

Maharashtra Vikalp Sangam

27-30 October 2015

A Report



The fourth regional Vikalp Sangam¹ was organised in Mahatma Gandhi Ashram at Sevagram, Wardha from 27th to 30th October 2015.

VikalpSangam or the Confluence on Alternatives is a process that attempts to move beyond critiquing the present day disruptive and exploitative systems, and focuses on what are the Alternatives which can challenge such a system. This process thus involves coming together of various initiatives, organizations and concerned individuals. These Sangams are organized by a number of organizations constituting the VikalpSangam core group to celebrate, share and learn from each other's inspiring work and also to collaborate across domains and different regions to move towards a holistic vision of the Alternatives.

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

The Maharashtra Sangam was co-hosted by 18 organisations working in different parts of Maharashtra, namely, Dharamitra, Amhi Amchya Arogyasathi, SOPPECOM, Centre for Environment Education, Vrikshamitra, National Alliance of Peoples' Movements, Narmada Navnirman Abhiyan, Maha Mahila Arogya Hakka Parishad, Chetana Vikas, Vidarbha Nature Conservation Society, Khoj – Melaghat, Samvedana, Gramin Yuva Praagatik Mandal, Bhandara Nisararg, Prayas Energy Group, Kalpavriksh, KKPKP and SWaCH.

With special efforts put in to keep the celebrative spirit of Vikalp Sangams alive, the Maharashtra Sangam was a lively event with performances of songs and poetry in between the sessions, a wonderful exhibition on Alternatives along with display of exhibits brought by various groups, singing and dancing by participants, *rangoli* making, etc. Some enjoyable hands on activities such as- clay modelling – along with students from Anand Niketan, charkha weaving, and cooking *mahua ke pakore* were organised as a part of the activity session on the second day of the Sangam. This session was an opportunity for the adults thinking about *Vikalpas* to experience “Learning from Children” as an Alternative approach to the existing Teacher/Adult centred Education system and also experience the rich tribal knowledge in the form of varied uses of Mahua (which to the Urban people is only the condemned one, as Source of Liquor). The Rangoli of Tanmore by Kaustubh Pandharipande (who began as Bird watcher and then established a group called SAMVEDANA with the local youth of the DNT community) is an example of going beyond verbal discussions as the medium of expression of one's concerns.

The Maharashtra Vikalpa Sangam's last session was concluded by Rela dance of the Gadchiroli's Adivasies. This was lead by Izamshah of Village sale along with Vijaylaxmi and Kaustubh and some other groups.

Day 1

The first day started with a song by students from Anand Niketan School, which was followed by paying tribute to the late Bhaskar Hiraji Save, known in India as the "Gandhi of natural farming", an educator, entrepreneur, farmer, and activist. He worked on alternative farming, especially in the forest area. He started with tree farming, creating a micro-climate for plants and at the same time, improving the nutritional value of soil.

Introduction to the process of Vikalp Sangam by Ashish Kothari- The idea of Vikalp Sangam emerged from the discussions around the destruction of the natural resources, inequity in the distribution of resources and thinking about what kind of alternatives we can look into in such a scenario. The idea of having a Sangam is to share ideas and alternatives in various sectors such as farming, education, energy, water, health, lifestyle, and so on, which mainly works on the principles of equity, sustainability and participation of the people.

The focus of these Sangams is how the collaboration on these alternative methods/processes can be improved. Another objective is also to develop an alternative framework through a participatory process.

The Maharashtra Vikalp Sangam was then introduced by Tarak Kate of Dharamitra. He shared with the participants the process behind organising such a Vikalp sangam, like developing agenda, what topics to cover and the inter-linked themes. The process was quite democratic, the approach was to make the sessions more interactive than only theoretical.

The discussion on Agenda also took place in which Anant Phadke suggested that there are certain topics that cannot fall and do not come under the purview of the agenda like health, transportation, sexuality, etc. These should be acknowledged and noted, if not covered specifically under the topics.

Introduction of Participants: In the following session, round of introduction took place wherein participants from each group/organisation introduced themselves, their organisation and their work.

