

Alternative Forum, Pune

Brief report of 1st meeting, 13.5.2013

Venue: Lokayat, Law College Road

Present: Abhay Shukla (Sathi/Jan Arogya Abhiyan), Sujit Patwardhan (Parisar), KJ Joy (SOPPECOM), Sanskriti Menon (CEE), Ashok Sreenivas (Prayas), Suhas Kolhekar (NAPM/Mahila Arogya Hakka Parishad), Malti Gadgil (SWaCH/KKPKP), S.N. Guttikar (Lok Vigyan Sanghatana), Milind Wani, Sharmila Deo, Pradeep Chavan, Neema Pathak, Shiba Desor, Sujatha Padmanabhan, Anuradha Arjunwadar & Ashish Kothari (all Kalpavriksh), Sourabh Phadke

Key points

Main objectives of the forum would be to exchange ideas, information, and opinions on what could broadly be called alternatives to the current dominant model of development and governance; these alternatives could be practical, conceptual and theoretical. Through such exchange, we could explore linkages across sectors, assess our own work from the standpoint of other worldviews and sectoral priorities, and thereby add value to our own work and visions.

A long-term objective could be to collectively evolve a coherent alternative conceptual framework that has social, political, economic, cultural and ecological dimensions....something sorely missing today. The Forum could also help clarify questions or confusion on whether a number of technofix or market-fix ideas being offered as alternatives, are really alternatives or are more 'false solutions' that distract from the deeper political and social changes needed. Analysis of why the current initiatives on alternatives are not yet reaching critical mass, or helping to change the dominant system, could also help evolve more effective advocacy and networking in future.

Should the Forum remain at discussions? Perhaps some joint activities too could be undertaken, such as critiques of the Pune Development plan (this is only an example). However, there is also value in discussions and dialogue as long as they are adding to broadening our own visions and thereby enhancing our individual or group work. Such a process has been carried on for 40 years by the Medico Friends Circle, and has helped its members intervene more effectively in health policies and programmes.

The Forum could also consider an occasional or periodic public event, such as interaction with practitioners or thinkers of alternatives, somewhat similar to the Signs of Hope programme that some organizations used to organize a few years back in Pune. This could be a platform for some intellectual stimulation of Pune's public.

Remaining informal at least for the time being, the Forum would not take positions as a Forum (though it could be a platform where a number of groups/individuals get together to take positions), or attempt to artificially reach consensus on key issues.

If alternative visions are indeed evolved through the Forum, who would be its 'buyers'; would these remain restricted to only a few of us? Several of us work with mass movements, workers' groups, communities etc, as also students, middle class constituencies ... our discussions on alternatives could also reach across to them, and learn from them, so that there is a greater political process. Some are also providing inputs to the Aam Aadmi Party, or to other political forums, and ideas from the Forum could be used to reach their workers, and possibly even voters (though we should not be too ambitious about this).

For its discussions and actions, the Forum could consider:

- Some recent events/news (e.g. drought in Maharashtra; are there alternative ways of tackling such a crisis?)
- Conceptual papers presenting alternatives
- Work of any of its participating organizations and individuals

Next meeting

Date: 14 June, 4-6 pm

Venue: Lokayat (if available; alternative SWaCH office)

Agenda:

1. Matters related to the Forum (including introduction of/to new members)
2. Discussion on report of a Sustainability Framework for India, prepared by Ashish