

# Environment, Food Security and Natural Resources

Lacunae in Tenth Plan Approach Paper

ASHISH KOTHARI

Reprinted from *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol XXXVII, No 4, January 26, 2002  
Pagination as in Original

# Environment, Food Security and Natural Resources

## Lacunae in Tenth Plan Approach Paper

*The Tenth Plan Approach Paper has many interesting and progressive elements, but also many prescriptions that are likely to cause further destruction of the environment, food security, and people's natural resource-based livelihoods. There is no clear and coherent thrust towards integrating these concerns throughout the paper, within all sectors. Even at this late stage, it would be fruitful for the Planning Commission to set up a group of independent persons to consider ways of achieving such integration.*

ASHISH KOTHARI

The approach paper to the Tenth Five-Year Plan has several progressive elements, but also several regressive ones, and the two seem to contradict each other in many places (some examples are given below in the section 'Specific Comments'). There does not appear to have been an attempt to bring some coherence to the document as a whole, so that it seems like a bundle of disparate, often contradictory, or at least unconnected statements and recommendations. Perhaps the most glaring contradiction is between the sections on 'Unresolved issues in tribal development' and that on 'Coal', in which a recommendation is made to remove hurdles placed before private mining interest by a judgment in the Samatha case.

The paper also suffers from many general, vague prescriptions and recommendations, without an indication of how to operationalise these. Without these, or in the absence of the actual sectoral plans/schemes, it is difficult to judge the implications of these prescriptions. Some examples are given in the Specific Comments section.

While laying stress on the need to generate considerably more employment, one of the most promising sources of this is missing or very weakly brought out. This is the enormous potential of employment in environmental regeneration and management, in particular of India's vast degraded lands. This has been talked about for years now, and it is surprising that the Planning Commission is still ignoring it, especially given that it does recognise the damage caused by environmental degra-

ation. Section 3.23 brings this in, but Sections 1.2, 1.9, 1.19(ii), and others could also integrate such a recommendation, with suitable monitorable targets.

In some places (e.g., relating to governance in Section 1.4), the alternatives posited are between the state (public) and the private sector, ignoring the third alternative, of local communities. This too is surprising, for at other places, the importance of panchayat raj institutions is highlighted.

The diagnosis of the problems relating to adivasis, environment, and others, is fairly robust. However, such diagnosis is at times not followed up with appropriate recommendations and actions. Some examples are pointed out below.

A serious lacuna is the inadequate integration of environmental concerns (including biodiversity and biodiversity-based livelihoods) across all sectors. For instance, almost the entire 'Infrastructure' chapter is devoid of such integration. The 'Agriculture' section only brings this very weakly, and has nothing on biodiversity. The IRDP discussion does not bring out the fact that projects under it often lead to ecological destruction, and need to be reoriented to be more ecology-friendly. The overall thrust towards economic growth, in particular the references to freeing the economy from governmental shackles, is not critically examined from the point of view of environment, or the livelihoods of people dependent on natural resources.

The approach of setting monitorable targets is good, and I believe this has been accepted by the NDC. However, it is not clear how the targets are internally coher-

ent and would not contradict each other (such as, how would providing 'gainful high-quality employment' fit into the need for 'increase in forest cover'?). Secondly, some of the targets which in themselves sound harmless, could in fact be socially and ecologically damaging; e.g., that of increasing 'tree cover', if done in ways so far done in many parts of India, could only lead to further dispossession of communities from lands they are dependent on, and could promote monoculture plantations which are good neither for the environment nor for local people. More coherence and a clear direction towards ecologically sustainable, biodiverse, and socially just targets, is needed. For instance, the target on increasing forest cover must stress the central importance of biodiversity and 'naturalness' as against monocultures and artificial plantations; the target on employment should mention the potential of linking with forest and biodiversity regeneration and management, and so on.

There is very good recognition of the links between 'destructive development', poverty, and environmental degradation (Sections 1.29 and 1.30). But again, this recognition is not followed up with concrete, coherent recommendations on how to break these links, and orient development in a way that truly enhances the natural and financial resource base of the poorest of the country.

