

**POINTS EMERGING FROM THE MULTI-DISCIPLINARY  
WORKSHOP ON “TOWARDS A THEORY OF SUSTAINABLE  
DEVELOPMENT OF KERALA”**

It is widely acknowledged, that the State of Kerala is an exception to the rule as far as its developmental experience is concerned. Having had to face almost the same kind of problems as in other parts of the developing world, Kerala has achieved a high level of quality of life for its people. The State has one of the highest literacy levels in the developing world and has primary health facilities available and accessible to significant sections of its people. As a result, Kerala’s Human Development Index (HDI) is also one of the highest in the developing world. Contrary to the experience of most other developing regions, these achievements of Kerala, cut across rural-urban and gender divide and between socially backward groups and forward groups. Relatively comprehensive land reforms, minimum wages and a fairly wide Public Distribution System (PDS), ensured continuous distribution of development gains among the people. Different from the experiences of other Indian States, Kerala claims a fairly long history of absence of inter- religious or communal tensions and conflicts. This State has a fairly participatory and vibrant democratic polity too.

In such circumstances, it was not at all surprising that some observers of the Kerala scene went overboard and claimed that Kerala is the ultimate model for the developing world. By late 1980s, the issue of sustainability of such a model became an important point for discussion among scholars of Kerala. What prompted them to turn their attention to sustainability was the growing fiscal crisis, which in turn has been largely a result of the slow growth of the economy. Over time, other issues of sustainability such as durability of Kerala's social stability and the conservation of its environment also assumed importance in discussions on development experience. It was made increasingly clear that the capacity of the State and non-State organisations to invest in the social sector depends, in the long run, on the rate of economic growth, and that a welfare state cannot be maintained for long by large scale borrowing. Though Kerala economy had developed strong linkages with international markets; strengthened further by large scale emigration; it does not seem to have resulted in any significant transfer of modern technology and management skills to the domestic economy. The slow increase in economic opportunities has led to the religious and caste based groups; which once spearheaded social reforms but eventually turned into inward looking groups, becoming stronger and to their demanding a larger share of the developmental cake. The deterioration of the quality of public services has made the growing middle class in the State to opt out of public institutions and

patronise private institutions. They are now growingly unwilling to pay for public services on which they no longer depend. The large scale emigration from the State has led to inflow of remittances which are apparently spent on consumption. This has pushed the region into a high-ranking status in per-capita consumption. Such high consumption is made possible by externalising environmentally unsound production. It also leads to larger generation of waste and to larger utilisation of non-renewable natural resources like forests, clay, river sand, water etc. More importantly, traditionally excluded groups like Adivasis, Dalits, Fisher persons, Women etc; were not able to gain much from the developmental process followed in Kerala. It may be due to the fact that the socio-religious Reform Movements and political movements which spearheaded movements for development, pursued a largely patriarchal and agrarian strategy. In other words, Kerala's developmental model is far from perfect.

Different scholars working on developmental issues and Kerala studies were increasingly concerned about this. Since Kerala's achievements, particularly in social sector development, were hailed as a model for the rest of the world, this concern was also felt at international levels. The Centre for Development and the Environment [SUM] of the University of Oslo, Norway sponsored a workshop of scholars from different disciplines working on Kerala,

on 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> of April, 2004 at Kochi. The task of organising the workshop was undertaken by P.K. Michael Tharakan, a Social Scientist working on Kerala, who sought and received both academic and administrative assistance and co-operation from the Centre for Socio-economic Environmental Studies [CSES], Cochin. The SUM's interest in the workshop was explained as follows by Bente Herstad, its Director. The SUM was established in 1990, in the wake of the Brundtardt Commission on Environment, to develop scientific basis for sustainable development. Though the SUM dealt with many major issues of North - South development, Aid and Trade, it has not yet discussed sufficiently specific problems of social development. Norway which emerged out of relative poverty, through late industrialization and oil money into affluence, has put their wealth into expanding education, and to put up a redistributive welfare State which has almost abolished poverty and is striving hard to engineer gender equity. The need to discuss problems specific to social development, and that too in comparison with a developing region with problems somewhat similarly to that of Norway, came into prominence. SUM in Norway, the country with the highest HDI in the whole world, quite naturally gravitated towards the case of Kerala, which has one of the highest HDIs of the developing world. Suggestions made by Olle Tornquist of the faculty of the SUM, and a scholar who has worked on Kerala, and the support extended to the idea by His Excellency Mr.Gopal Gandhi,

India's Ambassador to Norway, further strengthened the choice. Discussions with K.K. George, Chairman, CSES on a visit to Norway led to the final decision to discuss Kerala in greater detail.

