

**Article begins...**

## **Random Thoughts**

### **Mountains and the Climate Change Agenda**

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Commenting on the recent unveiling of the country's Action Plan on Climate Change ( National Action Plan on Climate Change, NAPCC ) P.P. Sangal in *The Economic Times* has observed that the country 'faces an uphill task of not only convincing the global community but even environmentalists in the country about the feasibility of its action plan'. What exactly are the salient features of this NAPCC, or more importantly, the do-able parts of this plan ? Leaving aside the non-doable parts of this plan we focus on what ought to be done by each of the States in general and how Uttarakhand in particular should respond to this global challenge, contributing whatever is possible through its state apparatus, various institutions and individual citizens ?

The action agenda consists of as many as eight Missions and of these eight Missions as many as six have a direct bearing with Uttarakhand and the other ten mountain States. *First*, in ( i ) 'promoting sustainable habitats', great care has to be taken to enforce land-use laws and regulations and our 'Bhagirathi River Valley Authority' and its extended application has to be immediately put in place as the totally unregulated 'development' of numerous valley systems/river-sheds on the one hand and near absent enforcement mechanism in the so-called 'regulated areas' have

already become a matter of grave concern. Instead of holding ‘workshops and seminars’ showing concerns, time has come to ask hard questions as to how the existing laws are being regulated and enforced ?

The so-called ‘Master Plans’ are anything other than what their names suggest and its questionable the way their notifications are being postponed. Here again sheer lack of will is the villain of the piece. *Secondly*, in ‘*saving the Himalayan glaciers*’ it is the States concerned, where these glaciers are located, who should be the prime movers, and not merely the ‘scientific institutions involved in the study of the recession of the glaciers’. Excepting the Wadia Institute of Himalayan Geology (WIHG), and now perhaps to some extent, and of late, the GBH Himalayan Institute of Environment & Development, no other institution or state apparatus seems to be either concerned or involved. Isn’t it time that a set-up like the Uttarakhand Council of Science and Technology (UCOST) was made the nodal agency to co-ordinate at the state level whatever needed to be co-ordinated and they prepared a Status Paper on Action to be taken at Uttarakhand level and also net-worked at the efforts which might be contemplated for this part of the Mission ? Climate Change is a challenge which can be addressed best through advance action, effective net-working for adaptation rather than the usual post-event knee-jerk action.

As regards, (iii) ‘*water resource management*’, this action item continues to occupy the highest priority in this state, as in all other Himalayan states. Its indeed ironical that even though the mountains are seen as ‘the water towers of the world’ the availability of water is most scares in a state which gives to India mighty rivers such as the Ganges and the Yamuna ? The on-going flip-flop on ‘SWAP’, both at the policy level and the praxis, valuable time has been lost, to say nothing of not following the mandate of the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment. There should be no shying away from the path of ‘policy reforms’ in the

water sector which, however, should allow practical complexities involved in our ‘multi-village’ and ‘lift-drinking water’ drinking water projects. Its high time to enforce reforms in state-utilities on the one hand and a clear-cut action plan on the ‘consumptive’ and ‘non-consumptive’ uses of water, on the other. The on-going discourse, a seemingly open-ended debate on establishment of hydro-power project and their implementational modalities, already highlight the importance attached to a firm and far-sighted approach towards the effective and efficient use of this extremely valuable resource by this state.

*‘Protecting mountain eco-system’*, as the *fourth Mission*, engaged the attention of the Task Force set up by the Planning Commission, and in preparing its Report submitted in November 2006 a majority of the environment scientists and ecologists working in this state participated and I am given understand that this Report formed the basis on which recently concluded Sustainable Development Seminar in collaboration with The Energy Research Institute ( TERI) was held. Its five chapters contain a large number of do-able action items which this state can easily implement itself and for the rest pursue with the Government of India. This report contains several ‘best practices’ being pursued in Uttarakhand and other mountain states, which can be easily mainstreamed for larger and long term action. One of the major recommendations consists of immediately constituting a Ministry of Mountain Development, at the Centre just as a Department of Ocean Development was constituted in 1974, if a policy and major paradigm shift is to occur in the way this country is looking after the concerns of the mountains of India and the poor and hapless people who inhabit these mountains. This author had the privilege of heading this Task Force on the Mountain Eco Systems.

In *‘improving eco-system services’* and *‘making agriculture more resilient and adaptable to climate change’*, the *fifth* and *sixth Missions* respectively, perhaps the lead which Uttarakhand has

provided to the country has not been adequately highlighted so far. The Rs. 1,000 crores which the Eleventh Finance Commission earmarked for 'forest management' to the various states on a prorate basis would not have been possible but for a very forceful Additional Memorandum presented to the Commission by Uttarakhand and the way the issue was followed with all the forest-rich states of the country. This case has been further buttressed with the help of an improved paper recently published by CHEA, a NGO dedicated to the cause of environment in this state. This requires to be taken up with a renewed fervor with the next Finance Commission on the one hand and the 'concern for the management of the existing forests' included in the 'plan side' as well. In principle this has been accepted by the Planning Commission at the time of the Mid Term Assessment of the Tenth Five Year Plan.

In the field of agriculture the lead taken by Uttarakhand in pushing forward the 'Organic Movement' has been acknowledged by the Planning Commission itself and Uttarakhand's persistent follow-up deserves to be leveraged for accessing more plan-funds and even carbon credits. This is where a nodal institution like UCOST, as suggested already, has a role cut out for them. How, a well co-ordinated and well –synchronized action by various players, can yield demonstrable gains has already been proved by the support rendered by public spirited charities like the Sir Ratan Tata Trust and others, in promoting 'Organic Agriculture' and 'Bamboo Mission' which deserves to be consolidated further.

These six Missions, mentioned above, have great salience for Uttarakhand in the global campaign on the Climate Change, and this state stands to gain substantially if it quickly positions itself intelligently and put its acts together to leverage the opportunity which presents itself through the NAPCC. In '*enhancing solar energy contribution in total energy mix*' and '*introducing energy efficient steps*', the *seventh* and the *eighth* Missions, the state has

taken certain steps through UREDA etc. but there exists a potential to obtain more demonstrable gains through *thinking-out-of-the-box* and *generating much bigger projects* to attract financial assistance, including the window now provided through the carbon credits.

To conclude, the NAPCC has to be operationalized at the sub-national level and it certainly can be acted upon if a well-oiled and pro-active mechanism is immediately put in place to provide flesh and bones to the plan and move beyond the rhetoric and polemics of ‘organizing seminars, work-shops, protest marches and sit - ins’ on one issue or the other. Some suggestions have been provided, by way of random thoughts, in this piece which have already been taken on board and now await a far more serious notice being taken of. The inexorable march of the Climate Change brooks no further ‘delays or dithering’ on the actionable-items mentioned in the eight Missions. As of now it indeed appears to be an up-hill task, as Sangal observes, but the Action Plan is highly feasible, given a collective will and a clear vision, in that order. All the ‘mountain states’, as has been shown, have the opportunity like Uttarakhand, to convert these ‘mountains into mole-hills’, to turn the saying upside down, and walk all their way laughing to the ‘banks’, collecting their ‘carbon credits’.

**Article ends....**