

Indian Mining Exchange

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Obituary

National Forum of Forest People and Forest Workers (NFFPFW) deeply mourn the untimely demise of Dr. Ram Dayal Munda, a great and respected friend of the indigenous peoples and struggling tribal communities.

Mundaji epitomised tribal wisdom in a time that increasingly rejected indigneous values; he was a dedicated academic, an outstanding musicologist and an activist who had a life-long association with indigenous movements inside and outside the country.

NFFPFW, its constituent groups and many other tribal movements and struggling communities will miss an ardent supporter of their cause and a great visionary. Our heartfelt condolences for his family.

We salute Mundaji. We will miss him.

In grief,

NFFPFW Family

1 October 2011

Ecosystems and people

Growth bypasses inhabitants of forests

<http://www.dailypioneer.com/pioneer-news/oped/7933-growth-bypasses-inhabitants-of-forests.html>

Growth in Asia at high environmental cost:

<http://www.inewsone.com/2011/09/19/growth-in-asia-at-high-environmental-cost-un/77607>

Now, fair share for forest-dwellers

http://www.dnaindia.com/mumbai/report_now-fair-share-for-forest-dwellers_1590056

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Farmers are selling land out of desperation

<http://blogs.economictimes.indiatimes.com/something-fresh/entry/farmers-are-selling-land-out-of-desperation#comment-form>

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Ecosystems and people

Growth bypasses inhabitants of forests

Wednesday, 21 September 2011 00:37

Despite several policies and programmes of the Government for the welfare of Adivasis, they continue to remain on the margins, writes Etwa Munda

The Adivasis are probably the oldest inhabitants of our sub-continent mostly in forested areas. Over time they have evolved a life-pattern close to nature. Their way of life is connected with the forest, which nurtures them, meets many of their needs for food, medicines, fuel and fodder. It is widely acknowledged that wherever forests remain on our planet, Adivasis or tribal communities exist. It is a symbiotic bond.

During the pre-independence era, life for Adivasis was a continuation of patterns as they existed down the centuries. With the colonial rulers concentrating on other areas of

revenue collection and establishing markets, Adivasis were simply allowed to be. After independence and with the Constitution being adopted things began to shift. There was recognition of the large adivasi population, their unique pattern of life, and their developmental needs in a newly emergent nation-state. This was reflected in the Constitution and in the plans and policies of the Government of India.

As a starting point, they were classified and fell under the category of Scheduled Tribes. This was meant for facilitating the formation and implementation of policies and programmes catering to their specific needs, based on based on their unique life-patterns.

But 64 years after independence, the question we need to ask ourselves is whether this has worked? If we look at basic facilities, Adivasis suffer high levels of deprivation. Access to healthcare, drinking water, electricity, roads, education is abysmal. Notwithstanding the priority given to this group in the Constitution, in relevant plans and policies, they still remain on the margins.

The growth story of India, its vast achievements in a variety of fields and its strides in development seem to have bypassed them. They remain in their old world which sustained them but also limited their potential in a fast-changing world. It kept them away from modern processes of development, prevented the process of mainstreaming them. Despite stated policy intent and a large allocation of resources under various plans and schemes, why is this so?

Today many of the regions affected by Maoism are areas with a large adivasi population. The backwardness, lack of development and the neglect they have faced over the decades by those in power is seen to be a factor in the rise of Maoism. In Jharkhand, this is a truism. Despite this understanding now widely prevalent in policy circles, there is precious little to show in terms of a better life, or new avenues opening out for the Adivasis. They straddle the world of a market economy and a forest-based one, dipping into both for their survival. This is not proving to be a happy mix.

With rising prices, the Adivasis are finding it difficult to buy basic items from the market. On the other hand, Government policies and programmes fall short of their overall developmental needs. They seem to have travelled a distance from their traditional way of life but not been mainstreamed into life as it moves beyond this sphere.

