

Towards discussions on Manifestoes for Ecological Swaraaj

Discussion Notes

हिन्दी में उपलब्ध सामग्री:

- *2009 लोकसभा चुनाव: जन जल घोषणा पत्र*
- *कोशी घोषणा पत्र*
- *झारखण्ड के गांव गणराज्य में समाज-संस्कृति नीति की अवधारणा*
- *किसान घोषणा पत्र के मुद्दे*
- *झारखंड उलगुलान मंच-दस्तावेज-सारांश*

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Introduction to the present Discussion

Our belief that environmental problems are one of the greatest challenges to humanity in contemporary times and the most serious threat to the long term well being of society, has only been further validated, with the concerns on climate change, melting ice sheets, the loss of millions of lives during the devastation brought by the Tsunami in south Asian and South East Asian countries, the recent Kosi Floods in Bihar and Nepal. We are still grappling with immediate and long term solutions for the same. Researches reveal the changing climatic situation in the Himalayas and its resultant impacts on biodiversity, and the changing course of rivers, their drying up and related impact on food production and food security. While these continue, introduction of GM foods is being considered one among the many impending environmental disasters resulting from the modern industrial development paradigm and the world of global finance.

While some of these problems seem difficult to grasp in our every day lives, those sections closely associated with nature have a clearer notion of the problems, while there is another section which tries to find solutions through market mechanisms alone. The social and cultural divide, as well as the economic and political forces/processes that are closely related to these ecological issues constitute the dimensions to be addressed for moving towards ecological justice.

Most people want to live on an Earth which has clean air, clean water and do not want to support the destruction of forests, however the complex web of economic and power relations often forces people to support policies which they would not like to support. Thus we cannot save ourselves and our environment without tackling issues of democracy, equality and justice. Within this complex web of power relations today, market mechanisms and other institutions of determining social relationships while having begun to look at ecological problems, have also appropriated or defined the problems in a certain way, that may not lead to ecological justice and will further undermine ecological democracy.

Unlike the North, in the South, most environmental movements have emerged on the basis of issues related to everyday survival, such as adequate food, water, or basic rights to land providing life and livelihood. While the challenges are global, how can global solutions be found?

There are many ways of solving the same environmental problems. Different solutions have different social, economic, cultural and political consequences. The question is how far have earlier problems been mitigated through new policy directions? Is this still a mighty task and challenge not touched by our governments or have the decisions of multiple stakeholders compounded the problems?

A large number of movement groups, struggles on the ground, other civil society groups working on development issues and researchers have developed proposals for policy and action, charter of demands etc. Given

that the process of national elections has begun, this seems an opportune moment to bring together one or more People's manifestoes.

To discuss this in greater depth we have proposed some clusters around which discussions and elaborations would help to evolve some key thoughts or ideas on ecological justice. To bring together different dimensions, which would culminate in not only a charter of demands, but give continuity in the preparation for a whole new discourse which seems to be emerging from the groundswell of activism, as an alternative to the dominant growth-oriented model of development.

Briefly presented below is a broad perspective for an 'Ecological Democracy' framework for development planning and preparing manifestoes. This is followed by some points culled from various manifestoes and charter of demands prepared by the movement groups and then the text of these documents and some background papers that may be useful in the discussions.

We thus hope that the discussions will help us to combine these arguments, elements and give a holistic perspective to the challenges and future path on issues of society and governance in the direction of *swaraaj*, by linking ecological, economic, social, cultural, political and gender democracy.

