

Gadgil Committee Report – facts and concerns



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Preface

Western Ghats Ecology Panel (WGEEP) Report, often referred to as 'Gadgil Report', is perhaps the only report dealing with conservation and development that has attracted so much of debates, controversies and criticisms. This certainly is a healthy sign. Should be encouraged.

The unfortunate trend in these criticisms is that they often mask, overlook or twist the facts. Hence, the audience are misled or confused. A group of people are engaged in misguiding the people raising points which are not even mentioned in the report.

It is also not healthy that the discussions on the report are centred on certain levels of the people. It should have been at the grass root level. The Gadgil Report clearly says, repeatedly, that the report should be discussed at the panchayath level and the final decisions on all the recommendations given should be taken with their consent; whether it is for demarcating the Ecologically Sensitive Zones or for the various activities to be undertaken in each of them.

Since I was a member of the WGEEP and have been participating in a large number of discussions on the report, I thought it is my moral responsibility to the Society to place the facts in front of the people so that they will get a correct picture.

The entire report, more than 500 pages, has been condensed in this booklet bringing out the salient features. All major recommendations are given with clarifications (in parentheses) wherever it is required. The readers may find the facts and form your opinion.

3 March 2013
V. S. Vijayan

Salient features of the Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel (Gadgil Committee) Report with clarifications on often raised questions

Given the environmental sensitivity and ecological significance of the Western Ghats region and the complex interstate nature of its geography, the Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India constituted the Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel (WGEEP) with the following members on 4 March 2010.

Chairman

Prof. Madhav Gadgil

Members

Dr. R. Sukumar, Dr. V. S. Vijayan, Dr. (Mrs.) Rene Borges, Dr. Ganeshiah, Dr. D. K. Subramanian, Dr. Ligia Norona, Mrs. Vidyanayak, Shri. B. J. Krishnan,

Ex-officio Members

Chairman, Kerala state Biodiversity Board (Dr. R. V. Varma), **Chairman**, National Biodiversity Authority (Dr. P.L. Gautham), **Chairman**, Central Pollution Control Board (Prof. S.P. Gautham), **Director**, Space Application Centre (Dr. R. R. Navalgund),

Member Secretary (ex-officio)

Dr. G. V. Subramanyam

Terms of reference of the Panel are as under:

- i. Assess the current status of ecology of the Western Ghats region.
- ii. Demarcate areas within the Western Ghats Region to be notified as Ecologically Sensitive Zones under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986. In doing so, the Panel shall review the existing reports, such as the Pronab Sen Committee report, Dr. T. S. Vijayaraghavan Committee report, Hon'ble Supreme Court's directions, Recommendations of the National Board for Wildlife, and consult all the concerned States.
- iii. Make recommendations for the conservation, protection and rejuvenation of the Western Ghats Region following a comprehensive consultation process involving people and governments of all concerned States.
- iv. Suggest measures for effective implementation of the notifications issued by the government of India in the Ministry of Environment and forests declaring specific areas in the Western Ghats Region as Eco-sensitive Zones under the Environment (Protection) Act , 1986
- v. Recommend the modalities for the establishment of Western Ghats Ecology Authority (WGEA) under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986,

which will be a professional body to manage the ecology of the region and to ensure its sustainable development with the support of all concerned States.

- vi. Deal with any other relevant environment and ecological issues pertaining to Western Ghats Region, including those which may be referred to it by the Central Government in the Ministry of Environment and Forests.
- vii. To evaluate and submit reports on:
 - a) the Athirappilly Hydro-electric Project
 - b) Gundia Hydro-electric project
 - c) to suggest an appropriate course of further development of mining, power production and polluting industries in Ratnagiri and Sindhudurg districts of Maharashtra.

Gist of Activities undertaken by the WGEEP

- Panel meetings: 15
- Commissioned papers: 42
- Brainstorming sessions: 7
- Expert Consultative Meeting: 1
- Consultations with Government agencies: 8
- Consultations with civil society: 40
- Field visits: 14

Apart from these, the WGEEP had one consultation with the MPs representing various constituencies within the limit of the Western Ghats. It was chaired by the then Union Minister for Environment and Forests, Mr. Jairam Ramesh and the consultation was conducted in New Delhi. The inputs received from the various consultations mentioned above, especially from the Commissioned Papers written by experts in various fields were used extensively in the final report.

