

Sub : Three day National Seminar on 'Sustainable Development : Searching A Policy Frame for Kerala' - Appeal for Papers – regarding

We are happy to inform you that the C.Achutha Menon Foundation is organising a Three Day National Seminar on 'Sustainable Development : Searching A Policy Frame for Kerala', a topic of contemporary relevance, during the first week of March 2016. Experts from the field of Social Sciences, Science and Technology, Education, Medical Science, Agriculture, Industry and other related fields will attend and present papers.

As one of the leading experts in the subject your participation will enrich the deliberations of the Seminar. On behalf of the Foundation we request you to spare some time from your busy preoccupations and participate in the Seminar by contributing a scholarly paper on any one of the themes related to the topic of the Seminar. We will appreciate it very much if your valuable paper reaches us on or before **20th February 2016**. Our idea is to publish the proceedings of the seminar in a book form at a later date. Enclosed please find a theme paper for your kind reference.

It may please be noted that the Foundation will reimburse your travel expenses and take care of your local hospitality. We eagerly look forward to an affirmative response from your side in the format enclosed.

Please Visit our Website at : www.achuthamenonfoundation.org

Thanking you,

With warm regards

Yours sincerely,

Kanam Rajendran
President

N.Shanmughom Pillai
Secretary

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Sustainable Development : Searching A Policy Frame for Kerala (Theme Paper)

Introduction

The term development is an obsession in the public domain of Kerala in recent times. It is people's aspiration for improved living conditions, gainful employment, and sufficient opportunities for health, education and self actualization that relate them with this fascinating term. The present NDA government assumed power mainly on this plank. Along with some other states, Kerala will also go to polls soon. The political parties, leaders and the general public are seriously concerned with the development issues and prospects of the state. Many outfits have already started interacting with people on this topic in various ways. It is at this juncture that Achutha Menon Foundation is organising a National seminar with an intention to comprehend what exactly the term development implies in Kerala context and whether the present perceptions and practices in development are appropriate to satisfy the societal dreams.

'Development' is a term coined for the Third World by the economists of the West in the 1950s. All their theories and policies were premised on the idea that infusion of sufficient capital and technology is enough so that development process gets started and subsequently mature into in poor economies assuring development. Various strategies using market principles and planning process were applied in between in such economies. However, development has always remained elusive from the masses. Their life became more and more precarious and a substantial section of the people got marginalized in the process of development.

It is now realised that the conventional models of development are not conducive for the making of a civilised human society. The manoeuvrability of the capitalist system, however, suggests sustainable development as an alternative measure. It views development as a single dimensional process rooted in ecological balancing and the remedy is in clean technology.

The situation in developing economies is such that neither clean technology nor ecological balancing can ensure a people centred development. While these variables are important, the development needs are much greater, providing people with meaningful avenues of life sustenance. Thus sustainable development assumes a different note in developing economies like India. Based on the fundamental necessity of ensuring a decent life to all human beings, a 'right based' approach should constitute the cardinal principle of governance. Such governance in a democratic setup can provide a true form of sustainable development.

The right based approach of development is familiar to Kerala society. The development policies and programmes particularly by the Left when in power has articulated the right based empowerment of people. However, as an alternative development strategy the concept of sustainable development has to be embedded more practically and productively in the governance of the state. The seminar envisages a platform for such an inquiry with an objective of framing sustainable alternative policies.

Session 1. Development Trends in Kerala

The main features of the popular Kerala Model of Development (KMD) is that it enabled the people of Kerala to secure commendable achievements in many social sectors

such as health, education, women education, gender equality and social capital. The main factor instrumental for this performance was the concept of equality embedded in the social psyche of Kerala Society. However, there is a valid criticism against the KMD that such achievements are not sustainable because of its weak economic base. In this context, it is a fact that since the mid 1980s a turn around has happened in the growth rate of Kerala and on an average it even surpassed the national average. Though it is acceded that the growth rate has crossed 10 percent, the social sector indices are on a flatter and the socio economic maladies found in the Kerala Society is far intense in nature than elsewhere. It is indeed essential under this circumstance to examine the nature of growth process in Kerala. Normally a society which has learned and experienced a people centred governance ought to have transformed as a model society as that of Sweden or Denmark. Instead the brunt of development evils has starkly burdened a society. Is it due to the kind of development that occurs in the state? Is it due to the miss of equality plank that the Kerala Society secured historically through its social struggles and movements? Is it due to the poor governance in Kerala which failed in efficient allocation of resources to productive and people centred programmes? Does this development trend and experience necessitates a paradigm shift in the development policy of the state?

