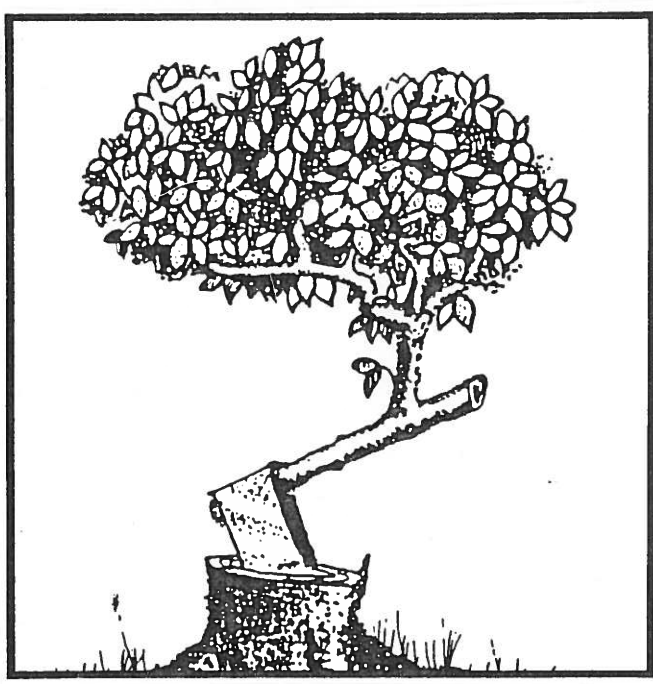


WHERE TWO MOVEMENTS MEET

RIGHT TO WORK AND ENVIRONMENTAL REGENERATION IN INDIA

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India Committee of the Netherlands

The India Committee of the Netherlands (ICN) is an independent, non-governmental voluntary organization in solidarity with the poor and oppressed in India. The objectives of the ICN are:

- * to inform the public in The Netherlands and other western countries about social, economic and political developments in India. Emphasis is put on the struggle of the people against poverty, oppression and environmental degradation and on the often adverse impact of western policies (e.g. in the field of trade relations, multinationals and development aid) on the poor and on India's development potential.*

- * to expose and if possible change western policies that harm the poor or India's self-reliance as well as to promote policies and developments that support the struggle for social justice and sustainable development in India.*

*ICN's work is done on the basis of consultation and collaboration with many organizations in India. It is a registered non-profit association with many active voluntary members, a number of local and thematic groups and a staff of three part-time staff members. Its activities are financed by membership contributions, donations, subsidies and income from activities like selling books. **ICN is not a funding agency**; it does not receive or raise money for development projects and organizations in India.*

The ICN does research, keeps a public library, publishes and distributes books, booklets and a bi-monthly magazine and lends out video-tapes, slide-shows and exhibitions. It also organizes seminars, conferences, information and discussion meetings and other educational activities for and with a wide variety of individuals and groups. Another major part of ICN's work consists of initiating and implementing campaigns on issues affecting India's relations with the western countries, in particular The Netherlands and the European Community.

In the past there have been actions and campaigns on the delivery of fishery trawlers and fertilizer exports to India financed with Dutch development aid, EEC's aid for India's dairy development programme 'Operation Flood', the Bhopal disaster and (other) human rights and women's issues. Examples of topics on which the ICN is presently working are: women and employment, the urban poor, garment trade and labour conditions, environmental issues, labour unions and multinationals (eg. Unilever). Since december 1990 we are engaged in the campaign 'Work Against Poverty'. We are looking forward to your reactions and cooperation.

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"Unemployment is a major problem in this country. Fortunately, ecological regeneration is a very labour intensive exercise, whether it will be soil or water conservation, digging ponds and tanks, or afforestation. Once a decentralised eco-development plan is available for a particular region, massive employment can be created through activities aimed at the restoration of the ecological infrastructure. If we can somehow tie together a legal employment guarantee with programmes of ecological regeneration I think we can make a massive bid to meet people's needs on a sustainable basis."

From: Environmental Agenda - Anil Agarwal, Centre for Science and Environment

1. Introduction

India's environment is in a sad state. Deforestation has denuded the hills, soil erosion has washed away fertile soil, water tables have dropped and both surface and ground water are seriously polluted.

At the same time, unemployment and underemployment are chronic problems in the rural areas of India and they are not tackled effectively in spite of a number of poverty-alleviating schemes during the last decades.

In a country where most of the people depend on what nature provides to survive and where 70 per cent of the population is employed in agriculture, the relation between environmental degradation and increasing un(der)employment is obvious. The effects on employment range from the spending four hours daily in gathering firewood instead of being able to take up gainful employment, to fleeing from a village where the environment is so badly destroyed that not only the employment opportunities, but also the immediate living conditions are seriously affected.

It is in the situation of a deteriorating environment and an enormous employment problem, that both environmental groups and agricultural labourers unions conduct a campaign for employment guarantee and a fundamental right to work.

Of the environmental groups, the Centre for Science and Environment declared itself in favour of the creation of massive employment through activities aimed at the restoration of the ecological infrastructure through employment guarantee schemes.

The right to work movement, which emerged among non-governmental organizations (NGO's) and labour unions demanding right to work, appeals for employment guarantee on national scale with the example of a similar scheme in the State of Maharashtra. Here, an Employment Guarantee Scheme (EGS) has been implemented for the last two decades. With this scheme the State government has taken upon itself the legal obligation to provide direct employment in case of unemployment of any adult living in the areas. During the past few years, many of the projects under EGS are related to the regeneration of environment and the development of sustainable agriculture.

The right to work movement aims at the development of productive assets of the poor such as land, water resources, forests, common waste lands etc. The poor should in any future employment guarantee scheme have the right to use all assets created through their own labour. At present this is not the case under the EGS of Maharashtra.

At the local level, grass root organisations have set some good examples in environmental upgradation and creating of new employment opportunities. The best of these organisations have not only worked for but mainly with the local people, so they would realise their own responsibility with regard to their environment.

However, this report will not focus on the efforts undertaken by grass-root organisations. It will rather emphasize government policy and governmental programmes on environment and employment in rural areas, as a fundamental right to work can only be enacted as a result of a government decision. In addition, the implementation of employment guarantee schemes on national scale requires reallocation of government investments, change of government policy and decentralisation in planning. With regard to the latter, grass- root organisations can play an important role if and when new employment guarantee schemes are put into practice. In fact they are indispensable for any governmental programme or policy with regard to employment generation, poverty alleviation and environmental regeneration to work effectively.

2. People and Environment

Diversity

India is inhabited by 850 million people, the second largest population in the world. Although Indian society is dominated by hindu religion, one also finds muslims, sikhs, christians, tribal groups with their own religion and culture, etc.

India is huge and as such environmentally as differentiated as its people are. Within the same country we can move from the tropical high mountains in Tamil Nadu in the South to the sub-temperate high mountains of the Himalayas in the North. There are areas with extreme low rainfall (less than 200 mm a year) and areas with extreme high rainfall. In Kerala average levels of rainfall can be over 4000 mm. The variety in landscapes and ecosystems is therefore enormous.

Within any ecosystem one finds - to put it simply - croplands, grazing lands and forests or woodlots. The balance between these three components is crucial for sound land-use of the ecosystem. In mountain areas forests will be dominating, while grazing and crop lands will play a minor role. In the desert of Rajasthan land-use is predominantly pastoral, with agricultural lands and forests playing a minor role. The fertile soils in the Punjab are used for agriculture, here forests and grazing lands fulfil only a minor and supporting role.

Deforestation

But the forest cover has rapidly decreased and its quality deteriorated, unbalancing the ecosystems. Deforestation is due to the growth of human and animal population, the increasing demand for fodder, for fuelwood to meet domestic energy needs and the rising industrial demand for forest products. As a consequence, India is losing 1,3 million hectare of forest a year¹.

The large scale quest for forest products started under British colonial rule in the previous century. Around the middle of the 19th century the British Government decided to confiscate the common lands and forests. Especially forests were of great economic importance to the British. A large supply of wood was needed for the construction of railroads throughout the country. The railroads were used for the transport of goods. Raw materials were transported to the ports, and subsequently to Europe.

The policy of the British has been continued after India became independent in 1947. With industrial development as first priority of the Indian government, forests were regarded as providers of raw materials and as source of revenues. The common lands have turned into waste lands or are for instance used as Eucalyptus plantations to meet the high demand of the pulpfactories. Wood is further used in the package industries and tobacco industries. Large amounts of wood is used to produce crates for the package of fruit. In the tobacco industries firewood burns in big ovens in order to dry the tobacco leaves. According to the World Health Organisation for every 300 cigarettes produced, one tree is burnt.²

Large areas covered with thick forest are denuded in order to extract minerals and other raw materials. Transport through the woods and the pollution caused by mining have destroyed the areas surrounding the mines.

