

Question Period:

Martin Bunch:

I would like to say that I thought we had three very engaging presentations and it had the gears turning in my head for each one. I can't touch on every point that I would like to but what I would like to do is offer three observations that I have from some time that I have spent in Indian and working with slum communities in Chennai. I would also like to ask you if this is your perception, if you could confirm or contradict my observations and then ask you how you think you might deal with these kinds of situations because you have each touched on some aspects of my observation.

The first thing I noticed is that there seems to be a tendency to blame the poor for environmental problems. I am not saying this is Indian. This is lots of places, but one of the things I found particularly working with urban slum communities along a polluted river way is that often people would point to the slum dwellers and say they were throwing their trash on the riverbanks or open air defecation. Their pollution of the river is the problem. This is, of course, not the case. Ninety per cent of the pollution in the river comes from the middle and high class households and industry. It is a perception problem.

The other problem is ignore the poor. You mentioned the census, Dr. Joyashree. I know that in Chennai, where my experience is, probably the most extensive survey identified that 35 per cent of the population living in urban slum settlements. A census a little bit later than that identified 27 per cent of the population living in urban slums. The difference is that they had a larger threshold; they had to have 60 to 70 to 80 huts together to count as a slum. And the Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board identifies 150,000, which is less than 10 per cent, which is quite a smaller number of people living in slums. This is another thing. The problems that they have to deal with, the poor people of slums, rehabilitation of slums, ignoring a very large proportion of the community.

I also found that when I worked with research assistants in India, going into slums area, it was the first time that one of these students in their 20s had ever entered into one of these communities, despite the fact that somewhere between 30 and 40 per cent of the population of Chennai is slums.

Finally, that there seems to be trends towards technocratic solutions, declarations, for example, that Chennai should be slum free by 2017. Let's go take the bulldozer and clear it out, move the population out of the city so it will be slum free.

Despite the fact that even talking to the Managing Director of the Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board who is very sensitive as an individual. It is very different between the individual and the organizational here to the individual communities, the individual people and the need to build capacity and communities. The need to improve slums in situ, in terms of their environmental context. But the organization that he leads says no, we are going to clear the slums. So an orientation towards technocratic large-scale, top-down type of solutions.

So three observations I've made that touch into something each of you have also touched on and I hope you will be able to comment on these points.

Vivek Jha:

I am going to touch on two of your questions. One, he said that the poor are blamed for pollution and for all the bad that is happening to the environment. Unfortunately, that is true. I will take an example of the metropolis of Delhi. Delhi has one of the biggest slums after Darvi, Mumbai. Darvi was where 'Slumdog Millionaire' was picturized. Most of you have heard of the movie. This slum in Delhi is called Yamuna Pushta and it is on the riverbed of the Yamuna. It has been declared a flood plain and no construction can happen there. But people who have migrated to urban centres and did not have any other place to stay, so they settled there. Recently, Delhi is getting its mass rapid transport service and there was a place requirement to set up their depots and washing areas. Guess what happened? A lot of these people from the slums were moved on two grounds: one, that they were living on the flood plains and it is not safe for them. And two, they are polluting the rivers. Now, I will leave it to you to answer that. One, if they are living in a flood plain, why are you setting up a transport cleaning area there. That is also dangerous. That also affects the river bank. Second, which pollutes more – three clothes of slum dwellers, multiplied into a few thousand or washing of trains with detergents and other chemicals. Which pollutes more? This is the kind of situation. Yesterday, when I was driving down with Dawn, she was telling me that planners are useless. I agree with her in this context.

The other question that you raised is that these people are shifted on a yearly basis from one place to another. That is also true. There is a very strong activist movement in all metropolitan cities where you have a lot of activist NGOs that are protesting against all of this. To some success now, but there is a lot of work that needs to be done. The interesting thing is that the slums never move. You move them to a place and these people usually settle in places that are close to their employment. If I am working in place A, I would settle close to it. If you pick me up and move me to another place that is 20 kilometres down the line, somehow, in about three or four months, I will come back to the same place. So it is kind of a circle. The administration also has to deal with this. But there is complete apathy in terms of administration to look at these situations. But there is a civil society movement going so hopefully we should get better soon.

