Beyond Rio

The United Nation Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) has been held at Rio de Janeiro, Brazil during the first half of June 1992. The Summit of Heads of State at Rio centro accomplished a few things: Conventions on Climate change and Biodiversity, Rio Declaration, Principles on Forest and Agenda 21. Various opinions on the success or otherwise of the summit have already been expressed since then.

Parallel to the official UNCED at Rio centro, and sometimes in conjunction to that, a Global Forum of citizens, youth, indigenous people, women's organizations, and a wide spectrum of Non-Governmental Organisations was also held at Flamengo Park, one of the famous beaches in the heart of Rio. The Forum, became an opportunity for exchange, dialogue, networking and solidarity. Besides, the Forum also generated a host of treatises (or charters) reflecting the aspirations of the civil society on issues affecting the daily strategy of poverty, development and environment. These focused on such a wide range of issues such as Environment and Poverty, Debt and Environment, Women and Environment, Environment Education, etc. The principles and frameworks elaborated at Flamengo Park are certainly far more futuristic than the Conventions and Declarations of Rio centro. The former represent the process of coalescing of various sectors of civil society; the latter represent the bureaucratic compromises of National states.

Not withstanding these differences, it is now possible for the civil society to demand the accountability of the states vis-a-vis the Conventions and Declarations of Rio centro. To begin with, Agenda 21 presents a wide range of initiatives that the states have committed themselves to undertake in preparation for the twenty first century. This Agenda also lays down the principles of accountability of State actions to various sections of the civil society (citizen groups, women's group, indigenous people, NGOs, etc.). Therefore, it seems that the next set of steps on behalf of various actors of civil society in different regions and countries of the world is to create a process of public education, policy influence and monitoring State actions to ensure that concrete steps towards implementation of Agenda 21 begin and continue.

In this context, several interesting pronouncements were made by the Indian Prime Minister and Minister for Environment and Forest, at Rio centro. Shri Kamal Nath, Minister for Environment and Forest even proclaimed (in an attempt to challenge the American initiative to control our Forests) that forests have always been community-controlled and community-managed in India. True, it was so till the British Colonial Rule (in the 1850-1945 period) and the Indian Government subsequently, took away the management and control of forest resources from the tribals and other forest dwellers. Therefore, this renewed recognition by our Minister for Environment and Forest of the local community's rights of control and management of forests is highly welcome. Beyond Rio, we can now work towards making our forests community-controlled and community-managed in India once again. This would be the first concrete follow-up of UNCED and the beginning of implementation of Agenda 21.
NEW ECONOMIC POLICY: HOW ENVIRONMENT-FRIENDLY?

On 17th June 1992, Dr. Manmohan Singh, Union Finance Minister delivered the Foundation Day lecture of the Society for the Promotion of Wasteland Development on the theme “Environment and New Economic Policies”. This rhetoric lecture is basically a promotional speech for implementation of the new economic policy, which is purported to be environment-friendly.

To begin with, Dr. Manmohan Singh emphasizes that “Environmental degradation can be caused both by poverty and lack of development as well as by uncontrolled economic development and that development is necessary to tackle the poverty-related environmental problems”.

This statement is full of contradictions. It is the current development paradigm which is causing the environmental degradation, not the ‘poverty’ or ‘lack of development’, as claimed by Manmohan Singh, rather, “the uncontrolled economic development” which he mentioned as the third factor causing environmental degradation. If the current ‘regulated’ model of development is causing ‘uncontrolled’ mining of our natural resource base (e.g. at Palamau in Bihar, Kota in Rajasthan, etc.), then this devastation is bound to increase in geometric progression with the advent of the new ‘de-regulated’ economic policy.

He further states that: “The survival strategies of the poor, particularly their search for food, fodder, fuel and shelter, often leads to over-utilization of available natural resources, thereby accentuating the problem of environmental degradation. Therefore, eradication of poverty and control of population-growth have to constitute an integral part of a strategy of protecting the environment”.

