

# Institute for Ecology and Livelihood Action (IELA)



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# **Institute for Ecology and Livelihood Action**

*Agenda 2030 in focus keeping women and children at the centre of development: Relevance of the eco-system approach for sustainable development and addressing issues related to climate change*

## **Background:**

Taking one step forward while going two steps back became a necessity as the need to take a re-look at IELA's work took precedence following the pandemic. Following the engagement with XINRM in 21-22, it had become possible to place IELA's experiences on a theoretical footing in line with the requirements of the MA-NRM syllabus where IELA was a part of the core faculty in the first semester. Since the classes were taught by giving examples from Maharashtra in general and Ahmednagar in particular it became possible to develop an ecological perspective for Maharashtra highlighting key elements of the Natural Resources on which the State is dependent. At the State level, the following stood out

- a. Sugarcane a water loving crop growing in the drought prone area of the State.
- b. Bagasse the byproduct of sugarcane being the highest producer of non renewable energy.
- c. The depletion of ground water across the State.

In Ahmednagar, (apart from the issue above, the key issues that stood out was that while post monsoon data showed an increase in the water table, pre-monsoon data indicated a decline in the water tables, possibly indicating that while watershed development which has been very widely implemented in Ahmednagar may be responsible for the increase in the water tables post monsoon, the promotion of water loving crops like sugar cane and onion would result in the over-extraction of water during the year. While a detailed study of the same could not be done, we came across wide spread diversion of agricultural land use to production of water loving cash crops in the District (More on this later).

The report on Maharashtra was preceded by one on Sikkim and another on Jharkhand giving a clear ecological thrust to the analysis of key developments in these States. While in Sikkim, the target is the production of hydroelectric power that does not benefit the people of the State, In Jharkhand it became clear that while the State has the highest coal reserves in the country, the people of the State are starved for electricity. Why this dichotomy? What can local communities do to correct this? IELA teamed up with Society for Promotion of Wastelands Development and Prayatana Samiti to consolidate the understanding of these three organisations in the State of Rajasthan where the Aravallis provides a clear dividing line as to the ecology found on its Western and Eastern regions.

Including Goa and Gujarat, where State reports have been written, IELA now has State reports of Six States of the Country with four being in the Western region. It clearly provides the space to seriously examine the larger issues related to the key factors of Eco-system governance driving resource use in different parts of the country. In Collaboration with Akhil

Bharatiya Mazdoor Kisan Sangharsh Samiti and Jharkhand Mazdoor Kisan Union, this approach is being tested out in Jharkhand early next year.

On the question of developing the key role of women and children on issues related to Nutrition, Health, Education and Overall well being with its related impact on all the other SDGs, IELA teamed up with women headed organisations in the States of Maharashtra, Gujarat and Rajasthan. The experience helped IELA to prepare a paper on the relevance of the Ecosystems approach to Sustainable Development in collaboration with Habitat Ecological trust Based in Visnagar, Mehsana District of Gujarat and following up on this a paper on the relevance of geo-spatial tools for facilitating real time ecological research in collaboration with Ashankur based at Bhokar, Srirampur Taluka of Ahmednagar, Maharashtra. Separately using the opportunity provided by the Universal Participatory review process of the United Nations, a report on behalf of the children of Fenai Rewakhand Jaiv Sristhi Mandal located in Chhota Udepur District was prepared and submitted to the UN Commission on Human Rights headquartered at Geneva and with copies to UNICEF, Delhi and Gujarat (Gandhinagar). This exercise threw up the need for a more systematic programme with children (more on this later).

The four editions of the Especioza Trust newsletter brought out quarterly during the year have responded to the transition made in IELA. Using the help of historical and geographical transects, both thematic and regional issues having global relevance and significance have been covered in some form or another. Drawing lessons from the global journey since the Brundtland Commission report brought out in 1987, the global evolution towards sustainable development and the necessary cross disciplinary assessment tools developed as a result of the Millennium Assessment exercise give us a handle to seriously examine varied Ecosystems in participation with the local communities that depend on them for survival. The newsletter has been successful in tracking developments taking place during the quarter that have some relationship with IELA team members in some way. It has also been able to place key ecological and developmental questions being tracked by IELA.