Session 2. Sustainable Issues in Leading Sectors

A casual observation of the development pattern of Kerala indicates a domination of the tertiary sector over the other two major sectors viz, agriculture and industry. The share of tertiary sector to State Domestic Product (SDP) is 60% whereas that of agriculture and industry is almost 15% and 25% respectively. There is nothing wrong in this pattern as it is eulogised as a desirable outcome of development process as experienced in Western developed countries. However, the tertiary sector dominates a mature economy after a saturated level of development in the other two sectors. In short, the basic balance among the leading sectors still remains intact in spite of the tertiary domination. In Kerala, the basic balance among the sectors has been lost leading to unprecedented changes in the living conditions of people, pushing many into stark deprivation, unemployment and exploitation. Agriculture and industry became non performing sectors, often agriculture witnessing a negative growth. In the context of rising farmers' suicide, ever growing indebtedness of farming community, increasing withdrawal from agricultural activities without any alternative avocation, rising levels of unemployment, a great question relates to revitalising agriculture substantially. A revisit to agricultural policies of the state has to be made in this context. What afflicts Kerala's Agriculture? Is it lack of modernisation? Is it due to natural outcomes of macro policies? What should be our approach to food security programme? Is demand for PDS a substitute for agricultural revival? The questions of sustainable agriculture require probing in to all these and similar issues.

Session 3. Livelihood Issues of Development and Sustainability

A lopsided and misdirected governance along with typical (special) situations like external debt of Kerala has caused livelihood losses to many sections of people in the state. The extensive deprivations meted out to marginalised communities like fisher men, adivasis,

women from poor households, workers in traditional sectors, students, farmers etc. have thrown out them from the development process subjecting them to penury and poverty. How can we revive the opportunities of these marginalised groups through proper development policies? Livelihood issues of each of these groups have to be addressed particularly in terms of 'rights based' approach. It is high time that sustainable development requires 'rights' related allocations from community resources so that all sections will be included in the development process. A major question in policy formulation or rather governance is that how the 'rights' should be practically linked with resource allocation mechanisms? The conventional norms of budgetary transfers may be linked to basic human rights of these marginalised sections.

Section 4. Institutionalising Sustainable Development at Grass root Level

To make development process people centred, the major platform for change is the development of proper institutional mechanism. In our state the decentralised planning process can be a powerful tool in this regard. The remarkable success of empowerment of women through Kudumbasree and similar outfits indicate the power of grass root planning as a mechanism for success. The control of resources by the people of the locality along with their pressing societal needs enable them to chalk out their own plans of resource utilisation. Such a control and collective power enable a democratic society to wipe out the corrupt practices, hidden strategies of the vested interests and keep away the mafia groups from exploiting the society, resources and people. How can we effectively make use of decentralisation technique for a people centred transformation is to be debated with each issue that may crop up in the society.

Section 5. Conflicting Realms in Sustainable Development

The development process in the state, as reflected in its features and characteristics indicate the emergence of an unequal society. The benefits of higher growth are skewed in favour of a few and also limited to certain parts of the state. The development is not even. The access to the natural resources are limited to those few depriving the common people of their ownership and possession extensively. The governance of the state became corrupt, parochial and partisan. People and society are not the central focus of governance. Governance is not citizen centric. Welfare measures are vote bank oriented.

How can this skewed distribution be corrected? A revamping of policies in the entire governance process is inevitable. A 'right based' approach is essential to cure the unequal situation in the society. Basic access to minimum rights of food, shelter, education, housing, health and employment should become the corner stone of governance. Ensuring basic rights involve allocation of resources primarily to societal needs. Government Finances has to be managed accordingly. Tax policies should change to facilitate transmission. All these involve moving away from the present biased practices. Conflicting situation emerge in this context. Right based legal frames are increasingly becoming the norms of governance. Resolution of conflicts are increasingly possible by the appropriate use of such legal frames. It is essential

to identify the conflicting issues and areas. The settlement of such conflicts with 'right based' legal frames will ensure sustainable development process.

Section 6. Experiments in Sustainability

There are many instances of sustainable development process undertaken by individuals, NGOs and many civil groups. It is required to locate such instances to draw lessons and find shortcomings so that such initiatives are replicated through multiple mechanisms such as decentralisation process, appropriating individual and collective rights and using right oriented legal frames.