The reduction in forest cover has resulted in serious soil erosion, droughts, floods and ecological damage, with serious repercussion on society, particularly on tribal groups and the poor in agricultural villages.

Tribals

Tribals are the indigenous inhabitants of India. There are about 60 million of them, of which the largest part belongs to the poorest groups in Indian society. The three main occupations of tribals are food gathering, shifting cultivation and settled cultivation. Over the centuries, tribal groups developed a culture which maintained a balance between own needs and the environment. Their social, religious and cultural life was closely linked with the forests. The continuity of the balance between needs and nature was legitimized by myths, while social control mechanisms limited environmental degradation. The daily existence of tribal groups is based on the forest, which provides food, fodder, firewood, construction materials and medicines.

To the tribals, deforestation results in a larger distance between village and forest and in a decline of the available food production. Tribals are forced to take up wage labour with the disappearance of the forest as means of subsistence and the lack of economic alternatives. There is a high degree of male migration.

The commons

Where as tribals have lost access to the forest, the population living in agricultural villages at present has limited access to common lands. These people mainly depend on agriculture and cattle-raising for their livelihood. The common lands surrounding the villages provide additional resources to the households. Especially the poor - marginal farmers and landless labourers - have been depending on these lands to meet their basic needs of for edible wild leaves and fruits, fodder for cattle, fuel for cooking, small timber for house-building and agricultural implements, green dry leaves for manure and raw materials for artisans.

In the arid zones, where the cultivation of crops without irrigation is only possible during the rainy season, common lands play a crucial role. Research has shown that over 75 per cent of poor households, mainly landless households, depend on the commons for fodder for their cattle, firewood, dung and handicraft materials.

Collecting products from the commons is an important source of employment and income for the poorest people in the villages, particularly in the dry period when agriculture offers no employment.

In Andhra Pradesh common lands create 139 days of work for poorer households. In Gujarat employment generated is as much as 196 days, against 185 in Karnataka. The income generated by collecting products from these lands consists of about 20 per cent of the total household income.³

The common property resources are also important to agriculture as they supply the lands with manure. Agricultural assets can be bought with money generated by the commons. The additional income and products are especially important to marginal farmers with less than one hectare of land.

Water problems

Not only products like fuel, fodder and construction material have become scarce. India's population is also facing urgent water problems. Seventy per cent of the rural population is without access to safe water-supply. Both groundwater and surface water are seriously polluted. This pollution is not limited to the urban areas. Tanneries and, for instance, dyeing factories in rural areas discharge polluted water.

Agriculture is an important contributor to rural pollution. Under the name of 'green revolution' high yielding seeds were introduced in agriculture in the middle of the sixties. The new seeds have indeed contributed to a higher food production, but at the same time required water, pesticides, and fertilizer in large amounts. However the green revolution was only successfully implemented in a limited number of areas. Arid zones have been neglected, which in some areas has led to a decrease in food production.

In areas where the green revolution is successful, like Punjab and Haryana, fertilizers and pesticides seep into the soil and spoil the groundwater. The total amount of pesticides used, increased from 2,000 tonnes in the fifties to over 80,000 in 1989. In these same areas, the groundwater table has dropped seriously due to the insatiable demand for water. In response to the lowering groundwater tables farmers deepened tubewells and lowered the pumpsets. In coastal areas, excessive withdrawals of groundwater have led to saline intrusion in sweet water aquifers. Fertile soil has turned into virtual waste land. Women, who are responsible for fetching water for domestic purposes are faced with dried-

up wells and have to walk many miles in search for water.

As the rainfall is unequally spread over the Indian continent, both in time and in space, it is necessary to conserve as much water as possible for use during the long dry period. Groundwater accounts for more than 95 per cent of all the liquid fresh water available on earth and as such it seems relevant to manage it well.⁴ Groundwater level can be maintained or increased by reducing the enormous run-off losses taking place particularly during the monsoon season as a result of the denudation of forest lands and poor soil and water conservation in the rainfed agricultural areas.

Dams

Big dams are still thought to be the solution to a variety of water problems. The purpose of these dams is to create huge reservoirs of water for irrigation and other use, to cater to urban water demands and to generate energy. However, most of the water is not going to the poorer or drought affected areas. The main beneficiaries are medium and large farmers on fertile soil and the industrialists, who either benefit from the water or the generated energy.

Long-term effects of the dams on the soil and whole environment are extremely destructive. Smaller water schemes would be much more appropriate.

Building of large dams means displacing thousands of people, most of them tribals, without adequate compensation. The construction of a dam creates employment for construction workers, the dam itself may create some employment in irrigated areas. But most of all it destroys the employment activities of hundreds of thousands of tribal people and uproots and threatens their very existence as they are removed from their ancestral lands.

'I found these', she said, handing him a few broken bits of pottery, 'not far from here. In fact I found several pieces in our compound alone. They're all over the place once you start looking.'

'What are they?' He turned the over in his hand. 'Are they valuable?'

'No, not valuable. Just a few household things, cooking pots and so on. I wondered how they got here, that was all.'

'I expect they broke them up and buried the lot', said Clinton, 'rather than cart them away. The locals, I mean ... some of 'em were camped here before we moved in, I'd quite forgotten that little episode.'

'What happened to them?'

'They moved.'

'Where to?'

'No idea. Just got up and went, like animals. No moving problems there - I wish to God we travelled as light, we could have done this job (...building a dam...) in half the time.'

Helen said: 'But they lived here, didn't they? They didn't ask to move.'

'No. We persuaded them.'

'Why.'

'Why?' Clinton repeated irritably. 'Because they occupied the site we needed.'

'Were there no other sites?'

'Not suitable ones. It had to be away from labour quarters and near the river and away from the blasting - a hundred things. Then we found this spot - absolutely ideal from our point of view, except for those huts.'

'How many?'

'How many? Do you mean huts?'

'People.'

(From: 'The Cofferd Dams', K. Markandaya, 1969. Dialogue between Clinton, dam construction manager and Helen, his wife.)

Unemployment and poverty

With forests vanishing and the environment deteriorating, employment opportunities are lost. Unemployment and ungainful employment take their place.

Data based on National Survey Samples(1977-78, 1983 and 1987-88) show that the person-day rate of

unemployment in rural areas moves around 8 per cent.⁵ The rates of underemployment are, however, much higher: about 20 per cent of the labour force is found to be in a state of underemployment. In addition, the rates of unemployment and underemployment of women are higher than those of men. While over one third of the women is underemployed, only one out of six men is underemployed. This figures show that employment opportunities for women are fewer than those for men in rural areas. The person-day rate of unemployment is higher among agricultural labour households than among self-employed households. At the same time agricultural labourers families, forming 40 per cent of the rural population with a total of around 250 million, do not own land and hardly other productive assets. They depend on employment provided by medium and large farmers. Most of them work no more than three to six months a year, which explains the high rate of unemployment among them. In most states, except for Assam, Himachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir, the person-days of unemployment among landless labourers range from 31 to 74 per cent.⁶ Most of the Indian agricultural labour households have an income below the official poverty line of about \$ 450 a year. Both man and woman would need 300 days a year of work and a wage of 15 rupees (\$ 0,75) daily in order to earn this amount yearly. While working only part of the year, and as a woman earning only about 10 rupees a day, is not surprising that most of the landless labourers live far below the poverty line.

3. Environmental loss loss of employment

Today in India, due to environmental degradation, many are (partly) unemployed or work hard but retain little.

The consequences of deforestation, erosion and the lowering of water levels on employment are many-sided and range from total loss of employment in specific regions to ungainful work and increasing workloads everywhere in the rural areas.

Environmental refugees

Environmental refugees are people who are forced to leave their residence permanently, due to loss of their natural environment. For instance, large scale development projects, like mining or the construction of a dam, often result in the displacement of people and the total destruction of their environment.

Narmada

The Narmada is one of India's greatest rivers. Twenty million people live on the fertile soil of its basin. Some of India's best remaining forests are situated here. Tribal groups have inhabited these forests for centuries. The tribals make their living out of hunting as well as cultivating rice and other crops. Forest produce is collected for building and making tools, utensils etc. as well as for food and medicines. Their whole way of life is now threatened by the Narmada Valley Project. The Narmada Valley Project is a scheme to build 30 major dams, 135 medium-sized dams and 3,000 small dams on the Narmada and its tributaries. The dams will displace over a million people from their land.

