Dindigul Declaration 2002

WE, the representatives of Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), elected representatives of local governance, civil society groups such as consumer organisations, women federations, youth associations, farmers’ associations, social and environmental activists, academicians and journalists from the local and Tamil Nadu State gathered in Dindigul in Tamil Nadu, India on the 5th of June 2002 to deliberate and to draw the Declaration for discussion and adoption in the World Summit on Sustainable Development 2002 to be held in Johannesburg in South Africa. What we have declared below is out of the commitment of the representatives who gathered in large number in the Deliberation of Peoples Earth Summit, Dindigul.

Context

Agenda 21 is a comprehensive plan of action to take globally, nationally and locally by organizations of the United Nations System, Governments, and Major Groups in every area which human impacts on the environment.

Agenda 21, the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, and the Statement of principles for the Sustainable Management of Forests were adopted by more than 178 Governments at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 3 to 14 June 1992.

The Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) was created in December 1992 to ensure effective follow-up of UNCED, to monitor and report on implementation of the agreements at the local, national, regional and international levels.

10 years ago this day the Rio Declaration reaffirmed the goal of establishing a new and equitable global partnership through the creation of new levels of cooperation among States, key sectors of society and people. It is also important at this stage to remember Principle 25 (Peace, development and environmental protection are interdependent and indivisible) in working towards international agreements, which respect the interests of all and protect the integrity of the global environment and development

Assessment of Agenda 21

The Chairman’s Paper (Commission on Sustainable Development), New York April 2002, recognizes that despite domestic and international actions there is still a major gap in the implementation of Agenda 21. Ten years after the Rio Conference, the world is still confronted with the challenges of endemic poverty, unsustainable lifestyles and environmental degradation. That gap can be bridged with renewed political will, practical steps and partnerships to promote sustainable development.

The Southern NGO Partnership Summit, Algeria, March 2002 confirmed that the foremost problem of Asia Region is poverty. Poverty creates pressures on land and resources to meet the needs and expectation of people on a sustainable basis.
Indaba, the South African National NGO Coalition process has declared the last ten years as 10 years of Broken Promises. They have judged that the heads of governments that met in Rio 1992 have failed to live up to their promises. Instead of human beings being at the centre of development, we have seen a world dominated by the search for more profits, by corporate greed, and by unmerciful and unforgiving markets. For the majority of the peoples, lives and livelihoods have become less and less sustainable. This of course is the reality in INDIA, too.

Friends of the Earth has in May 2002, decried the ‘shameful abdication of responsibility by government, and ignores that big business is one of the key players undermining sustainable development today’.

At Dindigul, the delegates came down heavily on the lack of commitment shown by the developed countries in actualizing the Agenda 21. Instead of keeping to the commitment of support to developing countries of the 0.4% contribution of their GDP, we have instead seen the same governments using the call for ‘trade not aid’ as the clarion call for the pushing of their multinational companies down the throats of poor developing countries. Delegates also recognized the poor of dissemination Rio Declaration and Agenda 21 was a serious issue that needed to rectify in the coming years post Johannesburg.

The delegates in one voice called for de-escalation of military build-up in the region and called for a peace, which they reiterated, was the basis of any discussion on sustainable development.

Recognition of the Basis of the Dindigul Declaration

Tamil Nadu Environment Council (TNEC) is a network of 600 NGOs, people’s organisations, consumer organisations, academicians and scientists from Tamil Nadu that emerged as a response to the call of the Rio Declaration in 1992. Its focus has been to promote a holistic perspective of sustainable development. It has been involved with monitoring and creating alternative discourses on the implementation of the Rio Declaration and Agenda 21 in the context of Tamil Nadu.