The SUM contributed academically too to the workshop when three of their faculty members, Olle Tornquist, Harold Wilhite and Dan Banik contributed one of its Theme papers. The other Theme paper was presented by K.K. George and P.K. Michael Tharakan. In addition, nine specific papers were also presented to initiate discussions at the workshop. They were on the socio-economic perspective by K.N. Nair and D.Narayana of Centre for Development Studies (CDS), and D.Narayana of CDS, on Environmental and Ecological Perspectives by Sreekumar Chathopadhyaya of the Centre for Earth Science Studies (CESS) and V. Santhakumar of CDS, perspectives of excluded communities by M. Kunhaman of the Department of Economics, University of Kerala and on perspective of women by Praveena Kodoth of CDS, on perspectives on long-term management of change by Rajan Gurukkal of the School of Social Sciences, Mahatma Gandhi University, and D.D. Nampoothiri of the Centre of Excellence, Indian Institute of Management, Kozhikode and on Kerala's Development Challenges in a globalising world by K.P. Kannan of the CDS. Another paper prepared by John Kurien of the CDS on issues of Sustainable Development with specific reference to

Fisheries was also discussed at the workshop. As both the organisers and participants felt, the issues of Sustainable Development were approached from a multi-disciplinary perspective. The group of participants also truly reflected this, as they included, engineers, technologists, natural scientists, geographers, environmental scientists, anthropologists, historians, economists, political scientists and sociologists. The very lively discussions that took place in the workshop led to a partial forming of an inter disciplinary approach – deriving from different disciplines but not merely an addition of them. The initial steps taken by the workshop towards being sensitive to different disciplines rather than one or two disciplines and from there to the formation of an inter disciplinary approach to the question of Sustainable Development of Kerala was perhaps its main achievement.

The following document started off as a Rapporteur's Report. But the idea was dropped because, in the specific context of the workshop, it was felt to be too ambitious. The participants presented many points of equal importance. Since the participation cut across disciplinary boundaries, different terminologies were used to express these points. To present everyone of them, doing justice to each one, is a near impossibility. Further, putting them all, after compilation, in one document will not only make that document too lengthy but will also not help to incite further discussions. Therefore

this report strives to present a summation of points presented at the workshop both in papers and in discussions – in such a way as to initiate further discussions. Certain amount of streamlining and categorisation are used to make them presentable in this manner. Therefore, it will be advisable to take this document not as a report of the workshop but as a document addressing the issue of ‘Towards a Theory of Sustainable Development’ based upon opinions, perspectives and points of view expressed in the workshop on the subject. This document is meant to be circulated first among the organisers and participants, and then in a wider body of scholars and those who are concerned with the issue, as an initial document in a continuous network of discussions. The purpose is to gather as much additional points, perspectives, opinions and insights as possible. The resultant document is to be supplemented by fresh research, wherever possible, desirable and feasible. Therefore this document comes to you with the invitation to join this Network which for identification purposes will be named Sustainable Development Kerala Network and will be initiated by the CSES, Cochin under the co-ordinatorship of K.K. George.

International perspectives on successes and failures of development across countries have led to the evolution of two parallel streams. The impressive experiences of rapid economic growth; particularly in some East Asian Countries, have led to attempts at explaining

development in sources of and forms of economic growth. On the other hand, there is also a view that the central issue in development is to expand the social opportunities open to the people; and that, therefore, economic growth have only a derivative importance. If the latter view is adopted, then Kerala along with countries like Sri Lanka and Costa Rica, having achieved a high level of social development in spite of a comparatively low rate of economic progress, chooses itself for deeper analysis. Kerala has already been studied much in this direction. Yet, there seems to be a that further need for studying how the lessons from Kerala can be generalised in ways that inform more general theory and practice of sustainable development. There could also be the need to look at the possibility of the social development-oriented welfarist policies followed by Kerala, which in turn are the results of a particular kind of social and political development, themselves could have dampened the prospect of further economic growth in this region. It is also necessary to look at whether Kerala's development is really environmentally sustainable human development broadly defined as "the combination of economic development, social welfare, poverty reduction and environmental amelioration". If it is not, the sources of unsustainability are to be located and suggestions for their rectification are to be sought.



The following three general questions may not be exhaustive in addressing the issue of sustainable development of Kerala. But they can provide a fairly comprehensive framework under which manifold questions that can be raised in relation to the issue, can be discussed.