Barna is a dam, already built on a tributary of the Narmada. Barna was completed in 1975, submerging 7,700 hectares and displacing over 3,000 people. Compensation was a meagre Rs. 300 per acre and a similar sum for each house. Very few families were able to buy land with this money. People lost their home, their income and were offered no new employment opportunities. In addition, agriculture in the region suffered from severe waterlogging due to improper drainage, resulting into further unemployment.⁷

Singrauli

Singrauli is a massive coal mining and energy development programme for which the World Bank has lent \$850 million in four separate loans for the construction of the Singrauli super thermal coal fired electric generating plant, for the adjacent coal mine, and for electric transmission lines.

The project area lies south of Varanasi. The Bank-financed power plant and coal mine are part of a much larger energy development program in the region, which is to become India's energy capital. So far, eleven open pit coal mines have been developed, along with four other super coal fired electric generation plants besides the one financed by the World Bank.

The problem with Singrauli is very simple and horrifying to see in person: 200,000 to 300,000 of the rural poor in the area have been subject to forced relocation twice, three times, in some cases even four or five times in 25 years, each time with little or no compensation. Mostly tribals at the fringes of Indian society are displaced. Their livelihood

was the land, which has now been totally destroyed and resembles scenes out of the lower circles of Dante's inferno. Enormous amounts of dust and air and water pollution of every conceivable sort have created tremendous public health problems. Tuberculosis is rampant, potable water supplies have been destroyed and cloroquine resistant malaria afflicts the area.⁸

Seasonal migration

Where environmental refugees leave their residence permanently, seasonal migrants leave their village only periodically in search for employment. This employment is found at places too far away to enable daily travelling. Seasonal migrants stay at labour sites for extensive periods and then return to their homes. Both male and female migrants search for work, not only in towns and cities, but also in other rural areas.

The tribal Bhil community in Maharashtra was to a large extent dependent on forest produce. Due to deforestation and a gradual loss of land the Bhils are becoming increasingly marginalized. The lack of control over land or other means of production compels many Bhils to migrate every year to harvest sugarcane, grown by large peasant-entrepreneurs in South Gujarat. During the entire harvest season (which lasts up to eight months) the migrants live in make-shift huts on fallow lands on the road sides, without access to water, electricity or other facilities. The women participate to a large extent in the harvesting of the cane. A woman forms a harvest team together with her husband. She ties the cane stalks into bundles after they have been cut by her husband.

For the Bhils migration is a way to survive, as their natural environment can no longer support them.⁹

Change of profession

Most people try to survive in their village first, without migrating. They will change their profession, when due to environmental degradation, the old profession can no longer be exercised.

All kinds of artisans, from basket-weavers to potters, are faced with acute shortage of fuel and raw materials. They are forced to become agricultural labourers.

Nearly a million people eke out their living by making bamboo baskets, boxes, brooms and mats. Due to flowering of bamboos and disappearance of bamboo forests, there is an acute shortage of raw materials, forcing these artisans to take up other jobs.

There are 1,5 million potters in India who are faced with a similar crisis in the availability in raw materials. The cost of clay and firewood has shot up. Gradually potters are taking up other occupations in villages and cities.

In Dharwar district, Karnataka, fishermen have shifted from catching fish to cultivating crops. They were forced to do so as a big plant upstream the river, producing polyester, polluted the river in such a way that the fish turned black inside and was no longer edible.

In the same district, common lands have been turned into Eucalyptus plantations, which supply a pulpwood factory with raw materials. Hanumanthappa Waddar, a landless shepherd, received a loan from the local bank to buy fourteen sheep. But where should he let them graze? The plantations' guards confiscated his sheep for grazing them under the Eucalyptus trees. With a lot of difficulty Waddar recovered all sheep except one. However, he was forced to sell the sheep, as he could not find fodder to feed them. Waddar is now unemployed and has debt at the bank.

(In: 'Whither Common Lands?', 1988, SPS)

The increasing burden of women

Because of environmental deterioration, the daily workload of women is increasing. Women are not only partly responsible for food production, they also have to gather firewood and fodder and fetch water. The continuing destruction of the natural environment makes it hard to perform these tasks. It

is difficult to find water of good quality as the groundwater-level is lowering due to large scale irrigation and the use of fertilizers and pesticides.

Growing distance between village and forest as a result of deforestation leads to walking long distances and spending many hours in collecting firewood and fodder for household purposes. Women find alternatives in substituting firewood by cowdung.

As I took up my basket, he peered in. 'I see you collect dung and take it with you. Is it not for the land?'

'Indeed no. Dung is too useful in our homes to be given to the land, for it is fuel to us and protection against damp and heat and even ants and mice. Did you not know?'

'Too well', he answered shortly, 'I have seen your women for ever making dung-cakes and burning them and smearing their huts. Yet I thought you would know better, who live by the land yet think of taking from it without giving.'

'What substitute then?' I said quietly.

(From: 'Nectar in a sieve', 1982, Kamala Markandaya)

Women also save firewood by preparing less meals or meals which are not fully boiled. It is said that what is beneath the pot is as important as what is in it. Malnutrition can be both a consequence of lack of food as lack of fuel to prepare it. While women work harder, they have to eat food which is both less in quantity and in quality and as such their health is suffering. The increasing workload for women is also shown in working while pregnant. Women used to work till their seventh month, nowadays they work till short before delivery.

Nowadays, also older women and widows spend many hours working. In areas where environmental degradation is such that men have migrated in order to find work elsewhere, women are left behind with the responsibility for both land and household. But in most cases the already existing workload does not allow time to work on the land. Food production and household income declines as a result.

Economic activities, which were giving women with some degree of independence and created additional income, have disappeared. Minor forest produce, used in making baskets, ropes and plates, can no longer be found within a short distance from the village.

The specific difficulties women are facing are not due to environmental degradation as such. The sexual division of labour puts up women with a double workload, of working both within and outside the household.

The nature of the tasks the women are performing is related to gender-ideology and sexual division of labour. Assets and consumption within the household are distributed unequally, showing the lower status of women. An example of this is the food-intake of women. A woman first feeds her husband and next her children. She will eat what is left, which is usually not sufficient compared to her daily workload.

In addition, women have no or little access to resources such as land or money. Economic alternatives - like selling of cowdung and firewood - which remain to be performed by women, often destroy what is left of their own environment.

Ungainful employment: headloading

Deforestation has destroyed the forest economy, on which tribal life was based. Shifting cultivation is strongly limited by State governments and with the disappearing of the forests, minor forest produce as an important source of income has disappeared. As such, increasing numbers of tribals and other poor are taking to unauthorised cutting and selling of firewood. The firewood has to be gathered over a distance of 8-10 kilometres. Although the work is hard and the proceeds are little, it is an important source of income. The headloaders easily sell their wood in towns and cities, where there are inadequate supplies of commercial fuels like kerosene and LPG. Tribal women collect two or three headloads a day from the forests and sell them at Rs. 1,50 or Rs. 2,- to households and teashops.

At least two to three million people are headloading today, of which many are women. Headloading provides employment throughout the year, although many headloaders take up this kind of employment only in the slack season.

4. Environmental Management

Partly as a result of a degrading environment the Indian labour force is continuously increasing, worsening the problem of employment in the country. According to an estimate, around 100 million persons will be added to the labour force in the next 10 years. Until now, environmental and employment programmes implemented by the government, have not been able to ameliorate the situation.

Environmental policy

In India, some aspects of environmental protection, namely soil conservation, public health, protection of forest and wildlife, industrial hygiene and water supply and sanitation, have been included in development programmes right from the start of the Five Year Plans in 1954. However, the concern for integration of environmental considerations in the process of economic planning was for the first time explicitly articulated in the Fourth Five Year Plan (1969-1974).

The National Committee on Environmental Planning and Coordination (NCEPC) was established in 1972. Its major objective was to promote research on environmental problems. In 1980 a Department of Environment (DOE) was set up by the Indian Government. NCEPC and DOE are supported by a set of legislations, which can be enacted when environmental protection is required. These legislations are a result of the Directive Principle of India's Constitution, that 'protection and improvement of the natural environment is an obligatory responsibility of the State and every citizen of India' (articles 48 and 51-A). Within the framework of rules and regulations, however, emphasis was on industrial and domestic pollution abatement. In 1974 a Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act passed, followed by the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act in 1981.

But although more attention was then paid to the 'pollution side', some acts with regard to the management of natural resources were drafted. For instance the Wildlife Protection Act 1972 and the Forest Conservation Act 1981. Unfortunately, these acts have not been able to prevent further deterioration of forests, common lands, etc.

Environmental programmes

Several environmental programmes with the purpose of managing the natural resources have been carried out as part of the Five Year Plans.

