

Ladakh Vikalp Sangam, 20-24 July 2015

Report



The Ladakh Sangam was Co-Hosted by:

Ladakh Ecological Development Group

Snow Leopard Conservancy India Trust

Ladakh Arts and Media Organisation

Students' Educational and Cultural Movement of Ladakh

Kalpavriksh

As part of the ongoing Vikalp Sangam process, the third regional Vikalp Sangam was organized at the LEDeG campus in Leh, Ladakh from 20th to 24th July, 2015.

The Ladakh sangam broadly focused on the two issues that have been plaguing the region in recent years – Waste and increased popularity of Packaged Food. Another important aspect of the sangam was to revisit the Ladakh Vision Document and take it forward towards implementation.

A brief background to these two issues

From being a region that never had any waste at all, things slowly changed as Ladakh experienced many changes: the laying of roads into the region in the 60s, the coming in of the armed forces, the opening of the area to outsiders, the growth in tourism, the increase in income of Ladakhi families, and the inflow of consumer goods.

There is almost no systematic handling of the solid waste generated, as most of it is dumped in a valley near Leh. The local Hill Council banned the use of plastic carry bags many years ago when many organisations and particularly the Women's Alliance, pressurized the government to do so. While the ban is effective against polyethylene bags, and while many shopkeepers or other vendors do use paper bags, unfortunately now many shopkeepers have substituted a different kind of plastic bag, polypropylene, that looks deceptively like a cloth bag and is now becoming a common sight amidst the waste. However packaged goods have come to Leh in a big way and that has resulted in growing quantities of garbage.

Bottled water is also another huge source of waste during the tourist season. In an effort to reduce garbage, a shop called Dzomsa has for years been providing solar boiled water that can be refilled in a bottle by tourists. Also on some trekking routes, solar boiled water is being sold by local villagers. The Hill Council announced a ban on bottled water two years ago but was forced to take it back when local hotel owners, shop keepers protested saying that tourists would demand it and that adequate alternative options need to be worked out before such a ban. No ban has been enforced till date.

Introducing the Vikalp Sangam process, Ashish Kothari explained that idea is to create a space wherein organizations/individuals from diverse sectors can come together and build a combined vision for an alternative future which is socially and ecologically just. This process is being carried out through sharing of experiences, nurturing spaces for collaborations and synergies, learning through cross sectoral dialogue, and having larger conceptual and theoretical discussions of what the future could be. Relating the etymology of the term 'Vikalp Sangam' with the sacred confluence of Zaskar and Indus rivers of Ladakh (sangam in Hindi means a sacred place where two or more rivers unite), he explained that the intention behind calling the process 'vikalp sangam' was the hope that these meetings would serve as sacred gatherings attempting to celebrate the existing positive stories.

And so keeping this spirit of celebration alive, at the Ladakh Sangam we had beautiful Ladakhi songs sung together by participants; a cultural show on the third day of the Sangam which had lovely folk performances by students of SECMOL; exhibition of self portraits made by participants; stalls of handicrafts, books, etc. set up by various organizations on the second day; and other such activities.

With the view of promoting the local food cultures and traditional knowledge, food at Ladakh sangam had a variety of delicious local dishes prepared by a women's group from Ledo village, including *Chathuk*- made from millet and wild garlic, *Ten ten*- made from buckwheat flour with wild zeera, *Kersey Daal*, *Chutagi* with milk, etc.

One regret was that many groups from outside and within Ladakh, that had expressed interest in the process, were not able to participate in the Sangam. This was due to the fact that a group of Vikalp Sangam core members, who were travelling from different parts of the country couldn't make it to the sangam due to troubled climatic conditions and consequent road blocks. From within Ladakh, participation of some important stake holders, community people, organizations, etc was low since the sangam was organized in summer season which is busiest time of the year for most Ladakhis.



Self Portraits made by the participants



Clockwise: Participants outside the venue during a tea break; Discussions during VS; Local Ladakhi dishes prepared for lunch; At SEMCOL campus for a field visit

Day One

The first day began with round of introductions of participants, followed by Ka Tsultim welcoming all the participants and Ka Tsewang Namgail laying out the context and relevance of hosting a Vikalp sangam in Ladakh. He emphasized on the urgent need for Ladakhis to come together and work towards finding alternatives to the kind of development which is taking shape in Ladakh, and also to find meaningful solutions to existing problems.

