



National Vikalp Sangam 2024

**Khamir
Kutch, Gujarat**



Acknowledgements

The National Vikalp Sangam 2024 was organized by members of Vikalp Sangam in collaboration with local Kutch organizations.

This report has been written and compiled by Mugdha Trifaley and Pooja Kishinani with inputs from Ashish Kothari and Shrishtee Bajpai.

Photographic & Videographic Documentation: Diya Gambhir and Sharannya Parkar (Srishti Films, Srishti Manipal Institute of Art, Design and Technology)

The National Vikalp Sangam 2024 was financially supported by Heinrich Böll Stiftung, India Centre, and local Kutch organizations involved in the planning. It was hosted at campus of Khamir, Kutch.

The following local Kutch organizations were involved in the planning and execution of the Sangam

- Aabhat, Bhuj
- ACT, Bhuj
- Aina, Bhuj
- HIC, Bhuj
- Khamir, Kukma, Bhuj
- KMVS, Bhuj
- LLDC, Near Ajrakhpur, Bhuj
- Qasab, Bhuj
- Sahjeevan, Bhuj
- Sakhi Sangini, Bhuj
- Satvik, Bhuj
- Setu Abhiyan, Bhuj





Introduction

A National Vikalp Sangam was held in Khamir, Kachchh, Gujarat from 21st to 25th November 2024. This Sangam marked the 10th anniversary of the Vikalp Sangam process, started in 2014. The 4 day Sangam included 3 days of celebration, reflection and visioning for the next 5 years of the VS process, along with regional food, self-portrait exercises, handmade banners drawn/written collectively, and field visits exploring the diverse civil society spaces within Kachchh. The Sangam featured representation across regions, from Ladakh to Kanyakumari, and Nagaland to Gujarat; also, it had diverse thematic representation including water, agriculture, crafts, education, biodiversity, and gender among others. There were activists, academics, and civil society organisations in attendance. Participants left for their homes with a renewed appreciation for the VS process, and a renewed commitment to foster this space.





Day 1

Alternative Stories Adda

We are all facing a multi-faceted crisis, including war, inequality, ecological collapse, climate crisis and authoritarian governments. However, there are alternatives to this crisis that look at the overall well-being of everyone rather than just a few, while ensuring ecological regeneration; and this session brought out stories which highlighted these alternatives. We discussed the 30 sangams (including both thematic and regional) that have taken place in the past 10 years, the People's Manifesto for a Just and Equitable India, and a Framework Note on alternatives currently in its 7th avatar; as well as the Flower of Transformation and its values.



Some reflections that emerged included inculcating acceptance of alternatives within the 'mainstream', expanding the list of values at the center of the Flower of Transformation framework to match the pace of our changing world, re-evaluating western concepts of work and rest, the need to celebrate the diversity of religions and belief systems, and change happening in small steps, through conversations.

VS Memory Lane

The VS Memory Lane session added to the discussion of Alternatives we had in 'Alternative Stories Adda', as a video documenting the 10 years of the VS process prompted everyone's memories. The larger tapestry woven out of all the participants' experiences was further enriched by the facilitators calling out people



who were there at the specific Sangams, and some memories shared included the origin of the name 'Vikalp Sangam' being inspired by the Bhasha (Language) Sangam, the building of a local network that arose from the Ladakh Vikalp Sangam, the Western Himalaya Vikalp Sangam having two Sangams in 2024 and its processes, and above all, how exchanging knowledge is one of VS's greatest gifts. We celebrated the many beautiful relationships that were, and are, nurtured through the sangam work.

Participants shared on the lessons learnt during each Sangam that were brought back to the local spaces of the participants with intentionality, such as growing women's participation in local governance bodies following the Democracy Sangam as mentioned by a participant from the Maha Gram Sabha. A participant who attended the sangam at Kerala on organic farming felt the importance of aspects such as alternative forms of credit, and participative and representative democracy.



Another participant whose journey started at the Tamil Nadu Vikalp Sangam, felt inspired by the collective intelligence, collaborations and experimentations that emerged from an alive network of like-minded organisations. A few participants from the Youth Vikalp Sangams shared about the importance of having young voices in the network and remembered joyful anecdotes from the sangams.

Overall, this session allowed long term participants to refresh their memories of the 10 years of VS, and for new participants to get a deeper sense of the work Vikalp Sangam does.