Contrary to popular notion, it is not only Adivasis living deep within the forest, cut off from more developed habitation who faces problems. Even amongst those relatively close to the capital of Jharkhand, Ranchi, there is a lack of awareness of Government policies and programmes meant for their benefit, much less how to go about getting them. Sarjam Ikir, 13 km from Bundu block, Ranchi on the banks of Khoja River seems an idyllic village surrounded by forests where people live off agriculture and gathering of forest produce. But this small village is beset by problems. Lakhimani Munda, a BA student from PP College,

Bundu, says, "It is sad that even after 11 years of the formation of the State of Jharkhand, the people of this village have no electricity."

It is true that the neighbouring village, Gabhdeya Gaup has electricity but that does not bring any joy to the villagers of Sarjam Ikir dogged by an abysmal lack of facilities on several counts. Transport facilities, system for irrigation is wanting. Even something as basic as a well does not exist here. There is no sub-healthcare centre. There is no PDS outlet in their village for which they have to walk six km to another village. Many of them get less than their quota but do not know how to go about getting their entitlements.

The Adivasis of Sarjam Ikir are not a happy lot and in a sense they reflect the despondency of the Adivasis at large. While the onus is on the Government to ensure that the interests of the Adivasis figure in any configuration of policy planning and implementation, it is also time to get the Adivasis more involved in charting out a path of their development.

The Gram Sabha is an excellent forum for discussion on a variety of issues related to agriculture, forest protection and PDS amongst others. It is crucial that the perspectives of the Adivasis are highlighted through this.

<http://www.dailypioneer.com/pioneer-news/oped/7933-growth-bypasses-inhabitants-of-forests.html>

Growth in Asia at high environmental cost:

Posted on 19th September 2011

New Delhi, Sep 19 (IANS) The Asia-Pacific region has seen dynamic growth in the past few decades but this development has affected the environment, leading to pollution, increased emissions and biodiversity loss, said a report released by United Nations Monday.

The report, 'Resource Efficiency-Economics and Outlook for Asia and the Pacific', prepared by the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and partners including the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation, was released in Beijing.

'Asia-Pacific's dynamic growth of the past few decades has reduced poverty and increased wealth and per capita incomes. But that has come at a price that is exacting a high environmental cost. Problems include pollution including greenhouse gas emissions, biodiversity loss, deteriorating ecosystems and rapid resource depletion,' it said.

According to the report, a new 'green' industrial revolution is needed in the Asia-Pacific region that catalyzes dramatic improvements in resource efficiency if the countries and communities there are to prosper in the 21st century.

It estimates that per capita resource consumption of materials in the region, such as construction minerals and fuels, needs to be around 80 percent less than today if sustainable development is to be achieved.

Total materials consumed in 2005 alone – including biomass, fossil fuels, metals and industrial and construction materials – amounted to around 32 billion tonnes.

Asia-Pacific currently accounts for more than half of the world's total resource use — in large part because it also accounts for over half the world's population and nearly 30 percent of the world's GDP.

The report underlines that Asia-Pacific has, however, enormous opportunities to dramatically boost resource efficiency and in doing so, boost economic growth, generate new kinds of clean tech industries and reduce, if not overturn, losses linked with environmental degradation.

The global economy outside Asia-Pacific has been registering efficiency gains in respect to the use of materials.

Achim Steiner, UN under secretary general and UNEP executive director, said: 'These new findings come some nine months before the Rio+20 conference where the world needs to get back into the business of actioning a truly transformational sustainability agenda.'

'This new report spotlights the challenges but also the opportunities for a transition to a low carbon, far more resource efficient Green Economy not as an alternative to sustainable development but as a means of implementing it,' he said.

<http://www.inewsone.com/2011/09/19/growth-in-asia-at-high-environmental-cost-un/77607>

Now, fair share for forest-dwellers

Published: Thursday, Sep 22, 2011, 4:27 IST

By DNA Correspondent | Place: Mumbai | Agency: DNA

In a move to strengthen the joint forest management committees, the Maharashtra cabinet has decided that forest-dwellers will now be eligible for a share of all forest produce excluding wood. The joint forest management committees comprise forest-dwellers and forest department officials, who are charged with looking after the forest and increasing forest cover.