In Rajasthan, IELA's concern for the ecology has led to a strategic dialogue with the Forest Department in different regions and at different levels. In response to a request for delineating the core area of Sitamata sanctuary in which IELA's joint managing trustee Dr. Sunil Dubey is involved as expert, IELA has developed a template to understand the critical issues of concern. This will now be used to develop something similar for other wildlife sanctuaries as well. How good governance by local community management is helping sound eco-tourism has been demonstrated quite effectively by Mewar Biodiversity Park at Amberi. IELA is in close touch with the Village Forest Protection and Management Committee (VFPMC) members of Amberi village who are operating the ecotourism activities with forest department in the Mewar Biodiversity Park.

The cross country study of the status of Tribals, pastoralists, small and traditional fishers, small and marginal farmers and wage workers originating out of the village sponsored by ABMKSS has resulted in IELA's active participation in a cross country dialogue on issues

related to Eco-systems and relevance of renewable energy for decentralised governance. To facilitate this IELA participated actively in a number of events related to commemorating World Water Day and the relevance of support to small and traditional fishers whose concern related to decline fish catch, neglect by the fisheries department and impact of invasive species like Tilapia find common cause with the larger issues of interest to IELA.

Keeping the above developments in mind IELA has decided to facilitate the development of multi-disciplinary specialists which can flexibly look at and respond to issues emerging at different levels and facilitate their documentation (More on this later).

## **Annual Report 2022-23**

### **Agenda 2030 keeping Women and Children in the Centre:**

Following up on an assignment done by one of the XINRM students, IELA initiated an interaction with SADDAC at Daund. SADDAC worked closely with abandoned and destitute children found at Daund railway Station and later got engaged with the women and children of slums of Daund. Building on the report related to pollution of Bhima river flowing through Daund, IELA prepared a draft outline for study of issues in the Bhima catchment area, starting with the source at Bhimashakar sanctuary in the Sahyadri hills, following through to the pollution at Pune and then its impact at Daund from urban and industrial pollution. The children of Pansare Basti where SADDAC is located were educated about the National Inclusive Children's Parliament (NICP) and PRATYeK which acts as the Secretariat. In line with the agenda of the NICP, SADDAC children were educated on the Sustainable Development Goals and through the Sociocracy process election for Prime Minister and Education Minister took place. Due to the specific nature of concerns of SADDAC, they were put in touch with PRATYeK for further follow up.

In November 2022, as an input for COP 27 that took place in Egypt, a process was undertaken with children of Bhekadiya and Kanalva. The report of this process was sent to the UN Head quarters at Geneva, with copies to UNICEF offices at Delhi and Gandhinagar. Following up on the submission of the report for the UPR, it was decided to develop a long term plan for children so that they develop an enquiring mind and root their understanding to the surroundings they live in, begin to understand issues related to children's ecological rights and become responsible citizens of the future. Accordingly the teachers of the Ashram were exposed to concepts related education of children, relevance of development of observational abilities so that they could themselves seek answers to questions they were exploring. It was explained that a five year education programme was planned for children from classes 5 to 9. The first two years would focus on Fenai Mata region (for convenience this has been divided into Kanalva region, Manka region and Dharsimel. Since there are children from MP too at the hostel, a separate group will be formed for them too. The next year will be devoted to two

aspects. On one hand, development of a perspective on tribals by relating to tribals of neighboring regions, On the other a perspective on Gujarat State, namely understanding different eco-regions as well. The fourth year will be to develop a perspective on India (coastal, hill, plateau, plains and apart from tribals, pastoralists, fishers, small and marginal farmers and wage labour as well - a start having already being made while providing exposure to the State of Gujarat). The final year will be to develop an International perspective related to other countries and continents and to the five communities outlined above as well. The education process will not be a straight line as mentioned above, there will be overlaps, but main focus as above.

The above will also link up to engagement with the school and education system as well. A WhatsApp group has been formed with the purpose of developing the education objectives and course curricula. Three villages Mandvada, Bhekadiya and Munglavat have been chosen to take this up more intensively.