Session on Ladakh Vision Document

In this session, the Ladakh 2025 Vision Document (LVD) was introduced by Ka Sonam Wangchuk, who was part of the committee that led the process of preparing the document. The committee was headed by Dr. Sonam Dawa (Chief Executive Councilor), and the resources were provided by the Ladakh Hill Council. The document came out from a very thorough and extensive process in which every section of the society in Ladakh was consulted. It took 2- 3 years before it was finally launched in 2005 by the then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. Sonam mentioned that while the process of producing the Vision Document was extremely participatory and the Ladakh Hill Council was happy with it, unfortunately no steps have been taken by the council for its implementation.

The idea behind preparing a Vision Document for Ladakh was that a place like Ladakh which is so different and secluded from rest of the country should choose its own future. It doesn't make sense to transplant policies made in Delhi.

Speaking about the values on which the LVD was based, he said that the document was purposefully made idealistic, going beyond an action plan. The reason behind is that you strive and achieve what is practically possible but your ideals are high. Making Ladakh a self reliant was another principle guiding the document.

He then gave an outline of the main topics the LVD dealt with:

- 1) Ladakh being a **land based economy**, maintaining and promoting agriculture by bringing suitable technologies while respecting traditional practices.
- 2) To improve the **rural infrastructure** so as to check urban migration by providing all basic facilities in villages while preserving traditional values. Education is a major factor causing large scale migration to Leh.
- 3) **Water** has been another major issue in Ladakh, but now is even more so with melting glaciers, climate change, cloud bursts, etc. In the past, Ladakhis have found ingenious ways to manage water. This knowledge is now getting lost owing to the inappropriate education system. LVD thus also focuses on how to adopt education to the local context and have effective water management systems in place.
- 4) Growing number of **health** issues amongst the urban population to be addressed by revisiting lifestyles rather than building more number of hospitals.
- 5) To make **education** system more contextually appropriate rather than making students disconnected with their immediate surroundings. Education needs to prepare students for living in Ladakh, use the natural resources in a sustainable way so as to be self-reliant.
- 6) To protect **social and cultural value** from getting abandoned for quick benefits and blind development.
- 7) In the **Power and Energy sector**, LVD focuses on making Ladakh an energy surplus region. To see how solar and hydro energy can be optimally

used as Ladakh has an abundance of rivers and solar energy. Though this has to be done sustainably and Ladakhi's have to be in control of whether they want it or how they want it, where they want it. 8) LVD identifies **tourism** as the backbone of Ladakhi economy and aims to make it well managed and well distributed, emphasizing on intercultural exchanges, providing economic benefits to villages through home stays, handicrafts, etc. 9) Need to check the environmental impacts of growing **Urban infrastructure** and its exploitative nature towards village resources. 10) On the industrial front, LVD aims to promote **small scale** home based **industries** in Ladakh such as handicrafts, herbal products, etc. 11) **Information Technology** was another sector identified in LVD as very suitable to Ladakh since in I.T. you need industries low in weight and volume but high in value, such as Pashmina. 12) Under the topic **Planning and Governance**, LVD talks about strengthening Panchayati Raj through micro level planning and strengthening democratic governance at villages and block level. However, not agreeing with the last point in the LVD, Sonam Wangchuk expresses concern over the way Panchayati Raj has been applied in Ladakh. It has killed the ancient traditional system of Gobas which was something like a panchayat. Panchayati Raj not having adapted well to the local context in Ladakh has led to clashing and overlap between the two systems of governance. What can be done instead is to merge the Panchayat system with Goba system, making Goba system more democratic, and have one legitimate system in place.

Post Lunch session- Open discussion on Ladakh Vision Document:

In the open discussion participants discussed various aspects of the Document, their relevance and need for implementation. Some of the issues missing in the LVD were also brought out. Tourism being the major economic mainstay of Ladakh was debunked as a myth during the discussion. The contributions of activities such as agriculture, pastoralism and particularly women's contribution are under-emphasized since they do not involve monetary exchanges or incomes. Another point made was that electricity in Ladakh is much more needed for heating during winters than for lighting. And for heating a more appropriate solution would be to have architectural changes of houses/buildings (utilizing passive solar heating system), rather than having more hydro plants for producing electricity. The problem of garbage and over-use of tourist spots such as Pangong Tso, haphazard construction and traffic in Leh, lack of benefits from tourism going to villagers, and others such issues were discussed, and recommendations on how to tackle these were brought up.