### **I. Generalizations to Inform Theory and Practice of Development**

To theorize on the basis of the lessons of Kerala, we require to empirically study the preconditions, alternative strategies and problems that characterise attempts aimed at promoting human development on the one hand and economic growth and environmental sustainability on the other. There are already such studies, results of which are to be systematically reread from secondary sources. There are obviously important areas to be further investigated. For instance even with a modest growth, Kerala has managed sharp reduction in poverty, bringing down the population of the poor to around 15 percent. It is widely believed that the redistributive and welfare-oriented policies pursued in the past have contributed significantly to the trickling down process of the benefits of growth to the lower strata of the society. Earlier studies have brought to focus the crucial role of public intervention in providing food security, health and education services. At least in the case of Sri Lanka, a region of similar development pattern as Kerala, it has been suggested that if it had followed a more growth oriented

strategy its social achievement would have been even higher. There has been counter-arguments, again in relation to Sri Lanka, that its welfare policies did play a crucial role in raising its level of well-being; and that there is complementarity and not conflict between growth and welfarism. This question is worthwhile to be raised in the specific context of Kerala, too.

When this question is posed in the specific context of Kerala, constraints such as influence of policies pursued by the Central/Federal Government, the differing levels of development of other regions of India, and that of the process of economic globalization have to be taken into account. The study stressing complementarity between development and welfarism in relation to Sri Lanka, is based upon the causality running from growth to welfare which considers slower growth as a constraining factor on financing welfare expenditure. The causality can be reversed and pursued in the case of Kerala. The actual experience of Kerala is being interpreted as to indicate a growing inability of the State to finance its development through internal resource mobilization. In the context of welfare services becoming increasingly costly, the question as to how long can a welfare State be maintained by large scale borrowing, looms large. Moreover, in the international market place, nations and regions with less welfare obligations get a competitive advantage leading to the exodus of capital to the low

wage, low welfare regions. It has been mentioned with reference to Scandinavian countries, which have very high levels of social welfare, that they have already revised their development model at least partially. It should be remembered that the Scandinavian countries have already benefitted economically from their high level of social development. This leads us to the need for comparative studies between Kerala and Scandinavia at least on two grounds, one to access which are the factors in Kerala's model that can be fruitfully revised in the context of the experience of Scandinavia and two, which are the specific factors that prevented Kerala, in spite of comprehensive land reforms, fairly well developed rural infrastructure and a highly level of human development, to attain greater growth levels as Scandinavia has achieved. Kerala and Sri Lanka are to be studied comparatively. One can even undertake comparative case studies of Kerala with North-Eastern States of Brazil which have now become the rallying point, internationally, for socially oriented development which is backed by decentralization just as Kerala has also experimented.

Such comparative case studies are not to be restricted to international level alone. Equally illuminating will be comparative studies with other Indian regions. The relative failure of Kerala in making use of its exposure to international markets and inward remittances to attain greater growth rates can be contrasted with the

state of Gujarat which had used these two components along with others to have higher growth. Gujarat is now facing major environmental issues along with public action by the most marginalised people. Kerala is also finding itself in such situations. Another profitable comparative study will be between Kerala and West Bengal since both these regions are marked by the important roles played by political left in general and the communist movement in particular. Such widespread empirical comparative studies are mooted because they are quiet likely to generate valuable data, which will strengthen our analytical abilities to understand and analyse relations of complementarity and conflict between growth and welfare.

Another area in which clearer theoretical insights are required is with regard to the two activities suggested emphatically for sustained development, that of technological change and innovation. These are necessary to increase productivity and thus create more jobs and higher incomes. The global development driven increasingly by knowledge capital seems to offer opportunities for sustainable development, provided past investments in social development are converted into human capital. This would mean higher investment in higher education, research and development, in which Kerala should have taken a lead with having achieved universal primary education early; but yet is found wanting. There

seems to exist no difference of opinion on the need to introduce all round technological change, and that too starting with the primary sector. There is scope for development and dissemination of environment related technologies and natural resources management. New areas of production and new areas of organising work are to be introduced with welcoming innovation. Those who are harmed by loss of jobs at the initial stages are to be taken care of by as wide a social security net as possible and/or by worker's retraining and training for self generated incomes.

A deeper look into the situation that has evolved over years in Kerala, seems to throw up certain questions doubts with regard to the adoption of technology without sufficient institutional backing. A reading of the history of economic development of Kerala indicates that a long term extractive view is governing the technology of interaction with nature, particularly in crop production. The technology used is found in most cases as "one of as long as the nature is conducive to production continue with it and once the environment turns unsuitable move to another location. Moreover whatever technology is available from any part of the globe is found to be used indiscriminately. Institutions which should decide upon specific technologies to be used, from among a bundle of technologies available to society at a particular point of time, seem to be failing. Powerful elements in society can get away with any

sort of decision without fear of retribution and decisions are generally taken on a strict profitability concern, which cannot accommodate sustainability concerns.

