

VIKALP SANGAM CORE GROUP MEETING

DEHRADUN, 2021



Acknowledgement

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We would like give a special thanks to the Christian Retreat Center in Dehradun for being such gracious hosts to the Vikalp Sangam Core Group.

Vikalp Sangam Core Group Meet 2021, Dehradun

Introduction

[The Vikalp Sangam Core Group](#) held their meeting on 27th and 28th October 2021 at Christian Retreat Centre in Dehradun, Uttarakhand. The meeting was attended by over [30 participants](#) from the various Core Group member organisations (see Annexure: List of Participants), with some participants attending Vikalp Sangam Core Group meetings for the first time.



Day 1: 27th October

The first day began by welcoming the participants and was followed by a round of introductions of all present. This was followed by a brief introduction of Vikalp Sangam's history, objectives, processes and structure. Participants were provided with an overview of the different activities of Vikalp Sangam such as documentation and outreach, collaborations, collective visioning, advocacy, physical Sangams, the Vikalp Sangam website, and [The Global Tapestry of Alternatives](#), which is an international platform partly arising out of the experience of Vikalp Sangam.

To ensure that the first-time participants had a grasp of what constitutes 'alternatives', participants were provided with examples of Deccan Development Society in Telangana, Kunariya in Kutch, Gadchiroli in Maharashtra, and Bhuj, Gujarat. Next, the [Alternatives Framework](#) was discussed by the group, which is an evolving document that has emerged through the Vikalp Sangam process (provide a link here). and how these examples share the values of ecological resilience and wisdom, radical democracy, culture and knowledge diversity, social justice and wellbeing, and economic democracy.

This was followed by a round of reflections with the participants:

- How to find more modes of online/offline dissemination to share about alternatives with more people who are not aware about these examples.
- Future-readiness within various sectors (such as agriculture) is critical. Technology forecasts are also necessary. We should include individuals/organisations which work on future-ready, sustainable and accessible technologies.
- Much has changed during COVID-19, and we need to include that lens within our conversations.
- How do we strengthen our collective beyond this meeting? We should look at the structure of Vikalp Sangam and find ways to increase the collective strength.
- Coming from different regions, it is important for us to collaborate. We have people from different spheres of work attempting to come together to create holistic development in a region. Such collaborations and processes of holistic development can be replicated in all regions.
- As Vikalp Sangam, we write statements and press releases for outreach, but the response rate is poor. We have many connections within the network, we have different strengths that we should utilise.
- On the question of how to find optimal ways of functioning, we can map the strengths of each organisation.
- How to push Vikalp Sangam externally by the participating organisations and access various strata of society, for eg., panchayats, government officials, and politicians

Review of Last Year's Activities

Ladakh Food and Agriculture Sangam 2021

- Held in September and organised by LAHDC, Agriculture Department, Local Futures, Snow Leopard Conservancy – India Trust, Ladakh Arts and Media Organisation, and Kalpavriksh.
- It was a two-day Sangam with around 25 participants ranging from farmers to scientists. The first day was spent on discussing the schemes/policies currently being applied in Ladakh, and whether they are relevant to Ladakh or not. The Ladakh Hill Development Council is working with the Sikkim government to understand and provide organic licences to Ladakhi farmers.
- On the second day, the possibility of a Wellbeing Index was discussed, and SLC-IT and Kalpavriksh have taken up the responsibility to make a comprehensive index, for not only Ladakh but all of Western Himalayas.

Reflections

- Development Alternatives was a part of the Wellbeing project in Sikkim, which went to an institutional level as a Bill, Zeenat will share the related material.
- NCNF are working on natural farming projects with the Himachal Pradesh government, and we can observe and replicate what they are doing.
- Organic farming isn't necessarily organic. Natural farming is a much stronger viable alternative.
- DRC works with many national/regional platforms. Desert-based programmes should also be encouraged.

2. Youth Vikalp Sangam

- A process to bring young people into the Vikalp Sangam forum to enable collaboration, sharing etc., while bringing the wisdom of the elders to the table as well. Issues faced by youth take a more central stage in this process. Both young people, and people who work with young people are part of the process.
- Youth Vikalp Sangam 2020 was held online over five days with about 40 members. The points discussed were the Alternatives Framework, sustainable livelihoods, learning from movements such as Yugma Network and Let India Breathe, learning from movements built by elders, and creating space for collaborations.
- Another project was the Youth Extraordinary Work of ‘Ordinary’ People document. Organisers of the Youth Vikalp Sangam came together to create this document about how youth in India showed resilience to the pandemic.
- Pluriverse 2021 was a youth-centric event based around the book Pluriverse held in Swaraj University with 27 participants from 14 States.

