PEOPLE'S STRUGGLE FOR INFORMATION

The Mansi-Wakal Project, located in the Jhadol tehsil of Udaipur district, is envisaged to meet the growing need for drinking water in the city of Udaipur. The present estimate of the project is Rs. 715 crores. Under the project, two medium dams will be built on the rivers Mansi and Wakal. The waters stored in the dam will be transported to the city, which is 60 km away from the dam sites, by pipelines.

On June 5, 1989, (World Environment Day) this project was announced by the Rajasthan government. On June 20, 1989, the project was inaugurated by the then Chief Minister of Rajasthan, Mr. Shiv Charan Mathur. Since then, the project has become controversial. On one hand, the villagers situated near the dam site are raising their fears about their displacement if the dam comes up and, on the other, the project authorities have made no attempts to inform the people about the dam, the submergence of the area, compensation, rehabilitation and other vital information related to the project. As a result, there is growing confusion among the population of the area as to whether the project will affect them or not.

The official claim is that the project will submerge 380 hectares of land, 60 hectares of forest land and displace 500 families residing in the 4 villages in the Jhadol tehsil of Udaipur. But the people believe that this information is not true. They claim that the figures are much higher.

The project has been well publicised to the city population of Udaipur, whom it is going to benefit, but the villagers, who are going to be directly affected by the project, have been kept totally in the dark. So far, the villagers have not been able to make up their minds whether to oppose or support the project, since they have no information about it. This state of affairs has led to growing discontent and unrest amongst the population about the proposed project.

The villagers are getting organised and mobilised under the banner of “Chandreshwar Kisan Sankarsh Samiti”. For the past few months, the Samiti has been able to put pressure on the dam officials and other concerned departments to inform them about the dam project, submergence of area, compensation and rehabilitation and other aspects related to the project. In this regard, the Samiti made many attempts but all failed. Whenever they asked the concerned officials for information, the officials responded negatively. As a result, they carried out a dharna in front of the office of the Executive Engineer of the Project. The Executive Engineer told them that he, along with other concerned officials, will come to the village Chandwas to meet and inform the villagers...
about the project on January 3, 1990. In the meanwhile, the activists of the Samiti organised a series of meetings in the villages likely to be submerged to prepare people to ask questions to the officials.

On January 3, 1990, the officials of the dam project visited the village to provide information to the villagers about the dam, submergence, displacement and other aspects related to the project. Nearly 500 villagers and activists from many social action groups were waiting for them since morning. The official team consisted of the Executive Engineer, the S.D.O., the Tehsildar and the patwars of the area. A question-answer session began. While the people kept demanding that the officials provide them relevant information related to the project - its objective, purpose and benefits and costs - the officials kept providing them information about how much compensation will be given to village land, wells and trees. The session was marked with many heated arguments. At times, the officials were not able to answer the questions raised by the villagers and judging the mood of the villagers, accepted that they did not know anything about it. The villagers also complained that many project officials, without giving any notice, have entered into their fields and dug the land, thus causing damage to the standing crops. The Executive Engineer apologised and assured the people that the damage will be soon compensated.

The activists also complained that the section 4 notice under the Land Acquisition Act is not valid since the notice does not carry adequate information related to the dam project, while the Act says that this information should be sufficiently dealt with in the notice. Also, this notice was not served to each and every villager whose land is being acquired. The notice was just displaced in one place in the village. While most of the population in the village is illiterate, no attempts were made by the authorities to call a meeting in the village to inform the people about the land acquisition. The officials agreed that the land acquisition process was not carried out properly.

When the activists demanded that they should be given a copy of the Detailed Project Report, feasibility report and other documents related to the project, the officials refused to do so. The project reports and other documents are not classified documents such as "Secret", "Top-Secret", "Confidential", the activists argued. But the officials were reluctant to provide a copy of the report. After much heated arguments when the villagers said that they will not allow the officials to go back with the project report and other documents, the Executive Engineer stated this is a technical report beyond the understanding of the villagers and activists and would serve no purpose. This led to a heated discussion while the activists kept demanding that this project is a public project and land is being acquired in the name of 'public purpose'. Therefore, the public has a right to know about the 'public project'. Finally, the Executive Engineer agreed to provide them this report.

In this case, the people were able to get some information from the project officials with the help of activists. But, there are situations in the country where the secrecy related to development projects is still being maintained, and access to documents related to the projects are being denied to the people. The big projects like the Sardar Sarovar Dam and the Narmada Sagar Dam on the river Narmada which involves displacement of over two lakh people are cases in point.