First of all, further research into developmental history of Kerala is necessary to ascertain whether the above given version is true or not. If it is, then it raises more fundamental questions with regard to the type of policies which play an important role in evolution of institutions. At the base of policy are social values and vision of nature and it is an outcome of a consensus from an intense interaction among social groups with differing and sometimes conflicting interests. Though Kerala has reduced the percentage share of poor among its population, quiet impressively, the inequalities within the society or cleavage among social classes is reported to be increasing. Further, new dimensions of poverty, vulnerability and social exclusion are appearing. The vital question in this context is with regard to how the preferences of the poor and excluded sections of society will influence the policy making exercise? Just as a worker who is protected in the security of her/his job is not likely to be an innovator or welcome technological change, the workers who are experiencing steadily increasing insecurity are likely to lose their moral identity which is a basic requirement for them to be innovative and technologically adaptive. The section of scheduled Tribes in a Reserve who retained some of their traditional

institutions, relations and structures that bind them together as an integrated group, proved to be remarkably successful while an other section who was already in a disintegrated state, were found very inadequate in institutional development [as reported in one study presented at the workshop.] This also points to the same issue. Further research is necessary to project a binding structure within which choices of policy and institutions are formulated and within which technologies are chosen and implemented in society.

## **II. The type of political development and dampening of economic growth**

Kerala has a fairly long history of public action and democratization, of competitive politics, basic freedoms, and fairly well-run institutions of redress. Democracy imposes mechanisms of participation, consultation and bargaining, enabling policy makers to shape the consensus needed to undertake the necessary policy adjustments. In the resultant politics, competing interest groups vie with each other in determining public policy; which come out at different levels of compromises. With a comparatively long history of democratic politics, different types of organised groups have emerged, giving public expression to the interests of their immediate constituencies. The consensus and compromises that these groups arrived at apparently resulted in diversion of a disproportionately higher amount of scarce resources in quantitative expansion of social development oriented welfare expenses, like education without

much thought for necessary diversification and qualitative development. With the accessibility to labour markets outside the domestic economy, the pressure for investment in quantitative expansion of services like education persisted.

Since the macro policy framework was an outcome of democratic polity and since the organised groups engaged in such decision making found it still conducive to the interests of their immediate constituencies, they persisted in giving support to the existing policy framework. Following the abatement of the initial mobilization of the people around land reforms, there was a lull in any new forward looking programmes. At this juncture, the important political parties, which had by then fragmented into several groups, regrouped and stabilised under the banner of two equally powerful alliances. Ever since that, maneuverability for bi-partisan policy making and implementation got considerably reduced. In other words, it is a dead-locked polity that sets the general framework for development of Kerala. The State has been led to a low level equilibrium to achieve some short term gains for the immediate constituencies of organised groups involved in decision making, or is well entrenched in clientelist politics. Into this low level equilibrium or the dead-locked polity, other plural political opinions emanating from the poor, the excluded or the marginalised can rarely enter. The political parties will not enact changes by itself



leading to quality improvement, diversification of introduction of new technologies unless their clients demand it.

Such a plight seems to affect organisations which are supposed to be civil society formations as well. Kerala was widely believed to have one of the strongest civil societies in the developing world. But that civil society is now apparently fragmentary, which is reflected in watertight boundaries that separate different arenas and associations. The origins of this civil society goes back to certain popular demands that emerged in the nineteenth century. They included demands for equality in religious and social spheres and for rightful access to public employment, education and healthcare facilities. Together with such organisations, activities of political parties, trade unions and co-operatives also helped evolved components of modern citizenship such as civic responsibility, social trust, egalitarianism and a world-oriented individualism. It is found that all these components are on the decline and there is increasing communalisation, erosion of secular spaces, visibly strident religiosity and increasing violence on women and the under privileged.

One apparent reason for such developments seems to be that the socio-religious movements which served to spear-head initial reforms in Kerala society found themselves in competition with political parties, trade unions, co-operatives etc, for decisive

positions in the public sphere. In such a competitive process, leading elements from each of these organisations apparently struck various compromises. Out of these compromises an outcome came about which made different aspects of the public policy making apparatus - within a dead locked polity or a dead-locked civil society - act the same way. Into their sphere of influence, no plurality that is reflected in public opinion of the people of Kerala can effectively enter. In spite of regular change of political regimes, brought about by popular vote, they act very differently from what the populace desire. "Citizenship in Kerala" as it has been put by one presentation at the workshop, has "turned to spectatorship".