'Churning the Earth': Film Screening

'Churning the Earth' is a film on the Vikalp Sangam, showcasing stories of alternatives. In the face of widespread ecological destruction, social injustice, economic deprivation, there are powerful countercurrents that the film presents. The reflections which emerged during the discussion after this screening were



appreciative, as well as speaking about elements that could be added to the film, such as the inclusion of alternatives in urban spaces; along with how to disseminate this film further, like reaching out to all the teachers in our circles and asking them to screen it in their spaces. We discussed showing this film to students and its powerful impact, helping their search for alternatives. A powerful question that we left with was, *“How do we find ways of fighting against the destruction of systems at so many levels?”*

The conversations across the day laid the foundations of the dialogues that followed on the second day of the Sangam, as they were eight specific breakout groups based on themes such as ‘Water, Food and Agriculture’, ‘Social Wellbeing and Justice’, and ‘Democracy’.



After the screening, held at the evocative museum of craft LLDC (The Living and Learning Design Centre), we explored their beautiful exhibits, and anchored ourselves within the threadwork and knowledge of different communities in Kachchh.

We also enjoyed some delicious camel milk ice-cream!





Day 2

Re-Imagining our Future: Different Themes

The second day of the National Vikalp Sangam started with some opening activities in the early morning hours, such as pottery and bird-watching. After a hearty breakfast we gathered together again; the agenda for the day was to divide into 8 thematic groups (as listed below). The expectations were threefold:

- 1) creating a strong, common shared mission statement that would outline the vision of the group,
- 2) mapping a pathway on how to reach the vision, given the kind of extractive economies and authoritarian political regimes we live in, and finally
- 3) sharing stories of the inspiring things we've noticed and received in society.

Water, Food and Agriculture

The vision statement that the Water, Food, and Agriculture group had framed was: *To have decentralised agro-industrial development, the intersecting issues of gender, caste and class, while recognising the diversity based on cultural, religious faiths.*



The necessity to bring equitable distribution should be emphasised, as humanity is dependent on these systems for survival. The group also mentioned the damage that large dams cause, affecting adivasi communities and creating a lot of water inequality. The group posed the question: **What is a good, transformative way of ensuring food security, especially in the context of climate change?**

Some reflections that emerged included inculcating acceptance of alternatives within the 'mainstream', expanding the list of values at the center of the Flower of Transformation framework to match the pace of our changing world, re-evaluating western concepts of work and rest, the need to celebrate the diversity of religions and belief systems, and change happening in small steps, through conversations.



Energy

The Energy group discussed pathways of moving towards energy systems that are non-destructive, democratic and ecologically conscious; towards energy systems that are for us, that are democratically governed and self-governed. The group's emphasis was on multi-level advocacy, from panchayats to governments, and a conscious reduction of jargon in conversations and dialogue about energy.

Democracy, Governance and Civic Spaces

The Democracy group formulated a vision statement in their group, highlighting the need for “a re-enchantment of democracy — re-imagining its vision, redesigning its institutions and re-awakening people and communities.” Accordingly, it decided on some action points necessary for democracy, such as redesigning the structure and processes of democratic institutions, creating an exchange model of economy, similar to a barter system, a campaign for decentralisation that would weaken the centres of finance, and documenting generational knowledges. Above all, they felt that everyone should have access to open source systems of governance, not controlled by a single person or company.

Education

The Education group's reflections included the importance of contextualisation in education, inculcating joyful learning, localisation of knowledge, and collective knowledge systems (specifically how to build them). Between sharing stories of alternative learning and education, the group also highlighted the importance of transformative education as a democratic, inclusive space where rights of nature are recognised and included.

Creative and Cultural Livelihoods



The Creative Livelihoods group first made the distinction between livelihoods and ‘dead’lihoods (uncreative, mass-production working spaces of today): **creative livelihoods mean that the home, work, life, and energy are all interconnected, seeping through all spheres of life and dependent on local resources.** The group stressed on the need to



move forward with traditional techniques while also incorporating new elements, creating hybrid models. It also proposed combining multiple livelihood activities, such as tourism with crafts.

Social and Communal Harmony

The Social and Communal Harmony group especially highlighted the need for international solidarity, and remembering that our struggles are not isolated; especially how all of our issues stand intersectionally. The question standing before



us now, is: rather than wasting time, resources, and energies on wars and conflicts, can we direct our energy towards love and strengthening communities instead?

Biodiversity and Nature

The Biodiversity and Nature group started by investigating what these terms meant, and described them as relationships between different biodiverse life forms, along with co-existence of life in different ecosystems. The group highlighted the need to decolonise conservation models, revisiting and implementing locally-rooted policies. There was a particular emphasis on the presence and actions of the community, with some pathways being communities writing their own community guidelines for conservation, and community research and knowledge production shaping policy at different levels.