While assuming office, the Prime Minister declared that the Official Secrets Act will be amended and the right to information will be incorporated in the Constitution. In this regard, he has appointed a Cabinet Committee under the Chairmanship of Mr. I. K. Gujral to prepare a bill on this issue. On New Year's eve, the new government also declared that a bill in this regard will be presented during the budget session. Will the Committee look into this important aspect related to access to information, where the information is not classified but denied? Is it not worthwhile to initiate a dialogue and discussion with action groups, citizens groups, lawyers and peoples' representatives to seek their views and experiences on this issue? Don't the people for whom the bill on the right to information is being presented, also have a right to know and take part in the preparation of this bill?
Rough Classification of Government Land Cultivators

Those who are cultivating government land, legally and also by staking their claim according to various landholding systems, in the rural areas, are primarily the tribal, dalit, and vishvakta jatis, in the rural areas. These cultivators face a multitude of problems which the administration and the powers that be choose to ignore. Those cultivating government land can be roughly classified in the following categories: (i) the landless and marginal farmers owning plots distributed by the government; (ii) those holding plots generated as 'surplus' under the land ceiling act; (iii) those cultivating plots regularised under the various CRs of (a) August 12, 1960, (b) September 1, 1961, (c) August 14, 1972, (d) December 27, 1978, and (e) September 12, 1979; (iv) one-yearly plot holders who were the beneficiaries under the CR of March 22, 1969, and were granted the plots on a permanent basis; (v) the Dalits plot holders from Raigad district who were considered legitimate candidates for receiving permanent plots under the CR of July 26, 1971; (vi) those plot holders whose encroachments within the period 1-5-72 to 31-3-78 have yet to be regularised; (vii) plot holders whose encroachments have occurred after April 1, 1978; and (viii) encroachments for farming that have taken place on the grazing pastures and other government land vested with the gram panchayats.

All the above categories of plot holders face different types of problems today. Their issues and struggles are at different stages.

Where is the Land?

As mentioned in the classification above, all the plot holders in the categories (i), (ii), and (iii) have legally received land distributed by the government. This land is mentioned in the records of rights: the plot holders also have VII-XII extracts in their names. In actuality, however, most of these 'plot owners' cannot draw any benefit from the rightful ownership of these plots. The problems of these cultivators - who own land only on paper - are more or less similar.

The manner in which this land was distributed is revealing. The revenue officials, assembled either at the local patwari's office, or at the government rest-house in the area, made the necessary changes in the village records and in the records of rights. None of them felt it was necessary to go to the spot, ascertain whether it was fit for cultivation or not, or for that matter even ascertain whether it was free at all. Consequently, most of the beneficiaries do not know where the land they possess is situated.

Some of these 'beneficiaries' have been granted plots which have been previously encroached upon by others. These previous encroachers are obviously not pleased with the newcomers and do not want to part with their claim on the land. Hence, the beneficiaries cannot use this land to their advantage though it may well be registered in their names now.

Government lands and the surplus lands generated under the land ceiling act were distributed without first ascertaining whether or not they were cultivable. The only aim seemed to be to meet some deadline and achieve some fixed target of distribution to please the superiors in the hierarchy. Thus, totally non-cultivable wastelands have been distributed, leaving the beneficiary none the better for this acquisition.

Many of the plots thus distributed have been occupied illegally by the rich and powerful upper caste elite or by the original owners themselves. Who is to prevent them and their musclemen from such illegal occupation? Repeated complaints to the concerned revenue and police officials also do not bring any result.

In a few cases, the beneficiaries were allotted land after showing them the actual area. However, being members of the weaker and vulnerable sections of society, these tribes and dalits found themselves owners only nominally, whereas the upper and dominant castes in the village drew all the benefits. Requests to the police and revenue officials to intervene fell on deaf ears.

(Contd. on page 6)
Janvikas Andolan --
A Draft Statement

The formation of Janvikas Andolan, a network of a wide range of movements, organisations and individuals, has its roots in a variety of struggles taking place in the country around issues like the National Test Range at Balakot, the Koel-Karo, Subarnarekha, Tehri and Narora nuclear power plants, the widespread alienation of lands, the loss of access to common property resources and other such developments. The meetings of representatives of these organisations, particularly at Anandwan and Hemalkasa, strengthened the understanding that these issues, seen together, are maladies of the prevalent developmental process. These meetings were also the precursor for the massive demonstration of people's concern and anger about this process at Balsud in September 1989.

