

Achieving Sustainable Development Goals through Legislation

Outcome Report

Consultation meeting with Civil Society Organizations

22nd February 2017, Janata Bhawan, Gangtok, Sikkim



*Empowered lives.
Resilient nations.*



Table of Contents

Overview.....	3
Exploring the mainstreaming of SDGs in Sikkim: Current status	4
Mapping the issues:.....	4
Conclusion:	8

Overview

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted by the global community in 2015, in follow-up to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). With the stated purpose of marking progress over the MDGs, the SDGs were premised on the fulfillment of the economic, social and environmental pillars of development, within the larger 2030 Agenda of Sustainable Development. With their adoption by member-states of United Nations, including India, they came into effect in January 2016, and have since, been gaining immense policy momentum.

India's premier planning think tank, the Niti Aayog, has already mapped the various schemes against the SDGs. Moreover, at the state level executive, various consultations and non-governmental partnerships are being facilitated to implement the SDGs. States like Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, and Odisha have contributed to this process by introducing vision documents and mapping context-specific indicators. State government bureaucrats are formulating state plans based on the SDGs, which are likely to culminate in a 15-year plan to be adopted by Niti Aayog and with the implementation of the 14th Finance Commission recommendations, states will have more money to plan the SDGs in their own way with little intervention from the Centre.

Sikkim being one of India's foremost progressive state in terms of momentum towards sustainability, has also begun the landmark process of formulating a legislation for implementing the SDGs across the state. For this purpose, besides legal and policy coordination and research, extensive stakeholder consultations are being held across the state, with various stakeholders like Panchayats, youth, industries, civil society organizations and other communities of concern.

The following report will describe the substantive outcomes that emerged after consultation with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) on 22nd February, 2017, at Janata Bhawan, Gangtok. The consultation saw participation from a diverse range of civil society actors, spanning areas of social health, youth welfare, livelihoods and sustainability.

The discussion mainly sought to understand and explore potential spaces for interlinkages between SDGs and the existing institutions at the social and economic level. The key issues raised included alternative perspectives on development (such as looking at human capabilities and talking about context-specific 'need-based' development), means to prevent exploitation of locals by profit-seeking industries, leveraging potential of new modes of economy (through arenas like cashless agriculture), addressing sexual harassment in the private sphere and ensuring justice in landholding patterns.

Exploring the mainstreaming of SDGs in Sikkim: Current status

A brief glance at the economic, human development and environmental indicators of Sikkim shows that the state is one of the most progressive performers on several key indicators – such as gender equality, agriculture, and, access to basic amenities. With more than 90% of the people having access to safe drinking water and to energy and high outcomes on equality in the field of employment and education, the state should form a natural part of the implementation of the goals of the SDG agenda.

Yet, despite this general progress, a closer examination reveals problems of inequity and access in several critical areas. For example, despite the strides taken towards the organic farming agenda, the state is still reeling under losses in ensuring food sovereignty. Similarly, when we look at the area of industries, it is clear that the current trajectory of economic growth is not adequately geared to address the issue of inclusiveness and employment generation for the local people, with, in many cases, industrial growth often leading to an uprooting of the cultural systems and livelihoods displacement of the indigenous communities.

These lines of trade-offs have created a deeply flawed trajectory of development, which is geared more towards exploring economic opportunities rather than ensuring an inclusive society. This issue was flagged repeatedly by concerned stakeholders during the consultation.

Mapping the issues:

Challenges	Opportunities	Action Points
<p>Reframing development:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Addressing the environment-development tradeoff. For instance, the agricultural economy has shifted to cash based system that is product-centric under the Organic Mission. This raises issues of food security, loss of traditional knowledge and agro-biodiversity and gene loss of traditional crops. Addressing skewed land ownership patterns: The 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sustainability-oriented missions like the Organic Mission need to focus on marketing, besides production and cultivation. A comprehensive policy of land reforms. Proper monitoring of the 100% local employment rule, through a better system of overall monitoring, can be ensured. Independent, self- 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitoring and conservation of natural assets. Establish a sense of ownership among the locals, through participation in decision-making processes. Reconciling the problem of rising unemployment with the statistically high economic growth. Need for a comprehensive