Chaitanya Kumar:

Answering the first question, my only concern is that we end up jumbling the language that we use to refer to such people. When we say adaptation to climate change, vulnerable communities, we refer to the word poor. But when you say they are being blamed, they suddenly turn illiterate, not poor. That is the reason they are being blamed, not because they are poor. That language has to be corrected. They are not poor, they are unaware. If they are to be blamed, take for example a lake in Hyderabad that I mentioned in my slideshow. One of the corporations in Hyderabad proudly exhibits a frame that says 90,000 litres of pollutants enter the lake from industrial areas around the city. What is probably says is that out of those 90,000, 40,000 are being cleaned every day. That is something that they are proud of. I

am saying stop the 90,000 litres in the first place, leave the lake to itself, it has its own capacities. That is one.

Second thing, if you can avoid migration of people. Let's take the example of AP again. There are people from Orissa, from Bihar, all those regions coming to AP and settling down as day labourers. They are taking odd jobs in local places and working on a daily wage basis. If this can be avoided, then probably the technocratical solutions that you mentioned can also be avoided.

Vivek Jha:

Just adding to the issue of arresting rural migration, I think both my colleagues will agree. India has come up with this programme that Chaitanya mentioned in his slideshow. It is called NREGA, the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme. This gives you a guarantee of 100 days of employment per family. If you are a family living in a rural area, you are given 100 days of employment. This, to some extent, is going to arrest the problem of migration and hopefully the whole conversion process into urban slums.

Joyashree Roy:

To me, is it the poor to be blamed for pollution? I think it is not. Straight answer is, when you saw that people are cutting the branches of mangroves and taking it for their cooking fuel, the whole issue is that they have no other alternative. I think giving options to them, giving access to them to different fuels would make them not to go for cutting trees or providing more sustainable forestry systems so that they can now know how it can be cut and how it can be managed. That will give them a livelihood as well as a source of fire too. It is how you are providing them the services. Are they included into the regular service net? They are not. They are denied access to land ownership for some reason or another. I will not go into that. So they do not have access to any basic facilities but those are the basic needs. If you do not have access, but if it is needful, then they are doing it anyway. That is why what is really needed is the right kind of governance to solve this problem. What is the relevance to what we are talking about now? It is that already we know that they are categorized as poor and they are going to be vulnerable. Now the question is, within the climate scenario, are they going to be poorer? That is the real question. If no immediate action is taken, they are going to be even poorer. In that number of poor, there are going to be more numbers coming in so poverty will increase. So what is being told. My perspective is what is really needed is that under this climate scenario, the remaining poor needs to be handled, but there is some more additional action that needs to be taken to guarantee that they will not get poorer but they will get social mobility. So that is really needed. For that, yes of course governance, policy, accounting system, this all needs to be questioned and addressed with more rigour than has so far been done. This simply shows that the poverty reduction programmes, which have done many good things, but what I am trying to say is that more needs to happen as we are one billion plus. We cannot get rid of our population overnight. We have all of the demographic projections that by 2050, the absolute number in India will go down. We have also come down from two per cent of annual growth rate of population to 1.68 per cent.

So many things have happened. What we need to take even faster and harder steps, more stringent governance measures to protect these vulnerable populations from more hardship. That should be the first agenda. I think we need to have a road map, and one where not only NGOs are involved. We do need government too. We need everyone. We should stop the blame game – no matter whether it is local, national or global, blame game won't do any good. We really need to sit together to find a point of cooperation. Once we start blame gaming, the chance for cooperation will be lost. We need to bargain hard, but do so with an open mind, to see how we can accommodate all of the hardships. Without this, I don't think we can solve the problem.

Question:

I have two questions. One is to Dr. Roy. With all of your understanding of climate change, obviously as you pointed out, Calcutta is highly vulnerable. When do you expect the sea will be touching the feet of Calcuttans walking in the street?