In a general sense, Janvikas Andolan is a movement against the development paradigm being practiced in post-independent India whereby a narrow elite primarily benefits at the cost of a very large population that continues to be marginalized, displaced and punished, along with large scale degradation and plundering of our natural resource base. The movement does not have an anti-developmental perspective. It is not against development. Rather, it maintains that much of what today goes under the name of development is not genuine development, in which the overriding objective is not just a higher growth rate regardless of its human and environmental cost, but the fulfillment of basic human needs and the creation of just and humane conditions of life for all our people.

Specifically, the Andolan holds the view that environmental destruction and the rapid depletion and degradation of natural resources, be it forests, land, water or air, goes hand in hand with oppression and exploitation of the already deprived weaker sections of the society. The Andolan believes that environmental problems arise only where there is injustice or human exploitation is present - where those who profit from a destructive action are not the same as those who have to pay for its consequences. Behind man's exploitation of nature often lies man's exploitation by man. By taking away the traditional rights of millions of tribals and small and marginal farmers from subsistence use of natural resources in preference to mega developmental projects, the compensatory benefits are derived at the cost of enormous suffering to the affected population and massive overuse and degradation of the surrounding natural resources. Such environmental concerns, therefore, are not mere hobby of a few middle class urban people, but an articulation of a sense of exploitation and anger of millions of Indians. With depleting natural resources, the contending claims of various sections of the society, the rich and the middle classes on one side and the tribals and the small peasants on the other, to control these resources is the essence of the problem. It is apparent that for the rich, the benefits are to be seen as a further improvement in the generation of surplus and in their life styles, whereas for the poor, it is a question of subsistence from a resource that was traditionally theirs. If these contending claims are not urgently addressed to and these trends are sustained in the name of 'national interests', the Andolan feels that there will be an escalation of economic conflict with an attendant increase in social and political violence.

Any democratic process of sorting out these contending claims is totally subordinated by the very nature of large developmental projects, since right from the planning stage they are centralized, the decisions in most instances emanating from New Delhi or from the offices of donors or multilateral banks like the World Bank. This precludes an approach of involving the local affected population in the decision making process. The Andolan views the process of deciding about the fate of large populations without their knowledge, understanding and consent as not just a serious human rights issue but also an ethical and moral one.

The deprivations of control of people from their subsistence access and use of natural resources as well as restricting their capacity to decide about their own lives must also be seen as the dominance of a particular kind of technological intervention in the developmental process. The acquisition of newer and more modern technology is generally considered as an indicator of development. However, such acquisition has brutally swamped and negated other contending technologies which have already existed or which could have been developed in relative harmony not only with local skills and needs but also with nature and natural processes. One of the subsumed doctrines of the existing developmental process is that science and technology are value neutral entities and it depends on the decision makers to put it to good use. The Andolan contends that this use/abuse model of science and technology is seriously misleading. Technology, in
particular, when mediated by researchers, technocrats, contractors, and the bureaucracy, all belonging to a particular section of the society is heavily value loaded towards the furtherance of the interest of that section. Therefore, the justification for latest technology for faster development is highly questionable. The example of large scale irrigation projects and heavy investments in the fertilizer industry to support intensive agriculture based on hybrid seeds adequately illustrates this. These strategies have brought about a dubious revolution. Though it is claimed that it has resulted in self-sufficiency in food, about forty percent of the population has practically no access to such bounty. The dependence on hybrid seeds has reached such proportions that last year, under the new seed import policy, several major multinationals were allowed entry in this sensitive area. Apart from gradually making the indigenous seed varieties, which have genetically developed in harmony with local climates, soils and environments extinct, the policy strengthens the possibilities of multinationals holding us to ransom in germ plasma (one must not forget that a single company, United Brands, now owns seventy percent of banana germ plasma). In fact, bio-technology is an area where the policies and projects can have serious consequences not only to the country's genetic resource but to self reliance, an ideal often hailed but systematically marred by current developmental policies and strategies.

Another aspect of concern is our rapid militarisation which, as is evident from the first world countries, goes hand in hand with the kind of developmental paradigm they have followed which we are trying so disastrously to imitate. The Andolan, therefore, ties but also views the stated objective of peaceful uses of nuclear energy with grave skepticism, in addition to the known hazards of nuclear power generation. If the pattern of development continues on the present path, it seems natural, having opted to become a dominant member within the global economy, that the multinational - military - industry combine will further penetrate our national and personal lives. It is the view of the Andolan that an alternative approach to development must give pride of place to ecological restoration. Fundamentally, repointing the development process and giving it a new direction is the historic challenge we face - and ecology is at the heart of it. It is becoming increasingly clear that the ecological perspective shows us the way to end poverty and achieve a balanced and sustainable development of all our people. Afforestation of all wastelands and degraded forest lands, integrated development of small watersheds, land shaping and soil and water conservation works, rainwater harvesting and small-scale storage, development of animal husbandry based pastures and fodder development, development of biomass based and other alternate energy sources, small-scale agroindustries using appropriate technology and vastly enhanced biomass productivity of the land, and a gradual switch over to ecologically sustainable agricultural prac-
The following are the questions

1. Is the environment movement oriented basically to issues that concern the middle class? What is the relationship and importance of the movement to the poor and marginalised sections of the society?

