2026

PARLIAMENTARY POLICY DIALOGUE

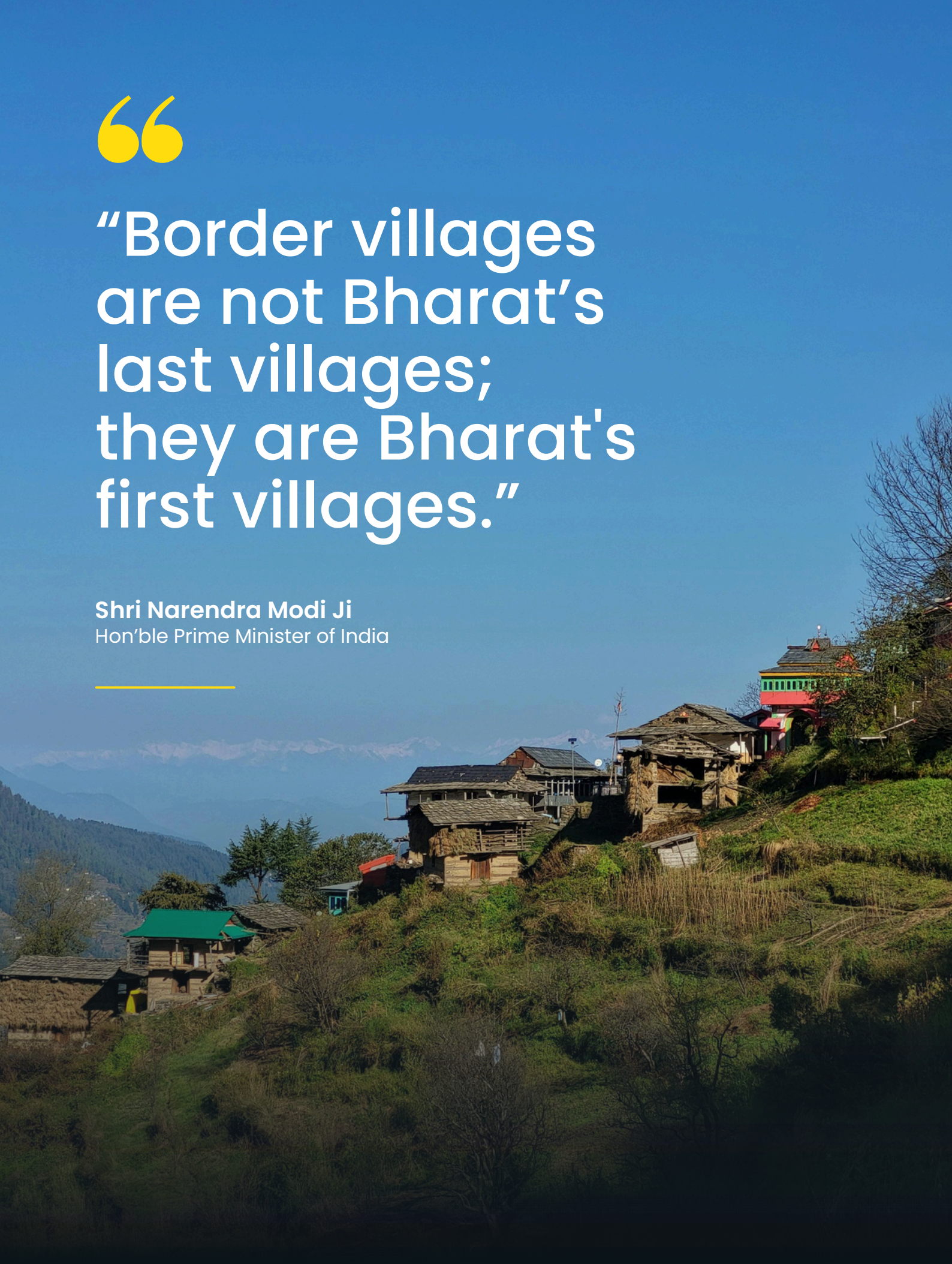
The Shared Role of Public Representatives and Civil Society in the Development of Border Regions



In collaboration with the Office of

Sh. Sujeet Kumar

Member of Parliament, Rajya Sabha



“Border villages are not Bharat’s last villages; they are Bharat's first villages.”