It is an overstatement that the survival strategy of poor leads to over-utilization of available natural resources and the erosion, thereby, of our natural resource base. In fact, it is the centralised policy of the government to use our forest resources as a main revenue-earning source which causes this erosion. It is the forest department which claims the ownership of one-fourth of India’s total land mass. And finally, it is the State (controlling and developing India’s forests, dams, power stations, mines, roads and the large part of its industry), which is not just the protector but also the most feared destroyer of our country’s environment.

Further blaming the poor, Dr. Manmohan Singh adds: “Since most of the poor live on the edge of subsistence, effective strategies for removal of poverty and control of population require purposeful government Intervention to help the poor to earn a decent livelihood and to improve their access to basic social services such as health and education”.

It is an inverted argument that puts poverty and population as causes of environmental degradation. There is no evidence from everywhere in the world to suggest that poverty causes degradation and that high population causes poverty. In fact, the arguments are quite reverse. It is the structural inequality and erosion of access to natural resources that accentuates poverty. The global history clearly indicates that population growth and incidence of poverty are co-related. Once interventions aimed at reducing poverty begin to succeed, there is a marked impact on the rate of population growth. Hence, poverty is not a cause of, but consequence of, environmental degradation. And investments in human resources, along with equitable access to natural resources, can arrest these trends. Let us further compare this rhetoric with the policies of the Finance minister. The 1992-93 national budget has slashed the National Health programme (i.e., control programme for T.B. by 27%, Malaria by 80.9% and Goitre by 88.9%). Not only this but even the rural water supply scheme is slashed by 59% and the Urban by 35%. There is also a substantial cut in the Rural Sanitation expenditure. The Education Budget is cut by 5%. The elementary education budget is slashed by 14%, Non-formal education by 14% and technical education by 15%.

Manmohan Singh argues: “Some people have been suggesting that the increase in incentives for agricultural exports implicit in the new policy reform could have adverse environmental effects. I see no valid basis for this conclusion ..............”

It is a “green” facade that the policy thrust on export of horticultural products and promotion of agro-based industries will benefit the environment. As a matter of fact, this policy measure will culminate into creating imbalances in the domestic consumption pattern. Even today, in certain areas, vast rural tracts of agricultural fields are being acquired for cash economy purposes (like sugarcane field, potato cultivation, etc.). This will promote the tendency to convert food-group areas into cash group ones. Such over use of natural resources (land, water, forest) has been the major cause of environmental degradation. (Outlined and intensification of land and desertification; extreme shortages of drinking water; increased salinity and water logging of prime agricultural land are all consequences of a pattern of over-use linked to the market based on ‘green-revolution’ and allied packages. Further promotion of same strategies, resulting from globalization of this market and intensified cash-cropping, will further destroy the natural resource base and accentuates poverty and inequality in society.
Concerned by the prevailing drought in Rajasthan, a NGO meeting was convened by the NGO Co-ordination Network on 7th April at I.S.I., Delhi. Following this, Srijan Lokhit Samiti in collaboration with PRIA called a day-long meeting at Rewa to discuss ways to combat the regions of drought in Baghalakand region of M.P. 'Akshaya Samiti' was consequently set up to coordinate the efforts waged against the drought.

Similar discussions were held among different groups/individuals in Gujarat and Maharashtra as well. Given the concern of these people about the prevailing situation, a regional meeting of groups and individuals from Rajasthan, Maharashtra, M.P. and Gujarat was held on "The Management of Drought Distress in the New Economic Scenario" at Udaipur on 16th May. (Proceedings of the meeting are available at PRIA). The meeting was jointly organised by Akal Mukti Andolan, Udaipur; Akshaya Samiti, Rewa; Unnati, Ahmedabad, NGO Coordination Network, Jaipur and PRIA. It was decided to submit a memorandum to the various government departments, both at the state and the central level. The memorandum stated:

A one day meeting on "The Management of Drought Distress in the New Economic Scenario" took place in Udaipur on the 16th of May, 1992. The aim of the meeting was to discuss the prevailing drought and scarcity conditions in the western part of our country i.e. Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Gujarat. People belonging to various NGOs and people's movements gathered together to assess the extent of drought in areas other than their own and to pinpoint the various factors that caused this present crisis to occur.