Such distancing of political decision making from popular verdict, seems to be happening in countries like Norway as a recent study indicates. (Ref: The Norwegian Study of Power and Democracy. A study initiated by the Storting of Norway) But in Kerala, since in addition to the polity, the civil society is also enmeshed in a low level equilibrium, the malaise seem to be greater. What it implies is that the same socio-political process which led Kerala to achieve all the widely - reported welfare measures, itself can be inhibiting such measures to reach groups who are so far denied them and to reorganize such services in a sustainable manner. Therefore the veracity of such a formulation need be searched systematically. Secondly Kerala's democratic process and governance should be

subjected to a comprehensive audit from the perspective of substantive democracy. It is likely to evolve ways and means for developing a polity that accommodates growth, welfare and sustainability for all sections of the people, through a process of human rights based democratisation.

### **III. Is the Development Of Kerala Really Environmentally Sustainable Human Development?**

Sustainable development, a process aiming to maximize the ecological, economic and social goals, calls for a resource utilisation pattern within the limits of regeneration or recouperment. In the case of Kerala, this region apparently achieved its existing pattern of development only due to a very conducive role played by its environmental - ecological foundation. This region has well distributed rainfall, limited temperature variations, rich surface and ground water reserves, availability of water throughout the State and also diversified topography and soil conditions. These have endowed the State with high production-potential and multiple cropping patterns. Distinct land use zones, bio-diversity even at the homestead level and availability of potable water are other features which have gone a long way in providing livelihood security to people depending on local resources and improving health conditions. High productivity has led to the amount of land required to sustain a family in Kerala to be very low. In such circumstances

the ecological and environmental base for development is a crucial factor, for analysis of the situation of Kerala.

Almost all participants of the workshop felt that such a well-endowed environmental base is facing disintegration and ruin. Many felt that the development of Kerala has greatly changed the commodity composition of consumption and to maintain the new pattern of consumption it is neglecting the much-needed material/natural resource balance. It was also argued that while the growth rate of building up capital stock is higher than the depreciation rate there will not be any problem of unsustainability. Meanwhile its underuse can also lead to depreciation. This argument was backed up by the possibility that only a farmer interested in farming will invest in soil conservation and on the other hand a piece of land kept fallow is likely to have problems with regard to conservation of its productive capacities. Nevertheless, some problems which are directly visible, such as pollution of river water, loss of vegetation cover, weakening of the regulatory mechanism of hydrological cycles etc, has reached a point from which it cannot be ignored anymore. Further, problems of waste disposal, industrial pollution, vehicular air pollution, noise pollution, degradation of the stock of forest and wildlife resources and the lessening of the quality of coastal environment and also becoming issues of utmost urgency.

The sources and origins of degradation of ecological environmental base are likely to have macro dimensions. One of such sources is due to market failure or the comparative inability of the market signals to detect signs of degeneration well in time. The main culprit in this scenario seems to be the high per capita consumption in the State backed up by inward remittances. Along with the failure of market signals, the performance of public regulation has also to be investigated, particularly because they also seem to fail in controlling pollution and the “over use” of non-renewable resources. Preventive actions suggested in this regard are likely to suffer from the lack of well-informed public policy, of proper institutions and a decision making mechanism increasingly influenced by clientelism.

Since the shrinkage of environmental resource base results in loss of livelihood opportunities and environmental degradation leads to deterioration of human health, some way of approaching the solution of these problems effectively is immediately needed. Since environmental issues have pronounced site and subject specific characteristics. They may require micro level and decentralized intervention as an effective approach for solution. The Center for Earth Science Studies [CESS] has already developed an impressive research agenda, funded by the Kerala Research Programme for Local Level Development [KRPLLD] of the CDS; and it was presented at the workshop. This agenda includes studies on Natural

Resources [land, water, air and biomass], Area studies/Regional Analysis, Ecosystem monitoring, Interface Analysis [environmental impact assessment and socio-economic consequences], model/methodology and curriculum development, policy research and institutional issues, pricing policy, Agriculture and Irrigation, Fisheries, Energy, participatory research, and database.