Shri Narendra Modi Ji
Hon’ble Prime Minister of India



Executive Summary

Sewa International, in collaboration with the office of Sh. Sujeet Kumar, Member of Parliament (Rajya Sabha), convened a Parliamentary Policy Dialogue on the theme “The Shared Role of Public Representatives and Civil Society in the Development of Border Regions” on 11 August 2026 at the India Habitat Centre, New Delhi. The Dialogue brought together Members of Parliament representing border constituencies, a Union Minister of State, senior development practitioners and the leadership of Sewa International on a single platform. The session was introduced and moderated by Prof. Kamalakanta Dash of the office of Sh. Sujeet Kumar, MP.

The Dialogue was anchored in one organising idea, and every intervention of the evening returned to it: the villages along Bharat's frontier are not the country's last villages but its first. That reframing is not rhetorical. It follows the designation of Kibithoo in Arunachal Pradesh as India's first village in April 2023, and it is the premise on which the Vibrant Villages Programme has been built. Border villages, speakers agreed, are simultaneously custodians of frontier culture, the first line of national awareness, and a legitimate destination for development in their own right.

Three propositions commanded broad agreement across the evening. First, that the past decade has produced a decisive shift in how the Indian state treats its frontier - from an older doctrine of deliberate under-development to a settled national commitment to develop the border belt. Second, that physical infrastructure is the floor of that commitment rather than its ceiling, and the next phase of work is human: education, health, nutrition, skills, livelihoods and awareness. Third, that this second phase is precisely where civil society, and Sewa International in particular, can add value to the Government's effort rather than duplicate it.

The Dialogue closed with a practical action agenda for Sewa International drawn directly from Members' interventions: a defined geographic focus on the Indo-Myanmar, Indo-Nepal, Indo-Bhutan and Indo-Tibet frontiers; a household-level community connect and entitlement-awareness model; livelihood work built on local craft and border tourism; corridor linkage between frontier villages and the towns behind them; and a youth fellowship placing young Indians in border villages for sustained periods of work.



2. Objectives and Outcomes

The Dialogue was convened around four stated objectives, each of which was substantively addressed.

The first objective, to foster meaningful dialogue on the development priorities of Bharat's border regions, was met through region-specific interventions covering the eastern Himalayan frontier of Arunachal Pradesh, the central Himalayan frontier of Uttarakhand, the western frontier experience of Kutch and the open Indo-Nepal boundary - with a Union Minister of State placing these alongside the Government's connectivity programme.

The second, to strengthen collaboration between Parliament and civil society, was met in the most direct way available: Sewa International committed on record to incorporating the suggestions of the Members present into its programme design, and to continuing engagement with their offices.

The third, to promote convergence between government initiatives and community-led development, became the organising concept of the evening. The proposition that convergence of schemes leads to saturation of benefit at the village level framed the role of civil society as the connective layer that helps entitlements already sanctioned actually reach the last household.

The fourth, to develop practical, policy-oriented recommendations, is recorded at Section 5 of this report as a consolidated action agenda.



3. Proceedings

3.1. Opening and Framing - Prof. Kamalakanta Dash, Office of Sh. Sujeet Kumar, Member of Parliament

Prof. Kamalakanta Dash of the office of Sh. Sujeet Kumar introduced the topic and moderated the session through the evening. He opened by establishing the frame: that border villages are Bharat's first villages and the custodians of the nation's frontier culture, and that the people who live along the boundary are not peripheral to the national story but the first keepers of it. He set the question that the rest of the evening answered - how Parliament and civil society, working together rather than in parallel, can convert that recognition into change on the ground - and carried the discussion between the interventions that followed.



