the process so that it is not reduced to an event but will be more carefully thought out with a collective ownership.

The invite for the preliminary meeting or the Mini Vikalp Sangam was extended to a series of organizations in Uttarakhand, Himachal and Jammu and Kashmir (See Annexure below). While some could not attend, 25 individuals from 10 organizations from the above states got together from August 20 to 22nd, 2016, as part of the Western Himalayan Mini-Vikalp Sangam at the campus of Sambhaavnaa, above Palampur in Himachal (See Annexure 1 below for attendees). The Sangam was organized by Sambhaavnaa, Jagori, Deer Park, and Kalpavriksh. Participants included groups and individuals working on;

- Organic and biodiverse farming
- Women's empowerment and rights
- caste and gender justice
- Sustainable livelihoods
- Alternative learning and education
- Local governance, community rights on natural resources
- Community based forest conservation

Also, attending were groups struggling against the inappropriate and destructive development being imposed, such as hydro-electricity projects and mining. The Sangam involved sharing of initiatives and experiences, challenges of mainstream development and governance, focus areas for further collaboration, and possibilities of a Himalayan region vision for the future.

¹ For details see <http://kalpavriksh.org/index.php/alternatives/alternatives-knowledge-center/353-vikalpsangam-coverage>

Agenda

Day 1:

- Introduction
- Vikalp Sangam
- Alternatives Framework
- Sharing of experiences by participants
- Film of Jammu and Kashmir situation (evening, optional)

Day 2:

- Sambhaavnaa campus tour
- Sharing of experiences by participants (contd.)
- Challenges and solutions in Himalayan region
- Jal-Jangal-Jameen- Janvar
- Presentation on examples of alternatives (evening, optional)

Day 3

- Exercise to help articulate meaning of 'alternative'
- Exercise for self-analysis of organization based on the alternatives framework
- Action Plan

DAY 1

The first session of the Sangam began with the melodious and beautiful songs by sung by Champaka and Dr. Sandhya Joshi and her colleague from Mahila Samakhya. Followed by a brief introduction to the Vikalp Sangam and the alternatives framework, its processes and objectives by Ashish Kothari.

Introduction: Vikalp Sangam:

Vikalp Sangam process began in 2013. Since a past few years, although we have been able to explain why we are against the issues of discrimination, exploitation, and destruction but are still unable to articulate what we are seeking for. Through the process of Vikalp Sangam, we envision a process of sharing and collaboration of alternative initiatives and ideas. The idea is to bring together individuals, communities and organizations who are attempting to go beyond just critiquing the present development model and its side-effects - discrimination, exploitation, and ecological destruction, human right violation, gender & caste inequity etc. - but are also seeking to search for answers, viable alternatives.

We are aware that there are many networks and initiatives that have brought together movements and groups on various platforms related to this theme. But most of these are limited to individual themes or sector-based social movements, e.g. struggles against destructive 'development' projects, alternative health initiatives, sustainable farming work, etc. There are limited opportunities and attempts to cut across thematic areas, bringing ecological, education, health, justice, livelihood, market/trade, governance and other alternatives together to learn from each other. We envisage these Vikalp gatherings to be such cross-cutting ones, and to build on rather than replicate the existing/ongoing initiatives. For example, we have platforms for organic farmers. But these platforms need to engage with women's group, ecological and political initiatives, alternative education models, etc. in order to be wholly effective. We need a holistic perspective for a holistic alternative. Therefore, the idea of confluence of alternatives. Just as a *sangam of rivers* is considered sacred; similarly bringing together people and alternative ideas is also sacred. Hence, Vikalp Sangam. Until mid-2016, there have been 5 regional Sangams and 1 thematic Sangam in India.

Re-imagining the future of Himalayas

To begin with, within the context of a fragile Himalayan mountainous ecology as well as the socio economic and political climate, the vision and practice of development must be envisaged very differently. If we all agree that the earth and human relationship are intrinsically bound together within the principle of INTER DEPENDENCE, that we are a member of this Earth Cooperative, then our role as development practitioners must abide by this principle. We are equal members of this enterprise called the universal social political and cultural ecology and have rights and obligation. The need of the hour is to evolve a real paradigm shift.

The term development is not value neutral. The present development model based on human greed and exploitation, political corruption, non-accountability to its citizens and the lack of respect for nature and people is neither sustainable nor to be sustained. The aggressive neo liberal sell out of peoples land and resources is posing real all time dangers to the survival of this earth and its people on the margins. In spite of the fact that the Himalayan states are in a fairly better position, in terms of not being at the very center of the growth led paradigm, the impacts are slowly reaching here. In fact, the survival of some community based natural resource livelihood systems need to be seen as an opportunity.

The handful of social organizations and movements in these Himalayan States have not been able to come together in a sustained manner on one platform to build a common understanding of the processes that need challenging and alternatively identifying common grounds where we evolve a

collective vision. While efforts have been made in silos there is a need to start exchanging the key challenges that we are facing in this region, as we strive for some fundamental change.

