

Rural Perspective on the Sustainable Development Goals – focus on decentralisation of governance – Case study of Chhota Udepur

SDG 1 - End poverty: The group through the process followed so far believes that there is enormous wealth in the region which has slowly been pauperised by the development process taking place so far. As an example the issue of Charoli versus Bt cotton farming was discussed in the light of experiences in the region. Based on the people's own analysis it was found that while Bt cotton cultivation on 1 acre earns then Rs 15,000/- less expenses, the earlier Charoli production which was destroyed would have earned then Rs 3,00,000/- . So unsustainable farming in a region supporting trees rather than agriculture which is leading to severe soil erosion which will reduce the life of the nearby Sardar Sarovar Dam as well is in the main responsible for the poverty the people face.

Restoration of the ecosystem and the relevance of decentralised self governance is the key to sustainable life and livelihoods.

SDG 2 - End Malnutrition: Following from the above the people of the region at the recent Mahayatra that took place from 9th January to 16th January (Schedule attached) highlighted the relevance of local foods to end malnutrition. The importance of Saragvo (drumstick) and Mahua was highlighted. In discussions with the Collector prior to the Yatra, the group pointed out the need to introduce local foods in the mid day meal as a way of promoting its relevance and also providing employment to the local women's self help group. Accordingly after the yatra, local delicacies of Mahua and Saragvo were prepared for the Collector who after tasting them has asked the group to develop a trial proposal for one mid day meal scheme for a school. This is in the process of being formulated. Examples of lack of iron diet leading to sickle cell anemia was also discussed. This is found in plenty in Saragvo and Mahua as also other local foods.

Malnutrition is due to the alienation of the local community from their traditional diet which was considered as inferior food (now highly priced in cities like Delhi and Mumbai). Restoration of the importance of local foods in the diet starting with providing an employment phi-lip for it under the mid day meal scheme would go a long way in reducing malnutrition in the region.

SDG 3 - Health and Well Being: SDG 2 is a subset of this. In addition it is the concept of healthy life and healthy living. The issue related to use of pesticide and urea was explained in the context of its impact on mother's milk and the resultant health of the baby. The increasing incidence of cancer in the epi-centre of the green revolution Punjab was also explained. This was also explained in relation to the high incidence of smog at Delhi as a result of burning of rice straw due to the need to replenish the soil with potash and the fact that the animals in that region do not eat this straw as a result of the high percentage of silica in the straw. The reduction in the population of bees is due to the lack of appropriate environment for them. How these and other creature help to sustain life on earth was also explained. The paradoxical story of the way almond milk (packaged as a healthy food) is resulting in the killing of bees globally was also explained. The relevance of the biodiversity in

controlling the rain water run-off, its impact on soil health and its relevance for maintaining a clean and healthy environment was also discussed.

The health of the environment and the health of people are intricately related. traditional wisdom understood these connections which need to be restored in the light of the modern day developments and pressures. Increase in the number of cancer hospitals in Punjab are not a sign of healthy development, as also the increased use of medicine in the diet to make up for the shortcoming available in the traditional, local environment suited diets.

SDG 4 - Education: The essence of vibrant education is one that empowers. Our experience shows that education housed in the local context which can be related to provides the wherewithal for the children not only to understand the wealth of information their parents and elders have as a result of day to day struggle with nature for survival but also gives them a sense of confidence in their own learning and skill abilities. Engaging with local governance issues as a result of such type of education process also brings in a sense of empowerment and inclusive process with their parents and elders.

While formal education helps in grasping concepts, environment education helps in contextualising this experience.

SDG 5 - Gender Equality: Traditional practices resulted in the gender segregation of labour due to the differential in the physical abilities. Modern developments like machines and computers make it possible to obliterate the differences between genders. This has not translated into gender equality rather employment and other stresses lead to the accentuation of gender differences. Modern development praxis helps to bring this dimension as a vital element in modernising traditionality. Without this the burden of environment conservation and eco- restoration talked of above will only result in additional burden for the women.

Modern scientific and technological developments make gender equality not only possible but a must if we are to achieve the goals set under the SDGs.