<p>per capita land in Sikkim is decreasing every year (now .1Ha) due to frequent buying and selling of land and use for non-agricultural purposes such as land taken up by Pharmas and HPPs. Also in the absence of land reforms land holdings are skewed. 28% of the people own 70% of the land.</p>	<p>enabling pathways to development will also reduce dependence on government welfare dole-outs.</p>	<p>agricultural policy which would ensure protection of traditional agro systems and crops and food security.</p>
<p>Conditioning industrial operations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Companies are using the labour contract system to avoid their obligations for providing local employment, with a shifting of employment responsibilities from the companies to the contractors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure big industrial projects provide employment to locals. • Screening process for companies before granting permission. • Large construction projects that are funded from outside the State should be seen as opportunities for capacity building of the local workforce. • The PES payment by companies could be a reimbursement money, which could go towards the wellbeing of the communities where these projects are located. • Opportunities to involve the Army in the solid waste management process and to biodiversity conservation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CSR funds should be given to the NGOs so that proper accounting and utilisation can be done. Many a times the companies give the funds to the youths who cannot constructively utilise the funds and so these are frittered away. • Payment of ecosystem services (PES) and benefit sharing should be imposed on the companies. • Monitoring of drug manufacturing companies to be done to ensure no leakages to drug abuse. Strict punishment to drug peddlers.

<p>Nuancing government's approach:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transparency in government MOUs with third parties for large projects is lacking. • Improper utilization of CSR funds. • Norms and specifications of large projects are designed to leave out local firms from bidding. • Devolution of Powers to PRIs is not satisfactory due to lack of funds and functionaries. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CSOs should be given more roles in the Govt. There is workforce and willingness to work among the organisations but is constrained by lack of funds. They can look into the proper functioning of Govt Departments and also of the industries. • Ensuring transparency by making publicly available assessment and progress of the Government Departments. • A proactive government approach across sectors will yield positive spillovers, in areas like solid waste management, hydropower project extraction of ecosystem services and water/river policies to curb pollution, which are poorly managed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The home-stays should be nuanced according to the location and culture and utilise locally available raw materials in construction. This would add more practicality and aesthetic value to help promote tourism. • Transparency is needed with regard to job openings in firms, with public advertisement of their requirements and qualifications so that locals with the given criteria can apply. • There needs to be transparency in CSR funds by declaring the quantum available each year. • Proper social auditing (like in MGNREGA) needs to be conducted on the larger projects, schemes and departments with frequent follow ups. • Stricter policies for ensuring local employment should be adopted. • Labour laws should be such as to prevent companies from avoiding their obligations for local
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		<p>employment namely through the labour contract system.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frame rules to ensure agriculture/landholding/ and rights for marginal households.
<p>Reforming education and empowering youth:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers are not motivated to impart quality education to the pupils. Teaching is just a job and many choose it as a lower career option. • Pre-schooling facilities in remote areas are very poor and it becomes unfair and difficult for children who have not had access to pre-school initiation to compete with others in town and higher population areas where such facilities exist. • Neglect of poor performing students, especially those from EWS. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote youth welfare by ensuring awareness on issues like drug abuse. • Education reform will ensure accountability in government schools. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need for a thorough survey of the teachers to see where their areas of interest lie so that they can teach better in the fields they are good at. • Adequate pre-schooling facilities to be provided for all children in remote areas. • Accountability needs to be fixed for performance and quality of education imparted in Government schools and education rights of poor children ensured.
<p>Addressing infrastructural bottlenecks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of road-connectivity in the remote areas and therefore difficulty in access. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remote areas do not qualify for road projects under the Central PMGSY schemes as these are based on local population which is small in remote areas. Need to search for alternatives.
<p>Meeting people's demands:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a generation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A well-developed Hydropower 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Put in place proper infrastructure for

<p>gap in power projects between projected estimated production and optimum/actual power production.</p>	<p>Development Policy can look at issues of water use, carrying capacity, water pollution, effects on microclimates and aquifers, aquatic life and other environmental issues.</p>	<p>realizing existing policies and opportunities. For instance, proper sanitation practices need to be put in place, including banning plastic waste discharge.</p>
<p>Gender equality:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sexual harassment of women within families, communities and workplace is prevalent and has been kept subdued. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strict rules on sexual harassment to be framed.

Conclusion:

From the opportunities, critiques and action points listed above, a host of issues were raised by the concerned stakeholder during the discussions. Recurring issues spanned the education sector reform, extractive enterprising by the Hydropower projects, the abject state of local employment, improper monitoring of CSR funding and general corruption-related issues and tardiness of government departments.

It is also clear that many of the critiques raised were supplemented by suitable recommendatory action measures. The root cause of non-implementation of good policies and intent by the government – such as, through flagship programmes like the Organic Mission – can ultimately be traced back, not just to seemingly immediate causes like bureaucratic lethargy, but to the larger developmental narrative that, in the name of green growth, often sidelines people’s and environmental concerns, making them a subset of economic growth and prosperity. Thus, the way forward needs to reflect on a “need-based” model of development, which can also take cognizance of the carrying capacity of the state’s ecosystem and its population.