Aims of Western Himalaya Vikalp Sangam:

- Bring together people who are working on or interested in alternatives, ideologically and in practice in the states of Himachal Pradesh, Jammu Kashmir and Uttarakhand.
- Strengthen the network of concerned people and organizations to collaborate and work towards the goal of amplifying the need for alternative vision of democracy and development
- Advocate for meaningful alternatives with a vision through positive analysis and criticism.
 - Evolve an inclusive and intersectional perspective through cross learning
 - Sharing of experiences and helping in alliances of people/organizations working on similar issues
 - Build a collective alternative vision for our communities and societies in years to come
- Make tentative plans for a Western Himalaya Sangam in 2017

What is an alternative? What is the Alternatives Framework?

Alternatives Framework is an effort to put together discussions and analysis from various alternative initiatives and Vikalp Sangams. It is an example of a Collective Vision of alternatives framed through discussions, experiences and learnings. It tries to explain what an alternative is and how to differentiate between false and real alternatives?

Alternatives are examples of solutions to our present issues which can be practical activities, policies, processes, technologies, and concepts/frameworks. They can be practiced or proposed/propagated by communities, government, civil society organizations, individuals, social enterprises.

It is proposed that alternatives are built on the following pillars (or overlapping circles):

- **Ecological sustainability**, which includes the conservation of the rest of nature (ecosystems, species, functions, cycles) and its resilience, and respect for ecological limits at various levels, local to global.
- **Social well-being and justice**, including lives that are fulfilling and satisfactory physically, socially, culturally, and spiritually; where there is equity between communities and individuals in socio-economic and political entitlements, benefits, rights and responsibilities; where there is communal and ethnic harmony.
- **Direct and delegated democracy**, where decision-making starts at the smallest unit of human settlement, in which every human has the right, capacity and opportunity to take part, and builds up from this unit to larger levels of governance by delegates that are downwardly accountable to the units of direct democracy; and where decision-making is not simply on a 'one-person one-vote' basis but respectful of the needs and rights of those currently disprivileged, e.g. some minorities.
- **Economic democracy**, in which local communities and individual (including producers and consumers, often combined into one as 'prosumers') have control over the means of production, distribution, exchange, markets; where localization is a key principle, and larger trade and exchange is built on it.
- **Cultural diversity and knowledge democracy**, in which pluralism of ways of living, ideas and ideologies is respected, and where the generation, transmission and use of knowledge (traditional/modern, including science and technology) are accessible to all.

Many or most current initiatives may not fulfill *all* the above. Perhaps we can consider something an alternative if it addresses at least two of the above features (i.e. is actually helping to achieve

them, or is explicitly or implicitly oriented towards them), and is not violating but rather being open to the other features.

This is the 4th version of the Alternative Framework. The above is clearly very tentative, and needs further discussion; it is offered only as a heuristic to the discussion on what could be considered fundamental alternatives to the current system

Following these brief introductory statements, began the process of experience sharing, and discussions by each participant introducing their organization, their work, vision and experience.

Sharing of Experiences by Participants

Van Panchayat Sangharsh Morcha, Ramgarh, Nainital, Uttarakhand

Van Panchayat Sangharsh Morcha is a mass organization started by Sainion Ka Sangathan, which was formed more than a decade ago as an alliance of Van Panchayats (or village forest councils in Uttarakhand) to respond to the dilution of the powers of Van Panchayats by the State Government. Today, the Van Panchayat Sangharsh Morcha at Ramgarh is trying to address the issues related to forest management, destructive development in the mountains, farmers' problems due to market mechanisms, unemployment, migration and issues related to commercial tourism. "Ramgarh is the food valley of the Kumaon region and there is ample scope for horticulture", said Gopal Lodhiyal. He gave a brief history of Van Panchayats in the area and how they came up as a response to a people's movement in Kumaon in the colonial period after forest laws were imposed, villagers' rights and movement was restricted leading to lack of food security, ecological degradation and atrocities by forest department. After several decades of well managed village forest councils the State government over the last decade has been trying to centralize the powers of the Van Panchayats. "We have been fighting against that and now we are using the Forest Rights Act 2006 to re-assert our rights on forest lands", he added.

Further, the organization is looking at encouraging community level initiatives for ecological sustenance through organic farming, employment generation through promotion of apple orchards, and community stays. It has been working intensively on community forest rights through FRA.

Uttaranchal Youth and Rural Development Centre (UYRDC), Chamoli, Uttarakhand

<http://www.uyrdc.org/>

UYRDC began in 1986 to establish an ecological, social and economic environment in which the mountain people can experience increased well-being and can foresee continued sustainable settlement for themselves and future generation in a sustainable manner. It aims to deeper community engagement and active participation in the process of development through processes of community governance, capacity building for stimulating sustained self-development.

