

## Where are the local communities?

In these carpeted conference halls, where everybody likes to be popular and say nice things about what their governments and organizations are doing, there exists a deliberate amnesia about the local communities that are forced to put up with the stratagems of states and corporations. These stratagems work to continually deceive the public and evade responsibility required to ensure that nature and natural ecosystems are available for the next generations.

Conferencing in New Delhi and being entertained by high culture, music and dance, one might tend to forget that India also has vast numbers of people struggling on the margins for a decent human existence. It is even easier to forget that in this poor country, it has been the traditional communities of forest dwellers, fisherfolk, and subsistence farmers who live by causing so little damage to the earth while continually protecting and regenerating ecosystems. In India, about 60,000 forest communities have regenerated 16 million hectares of degraded lands. Such work is ongoing. Local community initiatives are true not just for India but also in many other regions of the world. In countries such as Thailand or Laos, for instance, rotational farming systems that use fallows and village gardens have been responsible for maintaining biological diversity and secondary forest areas.

But with the rapid warming of the earth's climate, these communities have faced the most difficulties in their farming, fishing and forest-based livelihoods. Now when governments begin to look for solutions to global warming, it is these same communities that are facing more problems - eviction from forests, displacement by large-scale plantations in the name of "carbon sinks".

At the other end, the affluent with their ecosystem-destroying, high consumptive, luxurious living can afford to maintain these lifestyles only because the life of the earth is being prolonged by the traditional communities and their protection and caring for nature. But who gives these communities any recognition and rewards for their labour? They are invisible and forgotten in international conferences where deals are cynically negotiated in the name of the poor to reinforce the wealth and power of the rich.

## Superceding democracy

As per United Nations (UN) conventions the Vigyan Bhavan, where the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), Eighth Conference of Parties (COP 8) is being held, becomes UN territory for the period of the conference.

This temporary UN territory is located in the Union Territory of New Delhi that has an elected government. But this elected government of New Delhi has no power to make independent decisions. The decisions regarding the governance of New Delhi are the prerogative of the Government of India that has its seat in the capital of New Delhi. The Government of India can also supercede the decisions made by the Union Territory of Delhi. This is the fate of local democracy.

This is anomalous to what prevails in the world today. Many governments including India function in a global context where decisions are made for them by outside political forces more powerful than sovereign nation-states. Those with greater might and bullying capacity can also annul the decisions made by sovereign nation-states. This can be nation-states, inter-governmental organisations or transnational entities. You all surely know who they are.

Welcome therefore to the UN territory of New Delhi, a city symbolic of the state of both India and global democracy. Holding the COP 8 in New Delhi is symbolic in more ways than one. New Delhi represents a convergence: nation-states have no power, elected democracies function as a sham, and both nation-states and the UN increasingly become the captives of corporations. Maybe now we understand the much talked about convergence of environment, economics and governance.

*Some people still argue that human activity cannot be responsible for global warming, or argue that there is no global warming..... On the other hand it is also possible that humans are causing the climate to change, and in that in ten years it will be virtually impossible to reverse the damage. So the question we should be asking ourselves is not, Do we know for certain? We don't. And the sensible thing to do, if we do not have all the facts, is to do our best to learn more about the problem and in the meantime to act in a sophisticated manner - actually a conservative manner - by attempting to limit our exposure to the risk of a non-reversible situation. But this would require that we take a more complex approach to the way in which we make decisions, the way in which we think about ourselves, the way in which we embrace our powers of reason.*

*John Ralston Saul, Canadian writer and philosopher*

## **From the Coastal Communities to the Prime Minister of India**

Honorable Prime Minister,

Accelerated climate change and the options being negotiated on this issue directly impact natural resource based communities - our livelihood resources are either appropriated or degraded pushing us to even greater vulnerability, and therefore put to grave risk our right to life, livelihood and dignity.

We emphatically state that an ecologically sound coastline is essential for the livelihood of traditional coastal communities. We have treated the seacoast as our habitat and as a source of sustenance. We have built our culture, social systems, economy and very identity around these resources.