Apart from this impressive agenda, there are other issues which are to be studied in depth. While one can point out that Kerala has generally better quality housing than that of other parts of the country, there still is the fact that the concentration of poor quality houses with inadequate lighting etc, is in predominantly fishing and tribal areas. Further, in the urban areas the toilets are inadequately connected to a sewage system. The solid waste disposal in urban areas is perhaps the most important environmental challenge faced by Kerala. In the case of industrial pollution, when it is found to have been caused by public sector companies, regulatory action from the government is found to be very slow, due to concern for the rights of their employees. Public action against noise pollution is constrained by religious, caste and political sensibilities involved. As far as the stock of forest and wildlife resources is concerned, one has to look at whether the State ownership – which otherwise has helped the conservation process – has discouraged the genuine, efficient and non-destructive use of its resources and affected the livelihoods of

people who are traditionally dependent upon forest and its wealth. Similarly one has to look at why the income growth in the coastal area through fishery has not translated into improvements of physical and social infrastructure of these regimes. To reverse this specific trend, one may have to go back to fishing according to the rhythms of nature, fishing according to the season and retaining the diversity of the harvests, as well as extension of greater, socially-approved legal support for community rights over aquatic terrain and fishery resources. What seems to be necessary in such a situation of different groups having competing choices, is that of greater, more effective and imaginative role by the state backed up by enlightened civil society support. A rationalization of public spending, so that more resources will be available for pollution control etc, seems to be necessary. The contours of such a balanced intervention may be mapped.

One possible argument is that the development of tourism industry is likely to help strengthen conservation of coastal and forest regions, because of coincidence of interest. It need not be viewed purely as coincident by vulnerable sections of people who live in these regions. If there is pollution due to tourism or such other activities at upstream watershed over which the fisher persons do not have any control, then their traditional livelihood is likely to be affected adversely. Therefore any such purely market-based suggestions are

required to be tempered by the perspectives emerging from excluded or marginalised groups. It becomes particularly important since their view points are hardly represented in normal decision making fora. The logic of including such perspectives is that while we are looking at measures to enhance the ability of future generations to make use of our environment to meet their needs, it should not result in denying the same rights to already vulnerable sections of people living here and at present.

It has been pointed out at the workshop that vast majority of cultivable land is owned or controlled by persons whose major sources of income and employment are non-agricultural activities. There is also extensive informal leasing of land. Recently, there has been suggestions to legalize such leasing and introduce contract farming for greater and more efficient utilization of land resources. It is widely feared that such actions will lead to corporatising agriculture against the basic interest of land hungry agrarian wage earners. It is possible to think of a next stage of land reforms in which major sources of income and employment must be the criteria for redistribution. What seem to have happened is that those groups which did not have much of the generally approved social, cultural or symbolic capital, (as Pierre Bourdieu has pointed out), could not trade them for financial capital which could have placed them in the mainstream of developmental efforts.



Since women are found over represented among the socially and economically marginalised groups, gender is to be considered as an important axis of vulnerability to exclusion. Nevertheless it can be important to study the experiences of women who have apparently not been left out. This becomes important in the context of another argument raised in the workshop that many tribes among Adivasis, rather than being isolated, were included in the mainstream production-chain and ended up without a sustainable livelihood base. While most of the outcome indicators do show that women are not excluded, we may have to look beyond outcomes to processes. It is widely acknowledged that Female Work Participation Rate (FWPR) is on the decline, possibly constrained by “feminine specializations” and lack of choices imposed by concepts of social status and mobility. This results in seasonal and substantial withdrawal from paid work. It is found that women’s right over their spouse’s wealth is higher than of their own family’s wealth. This means marriage for women is linked directly with their social security. This means that even women who are generally considered to be among the included are forced to abide by a system of dependence imposed from outside. This also indicates that women who are forced to accept the dominant terms set by dominant groups, do not even have the advantage of the excluded who at least have the spirit of direct confrontation with the included.

#### **IV. Trends in Recent Period**

There are people who believe that Kerala has reached a critical threshold in its quest for long - term economic development. On the one hand there is the advent of new technologies and developments in information and communication areas. On the other, there has happened a Demographic transition which will lead to a stable population of around 35 million in the next ten years. Having already completed the task of near universal primary education, Kerala may be able to diversify gainful employment opportunities for the young in the primary and secondary sectors. Positive signs such as economic growth picking up from the middle of the eighties are clearly seen. Most of this growth seem to have taken place in those 'non-tradable' services which are influenced by local demand. Further, the employment elasticity of growth in Kerala between 1993-94 and 1999-2000 was just 0.013 which was the lowest among 15 major states in India. The growing demand for tertiary education, as a result of near universal secondary schooling will require further investment in higher and technical education sectors. The aging of the population which calls for higher investments in health care and social security is yet another important problem. Perhaps a futuristic mapping of the scenario in next twenty years; including the possibility of "productive aging" in which senior citizens going into self-employment etc may be necessary. We may have to look at the

possibility of having a service oriented development of Kerala which can be truly sustainable and which will fit in with the usual hope that India is going to be the “office of the world”.

