

Chhattisgarh State Consultation Nationalizing Sustainable Development Goals

21st & 22nd Feb, 2015, Raipur

More than 200 farmers and elected representatives of the local bodies participated in the Consultation on Nationalizing Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at Raipur organized by Chhattisgarh Krishak Biradari in collaboration with Beyond Copenhagen, Oxfam and Department of Irrigation, Government of Chhattisgarh. The Consultation also witnessed the participation of Sh Ajay Chandrakar, Minister Rural Development & Panchayati Raj, Parliamentary Affairs, Tourism, Sh Amar Aggrawal, Minister Urban Administration, Sh Chandrashekhar Sahu, former Minister & MP, Sh SC Behar, former Chief Secretary, Madhya Pradesh, Dr. Rajlakshmi, Sr. Scientist from MSSRF, Sh Anand Sharma, Convener, Chhattisgarh Krishak Biradari.

The Consultation discussed the SDGs proposal of the Open Working Group. While it reflected on the proposal, it found it unambitious and incapable of providing sustainable and inclusive development. Lack of centrality of food security and sustainable agriculture, failure to acknowledge water as human rights, lack of focus on inequality, lack of emphasis on gender equality, and inadequate support to end food wastage, fossil fuel subsidy and subsidy to export oriented agriculture, prominence to the role of multinational corporations and big business without meaningful regulation, failure to see development from human rights perspective and inadequate global partnership and resources, were seen as main stumbling blocks in the success of the SDGs. The Consultation also reflected on the orientation of development in the country and the state. Lack of decentralized planning and role of people in the planning, unabated degradation and exploitation of the natural resources, inadequate support to farmers and agriculture, lack of dignity in agriculture, feminization of agriculture etc. were voiced as the main concerns.

The main outcome of the Consultation was to undertake climate change resilient planning in 100 villages/blocks by the participants and organizers with the support of the elected representatives of the local bodies (Municipal Bodies and Gram Panchayats) and state government.

The discussion was spread into various sessions looking into current crisis, efforts and our perception of sustainability, peoples alternatives, climate change and Panchayat level planning, water and sustainability, interaction with PRI representatives over SDGs and Climate Change etc. While the first day of the discussion addressed farmers, second day witnessed the participation of elected members of the PRIs.

Sh Anand Sharma, convener of Krishak Biradari, opened the discussion by giving an overview of agriculture and farmers situation in the state. He said that Due to climate change cyclones have been diverted towards central India and Hudhud and Phailin adversely affected the crops. He also said that during Phailin insurance companies did not help farmers saying that insurance was valid only from June to September and more than 25% of paddy was submerged and wasted. He emphasized that to make the development sustainable, it was important to make

farming sustainable and viable. Reflecting on the global scenario he added that agriculture cannot be profitable in developing countries unless rich countries stopped subsidies to agriculture.

Dr. Rajlakshmi from MSSRF explained their work on water harvesting in Karnataka & Jharkhand. She explained that these models have been immensely beneficial to the farmers and can be adapted in similar.

Sh Anand Shukla from Oxfam sounded a caution against rapid adoption of technology without estimating its long-term impact. He emphasized that now life span of technologies are very short, and one technology, which can be beneficial today, could have negative long term impacts.

Sh Sharad Joshi explained how interests of developing countries are undermined in the WTO, Climate change and SDGs and the post 2015 processes. He said government of India should advocate strongly for enhancing ambition in poverty reduction, inequality, sustainable consumption and production, and means of implementation. He added that government should arrive at national consensus on what India should say in these critical issues rather than dealing it only at the level of ministry of foreign affairs, trade and climate change. He also added that many new policies are not in the interest of farmers (citing land acquisition ordinance) and said that farmers in all states should discuss and register their protest against such policies.

Sh Dayaram Nishad, member of Panchayat Samiti, Abhanpur who has been a farmers for 50 years, said that technology should be adequate in local needs and contexts, otherwise it is bound to fail. He added, that the drip irrigation technology being promoted blindly, is not in the interests of farmers, as it has adverse impact on taste, and shelf life and therefore fetches a lower price. He also doubted whether the drip irrigation increases water efficiency in all circumstances.

Former Chief Secretary of Madhya Pradesh Sh SC Behar emphasized the importance of micro planning, and in that context need for strengthening Gram Sabha. He said that adaptation to climate change is a highly localized function and unless we look into the needs of communities and villages, the response would not be sustainable and in the best interests of the people. He underlined that Gram Sabha too should have a longer horizon (30-35 years) while planning, only then we can plan appropriate response to contemporary challenges. He emphasized that farmers need to reflect not only with the issues related to agriculture, water, forests etc, but also explore overall orientation of the economy, and positioning of other sectors in the entire framework, to ensure that agriculture gets due importance in the entire planning.