Social Action Movement (SAM) has been a supportive forum focusing on the marginalized of the society and on their sustainable development. This collective includes within its fold around 600 NGOs from the states of Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry. The idea of this movement started in 1992 that culminated in 1994 at a state-level conference where some 3000 representatives from all over the state reaffirmed their commitment. It has been critically involved in the discourse on local governance issues and incorporation of the sectoral issues in the election. Some of the more important consultations are as follows:

Prioritized Issues

A Socioeconomic Issues

A.1 Impact of Globalisation

We call for a serious re-examination of Rio Declaration Principle 12 based on the experiences of the community of nations. We also call upon Governments to not subsume the interests of the marginalized in favour of trade. The quest for the growth in absolute wealth without a serious initiative on distributive justice is only bound to increase the gap between the haves and the have nots. The beneficiaries of the primary services should not be denied these services in the discourse on the ‘shrinking state’. In new borderless world it is increasingly the responsibility of the State and the Corporate sector to protect the interests of its people especially its most marginalized. The State and the Corporate Sector are responsible for the negative development and are accountable to the people of the nation.

A.2 Poverty

While Principle 5 enunciates the centrality of the poverty reduction in the strategy for sustainable development, the initiatives in last ten years have not shown considerable success. We call upon the Governments to bring debt elimination as a structural response to poverty alleviation. Denial of basic services has also played an accentuating role in pushing people into the poverty trap. In the special context of developing countries, we call upon Governments to recognize the role of employment guarantee / opportunities as an important weapon in the attack on poverty.
A.3 Sustainable Agriculture for Food Security

In its misguided endeavors to increase agriculture production, governments have played into the hands of corporate agriculturalists which has lead to a compromising of the cultural rights in agricultural production and to erosion of crop diversity. The marketisation of agricultural production has been the bane of Food Security in Third World contexts. Entitlement ownership, control and management to livelihoods sources such as land, water, forest resources etc., are critical to the sustainable livelihood of the most marginalized. We call upon the WSSD to be seized of the difficulties of the farmer community (especially suicides that farmers have resorted to) in relation to financial traps as well as the lack of markets for their products.

A.4 Unsustainable Consumption and production patterns

Caricaturing of consumption patterns of developed country as an indicator of development is itself an unsustainable ideology. This has been systematically linked up in production capacity and lifestyle marketing. We declare the need to re-understand indicators of development and call upon Governments to exercise their minds to eliminating unsustainable products. We call upon Governments to re-look at the priorities of communities when allowing production of products for local consumption such that they are need-based.

A.5 Coping with natural disasters

Unscientific programs and push issues from the misguided development paradigms have had a huge influence on what is generally discussed under the rubric of ‘natural disasters’. While acknowledging the timely intervention of Governments at the level of relief and rehabilitation, it is a reality that the lack of a comprehensive approach to these disasters has contributed to a recurring and each time more intensive rebuke from Nature. Droughts and floods are two sides of the same coin. The short-sightedness of our approach towards tank systems in our context is a example of frittering away of a unique and traditional resource utilization system. We call upon the Governments and States to plan and implement a comprehensive approach to prevent the disasters.

B Environmental Issues

B.1 Land and Biodiversity

The amendments to the Land Ceiling and Land Reforms Act in relation to corporate agricultural production and farming have been a retrograde step for small and marginal farmers working with traditional and sustainable practices and depletion of bio-diversity. The seeds controversy is blowing into a full-fledged battle for the keeping intact biological diversity of crops and species. We call upon the Governments / States to protect and safeguard the subsistence, traditional and cultural food of the locals.
B.2 Oceans and Coastal Resources

The Coast and Ocean is a huge livelihood source. Over-exploitation of ocean and coastal resources has increased many manifolds in the last ten years. Increased pressures of urbanization and development of infrastructure has increased this pressure many fold. On behalf of the one-third of the world’s population (which is resident along coastal and / or ocean spaces) we call upon Governments to ban all destructive fishing; ban destructive infrastructure in the coastal areas; ensure 12 km right of artisan Fisherfolk.

