

BLOG: RESISTANCE & RECONSTRUCTION

Will 2015 be a year of hope?

Will the synergies between the politics of resistance and grassroots initiatives towards reconstruction of the damages wrought by 'development' be reaped effectively enough in the year ahead? That is what Ashish Kothari will track in his new blog.



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2015 is the year when the world's nations are negotiating a new global compact: the Sustainable Development (SD) Agenda. This is to replace the Millennium Development Goals, agreed to in 2000, and acknowledged to be only partially successful in some areas (absolute poverty, sanitation, education of the girl child), and a failure in others (ecological sustainability, universal human rights). It is hoped that the SD Agenda will make up for the weaknesses of the MDGs. But will the agenda be truly transformative?

2015 is also the year when the world will try to reach a new treaty to halt the disastrous warming of the planet and the consequent climate crisis that is already undermining the lives of tens of millions of people (not to mention wildlife). If, however, the last few years of climate negotiations are anything to go by, a fundamental breakthrough leading to meaningful emission reductions appears rather remote.

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Back home in India, 2015 is the year for the new government to show that it is indeed moving the country towards *achchhe din* ('good days'). The build-up to this in late 2014 did not give much reason for hope, though; on the contrary, for the vast numbers of poor and marginalised people, it brought the fear that hard-fought gains on land and forest rights, and on the right to employment, could be undermined by a government bent on loosening laws to allow industrial expansion. The slashing of the health budget by 20% was another new year 'gift' that the Modi government gave to the poor.

In such a situation, where lies the real hope? One source is in the rapidly increasing numbers of people protesting, resisting, speaking out, or in other ways questioning those in power. Uprisings in many parts of the world against dictatorial or elitist governments, hundreds of thousands of people marching to demand action on climate crisis, new political formations in many countries, are strong indications that people are no longer willing to take things lying down.

Not all these movements have sustained themselves, nor have they all had a vision of what to do if they come to power, but the sheer people-power they represent is itself cause for celebration and hope.

In India, a unique rally on 2 December 2014 in Delhi brought together sectors of resistance and protest that have rarely been seen together on a common platform. The rally was labeled *Abki Baar, Hamara Adhikar* ('this time, our rights'), a clever take on the BJP's election slogan *Abki Baar, BJP Sarkar*.



Abki Baar Hamara Adhikar rally, Delhi. Pic: Daniela Del Bene

With over 15,000 people, the gathering comprised communities affected by mining and dams and industries, workers and labourers from various sectors including forestry and childcare and waste management, members of trade unions and farmers' movements, human rights organisations, community health movement groups, catalysts of the right to information, food and employment campaigns, youth and women's groups, politicians, academics, and many others. They all saw in the new government a common threat, as it was proposing to undermine or weaken a number of laws, policies and schemes relating to livelihoods, labour and environment. They resolved to unitedly struggle against such processes.

Can such a coalition, cutting across so many sectors, survive for long? More important, can it become a large enough, united critical mass to force the government towards progressive policies, and eventually bring about a fundamental transformation of the political and economic structures currently prevalent?

To do this, I submit, requires not only a common understanding of what they are *against*, but also what they are *for*. The slogan of 'justice for all' needs to be translated into a vision and a programme of transformation that addresses some of India's most deep-rooted problems. In other words, the alliance of movements needs to come up with both conceptual and practical alternatives to the currently dominant model of economic development and political governance. This is a challenge facing peoples' movements across the globe.

This is where we can find some answers within a range of ongoing initiatives at the grassroots and conceptual level, seeking alternatives. There are thousands of attempts at direct or radical democracy, sustainable agriculture and pastoralism, decentralised water harvesting and management, producer-owned companies and cooperatives linking with discerning consumers, community-based nature conservation and natural resource management, justice and dignity for oppressed castes and ethnicities, women's

empowerment and child rights, sustainable and dignified livelihoods and jobs, ecofriendly construction and materials use, decentralised renewable energy projects, alternative media and learning, and much more.

(A compendium of stories on these, focusing on India, can be found at www.vikalpsangam.org; links to many in other parts of the world are at <http://radicalecologicaldemocracy.wordpress.com>)



Jeevanshala, alternative education by the Narmada movement, at Manibeli. Pic: Ashish Kothari

These initiatives need documentation and analysis, networking, outreach and support. They also need to be linked to political movements such as those of resistance groups, so that they may gain political traction and in turn help these movements generate a positive vision of the future. Finally, they need to be networked with similar initiatives around the world, so that they can perhaps influence the upcoming big ticket meetings on sustainable development and climate, at least to ensure that these are not regressive.

It is this theme of the interplay between the politics of resistance and the dynamics of constructive alternatives that I will explore in this blog. The context of massive ecological, social, cultural and economic damage that is being wrought in India and across the world, in the name of ‘development’, will be a backdrop to this exploration, but I will not dwell on it long; there are plenty of other spaces and people who are already doing that. This blog will be about the signs of hope, the pinpoints of light that need to be located, focused on, and spread, to dispel the darkness around us.

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URL for this article

<http://indiatogether.org/resistance-reconstruction-development-and-rights-of-marginalised-human-rights>