To address the issue of increased traffic and traffic jams, improving the quality of public transport was voiced. For discouraging use of personal vehicles levying taxes on cars, LPG differential costing, high prices for parking, etc. were suggested as part of bring about a systemic change through govt. policies. The need for taxi unions and hotel associations also to be involved in these discussions for figuring out a working plan with them was echoed by many.

Day Two

The second day started with lively Ladkahi folk song sung by participants. The meaning of this song as explained later was it was in praise of preparations for a wedding event.

The sessions this day had the following presentations and discussions:

1) Sonam Wangchuk's presentation on Waste Issues in Ladakh:

Sonam Wagchuk gave a detailed account of the issue of waste in Ladakh, explaining the sources of waste, mismanagement of waste produced, other issues breeding due to this and alternative ways of handling and utilizing waste. He started his presentation stating that apart from having some of the highest mountain passes and highest motor-able roads, Ladakh also has the highest garbage dump in the world.

Leh has become a major waste producing town which is partly a result of growing number of tourists and partly because of the influence of the outside world- e.i. our consumerism driven society. Growing popularity of packaged food, packaged water, etc. is creating a menace. The waste is simply collected from Leh town and is dumped in Bamgad valley, or is thrown in rivers/streams. This is evident from the repulsive sight of Alchi dam. The increasing number of army camps in the region and the use of clean pastures by them for dumping waste is another reason. This present picture of Ladakh sounded even more disheartening when Sonam described Ladakh as a zero waste region in the past. Everything was re-used then and there was minimal presence of non-degradable waste. The scenario is still better in the villages in contrast to the poor state of Leh town. And although the youth in the villages often take up the initiative of cleaning up streams and rivers but the clean ups done are not sufficient. Some serious repercussions of this waste issue he described were- the horrible disease prone environment for waste pickers, recent cases of scavenger dogs attacking humans, etc.

Alternatives: Moving on to how this scenario can be changed he emphasized that we need to prepare the youngsters to view garbage as a new form of invasion. In this regard he shared how SECMOL educates the students to handle garbage through the practice of- Reuse, Reduce and Recycle. Waste, if handled properly, can also be an opportunity. Some ways in which waste can be utilized are - giving food waste to cows and other animals; young entrepreneurs can start neighborhood segregation yards and recycle waste, what cannot be segregated can be picked by trucks and taken off to another place where the final segregation takes place. The non-biodegradable waste then left can be burnt at high temperature using incinerator technology, which is said to convert waste into energy. This technology, he argued, is specifically apt for Ladakh as it requires the waste to be dried before burning. In Ladakh this process of drying can easily be carried out by sun's heat during summers, as the sun is very strong then. The dried waste can then be burnt in winters. The hot water produced as waste at this stage can be circulated to heat houses through pipelines. The process also requires lime, which is in abundance in Ladakh. The lime byproduct produced as waste from the incinerators can be used to build houses replacing cement. This will also reduce the number of trucks coming into Ladakh from outside, carrying cement. In this manner at every stage of the process something useful is generated from the waste.

Another experiment that they carried out in SECMOL campus was they kept 2-3 cows and fed them with kitchen waste and little bit of fodder. The cow dung was then put in a bio-digester to produce biogas. The bio-digester in SECMOL was redesigned to work on solar energy and is now close to being functional. A similar initiative can be started at army camps which on one hand produce a lot of food waste and on the other buy gas from outside. Young entrepreneurs can start a dairy next to these camps. The food waste can go to cows at these dairies and the cow dung and human dung can be used for producing biogas for utilizing in camps. The manure produced in this process can be sold to nearby villagers by the army. This would lead not only to solve waste issue but will also provide employment to Ladakhi youth and allow army camps to produce their own gas and be more self-reliant.

2) Presentation by Pema from KCC, Sikkim: The Kanchanjanga Conservation Committee (KCC) in Sikkim was started as an informal initiative by concerned people to clean the trekking trail to Kanchanjanga (KJ). Pema Bhutiya from KCC shared the experience of this community based organization with waste management in Sikkim. KCC initially started with cleaning campaigns in which all, non-segregated waste, was hand-picked and brought down by them. This was soon realized to be a non-sustainable effort in the long run as it wasn't feasible to clean the trek every time at such high altitude. This led the initiative to start the Zero Waste Trekking trail project. This project, which includes coordination with all tourism stake holders such as guides, government tourism department, KJ National Park Authority, etc., works on the basis of tourists themselves bringing back all waste material from the trek. A check list is prepared and every tourist is asked to declare the things that they are carrying for the trek. On return random checking ensures that they have brought back all the things (packages of food items and other such waste) that was declared and carried for the trek. The waste that is then collected at the base camp is taken to Resource Recovery Centre where it is segregated and cleaned. It is then recycled and made ready for reuse. Zero Waste project has also initiated dialogue with monks in monasteries asking them to encourage people to offer fruits during ceremonies instead of packaged food.