- Shubhada Deshmukh and Vijaylaxmi Waghire representing Maharashtra Mahila Arogya hakka Parishad as well as Amhi Amachya Arogya Sathi; participants from Kurkheda; and Village reps like Izamshaha from village Sale
- Suniti, S.R. and Suhas Kolhekar from National Alliance of Peoples' Movements
- Satish from Amhi machya sathi, Gadchioli, working on- Livelihood (jungle and agriculture), education, strengthening women's role, health issues
- Adivasi group working on Bamboo cultivation
- Chetan Salve, Siyaram Padavi from Narmada Bachao Andolan and Sukhalal - teacher from Jeevanshalas, schools run by NNNA.
- Vasant Deshpande: Organic farming and developing a centre to understand efforts toward downward mobility.
- Bharat Mansata from Vanvadi working on environmental regeneration, on water and agriculture to make people self-reliant.
- Harshil from Vanvadi and working on organic farming issues
- Sunil Nivare, Lokmanagal Sanstha working for women's issues.
- Asmin Shrivastav from Delhi, a writer, his works mainly focusing on effects of globalisation on environment and common people.
- Sohail Khan from education sector. He gives training on development on social skills came by reading in News Paper.
- Subhash from Bhimashanakar with 2 women representatives, engaged in work related to Forest Rights Act and Mahila bachat gath, market for agro-products, like honey, timber.
- Vasant Phutane from Amravati, founder member of Beej Mohatsav and also working on watershed development.
- Shiba from Kalpavriksh: the organisation works on conservation, environmental development, education and alternatives. She is also associated with Maati Sangathan in Uttarakhand.
- Tarak Kate from Dharamitra. The organisation works on rural development related to innovative technology, educated, sustainable agriculture, spread of technology and watershed development (with three others from Dharamitra)
- Vilbhurkar from Gramin Yuva works on women studies, forest, land and livelihood issues, education and its rights, movements against privatisation, etc.
- Avinash Kadam from Shramik Mukti Dal: SMD is a left wing organisation which participates in movements for droughts, development for environment, etc. (Two others from SMD- Dr, Ghighe and Ranjana Kanhere)

- Baba Amte Sansthan
- Gautam from Nagpur working on community forest development in Gadchiroli, Gondiya and Chandrapur
- Anant Pher involved in organic farming in Nagpur district, is focusing on self reliance by experimenting on energy, water and direct supply of agriculture products to consumers. And also awareness of natural lifestyle.
- Nirbhay Singh from Ekta Parishad working on land rights and alternative forms of agriculture like natural composting, improving the soil fertility
- Satish Awate from CEE working on education, alternatives and relationship between environment and human beings.
- Alok Bang and Ashok Bang from Chetana Vikas Sanstha working on University based research, how to connect research and implementation at rural level, technologies applied at farm level, i.e. agro-ecology,
- Sushama Sharma from Anand Niketan Vidyalay works on alternative education that goes beyond classroom teaching.

Post lunch the **thematic session on Food and Agriculture** took place wherein there were five sub-topics for smaller group discussions.

1) Sustainable Agriculture The discussion started with concerns being raised by participants regarding the following points-How to create a demand / movement for sustainable agriculture?; Need for food grains and its relation with the availability of water; Looking at agriculture not only from the perspective of food security but to create demand for agro-industry; Localisation of food grains for food security of the local people; Seed bank ,with Seeds resistant to pests and insects are not available; There is lack of traditional knowledge with the current generation of farmers. How to ensure that along with traditional knowledge, interest for farming remains uniformed?; All the alternatives related to agriculture have failed due to the 1991 economic policy which concentrates more on the market of Cash crops; Social culture emerging in the rural areas that do not promote agriculture.

Air, water and food as integral part of agricultural system were also discussed. For development of agriculture, it is important to understand the relationship of farmers with land, water, the nature of seeds and management of productivity. Use of natural fertilisers, harvesting rainwater to the maximum for planning of irrigation can be alternatives to approach sustainable farming. Schemes depending on the productivity and thereby creating a market for the agro-products are important. Today's schemes and policies aim towards reducing the dependency on agriculture and promote industrialisation instead.



To approach any alternative form of technology requires support of the Government. Farmers have the right to decide the price of the crops. However, our economic policy is such that it does not allow the farmers to acquire profit from their produce of crops.

The tax rate is very low, especially from the affordable families, as compared to other countries. There are various ways in which the government can collect tax, which may be used to provide subsidy to the government. There are many tax exemptions, which reduce the overall tax efficiency. Increasing people's participation and democracy in the current market mechanism can be the beginning to bring changes in the policy.

Opting for multi-grain technology is required which has benefits like- farmers getting diverse crops, productivity of crops can increase and also improves the fertility of soil. The need to increase of small micro-movements and escalating them to the market was also voiced. For example, collection of traditional seeds, measuring the impact of less or increased water on plants are taking place.