In response to a request from the Chairman of TRIFED Ram Singh Rathva, a proposal to process local biodiversity into food, medicine and other products is being explored. The preliminary discussion on the possibilities indicated the following issues

- Women are burdened with household tasks and other restrictions, which make the issue of quality control and market exploration a huge challenge.
- The destruction of the biodiversity and natural resources makes the availability of suitable raw material scarce. Separate efforts are needed for eco-restoration of appropriate local biodiversity.
- Up scaling current initiatives in the household industry require a huge effort.
- The existing programme of the 'Van Dhan Yojna' involving 300 provides a potential which can be explored to mitigate the issues identified above. Women from the villages of Mandvada, Jamba and Chipa will be contacted in this regard.

Keeping the above in mind, issues related to eco-restoration, contribution of women to the mid day meal scheme and its potential for guiding the programme with schools in relation to issues concerning nutrition, health and overall well being is the second option to be explored in terms of activating the potential that women provide for introduction of real change in outlook ensuring equality for women at the work place and at home as well. Considering previous experiences, development of women teams is being explored.

At the request of Ashankur, IELA initiated a quarterly action research training programme on the SDGs with the staff of Ashankur. The first training in August 2022 helped to consolidate the work of Ashankur on the platform of the SDGs, as an action research exercise, base line data for Mandve was to be prepared. This exercise was discussed in detail in the next training programme held in November 2022. The exercise of mapping the data generated in Mandve along with an assessment of the biodiversity at the campus, helped to provide a preliminary understanding of Eco-systems, the Eco-system services they provide, key ecological and

social issues confronted and a possible road map for future action. This understanding was further developed in the next training programme held in February 2023, where the use of geo-spatial tools helped the participants to get a more accurate assessment of the issues they had observed on the ground and also see its linkage with other issues. A more detailed exposure to the question of Invasive Alien Species was facilitated as also an appreciation of medicinal and nutritive species as well. The understanding so developed motivated Ashankur to take up these issues on women's day held on 14<sup>th</sup> March. How the same can be used to develop the proposed plan for women and children will be explored in the next training programme to be held in June 2023.

More details on these have been put up on the IELA web site.

### **Workshop on the Relevance of the Aravallis for climate change: Case studies of Mahi River basin and other case studies and follow up**

In partnership with Society for Promotion of Wastelands Development (Western Regional Office) and Prayatana Samiti (Bambora), IELA jointly organised a workshop on the topic above. The details as well as the way forward have been shared on our web site. Some of the major aspects highlighted are as follows

- a. A joint presentation Dr. Satish Sharma (Sr. Scientific advisor of IELA), Dr. Sunil Dubey (Jt. Managing Trustee of IELA) and Dr. Leena Gupta (CEO, Habitat Ecological Trust) outlined the ecological significance of the Aravallis and the unique nature of the biodiversity found in the region. More details of the presentation are on IELA web site.
- b. The case studies of Jaisamand, Jaisalmer and Bharatpur and the discussions that followed highlighted key issues in these eco-systems and pointed to the relevance of the Millenium Assessment (MA) approach to highlight multi dimensional elements and identify key drivers of change. It also pointed to the need for a decentralised approach to look into the specifics of each Eco-system and identify the key areas of concern to local communities.
- c. Presentations by Forest Dwellers/ Forest Dependant Communities and Fisher Communities expressed the issues and concerns of these communities in relation to the consistent neglect and more often than not implementation of policies and schemes that ran counter to their interest. These included issues related to tribals and pastoralists in the sanctuaries of Phulwari ki Naal, Bhensrodagarh, Sariska and Kumbalgarh and in relation to fishers in Jaisamand, Mahi and Jakham.
- d. Separate presentations on issues of pastoralists and mining labour also flagged the nature of neglect these communities were facing.
- e. A special presentation on the issues related to children of the State and in particular related to child rights and education, pointed to the pressing need to develop a separate approach to specifically deal with the issues facing children.

f. Presentations by different civil society organisations flagged various aspects related to forest rights, common land management and the relevance of the local biodiversity and MGNREGA in developing a unified approach and related financial support to local communities for Eco-restoration across different Eco-systems of the State.