Traditional coastal communities will directly bear the burnt of sea level rise and other forms of climate change. Our regions are already indiscriminately being used for industrial activity and to dump effluents, disturbing bio-diversity and the marine food chain. Now, climate change is destroying this habitat through submergence, further affecting marine life, and increasing our vulnerability to enhanced and more frequent storm surges.

We are being asked to adapt to and accommodate this crisis, but resources are not being genuinely committed. Voluntary support and market mechanisms are not enough. The traditional coastal communities are not the cause of these problems. We have a right - entitlement - to the resources, including technologies, to face this onslaught on our livelihoods.

Furthermore, the entire debate on Climate Change must be anchored to the conception of sustainable societies; sustainable development needs to be the basis of economic decisions. India as a signatory to the UN Framework Convention Climate Change (UNFCCC) needs to play a leadership role in influencing the global economies to pursue sustainable development options.

The Government of India is demanding an equity-based solution at the international level. This equity needs to be practised at home. Sustainable governance requires that we, local communities, retain a high degree of autonomy in matters concerning our livelihoods, and concerning our local resource; and that our partnership and ownership is essential for survival.

We do hope that you will take up these issues at the COP 8 during its Delhi Session, as well as pursue the path of sustainable societies, sustainable governance and social justice in the domestic domain.

In solidarity

## **Soft COP or Sleepy COP?**

China and Africa Speak ...

The biggest polluters are running away. So what is there in everybody's mind, but not in the official agenda is, how to engage the United States in the Kyoto Protocol. Interestingly, in the opening day's Plenary, except for China and South Africa, no one dared to speak a word about the attitude of the United States in being dismissive of multilateral efforts to find solutions to the problem of global warming. Even these two countries, without specifically naming the US, emphasised that the basic rights of the people is to be protected when considering solutions to climate change. China's representative came down heavily on the issue of unfair treatment meted out to the developing nations. The South African representative said that some countries are not seriously interested in implementing the Kyoto Protocol. The developed countries have ignored the basic economic and social conditions of the developing countries, he said. The Common but Differentiated Principle is not followed in the implementation of the Kyoto Protocol, he added.

### **Jharkhand**

The total population is 218 million and the area of the state 7.98 million hectares. 80 per cent of the people depend on agriculture, and the remaining on mining, forest-use and construction. In the 1960s people experienced all three seasons in one day: morning - sun, afternoon - rain and evening - cold. But after the 20th century, there have been drastic changes in climate due to rapid industrialisation.

In the name of development - tourism, mining, construction of dams and industrialisation, there are a number of projects coming and many people are being displaced.

In Jharkhand, the total amount of rainfall during summer is declining and underground water levels have gone down. Earlier a borewell needed to be only 50 feet deep but now one has to dig up to depths of 200 to 300 feet. Due to the decrease in the rainfall, incidences of heat waves have increased. The change in the climate is affecting the crops. There is a great loss of medicinal plant species. The number of species of leaves and herbs has been reduced from nearly 5000 to 200. Diseases are becoming more frequent especially malaria and lung diseases as well as cancer in uranium mining areas of Jaduguda leading to worsening impoverishment.

Jharkhand is one of Asia's largest forest areas. Now the 40 year cycle of forest resource use of local communities has been disrupted even as tribals are being evicted from their traditional homes in the name of conservation. The natural habitats of elephants are also disappearing forcing the animals to trespass into village areas.

Local communities are facing dire consequences due to the rapid warming of the earth's atmosphere. The present scenario of international negotiations on climate change is insufficient to address the seriousness of the problem. The issue of climate change raises basic questions of social justice and has a direct bearing on development alternatives for the future. We believe that equity should be the basic issue in climate change negotiations and implementation of measures to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions.

We also believe that this norm used at the international level should also be applied consistently within each country. In this context we are alarmed that negotiations do not reflect the concerns of the common person especially in developing countries. The direction in which the negotiation process has led us thus far is diverting attention from the fundamental issues of reducing global greenhouse gas emissions. We want to bring the issue of actual reduction of greenhouse gases and the sustainable livelihoods of local communities as key aspects of global negotiations.