A complex web of factors causing drought and scarcity came up during the discussions, clearly demonstrating the interconnections between the ecological balance, environmental degradation, economic growth and the role of the state. The discussion was not limited to the impact of these conditions but also looked for the causes and the responses of various agents.

The participants made presentations on the conditions and on the extent of distress caused by the scarcity conditions, this year. It was clear that similar conditions exist in each state. It was also clear that, in the final analysis, the government was unresponsive as it was never before.

It would be worthwhile to see the kind of presentations that were made and then draw the common conclusions from them. This would clearly identify the similarity of conditions existing in these areas.

Drought Scenario
In the case of Maharashtra, two third of the last Kharif crop was destroyed. There is a drinking water problem in 29,000 villages. These conditions of drought and scarcity have affected 3 crore people in 26 districts of the state, especially in Marathwada as well as Vidharbha region. The Employment Guarantee Scheme is providing some help to the people but there are not enough resources with the government to pay the wages on time. Lack of fodder has caused the sale of cattle and that of water in forcing the people to migrate.

Looking at the Beech district, the impact of the drought this year has been worse than that in 1972. While in 1972, the government actively provided fodder, drinking water and undertook water conservation schemes, the only activity undertaken this year by the EGS programme is land-levelling. It can be clearly seen that this activity is being done on the fields of large farmers, who would directly benefit from this and thus, lead to a higher inequality in the long run. The maximum wages paid through Employment Guarantee Scheme (EGS) are Rs. 10 in this area. The factor causing the most distress in the area is the non-functioning of the PDS (Public Distribution System). This has put a further pressure on the already distressed population.

In Latur district, though water is available, all water storage is controlled by the rich. A hard struggle had to be undertaken.
by the people to force the government to give even half kg. of grain as a part of the daily wages under EGS.

In Gujarat, the government has declared 7617 villages as scarcity hit and 3,764 villages as semi-scarcity hit out of a total of 18,296 villages i.e. 62% of all villages declared affected. [If the rainfall is less than 125 mm then the area is declared "scarcity hit". Scarcity is also declared on the basis of the assessment of the yield (annnawari assessment). If the production is 25% less than that compared to previous years, then the area is classified as scarcity hit and if there is a 25% to 50% reduction then it is classified as a semi-scarcity hit area].

Despite the realization of the government that 36 lakh people will be seeking employment and an assistance of Rs.650 crores is needed to tackle the drought, the government has not yet thought of creating job opportunities. Apart from digging, no other scarcity-works are being considered by the government. Since the state is affected more often than not by droughts, there is a need to redefine scarcity works. Added to this, food, water, fodder and other issues need to be addressed on a long term basis. This year's drought clearly shows that protection of cattle has been seriously neglected.

In Madhya Pradesh, about 1.25 crore people are suffering from drought-induced distress. Tribals in the Bindhy region have been forced to consume only roots and herbs. Drought relief work is visible only on paper, prices of essential food items have increased multifold. All this has resulted in starvation and migration at large scale.

The average wages received by men are Rs.7/- a day while they are Rs.5/- a day for the women.

The people are in such a state that they prefer to be fed in exchange for work rather than take money for it. This is not so hard to believe, given the way prices have gone up in the region. Also, the PDS, where ever it is functional, is so erratic in its distribution that people are always facing a shortage of grain.