The WGEEP after considering the earlier reports on Western Ghats, especially the recommendations of the Pronab Sen Committee, resolved to consider the entire Western Ghats as an **Ecologically Significant Area**, based mainly on the following three reasons

- 1) Biodiversity values:** Western Ghats is one of the 35 Biodiversity Hot-spots of the world and, one of the eight 'hottest hot spots' of biodiversity
- 2) Ecosystem services values of the Western Ghats:** More than 28 crores of people from six States, namely Gujarat, Goa, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala are dependent on the Western Ghats mainly for water for irrigation and drinking.
- 3) The ecological integrity of the Western Ghats** has a telling effect on the climate, resulting in the life and livelihood of the people

Zoning of the Western Ghats

Although the entire Western Ghats is to be declared as an Ecologically Sensitive Area, the entire area cannot be treated on the same scale either for development or for conservation. It is necessary to demarcate areas separately. Since development and conservation have to go hand-in-hand, it was found prudent to follow a layered approach. The entire Western Ghats had to be divided based on the significance of the area. Thus, three categories have been identified, namely

- most significant area - Ecologically Sensitive Zone I (ESZ 1),
- moderately significant area - ESZ 2
- less significant area - ESZ 3

The Committee stress that Local Self Governments should be empowered to decide the kind of activities that should be encouraged or regulated in each of the Zone.

How was the ESZ identified ?

The entire Western Ghats (1,29,037 sq km; 1490 km in length from Tapi Valley to Kanyakumari and, width 48 km to 210 km) was divided into 2200 quadrates (squares); each 9 x 9 km, i.e. 8100 hectare in size. Occurrence of the following vital parameters in each quadrate was marked giving a score from 1 - 10 depending on the quantum/degree/no. of occurrence of each parameter. Finally the score obtained for each parameter was added together and the average taken for each quadrate. Those quadrates getting scores less than 3 are considered as less significant (ESZ 3), those between 3 - 5 as moderately significant (ESZ 2) and those above 5 highly significant (ESZ 1). Data for the same was gathered from published literature and various data banks.

The parameters considered are:

- (1) **Biological features**, such as richness and rarity of species (both plants and animals), habitat richness, ecological resilience (level of persistence of original climax vegetation);
- (2) **Cultural and Historical significance** (evolutionary- historical value and cultural-historical value of the area);
- (3) **Geo-climatic features** such as slope, aspect, altitude, precipitation and number of wet days;
- (4) **Hazard vulnerability:** natural hazards such as landslides and fires;

(5) Stakeholders valuation;

(6) Areas of origin of rivers, habitats contiguous to national parks and sanctuaries, riverine vegetation.

The merit of this method is that it is the most unbiased; whichever quadrates get a score below 3 is marked as ESZ 3; between 3 and 5 as ESZ 2 and above 5 as ESZ 1. Accordingly Athirappilly hydro-electric project area and the Gundia project area fall in ESZ 1, and hence the panel recommended against both the projects.

Ecologically sensitive Zones in Kerala

No. of taluks covering ESZ

| | |
|-------|-------------|
| ESZ 1 | : 15 taluks |
| ESZ 2 | : 2 taluks |
| ESZ 3 | : 8 taluks |

Total taluks in Kerala = 63.

What is to be noted particularly is that if any taluk is indicated as ESZ 1, 2 or 3, it does not mean that the entire taluk is covered under the ESZ. It only means that the particular taluk contains an area of significance in terms of biodiversity or any of the parameters mentioned above, having the particular score. It may be located in one pachayath or even in a ward of a panchayath. To make it more clear, the particular taluk may have a patch of forest, a good wetland or even a historical monument. Only this will be covered under the Zone, which has to be identified and demarcated by the local panchayath at a later stage when the Western Ghats Ecology Authority, State Western Ghats Ecology Authority, and the District Ecological Committee are in place.

The Ecologically Significant Locations (ESLs) within the taluks are tentatively marked. There are 18 such ESLs spread over 25 taluks in Kerala (fig 1) .

However, the Committee has made it abundantly clear that these are all tentative and the final demarcation of the Zones taking into account of the micro-watersheds and village boundaries, as well as the activities to be undertaken in each, those to be encouraged and regulated , must be based on extensive inputs from local communities and local bodies, namely Gram Panchayaths, Taluka Panchayaths, Zilla Parishads, and Nagarpalikas, under the overall supervision of the Western Ghats Ecology Authority (WGEA), State level Ecology Authorities and District Ecology Committees (page 40; part I)

Another mandate of the Committee was to recommend the modalities for the establishment of **Western Ghats Ecology Authority** under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 to manage the ecology of the region and to ensure its sustainable development with the support of all concerned States.

