

Environmental Advocacy as a Critical Component of Environmental Education

Paper submitted

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Abstract

As the first decade of the 21st century comes to an end, humanity is challenged by economic growth and the associated destructive development that is causing unprecedented environmental damage around the world. Traditional ways of living have been completely replaced by the consumerist and profit making paradigms. To envision and practice for a better world the author discusses the importance of environmental advocacy as a critical component of environmental education. The author elucidates this through some experiences of the organisation she works with.

Key Words: Environmental Education, Advocacy, Campaign, Community, Participation, Public interest, Reform, Economic Development.

Introduction

As the first decade of the 21st century comes to an end, communities across the world are facing problems that were previously never known. Failed monsoons, farmer suicides, shift in agriculture from food crops to biofuels, new diseases, displacement caused by floods, rise in sea levels, and disappearing fresh water supplies, are some of the major unprecedented responses of our planet taking their toll on human life and causing an increase in conflicts around the world. The consequences of such conflicts have been varied and some have been extraordinarily violent leaving affected communities in horrendous conditions. At the

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same time governments are challenged with an ever rising crisis in areas of delivering education, health care, food security, housing and employment for their people. The adverse impacts of such events world over have been borne mostly by the poor and the marginalized, accentuated as it is with the increased concentration of wealth and access to resources among the wealthy few. The neo liberalized global economy promotes a very different lifestyle from that of traditional ways of living and these indigenous and long-established ways of living have been replaced with relentless consumerist and corporate profit making paradigms.

As educators, students, non profit organisations, academics, decision makers, *et al* who want to envision and practice living, acting, and teaching for a better world, there is a very big challenge in making our education systems a transformative experience to help advance social and environmental justice, make our governments efficient in securing public interest and in promoting peace and justice for all. There is a need to communicate, demonstrate and help students learn experientially across various disciplines and boundaries and deepen their human values so that they appreciate the broad context of securing environmental and social justice. More importantly, students have to be equipped with skills necessary to be good environmental advocates in order to participate and influence environmental decision making processes – a pathway for a just and safe planet Earth that is now increasingly recognized as critical for our very survival.

Almost all Environmental education programs today focus on scientific knowledge and much of this is taught within the four walls of a classroom with very little exposure to ground realities. Much of such education is imparted, even at higher levels, with very little focus on the socio-economic and cultural dimensions of the impacts of the current paradigm of development. Making connections from the local to the global issues or understanding the issues from different world views is largely rhetorical. There is a complete lack of capacity building in the education systems to create a future citizenry who will be environmental advocates of the City, State or Nation in a context that projects humanistic values of stewardship in the framework of intergenerational principles of action. Environmental education systems, at least in India, completely lack this perspective in the taught curricula.

Not surprisingly, therefore, this stream of learning is looked down as being politically incorrect, economically useless and in general not keeping with the classical framework of productive learning in an education process. Unless we address this fundamental challenge, our objective of evolving a citizenry capable of stewarding a planet in peril would become extremely difficult. Needless to state, it may become impossible for our formal decision making cycles to consider the overwhelming need to respond with due dispatch in establishing at least a workable relationship with our ways of living and the environmental limits of our planetary systems.

Based on some of the experiences in advocating change in some very key environmental decision making processes in India, this paper explores the importance of training youth as part of their environmental education in some basic skills of environmental advocacy. It is argued that such engagement would help initiate a process of change at a time when the planet is in deep crisis and humanity must reshape its ways of living. Some case studies of Environment Support Group, a non profit organization focused on

environmental and social justice, are utilized to establish the need for such engagement of environmental education in our society.

A brief about the organization:

Environment Support group (ESG) is a not for profit public interest, voluntary organisation working to advance environmental and social justice. Its initiatives include research, documentation, training, campaign and advocacy and initiation of public interest litigations in securing these objectives. ESG has been in the forefront of a variety of environmental and social justice campaigns keeping the interests of local project affected communities and voiceless ecosystems primary in its focus.

Case Study 1: Engaging with Judiciary in Conserving Lakes as Public Commons and Ecologically critical habitats

Background

Societies from time immemorial have lived on this planet using natural resources. They evolved over a period of time ways in which nature's resources could be used within limits of access. Modern processes have disturbed this relationship in practically every aspect of our living, and in particular affecting our traditional knowledge, ways of learning and praxis. The mechanistic trudge of the modern machinery of knowledge production has effectively decimated traditional knowledge systems and along with it valuable knowledge about ways of living in harmony with nature.