The Rajasthan Government declared some villages as scarcity affected only on 29th February, 1992. Today, there are about 5 lakh people living in 70,000 villages of Rajasthan who have been adversely affected by drought. Lack of fodder is the reason for the death of cattle and its sale at very low rates. Even though many more villages have been officially declared as scarcity-affected, relief work has not begun in most of the places. Even at the places where there is some amount of relief work, there are complaints of erratic payment of wages. The PDS has completely failed with the people not having any source of supply of grain. Hence, massive migration is taking place. This starvation and consequent migration is forcing them towards mines, cities and factories in expectation of some work.

There are similar responses to these conditions by the people in each of the four states. Distress-migration in search of water and food on one hand, and the forced migration of people on the other, in order to allow their cattle and goats and sheep to survive. Relief work is the only available alternative with the people but, as already stated, there is just not as much relief work started so as to provide employment to all those who need it. Even those who do get employed in such work face problems. These are: the distance they have to travel to the worksite, underpayment of wages, non-payment of wages and the fact that wages are paid in cash. The last factor is of great importance in a scarcity condition where there is no assured supply of food grains.

**Issues**

Linked to the last point, is the issue of the functioning of the Public Distribution System. This is to provide the poorer sections of society with a safety net, but increasingly we find that it has not been operating properly, if at all. For example, the
quote of wheat has been reduced to 3 kg. per month per unit from 10 kg. per month per unit in Bikaner district of Rajasthan; allocation of wheat per family per month is cut down from 20 kg. to 10 kg. in Gujarat; in Sidhi district of Madhya Pradesh, it has been reduced from 12 kg. to 3.5 kg. per card holder per month and in Maharashtra, the trend is no different. This is merely the reduction in allocation, which has been a direct result of the cut in the food subsidy. Another direct result, which operates on the demand side, is the increase in the price of items sold through the PDS.

The other aspect of the issue is one of delivery. Supply is erratic, the quantity delivered, more often than not, is lower than the allotted amount and no prior information is given to the people as to when the next consignment of the foodgrain would come. The implication of this is that people are enforced to buy at the open market rates or that supplies are cornered by those who have the ready cash the day the supply comes. This obviously has the effect of further distress on the people who are surviving on meagre wages. Another disturbing fact is about the PDS in Gujarat, where the distribution is done at a highly subsidized level to the customer. This reduces his real purchasing power on one hand, and allows the shopkeepers to sell the rest of the goods at the market price, on the other.

At a broader level, exists the issue of devolution of funds. The Union Government, through the 16th Finance Commission, has created a National Calamity Relief Fund which has allotted Rs.800 crores per year to the various states, with the centre contributing 3/4th of it and each state contributing 1/4th of their share. The fund is to be used for any calamity which occurs in the various states. It is to allow the states to tackle the problem themselves rather than approach the centre every time a calamity occurs. The centre is to help out the state only in case of "rarest of rare" Calamities.

The allocation for this fund has been done on the basis of an average of 10 years of the central allocation for disaster management. This estimate was felt to be arbitrary as natural calamities cannot be averaged out. It was also clear that the centre, over the past few years, had been sanctioning amounts for tackling such calamities as a portion of the state's demand i.e., the centre felt that the states were overplaying the situation and so allotted a reduced amount, however justified the claim. The methodology adopted for the determination of allocation of resources of the CRF (Calamity Relief Fund) is flawed.

In a time when various parts of the country are facing severe scarcities and there are no significant sources of income generation, the last safety net in the form of PDS is being curtailed by the government. This is clear both from the ground level reports and also the Union Government's budget for 1992-93, where there has been a 12.28% cut in nominal terms in the 1991-92 revised budget for food subsidy. The fact that there has been a cut in the JRY (Jawahar Rozgar Yojana) budget also indicates the continuing hardships on a population already under pressure.