In the first Five Year Plans soil and water conservation projects mainly consisted of contour bunding and afforestation. They were extended to conservation of river catchment areas and today soil and water conservation programmes are being taken up under the so-called watershed approach, i.e. a complete watershed area is upgraded by a set of measures like irrigation, drainage, bunding, land-levelling and afforestation. Watershed management was for example carried out in catchments of the flood-prone rivers of the Gangetic basin. The catchments lie in six different states, Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal and in the Union Territory of Delhi. The main objective of this scheme was to contain the maximum rainfall within the catchments, check erosion and thereby mitigate the floods in lower valleys.

For a number of years programmes of social forestry and economic and industrial plantations have already been implemented in different states with varying degree of effectiveness.

From the beginning of the eighties, the main objective of forestry programme has been the conservation of existing forests and the launching of countrywide afforestation and social forestry programmes. Thus, three sets of needs are to be fulfilled: ecological security, fuel, fodder and other domestic needs of the population and the needs of village small scale and large industries.

But the massive planting programmes have not been without controversy. The question is, who is actually benefiting from the social forestry projects. There are basically three types of social forestry projects to be recognised, - community forestry, in which trees are planted on community lands and an entire village is involved; forest department woodlots which are planted on public lands and along canals and roadsides; and farm forestry in which farmers are given seedlings free or for a reduced price in order to encourage them to plant trees on their own land.

Far greater progress has been reported in farm forestry rather than community or public plantations. 'The State of India's Environment 1984-85' heavily criticizes farm forestry. "The fact that seedlings are distributed free or heavily subsidized essentially means that the programmes, started with the professed aim of meeting the dire fuel and fodder needs of the poor, are becoming a scheme of subsidies to support lucrative cash cropping by the rich."¹⁰

According to the 'State of environment in Andhra Pradesh' forest policy worsens the situation, as "forest policy is ad hoc. Planning perspectives are formulated for a maximum period of five years, which is clearly not enough time for whatever plant species to develop into a tree. Most of the five year plans have apparently no connection - each turns out to be a separate entity. Planning in India is based on the electoral process repeated every five years. A long term perspective of 100 years can never be seen in the forest development planning, which could have maintained continuity at the implementation level."¹¹

A national water supply programme was launched in 1954 during the First Five Year Plan and progressively larger allocations were made for water supply and sanitation in the succeeding plans. But it was only in the Fifth Year Plan that the importance of providing safe water supply and sanitation as a basic minimum need was stressed.

However, the progress so far made in providing safe water supply and basic sanitation facilities could hardly be called satisfactory. Seventy per cent of the rural population is without access to safe water. The situation in the urban areas is relatively better but here too, particularly in smaller towns, water supply and sanitation arrangements are far from adequate.

Environmental management

The quality of life in the village mainly depends on the quality of and access to common lands and water. We have seen that both natural resources have been neglected by Indian development planning. As such, it is of the utmost importance to put rural communities in a central position where the management of their environment is concerned. In particular rural communities have an interest in upgrading and managing the environment.

Environmental management calls for comprehensive decision-taking which should take place at village level. Current decisions with regard to villages are taken either within the panchayat, a village council often covering several villages, or on block level. A block comprises about 100,000 households within 100 villages. Decentralisation is necessary in order to put the responsibility and management for the environment in the hands of the people in the village. The Centre for Science and Environment in New Delhi advocates village ecosystem planning.¹² Every village should be looked upon as being surrounded by a unique ecosystem. Therefore every village should take its own decisions regarding the ecosystem it lives from.

Ownership rights and user rights

One of the main problems related to the control over the environment is to be found in ownership rights and user rights. Many common lands are confiscated by the government, others still belong to the village communities. People in the villages are willing to take care of the village owned commons but refuse to look after government lands, which are officially not even accessible. For example, when they would plant fruit trees on government lands, they would have no guarantee what-so-ever that they would have usufruct rights in future years.

The commons left under village control are used intensively, as the demand for fuelwood, fodder and other products has increased due to a growing human and animal population in the villages, while the commons have decreased in size over time. The intensive use of these commons has often turned them into waste lands, because they have not been given time to recover.

Privatisation

There are two ways to achieve proper management of the common lands. The first is to privatise the common lands, either fully or partly, of which there are some successful examples. In the state of West Bengal poor and landless families are granted patta's (user rights) for plots of government land in the framework of a social forestry programme. Afforestation agencies have encouraged them to plant trees instead of growing crops, as the soil is virtually unfit for the latter. The poor families have carefully protected the afforested land and ensured the survival of trees.

The 'Tree Patta Scheme' is a project which is executed in several states. Within this scheme, households have the right to use the trees, but the land itself does not become their property.

However, the privatisation approach has major problems. In a densely populated country like India this approach would reduce access to the commons for a large number of village people. There is simply not enough land to benefit all the poor on a private basis.

Given that these lands are vital for the survival of landless labourers and marginal farmers who use the land for fodder, fuel, grazing and other substantial needs, the people will be adversely affected by the reduction of common lands.

Retaining the commons as commons

The second and - as the Centre for Science and Environment admits - a far more difficult option, is "to retain the commons as commons and manage them by organising and mobilising village communities to develop the commons as a community enterprise." This would socially and ecologically be the best option and should be done according to the following principles:

- * the commons must be brought under the control of the village communities
- * the entire community must be involved in the protection of the commons under its control
- * all the members of a group will protect a common resource only if all of them know that they will benefit from the resource equally.

Village organisation

Hitherto, the government has implemented its environmental programmes through a top-down approach. In this approach people are looked upon as targets. This has created a feeling of total dependence among the people. Today, villagers not only expect the government to build roads and schools and give them employment but also plant trees and grasses and look after them.

However, the natural resource base of a village can only be managed by villagers themselves. The Indian government cannot do this in each and every village in the country. Environmental regeneration is a task that the people must take up themselves. An effective village-level institution is necessary in order to achieve the participation of villagers in upgrading the commons. Such an institution would be responsible for equal sharing of benefits and resolving the disputes which may arise among the people. The already existing village panchayats are not adequately equipped to do this. A panchayat, being an elected body, tends to divide the community into factions and is itself often dominated by the more powerful groups in the village. The powerful do not need the commons in order to survive and as such will not see a point in upgrading them.

Further, one panchayat can easily consist of three to six villages, whereas each village consists of several hamlets. In such cases environmental management mediated through the panchayat may lead to inter-settlement tensions. The common resources of a village normally can be used by people from different settlements. When people from one settlement decide to protect and rationally use the common natural resources around them, they run into conflict with people from other settlements. Panchayats are seldom able to resolve these conflicts, as the fight will continue within the council by representatives of the different settlements.

As such, it is a prerequisite that every settlement must have its own institution which enables its members to participate in managing its common resources and which provides a forum for resolving disputes among them. The natural resources involved should be clearly defined in order to reduce the chances of inter-settlement tensions.

Gram Sabha

In the state of Gujarat one finds gram sabha villages. These villages are registered under the Rajasthan Gramdan Act of 1971. This Act, which is unique in India, gives executive and legal powers to the village organisation (gram sabha). The act permits a village to declare itself a Gramdan village. Accepted as such, the Act allows the gram sabha to manage all the natural resources within the village boundary and it also has the powers to judge, penalise and prosecute.

Close to Udaipur in the State of Gujarat one finds the village of Seed. Being a Gramdan village, the gram sabha of Seed has full control over all the land within the village boundary, including previous government lands, and exercise full control over their use. The gram sabha of the village consists of all adults in the village. It has devised clear rules for the protection of village common lands. The common lands have been divided into two categories. One exists of lands on which both grazing and leaf collection is banned. The second category consists of lands on which grazing is permitted but leaf collection or harming trees is banned. The first category of land is lush green and full of grass which villagers cut only once a year. The grass is distributed equally among all the households.

Seed's gram sabha does not even allow the cutting of trees on private land. Prior permission of the gram sabha is permitted and it is only granted if the owner needs the wood for domestic purposes, and not for sale.

The gram sabha also has a system for penalties to enforce disciplined use of the village trees and grasslands. Often fines are levied on people from neighbouring villages, for whom Seed's commons are no longer accessible, but still make an attempt.

(In: 'Towards Green Villages', Agarwal & Surain, CSE New Delhi, 1989)

Mahila mandals

Participation of women in the gram sabha and the regeneration of the common resources is crucial because of their role as provider of water, firewood and fodder to the household. As it will benefit them directly, women are likely to be active in afforestation activities etc.

But although women can be full members of gram sabha's, like in the village of Seed, women are not likely to participate in any institution which is male dominated.