2) Forest Livelihoods:The main points shared by participants in this group were:

- Before the emergence of the Forest Rights Act, 2006, many Gram Panchayats had been themselves preserving the forest. The Act has itself benefited many villages. Biogas installed with the help of Gram Panchayat (Gujarat's example was shared). If proper marketing of the forests products is done by participation of villagers they gain maximum profit. For this, there is a need to strengthen the Gram Panchayats/Gramsabhas.
- Afforestation was also discussed. There is a need to create knowledge about the existing species and its usefulness and thereby creating awareness. Promote awareness among youth.
- Mining can be stopped using Forest Rights Act.
- Gadchiroli: Bamboo and Tendu are being cultivated. Gram Sabhas are taking initiatives to provide incentives to cultivate these plants.
- What kind of alternative developments can be approached, because policies usually ignore the marginalised communities like the Adivasis?

3) Grasslands and livestock: In this discussion issues, alternatives and limitations related to the topic were discussed.

Issues: This is quite an ignored subject. Policies of govt are being ignored because they focus more on artificial reproduction and the villagers are not convinced as they fear to lose the indigenous species. Market is also not available

Alternatives: Example of Wadala where grazing has been increased without the use of irrigation facility or additional money but only through the support of the people. Efforts are to be made to improve and preserve the indigenous species than promoting the hybrid form of livestock. There are instances where artificial insemination for indigenous species has been done.

Limitation: Land for grazing is reducing, affecting the livestock. Farmers usually take lot of loan and often to pay back the loan and interest is very difficult. At such a time they are not left with any option but to sell their existing livestock. These are limitations in the sense that migrated individuals often pay less attention to their families back home.

4) Water and Fisheries: The following points were shared-

- Fishes are being cultivated with PESA and community rights Act. Under PESA, *Rohu*, *katla* and *mrigal* which are non-indigenous species are being cultivated in Maharashtra which is destroying the native species. So, gram sabhas can interfere and promote native species. Since this is a new arena, the Gram sabhas have difficulties, like cleaning of the ponds and where to collect money for the same. Institutions who can give guidance to such Gram sabhas should come forward.
- Narmada river basin and fishery: Siyaram, an activist (who got some training from Anand Kapoor from Shashwat, near Pune) has played important role in strengthening the capability of the rehabilitated people. 5 societies have been formed (Narmanda Nav Nirman: matsya Sanga) and 20 more are proposed taking into consideration the displaced people who have lost their fishery occupation due to submergence by backwater of the Sardar Sarovar Dam. The societies have adopted a policy on their own that “no fishing will be done in the monsoon season which is a breeding season; and use of traditional nets than depending on the nets provided by the Govt”.
- Konkan: Khadis, rivers and sea is available, both local fishing communities are facing problem due to large trawlers and big fishing companies. There is a proposition from the Govt. to create chemical zones and energy alternatives at the mouth of the river and the fishing communities are already opposing this.
- Productivity of fishing in *talabs* should increase; preservation of the native species; gram sabhas should get the responsibility of introducing the fingerlings to ensure that sustainable fisheries are maintained. What is the role of creating a fishing society if the village gram sabha and can they play the same role efficiently? The incentive which is being provided to society can be provided to the Gram sabhas instead. Barter system within individual *gram sabhas* to be maintained.

5) Food Sovereignty and our concerns as consumer: In this group, the discussions focused around onslaught of GM food. Another important issue discussed was –peoples’ democratic

right to decide what they choose as food which in the recent days was being seen to be grossly violated at some instances. Some other points brought out were:

- In villages the chain of organic farmers needs to increase
- Farmers should cultivate food for themselves along with cash crops.
- The seed festivals should be taken to ensure traditional knowledge is carried forward
- Recipes should be shared to make traditional vegetables more acceptable and popular.
- Such alternatives are already taking place in many places.
- In the monsoon season, in hilly regions many vegetables that are growing are not known to the general public and market. If dried/preserved they can be kept for local consumption throughout the year.
- Some alternative techniques should be developed to preserve perishable fruits so that they make it to the market.
- Communities in urban areas should find a common place to cultivate.
- Our seeds should be preserved and we should make customers aware of this.

Day 2

The second day started with **Parallel thematic sessions on the following topics-**

1) Water: Discussion started with participants expressing concern about drought situation in Maharashtra and also in most parts of India. Water is crucial component for life, regeneration and livelihood. This is essential part of social political and economic processes of the society. The major challenges before water sector as discussed were-

- Climate change, which is a global phenomenon, is adversely affecting rainfall patterns mainly increasing erratic rainfall.
- Multilateral Institutional interventions in water sector for bringing it into commodity market.
- Water use has mainly increased due to cash crop based agriculture, industrial and urban users.