Play on Nature-based Agricultural Practices

One of the participating organizations put on a play at the end of the day's proceedings to highlight the importance of natural farming and avoiding industrial farming that causes harm to water, soil and the ecosystem. The play followed the story of a farmer family who is trying to practice natural ways of farming that existed in the region before modern agriculture was introduced, but faces resistance from the young son who is enamored by the modern machines and tools. Through music and powerful oratory, the young man turns around and understands the importance of natural farming.



The powerful performance left everyone inspired and one participant from Ladakh even decided to enact such plays in his region as well.





Day 3

Pathways and Interlinkages



After the many discussions held the previous day, the focus for this day was weaving together the interlinkages that emerged through these presentations. We discussed the importance of connecting energy to education, especially going beyond just electricity as energy, and wove together Interfaith processes and governance through the need to respect planetary boundaries.

We examined the linkages of art and culture with livelihoods, along with transformative education and language, how we talk about nature and our relationship with it. We talked about community-led tourism that can connect to all of these values in different ways. And finally, we discussed how the connectivity across different themes is evident, from local to global; thinking about decision-making at different levels, and also, how our problems are interconnected and the solutions as well- the goal is to connect with others, collaborate and see how to enhance the work we're doing.

Strategizing Alternative Visions and Action Plans

Emerging from the many interlinkages that were unearthed, this discussion explored pathways of Alternative Visions, especially what we could do as a process, as organisations within the collective and as individuals within these organisations. For instance, the idea of bringing together a South Asia-wide Vikalp Sangam, connecting like-minded networks and cooperating with other organisations within India such as National Sex Workers Network was a highlight of this session. We also decided to make the detailed and dynamic database of



organisations within VS widely available, including the expertise, thematic areas, and specific projects of each organisation. Facilitating vertical and horizontal learning, especially in the context of bioregions, is helpful in locating us within the Vikalp Sangam. And then, we could initiate exchange visits for more learning. We must also cover various thematic areas with a bioregional approach.



We examined the linkages of art and culture with livelihoods, along with transformative education and language, how we talk about nature and our relationship with it. We talked about community-led tourism that can connect to all of these values in different ways. And finally, we discussed how the connectivity across different themes is evident, from local to global; thinking about decision-making at different levels, and also, how our problems are interconnected and the solutions as well- the goal is to connect with others, collaborate and see how to enhance the work we're doing.



The need to examine the history of social movements that have come before ours, their challenges, their achievements, and their failures, also was discussed at length. We emphasised the need for women to reclaim their spaces in peace-building movements; their participation in decision-making, and enabling space for this. Some of the earthy actions resulting from this discussion are listed in the task list below.



One of the concluding activities arranged by the National Vikalp Sangam organising team involved exchanging gifts filled with personal meaning. This activity brought us closer, and this exchange was filled with much joy and excitement.

In the evening, a garba night (a Gujarati folk dance) was held with participants dressing for the event, in voluminous skirts and dazzling kurtis. All created a circle through their dance, celebrating the three days of deep conversations and earthy actions, as well as the ten-year long process of alternatives.





Day 4

Field Trips

The last day of the National Vikalp Sangam was the day of field visits; we divided ourselves into groups for specific destinations. Kachchh is unique in that its civil society spaces and NGOs are all deeply connected and work collaboratively, with different focus areas for each organization. The field visits are listed below:



CEDO Birding: A birding and nature safari trip to Banni Grasslands and Chhari Dhand Wetland Reserves

Khamir: A trip to understand the process of Spinning and Weaving in Kala Cotton and Desi Oon

Kutch Mahila Vikas Sanahan : A trip to their Safe District Program to build a contextual understanding Kachchh with respect to intersecting identities of women - from lens of geography, caste, gender, age and so forth.

SETU Abhiyaan : A trip to understand the local governance system at Angiya Panchayat, Nakhtrana Block.

Satvik: A trip to understand the rainfed farming practices, importance of seed banks, mixed cropping with women farmers of Kachchh.

Sahjeevan: A visit to meet pastorals from Banni Pashu Uchherak Maldari Sangathan working towards conservation and prosperity of Banni Grasslands.