In the entire chapter on 'Resources and Other Measures', and generally in the paper, there is little or no recognition of natural resources as also being limiting, constraining, or enabling factors. One brief mention of the gross nature product (Section 1.30) is not adequate, as there is no other link to this in the paper. This chapter on resources should have a full section on natural resources, the implications of degrading these as 'natural capital', and methods to integrate them into the national planning process.

The paper is unusually frank in places, criticising governmental policies or programmes in no uncertain terms. For this, the commission is to be commended. However, there has been a distinct toning down of criticism between the first (July) draft and the latest (September) one. For instance, in what is Section 3.9 in the new version (and was 3.6 in the earlier version), earlier text regarding government failure to involve people has been left out.

A comprehensive vision of food security could have been possible if the various diagnosis points in the paper were coherently brought together. Corruption, ecological degradation, financial poverty,

faults in the PDS, and so on are all pointed to, but they do not come together and result in sharply directed recommendations to enhance food security of the country as a whole and of the poorest people. Such recommendations could have pointed to the need to enhance ecological (land/water/forest) regeneration, generate employment through this, link agricultural biodiversity and the PDS and consumer markets, decentralise governance and decision-making powers over such resources to local communities, and provide access to inputs for sustainable farming. This boat is, unfortunately, missed by the paper.

While there are some very strong and welcome words regarding the destruction of the environment, these could well have been followed up by clear, unequivocal policy stands. For instance, the commission could have boldly asserted that no further natural forests should be diverted for any large-scale project, that pollution and draining out of critical wetlands including rivers will simply no longer be tolerated, and so on. Monitorable targets could then have been fixed for these policy prescriptions. The paper's conclusion could have been a good place to do this. This opportunity too, has been largely missed.

## Specific Comments

*Introduction and Objectives:* 1.2: Need to incorporate the link between environmental regeneration and employment generation. There is a good recognition here of the link between environment and food security.

1.4: This only posits a government vs private sector scenario, ignoring the third alternative of local communities, or of collaborative arrangements amongst these three.

1.5: There should be explicit recognition here that safeguarding a healthy environment is also a state responsibility.

1.9: Same comment as for 1.2 above.

Box on monitorable targets: (1) Link employment with environmental regeneration; (2) specify that increase in tree/forest cover should be aimed at enhancing biodiversity and ecological services, and securing forest-based livelihoods; (3) aim at cleaning of all wetlands/coastal and marine areas, not only rivers.

1.14: These statewise targets should also include environmental ones, including those in the national list as modified above. *Growth, Equity and Sustainability:* 1.19(ii): Integration of ecological and biodiversity concerns to re-orient and guide the process of 'rapid growth' should be built in, and the link mentioned in 1.2 above needs to be reiterated here.

*Quality and Productivity of Employment:* 1.22: The quality of the working environment, including the need to remove all environmental hazards in the workplace as a means of improving the quality of employment, needs to be explicitly included here.

*Unresolved Issues in Tribal Development:* 1.23: The language in the earlier (July) text of the paper, which spoke of 'consequences of forced integration' rather than, 'process of integration', was much more accurate and reflected the fact that more often than not, such communities are unwilling and involuntary participants in the process of 'integration'. The text should go back to that earlier version.

1.24: Again, the earlier version had text on 'government monopoly over MFPS', which accurately reflected the problem; this should be brought back in the bullet points here.

1.24: There is a need for much more than a 'National Policy for Empowering Tribals'; what needs to be reiterated is that the constitutional provisions that safeguard tribals must be strongly implemented, and that the National Policy should reflect ways of doing this.

*Environment Degradation, Poverty and Economic Development:* 1.29: There is a welcome recognition here of the faults in poverty alleviation programmes, and of the gender aspect of environment. Such recognition, however, does not get reflected in actual policy and programmatic prescriptions later in the paper (e.g., see comment relating to Sections 3.19 and 3.20 below).

1.30: Similarly, the diagnosis here that "economic development which destroys the environment will create more poverty, unemployment, and diseases" is very welcome and timely. Yet the paper later (including in this section itself, in the last sentence) does not reflect this in terms of policy and programmatic recommendations. What kind of re-orientation is needed to steer development away from its current destructive path? What economic and policy instruments would be needed to ensure this? These questions are left largely unanswered in the paper.