Therefore, together with the establishments of gram sabhas of all adults, separate mahila mandals (women organisations) could be formed in every village as a distinct sub-unit of the gram sabha, but with clearly and legally defined roles, rights and access to funds. The National Commission on Self-Employment for Women has also recommended the revival of Mahila Mandals in every village.¹³

In the family women have an inferior position. A woman is responsible for the reproductive activities, cannot inherit land and has limited access to assets such as land or money. Through a mahila mandal, a woman could have access to common lands, which can supply her with minor forest produce, which she can use for additional income-generating activities. In the long run, when the commons are fully upgraded, firewood will be less scarce and fodder can become a stock item as is the case in the village of Seed.

People's participation

Many scientists and non-governmental organisations support the viewpoint of the Centre for Science and Environment, as far the participation of people in the process of development is concerned.

According to Dr M.L. Dewan, "strategies and concerted action are best implemented if the people who participate in the process understand and see their own interests, both short-term and long-term, in

such development. The focus should be on strengthening local capacities for planning and implementing development activities."¹⁴

As such, Dewan regards the 'tragedy of the commons' as created by persons who overuse common property resources like forest or pastoral land to their own advantage, even to the point of destroying the resources. Several governments have failed to manage common resources without full participation of the local institutions and people.

The government did not only fail to make people participate in environmental management. The history of employment programmes shows the same top-down approach, as we will see in the following chapter.

5. Employment Policy and Programmes in Past and Present

Where India has a relative short history where environmental programmes are concerned, the history of rural employment programmes goes back a longer time. Most of the rural employment programmes are directly or indirectly related to the environment. The British introduced the concept of 'test relief works' to gauge the intensity of famines. Large attendance at such works was indicative of the seriousness of droughts in the pre-independence period. Depending on demand more and more wage employment was provided at labour intensive public works. The strategy of wage employment was initiated in post-independence India with the introduction of the Rural Manpower Programme (RMP) in 1961. RMP was started as a pilot project in a number of districts. Its objective was to provide employment for 100 days to those who were unemployed during the slack seasons in agriculture.

A country-wide scheme known as Crash Scheme for Rural Employment (CSRE) was launched in April 1971. It was intended to provide employment to at least 1,000 persons in each district through labour-intensive works and to create durable assets. Evaluation of the schemes revealed that although they achieved the immediate objective of providing employment opportunities, the benefits were thinly scattered. Lack of proper planning was also evident.

In the light of the experience of RMP and CSRE a Pilot Intensive Rural Employment Programme (PIREP) was started on small scale in November 1972 for a three-year period. Its objective was to evolve a comprehensive rural employment strategy for the entire country. The committee which reviewed PIREP, however, expressed the view that the entire development strategy should be based on labour-intensive technologies so that the maximum labour absorption takes place through the regular development process.

Food for work

The Food for Work Programme (FWP) started in April 1977. Projects under FWP ranged from small-scale village projects to large public works. Goals of FWP were creation of employment for the poor and upgrading of the infrastructure in the rural areas. The workers at the project-sites received their payment fully or partly in the form of food.

The Food for Work Programme came to be recognised as a major instrument of rural employment and development. India succeeded in effectively fighting the drought of 1979-80 by providing about 600 million mandays of employment under FWP.

A nation-wide evaluation, however, brought out a number of deficiencies in its implementation. These included erratic supply of foodgrains, delay in measurement of earthwork, non-durability of assets created under the programme, inadequate technical support and lack of supervision.

Besides these deficiencies there were three major reasons due to which the programme suffered a setback. First, the programme was implemented on an ad hoc basis. In the context of this uncertainty, the State governments were not able to provide the needed technical and administrative support to plan, oversee and monitor the programme effectively. Second, there was no attempt by the States to formulate a shelf of projects which could take into account the local needs and could also fit in with the overall priorities of the region where the programme was implemented. Third, in many States, for want of financial provision for the material component of works and also to give part of wages in cash, there was a tendency to take up earth works, mainly road works, which were not of a durable nature.

National Rural Employment Programme

An improved version of FWP, the National Rural Employment Programme (NREP) was introduced on a nation-wide scale in October 1980. NREP was made an integral part of the Sixth Plan in April 1981. It has been implemented since then as a centrally sponsored programme on a 50:50 financial sharing basis between Central and State governments. Its major objectives are generation of additional employment and creation of productive community assets. Preference should be given to landless labourers for employment. Further, among the landless labourers priority should be given to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. The programme was being implemented through District Rural Development Agencies. The works were mainly executed through village councils (panchayats). Workers were to be paid the minimum wages. Part of the wages were paid in the form of subsidised foodgrains.

Though the principle objective of NREP has been to provide employment to the needy during the slack seasons, in actual practice the employment generation is more attuned to the budget cycle. As a result, very little employment is generated during the first quarter of the financial year, which is in fact the main slack season. On the other hand more than half of employment generation was realized during the last quarter of the financial year. Besides, most of the assets created by the programme did not benefit the poor. The preferred items of work were roads, school buildings, tanks, wells, community centres and panchayat bhavans. Not much emphasis was given to productive types of works like minor irrigation, drainage, land reclamation etc, which generate sustained employment opportunities.¹⁵

The Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme (RLEGP) was launched in 1983. It is largely similar to NREP, only with the difference that RLEGP is specifically meant for the landless and aims to offer guaranteed employment to at least one member of every willing landless labour household up to 100 days a year. The main structural limitation of RLEGP is the present budget which does not allow for even a limited guarantee of 80 to 100 days of each deserving household. Another limitation is that there are no specific guidelines to ensure that the assets created by wage employment will primarily benefit the poor.

In 1989 the existing wage labour programmes were combined into one programme, Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY). With a budget of US \$840 million per year, one member of each landless household is to be provided with employment for 100 days in a year. However, planning and implementation of the projects under the programme are insufficient. The programme was set up in a hurry just before the 1989 elections.

The JRY offers no guarantee of employment to the poor. There are a lot of complaints that many sarpanches (village heads) are using the programme to enhance their own status e.g. by expanding the panchayat building. The types of projects selected and the choice of people benefiting largely depend on the goodwill of government employees.

But in spite of its shortcomings, JRY is the biggest wage employment programme in India, through which millions of people find additional employment.

Self-employment

Next to wage employment projects, programmes like the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) support self-employment activities of people. IRDP started in 1980 on a national scale and replaced some of the earlier self-employment programmes. IRDP was meant to provide families below the poverty line with subsidised loans to enable them to purchase productive assets for activities like animal husbandry, weaving, handicrafts, etc.

However, many poor household enterprises are not likely to become economically viable. Their lack of supporting resources, in particular land, and very low income position will seriously affect their ability to run any enterprise with even the normal degree of uncertainty.

Employment guarantee scheme

In the seventies, in the State of Maharashtra another employment programme emerged: the Employment Guarantee Scheme. The unique feature of this scheme is that it legally secured the right to work by guaranteeing employment to all adult persons in the rural areas who want to do unskilled

work. This implies the obligation by the State government of Maharashtra to provide this employment in rural public works on demand.

The Employment Guarantee Scheme began as a result of several factors. Agricultural growth during 1961-1971 (0.07% per year) was much lower than the population increase during that period (2.4% per year). This agricultural stagnation aggravated the employment problem in the rural areas and led to a deterioration of the conditions of the poor. Besides, regional economic differences and income disparities in Maharashtra show extreme contrasts. The areas of Bombay, Thane and Pune are industrially highly developed but, excluding the sugarcane areas, the rest of Maharashtra is dominated by traditional rainfed and subsistence farming.

Agriculture employs about 62 per cent of the labour force, but accounts for only 25 per cent of the state's domestic product. The state's policy to reshape agriculture primarily through technological innovations and irrigation in the sugarcane areas, and not through land reforms, has condemned millions to landlessness and unemployment. More than half of the rural population was landless in 1981. Also marginal farmers are forced to work as agricultural labourers in order to supplement their income. Droughts, which have affected the largest part of Maharashtra, have set in motion the migration of the poor in the rural areas to cities like Bombay. Despite of this the rural population increased over 1971-1981 by about 20 per cent. The level of unemployment and especially of underemployment is very high. Around one third of the rural labour force is in need of additional employment.¹⁶

In July 1969 a Pilot Employment Guarantee Scheme (PEGS) was initiated in 23 districts, which was expanded in May 1972 to cover the whole state of Maharashtra.

During the drought years of 1971-1974 millions of landless became unemployed and millions of farmers could not cultivate their land. The PEGS was suspended because of the acute draught conditions. People were temporarily employed on relief projects like breaking rocks etc. However, the widespread rural turmoil and discontent during this period culminated in a strike of 1.5 million farmers and labourers in 1973. The government responded with some reforms such as the first minimum wage act and took up the Employment Guarantee Scheme again. As such, EGS can be seen as a concession to the poor and also as an effort to diffuse the crisis situation with possible disruptive consequences for the economic and political system.