Reflections

- There can be differences between the ways of working of youth and elders, as seen in Sangams organised by Youth Vikalp Sangam folks which tend to be more interactive.
- The next Youth Vikalp Sangam should include more youth who aren’t part of the process. To bring people who are unaware of these alternatives processes will further strengthen the team.

3. [Extraordinary Work of Ordinary People: A series](#)

- A series of documents to present examples, from which crucial lessons can be learnt and adapted to achieve similar results elsewhere. We show how each of the major problems faced during COVID-19 (all of which have been around for much longer, of course, but are more sharply visible now), has solutions, already demonstrated by communities, civil society, or government agencies somewhere in India.
- Five volumes have been compiled so far. Two more volumes are upcoming.
- Many of these stories (and lessons) were brought together by member organisations.

Reflections

- The outreach hasn’t been strong enough for these series, and though each volume has been translated into multiple languages, these have not been picked up adequately including by VSCG members despite repeated requests. Tracking the effects of these volumes is proving to be a challenge.
- Further attempts can be made to share these stories within the grassroots as well as policymakers.
- Videos put together by EQUATIONS on grassroots stories can be shared on the VS website.

4. [52 Parindey Fellowship](#)

- An 18 day Fellowship for people looking to understand and participate in alternative processes. The Fellowship is meant to provide mentorship, direct learning, individualised experience and a holistic exposure to the work, challenges, sustenance etc.

- The attempt is to provide valuable information on alternative livelihoods and alternative processes.
- After three months, the idea is to compile a book on the experiences found within the Fellowship.
- Dissemination of the book will involve VS and VS-related organisations. The stories are meant to be an important source of inspiration, awareness and relatability.
- There are plans to translate these stories into some local languages as well.

Reflections

- In Kashmir, tourism is over-hyped and heavily-modernised within the youth. In that backdrop, “Conversation on Conservation” was a youth-based programme to promote ecotourism and respect for nature.
- Another idea was the “Mountain School” for youth who would go to remote schools to teach. This changed into edu-tourism, where non-Kashmiris would teach at remote schools and stay with the community. Alongside a progressive syllabus being taught, localised knowledge was also promoted. Both processes are to begin again next year.

5. South Asia Bioregionalism Working Group

- A group attempting to re-imagine nation state boundaries based on bioregions, a perspective which puts nature and natural resources as also cultural connections front and centre of the political conversation.
- It is an ongoing process, a learning journey to discover how such a governance structure can look, take shape, and evolve keeping human-ecological sustainability in mind. It isn’t necessary to break down boundaries, but rather to break down the policy-dead-spaces with regards to boundaries, and perhaps recognise and protect ecological spaces, traditional livelihoods, cultural flows, disaster support etc.
- An Amazonian Bioregionalism Plan is being worked on by organisations across the Amazonian region, which was presented to the South Asian Bioregionalism group recently.
- Currently, three processes are underway: A historical bioregional mapping from a nature-based, cultural, and spiritual perspective. Another study is being conducted on the Teesta Basin; and the third is documentation of the Bioregionalism Working Group as an unfolding process.

Reflections

- At the India-Pakistan border in Bikaner, there are issues over the border region because of the break in the contiguous bioregion, which prevents pastoralists from accessing their historical livelihood.
- Currently, this may not seem possible to actually realise. But it is important to start having these conversations, to conjoin local democracy and bioregionalism.
- It is very important from a policy-perspective. An example is Ladakh, where policies and schemes are formulated on the basis of the geo-climatic reality of India. Ladakh’s geo-climatic reality is very different and needs to be recognised as such.
- Reinvigorating the bioregional parlance will provide an important political voice to this issue. Bioregions, linguistics, food, and culture can all come together to enhance unique identities.
- People’s perceptions of belonging keep changing, and that has changed further with increasing modernisation. At the same time, there is ‘artificial evolution’ of bioregions which

threatens to destabilise these regions of historical significance, such as river linking projects in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana which are changing the known landscape.

- PPST has mapped and created 56 bio-cultural regions in the past; this should be looked into.