Joyashree Roy:

I think that when we talk of business as usual, that is a very wrong statement. In business as usual, there are many mitigation measures that are happening so if it is business as usual, it means that no action. That is the wrong strategy. But given whatever is happening at this rate and if we think that two degrees Celsius rise is somewhere stabilizing, then I do not see the sea touching the feet of Calcuttans unless they go to the sea.

Question:

My second question is to my namesake, Chaitanya Kumar. You talked briefly about Naxalites. How do you see democratic India reaching that level of the population, that group. It is crucial because as even in a democratic world, we find that things don't move fast enough. Can you address that?

Chaitanya Kumar:

This is the largest democracy. I understand democracy is like a tortoise. It moves slowly but things happen eventually. The environment calls for drastic action, which essentially means you create this model of development, not models that are based on taking consensus, going through the whole rigmarole of the democratic process. I don't know how to answer that question. All I know is that action has to happen immediately. If democracy can get us there, good enough. If it can't then, something else has to be in place. If my understanding of democracy is limited, if it is the form of governance that is there to keep people in their own position, not protests, not get out there and form of revolution, that is not a form of government I would like to be under. But as I see, protests are happening in small pockets in the country, in AP. The Naxalite movement is gaining mileage these days. You read mainstream media. People are turning to Marx these days. They read a lot of theories of Marx. Sales of Marx and Ghandi have gone up. Some sort of change is happening. Can we sustain or contain that? I don't know. Do we fall back to the safe democratic measures? I don't know.

Vivek Jha:

Chaitanya, I will request you to put a little background to Naxalite.

Chaitanya Kumar:

Somewhere in the 1970s, due to an unrest amongst the peasants, the Communist Party in India (Marxist) (CPIM) was formed. This Party came into existence in the Telangana district of AP. This Party had revolutionary ideas. They put peasants on the top. They wanted social equality and lots of other policies. This party is still in existence but has never taken part in central state governance yet. That is how it began, due to peasant unrest. It is a major political party in certain pockets of rural AP and West Bengal. These Parties start with an idealistic formula but somehow do not have the resources to implement them and that is why they never end up in the major political frame.

Vivek Jha:

They are a right wing left party because their methods are right wing. Their methods are extremism and their thoughts are towards communism. They resort to violent means at times to get their voices heard. This is why they have been given a bad name.

Question:

Maoist Naxalites. And they have a problem with the technological emphasis.

Vivek Jha:

Yes, they have a problem with the corporations because a lot of land was taken from them and the profits were taken. So they have a problem with business enterprises and against corruption. There are pros and cons to it.

Question:

Do you find that they are resistant to the type of things, like the solar lighting programmes, or are they supportive of those types of technologically driven endeavours?

Vivek Jha:

No, anything that is based on community and if the means are right and if they feel it is reaching the community, they do not object to it. I might be slightly biased though.

Chaitanya Kumar:

I haven't heard of any case or read of any case of Naxalites present in AP who have come out and objected to such activities taking place. Anything that deals with the community is okay. And this is something I want York University to have. There is a book written by Mr. Vijendra. He is a Communist Party member. This book is basically education for activists. That is how it is labelled. Simple language. The Naxalite movement, how it came about, is talked about in his book. I will put it here so people can look at it later.

Question:

A few of you talked about diversity and culture and the need to have local policies and decentralize politics. I was wondering about the role that governance would play as far as national policies and even how that might affect India's role in Copenhagen and international agreements.

Question:

I just want to clarify the point about technology. The economy is no longer really growing anymore so technology should not be linked in people's minds with economic growth. Technology uses a lot of resources, it makes things less efficient. You see that with high tech, with some aspects of agriculture and in more and more areas. So the comparison between rich and poor countries should not lead people to believe that technology is the answer. There are some countries where there still is economic growth, mostly in Asia. I think you want to keep that economic growth. If you want to keep it, then don't get too much technology because that will cause economic problems that are already happening in the rest of the world.

Question:

I just want to quickly thank the panels and the organizers. My question is, you talked about engaging vulnerable people in the solution, which seems to me to be key. The question is how to do that in a way that is not tokenism and that doesn't reproduce the inequality of power and resources that already exist? Just a specific angle is fine. You also mentioned traditional knowledge and how valuable that is. What happens when there is western knowledge and traditional knowledge and they don't mesh? How do you respect both?