Actions List from the Sangam

| Action Item | Anchors |
|---|--|
| Gender and sexuality Sangam | Asha, Bharati, Delfina, Naveen |
| North-east VS | NEN/Akole, Mayalmit and Rashmi, Franco |
| Deccan VS | DDS (Narsamma, Laya), Joy, Bharat, Abhay |
| Energy VS | Soumya and Mohammad, Joy, Maju |
| Desert VS, including 4 kinds of desert | Urmul, MKSS |
| Biodiversity VS | ATREE/Siddappa, Akanksha, Laya, Radhika |
| Credit VS | Franco, Sehjo, John, Vijay Pratap |
| South Asia VS | Soumya, Vijay Pratap, Shail, Milind, Vijay Bharatiya, Abha |
| Education VS | Shail, Rahul, Sujatha, Pallavi (?), Pooja, Aanchal, Vijay Bharatiya |
| Water and Food (within which, or separately, Rainfed agriculture) | SOPPECOM, Joy/Neha, CDPN (for Rainfed - DDS), Equitable Water Movement (Bharat), Sehjo |
| Sarkar Sangam (?) | Vittal Rao |
| Adivasis (Jal, Jangal, Jameen) (?) VS | Vittal Rao |
| Arts Sangam | Akanksha, Kavya, Rahul, Urvi, Aanchal, Mugdha, Arnaz |
| Design working group (How we can create systems of collaboration and communication within VS that are open source) | Perceval, with John, Arnaz |
| Ladakh theatre on alternatives | Tashi, Spalzes |
| Bringing together resistance movements with constructive alternatives | Bharat, Joy, Milind, Franco, Meera, Vijay Pratap, Mugdha |
| Delhi NCR: bringing civil society spaces together | Yogesh |
| A comparative study of 5 youths from communities who are practising traditional livelihoods, and 5 who are not, and seeing what emerges from this for actions | Khamir, Vijay Bharatiya, Ghatit bhai |
| Signature campaign for local people participation in governance (for urban areas in Kachchh) | Asha (KMVS) |
| Alternatives funds resources. Besides funding, an exploration of how else can we help each other. | |



| | |
|--|--|
| Documentation of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alternative education • Local governance • Youth and local biodiversity • Alternative energy • Collective health programs • 1960s to 1990s movements' documentation • Stories from Bihar • Stories from Western Himalayas • Artificial reefs for fisheries | Soumya John, Joy, Rajesh, Abhay, Rajeshwari, Rahul, Maju, Mugdha helping Neeraj Abha and Rajeshwari, WHVS media team Robert |
| A completely fossil-fuel free collective/ community (linked to energy VS process) | |
| Elaboration of each part of the Manifesto | Bharat |
| Rain-fed agriculture Manifesto | DDS and Joy |
| Expanding the VS database to include thematic areas, expertise and their current projects | Chandramouli (to circulate existing database) |
| Bringing in new people into the GA, in upcoming thematic and regional Sangams: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pastoralists • Fisher groups • Arts and Cultural groups • Student / youth groups • Faith-based action groups • Adivasi sangathan • Social movements that are interested in alternatives • Himachal members | (Soumya supporting) Ramesh, Maju Kumaritai Akanksha |
| 2 new campaigns on Food and Health | |
| Online dialogues about each others' work | KV or FT |
| LLDC: annual festival expanding; on behalf of VS we collaborate; an alternatives festival. post -2025 festival, e.g. on western Himalaya. Folks from VS can visit the festival in 2025 and then envision what the next one can be. | |
| Plan for publications (like Alternative Futures) | |
| Transitions and external pressures: resilience capacities in local groups and movements | Kejal |



Participants from Vikalp Sangam Network

Aanchal, Kalpavriksh
Abha Bhaiya, Jagori
Abhayraj Naik, Pipal Tree
Akanksha Pandey, WHVS
Aravind N, Blue Ribbon Movement
Arnaz Khan, Kalpavriksh
Ashish Kothari, Kalpavriksh
Baba Mayaram, Independent Journalist
Bharat Patankar, Shramik Mukti Dal
Chandramouli Sharma, Kalpavriksh
Chatar Singh, Sambhaav Trust
Dipak Dholakia, CDNP
Dr. Siddappa Setty R, ATREE
Gabrielle, Feminist
Ginobai, MALAR
Ishan Aggarwal, Dancing with Mountains
Jayshree Guha, Educator
Jiwan Singh, Sambhaav Trust
Jochen Luckscheiter, HBS
John D'souza, Centre for Education and Documentation
K J Joy, SOPPECOM
Kavya Chinda, WASSAN-RRAN
Keerthi Srilakshmi, Finance Department, Government of Andhra Pradesh
Kejal Savla, Blue Ribbon Movement
Kumar Neeraj, Regenerative Bihar
Kumaribai, AAAS
Madegowda, ATREE
Madhulika Banerjee, Professor, University of Delhi
Maju Varghese, Centre for Financial Accountability
Masanagiri Narsamma, Deccan Development Society
Mayalmit Lepcha, SILTA
Meera Sanghamitra, NAPM
Milind Wani, Kalpavriksh
Mohammad Chappalwala, Sambhaavnaa Institute
Mugdha Trifaley, Kalpavriksh
Neha Bhadbhade, SOPPECOM