Across South Asia traditional methods of soil and water management have involved the building of network tanks which are artificial waterbodies created using the undulating topography of the land for harvesting rain and surface runoff helping build soil moisture and regeneration of vegetation. These tanks were built and managed largely conforming to principles of equity and justice in sharing of the waters. Tank irrigation is an age-old established practice in across south Asia, and in particular India, and is especially practiced in semi-arid zones to capture the bounty of the short monsoon.

The tank waters provided for irrigation, drinking and almost all domestic purposes. The tanks were also spaces for socializing and accommodated a variety of religious and cultural rituals. Most temples in south India, and also Sri Lanka, had massive temple tanks around which communities lived and celebrated their daily life.

Over a period of time there has been a considerable shift in our social structures of managing such resources and this has had a definite impact on attitudes of people towards such management of critical resources. Modern education systems have glorified big dams as "temples of modern India" (a phrase

credited to our first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru) and as a consequence, such simple ideas of harvesting water have been bypassed and with it the traditional wisdom of management of such life supporting resources. The modern systems of water technology and management fail to understand the natural patterns and rhythms of the movement of water as a source and supportive element of all life and this has resulted in severe depletion of this critical resource most tragically embodied in its widespread pollution.

Currently very few of these architectural wonders exist in fully functional condition. The few that are left are either being privatized, sold, converted to sewers or dried up to make place for mega Infrastructure projects. This is particularly the case in our cities, where people are thirsting of water, and water wars are fought on streets. Privatisation of these community tanks – most of which no one knows who built - fundamentally attacks the very principles of social justice and equity that once secured such waterbodies to wide cross sections of our society in the context of these being our public commons.

In the ever growing city of Bangalore, the Lake Development Agency (LDA) was originally constituted by the Government of Karnataka ostensibly to conserve lakes by collaborating with 'non-profit organisations.' However, soon after its inception the LDA began to conclude a series of long (15 year) lease agreements with a variety of private parties, handing over lakes for commercial development for a measly rent. But given the large acreage of the lakes, it was only commercial enterprises that could secure access to these waterbodies, which as part of the maintenance agreements, also provided them unfettered access to developing commercial facilities such as building floating restaurants, water sports parks, water theme parks, party kiosks, food courts, and so on. What has been initiated in four large lakes are soon to become a model for “maintenance” across the state of Karnataka, and could soon become a feature of lake maintenance across metropolitan India. Interestingly, all the lakes that have been so privatised in Bangalore have benefited large builders, hoteliers and developers – with the world wide hotel chain Oberois being a leading partner to such a contract in the case of the Hebbal lake in Bangalore.

This has had a series of ramifications on the local populace, with those directly affected being farmers and fishing communities. The local public who had easy access to such lakes as lung spaces, recreational zones and comfort areas from the stress of living in the urb, has now been denied access as these lakes as they can only be accessed by an unaffordable entry fee. This has raised critical questions of whether such public commons can at all be privatised and commercialized and thereby denying the public at large their due right of accessing the commons.

Goals

To stop privatisation of lakes and advance a people centred conservation strategy of lakes as functional ecosystems

Tools of Advocacy

ESG's campaign to save the lakes of Bangalore drew support from a wide section of the society which included school children, college students, researchers, retired members of the judiciary, local residents and the general public. ESG organized a "Join the human chain to protect the lakes of Bangalore" around one of the lakes that had been privatized, namely the Agara lake in Bangalore.

This event was followed by several public meetings with the forest department, various government bodies and also included a widely subscribed representation to the Chief Minister of Karnataka requesting him not to privatize the lakes. Instead it called upon him to ensure the State played the role of stewarding public commons. This gained wide media attention and was followed by a Public Interest Litigation in the Karnataka High Court.

ESG's Public Interest Litigation of January, 2008 argued that the schemes to privatise maintenance of lakes on commercial terms were illegal and against State Policy. It also argued that such a policy fences off public, social and ecological spaces from the very public that ought to enjoy it. It is an approach where the State is abandoning its duty to protect and maintain nature and the public commons, and instead farming out such spaces for commercial profit. The case also argued that the approach had a debilitating impact on cattle rearers and fishing communities, still dependent on lakes for their livelihoods. Private parties have fenced off some these lakes and charge unaffordable user fees to access them, making it impossible for local communities to use these public spaces as their commons.