3) Presentation by Piyush from Toxic Links, Delhi:

Piyush's presentation on 'Rethinking Urban Waste Management in India' focused around the various government laws and policies related to waste management and their functioning/effectiveness, and on the effects of these formal systems on various stake holders involved in the process. Stating that the daily municipal waste generated in India from the urban centers is around 1,60,000 MT, out of which 80-90% is dumped in landfills shows the poor condition of waste disposal. This is a great threat to the environment. The heavy metals from these landfills contaminate the groundwater and have direct health and food safety concerns. The current system also leads to occupational hazards, such as environmental health risk at the dumping site. Waste pickers are not paid for the primary collection.

Currents models of waste management in cities failed in India due to poor reflection of the ground scenario. He iterated how the formal and the informal systems of waste collection often lead to conflicts. Waste is not just an environmental policy and regulation issue as dealt with by government agencies. The dynamic processes of urbanisation need to be considered. Some of the other points that he raised were- Environmental health and social justice challenges are distributed throughout the waste chain and some centralised technologies may exacerbate these; Multiple options for decentralisation are possible alongside centralised approaches (e.g. waste collection/decentralised processing such as

biomethanation); Incentive structure could support more sustainable and wide ranging, multi-scale options – they currently support private sector stakeholders & large technological ‘solutions’; Environmental and social justice movements offer key insights into alternative waste management pathways-but are not supported to work together in constructive ways to develop sustainable waste management strategies.

Speaking of solutions, he suggested that there should be mandatory segregation of waste at source level, violations of which need to be strictly penalized. The other thing is to focus more on recycling and composting so as to produce energy from waste. Mainstreaming of the waste pickers and legal acceptance to the decentralized system would provide better justice to the workers. There is also a need to have constitution of State Level Advisory Body with NGO participation.

In the follow up discussion, examples of KKPKP (Kagad Kach Patra Kashtakari Panchayat) and SWaCH (Solid Waste Collection and Handling) were shared. KKPKP is a trade union of waste pickers that has worked for recognition, rights and better working conditions for their community. KKPKP also launched SWaCH which is a cooperative of self-employed waste pickers / waste collectors and other urban poor. They not only work for the rights of waste pickers and other social issues but also carry out door-to-door waste collection and ensure that proper source segregation is carried out. The system also facilitates optimum recovery of recyclables and increased composting of organics, drastically reducing the financial burden on Pune Municipal Corporation, which was otherwise spending millions on transporting waste to landfills and processing facilities.

4) Presentation by Amchi Tsewang on Local food:

He spoke about the traditional Tibetan medicine which has its roots in the Buddhist philosophy. It holds that every food has four characteristics- the colour, shape, material and compatibility with the body type. According to Tibetan medicine, the resemblance of colour and shape of any food grain, fruit or vegetable to a human organ indicates that it would benefit that particular organ, for example walnut is good for brain. He also mentioned that what we eat should be suitable to the individual’s body type and also the climate of that area, any plant/food of a particular place will not have the same power if grown elsewhere. In Ladakh, the local grains- wheat and barley are very nutritional. So is the case with various fruits of the region such as walnut, apricot, etc. which have nutrients that are essential for the people living in such harsh cold- desert like conditions.

5) Presentation by Dr. Thinley on Junk/ processed Food:

He spoke about the growing popularity of Junk food in our lives today, especially among youth. The fast food industry promoting it has come up with numerous advertisements which appeal and influence the youth. Junk food has thus taken over our traditional food habits which focused on a balanced nutritional diet. Junk food has very high level of calories and contains an abundance of fat, sugar, sodium, and other chemicals, which are harmful to our system in the long run. These ingredients in junk food also make it addictive. The refined food and saturated fats present in junk food lead to a number of health problems such as obesity and diabetes. He also spoke about Maggi and the detection of Lead in it which is a heavy metal and can severely damage our nervous system.

Post Lunch Session on Recommendations on LVD by participants:

The group activity involved participants taking part in small groups with one of the topics from the LVD. They discussed the points already mentioned in LVD and brought out suggestions which could be added. These recommendations were then discussed on the last date and were proposed to be submitted to the Chief Executive Councilor of Ladakh Hill Council.