Proposed Ecological Democracy Perspective

In 2004 SADED had published a discussion paper called “Global Ecological Problems and Issues of Ecological Democracy in the Beginning of the New Millennium”. The continuing discussions have enriched our understanding of the complex layering of issues related to Ecological Democracy. Using the discussion paper as a base paper and looking at the multiple dimensions that have emerged through SADED’s engagement with different groups the questions related to ecological problems and ecological democracy, and campaigns for ecological justice, SADED has now built a perspective where in it is clear that there has to be a sharp and brief articulation of another vision of development in operative, ‘doable’ ways—a People’s Manifesto. One broad framework for consideration is as below. In the coming year we hope to initiate developing of plans for some regions/districts/blocks through dialogues with various civil society, state and movement groups using the framework. The framework proposes a focus on four major dimensions:

- Ecosystems—macro to micro
- Livelihoods
- Health
- Social Relationships & Decentralized Governance

These would be the umbrella issues for which all other dimensions would be planned, for instance, agriculture would be related to the ecosystem, to livelihoods of people especially those related to nature, to food availability and food cycles, to water (from the ecosystem and health

points of view), to the relationships of caste, class and gender, to the policy and decision making processes; similarly, for forests, land, energy, education and knowledge systems, security, and other dimension. Corruption and election reform would fall under the governance and social relationships across dimensions. No one dimension should be at the cost of the others, and if prioritization has to be done, it must be given importance in descending order, i.e. livelihoods before health services, and impact on health before social considerations. However, these four form a cluster and should ideally be considered as such, rather as one-by-one again.

This broad framework necessarily means giving primacy to the nature-related occupational groups, who are primarily the impoverished sections today. The existing industrial and urban complexes would have to be considered as a second layer of the 'ecosystem', and ecological planning would have to include them. Decentralised governance could mean consideration from family and village level institutions, to elected district government, to state and centre relations. Market relations from the individual to local markets, to state and national policies, to international economic regimes—to be evaluated in terms of their impact on the ecosystems, livelihoods, health, and social relationships within production systems and between the sexes, castes, rural-urban areas and classes. Delineating eco-cultural zones as the administrative units for planning and giving primacy to the larger eco-system as a significant background consideration are proposed as principles that would facilitate the process of ecological democracy.

Besides adopting this generic approach in principle, specifics would be delineated based on the local context, the various forms of ecological life patterns as well as technological options. In addition, corresponding administrative and financial mechanisms, tax regimes, etc. could be worked out to facilitate moves in this direction. Sectoral/sectional proposals are being prepared in keeping with this perspective of ecological democracy, and we hope will continue to evolve in a dynamic process of constant renewal.

From Various Movement Manifestoes / Charter of Demands: Elements of a People's Manifesto

Economic democracy and the economic crisis and its links with ecological swaraaj

- The financial meltdown has devastated the informal sector. According to the labour ministry half a million people have lost their jobs. The government should immediately step in to provide social security cover to the retrenched workers and provide incentives to sick industries
- Protect small scale industries and artisans with guaranteed institutional credit with low interest rates
- No subsidies for rich industries that are in trouble except for those that agree to not to retrench workers
- A cut off in the size of the work force (the size of which will depend on the company's rate of profit) below which no subsidies can even be proposed.
- Throw World Bank and IMF out of the 3rd world.

- Cancel all debt of the Global South immediately.
- Go back to the Gold Standard; if not then remove the US \$ from its almighty position as the World's Reserve Currency. Institute a nominal world currency whose "value" is a weighted average of all currencies, the individual weights being determined by the degree to which a country socializes the instruments of sovereignty production.
- Demand for free movement of people, stop free movement of capital.
- Cut military budget by 34% enhance health for the poor budget.
- There must be a transfer of resources, both material and political, from the carbon users to the carbon keepers. Forest communities must be given the right to decide how best forests will be preserved, for the good of human and other species. Reckless cutting of forests by industry for mining purposes and wood and other forest resources must stop.
 - Cancel all mining and industrial projects in forest areas
- The Indian government needs to proactively do much more in terms of emission reductions and preventive intervention, along with a focus on adaptation, and help people - the poor in particular - to cope with the current and potential impacts of global warming. For a start, it needs to move away from the current unsustainable pattern of economic activity. This includes putting a stop to the takeover of agricultural lands for industrial use and SEZs, since as a rule, they are far more carbon-intensive than agriculture. A more equitable, less wasteful pattern of economic development is not merely a

desirable end in itself, but it would actually help lower carbon emissions.

