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Comments on Gadgil Committee Report

The report submitted by Western Ghats Ecology Experts Panel under the chairmanship of Prof Madhav Gadgil to the Ministry of Environment and Forests of Government of India had raised concerns among the people who dwell in the region. The committee consists of 14 members including chairman and submitted its report on 31 st August 2011. The report consists of 522 pages in 2 parts, is termed as an attempt to jeopardize the progress of a developing nation in the pretext of protection of nature. Many of the people who dwell in the region opined that the report will take country backwards by at least 2 centuries leading to exploitation by foreign countries and multi national companies. They even feel that the report is an outcome of an international conspiracy for the above.

KSEB Officers Association is for the coexistence of nature and development. The development of becomes sustainable only when the nature of the development is such that it compliments environment. The developmental activities and protection of nature are both equally important for society to progress. With this view KSEB Officers Association analyze the report critically. A few of our findings are listed below.

1. The report is not in agreement with the history of development of our country that we had experienced in the last 65 years after independence. The report rejects our achievements in infrastructure building especially in Hydro power generation and Irrigation and agricultural production through green revolution as envisaged in our five year plans.
2. The report totally rejects the very existence of human kind.
3. Many suggestions in the report are based on environmental fanatics and are anti developmental and subverting agricultural production.
4. The suggestions in the report if implemented will side line the people living in the area and will reject their fundamental rights to live.
5. 14 Taluks in Kerala state were listed under Zone 1 in the report and restrictions proposed in this Zone are not practical and a few out of a total of 54 are listed below.
 - a. In each inhabited place certain area should be kept separated and isolated as no mans land.
 - b. Government land should not be converted in to private land. All steps to give title deeds should be stopped.
 - c. Agricultural land should not be used for non agricultural purposes. Construction of houses, hospitals, educational institutes, religious institutions, commercial buildings and even cow sheds in the agricultural land are prohibited.
 - d. Use of steel, sand and cement were prohibited.
 - e. Paving of clay tiles, granites etc are prohibited.
 - f. All kinds of pesticides and insecticides will be banned.
 - g. In slanted area cultivation of annual crops will not be permitted.
 - h. All constructions including that of road, house, rail etc will be banned. Hence no express ways will be permitted.
 - i. Sand mining and blasting of rocks are banned.

- j. No dams having a height above 10 feet will be allowed. Thus the storage of water becomes impossible and results a collapse of agricultural sector.
 - k. Hydel, thermal or wind power generating stations above 10 megawatt will not be allowed
 - l. All plastic goods will be banned. (Plastic does not mean plastic covers alone).
 - m. People rush to tourist places will be restricted. Farm tourism will be banned.
 - n. Vehicular transport will be restricted.
 - o. Use of water will be restricted.
 - p. Environmental impact study will be made compulsory for all construction works.
 - q. Use of electric pump for irrigation will be banned.
 - r. Hen or Goat farms can be started only after hectic licensing processes. More than 3 cows will not be permitted for a house. Also cows having more productivity will not be allowed.
 - s. Land given for lease will be protected as reserved forest once the lease period is over.
 - t. Agricultural land near to passage of wild animals will be converted to forest land.
 - u. Genetically modified seeds or plants will not be allowed and so on.
6. The panel had not visited any area other than Athirappalli.
 7. Thickly populated areas, agricultural lands and commercial areas were put in to environmentally fragile zone without conducting any scientific studies.
 8. Many suggestions in the report are against the recommendations of Dr Swaminathan commission.
 9. The suggestions in the report create new regulatory mechanisms like Western Ghats Environmental Authority, State Western Ghats Authority, and District Environmental Committee in addition to the existing authorities.
 10. Existing state and central rules and regulations are capable of protecting nature and environment and hence the directions in the report are un-warranted.
 11. Design and implementation of environmental protection activities, rules and regulations should be done with the support of people and without damaging their rights, independence and interests and taking them in to conscious.
 12. Putting restrictions on people living in a specified area thinking that the protection of the environment is the responsibility of a few people alone local to that area is not correct.
 13. All the issues raised in the WGEEP report regarding bio diversity were in fact verbatim of the representation forwarded to the Prime Minister's Office by then Chairman of the Salim Ali Foundation, Dr. V.S.Vijayan. The spirit of recommendations of WGEEP should have been basically evaluation of trade-offs for balancing the development needs with environmental sustainability, examination of scope of mitigation and capacity of the ecosystems to withstand the impact. In such circumstances, the trade-offs for this green power project and ecological impacts were to be judged carefully, and thereafter a view was to be taken by WGEEP as done by various Expert Appraisal Committees of MoE&F. Several inputs/views received from the MoE&F, KSEBoard, other government departments, scientific organizations, R&D institutions like TBGRI should have also been considered rather than rely on inputs from one particular member of WGEEP.
 14. In the end of box 4 of the report which describes the methodology in brief it has been stated that '*as the Methodology described in Section 20 indicates, we could not compile the full set of data indicated above, nor have we been able to cover all the criteria proposed by the Pronab Sen Committee, primarily due to lack of time*'. Thus even though the methodology for classification of the area in various ESA zones has been objective and scientific, its scale is coarse for decision making in smaller catchments.
 15. Kerala's achievement in the social front, comparable even with west Europe in many areas, is a matter of national pride. But how long the state can keep its unique position is a big question when it is considered that the state's per-capita consumption of power is only 536.78 units, far behind the national average of 778.63 units. Sustenance of Kerala's progress depends now on industrial development for which power is the only limitation State of Kerala is bestowed with huge hydro potential by way of plentiful of rain and 44 rivers, As if acted upon by nature's balancing mechanism, the state is devoid of any of the

fossil fuel reserves. The hydel potential can take care of the power needs of the state for many decades to come. Lion's share of Kerala's hydel potential remains untapped. All the proposed hydel projects can come up only in Western Ghats, which is declared to be a bio diversity hot spot by International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

16. Kerala's requirements of power, irrigation and drinking water are now being met by the storage reservoirs at the high ranges proposed to be made ESZ-I. Decommissioning of the dams would virtually fail the state in all the above sectors.
17. All the existing and proposed hydroelectric projects are in the proposed ESZ-I. The recommendations that only dams having the height of 3m will be permitted in ESZ-I will effectively thwart the state's proposals for harvesting hydro electrical power, since dams cannot be build at any places in the other zones. There is no alternative for the 2500 MW of power generated in the state from the hydel projects.
18. The condition that the dams 50 years old shall be decommissioned and the prospects of no new dams would prevent the state from having electricity and producing it in the only way by which it could be produced here eco friendly and economically.

Being an organization in the power sector KSEB Officers Association is more worried on the impact of the report on power sector. We reiterate that, according to latest studies on Human Developmental Index level of a society is directly related to their per capita electricity consumption. To have a minimum level for a society the minimum per capita consumption required is 2000 units. In Kerala presently it is 536.78 units and in India it is only 778.63 units. This shows the urgent requirement of increasing the per capita consumption. Capacity addition is definitely a prelude to increasing per capita consumption. However the comments in the report will subvert our power capacity addition plans and even it will force to shut our existing plants as mentioned above.

Considering all these comments, KSEB Officers Association request to review the findings of the panel.

Sd/-

General Secretary