Sh Chandrshekhar Sahu, wondered whether farmers future will be buried under the debris of agriculture? He emphasized it is important to understand that agriculture has no alternative, and the only way to produce sustain food production through improvement in agriculture, which is in harmony with nature and improves lives of farmers. He emphasized that Chhattisgarh was very rich in water resources, and had water streams every two miles and 13 perennial rivers, all of which are drying up. He added that dominance of agriculture companies on inputs have led to rising cost of agriculture, which must be reduced to make farming

sustainable. He also added that its important to look at agriculture in a comprehensive way including farm, forests, livestock and fisheries, and looking at them in a isolated way have done much harm to agriculture. He emphasized that decentralized planning should lead the way to sustainable resources planning, and lamented that even after so many years of passage of 73rd Amendment, the devolution of powers to the Gram Sabha has not taken place.

The next session began with the address of Sh Soumya Dutta from Bharat Jan Vigyan Jatha. Reflecting on the SDGs he said that the SDGs should look at more advanced timeline than looking at contemporary scenario. He added that these are not ambitious enough and hence minimum common denominator is being taken as standard. He explained that in energy and renewable energy, the targets are even less ambitious than the earlier Secretary General's Campaign on Sustainable Energy for All. Reflecting on India's response, he said that India's response has been typical business as usual. He also emphasized that the State Action Plan on Climate Change of Chhattisgarh plans to give more water to coal plants than to farmers and citizens, without looking into availability of land and water. He suggested that the farmers could question that logic and do better micro planning by doing water and land budget in their villages.

Ajay Jha, PAIRVI, explained the SDGs and the post 2015 framework. He said that sustainability is equally important in all parts of the world today as many countries are consuming more resources than can be regenerated by nature. He said while India, China, and the USA etc are consuming two year's resources in one year, for many countries like UK and Japan these are 4 times and 7 times respectively. Many small countries like UAE etc are consuming 13 years natural resources in one year. He added that this pattern is not sustainable. However, he also added that post 2015 process and SDGs discussion too, fail to look into core reasons for sustainability and end up looking for solutions in the same framework, which caused this problem. He added that the SDGs in their current form is un ambitious, and put the pressure on developing countries, while the developed countries get away with perfunctory promises of very little and inadequate financial and technical support. He emphasized that global partnership which was the weakest link of the MDGs, also threaten the success of the SDGs. He underlined that India, as a nation must try to address these issues globally as well as nationally. He concluded by saying that the SDGs framework still can be a valuable tool for the NGOs and citizens to demand implementation and accountability from the government.

Participants reflected their views on the SDGs and the national and local development scenario, challenges and their solutions in the third session. Mrs. Santoshi Verma from Bilha Block, demanded discussion with women on SDGs so that they can understand it better and make the global and national development goals more gender sensitive. She added that women are hardly ever part of these discussions. Sh Salim from Gariband, highlighted pressure of the market on the local forests produce and herbs, due to which the income from these are going to middlemen and market rather than forest dwelling communities. He also attracted attention towards impact of pollution from small industrial units in decaying water bodies. He added that SDGs must have stronger regulation for industries. Sh Lavkush Kashyape from Ratanpur said that Ratanpur had more than 600 ponds, of which less than 150 are living today. He highlighted the disconnect between the water/lakes ecosystem and ecosystem of the mountains as main

reason for the environmental degradation and loss of ponds. Sh Ramphal Gadia from Sargha, emphasized the importance of civic duties in protection of natural resources. Sh Gurudas Yadav highlighted the importance of common property resources in maintaining viability of farming and cattle rearing, he attracted attention towards disappearance of village commons. Sh Tikam Sahu underlined the importance of sensitizing youth on these issues and integrating larger numbers of them in the campaign. Sh Kosle, president of the Abhanpur municipality committed to take local planning for SDGs forward.

Sh Ajay Chandrakar, Minister Rural development and Panchayati Raj, Government of Chhattisgarh, addressed the participants in the concluding session. Introducing him moderator, Sh Pradeep Sharma, asked him to support the micro-planning in 100 villages, which participants have committed to undertake. He said Chhattisgarh has always been very sensitive to the issues of poor and natural resources. He welcomed the suggestions for better and decentralized planning in response to the challenges posed by climate change, and said that local development can be ensured by micro planning which is based on the availability of local resources and needs and aspirations. He assured that his department will extend all possible help in facilitating micro-planning in 100 villages.

Sh Ram Gulam Sinha extended the vote of thanks.