Maharashtra Chief Minister Prithviraj Chavan said those committees that have looked after a particular forest for a minimum of five years will be eligible to share in the royalty earned from the sale of forest produce. Non-wood forest produce includes honey, lac, gum, mahua, seeds, herbal products, leaves, etc, all of which have a variety of uses.

At present, there are 12,500 joint forest management committees in the state. The CM also declared that the state government was determined to increase the state's forest cover and 100 crore saplings would be planted across the state.

Chavan also announced that the state would develop a world-class wildlife sanctuary at Gorhe village near Nagpur. An area of 28.37 hectare had been earmarked for the sanctuary that would have Indian and African safaris, river rides, and other facilities.

Meanwhile, the state government has extended the time limit to one year its rule that all aspirants for political office must have proper private toilets. The state government had rule in January last that all members of local councils - panchayats, zilla parishad, municipal councils, etc - must have private, properly constructed toilets at their homes to be eligible for public office.

The government had then said that those who did not have such toilets must build a toilet within 90 days. If they failed to do so, they would be disqualified from holding office and a few months ago, some 1500 members of various local councils were disqualified.

But on Wednesday, the CM announced that the period had been extended to one year. He said those members who had been disqualified would be reinstated. It turns out that around 26,000 members still don't have toilets. The decision seems to have been taken with an eye on the upcoming local polls, due across Maharashtra in February next.

http://www.dnaindia.com/mumbai/report_now-fair-share-for-forest-dwellers_1590056

Land

Farmers are selling land out of desperation

Nidhi Nath Srinivas

Thursday September 22, 2011, 10:39

Farms are disappearing in India. In the last decade, 2 million hectares of farm land – equal to Kerala's entire arable area - has been lost to industrialization and urbanization. More will be sold after new land acquisition laws are introduced by states. Given the shortage of land, why are farmers in such a rush to sell? Is it old-fashioned greed? Or do they know something city slickers don't?

It is clear crop prices will rise as food, feed and fuel demand increases with growing population and incomes. Across the world, higher crop prices have made farm land more precious. During 2010 alone, land values rose by 13% in the UK, 8% in US corn-growing belt and 24% in Brazil's sugarcane-growing Sao Paulo state, according to the Knight Frank Farmland Index. In India the equation is not so simple.

Despite high crop prices, Indian farmer returns are declining because the cost of cultivation, especially wages, is rising faster. Mechanization is expensive. Small and marginal farmers unable to invest in new technology are the worst hit. Erratic weather is increasing risks for rain-fed farms that add up to 60% of total farmland.

In states where higher yields have overcome this challenge, government curbs on inter-district and inter-state trade prohibit farmers from maximizing gains. Farmers in coastal Andhra, for instance, actually save money if they let their paddy fields lie fallow. This is exactly what they did this season too. Farmers in UP can't sell their sugarcane to highest bidder.

So whenever they meet a buyer willing to offer even a small premium, such farmers jump at the offer. This is the trend across eastern India, UP, parts of Maharashtra, Rajasthan and the South. They are exhausted battling the risks of agriculture.

Well-to-do farmers are also willing to sell, albeit at a significant premium. Most are above 60 years, with sons and sons-in-law settled in the city and unlikely to return. In Tamil Nadu and Andhra villages, all farmers are above 45 years. No one wants their son to be a farmer because it implies he is good for nothing else. Leasing land to tenant farmers is increasingly difficult with no willing takers. So the empty-nesters are keen to sell.

The lakhs of tenant farmers who may wish to continue cultivation despite the odds anyway have no voice. If the landlord gets a good offer, the deal is on.

Farmers themselves understand these trends very well. Often when a farmer sells his own land to a speculator/investor, he uses part of the cash to buy land in areas where land is still cheap because of poor crop margins. Punjab farmers have bought large tracts in UP, Jharkhand, and Chhattisgarh from local small and marginal farmers desperate to exit. Ditto Andhra farmers in Tamil Nadu and Orissa. The attraction is low land prices arising from low crop returns.