Another disturbing fact is that whatever relief work has been started would be closed by the 30th of June, be it the government relief work or that of the voluntary bodies and others carried out on behalf of the government. The reason, as far as we could decipher, is that the monsoon sets in around this period and so no other work is required. This is because the first rains would allow the situation to recover and that would be the end of the crisis period. What is not realised is that it is only after the harvesting of the Kharif crop that the misery of the people might end. They would still not be in a position to fight the starvation until the crops are ready. Also, agrarian repression starts with the process of crop cultivation. Since the agricultural labourers are not in a position to bargain after a hard, dry and jobless year, the chances of entering into bondage increase greatly. It is in this context that it was felt that relief work should not stop around the 30th of June but should be carried on till at least the beginning of December.

Another issue discussed was that of the Scarcity Manual, which has not been updated since the British times. This allows only the work of digging. The government should think of more innovative and productive ways of employment. It does not serve any purpose if the relief-work labour is used in unproductive works. It should be employed in drought-proofing work rather than in seasonal and erratic drought relief work. This would then lead to a
better land and water utilization, contributing to a higher moisture level and thus, reducing the probability of drought and scarcity conditions.

This sort of work has to be done on an ongoing basis rather than as a sudden response to a drought year. It is only by a continuous effort towards drought-proofing that we can be in a position whereby we can reduce the probability of developing scarcity conditions. It is important to note that the investment in drought proofing infrastructure is not enough to solve the problem, especially in the short run. For this, we would require a fully operational and functional PDS, productive income generation schemes linked to the rational mode of livelihood of the people, and a truly democratic and welfare state which is responsible to the people of India and not to the international and national elite.

Action Needed

In light of the above, the voluntary agencies and activists of these four states resolved to urge the central and state governments to take immediate and urgent steps with respect to the following:

1. The impact of New Economic Policies on drought situation has worsened the distress of the rural poor. The most significant manner of impact is through the sluggishness and indifference of the government machinery to respond to drought and famine. On one hand, this is being made out as a situation of resource crunch (particularly in light of restrictions on over-drafts of State Governments and lack of response from the Central government). Secondly, there is a mental indifference reflecting diminishing responsibility of the state to play its welfare role. Many political leaders and government officials are urging people to help themselves, without any support from the government machinery. There is an urgent need to re-vitalize the government relief effort in drought affected areas and to continue these till the end of 1992 (after the harvesting of next Kharif crop). All state governments and other bodies (like CAPART) must be asked to take relief efforts seriously, even at this stage.

2. The second impact of New Economic Policies is reflected in the scarcity of foodgrain. The enormous price increase of food-grain (even coarse grain like corn and bajara) coupled with the disfunctioning Public Distribution System is the direct result of the new policies. Allocation of food-grain under PDS has been substantially cut, and the price of such food ration increased during the past six months. Retargetted PDS promised by the government is yet to be implemented. Urgent and targeted availability of cheap foodgrain in drought and famine-affected areas must be ensured to minimize the continuing starvation.

3. Further hardships in water scarcity, soil conservation and afforestation efforts is likely to take place, due to steep budgetary cuts in these programmes made in 1992-93 budget, under the New Policies. This will further aggravate the situation in the coming period. Water provision and JRY allocation must be enhanced at this juncture.

4. The continuing occurrence of drought and associated scarcity, even 45 years after independence, is a result of certain destructive development policies. Degradation of natural resources, deforestation, indiscriminate mining, pollution, intensive exploitation of ground-water, rejection of traditional practices of water harvesting, and forest conservation have resulted in a higher frequency of wider and more intense impact due to drought and severity of scarcity caused by the drought in the country. Permanent and long-term solution to drought distress is only possible when relief and development efforts are viewed in an integrated and environmentally sustainable manner. Policies that result in environmental destruction further undermine any effort at drought proofing. As mentioned earlier, pressures on further deterioration of environment and degradation of natural resources are mounting under the New Economic Policies. A serious review of all developmental policies and programmes in light of worsening environment and destruction and alienation of natural resources need to be done to avoid future famines in the country.