The options for resolution of problems are based on following basic things: Conservation of water; Equitable water sharing; Water use; and Ownership of water.

Options

a) **Watershed management**

There is need of conservation of water at farm and village level in respective watersheds. Whatever rain, surface and ground water is available in respective watershed should be conserved by local community through traditional and rational need based use of modern technology. The decision making process related to sharing of water should be decentralized with active participation of Women and weaker sections of the society.

- There should be top to bottom approach in management of water in watershed
- There is need to think about equitable volumetric distribution of water among all the people in respective village/watershed.

- In case of acute scarcity of water there should be provision for bring out outside water in respective watershed.
- There is need to see ground and surface water in joint perspective.

Examples

- Watershed development work in Hiware Bazar, Ralegan Sidhi and Baliraja dam movement in south Maharashtra have demonstrated that the management of water through peoples participation and conservation through different methods of watershed management have resulted into resolving most of the problems related to water scarcity and sharing.
- Traditional irrigation tanks in Bhandara and Gondia is major source of irrigation, drinking and sanitation. The local organizations have revived these tanks through help of government funds with active participation of local people. This effort has increased water availability at village level. This can be good option to use traditional wisdom and technological options to resolve issues around water.
- Experiments of village level women engineers who are trained to restore rainwater in respective agriculture field, have been plasticized by Chetana Vikas organization in different villages of Wardha district.

b) Drinking water

Drinking water is basic human need which itself is base of human life and existence. Some drinking water related options which were discussed in group.

- There is need to put tariff for piped water supply for drinking and sanitation purposes. A model was proposed for this which can be divided into Lifeline water which is drinking water and should be free of cost, Lifeline Plus water which is mainly needed for sanitation purpose and cooking needs. This may be charged with a minimal amount and Luxury water (washing cars, gardening) should be charged with a high tariff. This system will help to provide drinking water free and other uses tariff will make water supply system economically viable.
- The option of drinking water ATM of Safe Water Network in some villages of Bhandara and Gondia is being used. Drinking water from ATM is free for BPL families and there are minimal charges (service charges) for other families of village for getting required drinking water.
- There is need to revisit water distribution and sharing in some cities like Pune and Mumbai where there is surplus water supply than requirement and there is still scarcity in some areas of city and areas where dams constructed for water supply is constructed.
- Water reuse in domestic and sanitation use can reduce huge amount of water demands in urban and rural areas.
- Use of treated sewage water/GREY WATER for gardening, washing and irrigation can be good option to reuse huge amount of water coming out from urban areas.

c) Industrial water and pollution

- Industrial water use should not be in priority before drinking and irrigation water use.
- There is need of rainwater harvesting in industrial premises

- The effluents coming out from industries should be under prescribed standards of State pollution Control Board. There is need of local people participation in monitoring of quality of effluent discharge in local environment.
- There is need to rationalize industrial water use taking into consideration local geography, water availability, other uses such as drinking, irrigation and environmental uses.

d) **Big options against localized small options**

- There is strong resistance to River Linking Project to tackle water scarcity the group thinks that this will be catastrophe.
- There can be medium and small dams but it should assure that the benefits from such projects should be first to the people and communities which are going to affect from such project.
- There is need of social relations which are based on equitable sharing of water.
- The state support should be to the watershed level or village level for conservation of water instead of building large dams or River linking like projects.

Excessive use of water for proposed Thermal Projects and Coal mining is a serious issue in Vidarbha. One of the participants, Jindal from Manthan, who has done work on this aspect shared this concern.

2) Energy

The five main issues on energy in India as highlighted in the group were

- Energy poverty (40 cr without connections, 80 cr without modern cooking arrangements)
- Scarcity of conventional fuels
- Pollution from energy generation
- Electricity companies financially indebted
- State and Centre in India both have responsibility of electricity but both have different goals

The RIR framework, which is R- Reduce (conservation of energy); I – Improve (energy efficiency); and R – Replace (renewable energy), was shared as one of the alternative frameworks for energy. Energy in India has a number of possibilities from a technological point of view. Solar and wind are almost equal to coal in terms of Rs per unit installed capacity for large new plants. The question that then comes up is ‘who should pay the difference?’ if we are to move towards Renewable energy. To which some points shared in the group were-

- Luxury use of electricity and petrol should be taxed in different ways.
- Commercial establishments could be charged at a higher rate.
- Cars should be charged based on congestion pricing and parking fees.