3.2 Sh. Jinesh Lal, Executive Director, Sewa International

Sh. Jinesh Lal set out Sewa International's institutional position. Sewa works across a wide geography and has, over the years, developed a distinct working concept of the border village as a unit of development in itself. Development, he emphasised, is not a matter of infrastructure alone; it is health, it is education, and it is the holistic advancement of the human being who lives there. The purpose of the Dialogue, he said, was to identify how work of this kind can be taken to scale - an aim that flows directly from Sewa's own motto and ideology, and one that requires the counsel of those who represent these regions in Parliament.



3.3 Sh. Tapir Gao, Member of Parliament, Arunachal East

Sh. Tapir Gao placed Arunachal Pradesh at the centre of the frontier question. The State, he noted, shares international boundaries with three countries - Bhutan to the west, Tibet (China) to the north and north-east, and Myanmar to the east - a distinction no other State carries in the same measure.

He recalled the designation of Kibithoo as India's first village by the Union Home Minister on 10 April 2023, an occasion at which he was present, and described it as the moment at which the national vocabulary about the frontier changed. A village that had for decades been described as the last of India was formally recognised as the first, and the policy consequences of that reversal have followed steadily since.

He drew attention to Arunachal Pradesh's exceptional weight within the Vibrant Villages Programme. Of the 662 villages taken up for priority coverage in the first phase, 455 lie in Arunachal Pradesh - by far the highest share of any State. This concentration, he observed, is both a recognition of the State's strategic significance and an honest measure of the scale of the task that the programme has taken on.



Speaking to the work that remains, Sh. Gao pointed to the higher reaches of the Himalayan belt, where terrain, distance and altitude make road connectivity and dependable power supply far costlier and slower to deliver than anywhere else in the country. Where connectivity is still thin, communities remain harder to reach, and postings in government schools remain difficult to fill. He framed this as the natural next phase of a programme that has already changed the trajectory of the region, and urged that serving in these locations be understood as service to the nation rather than as a hardship posting.

On opportunity he was emphatic that the geography which makes the region difficult is the same geography that makes it valuable. Arunachal's wildlife sanctuaries and landscapes can support a genuine tourism economy wherever road access reaches them. He pointed to Anini, headquarters of the Upper Dibang Valley district, set at 1,968 metres in the Mishmi Hills - a place of misty plateaus, cascading waterfalls and a living Idu Mishmi tradition that remains almost untouched. The Mishmi jacket and the wider craft tradition of the region, he suggested, can be built into a durable household income stream rather than remaining only a cultural artefact.

He also placed on record his continuing concern regarding unauthorised population movement in his constituency and across the wider North East, and its effect on the demographic balance and on local small-scale enterprise. He referred additionally to the Kalapani question at the India-Nepal-China trijunction, where the disagreement turns on differing readings of the source of the Kali River as fixed by the Treaty of Sugauli of 1816 - a reminder that questions of the frontier are settled as much by presence and documentation as by cartography.

His specific request to Sewa International was that it work at the real border rather than the accessible second line. He named Taksing, Walong and the Anini belt, and asked that Sewa concentrate its effort on villages along the Myanmar, Nepal, Bhutan and Indo-Tibet frontiers.

3.4 Sh. Ajay Tamta, Union Minister of State for Road Transport and Highways

Sh. Ajay Tamta brought both the perspective of the central Himalayan frontier -

Uttarakhand's boundary with China and Tibet - and that of the Ministry responsible for delivering connectivity to it.

He explained the structural reason frontier roads carry a different cost profile from roads elsewhere. In States such as Arunachal Pradesh, distance, gradient and terrain push the per-kilometre cost far above the national norm, and delivery runs through a chain in which the Union Government allocates the funds and elected representatives at the State level carry the work through on the ground. Understanding that chain, he suggested, is essential to reading progress on the frontier accurately.

Against that background he set out the change of the past decade. The Vibrant Villages Programme is an initiative of the present Government, and road connectivity in the areas it covers has measurably increased. He cited the Adi Kailash initiative, the all-weather road development programme, the connectivity work in the Pithoragarh sector, and the ongoing extension of roads to the last village in Uttarakhand.