## **V. New Issues**

It was pointed out that we have to get out of our age-long influence of positivism. In our discussions we have to have a concurrent form of self-critiquing. To expect that all the actors together can change the cartographed scenario need not be realistic. In the enmeshing structures under which we live and work, some actors can come out only as victims. To understand how the system enslaves the victims we may have to go beyond statistical or empirical realities. Since social reality is a social construct, we have to understand how the social construction was made. Since the object of research is primarily at the boundaries of disciplines, much more nuanced accounts are necessary. Along with New sociology, a New Political Science on power relations is also necessary. Bureaucraticisation of social organization and general definitions of political society to include even the social Reform Movements are to be studied in depth. So are the ways in which we address our modernity.

One of the well-known steps taken by Kerala in recent times was the People’s Planning Campaign, which was expected to strengthen objectives of decentralization; and local government. Local governance was expected to transform social development to higher

plains. It does not seem to have happened to the extent expected. The civil society initiatives which should have played a major role in such transformation came about largely from orchestrated sources which eventually were taken over, co-opted or appropriated by the state, political parties or trade unions. The unit of development planning and administration could flexibly be Panchayat, river basin or watershed. Such flexibility is yet to be present in general development discourse. As a result, societies are inadvertently turned into territories; and values of freedom to invest and to grow- which are important in territorial developmental paradigm- is given higher position than values of care and justice. It is important to look at whether this has affected the concept of participatory decentralization implemented in Kerala. In addition it has to be also looked at to what extent the tensions and conflicts generated by sustainability concept can be handled adequately at the local level.

Another recent effort by the Government of Kerala is in modernizing government. It has been argued in this context that these efforts are based upon the concept of minimizing government. The question is whether the money saved by Government withdrawing from some areas will be invested usefully? This question leads us directly to the more basic question of how the public and private initiatives can be fruitfully aligned and balanced. Fundamentally, it opens up the question whether we need a prescriptive or normative consensual

statement on sustainability. If developmental issues are to be settled by market forces, the less efficient is likely to be eliminated. Can we think of development if the concept of equity itself is negotiable? In fact the very concept of development does not have any concept of sustainability contained in it. Therefore we may have to rephrase the basic concepts used in such discussions as basic values for humanity to survive or as Vandana Shiva has put it ways of “staying alive”.

It is in this context that governance for sustainable development be discussed. Sustainable development seems to be not a philosophy inherited into the thinking of policy makers and administrators. Activities are often planned in terms of outcome measures and not in terms of process measures. We do not have a system of documentation whereby we could draw valid lessons on what is sustainable and what is not. At the root of our dilemma seems to be weak governance and misgovernance. The question is whether development administration can be done without empathetic attitudes? Similarly, relation between administrative officers and elected representatives in terms of policy formulation and implementation is also to be studied.

In general, Kerala is facing a number of active environmental problems such as diminishing wetlands and access to clean water, which are likely to have ramifications for long-term sustainability. They are likely to get worse due to the new ideas of social

construction of comfort, convenience and cleanliness spread in Kerala society through visual and other media. On the other hand, one has to look at whether the village level self-help groups etc which were created in the wake of decentralization are working as important networks through which information and technology can be spread and greater control can be exerted by local people over maintaining their local environment. For instance, can a sustainable consumption pattern of energy be effectively introduced in the domestic sector where consumerism is leading towards drastic increase in energy demand. If the local level organizations can play such a role, then they may even play a major role in ensuring energy security at the macro level; and in distributing the merits of such an energy consumption further into the population. It is feasible to undertake a study in relation to the lower middle class, the poor and the marginalized in terms of basic requirements like energy, water and the prevailing social structures and using appropriate institutions and instruments reorganising their communities'/societies' sustainability vis a vis global and local forces and resources.