- We demand the Repeal of the SEZ Act because we believe that it provides legislative and judicial support to privatization of the country's resources and has the potential to destabilize the democratic governance system. In addition to this, it threatens and over rides the existing rights of workers, farmers and other communities to be affected by SEZs. We are also concerned about the huge costs to the state exchequer as well as the economy of this country as a result of concessions provided to Private Corporations under the SEZ legislation and policy. Therefore, we once again firmly demand that to ensure industrial and economic development which is sustainable, equitable and democratic the SEZ Act 2005 and the SEZs created so far under the this Act be scrapped. The land acquired for these SEZs be returned to its original owners.

Politics of lifestyle

- Incentives for people's transport policy
- Restrictions and tax disincentives on private transport
- Incentives for production and use of cycles, cycle rickshaws
- Incentives for promotion of water conservation and harvesting mechanisms in urban and rural areas
- Restrictions on industrial pollution and urban effluents into rivers

Regeneration of rural economy

- Government should promote sustainable agriculture to maximize the local resource use and provide support to the farmers

- Farmers adopting organic/ecological farming should receive financial support for purchasing or producing their own organic inputs, at an equal level as subsidies for chemical fertilizers and seeds
- Special package should be announced for dry-land/rain-fed agriculture to encourage and sustain appropriate cropping patterns and cultivation methods
- Tax incentives for small scale industries and artisans
- Provide institutional support to organic farming
 - 50 % of the research investments in agriculture institutions should be earmarked to organic farming
 - 50 % of the demonstrations by department of agriculture should be on organic farming
 - Farmers training centres should be equipped to run courses on organic farming and experienced farmers should be used as the resource persons
- Replace SEZ with the Gram Swaraj concept of village economic models

Ecology, dignity, marginalized majorities/ Adivasi survival/ Caste and social justice

- 33% political reservation for women in Parliament
- Ensure employment guarantee for women belonging to weaker sections in urban and rural areas and children
- Strengthen anti trafficking laws and preventive measures against trafficking of children and introduce self defence education and empowerment for women and children

- Social security, maternity and child benefits for women engaged in informal sector, agriculture and landless women workers
- Strengthen laws against female infanticide
- Resolve loopholes and strengthen the laws on domestic violence
- Improve access to quality education for the girl child
- Reservation for women in higher education
- Equal opportunity for women in political, economic, social and cultural spheres, and state protection against taboos and myths operating against women and acting as barriers to their participation
- Programme country-wide for systematic community based nutrition rehabilitation of all grade 3 and grade 4 malnourished children.
- Expansion of ICDS to provide 2 meals to children between 3 to 6 years, and conversion of all ICDS centres into anganwadi centres cum crèches, with extended working hours and an extra helper.
- Large programme for open residential schools in cities for street and working children and migrant workers' children.
- Programme for seasonal community based hostels in the village school, run by committees of senior citizens, to retain migrant workers' children in villages and not let their schooling be disrupted.
- Large programme to implement recommendations of Sachar Committee, with special focus on massive expansion of modern inclusive education, and vocational training to access employment in the modern economy.

- Community ownership of village on grazing and pasturelands
- Land Acquisition Act is disrespectful to mother earth and therefore needs to be reformulated

Agrarian crisis and food security

- A policy package ensuring 100% food for all and removal of indirect tax on basic commodities accessed by poor communities
- Indian agriculture should be delinked from WTO
- 10% GDP for strengthening rural development, rural employment generation, and rural social security services including nutrition and mother and child facilities
- More incentives on food crop production and restriction of acreage for cash crops
- Guaranteed institutional credit facilities and low interest for farming
- Fair Minimum Support Price(MSP) and state procurement of food grains
- Strengthening Public Distribution System(PDS), corruption free and transparent systems
- 365 days guaranteed employment to ensure purchasing power of landless and marginal farmers
- Ban on Genetically Modified crops, livestock, fish etc
- Restrictions on external chemical inputs and chemical pesticides
- Promotion of indigenous seeds and provision of agricultural inputs at the same market rates to farmers as output prices

- Free provision of organic fertilizers and pesticides to farmers need to be made available to farmers by the State to promote organic farming in the country
- Provide free facilities for agricultural activities as in the case of industrial activities such as free facilities of water, electricity, etc. The traditional water sources for agriculture should be revived and sources for wind and solar energy introduced for agricultural purposes. Where farmers are not receiving water for agriculture purposes, in those circumstances, farmers should be compensated with the damages.