Public Event on Second Day

A public event was organized on the second day, attended by a huge crowd. The event included a presentation on Alternatives by Ashish Kothari; stalls set up by various organizations (mostly from Ladakh) displaying beautiful handicrafts made from waste, bags, postcards, books, apricot products, etc.; and screening of the documentary- 'Story of Stuff'.

In his presentation, Ashish Kothari spoke about how the current development model is causing destruction at a level which is unimaginable, and gave a detailed account of alternative initiatives (such as - Deccan Development Society's work on Food Security, Mendha Lekha's success story in decentralized governance, and so on) from all around India which are fundamentally challenging this model.

Day Three

On the third day of the Vikalp Sangam, an optional field trip was arranged for the participants, especially for those who had come from outside, to visit some of the alternative initiatives being carried out in and around Leh town.

Saboo Village:

The first visit was to Saboo village which is 8 kms outside Leh. The village was declared as a Model village in 2003 by the then president APJ Abdul Kalam. Interacting with the Sarpanch of the village Mr. Rinchen, we were introduced to some of the good practices adopted by the village which impressed Dr. Kalam and inspired him to call it a 'Model village'. The village has good fertile land and thus 90% of people are dependent on agriculture. The use of chemical fertilizers is minimal and they have good number of livestock. The village mainly grows potatoes and barley using traditional irrigation and water management system called *Chepol* which allows for optimum use of the perennial streams. The potatoes grown here are sold to defense forces. They have 5 hamlets with 280 households and 3 Gompas. Of the 280, except for 20-30 households, all have road connectivity and good electricity. The traditional governing body - *Gobas* and the panchayat work together. They have 2 women nominated as panchs. They have dumping pits to dispose off garbage and use of plastics is discouraged by the panchayat. Along with Primary Health Centre they also have local Amchi who is paid by the government.

Although some of the systems/practices in the village seemed progressive, some other major concerns were raised by the participants, in relation to the idea of development which the village is heading towards. We were told that the government provides subsidies for hybrid seeds, which are now liberally used by the villagers. Mostly mono cropping is practiced. The diversity of crop grown is thus reducing, such as black beans which are not grown anymore at all. Food habits of the people are also changing; traditional crops such as *Sattu* are not eaten these days.

PAGIR (People Action Group for Action and Rights):

Our next stop was PAGIR, which is an organization run by and for the disabled, to create a society which is more inclusive and free of prejudice. One of the main activities carried out by the organisation is to create products from recycled waste materials. Set up in March 2007, most of the members of PAGIR are disabled or have family members who are disabled or have experienced disability in different forms in the society and care to work towards it. The founder of the organization, Mohammad Iqbal, spoke about the discriminatory practices of the government and society which led them to start this organization and support themselves. Accessibility of education for disabled people is rather low as the education system is not inclusive. The government schemes in Ladakh don't benefit them as these schemes don't reach to them properly. Further the disabled people in Ladakh now need to obtain a certificate from the government stating their disability in order to avail any schemes/welfare programmes. The process of getting this certificate made is very tedious and a kind of harassment for the

disabled. The Ladakh Vision Document also doesn't speak about the disabled section at all. The employment reservation for disabled in Jammu and Kashmir is 3%, but since most of them don't get proper education they do not qualify for these jobs. The pension also is small amount of 400Rs a month.

Despite these prejudices and little support from government, PAGIR stands out as a strong force not only in supporting and fighting for the rights of disabled but also for the cause of environment. The artists at PAGIR are highly talented. During our tour around the campus we saw some of them creating beautiful paper-mashe pen stands with drawings on them. The various items that they had for sale, everything made from waste, were all exquisite.

Students' Educational and Cultural Movement of Ladakh (SECMOL):

Our last visit for the day was to SECMOL campus, which became the highlight of the field visit. The campus was highly intriguing with a number of innovative technologies and practices being utilised, all based on principles of sustainability and optimum resource utilisation.

Rebecca Norman of SECMOL spoke to us about how the school came into being, how it is functioning right now, what projects they are engaged in and gave us some interesting anecdotes about some old students who are now doing commendable work. Incidentally, Stanzin Dorjai who was carrying out the video documentation of this Sangam, and is an eminent film maker from Ladakh, was also a SECMOL alumnus.