The Committee envisages a three tier administrative set up. One for the entire Western Ghats as an apex body, then a State level body followed by a district level set up.

The Committee recommends constitution of the Western Ghats Ecology Authority (WGEA) comprising 24 members as follows:

1. **Chairman:** A retired Supreme Court Judge or an eminent ecologist
- 2 - 6 **Subject experts:** One each of Conservation biologist, Environmental lawyer, Social Scientist/economist, Agricultural Scientist, landscape ecologist,
7. **Representative of tribal:** Representative of a prominent tribal group (on rotation from each state)
- 8 - 13 **Civil society representatives:** one each from each State who had contributed to the conservation of the Western Ghats
- 14 - 18 **Exofficio-Members: Representative of MoEF** (an Additional Secretary); **Chairman**, Central Pollution Control Board; **Member**, Central Planning Commission dealing with Western Ghats/Environment; **Chairman**, National Biodiversity Authority; **Member Secretary** (full time; in the cadre of Joint secretary/Scientist G) to be deputed by the MoEF in consultation with the Chairman WGEA
- 19 - 24 **Member Secretary** of each state Western Ghats Ecology Authority

Constitution of the State Western Ghats Ecology Authority (SWGEA)

The State Western Ghats Ecology Authority shall comprise 11 members

1. **Chair:** A retired Judge or an eminent ecologist,
2. **Enviro-legal expert,**
3. **Ecologist of the region,**
- 4 -6 **Eminent Civil Society representatives,**
- 7 - 10 **Ex-officio Members: Chairman**, State Pollution Control Board; **Principal Secretary**, Dept of Environment and Forest; **Representative** of the State Planning Board; **Chairman**, State Biodiversity Board,
11. **Member Secretary** (Full time): One officer of the rank of Joint Secretary / **Scientist G (of the State Government) to be deputed by the concerned State.**

Constitution of the District Ecology Committee (DEC)

The DEC shall be constituted by the State WGEA in consultation with the respective State Government. It shall consist of:

Chair: Environmental Ombudsman, appointed by WGEA

Members: Experts from economics, law, sociology, forestry, hydrology, soil science, agriculture, land use, ecology and the like and, representatives of nodal departments and prominent civil society.

Activities to be promoted, discouraged, and banned in the Ecologically Sensitive Zones

- 1) No Genetically Modified Crops shall be allowed in the Western Ghats.** *(It is in line with the Kerala State policy to keep Kerala GM free and, M.S.Swaminathan's recommendation that Western Ghats should be kept GM free).*
- 2) Phase out the use of plastic bags in shops, commercial establishments, tourist spots, on a priority basis within 3 years** *(This does not mean that all plastic products should be banned from the Western Ghats as has been alleged)*

Land use

- 3) Water courses, water bodies, special habitats, geological formations, biodiversity rich areas, and sacred groves will remain as no-go areas for buildings and for other developments**
- 4) No Special Economic Zones & new hill stations in the Western Ghats (WG)**
- 5) Public lands should not be converted into private lands.** *(This has nothing to do with the decision of the Government of Kerala to give pattayam to all the lands encroached upon till 1977. But will certainly deter future encroachment. Therefore the apprehension that those who are settled in the Western Ghats for decades have to desert their homes has no basis.)*
- 6) No change of land use (in zone 1 & 2) from forest to non-forest use or agriculture to non-agriculture, except agriculture to forest, and except when extension of existing village settlement areas to accommodate increase in population of local residents. In zone 3, changes from agriculture to non-agriculture are permitted, following mitigating measures for the impacts** *(It makes it clear that Gadgil Committee do not ban construction of new houses in the Western Ghats. The allegation that no houses can be constructed in the Western Ghats is, therefore, totally unfounded. It only specifies that new houses can be built only when the population of the local residents increases.)*

- 7) Approval for built structures such as hotels, resorts should follow the policy of the MoEF appropriately refined by the WGEA**
- 8) Roads and other infrastructural expansion plans must have EIA scrutiny, assessing especially ecological costs and public benefits.**

Building construction

- 9) Building code should be evolved by the WGEA (Western Ghats Ecology Authority) covering *inter-alia*: eco-friendly building**

material and construction methods minimizing the use of steel, cement and steel, water harvesting methods, non- conventional energy and waste treatment *(This does not mean that no cement, steel and sand can be used for construction of buildings in the WG as alleged by some, but this means these building material should be used judiciously. Not only the Western Ghats , but the entire country should have such a building code, if our natural resources have to remain for the use of future generations.)*