5. Finally, active and central participation of people's organization and voluntary agencies in short-term relief and long-term environmental regeneration needs to be ensured if effective measures to deal with drought generated distress are to be taken.
Governments' Indifference to Drought

It is reliably learnt that the central government is not at all responding to the needs of the drought-affected people. A number of state governments submitted requests for additional grants. Subsequently, the central team visited a few states. But, South Block is still unmoved. Crisis Management Group (CMG) in the agriculture ministry, supposed to coordinate and monitor the relief work, is merely following the Ninth Finance Commission's recommendations: "Drought is a state responsibility. Central government will provide an additional fund only if there is a National calamity. Drought in Rajasthan, Gujarat (and resultant suffering of the people) is a routine affair. CMG is merely playing the role of a post office, merely passing on the requests to the concerned department. Recently, state relief commissioners had a conference here. It was not for tackling the present drought situation. It was a routine pre-monsoon annual meeting to take stock of the situation about state governments' plan during the monsoon.

Government Efforts Towards Drought Mitigation

The semi-arid and arid regions in India claim more than 60 percent of the total land cover. These are chronically deficit regions with scanty or erratic rainfall. Drought-prone areas are susceptible to scarcity and famine conditions. Usually, there is a prolonged spell of drought which calls for famine relief measures. Most of these relief measures are short-term or single purpose measures and do not contribute to the formation of a capital base which provides a multiplier effect on either income or employment. On the other hand, continued drought leads to erosion of the resource and asset base of the poor farmers, leading them towards destitution.

The regular drought and the truncate appeals of the state governments to the Centre for funds or other assistance for drought relief did suggest the near failure of the Drought Prone Area Programme (DPAP). A close examination of DPAP has, therefore, become necessary in the larger interest of the country for mitigating the evil effects of drought in the future.

During the last 30 years, the government has set up a number of research institutes e.g., Central Arid Zone Research Institute (CAZRI), Jodhpur. Ten soil Conservation Research, Demonstration and Training Centres were established during the early Sixties. Since the Third Five-year Plan, the Centrally sponsored scheme of soil and water conservation in the catchments of River Valley projects is operational in 17 states covering 27 catchments. During the Seventh plan, a new scheme - "National Watershed Development Programme for Rainfed Agriculture" was started. The main components of this programme are to harvest water and conserve soil moisture from the low rainfall which also varies highly in these areas and to extend farming practices and cropping systems which increase production by minimizing the yield-risks. The soil conservation programme in the country spent Rs 548 crores in the Sixth Plan period to treat about 6 million hectares of land. The Seventh Plan outlay was Rs 740 crores. Will the contour bunds made with two-thirds of this money be maintained and the follow-up conservation farming be done by the people on the bunded land? Will the trees planted thus, survive? From some evaluation studies, the answer to both these questions is a big 'No'. The country has taken 30 years to treat 30 million hectares of degraded land. Total degraded land is about 175 million hectares. At this rate, it will take us more than 100 years to give the minimum treatment.

The land problem is not a static one. During the next century, the amount of degraded land will increase further. The already developed areas in the meantime, without people's participation in maintenance (as is the case at present), will again need treatment. Are we then, fighting a losing battle? The answer again, is in the affirmative. There is no scope for a people-centred approach in the whole programme which is the reason for its failure. Another disturbing issue is that the government also is not seriously interested in this effort. Huge amounts are spent on big irrigation projects, which lead to massive problems. But, integrated watershed management is not a high priority area. In the total budget of the Agriculture Ministry, soil and water conservation has an allocation of even less than 10 percent.