With respect to cooking fuels the question discussed was can we move towards biogas? One hurdle noted was that it is comparatively difficult to use as compared to other technologies. It requires more maintenance. However another point raised was that thinking of the larger picture even LPG is finite and the lesser desired alternatives must be developed as well. Besides rural areas, urban areas as well can generate both their own energy and tackle their waste issues with biogas plants.

In the transport sector emphasis was laid on public transport and cycling as alternatives available to us. Although it was realised that these alternatives have to be implemented in an integrated manner along with restrictions placed on cars.

During the discussion in the larger group it was mentioned that Nuclear Power was out rightly opposed by the participants of the group. Demand side management (DSM) was also discussed, through which the price of electricity for larger commercial users can be raised. DSM concepts such as net metering are also gaining ground in India. One of the questions raised was - what happens when big companies come even into renewable energy? Isn't it the same danger again? The government's target reduction of 40% non-fossil fuel energy includes even nuclear, big-hydro and clean coal. Decentralized RE is not in the picture.

3) Alternative Economics

The starting question for this discussion was -What should a non-violent economy look like? The root problems of our current economic system were brought out. One issue shared was that the current economy has killed the need for personal relationships. We monetize everything. We earlier worshipped our cattle, now we worship our money.

On the question of how do we know whether we have moved towards a non-violent alternative economy, some metrics discussed were: One is that we do not always tend to move towards income generation as a solution; To gauge if we are also producing for ourselves or only for the economy; and is social justice being achieved.

However it was also pointed out that any alternative will not receive a yes/no answer as to whether it is alternative but instead we can rate whether it is more alternative than the current status quo.

Some of the examples of such existing alternatives discussed were- the Deccan Development society which works with women dalit farmers who have struggled against the odds and now earn their own income; the self reliant Kuthumbakkam village in Tamil Nadu following an alternative economic system; in Bhuj people in drought prone areas are attempting to become self-reliant in water.

4) Learning and Education

Learning and education being an essential part of our existence was a cross cutting issue underlined in all discussions. However in this specific session the different aspects about learning and alternative education were discussed more broadly. Discussing the Nai Talim concept of education and Gandhi's philosophy about how we should learn from the work of hands were shared, which is something that has not been accepted by the intellectuals. The prevalent belief is that we should learn technical material, computers and academic knowledge, which takes away people's independent thinking. Sharing other known thinkers' views on learning Tagore's philosophy about learning from the art to keep our humanity alive was mentioned. Dr. Ambedkar said that teaching, from the anganwadi to the research centres, should be provided from one place.



Some other points shared by participants were- We should also teach based on the interests of children; Non-violent communication should be used to teach, rather than simply telling them that something is right or wrong; the expectation is that a farmer's son moves on to better occupations but can we change our thinking to make farming itself modern and desirable; we can also learn from reviving local economies; people should have the opportunity to learn anything they want; if we observe children, we may learn their individual inclinations and see what they enjoy in learning; is there a need for shared vision about the goal of learning or can there be several different objectives for different people?!

Lastly, one of the examples of an alternative education - Gotul, the Adivasi school's ideology was discussed. The need for it to be applied in other places also was felt.

5) Lifestyle, art and culture

Under lifestyle, the discussion was structure under 4 main points.

Firstly the problems and alternatives to the lifestyles of today were discussed. Today's lifestyle is based on wanting more, commercialisation, high on packaging, suit-boot, big cars, etc. It is going in the wrong direction. Increasing consumption and growing competition are serious issues and so is the commercialization and globalization of everything. Standardization is also occurring everywhere. We are being brainwashed to become consumers. We are always in a hurry, the habit of sitting and contemplating isn't there anymore. IT lifestyles are also 'unnatural'. Commuting time has also increased as a result of Urbanization. More gadgets have come into our lives as they make certain aspects of our lives easier. Women who have to do much of house work accept these gadgets more easily. The village lifestyle is changing too and becoming less natural, more mechanized. Possibly Adivasis are less affected in terms of lifestyles but the way they used to work as a community earlier is now not so prevalent. The materials we use are also non-biodegradable. The effects of these changes are more mental stress, less physical ability, more family stress and even divorces.



