Environment and development: Goa at crossroads

Much harm is caused, both to the cause of environment and the cause of development by regarding environment and development as at cross purposes or antithetic to one another. Goa is a small state endowed with sufficient natural resources, but the pace of environmental degradation far exceeds the pace and potential of recoupment, thereby giving cause for serious concerns. So also, it cannot be gainsaid that a sizable, if not a substantial, populace is dependent upon activities like mining, tourism and fishing for their sustenance, if not survival. The situation cries out for a solution, which is not easy. Presently the situation hovers between extremities of all economic development regardless of the strain upon environment & natural resources and ban economic development altogether at the altar of environmental conservation. Sand dunes are razed and ground water overexploited in the name of developing tourism. Forests are destroyed and green fields deserted by the iron hand of the mining lobby. The river Mhadei, which is the life line of Goa and its peoples, is being dammed by the neighboring state of Karnataka. There is rampant unauthorized sand mining. Khazan ecosystems, which ought to be the eco-cultural pride of Goa, face extinction. Coastal ecology, in general, is under severe strain. On the other hand, the current blanket ban upon mining is threatening human rights and raising social and humanitarian issues. Responsible tourism and infrastructure development is necessary for overall progress and economic well being. In this sense, Goa is at cross roads.

Whilst most agree that sustainable development and balanced approach is the correct road forward, most are unable to agree upon the length and the breadth and the location of such road. Sustainable development, as a slogan is very attractive and almost universally acceptable. However, the true difficulty lies in finding ways and means to achieve the same, so that both environment and development are the gainers in future and for the future. Goa and her natural resources should not be treated as gifts from our ancestors, but rather as debts from our children.

Therefore, we at the Centre for Environment and Natural Resource Management (CENRM), Srujan, in collaboration with International Centre, Goa (ICG) and under the aegis of United States – India Educational Foundation (USIEF) propose to host a series of workshops with a view to throw up ideas, not merely to describe the appalling situation in which we find ourselves in or to indulge in any blame game, but rather to generate ideas, which may show us the way forward. The magnitude of the problem, no
doubt provokes humility at the task. True, we may not be able to come up with cut and dried solutions, but even if we get people thinking that much has already been said about the cross roads and now the emphasis has to be upon the balanced way forward, we may have done our bit. Then, on an optimistic note, there may always be the chance of coming up with an idea whose time has come. The workshops propose to provide a platform for this. Each workshop will be a half day session and will involve power point presentations of a background paper by eminent personalities followed by interactive sessions. Tentatively following topics have been chosen for the workshops.

1. Environment and development scenario in Goa: Introduction
2. Damming of Mhadei: water demands for urban settlement v/s fragile ecosystems
3. Mining: should it be stopped completely?
4. Tourism and its impacts on Goa
5. Khazan ecosystems of Goa: why do we need to conserve them?
6. Coastal ecology with a focus on sand mining, fishing etc.

First two workshops titled

1. ‘Environment and development scenario in Goa: an introduction’ and
2. ‘Damming of Mhadei: water demands for urban settlement v/s fragile ecosystems’

were held on 29th June 2013 at Zuari Conference Hall, International Centre, Dona Paula, Goa.

The next two sessions are scheduled for 13th July 2013 at Zuari Conference Hall, International Centre, Dona Paula, Goa between 10.30 a.m. and 4.00 P.M. The topics are:

• Mining: should it be stopped completely?
• Tourism and its impacts on Goa

The first session on mining will be held between 10.30 a.m. and 12.30 a.m. The second session on tourism will be held in the afternoon between 2.00 and 4.00 P.M. Lunch will be provided at the venue.

Remaining sessions are scheduled for 27th July 2013. These are as follows:

• Khazan ecosystems of Goa: why do we need to conserve them?
• Coastal ecology with a focus on sand mining, fishing etc.
After completion of this set of workshops, all background papers incorporating results of deliberations will be published in the form of a book. The entire project is supported by the USIEF.

The book will contain all papers with feedback from participants. List of our workshop participants and short bio-notes of eminent speakers will also be published in the book.

We request you to kindly participate in the workshops scheduled for 13th July 2013 and 27th July 2013 and provide us valuable feedback. There are no charges for participation; however, prior registration at <cnrm.srujan@gmail.com> is necessary.