



Sustainable Development in South Asia – Women Driving Change

Background Note

The Context

Our world faces two epoch defining issues - persistent poverty and environmental degradation. These two issues are intimately related - both being the inevitable result of adopting a highly lopsided economic system guided by a faulty development paradigm. There is growing international concern about the social and environmental costs of the current development pathway adopted by most nations. Climate change, species loss and ecosystem destruction at scale has come with social ramifications such as extensive migration, climate refugees, social strife, domestic and international terrorism, break-down of family and society, youth alienation and large scale deprivations disempowering large majority of populations.

This year marked the milestone for the United Nations twenty years after the declaration for Sustainable Development for All. Representatives from 156 nations, civil society, private sector actors came together to discuss the Future we want - a future of empowered communities accessing their rights and making sustainable choices for development and growth. This calls for a move to a new path of development. This new path, which will take us to a sustainable future, and provide wellbeing and fulfillment for all must focus much more on eliminating poverty and regenerating the environment. This means creating green jobs and sustainable livelihoods, strengthening social capital, empowering citizens, reducing our carbon footprint, reversing the loss of biodiversity and reviving the health of our ecosystems and societies.

The South Asian sub-region, endowed with a rich natural resource base, world's oldest civilizations with tremendous depth of social and spiritual philosophies, knowledge systems and cultural diversity should ideally position itself as a world leader in the path to sustainable development. It is however, one of the poorest and most vulnerable regions in the world most of its constituent nations at the lower half of the world's human development index. Amongst the many concerns that plague the sub-region is the marginalization of large numbers of its communities especially women.

Studies on gender and development issues in the sub-region have revealed that one of the barriers to sustainable development here has been the underdevelopment of its women; and, wherever women have had equitable access to education, economic opportunities and social support systems, families and societies have benefitted. Clearly, if we are to strive for sustainable development in the sub-region, then we will have to explore and support the potential of South Asian women to lead the process of sustainable economic growth in South Asia. Empowering Women in South Asia through education, capacity building, enterprise creation and leadership development supported by an enabling policy environment for mainstreaming their concerns thus becomes essential.

The South Asia Women's Network in its Annual Conference held at Kathmandu between 16 -18 July 2012 [dedicated to the theme of "Women of South Asia and Sustainable Development"] decided to strive for "sustainable future for all" by taking a critical call for collective civil society action with women at the centre of leadership. SWAN is committed to work in eight sectors viz. Arts & Literature, Women in Peacemaking, Health, Nutrition & Food Security, Education, Crafts and Textiles, Livelihood Development and Entrepreneurship, Environment and Women in Media.



TARAGram Yatra¹

To fulfill our mission to secure the future of our children and life on planet earth we need to cut to the heart of contemporary dialogue and advocate examples of proven practice in sustainable development. This must then lead to policies that respond urgently to the current social and environmental crises.

TARAGram Yatra is an annual event in India led by the Development Alternatives Group in partnership with international thinking – learning organisations, designed to deliberate on germane issues of development with the mission of inspiring sustainability in policy and practice. It brings together practitioners and policy makers from India and other parts of the World to share current thinking on and define direction of action to alleviate poverty, regenerate the environment and tackle social deprivation especially in the developing world. With a mix of dialogue and field visits, the Yatra provides a platform for exchanging cutting edge ideas on how to realize a sustainable future. The event provides leads for follow-up on policies and action at the global, national and local levels.

In the past two years, the **TARAGram Yatra** has contributed to form opinions around the concept of 'Green Economy' debated intensely at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development at Rio de Janeiro and helped build ideas for action for the Asia Pacific region presented to the International Poverty and Environment program.

TARAGram Yatra 2012 - “Sustainable Development in South Asia – Women Driving Change”:

This year, **TARAGramYatra 2012**, from the 22 to 25 November will focus on empowering women to lead the world on the path for Sustainable Development. Entitled, “**Sustainable Development in South Asia – Women Driving Change**”, the Yatra will celebrate contributions that women make to the economic, social, and political lives of their countries, communities, and families. It will debate on the practical solutions for sustainable livelihoods and green enterprises and the policies required to develop capacities and skills across women in South Asia empowering them as key actors and leaders in a green economy.

The four-day event will showcase the achievements of grassroots actions in community empowerment led by women. Discussions will focus on role and potential of women led interventions to nurture and revive the health of our ecosystems, enhance securities of food, water, energy and livelihoods and build greener economies, healthier and happier societies. Strategies such as education, skill building, enterprise development, institutional supports and leadership development for enabling women in the region to drive the process of sustainable development will be discussed. Moderated discussions will be interspersed with visits to field projects and meetings with women's groups in the rural areas of Bundelkhand and experience sharing amongst initiatives drawn from the South Asian region. Experience sharing of grass roots action will be juxtaposed with interventions on policy supports required for scaling up good practices and supporting large scale women's empowerment in the region. The launch event for this programme is scheduled at Development Alternatives World Headquarters in New Delhi on the 22nd November.

¹**Yātrā** ([Sanskrit](#), 'journey', 'procession') generally means pilgrimage to holy places One who goes on a yatra is known as a **yatri**.



Expected Outcomes of TARagram Yatra 2012

The **TARagram 2012** is a partnership between Development Alternatives Group and South Asia Women's Network (SWAN) supported by the United Nations Environment Programme – UNEP APFED Showcase programme. The deliberations over four days will lead to the design of a roadmap action on capacity development and leadership training of women in South Asia connecting them to economic opportunities and supporting policy development in this arena. It will orient policy makers and practitioners with emerging concepts and models for sustainable development for women in South Asia.

The event will identify policy imperatives and support systems required to scale up such women led grassroots initiatives in the region that have shown significant social and environmental value addition while strengthening economic assets of communities. It will mark a beginning of a four year long process of discussions amongst policy makers and practitioners of South Asia interspersed with capacity building and skill development of women leaders for fostering peace, sustainability and equity across the region.

Knowledge outputs of the TARagram Yatra 2012

The Event will result in specific knowledge products and action plan documents prepared in association with the members of the South Asian Women's Network, these are:

1. A theme paper describing the potential of women driving green economic growth in the context of South Asia.
2. Five Session papers on substantive aspects of adult education, enterprise development, leadership development, capacity building and training support systems focused on women's empowerment in the region.
3. A Road map document for future action
4. A document for association with organizations from the South Asian sub-region to scale-up community led sustainable development interventions.
5. A policy brief
6. Proceedings of the event