6. Global Tapestry of Alternatives

- Officially started in 2019 by connecting with other networks across the world similar to VS focusing on alternatives.
- The objectives are to visibilise and connect alternative networks across the world in a horizontal, decentralised way.
- Currently, there is a process underway for mapping of alternatives that aims to be completely decentralised, and to connect meta maps using open-source software.
- There is a compilation of COVID-resilience stories, as well as regular newsletters and webinars.
- Facilitating cross-pollination amongst various global networks/processes is underway in an emerging network called Adelante.
- To increase dialogue between the two ‘Weavers’ of GTA, Crianza Mutua Mexico and Columbia and Vikalp Sangam are scheduled to hold a dialogue in November 2021.
- There are plans to extend the network further with UPCIDS AltDev, which is an institution looking at alternatives in Southeast Asia.
- Newsletters are also published every two months, to facilitate cross-pollination and understanding across organisations and continents.

Reflections

- There is a need to bring together translators to ensure that language doesn’t become a barrier.
- We are requesting to write in multiple languages in VS Documentation as well.

- Do the values of the two Weavers (Mexico/Colombia and India) match? They broadly match in fundamental value, although there may be crucial differences that come out during the upcoming dialogue.

7. [PeDAGoG: Post-Development Academic-Activist Global Group](#)

- PeDAGoG is a global network of academics and academic-activists interested in post-development, radical alternatives, and related themes, initiated in early 2020. The main idea is to share existing course curricula, materials, methods/pedagogy, and approaches; propose new ones; coordinate programmes across different geographies and cultures; and be able to offer learning experiences to people in various parts of the world, especially the global south. And through all this, contribute to the movements for radical, systemic transformation.

8. VS Communications Team and VS Website Update

- There has been an increase in the number of followers in the VS social media pages and channels.
- Also, an increase in traffic to the VS website.
- Changes in the design and content of the VS website have been undertaken, to make it more accessible and attractive.

9. [Vikalp Sutra](#)

- Sutra Vaani: A free and locally facilitated HELPLINE for workers (especially informal/unorganised sector) in livelihoods' distress. The helpline responds to the needs of workers searching for dignified livelihood opportunities and related support in their home state or otherwise. These responses are available in the form of information and/ or direct support at the local level.
- Sutra Mandali: An online (and physical, in due course) platform for collective knowledge sharing and mentoring on issues and strategies around dignified and sustainable livelihoods. It will offer an opportunity to build and strengthen a conceptual understanding on dignified livelihoods, finding solutions that translate this thought into action as well as voice out for support/ partnership.
- Sutra Ajeewiki: A dynamic and synergistic collective space that shall function as a database of organisations and individuals working on dignified livelihoods across India. It will also serve as a platform to collaborate and communicate on the concept and practice of dignified livelihoods across the country.

Reflections

- Udyami is a platform similar to Vikalp Sutra, and can be looked at for further ideas/resources.
- There should be an exploration of the possibilities of connecting with supply chains, which may provide an important perspective on the question of dignified livelihoods.
- Further backend resources/automated responses can be researched upon, and help provided by the group

Day 2: 28th October



Reflections on Vikalp Sangam

1. VS Process and Objectives

- VS is a rich and dynamic confluence with a lot of use and a lot of resources. Representation is regional and socially-driven.
- Over the years, there has been an improved engagement within the network on knowledge and outreach. The next steps can be to include organisations on the periphery of VS philosophy.
- On the website, organisations/individuals can be mapped geographically, thematically, or on the basis of expertise and resources. This will further encourage member organisations to seek new collaborations.
- Is the VS process achieving what it set out to? There should be rigour to the process and resources used. Along with the principles, there should be a more conscious effort to increase diversity within these processes.
- Taking responsibility will bring ownership. A simpler version of our “collective vision” is required. A national as well as a global vision can be worked upon, which will make the process of communication about the process easier.

2. Structure, Functioning and Coordination

- Gender/Sexuality lens can be improved to further enrich this confluence. Northeast groups/networks, children’s groups, fisherfolk, pastoral groups, sanitation workers’ groups and Dalit organisations also need to be promoted, and with agency.
- Existing collaborations or new collaborations should be promoted. Different forms of capital should be further visibilised.
- There is a need to strengthen thematic Sangams/regional Sangams/specific projects and promote ownership of these processes.