Additionally, these water bodies are critical for the water security of the city. Their role continues to be important in a city that is highly stressed for both water and open space. Such lake privatizations would also have a terrible impact on the ecology of lakes, particularly for migratory waterfowl. Turning a lake into a commercialized water theme park would mean destroying the living ecosystem that it sustains.

If this policy were sustained, it would only be a matter of time when hundreds of lakes across the country would be similarly commercialized, thus attacking the very core of the State's obligation to provide water security for all and ensure the commons remain accessible to the public.

Results

On November 4th, 2008, the High Court of Karnataka passed an interim order restricting the Government and private parties from proceeding with any further investment or development of lakes based on the public-private partnership (PPP) model.² The Court sought from the Government a comprehensive plan for the protection of lakes and gardens in a manner that would ensure everyone, especially the "have nots",

² The Hon'ble Chief Justice of the High Court had this to say when passing the interim direction: "With all humility, concern and deep worries we are investing the precious time of this Court in this matter. Our deep concern is that one day or the other these places may not be accessible for the common man. This is 100% true! Poor man has to stand outside the fence and stare at a lake? Common man is deprived of the natural right to enjoy beauty of nature." The interim direction and more details are accessible at: http://www.esgindia.org/campaigns/lakes/legal/PIL_817_2008_InterimOrder_041108.zip

could enjoy the bounty of nature. As per the direction of the Court, the Karnataka Department of Ecology, Environment and Forests have held consultations with all affected parties, but there has been no agreement yet on how to proceed. The matter has now reached the final stages of argument in the Court, and the result would have far reaching consequences on the approach we take in conserving lakes, especially in urban areas.

This is an example to understand the importance of being able to influence the government and the judiciary to regard the traditional water harvesting systems of the city and preserve them for posterity. In particular, this case addresses the very difficult questions of how to ensure lakes are protected from encroachment, pollution and commercialization.

Case Study 2: Engaging Forest Department in Conserving unique Geological Landscapes and Biodiversity hotspots

Background

Very close to Bangalore city on the south western side lies a beautiful chain of hills referred to as the Savandurga-Ramnagar range of hills. This region is also referred to as the land of the seven hills. These hills are about 3000 feet above the sea level, and each rock competes with the next for their amazing features. Rocks of various shapes and sizes can be seen here. Some of them resemble a whale, a pigeon, elephant, pig, human being and the three-headed Lord Brahma from Hindu Mythology.

During the British period, Ramanagaram was called Closepet. The granite available here was much sought after in the bygone days and referred to as the Closepet granites. These hills are a younger set of coarse-grained potassic granites which form a chain of rounded bosses and domes running north-south, over a distance of 75 Km from south of Magadi till a little north of Kollegal and span over a width of nearly 25 Km from around Ramanagaram to the west of Kanakapura contiguous with the Eastern Ghats³. They represent rock formations of great antiquity as they were formed during the Lower Proterozoic era, and contain in them between 2600-2000 million years of geological history. These range of hills, unique to inland Karnataka, form one of the most picturesque features of the Indian landscape. They excel in grandeur and assume fantastic forms, while forming a critical biodiversity haven of the scrub and dry deciduous jungle.

Of the seven hills one is a huge monolith called the Handigondi rock. At 1050 Ft. this is the highest rock in the range and is easily visible from Bangalore. It forms an integral part of its landscape and lore and this hill is also a haven for rock climbers – because of its vertical face. In and around, several vulnerable and endangered species have been found, including the Yellow Throated Bulbul and the White back Vultures.

³ Ghat is a term used in India to represent a mountain range.

The forest covered slopes of these hills is an excellent habitat for sloth bears, leopards, a range of reptiles and birds.

In 2005, Bangalore based [Sanghamitra Foundation](#) proposed the carving up of the West face of the Handigondi rock into a massive Buddha statue. Presumably the reason was to compensate for the destruction of Bamiyan Buddha statues in Afghanistan by the Taliban. In addition the foundation had grand plans of carving the surrounding rocks too into busts of Mahatma Gandhi, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and other national figures and locating them in a setting that reflects a Buddhist retreat. To ensure there was sufficient revenue it was rumoured that the Foundation even proposed to develop over 2000 acres of land around these rocks into a Film City set based on the widely popular Bollywood film Sholay – which indeed was shot on this very landscape.