*Resources and Other Measures:* Chapter 2: As mentioned above, there should have been a section here on natural resources as a limiting factor for development, including further details on the idea of 'gross nature product' mentioned in Section 1.30. Given the increasing emphasis on factoring environmental parameters into the planning and budgeting process, this lacuna is glaring.

*Agriculture:* 3.2 and 3.3: Once again, the diagnosis of unsustainability in current agricultural practices is sound, but is not fully up followed by appropriate prescriptions. The paper does talk about "raising the productivity of land and water in a manner which is sustainable over the longer term (3.4)", but does not go into any details on how this is to be done. Indeed, prescriptions regarding fertilisers, market-oriented farming and so on, which appear later in the paper, could well contradict such a thrust towards sustainability. Alternatives to major irrigation projects, chemical fertilisers, pesticides and so on, are now abundantly available and clear, and could have received a major push in the paper, but these are missing or weakly developed.

3.4: It is perhaps good to point out that further agricultural expansion cannot happen at the cost of forests. But it is surprising that such a clear prescription has not been made for industries, cities, mining, and other 'development' projects too. If indeed there is a serious concern about not losing any more forests, this should apply across the board, not only to farmers.

3.5: The mention of a 'comprehensive land-use policy' is welcome. But this has been talked about for years, with not much progress. It is hoped that the Tenth Plan will achieve a breakthrough and provide such a policy. However, it should be evolved with maximum participation of the concerned sectors, especially those who depend for basic survival on land and water. There are also many examples of appropriate tenurial security, enhancement of biodiversity, increase in economic and livelihood well-being, and ecological regeneration, which could be learnt from and upscaled as part of the Tenth Plan.

3.7: Given increasing concerns regarding large irrigation projects, which are recognised here, rain water harvesting and decentralised storage/use structures should have been given top priority. Unfortunately they remain in the category of "greater attention will also have to be paid to".

3.9: The recognition of the need for people's participation in watershed projects is welcome. Mention could have been made of the need to transfer, in a phased manner, decision-making powers also; otherwise the kind of conflicts that have arisen in the state trying to take over people-constructed checkdams in Rajasthan, will recur elsewhere too, and weaken the community's stake in the management of such projects.

3.14 and 3.17: 'Diversification' of agriculture is not the same thing as increasing 'diversity' within agriculture. Indeed, in

the name of diversification, especially linked to exports, cash cropping with monocultures is being promoted in many parts of India! There should be an explicit recognition of the critical importance of crop and livestock diversity in Indian agriculture, the need to diversify in terms of land uses to accommodate a mix of cropping, animal husbandry, agroforestry and so on based on what is biologically and socially appropriate. Such mixes have been practices traditionally, and innovative new mixes are also being tried out by several farmers and groups. Indeed, the entire section on agriculture lacks a concerted focus on making it sustainable and biologically diverse, which is the only way that it can feed India's population over the coming decades. This would have to include reorienting R and D and training in agricultural universities and other institutions, focusing on availability of organic inputs for fertilising the soil and managing pests, state support and incentives (including support prices) for the switch from chemical to organic farming, incentives to maintain traditional patterns to help in protecting domesticated biodiversity, linking PDS to a diversity of crops, exchange of appropriate technologies for this and so on. These are all missing, or weakly developed, in the paper.

**Poverty-alleviation Programmes:** 3.19, 3.20 and 3.23: Though recognised in Section 1.29, the linkage between poverty alleviation programmes and environmental degradation or regeneration, is not fully developed here. Of the many problems that have plagued the IRDP, for instance, this is one of them. Certain elements of a natural resource-based poverty alleviation programme are found in Section 3.23, but need to be developed in a much more coherent and comprehensive manner. Poverty alleviation programmes should explicitly and creatively build in ecological concerns, and demonstrate that it is only when natural resources are protected and sustainably used that poverty can be truly eradicated. Again, there are many successful community examples of this, which can be learnt from.

3.21: The explicit recognition of 'illegal income' by the elements of the state, and others, is bold and very welcome!

**Public Distribution System:** 3.24-3.31: There is an opportunity in the Tenth Plan to link the PDS with agricultural revival, including the revival and protection of critical crop diversity. This would require that the PDS explicitly focus on not just wheat and rice, but on 'coarse' millets and other traditional crops, which would give

farmers an incentive to continue to grow them and consumers a much healthier range of foods to purchase. Secondly, PDS shops should increasingly be given over to the disprivileged sections of society to run, as has been successfully done in parts of Andhra Pradesh. Third, grain storage should be decentralised to be managed by communities in the form of village grain banks; this approach has been successfully tried out by many people's initiatives.