- 10) **While selecting sites for construction, conservation of top soil and trees should be ensured; filling of wetlands/marshes will not be permitted.**
- 11) **Paving areas should be restricted and, while paving care should be taken to see that run off/permeability is not affected.**

Waste treatment

- 12) **Local authorities should be made responsible for developing regional systems for handling hazardous, toxic, biomedical wastes as well as recyclable wastes.**
- 13) **No new hazardous or toxic waste processing units in Zone 1 & 2; existing ones could go up to 2016. New ones can be sited in Zone 3 strictly following Pollution Control Board regulations**

Waste water treatment

- 14) **Waste water management with appropriate technology of re-use, recharge, recycling, should be mandatory for all layouts and development projects**

Water

- 15) **Water resource management should be decentralized to Local Self Government level.** *(this should be viewed in the context of the proposed National Water Policy, where it is stated that water is to be treated as an economic commodity and should be sold by private/private-public partnership),*
- 16) **Protect high altitude valley swamps and water bodies.**
- 17) **Catchment area treatment plans of hydroelectric and major irrigation projects should be taken up to improve their life span.**
- 18) **Improve river flows and water quality by scientific riparian management programmes involving community participation.**

- 19) **Water conservation measures should be taken up through suitable technology up gradation and public awareness programme.**
- 20) **Inter-basin diversions of rivers in the Western Ghats should not be allowed.**

Agriculture

- 21) **Promote organic agricultural practices by phasing out use of chemical pesticides/ weedicides in Zone 1 within 5 years, Zone 2 within 8 years and in Zone 3 within 10 years.** *(This is almost similar to the Organic Farming Policy of the State. Those who argue that organic farming is not feasible, must see the organic farming initiatives taken by the government, meet the organic farmers in the state, especially in Idukki and Wyanad districts or visit Andhra Pradesh where 35 lakh acres are under cultivation without any pesticides, that too under the poverty alleviation scheme of the Government)*
- 22) **Financial and technical supports to be given to the farmers during the transition period from chemical to organic farming.** *(How does it work against the interest of farmers?)*
- 23) **Organize special incentive payments for sequestration of carbon in farm soils by switching over to organic farming practices**
- 24) **Introduce “conservation service charges” for :**
- a) **Farmers who cultivate traditional cultivars,**
 - b) **Farmers who rear traditional breeds of livestock,**
 - c) **those who culture indigenous fishes even in tanks,**
 - d) **those who protect sacred groves,**
 - e) **those who switch-over from annual crops to perennial crops in slopes exceeding 30%, especially for small landholders** *(please note that Committee do not ban cultivation in slopes; it says discourage annual crops and encourage perennial crops on slopes exceeding 30% and give them conservation charges for switching over, as it greatly prevents soil erosion) and,*
 - f) **those who maintain natural vegetation.**
- 25) **Provide MGNREGS support to small and marginal farmers.** **(Page 40; point 4; Part II)**
- 26) **Give subsidies for mechanizing weed control in the large plantations.** **(Page 40; point 4; Part II)**

Animal husbandry

- 27) **Redeploy subsidies for chemical fertilizers towards maintenance of livestock and production of biogas and generation of organic manure**
- 28) **Restore community grasslands and forest grazing lands outside the protected areas**
- 29) **Cattle breeds which can withstand adverse agro climatic conditions should be encouraged**
- 30) **Application of weedicides in cash crop area alongside the road must be prohibited, since most of them are rich cattle fodder.**
- 31) **The unused land in tea estates should be used for cattle rearing and the organic manure thus produced used for tea plantation.**
- 32) **Village communities should be supported to plan their fodder requirements and to adopt suitable methods by which fodder can be grown and managed. Page 46, part II (*is it against the farmers?*)**
- 33) **Families in the Western Ghats having 2 cattle may be supported to build biogas plants This may also be thought of at a village level where larger biogas plants could be maintained. Page 47; part I. (*2 cattle means, at least 2 cattle; it does not mean that more than 2 cattle are not permitted or cattle rearing is prohibited, as alleged*)**

Fishery

- 34) **Fish ladders should be provided to enable fish migration in places where their route is blocked**
- 35) **Prohibit dynamites and other explosives to kill fish**