LAND & PEOPLE
DROUGHT PRONE AREA PROGRAMME

Rural Works programme that started in the late Sixties was widened to involve the people of drought-affected areas in productive work schemes which would utilize their labour and provide off-season incomes while building up some infrastructure for soil and water conservation. During the Fifth Plan, Government of India started the DPAP with the view to "eliminate or reduce considerably the incidence of drought and scarcity in these vulnerable areas over a period of time, and also to help the small farmers, marginal farmers and agricultural labourers in raising their income levels. The strategy is to improve the economy of the drought-prone areas through a package of infrastructural and on-farm development activities with the objective of optimum utilisation of land, water, human and livestock resources of the area." Initially, it was started in 532 blocks. The coverage during the Sixth Plan, was 511 blocks of 70 districts in 13 states. During the Sixth Plan, Rs. 350 crores were allocated and Rs 310 crores spent. In the Seventh Plan, central government allocation was Rs 237 crores with the same amount of matching grant from state governments.

Despite huge investment, the intensity of drought is increasing. The drought has affected more villages today than in the past.

DPAP in Sidhi District

Sidhi district is a drought prone area. Over 80 percent depends upon agriculture, but there is a deficit in foodgrain production. Soil in not good, land is undulating and irrigation facilities are also poor. The DPAP was initiated in 1974-75 and it covered the entire district (8 blocks). During 1974-75 to 1979-80, Rs. 7.09 crores were allocated and Rs 5.94 crores were spent on the district. Minor Irrigation accounts for the bulk of allotment and expenditure and the allotment under this head increased from Rs 56 lakhs in 1974-75 to 129.50 lakhs in 1978-79. During the last 12 years, an additional 12-15 crores must have been spent. But, the result ??

<p>| Drought affected State governments have asked the Centre for additional aid for Relief |
|---------------------------------------------|------------------|------------------|
| State | State’s Demand | CRF from Centre |</p>
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Increasing Number of Villages are Being Affected

In Gujarat, the drought this year has affected far more villages than in the past. In 1968-69, the drought had affected 10,323 villages; in 1972-73, 12,592 villages; and in 1974-75, 12,746 villages. The 1987 drought had affected 13,068 villages and this year the state government has declared 7,490 villages as scarcity-affected and another 10,988 as facing drought conditions.
ORIENTATION PROGRAMME ON COASTAL RESEARCH MARCH

During July 13-16, at Dhyana Ashram, Madras, PRIA conducted an orientation programme on Participatory Research for the group associated with Coastal Poor Development Action Network. This group will participate in the Eastern Coast Research March to study the Coastal Poor. Thirty two participants from various organisations from Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Orissa attended the programme. As a follow up, Coastal Research March is planned in three stretches, from Kanyakumari to Srikakulam, during August - September 1992.

POLICE REPRESSIO AGAINST SOCIAL ACTIVISTS

On 5th June 1992, one Advait member of the Kashtakari Sanghatana was killed and a few others were seriously injured in an indiscriminate and unwarranted Police firing at Patelli village in Thanjavur district, Mahashatra. Later in the evening, Pradeep Prabhu and Ms. Shiraj Behara, two activists of the Kashtakari Sanghatana, were arrested under the false charge of attempting to murder the police personnel by instigating the villagers to throw stones at the Police. However, at the time of the alleged incident, both of them were not present in the village. Both of them were remanded to Police Custody till 19th June, without asking them any question. It needs to be stated that a sustained harassment of the Advaitas in the area has been going on for a considerable length of time. Advait lands and village common lands have been taken illegally away from the People. The Kashtakari Sanghatana is a people's organisation, working amongst the tribals of the area for the past 15 years and organizing tribal attacks against land alienation. Over the years, this people's organization has emerged as a strong force to reckon with. Local political leaders have deliberately made false charges against them. The incident of 5th June is not an isolated one. This is an attempt to strangle poor people's efforts in controlling their right over land which provides them sustenance. Moreover, these are the people who have been oppressed and exploited through generations. It is a part of a wider national trend where oppression is meted out in the most violent manner to those who can least afford it. We strongly condemn the incidents and demand an immediate withdrawal of the police case against Pradeep and Shiraj and a judicial inquiry be ordered into all the incidents prior to and during the firing.