SECMOL is an alternative education institute established in 1998 by Sonam Wangchuk and two others. Since it follows non-formal education, SECMOL does not focus on any curriculum. It enrolls those students who have failed in their 10th exam and then try to rebuild them. Students are brought in touch with the Ladakhi way of living, which has been a model of sustainable living. This also helps build pride in students about their Ladakhi roots. SECMOL's Phey campus completely utilizes solar energy for all its power, food and water needs. Solar panels generate the electricity needed, food is cooked using solar cooker and water heated using a solar heater. The SECMOL building is made up of rammed earth walls filled in with small wood pieces for insulation. This keeps the temperature inside the building low in summer and high in winter. All the buildings are solar heated. The maximum usage of the solar power has greatly reduced the costs of running SECMOL, due to which, the school doesn't require any kind of funding! The campus also has over a 1,000 trees that have been planted, vegetable gardens and green houses and cows. The required vegetables are grown in greenhouses. SECMOL students completely manage the campus on their own – tending the garden, maintaining the solar panels, helping with any construction work, kitchen duties, and so on.

After a tour around the campus, the students of SECMOL showcased wonderful folk performances pertaining to different regions/tribes of Ladakh.

Day Four

The last day of the Sangam was spent consolidating the recommendations for Ladakh Vision Document, prepared by participants during group activity on the second day. Apart from this some presentations and discussion on waste, feedback and follow-up session also took place.

Alex's presentation on Waste and Packaged Food:

Alex's presentation titled '*Towards Zero Waste*' gave a global perspective on issue of waste and reflected on how the neo-liberal policies have led to increase in plastics/waste. He also highlighted the linkages between globalization of food companies leading to increased consumerism and plastic growth. The term 'waste' is defined as any material which is not meaningful and non- recyclable material. This word had no usage in most of the languages earlier as it is a new concept.

He gave statistics showing that with liberalization, the use of plastic in countries like India has increased. In Delhi the amount of waste generated per day is 9000 tons, and this is expected to go up to 15,000 tons per day by 2020. With globalization there has been a marked increase in the popularity of junk food and spread of diet related diseases. Another interesting statistic that he gave was all countries which have signed Free Trade Agreement with USA have 63.4 % higher level of soft drink consumption per capita. Packaging of all items and export has led to increased use of plastics. He pointed out that 2/3rd of the plastic produced is used just for packaging. Relying less on local products, the globalized world has created an environment where packaged, big industrial products are more preferred. 60% of the tourists in Ladakh as well use only packaged water. The western world which has succeeded at the art of hiding its waste, exports its plastic waste to developing countries such as India and China.

A meaningful solution to this would be moving towards Zero Waste. Suggesting steps to be taken at various levels, he stressed that political actions such as regulating global trade and taking away subsidies from plastic industries need to be taken. There needs to be a control over advertisements. Plastic bag ban demanded by locals can be very effective, such as the protest march carried out by Women's Alliance in Ladakh against plastic bags. Some other ways that were also shared were- Re-localizing food systems; import substitution; having more Zero waste shops such as 'Dzomsa' in Leh town; providing more facilities for refilling clean drinking water to tourists; recycling of waste such as carried out by PAGIR; moving towards natural fabrics such as jute; moving towards organic and sustainable farming techniques such as mulching; public education and outreach for popularizing zero waste solutions; and personal actions such as composting and avoiding plastic to the extent possible.

Adding on to Alex's presentation Bharat Mansata from Vanvadi, Maharashtra spoke about promoting participatory tourism in Ladakh, where in tourists not only come to visit but also help locals in home stays and farms. He reiterated the need to continue with organic farming in Ladakh, avoid packaged food, recycling of water, have mixed cropping, and use of local seeds and grains.

Recommendations to Ladakh Vision Document

Given the lack of implementation of the Vision Document, the discussion around recommendations started with the suggestion on how it can be taken towards implementation. Some of the suggestions were:

- There is a need for a practical roadmap for implementation, including monitoring and periodic assessment, and with proper prioritization of key social and environmental sectors as identified by the Vision Document (such as education, agriculture, ecology, etc.);
- Create greater awareness of the Vision Document amongst village panchayats and gobas, and civil society in general;
- Translate it into local languages for greater reach;
- Re-orient govt. officials with the Vision Document as a base;
- Citizens' groups should do a citizens' report on the implementation (or lack of it) of the Vision Document, conduct public hearings on this, publicize in media, etc.

Post this these recommendations were discussed and main points were culled out which were to be sent to Chief Executive Councilor (CEC).