Forestry

- 36) **Recognize rights of all small-scale, traditional private land holders under FRA**
- 37) **Forest Rights Act be implemented in its true spirit; Community Forest Resource provisions to replace all current joint management programmes**
- 38) **No monoculture plantations like eucalyptus; encourage planting endemic species**
- 39) **Extraction of medicinal plants with strict regulations.**

Mining

- 40) **No new licenses for mining in Zone 1 & 2 but where mining exists, phase out by 2016; in Zone 2 it can be reviewed case by case. New mining may be taken up in Zone 3, only for scarce minerals not available on the plains and should be under strict regulation and social audit, subject to free prior informed consent of tribal and other communities and in recognition of tribal rights).**
- 41) **Illegal mining to be stopped immediately in all the three zones**

Quarry and sand mining

- 42) **No new license to be given for quarry and sand mining in Zone 1; permitted in Zone 2 and 3 subject to strict regulation and social audit without affecting tribal rights**

Industry

- 43) **No new polluting (red and orange category) industries in Zone 1 & 2; for existing industries switch over to zero pollution by 2016 and subject to strict regulation and social audit**
- 44) **New industries may be set up in Zone 3 under strict regulation and social audit**
- 45) **Local bio-resource based non-polluting industries may be promoted. All should be subject to social audit**

Power/energy

- 46) **Educate the consumer the environmental and social cost of power production and the need for reducing “luxury needs”**
- 47) **Launch “smart” campaigns as key components of demand side management, focusing on smart campaigns, smart buildings, smart power, smart logistics and smart motors**
- 48) **Promote decentralized electricity, use of solar power**
- 49) **Run of the river schemes after cumulative environmental impact assessment (CEIA), except in first and second order streams, with maximum 3 m height to serve local energy. In Zone 2, new hydro projects between 10- 25 MW (up to 10 m ht) are permissible while in Zone 3 larger dams are permitted with cumulative Environment Impact Assessment. Again, in Zone 1, promote small scale, micro and pico hydropower systems, that are people owned and managed, and are off grid.**

- 50) **No new thermal plants and large scale wind power projects in Zone 1. Strict environmental regulation of existing thermal power plants in all zones. New thermal plants are permitted in Zone 3, but with zero pollution.**
- 51) **Existing thermal plants must actively promote alternate uses of fly ash, such as road making in addition to the existing practice of fly ash bricks.**
- 52) **Promote biomass based /solar sources for decentralized energy needs**
- 53) **No diversion of streams/rivers are allowed for any power projects**
- 54) **Catchment area treatment in a phased manner following watershed principles**
- 55) **All project categories to be jointly operated by LSGs and Power Boards with strict monitoring for compliance under District Ecology Committees**
- 56) **Dams and thermal projects that have crossed their viable life span (for dams the threshold is 30-50 years) to be decommissioned in phased manner (page 46, Part I). Again in pp 32; Part II makes it clearer: “Recommend the decommissioning of dams that have outlived their utility, are underperforming, and have silted up beyond acceptable standards, etc.”** *(This certainly does not mean that all dams should be decommissioned. Only those which are not performing at the level expected of for various technical reasons need only to be decommissioned. Again, decommissioning is not something to be done overnight; it is a long process. It involves inter-alia expert technical evaluation of: a) **Structural safety** — due to age, weakness, structural problems, construction defects; b) **Reservoir siltation** — inability to store water as envisaged because of the siltation; c) **Reduction in benefits** — due to poor design, inefficient turbines; d) **Economic costs** —cost benefit analysis; considering the cost of maintenance of the dam including staff salary and related expenses and the net benefit that the dam offers to society; e) **Ecological damage** — again a cost - benefit analysis considering the total ecological loss and the economic gain by the dam. Only after such technical evaluation could a decision be taken whether a dam is to be decommissioned or not. The ICOLD (International Commission on Larger Dams), an international organisation of experts in dam construction and maintenance, considers 30 -50 years as the viable life span of a dam. The Committee just mentioned that. We need not follow that. We should follow only the technical experts’ advice. Therefore, the campaign that if the Gadgil Committee Report is accepted, all the dams in Kerala should be decommissioned and that the State would be in dark, has absolutely no basis)*

- 57) **No new railway lines and major roads, except where it is highly essential (as perhaps, in Goa), and subject to EIA, strict regulations and social audit in Zone 1 & 2; allowed in Zone 3 subject to strict regulation and social audit.** (It certainly does *not* mean that no new roads or railway lines are permitted)