EGS was introduced with unanimous support from the political parties, as the scheme would also benefit the larger farmers by providing them with infrastructure like irrigation and roads at little or no costs. Besides migration to the cities would be reduced.¹⁷

Most of the projects executed under EGS are in the categories of soil conservation, road works, land development, afforestation and irrigation. The budget for the Scheme is at present Rs. 235 crores (appr. US \$100 million). Till March 1991, over 195,000 projects were completed and almost 13,000 are still in progress. The highest attendance on the EGS works is now in the period between February up to July. In these months around 300,000 people daily participate in the projects. Until 1987 daily attendance was even two to three times higher.

EGS has helped to reduce un(der)employment among men and women. Most of the EGS workers are still living below the poverty line, but food intake and living conditions have clearly improved.

There is a very substantial participation of women in the EGS projects, officially given as more than 40 per cent, but more likely exceeding 50 per cent. There are several reasons for the high degree of participation of women in EGS projects. The works of the scheme are often closer to home than other jobs, which makes it easier for women to combine a wage job with household labour. Wages are generally higher than elsewhere and the provision of creches for small children has encouraged the attendance of women workers.

The creation of assets has been one of the main objectives of the EGS. A study¹⁸ showed that 78 per cent of the households, which lands have benefited from EGS works, reported an increase in agricultural production to the extent of 25 per cent. Based on the expansion of irrigation and soil conservation measures, improved seeds have been sown, more fertilizers applied and better management techniques used. However the medium and large farmers receive the largest share of the created assets. Landless labourers (only) benefit from the constructed works by the growing number of jobs on the farms of the landowners.

Organizing rural labour

In areas where labourers were not organized, rural workers demanding for EGS work, have not always been provided with such work. Irregularities in payment of wages have been reported, together with cases of malpractice and corruption. Sometimes, productive works like the construction of a tank or soil conservation were left uncompleted, as the work was not properly supervised.

However, the most important aspect of EGS is that it facilitates the organization of rural workers. Unequal distribution of land and inadequate wages are the two basic issues affecting rural labourers. The guarantee has proved to be an important incentive for collective action by landless labourers. In case the Scheme is not implemented properly, they are often demonstrations and other forms of protest. In about half of the districts in the State labour unions fight for the interests of the labourers. As employment is no favour but a right, the workers are in a better position to fight for their personal and collective interests.

EGS has enabled rural workers to get organized despite the divisions of caste and the contradictions between the small farmers and the landless labourers through struggles around issues like irregular work, non-payment of wages on time and improper management of work done under EGS. When rural workers are organized, it naturally increases their collective bargaining power.

New model

In the past few years a number of important changes have taken place in the Employment Guarantee Scheme. Integrated village development, called 'Rural Development through Labour' has, in addition to guaranteeing employment, become an important objective since 1989. EGS was still too much regarded by both people and planners as a relief programme rather than a development scheme. Goal of the new scheme is the creation of sustainable community assets and proper management of the most important source of income in Maharashtra: agriculture.

The village is the key unit in the new model. The villagers are provided with employment but the primary consideration is the development of the village. There are, however, certain conditions which a village has to observe to become eligible for the new sub-programme.

A village must guarantee the attendance of at least 50 labourers on work under the scheme. The works will be carried out in the slack seasons of agriculture.

Of each household in the village, except landless labourers, two persons have to offer shramdan (work without being paid) for a day in a month on an EGS project or donate a day's wages.

As such, each family is involved in the development of their village. The village council has to approve the programme to be implemented by a two-thirds majority. Works on lands belonging to poor and marginal land-holders are taken up on priority base at full government cost. However, in respect of other beneficiaries 50 per cent of expenses of works, such as forest farming, horticulture and digging of wells, will be treated as a subsidy and the remaining 50 per cent as a loan.

These conditions only apply to areas with hardly any irrigation. In other areas, the unfinished projects have to be completed first.

With regard to the common village lands, stray cattle is not allowed to graze freely and illegal felling of trees is prohibited in order to restore the ecological balance.

Once a village is involved in the programme, new works under EGS will not be implemented in a radius of 5 kms. The purpose behind this is that the local labourers should offer their labour under the new programmes, carried out in their village and help it develop through their labour.

Integration of EGS with other ongoing development projects has become the main principle, with the objective of rural development through labour power. Each work will be tied up with coordinated schemes. For instance, after completion of the work of percolation tanks, wells should be dug in order to put the completed percolation tanks to their optimum use.

In combination with EGS works, other government programmes, such as social forestry, can be taken up. In principal, the works should provide employment to the people below the poverty line, members of scheduled castes and tribes, nomadic castes and tribes as well as landless labourers and women.

In order to achieve the objective of rural development through labour power, emphasis is put on EGS works like impounding rain water around villages, improving farm land in a village and encouraging planned farming. The usual works like water and soil conservation are also undertaken.

Up to March 1991 almost 1600 villages have been selected for the programme and Rs.260 lakhs (about US \$800,000) have been spent.

In June 1990 the Government of Maharashtra launched a Horticulture Programme linked with the EGS, consisting of promoting fruit cultivation (like grapes, mango's, banana's) in dry areas. In 1990-91 this programme has covered 85,000 hectares of land and during the Eighth Five Year Plan one million hectares are to be developed under horticulture. The programme can be taken up on the land of any farmer. Small farmers and marginal farmers do get a 100% subsidy for a period of three years for all the inputs like labour costs, plants or trees, fertilizer etc. Big farmers do get a subsidy of 75%. Farmers have to show a 75% survival rate of their cultivation, otherwise the subsidy has to be repaid. Up to March 1991 more than 140,000 beneficiaries have been selected for the programme, the expenditure has been almost Rs.3000 lakhs (US \$12 million). The programme is expected to use a larger part of EGS funds in the future.

A positive feature of the Horticulture Programme is that it provides small farmers with a source of income, makes them less dependant on loans and develops dry uncultivated areas. The biggest problem however is that the programme almost excludes landless labourers because the paid labour input is mostly family labour, with no obligation to hire outside labour.

Ralegan Shindi

In Parner Taluk of Ahmednagar district in Maharashtra one finds Ralegan Shindi village.

The area is well-known for its perpetual drought situation. From here the maximum migration to Bombay takes place.

But Ralegan Shindi is a green spot in the vast expanse of dry, brown land. The village was surviving on EGS several years ago but today is a non-EGS village. The village inhabits 1,500 people, among which there is a relative homogeneity with regard to the landholding pattern and caste composition. There are only a few landless households, most of the villagers are small farmers. Thus the village provided an ideal base to bring people together.

During the drought years of 1973-1975 construction of a percolation tank was started near the village by the department of minor irrigation. It created 100,000 man-days of employment during one-and-half years. Mostly people from Ralegan Shindi worked on the construction of the tank. However, the tank proved to be useless as water used to seep out of the bund.

The local people were mobilized by Annasen Hazare in 1976.

Hazare, retired from the army and returned to his native village, faced some resistance first but gradually received their support. The village temple was rebuilt with his money and free labour (shramdan) by the villagers. By building a temple in cooperative spirit, Anna Hazare generated a lot of trust in his leadership. Then he started looking for government schemes which could build up assets for the whole community. He did not emphasize programmes like IRDP, which help people individually.

By then, the villagers had realized that although the percolation tank was completed, it was defective. Hence they approached the government to rebuild the bund. It was realized that the earlier bund did not have a layer of black soil, which is essential for stopping the water seeping through the bund. Corruption was suspected. The black soil had to be brought from elsewhere outside and this operation costs money. At the same time the layer is hidden, so its absence could be easily concealed. This time the villagers said they would themselves work on it more vigilant than before. Repairing the percolation tank was the first big step towards development of Ralegan Shindi.

Following the tank it was essential to develop nala-bundings to arrest water which overflows the tank or seeps out of the bunds. Under an EGS scheme, 32 nala-bundings were constructed and land was levelled. The productivity of the land in the command area of the percolation tank grew substantially.

Along with the soil and water conservation measures, 20 wells were dug, of which seven are community wells. Thousands of tree saplings were planted throughout the village and

thus rain water retention and soil conservation was achieved.

For the purpose of raising grass as fodder for animals on the slope of the hill nearby, people were requested not to take their goats onto the hill where the grass seed is stamped over. The people are supposed to cut the grass and feed the animals at home.

Hazare believed self-sufficiency of a village should be its main goal. As such he took up the Gandhian model of development. One of the important decisions following this principle was that, whatever irrigation facility is available, the farmers should first grow staple foodgrains, like jowar and bajra. The second and third crop can be cash crops.