The discussion then moved to alternatives that we need to build in our systems and also follow individually. There should be a change in our mindsets from maximization to optimization and we should produce for our needs and not in large excesses. We need to rethink the purpose of living. We also have to move from globalization to localization. Social justice should be achieved with everyone getting shared control of common resources. Our consumption and material possessions should be reduced. Vehicles should only be used if necessary. The true cost of lifestyle should be brought out clearly by including the damage caused to environment. Can we say no to urbanization? Certainly not but we can find middle ground. We can try to use more natural products.

Everyone likes festivals, so if we say no to certain customs that are harmful, socially and environmentally, we should find new occasions for Celebrations that are less harmful.

What we consider as development - the Gross Domestic Product, is problematic. We should consider Human Development Index with more emphasis.

Some of the attempts towards such alternative lifestyles shared were- the voluntary simplicity, a movement that is being adopted in the US and Bhutan giving more importance to GNH (Gross National Happiness).

The following session was open for participants to come and briefly share about their work in the larger group, which were then discussed and explained in more details in smaller groups. The alternatives shared in this session were as follows:

1. Non-violent communication as a compassionate communication: How can we share the power than dominating each other and can a positive change be approached filled with compassion.
2. Jivan Shala for adivasis which came into being during the Narmada Bachao Aandolan. The discussion along with sharing the work Jivan Shala does also focused on how better education may be offered for the Adivasi family.
3. Eco-tourism in Bhimashankar.

4. Alternatives to generic medicine, good medicines are obtained at a much cheaper rate, which has the same effect as other medicines: Anant Phadke
5. Co-operative marketing of forest products.
6. Waste management in the regional areas: Swacch (Mangal Pagare)

DAY 3

The first session on the third day was scheduled for - **Discussion on the Vikalp Sangam Framework Note**. The session was facilitated by Ashish Kothari who first gave a background of the note:

The note on the Vikalp developed during the first Vikalp Sangam was discussed in the consecutive Vikalp sangams. The aim of this is to develop a framework based on the experiences of the people, to develop an alternative approach which takes care of social, economic, environmental justice and equity issues.

The current status of economy oriented development is not taking into account the basic principles like democracy and the green status is being added to many products and processes. However, there is a need to see if these processes or materials are the real alternatives. Hence the need of these 5 pillars of the alternative framework emerged.

a) Environment: We agree that the resources we are dependent on are limited and shall deplete soon. Hence, all the human activities need to be done taking into consideration the limitation of these available resources.

b) Social Well-being and Equity: Inequality in terms of gender, caste, class should be demolished and how the current conflicts can be resolved in a peaceful manner. Again does an individual have cultural and spiritual understanding at the very first place, so that he/she can socialise as well in a peaceful manner.

c) Democracy: As individual or a community how can we participate into decision making process? Does our duty as a citizen is over by only voting and selecting a political leader? If any leader is not working as promised, as citizens we need to build the capacity to oppose the party's decisions. At local level, is it possible to participate in the decision making process, especially the participation of the marginalised sections of the society like the Dalits, women, etc.?

d) Economic reforms: The producers (like farmers) should have control over the sources of their productivity and not in the hands of the Govt. or large land owners. As a consumer, how do we ensure that the goods we are purchasing are of good and safe quality? If they are not we should have the capacity and capability to raise our voices. Again can we create an economic system which is localised and self-reliant. Small cottage industries, creating a local market can be some alternatives. However, there are some goods which cannot be locally produced and hence, only such industries should exist. Other goods may be produced locally.

e) Culture and knowledge: Cultural diversity exists in India and there are diverse forms of knowledge. Selecting appropriate knowledge and cultural understanding that fits into the basic principles of the Vikalp should be taken forward.



Following this background, discussions around the note began wherein the following questions and comments were shared:

- Creativity to develop something new from the previous traditional systems all the time, should be an integral part of the alternative framework.
- If we work on the laws of the Nature then there is no need for human laws. If we talk about Vikalp, we need to keep in mind the faith of the people and work along with it than against.
- As individuals or organisations who aspire to take this Vikalp forward, it is important to integrate the 5 values first within themselves and then spread it to others.
- Anant Phadke shared his view that no document is perfect. The team who has put forth this document has made a good effort and their work is appreciated. Since the team who has worked on this document comes from a socio-political movement background, their language and work is reflected in the document
- In the beginning whatever values and principles which have been noted are emerged from all the movements and philosophies/ reformers which have historically emerged and this should be clearly mentioned.
- Exploitation, domination and deprivation should be clearly mentioned in the document
- How can we talk about economic reform, without talking about profit or loss. Even Dr. Ambedkar has spoken about state socialism. We need to also talk about the corporate sector or privatisation before coming to the socialism.
- Inhuman traditions need to be mentioned.
- Decentralisation to the extent which we can be considered as an additional pillar or value of the Vikalp. Centralised method has issues related to environment and social aspects and has benefits too. So, decentralisation and its benefits along with some disadvantages can be explored too.