The proposal for clearance by the Foundation was forwarded by the Government of Karnataka to the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests. The proposal claimed that only one rock would be carved out into the Sanghamitra Buddha, that being Handigondi. The Karnataka Principal Secretary of the Department of Forests, Ecology and Environment allowed the diversion of the forest land for carving the statue so long as “the legal status of the land shall continue to be forest land” and 10 acres of such land would be leased for a period of 15 years based on compensatory afforestation charges.

The Forest Department failed to conduct a detailed verification of the project, and accepted whatever documentation was submitted to them by the Foundation without question. Thus was missed the big picture: that the project was over 2000 acres, not 10 acres for which permission was sought! A glimpse at the Sanghamitra Buddha Foundation website⁴ would have revealed that “(T)he International Peace Center once complete will be the finest, comprised of the world's tallest statue of Buddha with an imposing height of 712 Ft, amidst 2000 acres of lush green scenic beauty and creative marvels.” As a custodian of biodiversity, the Forest Department should first have independently verified the ecological impacts of the project, which they failed to.

Despite many representations by environmental groups, naturalists, bird watchers and rock climbers, the Government remained silent, even when it was highlighted that the project clearance violated a series of environmental laws and international agreements promoting active protection of threatened species and heritage conservation areas. Needless to state there are also many other reasons why this geological marvel should be left to its elements for posterity: sloth bear, leopard, small cats, wild boar, snakes, and the sheer grandeur of Handigondi itself.

Goal: To stop the acquisition of unique geological features, and forest land for private profit making ventures disguised as promoting communal harmony

Tools of advocacy:

⁴ The now inactive website of the Foundation is www.sanghamitrabuddha.com.

During May 2005, young and old rock climbers, bird watchers, naturalists, children and families joined together for a rally at the Handi Gondi rock and dropped a huge banner down the majestic rock face that said *"I am beautiful as I am, I don't need a face lift"*. The banner was visible from the Bangalore-Mysore highway and the event was covered in all the local dailies and some national television channels too. This brought the Karnataka Forest Department to pay serious attention to the matter, especially because His Excellency the Governor of Karnataka responded to an appeal and directed the department to conduct an independent inspection of the project clearance. It was soon discovered that the project clearance had involved corrupt practices, resulting in the initiation of enquiry against an official involved in the clearance decision. More importantly, the Department wrote to the Centre requesting it to revoke the clearance already granted, and returned the deposit amount deposited to securing forest land

Result:

This decision has since been questioned by the Foundation in a petition filed before the High Court of Karnataka. In its decision, the Court has directed the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests to take a final view of the matter. This decision is now awaited.

Meanwhile, the Forest Department has proposed that the entire region be declared as a sloth bear sanctuary.

Such efforts in understanding a rather specious proposal, examining the deeper implications of what seems like a simple project of carving a statue on a rock and particularly its possible impacts on the local environment has paid dividends beyond merely the act of save a geological marvel. Hundreds have been involved in the process, and the awareness generated has played a significant role in shaping people's views on why geological formations have to be conserved for posterity.

Case Study 3: Engaging a polluting paper mill and getting regulatory agencies to take action

Background:

Uttara Kannada district is one of the biggest districts of the state of Karnataka with abundant natural resources. Thick forests, perennial rivers and abundant flora and fauna and a long coastal line along the Arabian Sea are some of its remarkable features. There are seven rivers that flow through this district with Agriculture and Fisheries being the important means of livelihood. The region also receives very heavy rainfall.

Anshi National Park and the adjoining Dandeli Wildlife sanctuary form one of the most ecologically sensitive regions of the Western Ghats. The very heavy rainfall that this region receives, and the topography, help sustain some of the largest and contiguous evergreen and semi evergreen forests of the Western Ghats.

Of the seven rivers, the 184 km long Kali River has 6 major hydroelectric dams that generate over 1200 MW of power, a bulk of Karnataka's electricity generation. The river also supports the only nuclear plant in a rainforest in the world - the Kaiga Nuclear Power Station that is currently producing about 440 MW and will soon be expanded in its capacity to generate more. There has been a serious attempt to build a 7th dam on the Kali River, near the town of Dandeli.