ANOTHER WAY TO CONTROL FOREST

In recent years, there has been a sharp increase in the number of national parks and sanctuaries as they have gone up from 126 in 1975 to 419 in 1991 and from 5 to 76, respectively. Today, about 1,08,324.53 Sq. Km. of land area is under the government declared sanctuaries and about 25,278.26 Sq. Km. under the national parks. The government's "concern" to preserve India's fast diminishing wildlife also illustrates the loosening hold of the traditional rights of the local people over minor forest produce like fuelwood, fodder, herbs, etc. This has led to the confrontation between the forest department and the villagers in many areas, where the local people have taken up the cause of their discriminatory exclusion from their own environment.

In the last few months, we are getting disturbing news from different parts of the country about forest department's excessive control and denying the rights of the people in the national parks and wildlife sanctuaries. There have been reports from Puliwaal Sanctuary in Udaipur, where the forest department did not allow the villagers to collect Tendu leaves. Same nature of harassment is going on at Sanjay (Dubri) Sanctuary in Siddhi district, M.P. Those groups working in the forest area and facing some problems can write to us (PRIA) as we are shortly planning to organise a meeting on this issue.

SARDAR SAROVAR ON HOLD?

The independent review commission set up by the World Bank strongly criticized the Sardar Sarovar project authorities in their report stating that: (i) they have grossly underestimated the severity of rehabilitation and health problems, (ii) they have supplied incorrect hydrological data, (iii) the project will not perform as planned as the back-water effect of sedimentation into the reservoir is not even considered. (iv) The project is based on fragile and unfounded assumption which overstates the benefits and understates the costs. The committee, thus, called for immediate suspension of further work on the dam and canal until the resettlement and environmental concerns have been looked into. In spite of these critical comments, World Bank, government of India and the State government decided to go ahead with the project. The World Bank president declared the Bank's continued support to the project. The most pertinent question is that, why did World Bank set up this committee when they were not prepared to accept their recommendations?" The Commission visited the villages earmarked to be submerged, talked to the villagers, project authorities, concerned State governments and the Central government, NGO representatives and has covered the project in a broad spectrum. This unilateral decision on the part of the World Bank, clearly shows that they are not at all prepared to listen to the people's view point. We strongly oppose this dictatorship.
Towards a Green World

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The significance of this timely book by CSE is that it allows the people of the developing countries in getting an overview of the global environmental issues and also presents a more viable alternative.

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For further information, Contact:
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Forest and People

This report identifies issues related to the development of forest dependents. It highlights the perceptions of the people in the villages on commonly owned minor forest produce. It focuses on the utilisation of minor forest produce in South Bihar which relates to forest-livelihoods of forest dependent population in this area. The report argues for a policy review that will not only deregulate minor forest produce collection, but also support forest based livelihoods constructively.

Agriculture and People

This report on Eco Health Hazards of chemical based agriculture and proposed techniques for sustainable development, by Dr. A. T. Dudani and Gill Carr Harris, establishes the harmful effects of conventional agriculture, especially that of chemical fertilizers and pesticides on the rural environment. It discusses sustainable agriculture where a holistic perspective about rural environment and people’s health is debated. It presents some case studies which offer sustainable agriculture alternatives. The report consists of a bibliography along with a directory of some individual institutions and government agencies, involved in the practice and promotion of sustainable agriculture in India and Overseas.

For copies of ‘New Dimensions of Eco Health’ and ‘Forest and People’, write to:
South-South Solidarity
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This annual publication of the world Bank has focused on ‘Development and the Environment’ as its theme this year. The main message of this Report is the need to integrate environmental considerations into development policy making. It is an attempt to explore the links between economic development and the environment.

The report discusses how developing countries can function in the field of development while conserving their environment but avoids any discussion on important issues or practices that the developed countries or multilateral institutions (of which the World Bank is one) indulge in.

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