The new farmer-owners then wait for the other category of buyers such as investors in infrastructure and factories to arrive. Or even the pure speculators who are creating a land bank. State governments are keen to buy land for industrial hubs, airports and roads.

Even the sons who fled to the city are now willing to buy a few hectares in their village as a good investment. All these buyers and sellers are betting on the scarcity created by tough land acquisition and land usage laws. No one is betting on higher profits from farming.

Herein is the irony of Indian agriculture. Even with record food demand, it remains an unprofitable business. Curbs on inter-state and international trade to keep food inflation low have prevented crop prices from rising to their full potential. Lack of infrastructure in processing and storage don't allow efficient management of bumper harvests. This becomes a disincentive for farmers to invest in new technology. The resultant fall in yields keep their cost of production extraordinarily high. And so the vicious cycle continues.

A decade ago, textile mill land in Mumbai fetched record prices because it could be used more efficiently for other things. Not because textiles was a profitable business. The situation is identical in the countryside today.

In countries such as Brazil, Ethiopia, and Australia, land is becoming expensive because crops are fetching more. In India, farmland prices are rising because the land has many other uses. Not because its current use – production of crops – is profitable. In a country where 833 million people are dependent on agriculture and a third of these live below the poverty line, this desperation to exit can only be a silent scream for help. Ignoring it will push India towards greater import dependence and higher food inflation.

<http://blogs.economictimes.indiatimes.com/something-fresh/entry/farmers-are-selling-land-out-of-desperation#comment-form>

OXFAM warns on effect of land grabs on poor farmers

By Ayo Okulaja

September 29, 2011 03:20PM

The new wave of land deals is not the new investment in agriculture that millions had been waiting for, global anti-poverty group, Oxfam has warned.

Oxfam's research, contained in its recently released Oxfam Briefing paper 22, has revealed that residents regularly lose out to local elites and domestic or foreign investors because they lack the power to claim their rights effectively and to defend and advance their interests.

It says the poorest people are being hardest hit as competition for land intensifies.

"Companies and governments must take urgent steps to improve land rights outcomes for people living in poverty," the group said.

"Power relations between investors and local communities must also change if investment is to contribute to rather than undermine the food security and livelihoods of local communities."

The group says investment plays a vital role in development and poverty reduction and that investment can improve livelihoods and bring jobs, services, and infrastructure, when it is managed responsibly within the context of an effective regulatory framework.

It, however noted that the recent record of investment in land is very different as it tells a story of rapidly increasing pressure on land - a natural resource upon which the food security of millions of people living in poverty depends.

"Too many investments have resulted in dispossession, deception, violation of human rights, and destruction of livelihoods.

Without national and international measures to defend the rights of people living in poverty, this modern-day land-rush looks set to leave too many poor families worse off, often evicted from their land with little or no recourse to justice," it said.

The Oxfam report says in developing countries, as many as 227 million hectares of land - an area the size of Western Europe - has been sold or leased since 2001, mostly to international investors. The bulk of these land acquisitions has taken place over the past two years, according to on-going research by the Land Matrix Partnership.

"The recent rise in land acquisitions can be explained by the 2007-08 food prices crisis, which led investors and governments to turn their attention towards agriculture after decades of neglect," it says. "But this interest in land is not something that will pass; it is a trend with strong drivers. The land deals are very often intended to produce for foreign food and biofuel markets. They can often rightly be called 'land grabs.'"

Land grabs

It describes land grabs as land acquisitions which do one or more of the following:

- Violate human rights, and particularly the equal rights of women;
- Flout the principle of free, prior, and informed consent of the affected land users, particularly indigenous peoples;
- Ignore the impacts on social, economic, and gender relations, and on the environment;
- Avoid transparent contracts with clear and binding commitments on employment and benefit sharing;
- Eschew democratic planning, independent oversight, and meaningful participation.

