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Climate Change and People's Voice

**October 5th, 2015;
10 A.M.**

**Rajiv Gandhi Institute for Contemporary Studies,
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“The sustainable development enables the realization of green clean environment without pollution, having prosperity without poverty, peace without fear of war and a happy place to live for all citizens of the nations of the world” – Dr APJ Abdul Kalam.¹

Central idea:

Indian climate policy is currently at cross-roads. It espouses a deeply paradoxical discourse. On the one hand, it leverages development and universal energy access for its growing population as a justification to continue on a high emissions trajectory, using moral historical and current principles to validate its position. On the other hand, at a domestic level, it does not follow any of these moral principles when it comes to really meeting the developmental needs of its own population.

Given this paradox, it is worth questioning the beneficiaries of India’s current climate policy position. Since it is evidently not the majority of the rural and tribal poor of this country, there is, perhaps, a need to urgently re-visit India’s disjointed global and domestic climate policy position.

In this meeting, we seek to build up precisely such a position from the point of view of the people of this country, by exploring the varieties of ‘public discourse’ on climate change and what can be done to strengthen it.

Organization of the meeting:

The discussion on *Climate Change and People’s Voice* will be held on October 5th, 2015. It will bring together leaders and Members of Parliament from Indian politics, civil society activists, policy experts and representatives of affected communities.

Objective:

The purpose of the meeting is to begin a dialogue and interaction between political leaders and the civil society on the issue of climate policy in India, in order to evolve a policy position which advocates justice for the people as a core part of the Indian climate policy.

Format:

The meeting will be organized as a round-table discussion involving all the participants. While it will be conducted in a discussion format, speakers are requested to prepare their positions and communicate a short highlight/abstract to the coordinator in advance, so that the dialogue could be concentrated and focused.

Key themes:

It will be organized into discussions around three themes:

- Ensuring equity and justice in post-disaster assessments.
- Democratizing climate policy cooperation.
- Bringing climate public into the political mainstream.

Expected outcomes:

- A meeting report.

¹ UNDP 2015.

- Subsequent to the meeting, the aim is to draft a people's action plan for a roadmap on Indian climate policy, akin to national policy communications, which can be advocated as a position India should take at the COP-21.
- Evolving new tools and frameworks to assess and improve people's mobilization around climate policy issues.
- Knowledge exchange among the participants with the purpose of maintaining consistent future collaboration to sustain the key themes of the conference.

The Framework: Elaboration on the key themes/issues:

In keeping with our broad thematic, the focus will be on the following key themes/issues:

- ***Identifying the 'climate public' in India: Differentiating stakeholders to increase accountability:***

The problem:

India's climate policy suffers from an endemic exclusion of radical political mobilization of the concerned communities in the climate change debate. This lack of mobilization is despite the fact that about 70% of India's population is engaged in climate-sensitive sectors like agriculture, fishing and forests.² The climate change discourse in the country has generally focused on involving the public in general debates on the stand India should take in the global negotiations while relegating the actual engagement with the grassroots communities to the realm of expert knowledge, generally out of the domain of media interest. This is counter-productive to achieving radical public mobilization on climate change.

Potential solution:

In order to promote greater climate mobilization, the 'climate public' specific to the Indian context needs to be identified. It is no longer simply enough to say that 'poor rural people' constitute the community most vulnerable to climate change and natural resource degradation.³

Instead, there is a need to move beyond such homogenization and identify the political identities of the Indian communities that are impacted upon by climate change in specific ways.

- ***Themes of climate action:***

There is an urgent need to take into account the 'climate suffering'⁴ – a discursively-mediated political outcome that operates through entrenched structures of privilege and power that depend on 'routine processes' and 'slow violence' in exploiting its victims⁵ – to which a large section of vulnerable farmers are

² Praxis India 2015.

³ Rosendahl, et al. 2015.

⁴ Wapner 2014.

⁵ Ibid.

susceptible.⁶ Within this frame of climate suffering, we need to revise policy, taking into account the following thematics:

I. Addressing the need to give due recognition to equity and justice in post-disaster assessments:

There should be a recognition of ‘caste induced vulnerabilities’ in the National Disaster Management Policy and National Disaster Management Act, 2005.⁷ We need to particularly focus on religious and caste minorities and women, since effects of climate-induced disasters will impact their already limited socio-economic opportunities and dependence on natural resources for livelihood more forcefully⁸, as was brought home in the aftermath of the 2007 Bihar monsoon floods⁹, where Dalits, Muslims and Adivasis were hit the worst¹⁰ and were also blatantly discriminated against in the disbursement of aid.¹¹

Their vulnerability¹² came out through being overlooked during loss and damage assessments, based on officials favouring dominant castes from information in records, and living in separate and isolated habitats which worsen access to help after disasters and are also of poor quality.

II. Democratizing climate policy cooperation:

International institutional cooperation on climate change is largely dominated by certain political and corporate interests and often fails to reflect the interests of the affected communities world-over. Most of the indigenous communities have their voices heard through the intermediation of transnational networks.

There should be institutional provisions to address the direct interests of the affected community along three broad lines:

- *Institutional mechanisms*: Mechanisms of adaptation arrived upon in consensus and the manner in which countries address their mitigation commitments are fulfilled by countries which should ensure that there are no human costs to indigenous communities, as seen in provisions of CDM and REDD+.
- *Policy instruments*: Besides challenging the unmitigated promotion of coal-fired power plants which the current government has been advocating¹³, there should also be a larger contestation of the kind of exploitative policies that are embraced at the global level, which impact the farm sector negatively. Techniques like climate smart agriculture through soil carbon sequestration have no proof of reducing emissions. They just become an occasion for developed countries to transfer their mitigation obligations through the CDM and an opportunity for capital accumulation by agribusiness companies.¹⁴
- *Democratic representation*: There should be strong support to strengthen community-based representation in global negotiations. There is already some incipient mobilization in this regard. In 2009 Copenhagen climate talks, three Dalit activists strongly protested community non-representation in negotiations.¹⁵

⁶ Brought home in the context of the Uttarakhand and Kashmir disasters.

⁷ National Dalit Watch of National Campaigns on Dalit Human Rights & Society for Promotion of Wasteland Development 2013.

⁸ IANS 2009.

⁹ Baird 2008.

¹⁰ Brock 2012.

¹¹ Eccleston 2008.

¹² IDSN 2012.

¹³ Roy 2015.

¹⁴ Beyond Copenhagen 2011.

¹⁵ IDSN 2009.

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- Ensuring that the choice of alternatives itself is democratic and favourable to vulnerable communities. As is seen in the case with Environmental Impact Assessments, there should be an institutional framework for social and human impact assessments of climate change community-wise.

III. Bringing climate public into the political mainstream:

We seek to have an action agenda for climate change plans along the lines of national policy communications to intergovernmental negotiations, which can influence the policy-making in a democratic direction.

There should be recognition of linkage between climate change and people's movements' concerns such as "peasant and land rights, rural non-farm livelihoods, decentralized energy options, community control of natural resources and workers rights."¹⁶ This should be supplemented by the contestation of the lack of access, lethargy by government intermediaries and arbitrary favouritism by government towards corporations in the implementation of State Action Plan for Climate Change (SAPCCs)¹⁷, and a streamlining of the SAPCCs to reflect the issues of the concerned local communities. Reports highlight that SAPCCs are highly exclusionary in terms of seeking people's consultation.¹⁸

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¹⁶ South Solidarity Initiative 2015.

¹⁷ Praxis India 2015.

¹⁸ Pairvi 2013.