## **VI. Conclusion**

What is presented above is not a report of the workshop on Towards a Theory of Sustainable Development of Kerala, held at Kochi on 16-17 April 2004. It is a tentative statement incorporating a

few of the ideas expressed at the workshop. Participants are likely to find that very important points made in the workshop are missing from this presentation. We request you to supplement this document with your valuable comments, corrections and suggestions. This initial document is going to the participants and organizers only by post. You may kindly send in your comments as well as names of scholars who can strengthen this network with their addresses including e-mail id. You are welcome to send your material to [kkGeorge\\_csesind@md4.vsnl.net.in](mailto:kkGeorge_csesind@md4.vsnl.net.in) In subsequent documents, we hope to send out electronically, we hope to provide a list of research topics, developed research proposals and report of progress of research. As part of the network, the CSES will be taking the initiatives to organize discussions on specific topics related to sustainable development of Kerala at Kochi. You are all, needless to say, most welcome there. You may kindly inform us about any activity you are planning in relation to the subject of sustainable development of Kerala. We can publicise them through the network. Let us share useful insights on the subject. Let us also hope that this network will result in producing useful studies on sustainable development of Kerala.

Prepared by P.K.Michael Tharakan

**LIST OF PARTICIPANTS OF THE WORKSHOP ON “TOWARDS  
A THEORY OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF KERALA”**

<b>No.</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Institutional Affiliation</b>
1	Ms. Bente Herstad	Director, Centre for Development and the Environment (SUM), University of Oslo, Norway
2	Dr. D. Narayana	Centre for Development Studies (CDS), Thiruvananthapuram
3	Dr. D.D. Namboothiri	Centre of Excellence, Indian Institute of Management, Kozhikkode
4	Prof. E.H. Valsan	Emeritus professor of Public Administration, The American University, Cairo
5	Dr. Hal Wilhite	Centre for Development and the Environment (SUM), University of Oslo, Norway
6	Dr. J. Devika	Centre for Development Studies (CDS), Thiruvananthapuram
7	Dr. Jaiprakash Raghavaiah	Associate Programme Coordinator Indian Institute of Management, Kozhikkode
8	Dr. Joy Elamon	Chief Programme Coordinator, SDC - CapDeck, Thiruvananthapuram
9	Dr. K. P. Kannan	Director, Centre for Development Studies (CDS), Thiruvananthapuram
10	Prof. K.K.George	Chairman, Centre for Socio-Economic and Environmental Studies (CSES), Cochin



No.	Name	Institutional Affiliation
12	Dr.K.N. Nair	Programme Coordinator, Kerala Research Programme on Local Level Development (KRPLLD), Thiruvananthapuram
13	Mr. Krishnakumar K.K.	Research Fellow, Centre for Socio-Economic and Environmental Studies (CSES), Cochin
14	Dr. M. Kunhaman	Professor, Dept. of Economics, University of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram
15	Prof. M.A. Oommen	Senior Fellow, Institute of Social Sciences (ISS), New Delhi
16	Prof. M.K. Prasad	Kerala Sasthra Sahithya Parishad (KSSP)
17	Dr. Martin Patrick	Department of Applied Economics, Cochin University of Science and Technology (CUSAT)
18	Dr. Mridul Eapen	Centre for Development Studies (CDS), Thiruvananthapuram
19	Dr. N. Ajithkumar	Director, Centre for Socio-Economic and Environmental Studies (CSES)
20	Dr. Olle Tornquist	Professor in Political Science, University of Oslo, Norway
21	Dr. P.J. Cherian	Director, Kerala Council for Historical Research (KCHR), Thiruvananthapuram
22	Dr. P.K.Michael Tharakan	Consultant Social Scientist

No.	Name	Institutional Affiliation
23	Dr. Praveena Kodoth	Centre for Development Studies (CDS), Thiruvananthapuram
24	Dr. R. Harikumar	Energy Technologist, Energy Management Centre, Department of Power, Thiruvananthapuram
25	Dr. R.V.G. Menon	Honorary Fellow, Integrated Rural Technology Centre(IRTC), Mundur
26	Dr. Rajan Gurukkal	Professor & Director, School of Social Sciences, Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam
27	Dr. S.Muraleedharan	Department of Economics, Maharajas College, Ernakulam.
28	Dr. V.Santhakumar	Centre for Development Studies (CDS), Thiruvananthapuram
29	Dr. Siri Hellevik	Student, University of Oslo, Norway
30	Prof. Sophie Jose	Head of the Department, Department of English, St. Xaviers College, Thiruvananthapuram
31	Dr. Srikumar Chathopadhyaya	Centre for Earth Science Studies, Thiruvananthapuram
32	Dr. T.A Varghese	Social Scientist, Krishnanagar, Kesavadasapuram, Trivandrum
33	Dr. Visakha Varma	Department of Economic Government Sanskrit College, Pattambi
34	Dr. Anita Nair	Research Scholar, University of Sussex
35	Dr. P.S. Gopinathan Nair	Periyar River Protection Committee