The national debate within India itself and the perspectives presented by the various institutions at the Conference of Parties have eluded two important aspects:

Implementation of climate change on the life and livelihood of local communities, especially those on the economic and environmental margins, and

The critical linkages between the consequences of individual ethics, societal values and consumption patterns of the rich that are directly responsible for the increase in the use of materials that causes greenhouse gas emissions.

We support the stand of the Government of India at the international level that equity should be the basic issue in climate change negotiations and implementations. We expect this to be consistent and ensure equitable development of all people within the country. India must recognize internally the energy efficiency of traditional agricultural practices and encourage systems by seeking special provisions for their protection and expansion. India must provide a lead in validating traditional knowledge

systems and traditional technologies by updating them and emphasizing their value in the context of the climate change debate. India as a signatory to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) should play a leadership role in influencing the developed economies to pursue sustainable developing options. In this, India has to search for alternatives and demonstrate the potential of these options.

We support the current understanding that the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) will not include nuclear power and the developed world will not seek to implement under CDM any programme involving nuclear energy. This is vindicating INECC's position that nuclear energy is not clean either on environmental or ethical grounds. We also question the very basis of efficient technology on which a mechanism is considered to be "clean". For example, newer methods of mining and processing coal, which itself is a non-renewable resource, do not constitute a clean mechanism. In the current circumstances, we must argue for development based on renewable sources of energy. This will provide a greater thrust to renewable energy promotion in the country, which has a tremendous potential for growth.

The crucial ethical problem related to justice is listening to the voice of the marginalised majority. They have a right to their livelihoods and livelihood decisions. These communities, particularly indigenous people, have used and managed forests as their sustainable sustenance and have built their cultures, social systems, economies and identities around these resources. The identity of these communities is symbiotically linked to their habitat and cannot be sacrificed. The new concept of forests as "carbon sinks" and a commercial commodity ignores the fact that the sustenance, culture, habitat and identity of indigenous communities depend on these forests.

From INECC

*The Indian Network on Ethics and Climate Change (INECC) is a network of individuals and organization representatives who are concerned with the issue of 'Climate Change' with particular reference to the Indian situation.*



cartoon courtesy CSE

## Baalu Speak.....

**"The Prime Minister has been instrumental for major community-based initiatives which have catalysed sustainable development."** (emphasis added)

"Higher priority should be given to **adaptation**, a path way to sustainable development, keeping in view that those with the least resources have the least capacity to adapt and are the most vulnerable." (emphasis added)

"I will be available to you at all times, without coming in the way of your experiencing the sights in our capital city. Many friends have indicated to me how impressed they are by the manner in which the city's air has been cleaned up in recent years. You will notice that the public transport in New Delhi has switched over to compressed natural gas. This reflects India's technology vision on sustainable development, which, indeed covers a wide range including agriculture, water conservation, forestry, renewables and other sectors."

"I would like this Conference to be remembered as a meet, which connected well with the most vulnerable stakeholders - the marginal farmer, the fisherman, the small livestock owner and others, including the indigenous communities. We must focus on those which have contributed the least to the problem, but are the most vulnerable, I have often thought whether we have kept ourselves alive to the ethical and moral dimensions of the global problem. And, is there any shade of a metropolitan mind-set or approach, which is coming in the way of our putting the last first."

### **Forest Conservation - a recent move by the government**

The order passed by Dr. V. Bahuguna - Inspector General of Forests, Ministry of Environment and Forests on 3rd May 2002, has given a time bound action plan to all the Chief Secretaries, Principal Secretaries of State and Principal Conservators, that all the tribals should be evacuated from the forest lands by September 2002. The conservation of forests and people's dependence on forest resources are seen as inimical to each other.

This has a negative impact on the ecosystem in tribal areas, and is adversely affecting the climate. Though the Government of India and the World Bank say that people must be involved in the decision-making over the use and protection of resources, in practice, this does not happen in the Joint Forest Management and Community Forest Management project that has an investment budget of Rs. 640 crores (US\$130 million) for afforestation. All the government-sponsored programmes are conservation-oriented without any involvement of the local communities.

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