The recent study looks at incidents of land grabs in Uganda, Indonesia, Guatemala, Honduras, and South Sudan; where it records instances of forced eviction - often violent - of over 20,000 people from their lands and their homes, and the destruction of their crops.

Others tell how affected communities have been undermined through exclusion from decisions affecting the land they rely on. In most cases, the legal rights of those affected by the land grabs have not been respected.

"Most of those affected have received little or no compensation and have struggled to piece their lives back together, often facing higher rents, few job opportunities, and risks to their health.

The evidence is sadly consistent with many other recent studies on land grabbing. It is development in reverse," it says.

<http://234next.com/csp/cms/sites/Next/Money/5744016-147/story.csp>

The world of mining

Revealed: Secret world of global oil and mining giants

September 19th, 2011 | by Nick Mathiason |

Ten of the world's most powerful oil, gas and mining companies own a staggering 6,038 subsidiaries with over a third located in 'secrecy jurisdictions'.

As a growing number of international think-tanks and campaign groups demand action to prevent an estimated \$1 trillion flooding out of developing, but resource-rich countries, attention is focusing on states like Delaware in the US and the Netherlands.

Defined as secrecy jurisdictions, these are places where there are few requirements for companies to publish accounts and beneficial ownership details among a host of other key disclosures, which as a result can be kept hidden from public view.

Trawling annual reports and stock exchange filings of companies such as BP, Glencore and ExxonMobil, a five month investigation by Publish What You Pay Norway (PWYPN) found that:

- 2,083 (34.5%) of the 6,038 subsidiaries belonging to just 10 of the world's most powerful extractive industry companies are incorporated in secrecy jurisdictions.
- The global extractive industry's favourite place to incorporate is by far the US state of Delaware with 15.2% of all subsidiaries located there.
- The second favourite extractive industry company secrecy jurisdiction is the Netherlands, where 358 subsidiaries belonging to oil and mining giants are based.
- Chevron is the most opaque extractive industry company in this study. 62% of Chevron's 77 subsidiaries are located in secrecy jurisdictions. ConocoPhillips is the second most opaque oil and gas major in this report with 57% of its 536 subsidiaries incorporated in secrecy jurisdictions.
- Glencore International AG is the most opaque mining company in the Piping Profits survey with 46% of its 46 subsidiaries incorporated in secrecy jurisdiction

None of the companies are breaking any laws nor any regulatory requirements of stock market listings. But the disclosure of the enormous scale of the \$1.8 trillion extractive industry's reliance on opaque locations comes as pressure mounts on US and EU policymakers to come up with so-called Country-by-Country Reporting (CBCR) measures to counter corruption and aggressive tax avoidance.

This would force companies to reveal key financial information – revenues, profits, taxes paid and reserved used – in every country where they do business. Currently EI giants

‘consolidate’ this information in one set of accounts. This makes it impossible for citizens in resource rich countries to get an accurate picture of how much oil, gas or minerals is extracted, how much is left and what kind of deal their country has struck for them.

In America, the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) is currently deciding how to adopt the Dodd Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act (Dodd-Frank) that forces all US listed companies to report detailed payments to any state it operates on a project-by-project basis.

Next month, the European Commission is expected to introduce similar legislation in the EU parliament. But there are serious concerns that the measures will be watered down before they become law.

Corporate secrecy harms poor nations

Mona Thowsen, national co-ordinator of Publish What You Pay Norway, said: ‘What this study shows is that the extractive industry ownership structure and its huge use of secrecy jurisdictions may work against the urgent need to reduce corruption and aggressive tax avoidance in this sector.

‘This is why there is a large and growing body of opinion throughout the world now demanding the introduction of CBCR because it is a vital tool to reduce corruption, secrecy and aggressive tax avoidance that particularly harms people in developing and emerging economies.’

The report, Piping Profits also involved journalists from Bolivia and Ecuador attempting to establish key financial and operational performance information from strategically important natural resource companies in their countries. However a month-long concerted attempt to gain information from companies yielded nothing, reflecting the veil of secrecy which citizens face in the campaign to find out what is happening to their resources.