He noted that this connectivity has produced a security dividend alongside the development one. Activity that was previously difficult to detect along thinly-served stretches of the boundary is now far better observed and contained, and the Vibrant Villages Programme has in that sense strengthened the security architecture of the frontier as directly as it has strengthened its economy.



3.5 Sh. Shyam Parande, Global Coordinator, Sewa International, and Secretary General, Indian Council for International Cooperation (Antar Rashtriya Sahayog Parishad).



Sh. Shyam Parande supplied the historical frame that gave the evening its perspective. For decades, he recalled, the settled doctrine was that border areas should not be developed at all - the reasoning being that a road built to the frontier would serve an invading force as readily as it served India. The consequence was the sustained neglect of border villages and the communities that held them.

That doctrine, he said, was reversed after 2014. The present Government is the first to treat the development of border villages as a national objective in its own right, and the Vibrant Villages Programme is the institutional expression of that reversal.

He cautioned that gains of this kind require continuous protection in Himalayan

conditions, citing the steel bridge in the Niti Valley washed away in floods - a reminder that disaster resilience and maintenance are part of frontier infrastructure rather than a separate subject.
His central argument was that Sewa's distinctive contribution lies with the communities rather than with the concrete. Every household along the frontier, he said, can be an eye for the nation, and building that awareness is community work rather than government work - a point of particular relevance on the open Indo-Nepal border, where infiltration remains a live concern.

He drew on Sewa's own record in Kutch, where the organisation has worked since 2001, including with Hindu families who came across from Pakistan. Kutch, he argued, demonstrates the model in practice: handicraft and mud-work traditions connected to markets, producers linked directly to buyers, and the local and last-border markets developed as the first commercial layer rather than treated as the last.

He identified community governance and community connect as the space in which Sewa can work most effectively, and singled out one task in particular: linking second- and third-line villages and towns with the frontier villages themselves, so

that the border reads as the head of a corridor rather than as an isolated end-point. Facilities and entitlements exist, he noted; what is often missing is the knowledge of how to avail them. Connecting villages, training people, building awareness of development benefits, and creating employment and empowerment at the household level is work that Sewa is equipped to do and that complements government delivery rather than competing with it.

He closed with the Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 3, Verse 20 –

> **"karmaṇaiva hi saṁsiddhim āsthitā janakādayaḥ, loka-saṅgraham evāpi sampaśyan kartum arhasi"**

recalling King Janaka as the exemplar of perfection attained through selfless action, and the duty of the enlightened leader to act for lokasangraha, the welfare and cohesion of society. Community governance in the border villages, he suggested, is that principle applied to the frontier.

3.6 Sh. Sujeet Kumar, Member of Parliament, Rajya Sabha

Sh. Sujeet Kumar opened with the strategic memory that explains why the frontier cannot be left unattended. He recalled Aksai Chin, and the construction of China's G219 highway across territory India regarded as its own - a project of which India became aware only belatedly, with Shri R.K. Nehru raising the matter at the Chinese Embassy three years after the fact. The lesson he drew was that presence and awareness on the frontier are themselves instruments of national security. A border that is unpopulated and unwatched is a border already conceded.

Against that he set the Kargil experience, where villagers living close to the frontier were among the first to report unusual movement to the authorities. Populated, connected and confident border villages, he said, are a national security asset in the most literal sense, and this is precisely the logic on which the Vibrant Villages Programme rests: the border village programme enhances national security at the same time as it delivers development. He noted that China is investing heavily in model villages across the Line of Actual Control and is actively working to shape sentiment and loyalty in the border belt by displaying state provision to communities on both sides. India's answer, he said, must be development that is visible, saturated and unmistakably its own - which is the Viksit Bharat proposition applied at the frontier. He acknowledged the Border Roads Organisation for the standard of its work in the most demanding terrain in the country.