Question:

My question is about something you had in your presentation Joyashree. You had a map of a watershed and you were talking about a number of different interrelated problems in a different slide. It seems to be that an interesting way to think about climate change's influence on watersheds. We don't really have the ability now to think about these indicators in that kind of geographic way. I am also thinking about Eduardo's slide about the tress on the top and bottom and what happens in between being very important. You mentioned people moving from places where there was drought to place where there was flooding. It seems to be that we need to think about areas as safe areas. Places where production can happen and places where more people can live safely. It seems to me that this kind of watershed conception of geography is a useful way to start thinking.

Joyashree Roy:

I think this is right and from my field experience, I think this is how we should be working. This is how we are trying to think also, how you really look into the integrated ecosystem. This is rural, this is urban. If it is in the same watershed, you need to plan differently. So this is something we really need to be looking into.

Just one other question, in regards to what India will be doing in Copenhagen. I do not know if you have seen, the Government of India has published a book on *Road to Copenhagen: India's Position on Climate Change Issues*. The Indian Government has clarified its position on what it is going to do in Copenhagen and what its strategy is. It may be available on the website. It just states there, very clearly, question by question, and it answers the Indian government's stance. Just to tell in brief, it says that India is a high impact country. Their first priority is adaptation. Given that the per capita consumption is still very low, in the near future they are looking at how the government imperative can be tackled but not letting emissions to go. For that, they are looking into low carbon technology solutions as the first priority. So they are looking into renewables and any other programmes which can lead to low carbon growth. They are also commented that the per capita emissions will not go up in comparison to other countries. It is short. It is a 12 page book.

Chaitanya Kumar:

Just adding to the 'Road to Copenhagen' discussion, it is basically a Q&A document, questions that people might want to ask on the stance of India. The answers are given by the special envoy of the PM. He was the one who got the nuclear deal done with the U.S. it stresses highly on technology transfer. Rid of the international property rights (IPR), the protection rules and more emphasis on adaptation. Not the two person levy, which boils down to nothing, USD 65 million when UNDP and other UN organizations have something like USD 50 to 80 billion per annum for adaptation. Please go to the document. Its answers all of the positive questions one might have on India's stance.

Secondly, on technology and dividing technology and economy away from each other. I don't know. If you are against technology, I think it is better if you give me an alternative too. I need to know this. Otherwise, I will stick with technology. I am addicted to technology, as one of you used the word.

Traditional versus western methods and how do they come together? What can happen? Following traditional methods are very inclusive to the local community but not necessarily applicable to various other parts of the state or the country. They end up ensuring the local needs of the communities in that respect. And that is what limits it to. We don't want a huge scaling up of projects and complete decentralization of these methods. There are adaptation methods that are constrained to local bodies and that is fine.

Vivek Jha:

Just on traditional knowledge. The beauty of this is it is based on local. As Chaitanya said, it caters to local needs and it uses local resources, which might not be the case with Western technology. It uses local resources, it is that much more cost effective also. And sustainable. It has gone through years and years of change and is still existing. That is where we draw the line. It is drawing from a local resource, it is not drawing from something that was made 2,000 miles away and is being transported. It is cost effective and easy to maintain. It is for adaptation.

Chaitanya Kumar:

I will give you a very interesting example of this. In AP, what the government did, they got cows for biomass production. The cows were from Haryana, about 1,000 kilometres away. The livestock numbers in AP were coming down and they didn't want the biogas sector to be dampened by this. The problem was that the locals could not communicate with the cows. It is very important, an important issue and people tend to forget. They understand the local language in Haryana. They don't understand it in AP. The cows didn't respond. Simple things, traditional things cannot be scaled up or applied to different parts of the country. They are particular to certain needs.

Martin Bunch:

On that note, I would like to thank once again our three speakers this afternoon for their excellent presentations and also the speakers we had this morning. It was quite an engaging day. I would like to invite you all to join us for a mix meet and greet in the Junior Common Room. If you have any further questions, can you please reserve those for a more informal setting.