Another important principle Hazare followed was, not to take any fund as donation but only as a loan. Next to this, the labour component of any construction work should be performed by villagers as a 'gift' to the project, i.e. it should be done by the means of shramdan. According to Hazare, "Anything which is built with own labour, will be handled with care." The effect is noticeable in the village. All community owned assets, such as fruit trees, school buildings, community well and biogas installation, are used properly, without any damage or waste. The farmers are growing mainly foodcrops. Onion is cultivated as the main cashcrop in the village.

(In: Chhaya Datar, 'case study: Ralegan Shindi')

As such, Ralegan Shindi is an example of a village where the assets created under EGS schemes are useful in reinforcing subsistence agriculture. But it must also be noticed that little extra labour is created for landless labourers as the farmers do the work themselves. There are only a few landless households in Ralegan Shindi, as such emphasis has been put on marginal farmers. However, it must be realized that in villages where a large part of the inhabitants has to make a living as agricultural labourer, the generation of employment through the creation of assets which can be controlled by this group, is of the utmost importance. At the same time, the homogeneity among the households in such a village will be less. As such there will be more problems to be resolved by the village organisation and local leaders.

Participation of women is another serious problem. In Ralegan Shindi for instance, the participation of women is not profound, but living conditions have improved as nowadays the women cook on gas, which is supplied from the biogas installations. Water is available. But especially farmer's women have lost contact with each other as they are more bound to the field, since there is more work to be done. The women do not participate in the village council. A mahila mandal, as described in the previous chapter, could improve women's participation in this village.

Although the Employment Guarantee Scheme in Maharashtra cannot be regarded as a miracle solution to all the problems of poverty and unemployment in the rural areas, it has major advantages compared to other government employment programmes. Especially if such a programme with grass-root and ecosystem planning it could become an even more powerful tool in the hands of the rural poor. Employment also enables agricultural labourers to become organized. As such it could become the predecessor of a fundamental 'right to work'.

6. Right to Work: an option for the future?

As we have seen, Indian employment programmes - with the exception of the Employment Guarantee Scheme - have not been able to generate benefits and long-term employment for those who are in need of it. Neither wage-employment programmes like Food for Work or self-employment programmes like IRDP have alleviated poverty or tackled un(der)employment problems on the needed massive scale.

At the same time the (relative) success of the Employment Guarantee Scheme of Maharashtra has raised the quest for right to work. The government should recognize the right of the unemployed citizens (both rural and urban) to get work, both skilled and unskilled. The right to work is mentioned in the Directive Principles of the Indian Constitution and in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The latter states:

*"everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment."*¹⁹

The demand for inclusion of the 'right to work' as a fundamental right is not new and has been raised from time to time. As far back as 1962, the Indian Government stated:

*"The central concern of our planning has to be the removal of poverty as early as possible. The stage has now come when we would sharply focus our efforts on providing an assured minimum income to every citizen of the country within a reasonable period of time."*²⁰

The right to work has since long been a demand of (mainly) left-wing political parties, labour unions and some other movements.

During the past six years, this demand for right to work has developed into a movement for which right to work as a fundamental human right is the final goal.

The right to work can mean a number of different things. It can, as should be the case now under the present directive principle in the Indian Constitution, serve as a guideline for implementing labour-intensive socio-economic policies. Such a policy could include the legal provision for guaranteed employment for a particular group under specific conditions, as is the case with an employment guarantee scheme providing unskilled work for the rural poor. The most far-reaching step would be for the state to give every citizen the fundamental and justiciable right to work, under which a citizen could (if necessary) go to court and demand work from the government if he or she is without a job. Such an approach could be combined with granting unemployment allowances to those who, despite the best efforts of the government, are still unemployed. The latter would in fact imply a combination of the right to work and the right to income.

For practically implementing the right to work, the pattern of investment has to undergo substantial shifts from capital-intensive to labour-intensive. Further a greater emphasis on area planning is required. To the extent and till such time that employment generated through the normal development process does not adequately meet the requirements of those seeking work, a special programme of guaranteed work to the unemployed would be necessary.

According to Dr. M.S. Swaminathan, the 'father' of India's Green Revolution also skilled and educated

people can be provided with more jobs in the rural areas in the field of development oriented research, planning and implementation. He gives the following example: "For a practical impact, a project designed to improve the well being of farm and fishermen's families should be in the form of a participatory action research programme, implemented jointly by researchers and the families of farmers and fishermen. Also, it should be so designed in terms of the inputs used and management principles introduced that it is capable of self-replication. The training component has to be on the basis of learning by doing."²¹

A Right to Work Struggle Front has in 1990 been set up by organizations from all over India. This association of NGO's and agricultural labourers unions aims to involve more organisations in the struggle for the right to work. It wants to broaden and intensify the joint effort to put pressure on the central and state governments to legislate an act along the lines of the Maharashtra Act. In 1990, the Right to Work Struggle Front elaborated its ideas in a Memorandum on Right to Work. According to the Struggle Front, the government needs to change its economic and technological policies in favour of labour. Until now the investments in both agriculture and industry have been in favour of capital-intensive technology at the expense of labour. Half of the investments should be assigned for rural development to create rural infrastructure facilities like irrigation, roads, technical training centres, marketing yards, etc. The creation of irrigation potential will itself provide massive employment if minor irrigation projects are taken up. Afforestation is also necessary to ensure the right to work to tribals and women living in forest areas, besides improving ecological balance, preventing soil erosion, preserving ground-water and preventing the silting of dams and rivers.

The rural poor constitute the bulk of the poor in the country and among them, rural labour is the major component. Therefore, the governments must legislate as a first step, employment guarantee especially for the rural poor throughout the country. Even if right to work as a fundamental right is difficult to implement at present, the government can certainly afford to guarantee employment at least to the rural poor.

Some studies have pointed out that a considerable part of the requisite finances can be generated by a drastic re-allocation of the funds allocated to present poverty-alleviation programmes and the employment component of programmes of different departments. In addition a special tax can be levied as in Maharashtra, on those who can afford it. The Right to Work Struggle Front states in its Memorandum that if the central government decides to spent 20 per cent of its total annual investments on a national Employment Guarantee Programme, it can fulfil the promise of ensuring the right to work at the level of living wages for both rural and urban poor throughout the country. Other estimates of the costs of a modest all India employment guarantee scheme remain below 10% of central governments' plan expenditures.

According to the organizations involved in the Right to Work Struggle Front a successful implementation of a - still to be realized - national Employment Programme is only possible if labourers are well-informed and organized. Only then are they able to claim their legal right if necessary. But the right to work, once it has taken a concrete shape, is also a strong incentive for the rural workers to organize themselves for other common interests such as higher wages and land reforms.

Strategy of employment generation

To provide employment guarantee and to develop an employment-oriented pattern of employment, the following suggestions should be considered so as to evolve a proper strategy of employment generation.

1. *To legislate employment guarantee for rural and urban poor(...), and earmark 20% of the (Eighth Year) Plan funds to cover employment guarantee programme through which the following development activities will be undertaken, more especially during the slack season of agriculture:*
 - a. *development of productive assets of the poor such as land, irrigation facilities, land reclamation, contour bunding, minor irrigation, percolation tanks etc. The poor shall have right to use all assets created through their own labour;*

b. building of feeder roads to connect villages, not so far connected;

c. small irrigation projects, watershed-development and wasteland development projects. The benefits of these projects shall be enjoyed by the poor on priority basis;

d. improvement in the market structures in the rural areas;

e. installation of small power plants as an alternative to the mega power plants being erected by the government through public companies;

f. construction and improvement of school buildings and equipping them with teaching aids and other needed equipment. Single teacher schools shall be converted into 3-4 teacher schools for the primary level;

g. undertaking social forestry programmes, especially with the help of population in the tribal areas. The tribals shall have rights to those productive assets which they have been enjoying through generations, such as forest produce and forest land;

h. undertaking housing programmes for rural and urban poor. It is strongly recommended that this should be undertaken under a legislation granting housing rights to the rural and urban poor. The rural and urban poor shall also be guaranteed access to adequate housing resources and shall be provided with enabling legal and institutional mechanisms so that they can house themselves;

i. development of rural health facilities by enlarging the number of dispensaries and hospitals and equipping them with modern facilities. Besides, adult/health education programmes should be comprehensively undertaken;

j. all works undertaken under Employment Guarantee Schemes shall give women equal wages for equal work. There shall be no wage discrimination against women.