Turning to method, he made the case for convergence: convergence of schemes leads to saturation of benefit. It is rarely the absence of programmes that limits outcomes in remote villages, but their arrival in isolation from one another, so that no household receives the full basket.

He described his own initiatives within that frame. Vikas 75 game, his initiative built around 75 Government schemes, was designed to make the full basket of entitlements legible to citizens in one place, so that convergence becomes something a village can actually act upon rather than an administrative abstraction. Under the Saansad Adarsh Gram Yojana he has adopted two villages, working them as demonstration sites for the same saturation approach. Odisha, he acknowledged, has no international boundary; but the principle that national development must begin at the village and be measured there holds regardless of where the village sits, and the border village is that principle at its most demanding.

His specific proposal to Sewa International was institutional. He suggested that Sewa expand its fellowship programme to place young people in border villages for sustained periods of real work. A fellowship of that kind, he argued, would build a cadre of young Indians who understand the frontier from the inside, and would give border communities the sustained and skilled attention that short visits cannot provide.



3.7 Vote of Thanks - Sh. Harshit Kumar, Senior Manager, Programs and Public Relations, Sewa International

Sh. Harshit Kumar delivered the vote of thanks. He confirmed that Sewa International will incorporate the suggestions made by the Members present into its programme design, and will continue to work with their offices on the border regions agenda. He recorded Sewa International's thanks to the office of Sh. Sujeet Kumar, Member of Parliament, for partnering in the Dialogue and for making the evening possible.



4. Key Themes Emerging

4.1 A settled national commitment to the frontier

The most significant point of agreement across the evening was that the doctrinal question has been settled. The older view that border areas should be left undeveloped for strategic reasons, articulated as recently as 2010, no longer governs policy. Since 2014 the frontier has been treated as a development priority, and the Vibrant Villages Programme, the designation of first villages beginning with Kibithoo, and the extension of all-weather roads to last villages in Uttarakhand are the visible expressions of that shift. Every speaker, from the Union Minister of State to the civil society practitioners, treated this as the settled baseline from which the next phase begins.

4.2 Infrastructure is the floor, not the ceiling

Roads, power and bridges create the conditions for development but do not by themselves constitute it. Health, education, nutrition, skills and livelihoods are the substance, and these depend on people rather than projects - on teachers willing to serve, on producers connected to buyers, on households that know what they are entitled to. This is the phase of work in which civil society capacity is most useful and most needed.

4.3 Every border carries its own problem

The Dialogue made clear that the frontier is not a single category. The Indo-Tibet and Indo-Myanmar stretches face altitude, distance and cost; the Indo-Nepal border, being open, faces movement and infiltration; the western frontier in Kutch has a settlement and livelihood history of its own. Programme design that ignores this differentiation will underperform. Sewa's presence across several of these geographies is an asset precisely because it allows the differences to be read accurately.

4.4 Convergence, saturation and the household as the unit

The strongest methodological consensus of the evening was that entitlements already exist in sufficient number, and that the binding constraint is delivery in combination rather than in isolation. Convergence produces saturation; saturation produces visible change; visible change produces confidence in the state at the very locations where confidence matters most. The household, rather than the block or the district, is the unit at which this must be measured - and the household is also, as was noted more than once, the nation's first point of awareness along the boundary.

5. Action Agenda for Sewa International

The following agenda consolidates the specific suggestions made by the Members and practitioners present, and is offered as a basis for Sewa International's programme design in the border regions.

Geographic focus

01 Concentrate on villages along the Indo-Myanmar, Indo-Nepal, Indo-Bhutan and Indo-Tibet frontiers, and go to the actual border rather than the accessible second line - with Taksing, Walong and the Anini belt in Arunachal Pradesh named as illustrative starting points, and Kutch retained as the proven western template.

Community connect and entitlement awareness

02 Build a household-level awareness model so that families know which schemes and facilities are available to them and how to access them. This directly complements the convergence and saturation approach of the Vibrant Villages Programme, and turns each household into an informed participant in both development and frontier awareness.