- Education Sangam is a space left to fill, and it is crucial to bring about the changes that we envision in society, therefore further engagements with schools and colleges are necessary.
- In order to improve the engagement of Core Group members, one way could be to make tasks smaller and distributed so that they can be handled better and quicker.
- How to improve engagement of VS's outputs within member organisations?
- A collective communications team from across organisations is required. A smaller facilitation group can be formed to assist with Sangams, outreach, communications-related work.
- Which organisations other than Kalpavriksh can take the lead? How do we start the process of transferring the roles?
- We can identify small teams of three to five people with rolling responsibilities on various tasks.

3. Responding to Crises

- For future-readiness, a few issues become more pertinent—how to redirect attention and resources as they become immediate/necessary. There should be a conversation around roping in expertise instead of trying to be the experts on various issues.
- It is important to recognise the role of policy in shaping national and global crises while working on regional issues, thereby keeping advocacy at the centre.
- The VS process has low media engagement; 'Solutions Journalism' is an upcoming space that we can tap into.
- Instead of using VSCG meetings to share about Sangam activities, if we can communicate that using emails, then we can use this space to further our envisioning, interactions, learnings, reflections, plans, and coordinated responses.
- Collaborative statements with partner organisations is necessary, but how else can we improve collaborative possibilities? Simplifying the process of connecting with different arms of the Sangams is required.



Reflections and Way Forward: Planning for the Next Year of Vikalp Sangam

1. Communications

- Deeply listening to our political adversaries, while also improving our communications with varied political processes (for e.g. with the Progressives).
- Readings can become part of the Sangams to promote deep deliberations.
- Follow-ups and communications outreach will need more focus and attention from the larger groups involved.
- Improving transmission of understanding on CG information/news/functions within each organisation to ensure continuity when the representative is changing.

2. Coordination

- Core Group coordination should be strengthened.
- Transferring responsibility: Dividing the larger CG into smaller networking CGs based on tasks.
- Planning VS programmes to be holistic across sectors/thematic groups within regions.
- Clearer ideas on VS structure: how to improve, decentralise, etc.

3. Facilitation

- We need to plan our advocacy roles for each year in VSCG based on the necessities of the issues in the form of declarations to take forward common issues.
- Each annual CG meeting can consider a declaration on overall context and common issues, and plan to deal with these in the coming year.
- Can each CG meeting also have a ‘fun’ or practical activity that also involves the local community.
- There can be a process to categorise the ‘work’ of VS like documentation etc. according to the VS objectives.
- Organisational facilitation and resource mobilisation: Creating a pool of funding to help transfer of responsibility, since facilitation roles can be taken up more easily.
- There are certain groups which are increasingly taking up active roles, such as Alternative Economies VS, Youth VS, and Bioregionalism.
- There has been increasing (and welcome) diversity in geography, and thematic groups.
- Ways to keep our humanity alive; and more activities like ‘senior-junior’ interactions.

Annexure: List of Actions on Reflections

Idea	Specific action	Responsibility
More interaction with party political activists	Discussion with MPs on VS issues	Maadhyam (Mansi); Harit Swaraj (Vijay); LIB (Yash);
	Interaction with panchayats / other local politicians	Devalsari Samiti (Arun) DDS Deepa
	Mapping CG members active on party/electoral politics	

More dialogue with those who have differing/opposing viewpoints	Specific dialogues of opposing views with each other (e.g. youth of different religions) Invite those with differing points to VSs (not those with hardened positions)	ComMutiny (Nachiket to talk to them about possibilities)
VS framework evolution	Convert to simpler forms & as a VS vision	Sehjo
	Engage with framework within our own organisations	
	Session to deepen understanding of framework in CG (esp. for new members)	Late nov/ early Dec BRM (Pankati)
	Cartoon/graphic version of transformation / values	
VSCG facilitation team to distribute core responsibilities		TU (Ashik), YA (Rachit), DA (?), MKSS/SFD (?), Sehjo
Central pool of funds for VS		DA (can help buy tkts) Facilitatoin team to discuss
Add strength to VS Communications team	Video editing/transcription	To ask Green Hub (Zeenat to follow; Sanjay also)
	Podcasts	BBA (Biju Negi)
	Joint group of Comms/website persons of all VSCG groups (to discuss innovative, best practices, taglines etc)	LIB (Yash+), GP India (Avinash), KV (Vasudha/Upamanyu)
	VS song(s)	BBA (Biju), PPP (Manral)
	Media outreach strategy (need groups to help localize statements / press releases)	GP India (Avinash) + VS Comms team
Adding unrepresented groups to VSCG	Children (CWC, Chetna)	CWC: Joyatri Chetna: Sehjo CEE (Sanskriti) ? Salam Balak Trust (Joyatri) Girijan Students Union (Laya)
	Teachers	
	Coastal/fisher (NFF, National Inland Fishers Union)	NFF (Soumya) NIFU (Shaikh)
	Pastoral/nomadic (CfP, ?)	CfP (Ashish) Kachchh Maldhari Association (Ashish) Changpa (Namgail) Others (Yash, Vijay) Overall coordination: Tatsama