Tourism

- 58) **Ecotourism in Zone 1 is permitted following the ecotourism policy of the MoEF to be refined by the WGEA to promote minimum impact tourism in the region. In Zone 2 and 3 tourism is permitted with strict regulations based on the Tourism Master Plan worked out considering the carrying capacity of the area and, social and environmental costs.**

- 59) **Cumulative impact assessment for all new projects such as dams, mines, tourism, and housing, that impact upon water resources should be conducted and permission given only if they fall within the carrying capacity**

Education

- 60) **Reconnect children and youth to local environment through education programmes focussing on local environmental issues**

- 61) **Such environmental education programme should be modelled in such a way to involve local community members who could serve as an instrument of participatory environmental monitoring. Such a programme can help, preparation of people's Biodiversity register"**

- 62) **Students' "River Clubs" should be encouraged in schools situated along the course of the respective river**

- 63) **Teach agriculture in schools**

Science and technology

- 64) **Cumulative impact assessment for all new projects such as dams, mines, tourism, and housing that impact upon water resources should be conducted and permission given only if they fall within the carrying capacity.**

- 65) **Focus research on perfecting green technology and make it affordable for common people**

- 66) **Environmental flow assessments indicators should be worked out by research institutions, NGOs along with local communities**

Information management.

- 67) **Build on the Western Ghats data base of WGEEP to create an open, transparent, participatory system of environmental monitoring involving all citizens, in particular the student community.**
- 68) **Update and upgrade a hydrological database of rivers and consolidate the ecological database and information at river basin level.**

General

- 69) **Strengthen capacity building in local Panchayath for environmental governance.**
- 70) **Central Government to arrive at ways to compensate Western Ghats states for the contribution to preservation of country's forests given the high share of forests in their land area.**

Recommendation on Athirappilly hydroelectric project

The Gadgil Committee: (a) **examined the entire available data** on the issue such as the availability of water, biodiversity richness and uniqueness, possible impacts on tribal settlement around the area, impacts on agriculture and drinking water in the downstream, alternatives for power; (b) had **discussions at the Panchayath level**, (c) **conducted a public hearing at Athirappilly** and, (d) had a **technical consultation with the engineers of the KSEB**, officers of the Irrigation, Forest and tribal departments, scientists of KFRI, TBGRI and the NGOs working in the area and involved in the Athirappilly issue. It had also examined the **importance of the area** in the light of: (i) declaration of the area as **Important Bird Area** by BNHS/Birdlife International; (ii) **high priority conservation area** proposed by the French Institute, (iii) recommendation to declare the river as **Fish Sanctuary** by the National Bureau of Fish Genetic Resources, (iv) recommendations of the **Kerala State Biodiversity Board to protect the entire area** without causing any direct or indirect disturbance to the ecosystem of the area

The **Gadgil Committee was convinced** that (1) **there will not be adequate water** to produce the expected power (163 MW), (2) the area is **extremely rich in biodiversity**, (3) there is **no such riverine ecosystem in that elevation anywhere else** in the State, (4) the proposed dam will **adversely affect farming in the downstream** and, (5) **there are alternative sources for energy** and that there is no need to sacrifice such a valuable area and, (6) above all, local people are totally against the project.

Hence, Gadgil Committee recommended that the Athirappilly hydroelectric project be dropped and steps taken to conserve the area.

Often raised questions and answers

1. How could 14 members of the panel with their 'narrow expertise' cover such an array of fields and give recommendations?

A valid question, indeed. The panel was very conscious about their expertise and that was why it commissioned as many as 41 papers since the very beginning of the functioning of the Panel. We asked experts from various fields such as power, irrigation, and agriculture to give their advice and we have considered these while finalising the recommendations.

2. Since the terrain is uneven with hills and valleys, it was unscientific to make such a large grid (as much as 8100 ha). The panel should have gone for smaller grids which would have represented the area much better. This would have also kept a large chunk of areas outside the Zones now recommended.