‘I always heard it was very complex – and sometimes even dangerous – to obtain financial information about Extractive Industry activities,’ said Bolivian Marco Escalera, co-ordinator for major Southern Hemisphere campaign group Somos Sur, after spending six weeks attempting to draw out key financial information from EICs operating in his country.

‘Whether it is the extractive industries or the state itself, they close ranks against the common enemy: civil society questions. The story is repeated over and over again: Access to timely and reliable information is not good enough.’

Both Delaware and the Netherlands are attractive to corporations. Over 900,000 companies – more than its human population – choose Delaware as a place to incorporate. The Netherlands is the largest host of conduit companies worldwide and is an important jurisdiction for shifting corporate debt around the same organisation.

The Bureau's Nick Mathiason researched and wrote the Piping Profits report for Publish What You Pay Norway.

<http://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/2011/09/19/revealed-the-secret-world-of-global-oil-and-mining-giants/>

Water

Tibetan Waters: A Source of Cooperation or Conflict?

Hari Bansh Jha September 30, 2011

In recent times, the world has witnessed a major surge in regional unrests caused primarily by the shortage of water. Tension builds up between two or more countries when an effort is made by any upper riparian country to control the waterways of transboundary rivers. Factors like population surge, industrialization and other development activities compel a country to control waterways. When such activities begin to affect the livelihood, ecology and growth of the lower riparian countries, they become a source of dispute.

As in other parts of the world, tension has also been growing both in South Asia and Southeast Asia due to China's unilateral decision to construct dams and river diversion projects in Tibet. Since 1989, Chinese engineers have been thinking of constructing dams and developing south-north water diversion projects partly driven by internal economic compulsions and partly by the desire to acquire a dominant external position.

As is well known, the Tibetan plateau happens to be the largest water tank in the world. All the 10 major river systems of Asia including the Indus, Sutlej, Brahmaputra, Irrawady, Salween and Mekong originate in the Tibetan plateau. Of the world's 6.92 billion people, for nearly 2 billion (29 per cent) living in South Asia from Afghanistan to the Ganga-Meghna-Brahmaputra basin and in Southeast Asia the rivers flowing from Tibet constitute the lifeline.

According to media reports, China has already built a barrage on the Sutlej river. Since November 2010, it has started construction work for damming/diversion of the Tsangpo (Brahmaputra) in Tibet.

1 The detailed planning for the Tsangpo project was approved by the State Council in 2006 and has the support of both Chen Chuanyu, its main architect, and Hu Jintao.

2 Apart from the diversion project on the Brahmaputra river, China also plans to construct 15 dams along the Lancang (Mekong) river. In addition, China plans to tap the waters of most of the big rivers flowing from the Tibetan plateau.

3 There are also reports that China's state owned electric power companies have already contracted with the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) government for the development of

hydropower in different rivers of Tibet. China is also working towards developing road connectivity with Nepal and other South Asian countries. It wants to develop hydropower partly to reduce the development gap between its eastern and western provinces but also to sell the electricity generated to neighbours and thus promote cross-border integration of economies. The energy produced in Tibet might also be used to tap the region's rich mineral reserves including uranium, borax, lithium, copper, zinc and iron.

Some of these Chinese activities might affect Nepal as well. Some of Nepal's major rivers originate in Tibet before finally merging into the Ganga in India. Of them, the most important is Karnali (507 km), Nepal's longest river. Tibet is also the origin of some parts of Kali Gandaki River, Budhi Gandaki River and the larger part of Trishuli River, which are the major tributaries of the Gandaki River system in Nepal. Similarly, the major tributaries of the Koshi river such as the Sun Koshi/Bhote Koshi, the Tama Koshi and Arun originate in Tibet.

4 Nepal would be affected seriously if dams and diversion projects are built in upper riparian Tibet on such rivers as the Karnali in the west, Gandaki in the central and Kosi in the eastern part of the country.