Added on 13th March (after Right to Food discussions)

- Stop import of food grains
- Direct income support to farmers
- Ban future trading of food commodities
- Stop transfer of fertile agricultural lands for industrial purposes
- Public schemes catering to right to food, should procure locally produced food only
- Include oil in ration supplies, 150gm and 35 kgs of rice and pulses
- Improve investment in agricultural sector

Climate change

A comprehensive ecological regeneration agenda

- Afforestation of areas where there is no tree cover left and user and ownership rights should be given to tribals. Establishment of a carbon sink corporation which could be run with through finances raised through carbon tax and high energy consumption. Similar

incentives for dryland farmers, organic farmers and low energy consuming producer associations commonly awarded as carbon keepers

- Plans for reviving underground water recharging systems, preservation of ponds lakes and water bodies through various watershed plans
- Mapping of livelihoods and technologies and identification of carbon keepers in the country which are low energy consuming
- Constitute a Commission in India who can identify the ecological debt and methods of payment for this debt
- NREGA could be used for ecological regeneration work such as revival of local, nallas, ponds, forests, rivers, regeneration of wastelands, renewable energy projects etc.
- Un-proven, anti-poor and potentially disastrous non-solutions, such as nuclear (fission) energy and ethanol /bio-diesel, should be immediately put on hold for large-scale application.

Water and Floods

- Constitute a joint commission(government and people's commission) to look at ecological regeneration agendas on the entire impacted area of Kosi floods which includes Himalayan glacial systems, Ganga, and dams and barrages built through this entire watershed area and include Indian, Nepal and Bangladesh affected states, people and governments in this discussion for a long term sustainable solution.

- Integration of impact of highways and transport infrastructure on rivers in the commission debate. E.g the impact of Ganga Express Highway on Bihar Floods
- Enforce systems to include government officials in the debate
- Continued relief and reconstruction agendas for flood affected victims
- Preservation of ponds, lakes and water bodies
- Ban privatization of water and public water works
- The Water Policy would be based on the premise that every living being will have the right to free drinking water.
- The water would be owned by the local populace and its conservation would be undertaken on the basis of traditional knowledge and cultural values of the area. The conservation should be undertaken by rain harvesting, planting of trees with broad leaves and such measures as are being used by the local people traditionally. This is pertinent to both rural and urban areas implemented through the processes of proposed under the Urban Swaraaj Bill.
- The consent of the elected local body would be required before allowing the use of water resources for outside the area.
- Historically, it has been observed that Dalits and marginalized sections of the society are not given their due rights on the water resources. It would be ensured that these sections get the equal rights on water.

- Emphasis should be given to include women within participation in rural water supply schemes and women's appointment in village level water monitoring committees
- Demand an increase in total budgetary share and budget funds allocated to agriculture devoted to the needs of women farmers, who constitute 50% of agricultural labourers.
- We have found that women are encouraged to explore pisciculture, food processing, sericulture, livestock rearing and water conservation projects under the NREGA but most NREGA works have been devoted to road construction. NREGA could also be allocated in this form

Added on 13th March (discussions on Water)

- A separate policy for flood prone communities. Introduce resilient technological, socio-political institutions to cope with floods in these areas

Civil society movements-South Asian Context

- Political, economic, cultural, ecological ties amongst SAARC nations encouraging people to people contact, increasing educational and cultural exchanges and strive for a regional Trade Bloc
- Historical emissions by western capitalist-industrial societies have been a key driver for the current alarming situation, and therefore ecological debt - between nations and within nations – this must also be used to define current responsibility.