B.3 Fresh Water Resources

Water is a basic Human Right. Water is the life center of living beings. We are totally opposed to the privatization and commercialisation of water. The respective States should be made responsible first to ensure potable drinking water to every citizen of the State. We strongly call for cease of all measures towards the privatization and commercialization of water.

B.4 Energy and Mineral Resources

Governments have un-critically bought the argument that private sector is an efficient producer of power. The ground realities have been quite the opposite. The regulatory frameworks have to be worked out on a more transparent basis. We call upon the States to focus and provide adequate financial support and infrastructure toward utilising renewable energy sources. We urge governments to eliminate use of fossils fuels and redouble the initiatives for renewable energy sources.

We have had the experience of misutilisation of mineral resources and a case of completely un-regulated scenario especially in the case of sand mining. We call for a ban on the exploitation of these resources.

B.5 Atmospheric and Climatic Change

The dramatic changes that the world has experienced in the arena of climate change have by far surpassed the worst-case scenarios that had been predicted in 1992. Given the enormity of the issues we urge governments to allocate additional resources for the redressal of these issues. We call upon the WSSD to recognize the impact of pesticides and fertilizers being pushed by multinational companies in the diseasing of Mother Nature and the products, which have now been proven to be harmful to human consumption leading to health issues.

B.6 Tourism Issues

Over the past few decades’ evidence of the negative impacts of tourism has mounted. There is now conclusive research to prove tourism has significant adverse impacts on host communities - especially women and children, the local economy, the environment
and cultures. An attempt to mitigate these impacts is best reflected in UN processes like the Commission on Sustainable Development and the Convention on Biological Diversity devoting a substantive work programme to ensure that tourism policy is democratised and thus reflective of local specificities.

This consultation notes with concern the complete subversion of these processes by Tourism’s prominent presence in the World Trade Organisations General Agreement on Trade in Services. The language of benefit sharing, informed participation and environmental protection - all inviolable if Tourism is to benefit local people, is excluded from the GATS lexicon. We urge the WSSD process to ensure that it devotes considerable time and energy to ensure that trade agreements do not subvert the voice for a sustainable and equitable form tourism development. Likewise we urge our elected governments, both at the central and state level, to create synergies between local governments, communities and international processes to ensure that development is reflective of the felt needs of the people.

**B.7 Pollution and the bane of nonbiodegradable material**

In the last ten years the levels of pollution has reached uncontrollable proportions. There is a serious need for concerted action by all on this matter. We call for a more research and production of alternative and biodegradable material to be used in the future.

**C Cross-cutting Issues**

**C.1 Policy Challenges for Sustainable Development**

The conditionalities of the Bretton Woods institutions together with other institutional financing mechanisms are not coherent for the goal of sustainable development. Government’s lack of will in pushing issues that have already been adequately discussed is also a huge hindrance. We urge the Government of India to come clean on the discussion on the implementation successes of the Agenda 21 in India and to make a clear statement of intent for the next ten years.

**C.2 Institutional Reform of Governance**

Sustainable development within the context of the Rio Declaration Principles 1, 2, 3 and 6 clearly articulate the centrality of the institutional reform needs for governance. It is now accepted that the need for the recasting of governance as a inclusionary space encompassing all levels of participation is the only way out. The multistakeholder process of the Commission on Sustainable Development is in itself a process of working with the ideas generated in this discourse. In the same vein, we call for a furthering of the Good Governance discourse at the regional and national levels and the strengthening of the local government (Panchayat Raj) institutions.
C.3 Capacity Building

Inadequate attention to institutional mechanisms for capacity building has been a problem in the last ten years. We call upon Governments to clearly work out the areas of capacity building issues (keeping in mind reforms of governance indicators, strengthening of the local government mechanisms), implementation, monitoring and funding issues related to capacity-building based on the review of the last ten years.

C.4 Enabling Informed Decision Making

While some states in India have legislated the Right to Information Act, the actual implementation and redressal from this mechanism is inadequate. We call for the full-fledged implementation on a timely basis, of this statement of intent, in all states, with simplified procedures so that the applicant does benefit from this opening up of government decision-making. It has already been stated that Good Governance is not possible without the full and informed participation of all concerned.

