

Crossroads of Creativity: Building upon People's Knowledge

Anil K Gupta

There is an impasse in the debate on development. We are passing through a time of critical questioning by the people who are supposed to be the target of our policies and also by the people who have been providing support for our activities. When neither the clients nor the sponsors are satisfied, there is a need for fundamental rethinking. In this process one has also to learn from those people at the grassroots level whom we could never reach but who somehow also never gave up. It is these fortitudinous people who have solved their problems through their own vision, thinking, experimentation and often local resources who are the subject of my presentation.

I realise that these people are not just subjects but also actors and in some respect also objects from whom we learn. But I also realise that our ability to reach these people may be constrained by the skills we have acquired and the vision we have grown with. Therefore, I will first deal with the vision of sustainability and the role of indigenous knowledge systems in maintaining, rejuvenating and recreating sustainable alternatives for natural resource management as a means of livelihood. The impoverishment, vulnerability and consequent helplessness on the part of poor people does not arise just on account of lack of creativity. It arises also on account of mismatch between their skills, resources and risk taking ability and that of the support systems, I will deal with this mismatch next.

Once we understand how the mismatch arises, the ability to remove it will call for changes at both the ends. People who are poor in certain resources but rich in others may have to overcome low self esteem. They may also have to reevaluate the resources which they themselves discount just as it is discounted by the society. Similarly, the support systems have to reappraise their strategies of social change which have often been based on what people lack rather than what they have.

I discuss next the issue of indigenous knowledge system, role of creativity and innovation, ways to overcome the barriers to augment this capacity with or without linkage with formal science, institutions and networks. Finally, I will like to demonstrate the linkage between ethics, efficiency, equity, excellence and environment.

PART I

VISION OF SUSTAINABILITY

If the majority of illiterate, impoverished and ill-equipped people inhabit some of the most

marginal regions such as drought prone areas, hill areas, forest regions, flood prone regions, etc.,

PART II

MISMATCH BETWEEN WHAT PEOPLE HAVE AND WE THINK THEY HAVE

PART III

BARRIERS TO OUR LEARNING:

PART IV

LINKING ETHICS, EXCELLENCE, EFFICIENCY, ENVIRONMENT AND EQUITY