

**University World College, Freiburg
-A Seminar-**

**Shri Pawan Chamling, Chief Minister
Federal State of Sikkim, India
September 12, 2017**

Hon'ble first Mayor, Principal of this College, founder RUPUNZEL Mr. Joseph Wilhelm, eminent Professors, distinguished guests, dear College scholars, friends, ladies and gentlemen.

I grew up in a small village called Yangang in the Himalayan state of Sikkim in India. My childhood and adult life were spent there in close connect to the earth, and the rhythms of daily life then were attuned to nature. Between my childhood and adulthood however, I saw that the animals, birds and the bees were disappearing in our villages. During the same time, I also witnessed the rise of diseases like cancer and high blood sugar around me.

In hindsight, it was the quiet transformation taking place in society and our new consumption patterns that led to these changes. And one of the major reasons for this was the use of chemical fertilizers, pesticides and insecticides that were making their way into our soil. For a healthy life, we need healthy food, clean water, air and environment. And for all this, we need healthy soil. That is because we get everything from the soil. But if the soil itself is unhealthy, then there is no way for us to be healthy.

Only organic agriculture supports the health of the soil. It is also a non-violent form of agriculture because it saves the integrity of the soil. Chemical laden agriculture decreases soil quality and the cost of production also grows in the long run. In the developing world, chemical fertilizers besides being a detriment to health, is also an economic burden on farmers because of the difficulty in moving away from the dependence on chemicals.

Seeing these harmful trends in society, we recognized that there was no other way than to completely embrace organic agriculture. I first articulated this vision during the Budget Presentation in the Sikkim Legislative Assembly in 2003. Following this, we set forth a well-organized plan, devised programs, created communities and aligned stakeholders.

On our journey to transforming our farming system, we took a numbers of steps. We constituted the Sikkim State Organic Board in 2003 to outline policy issues

and strategic plans, as well as develop standards and regulations. We stopped procuring chemical fertilizers and chemical pesticides from 2004. We set up an Organic Conversion Information Service as well as Category-wise organic farming schemes and action plans to set the targets of conversion.

Laboratories were established for analyzing farm and processed agricultural products. Technical manpower was built and accreditation and certification agencies established. Mandatory soil testing was conducted and the production of organic seeds on a commercial scale was started. Organic manure production infrastructure was provided to farmers and livelihood Schools for organic farming were also opened. Following this process, by the end of the year 2015, we were able to convert 76,169.604 ha of cultivated area into organically certified cultivated land.

However, when we made the announcement in 2003 to pursue the vision of becoming a completely organic state, there were many sceptics. The journey was also challenging as there was no success story to replicate and no technical machinery to fall back on. With the short term success of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, the farming community did not have the incentive to accept organic farming as a viable alternative farming practice.

It was a long process full of challenges and learnings. Finally after 12 years of consistent work however, we became the first and only organic state of India in December 2015 and to mark this special occasion, the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India, Shri. Narendra Modi, declared Sikkim as the first organic State of India on January 18th, 2016.

Currently, the Government of Sikkim is implementing the scheme of "Mission Organic Value Chain Development for North Eastern Region" in Sikkim. The scheme aims at the development of certified organic production in a value chain mode, to link growers with consumers and support the development of the entire value chain starting from inputs, seeds and certification, to the creation of facilities for collection, aggregation, processing, marketing and brand building. It is a great achievement for us that we were able to transform Sikkim into an organic state but we are fully aware that there is much left to do. Our journey has only just begun.

Other "Green" Initiatives:

I would also like to share that taking the decision to fully embrace organic agriculture was a natural progression of our environmental friendly agenda in the state. From the beginning of our tenure in the government in 1994, environment protection and conservation has been a high priority. Since then, we have

undertaken numerous conservation measures to protect our mountain ecology, some of which I'd like to share with you today.

We declared the year 1995 as the Green Revolution Year, initiating a year-long program to generate awareness among people about nature conservation. We encouraged and undertook extensive plantation drives and this has been an on-going program. In the year 1995-96, the State Government also closed down a number of hydroelectric projects to protect our environment and ecology. We banned grazing and rearing of cattle in reserved forest areas since 1998.

An innovative concept called Smritivan was started in 1998. Smritivans are designated gardens where people plant trees in the memory of their loved ones, or as an act of offering reverence to their local deities. This is recorded with the date and names of persons who plant the trees. We initiated this as a new form of a plantation drive, while also connecting the people to the forests that may be created over time.

We declared the years 2000-2010 as the Green Revolution Decade in Sikkim to undertake programs and encourage in the people a sense of responsibility and accountability towards the environment. The peoples' participation was ensured for conservation, protection and promotion of the environment and ecology.