C.5 Technology Transfer

We demand an inventory of clean and useful technology for developing country contexts. We then demand the access rights on a preferential basis for technologies that are relevant in national, regional and local contexts.

C.6 Promoting participation of and participation with Major Groups

While conceptually promoting participation of and participation with major groups is a good idea, at the national and local level there is a serious concern in the ways in which this process translates. It is also clear that this process especially at the local levels does not take into account the power asymmetry that exists. We demand that a careful calibration of this process be done for the purposes of making this concept relevant at the local levels. We call upon the Corporate Sector and the State to be accountable to the people of the respective country and in promoting the sustainable development.

C.7 Ensuring Gender Equity

We recognize that women are fundamental to sustaining communities. But the reality is that the clasp of the patriarchal system has not loosened significantly. The discrimination that they face in education, health and access to employment / livelihood sources is appalling. We demand that a special emphasis be given in the WSSD to the positive discrimination in favour of women. The resource conflicts and male chauvinism are increasingly manifesting themselves with increased violence against women. We demand that women be given space to intervene in the development policies of the government.
C.8 Casteism & Racism

The manifestation of Casteism as it has been for centuries in India is worse than Racism, which alienates 25% of the Indian Population from the mainstream socio-economic, political and cultural arenas of Indian States. There is also a systematic process of exclusion of Dalits in the overall economic development arena. There has been a steady abuse of the human rights of the Dalits in the recent years. We urge states to ensure that all necessary constitutional, legislative and administrative measures including appropriate forms of affirmative action, are in place to prohibit and redress discrimination on the basis of work and descent, and that such measures are respected and implemented by all State authorities at all levels.

C.9 Marginalisation of Indigenous People

While Principle 22 talks of the vital role of the Indigenous People in environmental management and development, in the last ten years we have seen the trampling upon of their rights. We have seen in the last ten years an increase in the usurping of the lands of the tribal communities in name of mining, ecotourism and development. We urge governments to acknowledge the demands of the indigenous peoples’ voices, which have been brought to it through various UN forums including that of the UNHCR recently.

C.10 Youth & Children’s Issues

That the youth and child are not considered in the discussions about the future of our societies would not be an understatement to make. It is quite a travesty that while the definition of sustainable development states that ‘development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of the future generation to meet their own needs is called Sustainable Development’, very little focus has been given to their voices in large international, national and regional processes. We demand that the next ten years be a time that rights this wrong. We strongly urge Governments to include youth and children in the formulation of policies and to enable their informed participation by giving focus on capacity building.

C.11 Urbanization

While there has been a systematic breaking down of the agricultural and rural economy, the way forward suggested in the last years have been to increase urbanization of our society. The urban aspirations have been sold consistently leading to un-manageable civic problems. We call the actors at WSSD to give serious attention to the strengthening of the rural infrastructure so that about 60% of the world’s populations can join hands in the struggle for sustainable development.
C12 Labour

One of the major impacts of globalisation is dismantling the organised labour force and further marginalization of the unorganized labour force. The labour force is left unprotected. We call upon WSSD and the States to promote measures for the protection of all labour forces for sustainable development.

C13 For World Peace

The Dindigul Declaration strongly condemns any form of terrorism (in the name of religion, race, castes and gender), which is detrimental to sustainable development.

Role of the Civil Society, People’s Organisations, NGOs

Nongovernment organisations play a vital role in the shaping and implementation of participatory democracy.

Our credibility lies in the responsible and constructive role that we play in society since we work with the grassroots people.

Our community of NGOs should therefore, offer a global network that should be tapped, enabled and strengthened in support of efforts to achieve these common goals.

Hence we need to foster cooperation and communication among ourselves to reinforce our effectiveness as actors in the implementation of sustainable development.

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