	Worker & Dalit groups (Safai Karamchhari Andolan, Domestic workers group?, Gardeners group?, other unorganized workers/labour, SEWA?)	Mulkarni Sangathana (Aditya) SEWA (Ashish)
Education VS		?
Bioregionalism VS (like West Himalaya)	Maru Manthan / Desert VS (Feb 2022)	DRC, SLC-IT
Urban VS		DA, PRC, CEE, Parisar, PSI, EQUATIONS, GP India, others?
Youth VS on politics		TU (Ashik), YVS (Navendu), LIB (Yash), Devalsari Samiti (Arun)
Energy VS		MAUSAM (Sou b mya), GP India (Avinash)
VSCG mapping		EQUATIONS + TU (Ashwini)
Local green enterprises VS		DA (Stella), Sehjo, LIB (Radhika)
VSCG mid-year meet 2022 (online)		Facilitation team
VSCG end-year 2022 (physical, 3 days)		Facilitation team
West Himalaya VS		WHVS facilitation team
Digital / data privacy VS		SFD (Nachiket)
Tourism VS		EQUATIONS (Joyatri), SLC-IT (Namgail), DA (?), Titli Trust (Sanjay)?, Dakshin ?
Vikalp Yatra		TU, Yugma, LIB, AEVS, Sehjo
Well-being index	Online session (Dec 15)	SLC-IT (Namgail), KV (Ashish), DA (Zeenat)
List support organisations for issues like mental health, FCRA etc		PSI, ?

Annexure 2: List of Participants

Member Organisation	Participant	Location
Beej Bachao Andolan	Sahab Singh Sajwan	Garhwal, Uttarakhand
Blue Ribbon Movement	Pankati Jain	Mumbai, Maharashtra
D.E.P.T.D.S.	Arun Prasad	Devalsari, Uttarakhand

Deccan Development Society	Srilaya	Pastapur, Telangana
Desert Resource Centre	Tatsama Motilal	Bikaner, Rajasthan
Desert Resource Centre	Tejasvi Singh	Bikaner, Rajasthan
Desert Resource Centre	Jinto K. John	Bikaner, Rajasthan
Development Alternatives	Zeeenat Niazi	New Delhi
Development Alternatives	Stella George	New Delhi
EQUATIONS	Joyatri Roy	Bengaluru, Karnataka
Greenpeace	Avinash Chanchal	New Delhi
Harit Swaraj Samvad	Gopal	Pithoragarh, Uttarakhand
Heinrich Böll Stiftung	Marion Regina Mueller	New Delhi
Heinrich Böll Stiftung	Sadia Sohail	New Delhi
Kalpavriksh	Ashish Kothari	Pune, Maharashtra
Kalpavriksh	Shrishtee Bajpai	Mumbai, Maharashtra
Kalpavriksh	Vasudha Varadarajan	New Delhi
Kalpavriksh	Upamanyu Das	New Delhi
KKPKP	Aditya Vyas	Pune
Let India Breathe	Yash Marwah	Mumbai, Maharashtra
Let India Breathe	Kopal Goel	Ghaziabad (NCR)
MKSS and SFD	Nachiket Udupa	Rajasthan/ New Delhi
People's Resource Centre	Rajendra Ravi	New Delhi
People's Science Institute	Deepa	Dehradun, Uttarakhand
SADED	Vijay Pratap	New Delhi
SLC-IT	Tsewang Namgail	Chushot, Ladakh
SRDE	Dr. Shaikh Ghulam Rasool	Srinagar, Kashmir
Titli Trust	Sanjay Sondhi	Dehradun, Uttarakhand
Traveller's University	Ashik Krishnan	Thrissur, Kerala
Traveller's University	Ashwini Shah	Dehradun, Uttarakhand
Urmul Trust	Chirag Shahare	Bikaner, Rajasthan
Youth Alliance	Rachit Sharma	Meerut, Uttar Pradesh