UYRDC has currently undertaken the following projects:

- Uttarakhand Agricultural Development Program
- Business Development Services (BDS) Dairy sub sector.
- Organizing women agriculture producer.
- Propagatory Nursery of medicinal plants.
- Gadani Watershed development programme
- Swajal Pariyojana
- Training of women in economic small scale development
- Herbal Village –Ghesh

Siddharth Negi from UYRDC stated that the entire Uttarakhand is under the forest area and so FRA should be implemented all over UK. Unscheduled population is not more than 10% but Chipko

movement has demonstrated that the forests rights don't just impact the tribes but also women in forests all across India. Until rights to govern the resources are given back to the communities most of the issues related to instability, migration, and food insecurity will persist. If villagers own the forest, many issues related to management of the forests will be solved. He also stressed on the issue of out migration from the mountains and the need to strengthen livelihood opportunities within the state.

The existing policies are clearly not working. We need alternative solutions for governance and resources if we have to keep these forests and perennial rivers intact. The Van Panchayat Sarpanchs are not allowed in the BDS meetings. Hence, there is no power for equal representation. Villagers have been taking care of the forests until recently, but now they don't have a say in the governance policies nor do they gain any benefits. Thus, policies are wrong. FRA has been only on paper, proper implementation of FRA will be useful to overcome most of the problems in Himalayan states. We need an integrated approach – upper and lower villages, all are dependent on each other. Solutions have to be of integrated nature.

Maati, Uttarakhand

<http://www.munsiari.com/>



“Sangarsh ke saath nirman bahut zaroori hai” – MalikaViridi

Maati is a women's collective formed to empower rural women of Munsiari (Uttarakhand) as individuals with political, social, and economic agency. Named Maati, which is a Hindi word for earth, the collective pays homage to the soil which secures their livelihoods. Maati was formed in the mid-1990s to mobilize against domestic violence and abuse faced by women, and the culture of silence which enables it. Seeking violence free lives, Maati has put forth efforts to ban the sale of alcohol in Uttarakhand, as alcoholism is rampant and closely linked to domestic violence. Now spread across 20 hamlets, Maati has over 150 members and 8 core group members. As a continuation of their fight for social justice, working on the principle of 'rearguard', Maati tries to create opportunity for women to grow their own political voices and economic independence.

Through the principle of Local Governance Participation, Maati members have broken cultural barriers by becoming actively involved in Panchayat proceedings. It has tried to initiate governance of resources such as forest, land, water, farming - seeds and crafts through community participation and ownership of common livelihood resources. Community led tourism and marketing of local products have been some of its economic initiatives. Additionally, Maati members have mobilized other women and community members against multiple hydropower projects targeting their localities. It has tried to socially and culturally engage the communities in celebration of cultures, nature, traditional recipes and integration of various knowledge systems for identity building and empowerment.

The Jungli School is Maati's alternative education initiative. This school emphasizes finding balance between the importance of traditional knowledge and academic knowledge, local environment and standardized subjects, and experience and knowing.

Malika Virdi from Maati spoke about the need for alliances for any kind of a participatory politicization process. She also emphasized the need to bridge the gap between the 'intellectual' spaces and the 'working' masses for a real political democratic alternative to emerge.

Mahila Samakhya, Uttarakhand

<http://mahilasamakhyauttarakhand.org/about-ms/mahila-samakhya-programme>

Mahila Samakhya Programme is a government programme that was initiated in 1989 for the education and employment of women in rural areas, particularly of women from socially and economically marginalized groups. Mahila Samakhya Uttarakhand was formed in 2004 as a part of progressive women movement in 11 districts of Uttarakhand with the principle of 'women empowerment through women organizations'. It created a platform for discussions and debate to address women's issues at village, block and district level. Dr. Sandhya Joshi, member of MS while explaining the organization's work introduced the establishment of women's own adalat (courts) where women take their decisions and function as women pressure groups. Mahila sangha is the nodal point of Mahila Samakhya and all activities are planned around the Sangha. The Sangha processes are facilitated by Sahayogini and thereby a core cadre of women leaders at village level are developed. The organization worked on the issue of economic stability and health issues of women by building access places and reviving traditional medicinal knowledge systems. Currently, around 17000 women work with Mahila Samakhya.

Mool Sustainability Research and Training Center, Jammu and Kashmir

<http://www.moolsustainability.org/>

Mool Sustainability Research and Training Center, a Charitable Trust was established in 2012 with the aim of creating an alternative space for the youth of the Jammu and Kashmir. Mool aims to inspire youth to build local resource-based, environment-friendly, and independent livelihoods - exploring a sustainable way of life and enabling Kashmiris to lead participatory socio-economic transformation for a just, equal and healthy society, explained Lubna Rafiq and Rais Rafiq, members of Mool. Working on the core values of dignity and trust, right to life and identity, equality, justice, inclusivity, individual and community wellbeing, self-sufficiency and sustainability, Mool is trying to create a space for discussion and dialogue about issues related violence, destruction and development.