The West Coast Paper Mills was located at Dandeli in 1956 as an effort to bring much needed economic investment in a thickly forested backward region. The objective was to extract wild bamboo as a raw material for making paper, compensating the loss with afforestation. At that time and now, the Mill remains the main economic engine for this town. This monopoly over the town's economy has aided the industry to expand at will, and also pollute at will. Forest depletion has been extensive, and forest regeneration, a highly neglected sector. The weak regulation of its careless approach has actively encouraged its expansion plans, making it one of the biggest paper mills in India.

Interestingly, till Environment Support Group took up this issue, the Mill had largely been working without a functional effluent treatment plant. In addition there is severe pollution caused by the Paper mill that had been in operation over five decades without an effluent treatment plant. The analysis of effluent samples in 2001 to 2004 showed that the output did not conform to stipulated standards for parameters like BOD, COD, pH, and suspended solids. The high levels of COD reflect the presence of excess chemicals in the effluents. The high levels of BOD reflect the presence of high quantities of organic matter. The presence of high quantities of organic matter in the effluent often results in the outbreaks of gastroenteritis and cholera in downstream villages. Other health impacts noticed include neonatal deaths, renal failure, skin diseases and respiratory disorder in humans, while cattle are typically weak and with low yield of milk. Tumors in fishes and cattle are found quite frequently as well. There has also been low fish catch in the rivers over the last few years. In addition, newspaper reports showed that the irrigated fields are covered with layers of pulp, which prevents growth of crops and makes the land uncultivable.

Goal: To obtain clean drinking water for downstream villages and to pressurize the company to conform to legal requirements and establish an environmentally safe mill.

Tools of Advocacy:

ESG worked with the affected people and initiated the Kali Bachao Andolan (Save Kali Movement) in 2003. The objective was stop destructive projects, end pollution of the river and the devastation of forests. Many local campaigns to build awareness were followed by a series of workshops and campaigns in Bangalore, including even meeting the Chief Minister of Karnataka with a representation from the affected tribes. The Chief Minister ordered a review, and this was followed up by demanding that the local administration immediately ensure that the long pending demand of clean drinking water is provided to downstream

villages by the company at its own cost. The local groups and ESG also demonstrated remarkable courage by organizing a protest at the Annual General Body meeting of the Company in the town of Dandeli to sensitise its investors. All this put considerable pressure on the company to respond actively, and also brought teams of State and Central Pollution Control Boards to seriously examine the impacts of long term pollution.

Independent water analysis has also been conducted to prove the toxic nature of the river water. The local groups along with ESG have constantly engaged with the media to help raise these concerns among the elected representatives.

Results:

In all stages of this campaign affected communities were fundamentally involved. There was a particular emphasis on inclusion of women and children, who are also the worst affected due to the pollution. This has caught the attention of the media and the authorities and the constant pressure on the regulatory authorities has resulted in conducting a comprehensive water analysis of the region. It also pressurized the industry to supply clean drinking water to the affected villages at least for a short period through tankers and pay compensation of Rs.30,000/- for the first time in the history of the company to one of the affected villagers who suffered kidney failure due to water pollution. Later the company also was forced to set up an effluent treatment plant which it had failed to do in the five decades of its operations.

The efforts of the local communities in saving the forests, the rivers and their homeland will persist for they strongly believe these small steps gather momentum for change and cause desirable impacts over time. Local communities continue to resist the massive expansion plans of mills, especially now with support from the International Finance Corporation. This international exposure has only aided the Mill to develop big plans, with the latest being to access 68000 hectares of common lands for afforestation, but there are questions of access of local communities and their rights that have remained unattended.

All things considered, the issue is now at a stage where the industry is moving towards a full compliance of pollution control norms, a significant improvement from the times when there was not even a functional effluent treatment plant.

Case Study 4: Engaging in Policy and Legislative Reform to secure progressive Environmental Laws and Regulations

Background:

India's economic growth over the last two decades has been tremendous with the liberalization of the economy. A concomitant development has been that industrial and infrastructure development with local and foreign investments have significantly increased. With growth taking precedence over all else, industry and investors lobbies have systematically pushed governments to make the process of obtaining

environmental clearances fast and easy. To secure this advantage, environmental laws have been continuously diluted. This has exacerbated violations of community rights and increased the scale of human rights violations. The processes of diluting the environmental laws of the country have been taking place without public involvement and more so without the affected people's voices being heard.