**Forests:** 3.32-3.37: The chapter on forests is well thought out in many respects, including the stress on reviewing existing policies and laws, women's empowerment, classification of bamboo as NTFP, removing governmental monopolies on NTFP, criticism of tendu collection programmes and so on. However, three points could be added or strengthened: (1) the need to infuse all forestry activities with biodiversity concerns, which are currently missing from commercial forestry, social forestry, even joint forest management; (2) extending participatory mechanisms to all kinds of forests, including standing forests, protected areas, and others; and (3) recognising and facilitating, without interference, self-initiated processes of forest regeneration and protection by communities.

3.34: The paper should explicitly mention that such a review of laws and policies should be done in a participatory manner, including especially those most dependent on forests.

3.50: The emphasis on promoting a mix of technologies, and on harnessing this for human welfare, is welcome. Unfortunately, given that existing attention is largely and increasingly focused on modern technologies (including biotechnologies), there could have been an explicit mention of the need to boost the traditional sector to bring it on par with the modern.

**Education:** 3.57-3.59: The emphasis on local community controls over education, and on alternative education for the disprivileged, is most welcome. What is also needed is to decentralise the framing of the curricula and methods of teaching, to make them relevant to local ecological and socio-cultural contexts (including language), and to ensure that the links with natural resources, livelihoods, and environment are made from the start.

3.63: While recognising the role of the private sector, it is critical that the government retains its core support for education, and not allow the corporate sector to take over. The implications of such private takeover, especially in universities with fundamental topics of education, are of serious concern, as increasingly insti-

tutions will turn away from the social and environmental needs of disprivileged sections and areas.

**Health and Nutrition:** 3.67: ISM and H needs considerably greater attention and resources than are being provided currently. It is good that the paper recognises the need to decentralise powers over health services to village institutions. Indeed, health has increasingly to become a people's movement, linked to environmental regeneration and protection.

3.68, 3.73: The paper should recognise and promote the links between biodiversity (including crop diversity), nutrition and health. These links have been completely missing from the health sector, leading to devaluation of biodiversity-based preventive and curative approaches that were present in many traditional communities. Case studies of these links that still exist, e.g. in the Biligiri Hills of Karnataka, should be used to build the plan's prescriptions.

**Economic Infrastructure:** There is inadequate integration of environmental and biodiversity concerns, barring a few stray references to environmental destruction caused by infrastructure projects. There should be an explicit directive that no further large-scale diversion of forests, draining of wetlands, pollution of air and water and soil would be allowed for infrastructure development, given that the natural environment is our greatest infrastructure!

**Electric Power:** 3.87: It is good to say that hydropower potential should be tapped while protecting against environmental damage, but the question is, how would this be done? If the paper had placed an explicit and unequivocal focus on decentralised, alternative power generation measures, efficiency, and conservation, there may have been a move forward in this direction.

3.88: It is surprising and alarming that the Planning Commission considers atomic energy as having 'environmental advantages'. At a time when the whole world is reassessing the safety and necessity of atomic power, surely the country needs to go away from this hazardous and expensive technology.

**Coal:** 3.91: The suggestion regarding the Samatha judgment is perhaps one of the paper's most objectionable statements, and completely contradicts its own emphasis on reversing processes of tribal land alienation and displacement. This sentence should be completely removed.

3.91: The suggestion regarding simplification of environmental clearance procedures is also potentially alarming, given

that recent moves to 'simplify' have all been in the direction of diluting the measures. For instance, public hearings have been made unnecessary for a range of projects, a greatly regressive step. The paper should make it clear that the stringency of environmental regulations would only have to be increased, if the country is serious about reversing environmental damage and protecting what little is left of the natural environment.

**Non-conventional Energy:** Despite the clear advantages of several forms of non-conventional energy, this sector continues to get stepmotherly treatment. The Tenth Plan is an opportunity to rectify this. A much more ambitious target (from the current contribution of only 3 per cent of the total installed power) for this sector should be set, with appropriate provision of resources necessary to reach this target.