Following are the main recommendation under various topics as mentioned in original LVD:

Water

- Improve irrigation efficiency where necessary using appropriate methods including reviving traditional systems, drip irrigation (using alternatives to plastics), and other such methods
- Full recycling /re-use of wastewater in urban areas (e.g. for guest houses, restaurants), including traditional systems where appropriate, improved treatment systems, etc
- Annual water audits in Leh, to be made public (as part of new water supply project), and as a basis for regulation of use and re-use
- Similar audits in tourism hotspots in rest of Ladakh in the long run
- Discouraging wasteful use like flush toilets, promotion of improved dry toilets (policy should support only latter)
- Facilitate water equity in Leh, with right to and access to minimum amount entitlement per capita, and regulation of over-use by hotels/ restaurants/ construction
- Prevention of water contamination, full treatment of wastewater at source before it goes into waterways

Food

- Incentives to guest houses, restaurants, that provide traditional or other healthy foods, sourcing from local farmers, and do not serve/sell junk food
- Prohibition of bottled/canned soft drinks and encouragement of locally produced healthy drinks
- Major awareness campaign on junk foods and drinks, and on healthy eating, especially in educational institutions
- Request Council to invite women's groups from Ledo etc to provide food at its meetings, as was done at the Sangam

Health

(Refer to Food recommendations also)

- Encouragement to cycling and walking by constructing dedicated paths
- Promotion of Amchi system, and barefoot health workers, including integration into health sub-centres
- Regulation of mobile/internet towers with respect to EMR radiation
- Strict check on inflow of drugs, including checking tourists

Rural infrastructure and communications

- Road connectivity to villages left out
- Markets for locally produced items and processing of agricultural produce, including linking to existing restaurants/hotels
- Implementation of Vision Document section on promoting rural livelihoods, and stemming out migration through this
- Multimedia centres in villages, including internet and phone connection, Ladakhi channels on DTH and radio, and media/technology literacy programmes for appropriate use
- Upgradation of Radio Leh to enable reach to all villagers
- All rural infrastructure to be accessible to differently-abled
- Good, regular public transportation for all villages

Tourism

- No further expansion of tourism facilities in Leh; instead promotion of home stays in villages around
- Promotion of home stays in villages, and discouragement of resorts by outsiders, where tourists go
- Active tourist education and orientation on dos and donts, including cultural and environmental issues
- Regulation and penal actions on irresponsible tourist action, e.g. feeding wildlife, throwing garbage, with building capacity of villagers to enforce such regulations
- Give maximum opportunity to local operators rather than outside companies, including restrictions on the latter in tourism hotspots in various parts of Ladakh
- Education and orientation of taxi drivers, tour operators, hotel owners, etc re. culturally and environmentally responsible actions
- Encourage voluntourism and genuine ecotourism in place of spectator tourism
- Regulation of motorcycles and other vehicular traffic that create noise and other pollution
- Proposal for Ladakh as World Heritage Site (on cultural and geological grounds), without affecting the legitimate economic and traditional activities of Ladakhi residents, needs to be actively considered

Education

- Encouragement of local village experts on crafts, agriculture, etc, as part of school teaching and curriculum, as also special camps (esp. in winter)
- Encouragement of traditional cultural and ethical values, food, music, craft and other practices etc. (as recommended in Vision Document)
- Upgrade, enhance quality of education in govt schools, to discourage move to private schools
- Introduce alternative pedagogic systems into all schools & colleges, including valuing different skills and aptitudes rather than forcing uniformity/homogeneity, vocational and practical skills (including being responsible for local canteens with local foods and cuisines), and reducing importance of exams as the only means of assessing students

- Promote alternative schools or learning centres in each school such as SECMOL, encouraging self-sustenance of these
- Implement ban on junk food in schools and colleges, encourage healthy foods
- Switch long vacation from winter to spring and fall, to encourage learning regarding farming/pastoralism/crafts etc from parents and elders in village
- Greater gender equality orientation in schools

Land-based economy

- Greater recognition and social respect to land-based occupations in education, media, govt. programmes, parent-child knowledge transmission
- Support self-reliant occupations by improving local demand and marketing ('buy local, buy ladakhi' campaigns), value added & processed products (e.g. apricot juice and dried fruits), promoting local organic foods (e.g. Yos) in place of packaged imported foods
- Incorporate local foods into PDS
- Shift subsidies of chemical fertilisers etc to local organic farming and products; declare target to convert all of Ladakh into organic region (e.g. Sikkim) including GMO-free; promote PGS for certification of organic farming
- Support regeneration of health of land, through revival of animal husbandry where it has declined (as a source of organic manure), use of composted wet waste
- Support sustenance, revival, or enhancement of water facilities for agriculture and other occupations/uses (see also Water related recommendations)
- Health facilities for livestock
- Promote local breeds of livestock instead of exotics and cross-breeds
- Encourage sustenance and revival of traditional seed varieties, through seed banks, consumer awareness, other such measures