The organization provides Mool Internship and Fellowship Program, has worked towards revival of traditional art, local clothing for livelihood generation. It focuses on revival of family system, community living and traditional knowledge systems for over well-being of the people through programs such as Indigenous Practices Resource Center and Community Wellbeing Program.

Sukhdev Vishwapremi, Rural Technology Development Centre, Himachal Pradesh

While asserting a need for equal, 'pahadkendrit' and sustainable governance, Sukhdevji spoke about his work on the issue of Gram Panchayat level participation planning based on the 73rd Amendment which emphasized the importance of social justice and people's participation in local organizations. He highlighted the significance of 'UpGram Sabha' initiative started specifically for the mountainous region. The work included testing the provisions of the MLA local area development fund while trying to make the existing organization transparent and accountable. RTDC published a 'margadarshika' a document about the local organizations and people's participation in 2003 which highlights the importance of convergence of watershed, livelihood and panchayat plans for better effectiveness of the plans.

Sukhdevji emphasized the importance of bottom-up planning and convergence of local planning with government schemes wherein user communities from within the communities should be the implementers of the schemes rather than external contractors. He elaborated on experiments related to traditional seeds, protection of indigenous cattle and poultry species, discrimination-less education system, toilets in schools, social awareness during pre-election voter campaign and critical work relate to the issues of the systematic exclusion of scheduled castes in FRA process. Thus, through his own experience as an activist he highlighted the importance of need for cross-cutting planning for betterment of society.

Ekal Nari Sangathan, Himachal Pradesh

Started in 2005 for emancipation of single (widow, divorced and destitute women), Ekal Nari (widow/single/abandoned woman) is a sanghathan of women working for rights and freedom of women. It has worked in spreading awareness about government schemes, and instilling confidence and inspiration in the lives of repressed and destitute women. They mentioned the success of their organization in increasing widow pension from Rs. 200/- to Rs.650/- and Mother Teresa scheme from Rs. 1000/- to now Rs. 3000/- and also how the organization has been a significant force for strengthening and pushing for the Mukhya Mantri Kanyadan Yojana.

Rahul Saxena, Lok Vigyan Kendra

Rahul has been helping and supporting various organizations and individuals in their efforts. He spoke about 'Karsog Initiative' and the significant work of Nekram Sharma in the field of literacy, awareness, fodder and wood sufficiency, women participation, health and nutrition issues, and vegetable and traditional crop farming. Elaborating about their experiment related to stopping open grazing and preventing growth of pine trees he mentioned the importance of such experiments in order to protect forest species, and growth and plantation of useful trees. Within two years this experiment produced fodder surplus and is now expanding to other 20 nearby villages with the help of the forest department.

He also spoke about Samriddhi Mahila Co-operative society, a women's cooperative which produces organic and local fruits jams, pickles and chutneys. Earlier the co-operative was earning surplus profits but now is facing the problem of lack of next generation leadership and market related issues, thus, concluded that small initiatives will be more sustainable and profitable according to him.

DAY 2

The second day of the Vikalp Sangam began with campus tour of Sambhaavnaa; and then continuing with the introduction of various initiatives in Himachal Pradesh, related to organic farming, water management, cattle and poultry farming and workshops organized by the organization.



Sambhaavnaa, Himachal Pradesh

<http://www.sambhaavnaa.org/>

Sambhaavnaa Institute is a living-learning space for youth to exchange, collaborate, and mobilize for transformative change within the areas of Social, Economic, Political, and Environmental justice. Founded in 2004, this organization empowers young people to become politically engaged citizens, and value-based leaders. Sambhaavnaa offers a myriad of workshops and programmes, with content matter ranging from organic farming practices, to nuclear energy, to harmful development.

- Nayi Dishayein, summer school for young adults to tackle the socio-political, and economic implications of the prevailing development paradigm
- Buniyaad, workshop for local youth to engage in discussions about alternative wellbeing spaces and transformative change
- Udaan, an alternative pre-school for local children;
- Children's Learning Centre, with emphasis non-traditional academic subjects, including life skills, theater, dance, and music.

One of the main highlights of Sambhaavnaa organization is its mud architecture. Didi Contractor, architect of Sambhaavnaa spoke about her ideas about contemporary and traditional architecture and her vision which helped her design the mud buildings of Sambhaavnaa institute.

“I try to make my buildings universal. Buildings should speak everybody’s language and should make everybody comfortable. Use of cement in our construction has to reduce; earth has to be the main ingredient in our building materials and cement should be used just as a strengthening material. I tried to design Sambhaavnaa keeping this perspective in mind.”

– Didi Contractor



Kitchen and dining hall at Sambhaavnaa

Jagori Grameen, Himachal Pradesh

<http://www.jagorigrameen.org/>

JAGORI means "awaken, women!" Jagori's aim is to enable marginalized and oppressed women in rural and urban areas with awareness and action for rights. Jagori undertakes training, documentation, grassroots action research and advocacy on women's rights and collective empowerment.