SDG 6 - Water and Sanitation: The centrality of the industrial production process makes this subsidiary to the interests of production. Hence the need for large Multipurpose Dams to service the needs of people and industry which results in not only displacement of tribal communities but also loss of tree and biodiversity cover essential for the natural regulation of rain water and its perennial availability in the form of streams. While we are not in disagreement with the concerns of the current development discourse, we highlight spaces where these have become issues due to the current development process which is currently antithetical to the process of eco-restoration for sustainable livelihoods. This development process also brings in its wake the plastic economy which is polluting our countrysides and making them unlivable. Production based on nature which is biodegradable does not only provide employment but also provides healthy living spaces for all.

The importance of nature's regulatory ability in connection to water and sanitation inherent in earlier systems needs to be understood so as not to preclude these live options in the concern for water and sanitation for all.

SDG 7 - Energy for all: Modern development looks at the availability of electricity, gas and fuel as indicators of energy for all. The potential of renewable energy is also looked at in this way. To us the prime form of energy is solar energy and the prime converter of this energy being plants which are living photo voltaic cells which bio-degrade as well.

Modern developments in renewable energy make it possible for decentralisation of energy production to take place if co-related with the process of value addition for agriculture, dairy and forest produce including realising the medicinal potential of the local biodiversity.

Decentralisation of production combined with the potential of renewable energy in the control of local communities for in-house value addition and for the market will considerably reduce the current wastage in energy and make energy for all a realisable goal .

SDG 8 - Decent Work: Engagement with nature for livelihood provides a unique challenge for all. There is an example of a factory in Anantpur Andhra Pradesh which costs Rs 14,000/- crores and provides employment to 7,000 people ie an investment of Rs 2 crore per job. On the other hand it will destroy the livelihoods of many more due to the pressure on water and production of electricity to run the factory so in fact it will provide negative employment. On the other hand restoration of the local eco-systems using MGNREGA and other government schemes will provide employment to all in the countryside at the fraction of the cost. Modernisation in terms of value addition to local produce for self consumption and sale will also provide the much needed intellectual input locally required for creative innovation to meet modern needs.

Decent work means work in which the person is in control of self and dignity as well. Facilitation of the process of local self governance with innovation made possible by creative use of renewable energy provide the wherewithal for healthy engagement of self with society and the work place.

SDG 9 - Innovations and Technology: 24/7 energy made locally available and self produced by the local community using the current advancements in renewable energy will require creative engagement of the local community with the environment and understanding of the developments in modern technology that can be fine tuned to suit their needs. This means development sans displacement and combining traditional knowledge skillfully with the potential available from modern scientific developments. The ability to grasp concepts and their application require regular engagement of these within the local surroundings. An experiment in renewable energy at Jamnagar provides scope for local communities to develop their own capabilities to design appropriate machines to harvest bio-gas,for cooking, electricity generation and quality fertilizer. Learning from this will open the potential for value addition conducive to local employment generation in the local surroundings as well.

The potential of renewable energy combined with local knowledge and critical resources and support made available from the government will induce induce indigenous innovation and technology.

SDG 10 - Reduce Inequalities; Implied in Community activity and community based work for sustainable natural resources is the reduction of inequalities as there will be collective engagement for sustainable livelihoods and creation of decent work. The first part of this exercise is to stop the current process of development (locally) which are both resource intensive as also further accentuating inequalities.

Restoration of community sense of self worth based on informed engagement with modern development is a precondition for reduction of Inequalities.

SDG 11 - Sustainable and safe cities: A healthy countryside and reduction of the forced displacement currently taking place from the countryside reducing the pressure on cities and its consequent demand for more and more resources leading to the vicious cycle of resource depletion of the countryside and consequent pressure on urbanisation.

Vibrant urban communities creatively engaging with the countryside will provide healthy living spaces, employment for all and propel sustainable modernisation a pre condition for sustainable and safe cities.

SDG 12 - No Wastage wise consumption: The earlier countryside was marked with near zero wastage and healthy consumption habits due to the inherent process of recycling in the production process. Modern production is wastage generating and the market logic of transporting goods from point A to point B and often the same good from Point B to Point A as is the case with food and the PDS system is waste generating and energy intensive consumption habits. This production process prompted by the British need for raw material and later carried on by the Industrial class in this country has to stop. Local communities have to realise the potential their own natural and human resources have when combined with the potential that can be provided from the existing government schemes and budgets if modified suitably to meet their needs. Today the rural countryside is littered with plastic due to the introduction of externally produced goods into the local economy when many of the needs can be supplied locally itself.