Smaller quadrates would have been better, provided there is adequate information on the various parameters discussed earlier to assess the importance of each quadrate. We just do not have such a data set. To create data set for each smaller grid (say 500 x 500 m) for the entire Western Ghats will take decades, that too with a multidisciplinary team. The Panel thought it prudent to use the existing available data in a logical and transparent fashion and lay a foundation on which much could be added later on. The report clearly advocates such a building up of a database by making all Panchayats also as partners in the effort. **The 9x9 km (8100 ha) grid was used primarily to arrive at a very simple index of Ecological sensitivity by using readily available information. At no point of time were the analyses intended to come up with a rigid zonation as has been fully explained in the report. Instead, the zones were intended for prescribing possible management guidelines presuming precautionary principles.** With the given time frame and resources, this is an excellent beginning and it should be a continual programme. It is also to be noted that the entire methodology was published in one of the peer reviewed journals **Current Science** and the Panel had the benefit of getting comments from people working in the field of ecology. Moreover, the entire proceedings of each of the Panel meetings were put on the Website so that there was regular interaction with others.

3. Some of the Zones cover even the townships also so that no development activity could be undertaken there. Often quoted statement is that not even a branch of tree could be cut in Vattiyurkavu (a township in Nedumangadu Taluk) if the Gadgil Committee report is accepted.

This is not correct. There are three points to be clarified. **Firstly** the ESZs recommended by the Gadgil Committee do not exclude

people. There is no ban on agriculture in Zone 1, 2 or 3. If there is agriculture, it could be continued. The only condition is that it should be organic, but it should not affect the farmers even during the transition stage; therefore, compensation for any loss is recommended. Also there is no ban on construction of buildings, but it should follow some guidelines so that it would not affect the ecology any further. **Secondly**, Zones suggested in the report should not be compared with the Ecologically Fragile Lands (EFL) declared by the Forest Department, as the EFL tends to be exclusionary - human activities are limited/curtailed, whereas the ESZs proposed in the present report is inclusionary - inclusive of people. **Thirdly**, even if a taluk comes under Zone 1, 2 or 3, it does not mean that the entire taluk should be considered as such. It only means that an ecologically significant area lies in the particular taluk; it could be a panchayath or one or two wards of the Panchayath. When the borders of the Zones are fixed with the inputs from the panchayth or Local Self Governments, only the area of significance will be included. Vattiyurkavu comes under Nedumangadu taluk. This taluk has quite a lot of forest areas. Only these areas will come under the ESZ. But if the people of Vattiyurkavu wants to include their area also under the Zone, that is also possible. Because, here the people take the decision. It is quite possible that the residents of the area will insist to include their area within the Zone so that there will not be any unplanned buildings or polluting industries in the neighbourhoods.

4. If Gadgil Committee report is implemented, no farming will be possible, farmers will be either evacuated from the Western Ghats or such situations will be created so that the farmers will be forced to leave the Ghats by themselves

Not true at all. Nowhere in the 520 page Report, is there one sentence which would work even remotely against the interest of the farmers, adivasies and other local communities. Law abiding citizens will have absolutely no problem with the report. In fact, their interests will be served in more than one way

5. Why is that there are no people's representatives in the proposed Western Ghats Ecology Authority, State Western Ghats Ecology Authority and the District Ecology Commission

This was discussed elaborately at the Panel meetings. The difficulty was that there are so many MLAs and MPs representing various constituencies of the Western Ghats region from Gujarat to Kerala. Selecting one or two will create problems, politically and regionally. It was therefore decided that when a particular issue of a particular area is discussed, the respective MP and MLA could be invited.

6. Why there are no ESZs recommended for the Tamil Nadu? Is it because the Gadgil Committee did not want to displease the Union Minister for Environment and Forests, Mrs Jayanthi Natarajan, who hails from Tamil Nadu.

Please see the report (part 1) page no. 20 which gives the list and 24 which gives the map showing the locations of ESZs in Tamil Nadu. Again table 3 on page no. 25 gives the number of taluks covered under ESZ 1, 2, and 3; totally 13 taluks come under the various ESZs. More areas, if any, could be demarcated once the WGEA, the SWGEA and the District Ecological Commission are in place and with excessive input from the Local Self Governments. It has, however, nothing to do with the Union Minister Smt. Jayanthi Natarajan, as Shri. Jairam Ramesh was the Minister when the report was finalised.

7. There is an international conspiracy behind the Gadgil Committee report. Gadgil Committee Report was hurriedly submitted for India to get the World Heritage Status for the sites in the Western Ghats. One of the conditions laid by the UNESCO to approve the sites in the Western Ghats is that Gadgil Committee recommendations should be implemented. How could Gadgil Committee report reach UNESCO even before it was put on the websites?

