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National Vikalp Sangam Concludes with Resolution to Work Towards Ecological, Social, and Economic Justice, for India and for Kachchh

A national-level gathering of local communities, social movements, and NGOs working on environmental, social, economic, cultural and governance issues was held on 21-23 November, at Khamir, in Kachchh. Over 130 people including nearly 100 from outside Kachchh, participated. The occasion was the 10th anniversary of the national platform called 'Vikalp Sangam', which has brought together people working on solutions to hunger and malnutrition, water scarcity, gender and caste injustice, violation of basic human rights, weakening of democratic spaces, unemployment and loss of livelihoods, and other such issues that are causing suffering to hundreds of millions of people in India.

Participants in the Sangam resolved to challenge policies and programmes promoted by governments or private corporations, which cause millions of people to lose their lands and livelihoods. Instead, they will promote policies and programmes that can generate creative livelihoods (including in crafts, agriculture, forestry, fisheries, pastoralism, small manufacturing, and services) and also protect our natural environment. They also resolved to tackle traditional or new inequalities relating to gender, caste, class, ability, and so on.

Most participants are from groups involved in grassroots solutions. This includes over 50 organisations across India, and over a dozen organisations in Kachchh which have been working on sustainable and equitable ways of meeting needs of water, food, livelihoods, housing, education, health, as also empowering women and girls, and others whose voices normally do not enter decision-making spaces. They discussed the kinds of economic policies and social-cultural processes that could make these solutions more widespread. They also discussed future strategies and actions for the Vikalp Sangam process, including more documentation of grassroots initiatives, exchange programmes, helping communities to build capacities to take their own decisions, taking stories of alternatives to youth, and building a bigger national movement to link various struggles with alternative solutions.

The Sangam also featured cultural performances, exchange of gifts, hands-on teaching of pottery and weaving, collective painting. Participants also visited several field sites in Kachchh, to see first-hand the transformations that have been made possible by over a dozen organisations. They visited the LLDC museum of crafts, where also a film on alternatives, 'Churning the Earth', was screened.

Before this, a Vikalp Sangam had been organized in Kachchh, in 2016. For many participants of that Sangam, the experience of re-uniting for this event was memorable; and for new participants, it was a great introduction to Kachchh's beautiful landscape, culture, and initiatives. The 13 Kachchhi co-organising groups also resolved to work on key issues facing the region: stemming loss of land to industries, helping communities deal with impacts of climate change on pastoral & farming livelihoods, women's empowerment to have more equal voice in decision-making, stronger self-governance by villages and urban wards, and generating livelihoods especially for youth.

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