Waste

- Monasteries and other religious institutions to discourage packaged foods and drinks as offerings, and encourage fruits, nuts etc (some Sikkim monasteries have done this)
- Awareness campaign on above in relation to increasing cultural practice of giving packaged goods as gifts
- The Army should make a full plan on handling its waste, and moving to zero-waste facilities/camps

Governance

- Facilitate and promote for greater women's participation in all governance institutions from village to Hill Council level
- Empower and create capacity of gram sabha as a whole, convening regularly, encouraging full participation of all residents, and ensuring that panchayat is accountable to it (as per law)
- Role of Goba and other traditional systems of village governance needs wider debate on whether this is more appropriate than panchayat system, or a merger of the two in a governance system unique to Ladakh
- Greater financial powers should be given to the gram sabha, including relating to the functioning of govt. services (schools, clinics, etc), and helping them to build up capacity to utilize this; fund allocations should be made directly to the gram sabhas in the state/Hill Council plan process, to utilize as per their own identified priorities

Urban infrastructure

- Prepare a comprehensive perspective plan for Leh, working towards making it ecologically sustainable, with full public civic facilities, public transportation, cycling and walking as the main modes of transport, regulation of construction for tourism and other purposes, and other such aspects
- All urban infrastructure to be accessible to differently abled, including govt offices
- Discourage private cars, encourage cycling and walking in Leh

Social inclusion

- All programmes of govt. including the actions identified in the Vision Document must be made accessible to differently-abled persons
- Pension amounts should be substantially increased, and their accessibility should be extended to all differently-abled persons
- Some reservation in the panchayat and other governance institutions should be given to differently-abled

Follow-ups

- 1) To organize more sangams in Ladakh at village/local level, in some peoples' 'living' (instead of 'model') villages. (e.g. Gya village- which could be pegged by Karma le or Stanzen le during summers; Sham area- which could be pegged by LEDEG or SLC- IT during spring season.)
- 2) Publicizing the Sangam and its recommendations, both in Ladakhi and nationally, through articles in Reach Ladakh, civil soc. newsletters like Ladakh Phoniya, Stawa, etc. To be published in local papers by Rigzin and nationally by Kalpavriksh. Also to utilize social media, such as the 'Ladakh in the Media' group on facebook.
- 3) Give Recommendations to the CEC/Council, presidents of local parties, LBA, Anjuman Imamia Islamia / Muslim Coordination Committee (to be taken up by local groups - LEDEG , SLC etc)
- 4) Flesh out key Recommendations as Citizens' Charter for pre-election campaign, and post-election Council as guidance.
- 5) Session on governance issues with new Council (through present CEC - GM Shaikh);
- 6) Letter to Dalai Lama to say something on waste issues at his next teaching in Leh; and more generally environmental and sustainability issues related to Ladakh Court case/PIL on 'Bumghad' dump by Saboo village and Toxics Link (follow-up by Rinchin le, Tsultim le, and Piyush)
- 7) Organic waste management pilot project between Toxics Link and SLC-IT

Feedback

Some of the feedback points shared by participants at the end of the Sangam were:

- 1) It would have been better to organize the Sangam during winters as more people from the villages could have participated then. In summers, most Ladakhis are busy in their farms and in other activities.
- 2) Many important stakeholders- Panchs, officials, etc. were missing.

- 3) Cost of coming from far away should have been paid to villagers, this would have allowed for more community participation.
- 4) Sharing of experiences and more group activities were missed during this Sangam.
- 5) The presence and participation of youth was substantial, which was encouraging.
- 6) Commitment of local groups, the hospitality and the food were well appreciated by people from outside.
- 7) The sharing by outside groups were very inspiring for Ladakhis. One joint activity would have been good, such as- to build a garbage bin system as a model in nearby village.
- 8) Very good alternative platform to learn from each other; we must take it to more local levels.
- 9) Lots of learning; could have been more sharing and less presentation centric; could have shared the Alternatives Framework note.
- 10) Great privilege to join the Sangam, would love to associate in future.