We introduced compulsory environmental education in schools in 2000 and opened Eco Clubs in 2002. In 2001, the felling of trees was also banned. If there is any felling for bona fide purposes, ten seedlings have to be compulsorily planted for each tree that is cut down.

Many mountain peaks, caves, rocks, lakes and hot springs have been declared as sacred places of worship since 2001 and no case of defilement is allowed in these places. The scaling of Mount Kanchenjunga, the third highest mountain peak in the world, is also banned from the Sikkim side. Kanchenjunga is not only an important physical feature of the state; it has emotional significance for the people since it is believed to be the guardian deity of the state.

Littering of plastic bags and containers in National Parks and Sanctuaries and the killing of wild animals was banned in 2001. We also initiated the distribution of new LPG Gas connections to individual households as an alternative to wood in 2001.

The year 2006 was declared as the "Green Mission" year to work with focus on the people's mission for implementing environmental friendly measures. One year after in 2007, the Glacier and Climate Change Commission was constituted to

tackle issues of climate change. We were able to generate awareness among people about the impending threat of glacier melt and climate change, issues which are issue for the people of Sikkim. We also constituted the State Pollution Control Board in 2008 to make Sikkim a pollution free State. Today, Sikkim is India's cleanest state in India.

We started an innovative initiative known as "10 Minutes to Earth" in 2009. Under this program, every citizen plants saplings for 10 minutes on the 25th of June of every year, thereby giving 10 minutes of time year after year to making the world a little more green.

Then in 2012, the "Sikkim Eco-Tourism Policy" was enforced to promote environment-friendly tourism in the State. We also celebrate the Environment Festival between 15th June and 30th June of each year . Started in 2013, the festival engages in plantation drives, awareness building, and seminars and discussions on how we can establish a society that respects our ecology and our environment.

Later in 2014, we outlawed the bursting of all types of Fire Crackers. The burning of scraps tyres and agricultural wastes has also been banned since 2015.

There is a long standing and unique tradition of *mith* in Sikkim. Mith is a Nepali word which can be loosely translated as "friendship". Therefore "*mith* making" becomes the establishment of a strong bond of friendship between two people. What it means is that when a person becomes a "*mith*" with another person, they establish a relationship close to being like family members. This tradition has been extended in Sikkim to also include trees. When a man befriends a tree or becomes *mith* with a tree, he is bound by the vow to protect the tree. To carry on this tradition, I have become *mith* with our state tree - the 'rhododendron'. As a result of our various initiatives, our forest cover has also grown from 43.95 % in 1993 to 47.80 % today.

Besides our environmental-friendly initiatives which has been the top of our priority, another focus of ours has also been rural development. Since day one of taking over the task of governance in 1994, we have earmarked seventy percent of the plan budget for the development of rural Sikkim since 70 % of the people live in villages. The two pronged focus on environment friendly policies and programs and rural development measures has been the bed-rock of our development model in Sikkim.

Conclusion

Unfortunately, in today's world, we have created devastation in the name of development. We consume more than our natural need and that has created

many problems today. As a result, we are passing through the most critical time in human history of our existence on earth. The white expanses on our mountain tops are melting. Glaciers are receding. The most fundamental of necessities in life like the air we breathe, the food and water we consume is full of chemicals.

This imbalance in nature and our resulting lifestyle is also the reason for human suffering, pain and diseases like cancer, diabetics and hypertension. Looking at our world today, I am fearful and of the firm belief that we need to urgently pursue a new kind of development that first and foremost protects the environment and promotes health and happiness. In this regard, Sikkim perhaps presents a new kind of story that can be told.

Quite clearly, we are on for a long struggle to make this world chemical free since today, the world has unfortunately become a dumping ground for chemicals. Organic activists from around the world, our farming communities and hosts of institutions and organizations are seized of the urgency to address this harmful chemical menace. We must come together and work for a chemical free world.

From our experiments in Sikkim, I would like to suggest some of the ways in which we can all strive to build a healthier world:

The primary qualifying factor for all development initiatives should be that it does not harm the environment. That should be the top most qualifier for any development initiatives. We must protect our forests and take up extensive afforestation measures globally. Annual budgetary allocation should be set aside in every Ministry for all development schemes to undertake measures for the protection of the environment and ecology. Use of chemical agents for agriculture must be stopped and we must adopt the organic way of doing agriculture globally.

Agriculture is an activity that defines the health of a society and it is because of this that we must adopt organic agriculture. For there is no other way but organic agriculture for a healthy, happy and peaceful society. This is our message from Sikkim to the world.

Thank you every body
My best of wishes to all of you
Thank you