Working on health issues of women, Abha Bhaiya explained, we base our foundation on the knowledge system of women as healers. We are part of a co-operative, where everything is connected and functions together, women are integral part of this co-operative and thus, we need to work towards gender equality and respect.



Abha Bhaiya, Jagori

Women as farmers have always been ignored, they need to be given due credit for their work. We need to respect their knowledge and understand the issue of politics in farming. Speaking about the issues of alcoholism and agriculture she said, - "*hamari kheti hamare purush jaisi sharabi ho gayi hai*"². Thus, emphasized the need to promote organic farming. Jagori organizes food festivals, food melas and shops about local diverse food to celebrate and create awareness about organic, indigenous food, and importance of food diversity. Highlighting the importance of self-reliance and local markets, Abhaji referred to Gandhiji's belief that - 'Food should not travel more than a bullock cart's day journey'.

Deer Park Institute, Himachal Pradesh

<http://www.deerpark.in/>

Prashant Verma introduced Deer Park Institute and mentioned the core visions of the Institute are to re-create the spirit of Nalanda, working on the basis of the principle that traditional knowledge systems should be accessible to everybody and keeping the process of dialogue in religions alive. With the aspiration of applying compassion and wisdom traditions in the activities of the Institute, the institute organizes workshops and conferences on environmental issues, preserving local culture and sustainable livelihood in the Institute and local schools. The institute has been instrumental in work related to zero waste and plastic collection, and in creating spaces that can nurture these values.

Grassroots, Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh

<http://www.grassrootsindia.com/>

The Pan Himalayan Grassroots Development Foundation (Grassroots), a non-profit voluntary organization, works in the central and western Himalayan states of Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh to promote sustainable, self-reliant development at the village level. Ramesh Chandra spoke about the emphasis on self-help participation work across the integrated issues of water & sanitation, renewable energy, community forestry, sustainable agriculture and enterprise development. Working on issues related to *Jal, Jangal, Jameen* and *Janvar* the organization has undertaken projects related to catchment area treatment, integrated planning with communities for

farming and livelihood, established self-help groups, undertaken 15 lakh plantation in 1000 ha in 50 villages, construction of toilets, 600-700 infiltration wells, and 4000 biogas (with new material technology). It has worked on revival of traditional water resources, creation of a sustainable water resource system, and revival of traditional crops, millets/pulses, linking with Umang Producer Co.

Sunita Kashyap introduced Umang Mahila Samiti, a women self-help group (SHG) formed in 2001 by Grassroots to address women related issues. In 2009, Umang Producer Co, a producer company was started. Functioning under women leadership, the company now has 40 items such as natural honey, woolen items, pickles and natural grains in the market. She also spoke about Makaam, a federation of women farmers from Uttarakhand whom they are a part of.

Kulbhushan Upamanyuji, Himalaya Bachao Samiti and Himalaya Niti Abhiyan, Chamba Himachal Pradesh

As an activist, who started his journey with the JP (Jaiprakash Narayan) movement in the 70s, Kulbhushanji has been working on development related issues in the Himalayan region through Himalayan Niti Abhiyan – Himalaya Bachao Samiti. Speaking broadly on the current challenges faced by the Himalayan states, he stated that the challenges we face today need to be addressed through changing mindset and self-reliance wherein conflict will be minimized. We need to overcome the regional and communal barriers in order to achieve overall progress. He emphasized the need to focus on sovereignty and the limits to 'growth'. There was a discussion on the need to demystify 'technology' and give people the access and ownership of technology. At the same time not look at technology as a means to fix all problems

These context specific introductions and discussions about various organizations and initiatives led to convergence of ideas on the theme related to Jal- Jangal- Jameen-Janvar and Jan which then formed the foundation for further discussion and analysis of the opportunities, and challenges of growth and development of alternatives in the three Himalayan states.



Upamanyuji while explaining the challenges faced in Himalayan states

Jal- Jangal-Jameen-Janvar-Jan: An open discussion

Jal

Hydropower projects are creating many conflicts related to water rights and access for domestic as well as irrigational purposes. There is a need to address this issue in an integrated manner. Experimenting with alternative energy resources such as bioenergy, biogas, solar energy, clean energy techniques and decentralized energy production and consumption could help in reducing the dependence of hydropower projects. Himalayan rivers are the main water source to the entire northern India. Hence, there is a need to examine the provision of royalty of water within the economic and political framework.

Jangal

Monoculture and deforestation for developmental projects leading to loss of wildlife and diversity of flora and fauna need to be addressed. Issues related to policies and implementation of FRA have to be tackled for better management of forests. Forests are of great ecological significance hence, demand for more agricultural land needs to be prevented. Community ownership and control over forest resources should be the key focus

Jameen

Loss of incentive for farming as a livelihood and limitation of the PDS system have culminated in the issues of food insecurity, malnutrition, migration, unemployment and social issues such as alienation, alcoholism and drug addiction. Agriculture has to be adaptable to the changing climate scenario. There is a need for promotion of traditional farming systems, revival of indigenous seeds and organic farming for food security, and to solve the issues related to dependency on cash crops. However, there needs to be a solution for market availability and fair prices for such products. Issues related to land rights of communities, women and Dalits have to be addressed in order to achieve overall progress.