This has most significantly been achieved by the enactment of the Environment Impact Assessment Notification 2006, a subordinate legislation that has been highly criticized as fundamentally weakening India's environmental decision making processes. Environment Support Group comprehensively critiqued this legislation in its in house publication "*Green Tapism: A Review of the Environmental Impact Assessment Notification 2006*".⁵ This publication has been critically received and formed an important intervention in educating the wide public of the implications of this legislative change. In addition, it has helped formulation of an alternative position in advancing democratic involvement in environmental decision making.

More recently, the Ministry of Environment and Forests attempted to similarly dilute the country's Coastal Regulation Zone, a move that was forestalled by widespread action from fishing communities, and social and environmental action groups. The Ministry is now in the process of conducting a series of consultations across the country to ensure that any reform in the coastal regulation zone is not undertaken without due review of the affected communities.

Such processes are being engaged with largely because of vibrant local community actions that keep governments in check and accountable to the people. In the face of highly influential lobbies leveraging dilution of laws to advantage industrialization at any cost, it would seem almost unlikely that local community action could still secure environmental and social justice. Yet it is the very faith of common people in the power of their persistence that India's environmental laws have not been as significantly diluted as lobbies would have wished it to be. A significant component of this strategy of holding the Government accountable was played by a networked initiative of Campaign for Environmental Justice – India to advocate robust public involvement in environmental decision making as a means to advance strong regulatory frameworks.

Goal: To resist the dilution of India's environmental regulations.

Tools of Advocacy:

In 2005 project affected communities, social and environmental action groups, researchers and various individuals from across the country came together in New Delhi to express their opposition to the ongoing dilution of India's Environment Impact Notification. From the time it was first enacted in 1994, the Notification had been amended at least 14 times, each amendment aiding the process of dilution of environmental regulation. One significant result was that public involvement in environmental decision making was reduced to mere tokenism.

⁵ Green Tapism is accessible online at: <http://www.esgindia.org/campaigns/Greentapism/GreenTapism.html>

The Campaign popularly came to be called “*MoEF Chalo*” (Let’s go to MoEF – Ministry of Environment and Forests) and was associated with a Public Hearing called “*MoEF Suno*” (Listen MoEF). In this widely attended consultation, a variety of cases were prepared by affected communities from across India and presented to a Panel consisting of former judges, bureaucrats, academicians, journalists, etc. Even though the Ministry officials were invited to participate in the proceedings, no one came.

Peeved by such indifference and also to ensure that the Ministry became aware of people’s problems, over 200 participants in the consultation from across the country sneaked into the MoEF office despite its very tight security demanding the Minister and officials hear them. This action buoyed the group to hold a dharna (a sit in protest) inside the MoEF headquarters, effectively paralyzing the day’s work.

The group had a good representation from the many environmental movements that have emerged in India. Representation involved participants from the Himalayan regions of Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Assam, etc. to the tropical forests of Kerala. From Gujarat to the Eastern plains. They included people dislocated by dams, nuclear power plants, thermal power stations, etc. all demanding that they be heard and their freedoms and justice secured by the State. The large group refused to leave until they were heard by the highest officer of the MoEF. As no officer was willing to listen the group sat in the corridors of the MoEF office singing songs of their struggle and sharing the heartbreaking stories of their life affected by the destructive development that no one paid any heed to.

This overall effort has had a significant bearing on the strategies of action that groups have adopted since in advancing progressive reform of environmental law and policy in India.

Result:

As it turned out, despite these widespread protests, the Ministry went ahead and enacted the EIA Notification 2006. People’s objections and also that of Parliamentarians against the undemocratic manner in which such legislative changes were being adopted may seem to have failed. In reality, however, this effort has increased peoples capacities to question and hold the Ministry accountable. When a similar dilution was proposed of the Coastal Regulation Zone, fishing communities organized themselves to stop the amendments successfully. The new Union Minister for Environment and Forests, Mr. Jairam Ramesh, has been particularly pro-active in engaging with the public, and his first major decision has been to allow the proposed Coastal Management Zone Notification, a highly diluted version of the existing CRZ Notification, to lapse. He has also stated that any reform will involve deep consultations with the fishing and other coastal communities before proceeding on any change in policy. This certainly has been the result of the continuous efforts to influence the ministry in decisions that are crucial to the very life and livelihoods of the people of the country.