- Brahmanical caste system and other caste discrimination is there in the document, however, it is not yet clearly articulated/ reflected in the paper.
- Micro grids are essential but at the same time national grids are also important especially where the national economy is dependent on. Energy is not just a technical issue but also a socio-political issue and the Economic Divide(/vishamta) needs to be clearly discussed
- Environment: the point on page 11 is clearly articulated. However, human activities like agriculture have destroyed the species which existed then. So, human activities are bound to destroy species or else development is not possible. But the point to be taken into consideration is to which extent the destruction should take place, what kind of limitation or what role human beings should play to live in harmony with the environment needs to be understood and mentioned in the document. Human aspirations and their basic needs are going to surely increase in the future too but it should not be at the cost of destruction of the environment.
- On Page 14, adjective like preserving humanity while preserving the culture should be mentioned.
- Basic principles of equality and non-violence are mentioned. The Law system is the main decision maker and it is expected to work on these two basic principles. This system is itself created by the citizens, with the intention that the selected candidates shall do all the work. Somehow, people have forgotten their roles. They have forgotten that of they can create power, they can interfere, object and even pull down the existing government. This capability is there within the communities and every individual needs to realise this.
- **Ranjana:** The document is an informal guideline stating that if we are in line with the principles, we can move towards sustainability. However, there was also earlier draft of this document which mentioned that some of the social participation (like Khaap panchayat) or planting trees after cutting down old trees cannot be an Alternative. Agrarian Vs. Non-Agrarian is the real issue and most of our work is around resolving economic issues but we do not target the policies directly. There is a thinking being developed everywhere (especially in the urban areas) to treat the persons from rural areas with less dignity and less value. Our document needs to clearly articulate that all people should be treated equally and not based on the rural or urban setting.
- **Ashok Bang:** There is a belief that the Vikalp thoughts are conservative thoughts. For example, relationship between honey bees and flowers, where bees transfer the pollens to the flowers and at the same time take nectar from flowers, thus there is not any form of *shoshan*. Our relationship with each other should be such that if we are taking something from the nature, we should return more back to the nature, without exploiting it. This thought should be kept in mind when we are talking about alternatives in all forms of sectors.
- **Suniti:** During our work, we always come across a questions, that when we are resolving certain issues of the people, what aspirations (not individual but as a community) do they have and is our work helping them to fulfil these aspirations? Even if our strong movements are taking place and we are sure that the Vikalp is bringing a transformation and is better for the society, how do we ensure that these alternatives are reaching at the policy level.
- **Ashish:** Along with equity, truth (Satya) is important in the basic principle too. In the undivided India, there were about 1.5 lakh Britishers who were ruling us. We say we

are living in the decolonised land, however, there is still an urban and rural divide. Or they wayan individual perceives between town and country side, our way of looking at a country side brings a lot of thinking associated with the place. Dr. Ambedkar has said that for a better living we need to go to urban areas. However, Gandhi and Tagore said that India lives in the villages itself. So, if we need to bring forward the villages, we first have to love the concept of villages, appreciate its beauty and its people too. The real revolution will be to bring forward the importance of these villages and not look towards urbanisation as a better alternative and the correct way of living.

Feedback and Way Forward:Following points were shared by participants in this session-



- Many of the participants work in the villages, however they represent the urban areas. The ones who live in urban areas, how can we get them to participate in the Vikalp, especially the youth who have different aspirations and needs. Lets us not treat villages and urban areas different but as one unit and think for their development as we think for the urban areas.
- Tarak: Printed documentation of the Vikalp should be made along with the video so that individuals at their own level can take forward the issues raised in this Vikalp. Ashish Kothari suggested that if anyone can write a blog/ article on this and we can either publish it in the newspaper and online.
- If we are not making any discrimination on the basis of gender or caste then there should not be any discrimination on the basis of age and having a Vikalp for only youth may not be a good suggestion. There was a counter discussion that youth have more energy and capability to take the issues forward and hence a special Vikalp for youth may be considered.
- Alternatives and great philosophies have emerged historically; however, there is a lag that the right message has not been taken forward.
- Moderation on time, so that everyone gets to share their views
- Challenges and issues are faced mostly by the rural participants and they should be encouraged to speak in the Vikalp Sangam.
- Women from rural areas need to participate in more number.