**Railways and Roads:** Considerable concern is being justifiably raised about the environmental implications of the Golden Quadrilateral and the national highway network projects that have been announced by the government. An explicit provision for full environmental impact assessment, consideration of all possible alternatives for alignment and construction, full public scrutiny of these projects, must be built into the paper.

**Governance:** There is a welcome stress on decentralised governance, on the need to simplify the proliferation of schemes and government procedures relating to communities, on action against corruption and official apathy, on the right to information, and on panchayat raj institutions.

4.14: Transparency in the functioning of the entire governmental apparatus needs to be built in through appropriate measures.

4.26: One of the measures that could be considered for panchayati raj institutions to raise revenues is a biodiversity tax or fees, for collection and use of biological resources and related knowledge from their jurisdiction.

## Conclusion

Surprisingly, there is little focus on environment/biodiversity in the 'Conclusion'. There is only one mention of environmental sustainability. Environment does not figure in the Minimum Agenda (Section 5.5) at all. This must be rectified, with explicit and independent focus on the need to infuse environmental concerns through the entire economic planning and development process.

To sum up, the Tenth Five-Year Plan Approach Paper has many interesting and

progressive elements, but also many prescriptions that are likely to cause further destruction of the environment, food security, and people's natural resource-based livelihoods. There is no clear and coherent thrust towards integrating these concerns throughout the paper, within all sectors.

# Election to Rajya Sabha: Proposed 'Reform'

*The government is seeking to introduce amendments to the law on election of members to the Rajya Sabha by proposing open vote instead of the present secret ballot and allowing candidates to contest from any part of the country, by scrapping the 'ordinary resident' clause. While the latter proposal has met with some criticism, it is necessary to clear the confusion by drawing on the experience of the past 50 years.*

B VENKATESH KUMAR

In October 2001 the union cabinet passed a resolution wherein elections to the Council of States (Rajya Sabha) would be on the basis of 'open vote' instead of 'secret ballot' as is now prevalent. It has also sought to remove the 'ordinary resident clause' by seeking to amend section 19(b) of the Representation of People Act, 1950. This, in effect, would mean that a candidate could get elected to the Rajya Sabha in a manner similar to a candidate getting elected to the Lok Sabha.

The rationale for 'open vote' was due to the use of money and muscle power in certain states, especially in the biennial elections in 1998 in Maharashtra, which witnessed cross-voting. In view of persistent cross-voting in the Rajya Sabha elections, then chief election commissioner M S Gill had suggested radical reforms in the electoral system including the replacement of the present secret vote with an 'open vote'. It is felt that an open ballot system would introduce an element of accountability as it can be easily verified why some people going against their party voted for somebody "totally outrageous" and whether money power played any role in it.

In fact, the situation was so alarming that Gill commented, "I am sad and disturbed at the use of money and muscle power. Rajya Sabha results show that some of the candidates have got elected with proven abilities in this regard. If this is what the

Even at this late stage, it would be fruitful for the Planning Commission to set up a group of independent people to consider ways of achieving such integration. This group could also then monitor progress towards such an integrated approach, in the implementation of the Five-Year Plan. [E]

House of Elders has come to, then how do you run a democracy and an electoral system?"

The question of eligibility of candidates to the Rajya Sabha dates back to the early 1990s, when TN Seshan, the chief election commissioner, had raised this question and was firm on enforcing the rule that the candidate must be a bona fide resident of the state from where he/she wishes to seek election to the Rajya Sabha. There have been a large number of instances where a candidate has nothing to do with a particular state and yet seeks to represent the interests of that state through the Council of States.

The more fundamental issue is the fact that such an absentee citizen of a state claiming to represent it violates the basic premise on which the entire Rajya Sabha rests. Under the Constitution, the Council of States is the upper house of parliament and as its name implies is a council consisting of 'representatives' of the states as provided under Article 80 of the Constitution. Its composition has been structured keeping in view the federal character of the Indian union. The Representation of People Act, 1950 had laid down the conditions for the registration of voters. He or she must (a) be 18 years of age, and (b) be an 'ordinary resident' in the constituency where he or she seeks registration. According to Section (19) (1) it is not enough to possess an address or own a dwelling house in the area. It may be