Conclusion

From the above case studies it is evident that environmental advocacy is a natural corollary to environmental education. One could even argue that it could even be an imperative for progressive

environmental change. As is elucidated in these case studies, the action of engaging with different communities, judiciary, bureaucracy and politicians plays a significant role in not just building environmental awareness, but it also helps enhance possibilities of positive environmental change. Were such case studies made a part of the formal instruction in environmental education classes, it would influence students in exploring various aspects of public policy from perspectives of social, economic, political, and cultural streams of reasoning. It can also help build a positive movement for securing social and environmental justice. Not only will such an approach help protecting the public from environmental hazards, but it could also ensure conservation of nature and natural resources. It could well inspire our youth to stand up for a cause and work to implement changes that have a lasting and positive effect in the community.

Integrating environmental advocacy into environmental education is not difficult.⁶ It involves helping the youth identify the issues, research for alternatives or solutions, understand policy, raise awareness in the community through meaningful campaigns and rallies, lobby, negotiate with the decision makers, develop partnerships with local, national and international organisations working on similar issues, create ways for people to be active and publish the work through a wide variety of media that is available today. Such initiatives are bound to change how policy makers perceive social events and help them be more rationale and humanistic in their decisions. It will also help improve the public's understanding of complex environmental issues, and further, educate and engage them for progressive change. Needless to state, this could be a sure pathway to build accountability of institutions and increase transparency in decision making. To honest decision makers, such social processes will come as an important aid in ensuring the government delivers what people deserve.

Despite six decades of the practice of democracy in India, the active securitization of public interest remains in environmental decision-making leave a lot to be desired. In order to level the playing field between poor communities in urban, rural and forested areas, and industrial and investor lobbies, more informed public and such environmental movements are essential in a democratic society. Rather than leaving such possibilities to chance, building an aware and informed public could become a fundamental prerogative of environmental education initiatives. Not only would such processes need resources, but they also need active support of the wider society. Besides appropriate tools for engaging in effective advocacy and cross-sector dialogue embellish such educative processes with inspiring perspectives.

Those working to advance environmental and social justice need complex skills to address the complex issues faced by our societies. Although the last three decades have seen significant grass root action in protection of the environment in India, recent trends of development suggest that there is much work to be done in preparing people ready with such skills for the future. As economic development is increasingly

⁶It must however be said that engaging in environmental advocacy is not as exciting as it seems. It is certainly very challenging for it requires sufficient financial, infrastructural and human resources. One also needs to be particularly patient with methods and results for any initiative takes a lot of time and patience and change is never guaranteed. As the work involved demands activity with extremely difficult institutional forms such as bureaucracy and legislative bodies, often times the work can also be time consuming and trying.

becoming the main focus for the successive governments with increase in investments, ordinary citizens are increasingly becoming aware of the environmental concerns around them and realize the need for civil society participation in all areas of decision making. In this context it is certainly more likely that as more communities face threats to their physical, economic, cultural and social life, substantial mobilization will evolve from civil society to pressurize elected representatives and Governments into affirmative and progressive action.

This is bound to be a challenging task, but the situation we are all in is such, that one cannot wait any longer for the efficiencies of formal systems to be improved in addressing the crisis. Public interest initiatives, be they from within the formal system, or without, has found its way in re-shaping local, regional, national and global policies. Only more of it can be expected in the decades to come. To prepare a public that is aware, clear of its priorities, willing to participative in a patient but consistent manner, and unwilling to give in in the face of challenges, is an essential requirement for saving our planet in peril.

All these challenges acknowledged, the clear possibility of a positive result emerging from such praxis, as demonstrated in the ESG experiences, makes environmental advocacy an important component of educative action in today's complex world. To prepare a population ready with the skills for such advocacy as a formal part of environmental education is possibly the best chance we have in evolving an aware and responsive public. In real time and with real results change is expected – fact proved in many others sectors such as health, economic development, etc. Thereby, the opportunity is now for us to take environmental education to higher levels of engagement in our society keeping in mind this to be an investment in the progress of present and future generations.

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