Any diversion of waters from Nepalese rivers originating in Tibet would directly affect the flow of water of the Ganga, the soul of the people living in the Indian sub-continent including in Nepal. As is well known, the Ganga desperately needs fresh water from its tributaries. Nepal alone accounts for 46 per cent of the flow in the Ganga and its contribution grows to 71 per cent during the lean season.

5 What will happen to the Ganga if dams and diversion projects are built on rivers flowing from Tibet into Nepal?

The building of dams and diversion projects in Tibet by China is a matter of serious concern for the lower riparian states. But the Chinese government downplays the issue by stating that the projects are in the conceptual stage. When the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hong Lei was asked about this issue on April 19, 2011, he said that China would not do anything that would harm the interests of the lower riparian states. However, an April 24, 2011 report in the People's Daily conceded that China would undertake certain measures to ensure strategic water reserves, diversion of water, recharging ground water, etc.

6 Perhaps, China well understands what George Ginsburg wrote: that it could dominate the Himalayan piedmont by virtue of holding Tibet and by doing so it could even threaten the Indian subcontinent and thereby further threaten the entire South-east Asia and so to say all of Asia.

7 Is this why China has so far not signed any bilateral treaty in regard to the utilization of water resources with any of its neighbours?

There are already reports that the quantity of water in many of the rivers flowing from Tibet to South Asia and South East Asia is on the decline. This is partly attributed to the decline in the formation of glaciers in Tibet and in the Himalayas.

Besides, the industrial, nuclear and other construction activities in Tibet have been polluting the quality of water, which ultimately affects the lives sustained by the river waters flowing from Tibet – be it through the Indus, Sutlej, Karnali, Gandaki, Koshi, Brahmaputra, Mekong or any other river.

Unfortunately, Beijing is not transparent and is reluctant to share hydrological data with the lower riparian countries. It has not yet signed the 1997 UN Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Waterways. It did not notify the lower riparian countries when it started constructing three dams on the Mekong river. In the same way, it started work on the Brahmaputra river in November 2010 without sharing any information about it with the lower riparian countries. Can China accept a delegation from India, Nepal, Bangladesh or Vietnam to inspect the sites of projects that it is developing on the Indus, Sutlej, Brahmaputra or Mekong?

Of late, China has drawn strong opposition from 263 international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) for its effort to construct dams on the Mekong river.

8 These NGOs feel that China has been using the water resources in Tibet as a political tool. As such, they want a moratorium on the lower Mekong dams for at least 10 years.

China's decision to dam all the major rivers originating on the Tibetan plateau has invited strong reactions in various Asian capitals from Islamabad to Hanoi.

9 In fact, China has been using its river water as a weapon. Some analysts have predicted even wars or war like situations of various intensity in the region resulting from China's damming and diversion of Tibetan river waters.

Tibetan land is delicate and it cannot absorb the damming, river water diversion projects, mining and transportation, industrial and other related activities. Many fear that such activities would lead to receding glaciers in Tibet and in the Himalayas. There are also reports that the Tibetan nomads are gradually being made to shift from their traditional grassland and resettle in bleak villages. Unfortunately, some of these activities might invite eco-disaster. This might aggravate the meltdown of Himalayan glaciers, further resulting in the drying of rivers. Therefore, the Tibet water resources should be accepted as a global commons. Any distortion in the ecology of Tibet and its delicate river system is likely to affect the global environment.

Under the existing situation, what should the lower riparian countries do? The best strategy appears to be one of engaging China in a dialogue process and persuading it not to construct dams and diversion projects on Tibetan rivers at the cost of environmental

degradation and the livelihood of nearly 2 billion people living in Afghanistan, the Ganga-Brahmaputra-Meghana basin and the Mekong basin countries including Laos, Cambodia, Thailand and Vietnam. Such a dialogue could be initiated bilaterally or multilaterally by the lower riparian countries that are likely to be affected by China's construction of dams and river diversion projects in Tibet.