Janvar

With the introduction of hybrid breeds of cattle, local breeds and species are in danger. There is also a shortage of good quality fodder in many areas as forests have degraded.

Other issues facing the Himalaya

Other major problem in the Himalayan states is related to waste management mainly, plastic. The existing governance structures and definition of development is based on the principle of extraction and non-inclusive policies. There is a need to find technological alternative and simultaneously question this extractive and consumerist attitude. Along with it there is also a need to revive cultural and social norms which have been actually helping in maintaining ecological and social sustainability of resource production and consumption.

Demand for conventional development which is destructive in nature needs to be replaced by development for over wellbeing, stated Malika while speaking about the need for change in worldview and mindset about the definition of development. It is important to revive and celebrate traditions that were sustainable, e.g.: farming using organic fertilizers, etc. In 2011 our states were declared organic, yet use of fertilizers and pesticides is rampant. Mainstream development strategies such as cementing kulhs (traditional canal systems in Himachal for water distribution) need to be questioned and critiqued.

Prakash Bhandari of Himdhara Collective pointed out to one of the most crucial challenges for the Himalayan states, generating revenue for maintaining the existing governance system, for attaining

self-sufficiency and simultaneously, balancing ecological, social and cultural aspects of our societies for overall wellbeing. We need to rethink about the side effects of destructive development and find technological alternatives. The possibilities of revenue generation through alternative solutions need to be explored. For example, measures such as responsible community led tourism, tourism tax, water royalties from states downstream, decentralized power generation and connection with the grid, green bonus, ecosystem services evaluation could be useful in generating revenue for the Himalayan states.

Upamanyuji stated that considering the geographical and ecological uniqueness and sensitiveness of the Himalayan states a separate ministry and planning department needs to be formed to discuss Himalayan states issues. There is a need for pressure and resistances against destructive government initiatives, and simultaneously, need to find solutions – '*sangarsh ke saath nirman*'. Abhaji emphasized about the need for networking and collaboration within communities to work on these issues. The existing initiatives mentioned as alternatives by various originations and individuals within Himalayan states and all over India are demonstrative in nature. There is a need to figure out how these alternatives could be mainstreamed and could become more impactful.

In the case of Jammu and Kashmir, participants of Mool stressed that the militarized and conflict-ridden context of their region made it very difficult to think about issues of land-forests-water and alternatives, as it was a matter of daily survival. Sharing of experiences was valuable for them, but without freedom from the oppressive situation they are in, implementing alternatives on the ground would be very challenging.

DAY 3

Based on previous days' discussions on the challenges and solutions on the theme of Jal-Jangal-Jameen- Janvar, and Ashish Kothari's presentation on examples of alternatives such as decentralized and direct democracy practice in Mendha Lekha, and localized PDS system developed by the women of Deccan Development Society, DAY 3 began with an understanding that there are different ways in which different people define what is alternative. Thus, to enable better understanding an exercise was conducted which helped in articulating a general idea about the concept of alternative.

Summary of the exercise conducted to help articulate the meaning of an 'alternative'