There is no connection between the recognition of World Heritage Site and the Gadgil Committee report. Getting the tag of UNESCO's World heritage Site gives an international recognition to the sites, and nothing more. The governance of the sites is under the control of the concerned State. Most of the sites selected are the existing Protected Areas. The Gadgil Committee report has merely pointed out the inadequacies of the proposal, as it was done without any discussion with or consent of local communities. There is nothing unusual for the UNESCO or any other agency getting the Gadgil report since May 2012, as the report was available in the public domain since then. UNESCO's World Heritage Sites meeting was held in St. Petersburg during July 2012.

8. Among the mandates given to the Gadgil Committee, it is clearly stated that comprehensive consultations should be undertaken with the people and governments of all concerned States before making recommendations for the conservation, protection and rejuvenation of the Western Ghats. There were no such consultations in the local levels, at least in Kerala. The only place the Committee visited in Kerala was the Athirappilly area. However, in the beginning of the report it says comprehensive discussions were held. Is it not something totally false?

The number of consultations held with the expert groups, government agencies and the field visits undertaken are given in page 4. Since there

was no time to visit and hold consultations with all the LSGs in the Western Ghats, it was decided to visit only those areas such as Athirappilly in Kerala and Gundia project area in Karnataka where the Committee had been asked to give its final recommendations. For the rest of the area, since the recommendations are tentative and, the final decision would be taken only after discussing with the Panchayaths/Municipalities/Corporations by the Western Ghats Ecology Authority, State Western Ghats Ecology Authority, and the District Ecology Commission, the Panel decided to confine only to giving the broad scientific guidelines, especially considering the time frame.

Most other questions are answered in the text itself in parentheses under the concerned points.

Notable points of the report

- *Ultimately the WGEEP (Gadgil Committee) provides “a scientific decision support system to arrive at the potential of various localities for promotion of livelihoods while ensuring ecological sustainability.”*
- *The WGEEP Report focuses on ensuring enhancement of the livelihood of the poor while causing least disturbance to the environment and ecology.*
- *There is no recommendation for dislocation of tribal or local community from anywhere for the purpose of “development” or for “conservation”.*
- *The Committee try to replace the prevailing system of “Develop recklessly - conserve thoughtlessly” with “Develop sustainably - conserve thoughtfully”.*
- *The zones recommended in the Report are totally different from the Ecologically Fragile Lands (EFL) established by the Forest Department. Zones 1, 2 or 3 do not exclude human beings while the EFL tends to exclude them.*
- *Proper understanding of these distinctions attracted 25 Gram Sabhas in the Sindhurgh District of Maharashtra, who requested the Gadgil Committee to include their villages in Zone 1. Their main attraction was that once declared, there will not be any new mining coming up in their villages.*
- *Recommendations of Gadgil Report directly or indirectly help mitigate the impacts of climate change and help conserve water and water resources; the most vital need today, as the entire State reels under drought.*
- *The allegation that the Committee did not have consultations at local levels before making the final decision is not correct. Where the final recommendations had to be given (in the case of Athirappilly and Gundiya Hydroelectric Projects and, the question of permitting additional thermal projects and industries in Ratnagiri and Sindhurgh districts in Maharashtra), the Committee had discussions at the local level with the panchayaths, and also had open public hearings. In the case of*

Athirappilly, apart from consultations at the panchayath and public hearing, the Committee had an open technical consultation with the officials from KSEB, Forest department, Tribal department along with the organizations and individuals opposing the project.

- *All the other recommendations in the Report are tentative to be finalised by the Western Ghats Ecology Authority, State Western Ghats Ecology Authority and the District Ecology Committee in consultation with and extensive inputs from the local panchayath and State governments.*
- *It emphasises the need for empowering local bodies, i.e. Gram, Taluk and Zilla Panchayaths and Nagarpalikas and Mahanagarपालikas to take decisions on local development and environmental issues in the true spirit of the Panchayath Raj.*
- ***Gadgil Report offers a major opportunity to demonstrate:***
 - ❖ *Conservation and development can go hand in hand*
 - ❖ *Benefits of development can reach out to all segments of society*
 - ❖ *Local communities can guide the course of development*
 - ❖ *Conservation does not necessarily mean excluding people*
- *The Gadget Report in its 520 page Report does not have even one sentence which adversely affects, directly or indirectly, the interest of the farmers, tribal and the local communities of the Western Ghats. On the contrary they will be benefitted immensely in various ways.*
- *The only people who will be adversely affected by Gadgil Report are those involved in illegal mining, quarrying, sand mining, wood trading, constructions, and ganja cultivation and, poaching of wild animals.*