2. Is the development process destructive in its totality? Or are only some elements or parts of it that are destructive?

3. Is consumerism at the root of the present development process? How is consumerism to be understood in terms of quality of life, social justice, market economy and sustainable development?

4. Is the development process entirely a science and technology issue? What are the social, political and cultural linkages and the implications for the role of science and technology?

5. What is the relationship of the Jan Vikas Andolan to political parties and political processes? Should the Andolan consider participation in party politics?

6. What is the role of professionals in the critique of the present developmental process and working towards an alternative?

7. Are we opposed to displacement of the people, not only by large projects? What is the position of the Andolan on rehabilitation? Are we opposed to projects only because rehabilitation is not possible?

8. What should be the relationship of the people adversely affected by the developmental process and others within the Andolan?

9. Is the responsibility of the movement to detail the alternatives? What should be the ways of working out alternatives?

10. What is the relationship of the movement to the working classes, particularly since workers are dependent on or beneficiaries of these development projects?

11. How do specific groups—dalits, tribals, women, nomads and others perceive the development process? What is their role in the alternative development process?

12. What should be the role of the movement in international politics? What is the relationship between the alternative model in the international economy? Should the movement and the alternative remain strictly within national boundaries?

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A number of inconclusive debates have been formulated in a set of questions. It was felt that these be circulated for a wider debate in order to arrive at a comprehensive document that would reflect the concerns of the Jan Vikas Andolan.

(Cont'd. from page 3)

Land distributed on paper were not surveyed properly, no boundaries were marked nor areas demarcated, and maps of these lands and Kami Jastik Patrajs not prepared. Hence, the plot holders could legally dispossess the rich and powerful encroachers on their plots.

In a number of villages where plots had been distributed to the tribals and dalits, the consolidation officials, taking recourse to the land consolidation plan, registered all these plots together as government land again on the pretext of absence of Kami Jastik Patrajs. This amounted to taking away the plots from the cultivators and restoring them to their landless status.

Pressures from the centre and from the state spurred the revenue officials to prompt action and thousands of landless, dalits and tribals were given land (though on paper). However, in this rush to fulfill targets, the need to create a support structure in terms of agricultural equipment, subsidies and facilities to improve the land and the yield, was overlooked. Only a few plot holders therefore could utilize their lands.

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A more organised national process on the issues raised at Harsud.

A number of inconclusive debates have been formulated in a set of questions. It was felt that these be circulated for a wider debate in order to arrive at a comprehensive document that would reflect the concerns of the Jan Vikas Andolan.
Workshop on Environmental Education

The International Council for Adult Education and the Faculty of Environmental Studies, York University, Canada, jointly organised a three-day workshop on Environmental Education from November 11-13, 1989, in Toronto, Canada. The workshop brought together adult and environmental educators and environmentalists from Brazil, Kenya, Norway and India. In this workshop, it was decided to start a process of exchange of information and sharing of experiences on environmental issues among adult educators and environmentalists. Those who would like to link up with this network, should write to:

The International Council for Adult Education, 720 Bathurst Street, Suite 500, Toronto, Ontario M5S 2R4, Canada.

Report of the Workshop on 'People's Access to Water Resources'

While working on the issues related to Land Ownership and Alienation, and on other related issues such as displacement due to construction of big dams, forests and land degradation, PRIA realised the need to view these aspects from a broader perspective. Based on our own reflections, and on our interaction with others in the field, at the beginning of this year we decided to broaden the scope of our work from mere land ownership and alienation to people's access to natural resources.

Since we have been working on issues related to water policies, and also have been involved in the “Protect Water: Protect Life” march to Kanyakumari in 1989, we decided to discuss the theme of 'People's Access to Water Resources' in our annual consultation with our partners. The consultation was aimed at identifying and prioritising issues related to people's access to water for the purpose of future collaborations.

The Consultation was held from December 18-20, 1989, in New Delhi. Nearly 25 participants involved in research, action and struggle on water issues participated.

The Consultation began with the identification of issues related to water. Water was looked at from three perspectives:

(i) Water as an input to production processes, such as use of water in industrial and agricultural activities;

(ii) Water as a part of nature, and its role in various natural systems, e.g., the hydrological cycle;

(iii) Water as source of livelihood and survival, like water for drinking and fishing activities.