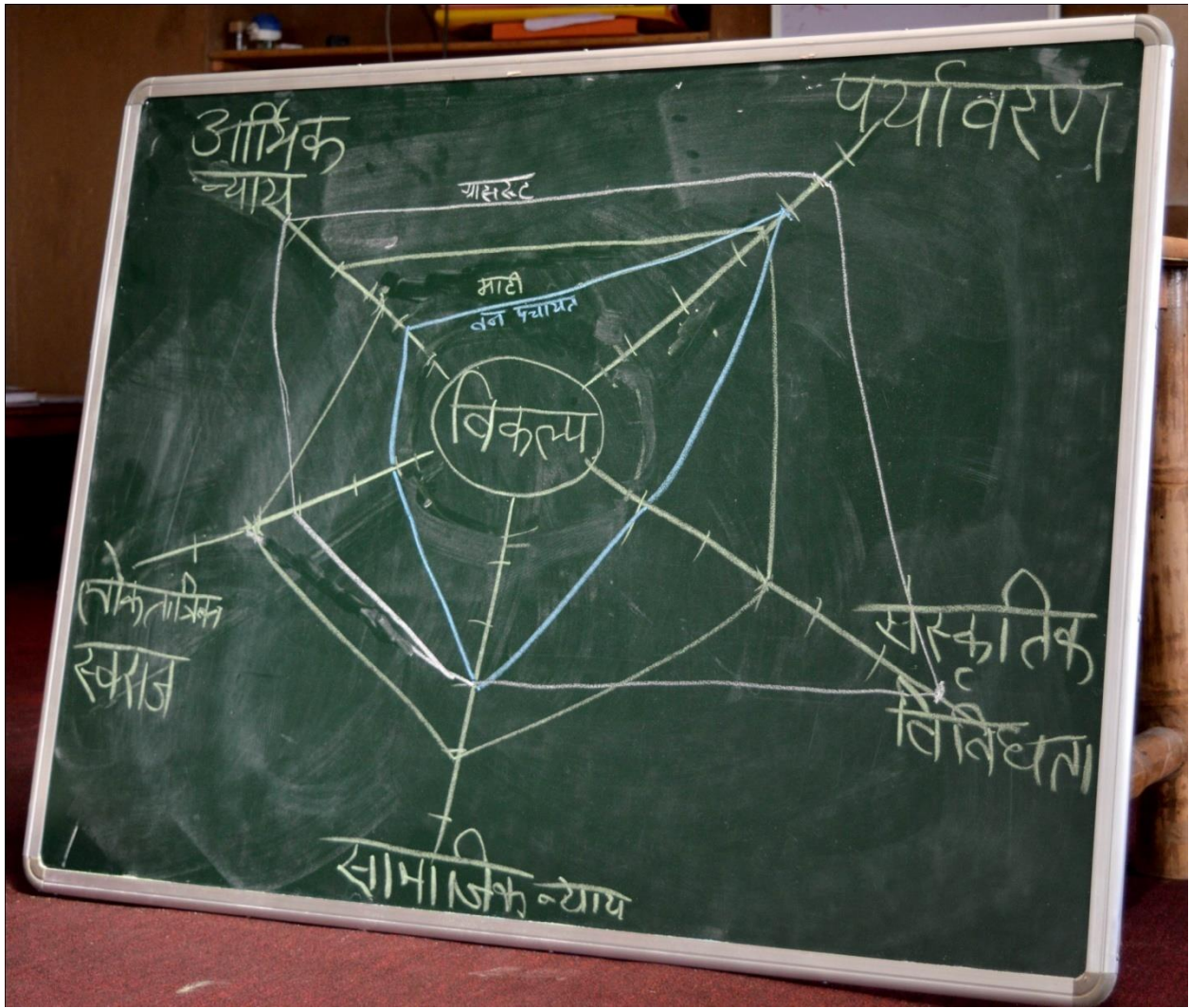
Alternative is something which is based on independence, interdependence and co-operation. It needs a platform or a network to collaborate between community and state to tackle specific issues such as power structures, curb migration, addresses issue of the youth and also to learn from each other. A *vikalp* is something which helps to change our present consumerist and resource intensive lifestyle. Thus, it needs to question and change our thought process, and treat the roots of the problem, not just its symptoms. An alternative world will not lead to alienation and disconnection between humans and nature. It should enhance individual development thus promoting over all society's development. Currently, solutions are based on technological improvements but we need improvement in our attitudes and value systems. Vikalp is not a product but a process of transformation which needs to take into consideration the history, social, ecological, cultural, ecological and economic foundations of the community while considering a solution.

There is a need for creating space for the existing alternative initiatives to strengthen and further grow and multiply. It is important to understand the issues related to class, caste, patriarchy, consumerism and capitalism to tackle the problems and develop sustainable alternatives. The issue of funds can be solved through focusing on community participation and self-reliance.

Alternatives have been small scale and have always been questioned about the limitations of scaling up and expanding them. However, it is important to keep in mind that Vikalp is a definition of well-being or development as defined by the people according to their needs and requirement. Vikalp should be in the hands of the community and should be an outcome of a bottom up process. Hence, it is context specific and location oriented. Thus, decentralization of power, rights and resources is the pre-requisite for developing a Vikalp. Along with defining the definition of growth and development there is a need to understand and respect the ecological limits.

We need to synergize and form networks on the principles of direct democracy, participation led planning, collaborate between government and public for building sustaining alternative initiatives. Documentation of existing alternatives as example of possibilities, learning opportunities, to identify and address gaps is important. Through these efforts we need to address the major elements of economic, social, cultural justice for all by tackling the challenge of giving equal opportunity for representation to all the sections of the society.

Along with speaking about finding an alternative to the problems we also need to look at our own organizational structures to understand how democratic or alternative our own organizations and initiatives are. There is a need to question ourselves, our organizations and our initiatives. To understand this better an exercise was conducted where participants volunteered to try and map their organizations and initiatives on the basis of the 5 alternative pillars. Based on how their initiatives have been performing on each aspect of the alternative framework, participants marked themselves. This exercise was beneficial in self-analysis and better understanding of what the alternative framework is about.



Exercise of mapping initiatives on basis of the 5 alternative pillars. Please consider this photo as an example and not the final analysis.

Based on the discussions so far, an Action Plan was prepared for continuing this process and to form wider network for connecting more organizations and individuals.