- 2. The poor shall have the right to organize themselves, and their organisations shall be protected by legal and other measures. These organisations shall monitor the programmes implemented through Employment Guarantee Act.*
- 3. Provide clean drinking water to the poor in rural areas and to slum dwellers in urban areas.*
- 4. All common properties in rural areas, such as tanks, forests and other resources within their territorial jurisdiction shall revert to the village community for their control and utilisation for employment generation.*
- 5. Capital depreciation allowances/investment allowances should be immediately stopped and replaced by employment incentives to industry.*
- 6. Selective use of superior technology should be made only after carefully studying labour capital substitution effects, and only in such areas in which capital intensive technology is imperative by the nature of industry.*
- 7. Labour absorption in agricultural and non agricultural activities in rural areas should be improved. For this purpose, effective and speedy implementation of land reforms inclusive of lowering the land ceiling will be essential. Land to the tiller shall be the policy of the government.*
- 8. To develop small towns as growth centres by encouraging the production of consumer items of mass consumption in a decentralised manner. The marketing of such items shall be organized collectively through public and/or cooperative agencies.*

9. *Production of several products, such as soap, food processing, oils etc to be reserved only for rural cottage sector.*
10. *The state should publish each year an account of total investment made, assets created and employment generated, as a part of the Economic Survey.*
11. *To have a social audit of the programmes of development enunciated above so as to plug leakages and improve implementation.*

Adopted in the Conference held in Delhi on 21-22 April 1990 by the Right to Work Struggle Front.

(In: 'Memorandum on Right to Work', Right to Work Struggle Front, New Delhi, 1990)

Eight Five Year Plan and Right to Work

The National Front government (November 1989 - November 1990) did plan to implement a national employment guarantee programme. The right to work was even going to be the central focus of the Eighth Five Year Plan (1990-1995). This was to be achieved by more investment in agriculture and infrastructure in the rural areas. Labour-intensive small-scale industries were to be supported by tax incentives and by giving them exclusive rights on the production of specific products. For example in textile industry labour-intensive handlooms would be favoured instead of powerlooms.

Proposals were mooted for a yearly budget of Rs.8000 (appr. US \$3.2 billion) crores for a national employment guarantee programme for the rural areas and Rs.6000 crores for the urban areas. The Government claimed it wanted to include the right to work as a fundamental right in the Indian Constitution. If the Government would not be able to generate work then a small dole would be paid to the unemployed labourer.

It is not clear yet if the minority Congress government elected in June 1991 is planning to implement any kind of national employment guarantee programme. The Congress government faces a severe financial crisis. Under pressure of the IMF it has already decided to cut fertilizer subsidies despite protests from the powerful farmers lobby. Also many industrial workers, who are better organized than rural workers, are facing unemployment and will at least try to wrench some exit benefit from the government. So the question remains whether the much less influential rural workers will be able to secure a substantial increase in the budget for employment programmes. On the other hand the government cannot totally ignore the rural poor. In the Approach Paper for the Eighth Plan, now to commence in April 1992, it states its intention to focus on generating enough employment to achieve close to full employment by the year 2000. The goal is to create 10 million new jobs per year during the next ten years. The new Plan gives top priority to rural employment and aims at 3% employment growth. The employment targets cannot be reached without drastic measures like a large scale employment (guarantee) scheme. But at the moment (January 1992) such a programme has not been announced yet.

Therefore the Right to Work Struggle Front is planning for a massive rally in New Delhi on the 25th of March 1992. A memorandum of demands will be submitted to Prime Minister Narasimha Rao. Before the rally in Delhi state level meetings will be organized to mobilize support.

7. Where Two Movements Meet

Employment can be the meeting point of growth and social justice, provided it is both productive and gainful.

The biggest potential for creating more employment can be found in the rural areas in the reclamation of wasteland, development of minor irrigation works, better utilisation of the water of the major and medium irrigation works (making double cropping possible), improving the availability of drinking water, development of dairy farming and fisheries, social forestry, etc.

All these and many other measures which generate employment and improve the living conditions of the poor must be pursued and expanded, according to Dr. D.N. Tewari, environmentalist and social anthropologist.

His viewpoint is supported by both labour organisations and environmental groups.

In his Environmental Agenda²², Agarwal states the following on employment guarantee built around programmes for ecological regeneration:

"Unemployment is a major problem in this country. Fortunately, ecological regeneration is a very labour intensive exercise, whether it will be soil or water conservation, digging ponds and tanks, or afforestation. Once a decentralised eco-development plan is available for a particular ecological region, massive employment can be created through activities aimed at the restoration of the ecological infrastructure. If we can somehow tie together a legal employment guarantee with programmes of ecological regeneration I think we can make a massive bid to meet people's needs on a sustainable basis.

To do this we can learn a lot from the Employment Guarantee Scheme of Maharashtra, the only state which guarantees a job as a matter of legal right. A lot of employment generation under this scheme has been in making roads but there is now a growing interest in creating jobs in afforestation, building of percolation tanks and village ponds, etc. There are many problems with this scheme but still I think other states can learn a lot from it."

As we have seen earlier, the right to work movement puts emphasis on development of productive assets of the poor such as land, irrigation facilities, land reclamation, contour bunding, minor irrigation, percolation tanks etc. Further, the poor must have the right to use all assets created through their own labour under employment guarantee schemes.

Villages should be able to provide themselves with food fodder, energy, construction materials, materials for artisans, etc.

A village surrounded by a healthy environment is a precondition for the kind of self-sufficiency Mahatma Gandhi envisioned. Based on this viewpoint, the Academy of Gandhian Studies in Hyderabad formulated a set of citizens' directives. These directives are formulated in a citizens' report on the status of environment in Andhra Pradesh²³, among which:

- * There should be a proper land-use pattern protecting the basic character of the land. A minimum of 33% forest cover, out of the total land area, needs to be sustained.

- * Development activities should not be in such a form as to change the natural characteristics of land and the ecological balance should be maintained.

- * Between peripheral villages and forests, energy plantations or community grazing lands should be raised, which could meet the requirements of fuel and fodder.
- * Tanks should be restored, which would regenerate environment and the ecosystem.
- * People should participate in the eco-development programmes, considering it as their responsibility. Community property should be protected and reserved.

Wage employment versus self-employment

Upgrading of the environment can be realised through wage employment under employment guarantee schemes. However, some scientists and planners doubt the feasibility of national employment guarantee, not only because of the costs but for the fact that up to the year 2000, eighty million people will join the Indian labour force. A large majority of them will have to find work as self-employed or casual workers. As such, growth of opportunities for self-employment should be encouraged.²⁴ At the same time it can be argued, however, that so many self-employed are losing their work today because of the lack of materials. We have seen that fishermen, artisans and potters are forced to become landless labourers as fish, clay and wood have become scarce, due to environmental degeneration. Stimulation of self-employment through government programmes, like IRDP, will only have long-term results if the environment can provide the self-employed with the necessary materials. Also, we have seen that especially households of landless labourers and marginal farmers are not likely to benefit from self-employment programmes, as they have no supporting resources. Only when the environment is regenerated, self-employment programmes can become feasible.

Wage employment (guarantee) and self-employment programmes can thus reinforce and complement each other. At the moment however there seems to be a greater, although certainly not exclusive, need for guaranteed wage employment. Massive wage employment can create jobs and some amount of social security for the growing number of (near) landless as well as significantly contribute to ecological regeneration which is the productive base for additional sustainable wage employment and self-employment in the 'mainstream' economy.

Environmental upgrading needs a huge labour input. India has a labour force which is available for environmental regeneration and can be and should be activated through employment guarantee. However, it should be a pre-condition to any employment guarantee scheme that the created assets should primarily benefit the landless and the marginal farmers. Therefore, first priority ought to be given to projects which will, either individually or collectively, be owned or controlled by these groups.

Notes

1. The State of India's Environment 1984-85, p.49
2. id. p.92
3. N.S. Jodha, EPW, June 30, 1990, p.A-65
4. Tewari, 1987, p.29
5. In the daily status approach, which results in the person-day rate of employment, the reference period is each day of the seven days preceding the date of survey.
6. EPW, July 16, 1988, p.1481 and EPW, April 13, 1991, p.972
7. Milieu en Armoede in India, p.27
8. South Asia Bulletin, Vol. 8, 1988, p.106
9. Teerink, 1990, p.1
10. The State of India's Environment 1984-85, p.52
11. Status of Environment in Andhra Pradesh, citizens' report 1990, p.14-15
12. The concept of village ecosystem planning is elaborated upon in 'Towards Green Villages' by Anil Agarwal and Sunita Narain
13. Dewan, 1990, p.71
14. EPW, June 15, 1991, p. 1459-60
15. Oonk, 1989, p.2
16. id. p.3
17. id. p.8
18. Kumar, p.4
19. id. p.1
20. Approach to the Eighth Five Year Plan 1990-95, p.11
21. Dr. M.S. Swaminathan in The Hindu of 24 April, 1990
22. The fight for survival, 1987, p.185, Environmental Agenda
23. Reddy, K.P., 1990
24. EPW, April 13, 1990, p.987

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