

NATIONAL CONSULTATION ON PARLIAMENTARY OVERSIGHT ON CLIMATE CHANGE POLICIES

24th November, 2011, Delhi

The Consultation was organized by Beyond Copenhagen Collective to discuss the Parliamentary and political oversight on climate change policies. A number of Members of Parliament and policymakers including Shri Basudeb Acharia (CPM), Shri Pradeep Tamta (BJP), Shri P D Rai (SDF), Shri Anil Dave (BJP, RS), Shri Gamvasi (former Minister, Uttarakhand), Dr. Sanjai Paswan (former Union Minister) participated in the Consultation besides representatives of the CSOs.

Mr. Basudeb Acharia (Chair of Parliamentary Committee on Agriculture) delivered the key note address on agriculture and food security in climate change policies. He said that there has been very little discussion on climate change policies in the Parliament. He added that government has failed in its duty to keep the Parliament informed on such important issue. He added that the previous Minister used to keep the members informed by writing letters to them after every major conference however, since the change in the ministry this informal practice too has fell in disuse. The Parliament is not aware what is the position of India for the coming COP in Durban.

Turning to agricultural policies, he said that Indian agriculture is going through worst phase. While the food production has increased to 240 million tones (2010-2011), millions of people are forced to sleep hungry. The gross capital formation in agriculture has decelerated since 1994, and the contribution of agriculture to the GDP has gone down from 51% after independence to less than 15%. Agricultural land is also reducing significantly. He wondered that China with 50% of agricultural land has double of India's food grain production due to quality investment in agricultural research. He emphasized that we have performed extremely poorly in agricultural research, and whatever advances that we have made do not reach farmers. Agricultural subsidy too (50,000 crore last year), is also poorly designed and targeted, he said. He also highlighted the anomaly in determining the Minimum support price, which does not help farmers. However, he cautioned that if the government does not bring desired policy responses on agriculture including the increase in investment, improving agriculture infrastructure, protect farmers from private companies, the country would not be able to meet the rising demand of food grains. He also added that a number of other legislations about to be tabled in the Parliament like BRAI and Food Security Bill etc. have very scant concern for the agriculture and food security in the country, and the Committee on agriculture has already given a number of recommendations to improve the Bill.

Shri P D Rai, shared similar concerns, and said that there has been only one discussion (Dec 3, 1009) on climate change policy, that too on the position of government of India in COP 15, where more than 30 members shared their concerns on climate change and related impacts and asked information from the then Minister. In the meantime while the position of India has changed substantially but there has been no debate. He added that NAPCC was introduced in a very top down manner, and looking at the implications that it might have, it is too serious an issue to be overlooked by the Parliament. Parliament seems to have other priorities for now, as it is faced with numerous issues including Lokpal Bill, Food Security Bill, BRAI etc. he added that India and China together having one third of humanity must take responsibilities to move on green growth. On being informed on the National Action Plan and State Action Plans on climate change and their likely impacts on overall sustainable development scenario he said that these are issues of extreme significance and must be taken up by the Parliament of respective state legislatures. He also assured to guide the coalition in raising this important issue in the Parliament and also in his home state Sikkim.

Shri Pradeep Tamta, spoke on Himalayan ecosystem and power projects. He said that more than half of the world's population is dependant on Himalayan eco system and Himalayan rivers, however, we do not have seemed to understood its importance yet. While the overwhelming opinion in the world now is in favouring of decommissioning big dams, we are still obsessed with making Big dams. Tehri is a classic case for example, which should have given us enough lessons but we are still moving ahead with Pancheswar dam, he lamented. He cited that while we have all the data required on energy, we have no data on how much water is required for irrigation and how much for drinking purposes (in the state of Uttarakhand). Now big dams are being replaced with run off the river projects which are equally dangerous. He said that the world is now concerned about melting of Himalayan glaciers, we have to understand that if we want to save Himalayas, we will have to save Himalayan rivers.

Shri Anil Dave, said that not many are bothered are what will happen to the world rather climate change has given an excellent opportunity to the world to pursue its economic interest. He said that he has been participating in the COP but he felt that the negotiators are hardly bothered by the urgency and seriousness that is required to address the issue. He wondered whether the gravity of the issue will be understood better when powerful countries of the world face disaster of the scale being faced by Tuvalu, Bangladesh and Maldives, or those countries suffering successive droughts in the eastern Africa. He emphasized that greater efforts are required in India to sensitize the policymakers on this critical issue to improve the parliamentary oversight and policymaking. He also said that we need to approach the issue with little bit of spirituality, rather than protecting the nature we should try to serve the nature.

Shri Gamvasi, former rural development Minister of Uttarakhand shared that he recently participated in a consultation organized by beyond Copenhagen along with H M Bahuguna University, Garhwal and was struck by the impact on Himalayan ecosystem, the state of Uttarakhand and the inadequacy of the state Action Plan on climate change. He said that more than 558 hydropower projects are planned in the state, which will definitely have a disastrous impact on water, agriculture, bio-diversity and eco system of the state. He added that he has personally met the Chief Minister asking him not to finalize the proposed draft of the action Plan as it suffers from many unconformities.

Shri Sanjai Paswan, former Union Minister bemoaned the lack of sincerity in the government and its policies to tackle climate change impacts. He shared that in the last few years the ground water level in several districts of Bihar including Patna has gone down alarmingly. This has been brought to light by many CSOs the government has been asked to address the situation by formulating clear policies on water and climate change. The state has also agreed to develop State Action Plan on Climate Change at the earliest, he added. However, he cautioned that there are a number of forces influencing policymaking and CSOs and political parties have to ensure that the policies remain responsive to the larger cause and interests.

All the members of Parliament and members of political parties, expressed a keen interest in climate change policies and their implementation and assured all possible support to the organizers in raising questions, generating debate and improved legislative oversight. Shri Prabhat Jha from PAIRVI delivered the vote of thanks.