The major themes around which discussions took place were:

--- The Ganga Mukt Andolan: The history and nature of the struggle by the fisherfolk of Bhagalpur, Bihar to stop the 'Pandari' system under which the fisherfolk used to pay taxes to the water lords of the area, and their continued struggle to keep the river Ganga free from pollution.

--- The struggle by the fisherfolk of Kerala and Tamil Nadu to stop the mechanisation of the fishing industry, and the subsequent efforts by the action groups to organise and mobilise the fisherfolk through building their cooperatives and organising them against the proposed nuclear power stations and the hotel industry. The impact and response of the Kanyakumari March was also discussed.

--- The problems of drinking water associated with drought-prone states like Rajasthan and Gujarat. The participants discussed the danger of growing desertification and drought conditions in these states and people's efforts to mitigate these problems. In the discussion, it was very clear that the development process in these states, such as increased mining and industrialisation in western Rajasthan, is contributing to these conditions.

--- The decay of traditional methods and sources of water collection and harvesting in Rajasthan and Chotanagpur areas of Bihar and their causes and results.

Keeping in view PRIA's work and involvement in these issues, the following suggestions were made:

(i) PRIA should identify and pool together resource persons - scientists, technocrats, environmentalists and researchers - to help local NGOs in the planning and implementation of water conservation and harvesting projects.

(ii) It was generally felt that the local; NGOs and groups have very little information on legislations and policies related to water issues. It was suggested that PRIA should work on this and perhaps bring out educational booklets and materials on various legislations and their inadequacies.

(iii) The participants also expressed the need for promoting various water conservation and harvesting experiments being carried out in the country, for example, Baira Panchayats in Maharashtra, Sukhmani Project in Haryana, etc. In this context, it was suggested that one of the ways this could be achieved was to bring out booklets in the form of case studies highlighting the important factors of such experiments.
Islands of Hope

This is the title of the book dealing with the role of voluntary organisations in the development of the rural poor in the country. Authored by Rajeshwar Mishra, the book attempts to analyse the typology of voluntary organisations, their work strategies and organisational characteristics suitable for effective implementation of their programme with the help of a case study.

The book is priced at Rs. 80/- and can be obtained from: Janaki Prakashan, Ashok Raj Path, Chaubatta, Patna 800 004.

Booklets on Forests

The Himalaya Action Research Centre has published a series of booklets on the plantation of forests in the Himalayan region. These booklets include information on how to do tree plantation, when and what kinds of species to be planted and what are the major uses of different trees in the daily life of the people.

For further details, contact: Himalaya Action Research Centre, 815/12 Indira Nagar, Phase-II, Dehradun - 248006.

NGO-Government Relations:

A Source of Life or a Kiss of Death?

This is the report of a consultation on NGO-Government Relationships organised by PRIA in collaboration with the International Council for Adult Education, the African Association for Literacy and Adult Education, and the Latin American Association for Adult Education. The report is an attempt to summarise the key analyses arising out of the consultation, with a view to promote wider sharing and reflection among leaders of NGOs from different countries of the South. It also attempts to present the range of aspects that characterise NGO-Government relations, the context in which they are situated and the issues which emerge from this reflection. It also draws certain implications for different actors in this situation in order to create possibilities for a more healthy and mutually respectful relationship between NGIDs and Governments.

Copies available from PRIA.

Against All Odds

This is the preliminary report of a recent medical study which brings out clearly that more than 80 percent of the gas victims in Bhopal in the seriously affected areas, and 50 percent from mildly affected areas, suffer from medically diagnosable gas-related diseases even today, and the diseases have led to a gross reduction in the working capacity of the people. The study challenges the so-called categorization which has been followed by the Madhya Pradesh government and shows that the methodology is designed to under estimate the nature and severity of injuries.

Copies available from: Centre for Education and Communication (Documentation), F-20 (GF), Jangpura Ext., New Delhi - 110014.

Environmental Calendar

A calendar depicting various problems related to the environment degradation like deforestation, wild life, floods and droughts and solutions to overcome these problems has been prepared to create wider awareness on this issues.

For further details, contact: Indo-German Social Service Society, Lodi Institutional Area, New Delhi - 110 003.

Environment Bulletin

This is the bi-monthly newsletter of the World Bank Environment Community. The newsletter highlights the efforts made by the Bank towards the maintenance of ecological balance and environmental protection.

The newsletter can be obtained from: World Bank, Environment Department, 1818 H Street, NW, Washington DC 20433, USA.