- Jalandhar from Shramik Mukti Dal: It was a good platform to engage with people from different sectors. He would like to engage more with the issues of Adivasis.
- Instead of having Vikalp Sangam for youth, there should be a vikalp sangam on youth issues, because senior experts and their experiences are required.
- The energy in the civil society has a certain form of dialogue and way of sleeping. Youth being not associated with it at times find it difficult to understand the language of the civil society and there was a hope that in the Vikalp Sangam a dialogue would be created.
- There is a need to engage with other sectors of the society and not only the ones working in the civil society sector per se. Better improvement in the dialogue process is required within the Sangam because the same level of language is not understood by all (especially the youth).
- If we are talking about the Vikalp, then the alternatives or examples of alternatives did not come clearly in the group discussions.
- The current generations are confused in the sense they have aspirations to earn money and at the same time want to get into different fields. In early times, there was a strong leadership, under which the youth could seek guidance and follow their principles.
- In movements, we often criticise certain issues (for example, the GMOs) so the alternative solutions have not emerged. Suhas mentioned that on the website alternative stories are being documented and at the Vikalp if you come across any alternative which interests you, then one should contact the individual/ organisation and visit the alternative in person.
- Satish (CEE): Vikalp can be successful if the language of conversation in terms of understanding and not the actual language per se could be equal. Second, it is not about the lack of knowledge but many people have not got the correct opportunity/ platform to express. There should be other ways of expressing, like use of posters, drawings, skits, which did not emerge in the Vikalp.
- Abhishek: If anyone is willing to write, he has taken the responsibility of publishing the articles in the tabloid 'Sabha' that he has started.
- Although the idea is to be democratic, strict and organised moderation is required.
- In the future planning, opportunity should be given to visit the alternative approaches. Also in the planning process, if there is one hour discussion on water, then 15 minutes to be allotted to discuss the issues/ policies and 45 mins to be allotted to discuss the vikalps.
- Ashish Kothari: In comparison to the first 3 sangams, the atmosphere in this Sangam was a bit serious. The cultural activities were less.
- Vikalp for urban issues and their alternatives should also be discussed.

Brief meeting on Food Vikalp Sangam: The last session was dedicated to planning and discussing the proposed Food Vikalp Sangam to be organised in 2016. The session started by participants sharing their experiences working in the food and agriculture sector. Following which the Food concept note was read out and discussed. Following suggestions and comments on the concept note were shared by the participants- cautioning against losing the joy and celebration associated with food; to give priority to burning issues like GMOs, land acquisition, making consumers more responsible, etc.; include topics such as Gender and Food, saving desi seeds, saving forest foods; to see how decrease in availability of resources is affecting food production; how to challenge mainstream advertisements and promote traditionally and culturally appropriate food; challenging the mainstream nutritionist view of

monolithic beliefs of what is good and what is not; to also make participants share their stories of failure of food and agriculture based initiatives; reviving lost food item, recipes and traditions while also looking at traditional myths which affect nutrition.

On the structure of the Sangam it was suggested that a separate public mela could be organised. Each day of the Sangam could have a different theme with more numbers of parallel sessions in an un-conference manner. Also have games, songs, and cooking every day. It was suggested to keep in mind the season and place where the sangam will be organised and see how it can complement the Food Sangam. Chetna Vikas offered to be a part of the process of Food Vikalp Sangam.

Day 4

On the Fourth Day of Vikalp Sangam the participants were taken for field visit to Subhash Sharma's organic farm in Tiyusa village, Vidarbha. This field visit aimed to expose participants to the value of organic farming and to the facts of how it is being practiced and challenged on ground. Subhas Sharmanarrated his association with organic farming that how he used to practice farming in more contemporary ways and then shifted from inorganic farming to organic farming since 1994. He has witnessed the impacts of inorganic farming v/s organic farming. Interestingly, Subhas Sharma has now become an example as other than just practicing organic farming by himself, he is also training other farmers to practice organic farming. In this year itself 500 farmers trained themselves under him. His training style includes hands on practice on field, communication of practical messages such as booming market of organic products, improvement of soil quality and increase in water level. He believes in the socio, ecological and cultural balance and which has become the foundation of his initiative of organic farming. He communicated this belief to the participants in a very fruitful manner.