

Workshop on Cultural Perspectives on Sustainable Rural Livelihoods: Situating Cultural Practices of Marginal Communities

A two day workshop on 'Cultural Perspectives on Sustainable Rural Livelihoods: Situating Cultural Practices of Marginal Communities' was organised by Deshkal Society on 30 November- 1 December 2008 at Delhi in partnership with UNESCO, FES and Sulabh International Social Service Organization. The objectives of the workshop were to identify issues, generate a dialogue among various stakeholders and chalk out concrete strategies and programmes for ensuring sustainable livelihoods for marginalized communities, based on their cultural practices. The two day deliberations



brought together policy makers, academicians, development practitioners, and cultural activists and performers. Around 100 participants from Gujarat, Rajasthan, West Bengal, Bihar, Jammu and Kashmir, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and New Delhi attended the workshop. International agencies like UNESCO, Fredrick Ebert Stiftung (FES), UNDP and Ford Foundation shared their perspectives and experiences on facilitating sustainable livelihood opportunities for marginalized communities linked with their traditional cultural practices. There were passionate presentations by NGO representatives and organisations working with traditional craftspeople and folk musicians. Scholars and development practitioners who have been working with pastoralists, nomads, and tribals also shared their experiences and viewpoints on community participation for sustainable development.

Experiments in sustainable rural livelihoods and cultural practices of the marginalized communities in different regions of India

The presentation on the experiments linking traditional cultural practices with sustainable livelihoods in various parts of the country had an important place in the workshop in facilitating a process of creative dialogue and mutual learning among the participants. SEWA, Ahmedabad, JMDC, UNDP, Kalaraksha, Foundation for MSME Clus-

ters, Bangla Natak, International Livestock, Kashmir Institute of Crafts, Sulabh International Social Services Organization and Fair Trade Forum, India shared the experiences, innovative approaches and challenges regarding the various experiments focusing on sustainable livelihood and cultural practices of the marginalized communities.

Ms. Viloo Mirza of SEWA made a presentation on the work of the organization with the women belonging to marginalized communities. She narrated how SEWA's work with poor informal sector women workers had successfully generated sustainable livelihoods for over 3500 women artisans, enabled them to understand the changing global environment that influences their work, and increased their access to competitive global markets.

Dr. P K. Sahu of Jute Manufactures Development Council, Ministry of Textiles, Govt. of India, Kolkata shared the work of the council and called for promotion of diversification of Jute products. Mr. RK Anil shared the UNDP supported work on endogenous tourism that brought market to the villagers for the traditional crafts. Ms Judy Frater described her work with craftpersons in Kutch. She shared how a systematic work with the traditional craft persons on design principles enabled them to introduce innovations in designs which increased their access to local, national and international markets. Mr. Parvinder Pal shared the success story of the craft cluster model in Chanderi and described the model in detail. Ms. Ananya Bhattacharya of Bangla Natak, Kolkata presented experiences from her successful work on documenting and marketing of the musical traditions of Bengal with special

reference to the music of Bauls, Faqeers and other local genres of music. Dr. Anajani Kumar from International Livestock shared the work on promotion of livestock rearing as part of sustainable rural livelihood. Ms. Nazima Qadri of Kashmir Institute of Crafts shared the work her institute has been doing and described the successes in getting registration under the Geographical Indication Acts of India. Ms. Abha Bahadur shared the success in getting diversification of livelihood options for the marginalized communities and shared the history of the work of Sulabh International Social Service Organization. Mr. O.P. Yadav shared the work of Fair Trade Forum with reference to sustainable livelihoods.



These practice based presentations based on ongoing work among marginalized communities in various regions of the country generated a lively dialogue among participants on the need to work on the constitutive and creative aspects of the cultural practices in achieving the challenges of sustainable rural livelihoods for the marginalized communities. The participants felt that the experiences from innovative practices need to be widely disseminated and shared at regional and national levels. The experiments also need to be structurally and organically linked up at regional levels through building and strengthening the network among organisations, development practitioners, practitioners of traditional cultural art and craft, and policy makers.

Suggestions for Future Programmes

Considering the intensity, depth, criticality of the discussions, and the issues raised, a consensus emerged in the workshop on the need to work on multiple fronts in order to promote policies and programmes for development of sustainable rural livelihood opportunities organically linked with cultural practices of the marginalized communities. The following key suggestions emerged in this regard.

1. Strengthening of the network of CSOs, national and international development agencies, development practitioners at grassroots level, marginalized practitioners of culture, and policy makers.
2. Regional consultations involving different stakeholders and marginal communities to better understand and respond to the local context of 'development' and cultural practices of marginalized communities.
3. A India Report to be prepared for advocating primarily on the issues related to sustainable livelihoods and cultural practices from perspectives of the marginalized communities. The India Report should be finalized as an outcome of the processes of generating and disseminating knowledge on marginal communities by collating participatory field research based studies, holding regional consultations, and collective evidences and experiences from the regions.
4. Organize cultural performances to facilitate a platform for the expressions of marginal cultural traditions.