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Reflections

Orientation problem

Ashish Kothari *The Hindustan*, October 3, 2011

In a world increasingly conscious of the need to harmonise economic development with the environment, how far has India travelled? One indication in this regard is the draft Approach Paper for the country's 12th Five-Year Plan, just put out by the Planning Commission. The paper is entitled: 'Faster, More Inclusive, Sustainable Growth'. But how sustainable is that vision? How far does it go in meeting the commitments India made at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (Johannesburg) and as part of the universally adopted Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)?

A series of international and national reports have shown how humanity has already breached the ecological tolerance of the earth, with increasing catastrophic consequences

for humans and other species. Any approach to economic planning that does not take these results on board, would risk being called suicidal. How does this Paper fare?

On the positive side, the Paper contains more on environment and related socio-economic issues than all previous Plan Papers.

This includes descriptions of serious problems like water and soil degradation, analysis pointing to weak and inappropriate policies and alienation of adivasi communities, and lack of citizens' empowerment. It also includes a number of recommendations on how sectors like manufacturing, cities and tourism can be 'greened', on specific actions like sustainable water harvesting and use, ecological fertiliser and non-pesticide-based agriculture and recycling. It contains proposals for better governance, such as a 'Commons Policy' with secure tenure and management rights to communities, creation of Water User Associations to involve communities, mechanisms of conflict resolution relating to land and water and speedy implementation of rights-based laws in specially disadvantaged areas.

Unfortunately, these progressive components do not make for a fundamental change in the way the Paper views the relationship between economy and environment. In a way this is to be expected, for the commission may be bound by the government's blind faith in economic growth as the panacea for all of India's ills. We no longer even ask if there is a necessary correlation between the rate of growth and the eradication of poverty, or the protection of environmental resources forming the basis of survival and livelihoods for hundreds of millions of people. Nor do we assess how, for these millions, untrammelled growth may actually make things worse by destroying this resource base.

For many years now, Indian leaders have been mouthing clichés on how development and environment must go together. But this Paper misses the opportunity to direct economic planning unequivocally in this direction, an outcome that was possible had it recommended the following:

Specific indicators that tell us whether we are achieving sustainability (like per capita availability of clean air and water, extent of natural ecosystems, reduction in the rates of biodiversity loss, health standards linked to a clean environment), as are being used in some countries now.

A process of empowering citizens to take part in decisions relating to development (and not only better compensation for land acquisition), such that many of the land and water related conflicts we see today would not arise.

Initiation of a national land use planning process, with full citizens' involvement and building on grassroots planning, that includes identification and protection of the areas most crucial for ecological, water, and food security. Assessment (within the macro-economic scenario) of how the natural environment contributes to the economy, and how its destruction is a drag on human welfare and development.

Long-term direction away from coal as primary energy source (given its horrendous environmental and social consequences), and towards renewable energy (especially decentralised sources that reach the poor fastest), with definite targets for the 12th Plan period.

Re-orienting each economic sector towards sustainability, e.g. through environment impact assessments not only of individual projects but of entire sectors and departments at the planning and budgeting stage. This would enormously increase the funding available for the environment, which has otherwise stayed at less than 1% of the outlay in the last 20 years.

Achieving the enormous employment potential in the regeneration of degraded lands, water and ecosystems (partly happening through NREGS). Measures (incentives and disincentives) to curb the wasteful consumerism of a minority of Indians, who are as damaging to the environment and climate as the Western consumers we so like to blame.

Policies that regulate or prohibit processes undermining food, nutritional and water security, including big river valley projects that block traditional flows, chemical-intensive agriculture that creates health problems, and replacement of diverse crops with monocultures.

Interestingly, there are already thousands of grassroots initiatives that are showing the way to achieve security of water, food, housing, livelihood, and other human needs, in ways that conserve the environment and benefit most people. The Paper does mention the need to promote the existing 'success stories'. The commission could initiate an ongoing process of documenting and supporting them. Since the Paper is still a draft, it is not too late to give it the basic re-orientation required to put India on a path towards genuine sustainability. Else, the 13th Plan will come, and we will still be as far away from the Johannesburg commitments and the MDGs as we are today.

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