In terms of the follow up done, the issue of the relevance of the Eco-systems approach to the larger question of State policies and practices on one hand and the need to involve women and children to develop a comprehensive approach to Eco-systems concerns on the other have the main planks through which sharing and exchange of views have taken place. State reports for Sikkim and Jharkhand have taken into account these key elements while the work in Maharashtra attempts to build up the approach, keeping women and children in the centre.

### **Follow up on Study on Local Self Governance and impact on Communities**

Following up on the study, Akhil Bharatiya Mazdoor Kisan Sangharsh Samiti (ABMKSS) helped Adivasi Bharat Mahasabha (Unity Forum) organise its first Conference in Adilabad in May 2022, representatives from six States of Telangana, Andhra, Rajasthan, Delhi, Odisha, Gujarat participated in the proceedings while another nine States (fifteen in all) were part of the deliberations leading up to the Conference. A brief overview of the proceedings has been put up on the IELA web site.

This meeting was followed up by a meeting at Udaipur in September 2022. Representatives from Rajasthan, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Jharkhand and Odisha participated in the meeting. This meeting highlighted two aspects -

- The question of State repression of Adivasis due to the denial of the implementation of the Forest Rights Act in general and Community Forest Rights in particular.
- The need for an alternative approach to land use and governance keeping in mind forest ecology. The experience of Fenai Mata Revakhand Jaiv Sristhi Mandal in activating women and children for creating awareness of the relevance of the local biodiversity for nutrition, health and overall well being was shared.

The brief report of the proceedings is put up on the IELA web site.

With a view to developing unity among struggle groups dependant on nature for their survival, ABMKSS participated actively in a meeting organised by All India Union of Forest Working people at Delhi in March 2023. The discussions that took place at the meeting helped ABMKSS prepare a draft charter of demands which were shared with the organisers.

## **Engagement with the Forest Department of Rajasthan on the question of Critical Wildlife Habitat in the Wildlife Sanctuaries**

There has been continuous engagement with representatives of the Forest Department in relation to issues related to forest fires, invasive species, provision of CAMPA and its implementation in some regions, preparation of the ten action plan in some regions, aspects related to the Biodiversity act, issues emerging from non implementation of the Forest Rights Act and issues related to the protection of wildlife in Protected areas and sanctuaries. As a result of these interactions, Dr. Sunil Dubey was placed in the expert committee for Sitamata Wildlife Sanctuary for delineation of the Critical Wildlife Habitat (CWH) area in the sanctuary. The delineation of CWH has to be done in compliance of the provisions laid in the Forest rights Act 2006. The exercise is under process.

While working with the forest department Dr. Sunil Dubey also suggested for inclusion of management aspects like sacred groves, Invasive Alien Species (IAS), places of archaeological, geological and historical importance; conservation of Rare, Endangered and Threatened (RET) and has prepared chapters on these that will be included in the forthcoming 10-year wildlife management plan of the sanctuary. Other wildlife divisions have also showed interest to include new management aspects in their management plans and the dialogue with them is going on.

The association with forest department has helped to place the issues related to the Forest Rights Act in the context of conservation and livelihoods outlined in the Act. Issues related to destruction of the forest by forest fires were taken up with the help of local communities in wildlife sanctuaries, territorial forest areas and other forest areas of the state.

## **Support to Small Scale Fish Workers of Rajasthan and Efforts for Union Formation**

IELA is engaged in providing support to the tribal fishermen communities in southern Rajasthan who have been granted the rights to fishing in the tanks of Jaisamand (Udaipur district), Kadana (Dungarpur district) and Mahi (Banswara district). Apart from the technical support to document their issues and concerns and communication to the authorities, the fishermen are also helped to represent at national platforms in dialogues and deliberations with other counterparts from different states of the country. National Platform for Small Scale Fish Workers (NPSSFW) is the platform that is under process of forming a national federation of fish workers. Mr. Govind Meena, a tribal fishermen and manager of his village's fishermen cooperative committee has representation in the national council of the NPSSFW. As a part of periodic regional and national meetings this year also five tribal fishermen were supported to participate in the meetings held a Goa and Delhi during July and November respectively. IELA is continuing its dialogue with tribal fishermen and doing efforts for formation of the state level union of fishermen. Dr. Sunil Dubey also participated in the national Training of Trainers (TOT) workshop that was organised by the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF) trust at Kolkata during December 2022.