Day 2

The second day of the discussion was focused on the role of local and municipal bodies in ensuring sustainable development, making planning sensitive to the impacts of climate change and conservation of water bodies. The title of the discussion on second day was “Jal-Jalwayu aur Sarovar (Water, Climate change and waterbodies).” Opening the discussion Sh Anand Sharma said that waterbodies have been an excellent tool to create harmony in the society in earlier times. He added that Chhattisgarh had huge number of water bodies, lakes and ponds, which became victims of development, and that it is impossible to face climate change without ensuring revival of local water bodies. Sh Gautam Bandopadhyay from Nadi Ghati Morcha, reflected on the water policy of the state, and said that in the last few decades policy has slowly but surely restricted community ownership and access to water bodies. He said that Chhattisgarh had more than 52000 lakes, but unfortunately state has no data. He said that the control of large waterbodies have been gradually passed over to the private interests. He emphasized that unless there is collective partnership of the society in preserving waterbodies. He also underlined the importance of planning around water and water resources. He also questioned government’s beautification drive which is cementing approach of lakes and disturbing its catchment area.

Ajay Jha, from PAIRVI, said that policies on water all over the world tend towards treating water as a resource rather than a basic fundamental right. This has led to privatization of water and despite failure models of water privatization, states are persisting with the same approach on the behest of few vested interests. He added that India has also water use efficiency high on its agenda, and most of the resources are going to drip and sprinkler in name of improving water use efficiency in agriculture. He wondered whether this approach and drip and sprinkler can

save us from the droughts that we face today? He highlighted that there is no justice in water governance and people in the slums end up paying more than the middle more class in cities for their minimal water uses. He added, that despite erratic weather and monsoon patterns many communities in desert state of Rajasthan, parched Bundelkhand and Madhya Pradesh have been able to significantly improve the water level in their areas through encouraging experiments and examples, and we need to learn from them.

Sh Tirki, Mayor of Ambikapur, said that Ambikapur has a population of 1.5 lakh and it has 39 small and big lakes. He said that the discussion has enlightened him as to maintenance of these water bodies and he hoped that now he will be able to do it better with community participation.

Sh Vikas Sharma from Dainik Hitvaad highlighted polluted ponds and shrinking water bodies in and around Raipur and flaws in their governance.

Commissioner of Durg, Mrs. Sundarani, showed an inspiring presentation on how Durg overcame the persistent problem of water logging and flooding by building a 14 acre pond.

Sh Amar Aggrawal, Minister Urban Administration, said that Chhattisgarh had thousand of lakes and ponds and majority of them were built by society. But today state is facing water scarcity. Water level has gone down to 400 feet in Raipur. Referring to Indore, he said that city has no water and water is brought from sources 40 kms away. We should harvest surface water for our maximum use, and look at ground water as a “deposit or reserve” only to be used in emergency. He said that the government started the Campaign Sarovar Dharohar with the intention of conservation of water bodies, and has been successful in reviving many water bodies. However, he also added that one of the fallouts has been that apprehension of pollution of these waterbodies has increased. He said 10% of all skin diseases are due to use of polluted water; therefore, we need another campaign to reverse water pollution in these lakes and ponds. He assured all support to efforts of local bodies in this context.

The session was followed by a film based on the book named “Aaj Bhi Khare hain Talaab,” authored by Sh Anupam Mishra, the renowned Gandhian and expert on tradition water harvesting management. The film focuses on the role of society in conservation of ponds and other traditional water bodies.

Post lunch session was a interaction with elected members of local bodies on micro-planning. Soumya Dutta initiated the session with attracting the attention of participants towards Chhattisgarh Meteorology department data that duration of rainfall has reduced from 66 days to 22 days. He raised the question whether cities in Chhattisgarh (or any city for that matter) has a drainage system that can handle this huge and sudden discharge of stormwater. He said that while it must be kept in mind that urban and rural settlements have entirely different characters. He highlighted many shortcomings in the municipal planning and explained that having drainage aligned with roads is highly unscientific, as drainage needs a slope or roads do not. He also added that toposheets are hardly ever used in planning the drainage systems. He also underlined that systems have separate drainage for domestic effluent and chemically contaminated water, as domestically used and rainwater can be purified at a very little cost and

reused for many purposes. He also added that average waste per person is approx. 600 mg per day, and municipal bodies must plan and waste management on this basis. He advised that some of the polluted lakes/ponds can be identified and used for pathological processes and composting of domestic waste.

Sh SC Behar, chair of the session summed up the recommendations. He said that the Urban Administration department should look at the SAPCC and look for the role of municipal bodies in the Plan and improve it. He added that municipal bodies should make their own byelaws rather than just following the model byelaws, which are only for guidance. Building permissions should have essential rainwater harvesting considerations and considerations for natural lighting and ventilation. He also recommended that a two-day workshop be conducted for officers of municipal bodies to discuss how byelaws can be improved for improved drainage and waste management.

Sh Ashok Chandrakar, Additional Director, Urban Administration, said that water harvesting systems are a requirement in the building byelaws however, these are not implemented strictly and permission is often given without it.

Sh Pradeep Sharma reiterated that Chhattisgarh Krishak Biradari in collaboration with beyond Copenhagen will take up micro-planning in 100 villages/block and will soon discuss it with the Urban Administration department with more details.

Sh Tarini Acharya delivered the vote of thanks.