Nikita Naidu, Environmentalist
Pankati Jain, Blue Ribbon Movement
Paranjoy Guha Thakurta, Author
Perceval Fayon, Green Silk Road
Pooja Kishinani, Kalpavriksh
Ragnhild Hovland Evang, Green Silk Road
Rahul Karanpuriya, Travellers' University
Rajaram Naitam, Mahagrame Sabha
Rajesh Ramakrishnan, CDNP
Rajeswari S. Raina, Professor, Shiv Nadar University
Ramesh Bhatti, Sahjeevan
Rashmi Rekha Borah, North East Network
Robert Panipilla, Friends of Marine life (FML)
S Naveenraj, Nirangal Charitable Trust
Sadia, HBS
Salam Rajesh, ICCA Consortium South Asia
Santhoshi Srilaya Routhu, Deccan Development Society
Sehjo Singh, Activist
Shail Shrestha, Digo Bikas Institute
Sheikh Ghulam Rasool, School for Rural development and Environment (SRDE)
Shrishtee Bajpai, Kalpavriksh
Siyaram Halami, Mahagrame Sabha
Soumya Dutta, MAUSAM
Spalzes Angmo, Local futures, Ladakh
Subham Biswas, Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan
Sujatha Padmanabhan, Kalpavriksh
Suraj Singh, Urmul Seemant Samiti
Tashi Morup, Ladakh Arts & Media Organisation
Thomas Franco, MALAR
Vijay Jardhari, Beej Bachao Andolan
Vijay Pratap, Harit Swaraaj
Vijaya Lakshmi, MALAR
Vittal Rao, Centre for Collective Development
Wekoweu Tsuha (Akole), North East Network
Yogendra Yadav, Bharat Jodo Abhiyan
Yogeshwar Yogesh Yadav
Zahid Iqbal, FRC - J&K

Participants from Local Kutch Organizations

Aditya, Aabhat, Bhuj
Aishwarya, Aabhat, Bhuj
Bhawna, Aabhat, Bhuj
Himani, Aabhat, Bhuj
Tanishq, Aabhat, Bhuj
Moksha, Aabhat, Bhuj

Bharti Ahir, ACT Bhuj
Sahadev Jadeja, ACT Bhuj
Vinod Paragadu, ACT Bhuj
Navab Lakha, ACT Bhuj

Mahavir Acharya, Aina, Bhuj
Gulal, Aina, Bhuj
Ramesh, Aina, Bhuj

Jay Anjaria, HIC Bhuj
Aseem Mishra, HIC Bhuj
Sourav Roy, HIC Bhuj
Deepali Pancholi, HIC Bhuj
Nayana Charan, HIC Bhuj
Pallavi Parmar, HIC Bhuj
Karishma Fajvani, HIC Bhuj

Dipesh Buch, Khamir, Kukma, Bhuj
Bimal Bhati, Khamir, Kukma, Bhuj
Rushikesh, Khamir, Kukma, Bhuj
Ghatit Laheru, Khamir, Kukma, Bhuj

Bhautik Vaishnav, LLDC, Bhuj
Ishwarsinh Jadeja, , LLDC, Bhuj

Punit Soni, Qasab, Bhuj
Haji Hasam Node, BPUMS,
Rana Kaka, KUUMS
Kavitaben Mehta, Sahjeevan
Mansi Gor, Sahjeevan

Pravin Muchhadiya, Satvik, Bhuj
Nandni Chad, Satvik, Bhuj
Ankita Batta, Satvik, Bhuj
Vikas Thumbar, Satvik, Bhuj

Asha Maheshwari, Setu Abhiyan, Bhuj
Nikita Varotra, Setu Abhiyan, Bhuj
Lalji Parmar, Setu Abhiyan, Bhuj

Aruna Dholakiya, KMVS, Bhuj
Kruti Leheru, KMVS, Bhuj
Rinkal Davda, KMVS, Bhuj
Pooja Soni, KMVS, Bhuj
Aruna Dholakiya, KMVS, Bhuj
Kruti Leheru, KMVS, Bhuj
Mahendrabhai, KMVS, Bhuj