## **Association with National Council for Science and Technology Communication (NCSTC) of the Dept. of Science and Technology (DST), Govt. of India and Its Associated Organisations**

Contribution to science popularization and scientific thinking continued this year as well. Dr. Sunil Dubey being associated with NCSTC for more than 23 years, this year too served as resource person to various state and union territory agencies (Andaman & Nicobar, Delhi, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan etc) in the teachers' orientation, mentoring and evaluation of child scientists in Children Science Congress. He served as resource person for DST, Rajasthan, Science Center (Gwalior) Madhya Pradesh, Prasansa Foundation, Gujarat, Voluntary Institute for Community Applied Science (VICAS), Uttar Pradesh, Network of Organizations for Science and Technology Communication (NOSTC) and other agencies. He acted as evaluator in the national screening of scientific projects under "Exposition of Women Innovation and its Outreach for Sustainability" (EWIOS); and national evaluation under "Indian Young Inventors and Innovators Challenge" (IYIIC), both programs organised by Prasansa Foundation, Gujarat. He also acted as member of the organizing committee, resource person as well as evaluator in the program "Year of Awareness on Science & Health" (YASH) of NSCTC, DST, Govt. of India, hosted by Science Center, Madhya Pradesh.

## **Celebration of World Wetlands Day 02 February**

Considering that Dr Sunil Dubey, Joint Managing Trustee of IELA had been made National Convener of the Working Group on Wetlands, a working unit of the National Platform for Small Scale Fish Workers (NPSSF), IELA decided that it would systematically raise the issues connected with wetlands along with the fisher cooperative group it was involved with at Jaisamand lake, Udaipur. The programme organised by IELA in collaboration with NPSSF and the Fishermen Cooperative Committees at Jaisamand was registered on the global map of the International World Wetlands Day website and locally reported in the print & electronic media as well.

In addition, with the help of Foster Indian Environment Society, Mavli, Udaipur a programme to invite essays on local wetlands from across the country was also taken up. The selected essays are being compiled into a book form that will be available for larger sharing worldwide.

Keeping these key programmes in mind, other groups were also invited to commemorate the world wetlands day across the country, details of the WWD, material in the form of posters, pamphlets, stickers, video clips etc released by the WWD International site was shared with groups and individuals across the country.

## **Other Associations**

**Engagement with PRATYeK** – As a supportive association with PRATYeK in facilitating the engagement of children from varied communities and their care givers towards creating a

just, inclusive, participatory, equitable, sustainable and mystical earth-community, through an education in advocacy for social and ecological justice, IELA was involved in **NINEISMINE** campaign for raising ecological rights of children under various sustainable development goals (SDGs) of the United Nations. Dr. Sunil Dubey was also involved in the evaluation of child/adolescent presenters in a national level competition organised by PRATYeK to invite general comments & recommendations for ecological rights of children in reference to the “*General Comment 26 (GC26) on children’s rights and the environment with a special focus on climate change*” of the United Nations Human Rights Commission (UNHRC). The comments and recommendations received from India were to be sent to the UNHRC for inclusion in the GC26.

**Engagement with CEPT University** – CEPT University, Ahmedabad takes its name from Centre for Environmental Planning and Technology. It focuses on understanding, designing, planning, constructing and managing human habitats. For building professional capacities of students the university expose them to natural landscapes for better understanding of human-nature interactions. CEPT university sent batches of students to southern Rajasthan for understanding natural environment, distribution & occurrence of species in different landforms. Dr. Sunil Dubey from IELA has been helping the university team as resource person during field visits & documentation work in wildlife sanctuaries. This year the university team visited the Jaisamand Wildlife Sanctuary, for the second time as they found the wild landscape and its biodiversity immensely interesting and useful in their learning objectives.

**Engagement with Gayatri Seva Sansthan** – Dr. Sunil Dubey on behalf of IELA worked as expert in ecology with GSS, Udaipur and helped in establishment of Herbal Park at their rural centre at Mandli village, Udaipur. Dr. Dubey has also been taken as member in the advisory committee of GSS w.e.f. October 2022.