Reduction in wastage of fuel and related plastic economy due to unnecessary transport required under the current development paradigm can be achieved in real terms by turning production back on its feet namely by strengthening local production processes.

SDG 13 - Climate Action: Eco-sustainable decentralised governance for sustainable livelihoods will provide the impetus for real term climate mitigation measures processes and principles which can be replicated by other communities as well.

Political action to mitigate impacts of Climate change is inbuilt in the up-scaling process envisaged namely developing federations at the eco-system level.

SDG 14 - Life in the Oceans: Recently the fishermen of downstream Bharuch were up in arms against the reduction of the Mackerel catch as a result of the loss of their breeding grounds upstream due to the dams constructed upstream in the Narmada. Studies show how the destruction of mangrove forests are increase the destruction

caused due to cyclones. Saline ingress due to the reduction of the pressure from sweet inland water flows as a result of the destruction of the rivers are some of the impacts that affect both land and sea which includes life in the estuaries, and inter-tidal zones. Practices like bottom trawling, affect the sea beds, reefs and related life in these regions while fine (mosquito nets) destroys small fish and affects subsequent catches. The ocean bed upto 100 mts depth provides 80% of the marine catch, but this catch is taken by big fishers who account for more than 80% of the production while engaging less than 20% of the labour. it makes no sense to promote such large boats and bottom trawling that can very well be sustainably harvested by small fishers. So also export orientation to an economy that has 20% of the world's population and can very well use the resources for self consumption due to the variety of produce possible leads to destruction of the coastline and the mangroves essential for sustaining the balance between the sea and the land. Coastal fishers were up in arms across the country due to the destructive potential of the modifications made in CRZ (Coastal regulation Zone).

The relation between Ocean and land is very complex and includes the rainfall patterns as well. The Destruction of the potential for life in the Oceans impacts Land too.

SDG 15 - Life on Land: The fishers on the coast and along rivers and water bodies, the small farmers of the countryside, pastoralists and tribals form a natural alliance which has a stake in the protection of life on land as it relates to their own life support systems as well. Destruction of their life support systems forces them to engage in wage labour and in extractive and nature/ biodiversity destructing economies as well. Many factors point to the need to reverse this trend and this is the force that can help us do it. Their children however are being alienated from this process by the education and employment processes currently in place but the large force of educated unemployed in the rural areas forces a rethink.

A union of fishers, small farmers, pastoralists and forest dwellers combined with the potential for indigenous modernisation offered by renewable energy is essential to generate the ground swell for preservation of life on land.

SDG 16 - Peace and Justice: rebuilding local communities with the idea of reduction in inequalities and working in harmony with nature are some of the prerequisites for peace and justice not just for human beings but life on earth as well. The tribals, fishers, pastoralists and small farmers in their different eco-systems are intricately aware of this relationship and have these symbols in their art and culture as well.

healthy and vibrant local communities participating actively in local governance process and their relationship to the natural resources in central to achieving peace and justice in real terms.

SDG17- Global Partnerships: Local partnership at the regional level, regional partnership at the State level, State level at the National level and National with International on the twin plank of commonality of local issues with the global and commonality in the separate themes being addressed are some of the planks on which real time partnerships can emerge and develop.

Save Mother Earth, save life on earth, save ourselves are vibrant agenda that give force to global partnerships for mutual learning and development.

SDG 18 - All rights for all children: As can be seen above all SDGs are intertwined with each other. This involves rebuilding of broken links at the local and regional level which provide the framework for realistic holistic decentralised development. The Pledge taken by the people of Fenai Mata Rewakhand Jaiv Sristhi Mandal has to be viewed in this light. Children have been central to this whole process of engagement and engagement with them on all these issues will provide the right mental framework for future engagement as well when they take their place as adults in society. The ongoing process of engagement with children will take place with children themselves facilitating those younger than them to take their shoes in the Children's parliament along the lines of the 18 SDGs.

Children are the future and the means to realisation of the overall thrust of the SDGs namely leave no one behind.