ACTION PLAN

Participants volunteered to work on the key themes emerging from the Sangam, as follows:

JAL: To follow up on issues related to hydropower and preservation/protection of rivers

- Himdhara Environment Research and Action Collective, Himachal
- Himalaya Niti Abhiyan, Himachal
- Nadi Bachao Abhiyan, Uttarakhand

JANGAL – Gopal, Prakash, Bharat

- Himalaya Van Adhikar Manch
- Van Panchayat Sangharsh Morcha
- Van Adhikar Kanoon Samanvay Samiti

JAMEEN – Malika, Abha

- Mahila Kisan Adhikar Manch (MAKAAM)
- Jagori

- Report about this meeting to be sent to a larger group so that everybody stays in loop
- Linking and contacting other organizations
- Organizing a meeting of these groups in next 3-4 months for further discussion on the specific issues
- Continuing such discussions and collaborations through various events and occasions

Thus, the Western Himalaya Mini-Vikalp Sangam was concluded with an understanding that it is not a project but a dynamic process of questioning, discussion, debate, self-analysis, positive criticism, documenting understanding structural issues and redefining the term ‘development’ and most importantly collaborating to engage in the process of visioning an alternative future for the Himalayan region and working towards it. This process was important in initiating a discussion about difference between ‘destructive development’ and ‘development for overall wellbeing’, alternatives and highlighted the importance about changing our mindset and attitude towards the term ‘development’.



Lunch on Day 3. Traditional Himachali reception known as Dhaam, rice served with delicious traditional curry recipes prepared using local millets and grains from Himachal Pradesh. Samabhaavnaa kitchen team prepared Rajma ka Madra, Khatta; made from chana and aamchuur, delicious sour and spicy and Sepu vadi; gravy of white lentil dumplings.



Annexure 1: List of Organizations Invited

Name of Organization	Theme
Organic Farming Association of India (OFAI)/IFOAM	Agriculture
CORD (Chinmay Organization for Rural Development)	Agriculture
Jagori Grameen	
Samridhi Women's Co-operative	Cooperatives/Self-Help Groups/Local Products
Shradha: A Foundation for Social and Environmental Care	
Dharmalaya Institute for Compassionate Living	Eco-Architecture/Earthen Building
Didi Contractor	Eco-Architecture/Earthen Building
Ecosphere, Spiti	Eco tourism and livelihood
Himalaya Bachao Samiti, Chamba	Environment
Lok Vigyan Kendra	Forest Rights/Community Forestry
Nishtha Rural Health, Education and Environment Centre	
Waste Warriors	Tourism and Waste
Sutra (Social Uplift Through Rural Action)	
Mool Sustainability Research and Training Center (MOOL) Ganderbal, Kashmirmoolsustainability@gmail.com 191131 Webpage: www.moolsustainability.org Email:	
Maati	Eco tourism; Gender; Forest Rights
Vividhara	Agriculture
People's Science Institute	Livelihoods; NRM
HESCO	Livelihoods and Environment
Mandakini Ki Awaaz	Community Radio
Beej Bachao Andolan	Agriculture
Ladakh Ecological Development Group (LEDEG)	
Ladakh Arts and Media Organisation (LAMO), Snow Leopard Conservancy India Trust (SLC), tsewang.namgail@gmail.com	
Secmol	
MAKAAM:	
UYRDC community organizing work in Chamoli;	
Grassroots in Ranikhet area	
Mahila Samakhya Pauri/ Garhwal	
Chintan	
Sutra - sect for Ekal Nari	Women's rights
RTDC	Dalit Rights
Pawalgarh conservation reserve	Forest Rights/Community Forestry
Van Panchayat	Forest Rights/Community Forestry
UOCB	
Chirag	Forest Rights/Community Forestry
Aarohi	

SoS Organics	Agriculture
Navdanya	Agriculture
PAPN	Child Rights

Annexure 2: List of Attendees

Name	Organisation
Malika Viridi	Representing Maati/Makaam
Vimla Vishwapremi	Rural Technology Development Center
Sukhdev Vishwavapremi	
Dr. Sandhya Joshi,	Mahila Samakh
Miss. Sunita Rawat.	
Suresh	
Raees	Mool
Lubna Rafiqi	
Siddharth Singh Negi	UYRDC
Bharat Rawat	
Birendra Singh	
Gopal	Vanpanchayat
Lakshman	
Kulbhushan Upmanyu	Himalaya Bachao Samiti, Chamba
Meena	Sutra - sectt for Ekal Nari
Milapa	
Santosh	
Sunita	Grassroots Umang Mahila
Sunita	
Ramesh	Jagori
Abha Bhaiya	
Anoop	Deer park
Prashant	
Trilok	Kalpavriksh
Ashish	
Radhika	
Milind	
Shrishtee	Sambhaavnaa
Manshi Asher	
Shashank Katoch	
Mohammad Chappalwala	