Livelihoods through craft and culture

03 Develop local craft traditions into household income - the Mishmi jacket and Idu Mishmi craft in the Dibang belt, and the handicraft and mud-work traditions of Kutch - with direct producer-to-buyer linkage and the development of local and last-border markets as the first commercial layer.

Border tourism

04 Work with communities to build the hospitality, guiding and homestay capacity that will allow the tourism potential of the wildlife sanctuaries, the Mishmi Hills and locations such as Anini to translate into local earnings as road access improves.

Education and health support

05 Support the human infrastructure of remote schools and health facilities, including through volunteer teaching and awareness cadres framed explicitly as service to the nation, in locations where regular postings are hardest to sustain.

Corridor linkage

01

Link second- and third-line villages and towns to the frontier villages, so that markets, services and skills flow along a corridor rather than stopping short of the boundary.

Disaster preparedness and community resilience

02

Build community-level preparedness in flood- and landslide-prone Himalayan valleys, so that infrastructure gains such as bridges and roads are protected by local capacity as well as by maintenance schedules.

Youth fellowship in border villages

03

Expand Sewa International's fellowship programme to place young people in border villages for sustained periods of substantive work, as proposed by Sh. Sujeet Kumar - building a cadre of young Indians with first-hand understanding of the frontier and giving border communities continuity of attention.



6. The Convening Office and the Way Forward

The Dialogue was made possible by the partnership between Sewa International and the office of Sh. Sujeet Kumar, Member of Parliament (Rajya Sabha), and the alignment between the theme and the Member's own record was evident throughout the evening. The convergence-to-saturation approach that framed the discussion is the same approach that underlies Vikas 75, his initiative built around 75 Government schemes, and the adoption of two villages under the Saansad Adarsh Gram Yojana. The proposition that national development must begin and be measured at the village, and the Viksit Bharat frame within which he placed the border village programme, gave the evening its organising logic.

Three lines of follow-up emerge naturally from the proceedings. The first is programme design: Sewa International to translate the action agenda at Section 5 into a defined set of geographies, interventions and timelines, and to share the design with participating offices. The second is the fellowship proposal, which is the single most institutionally durable idea to come out of the evening and merits early scoping. The third is continuity: this Dialogue should be treated as the first sitting of a sustained platform for parliamentary engagement on border area development, with subsequent sittings convened at intervals and widened to include Members from additional border States and districts.





7. Conclusion

The Parliamentary Policy Dialogue achieved what it set out to achieve. It brought Parliament, Government and civil society into the same room on a subject where all three are indispensable, and it produced not a general endorsement of border development but a specific and usable agenda for the organisation that convened it.

The evening's closing sense was that the hardest argument - whether the frontier should be developed at all - has been won, and that the work now is one of depth rather than direction: to carry development past the road head and into the household, to link the frontier village to the markets and towns behind it, and to ensure that the family living at the boundary experiences the Indian state as present, capable and its own. Border villages are Bharat's first villages, and secure, prosperous, resilient and self-reliant border communities are, on the evidence of this Dialogue, a shared undertaking of Parliament and civil society in the making of a Viksit Bharat.



Annexure: Speakers

- Prof. Kamalakanta Dash, Office of Sh. Sujeet Kumar, Member of Parliament, Rajya Sabha - Introduction and Moderation.
- Sh. Jinesh Lal, Executive Director, Sewa International.
- Sh. Tapir Gao, Member of Parliament, Arunachal East.
- Sh. Ajay Tamta, Union Minister of State for Road Transport and Highways.
- Sh. Shyam Parande, Global Coordinator, Sewa International, and Secretary General, Indian Council for International Cooperation (Antar Rashtriya Sahayog Parishad).
- Sh. Sujeet Kumar, Member of Parliament, Rajya Sabha.
- Sh. Harshit Kumar, Senior Manager, Programs and Public Relations, Sewa International - Vote of Thanks








sewa International
Parliamentary Policy Dialogue
The Shared Role of Public Representatives and Civil Society in the Development of Border Regions
A high-level Parliamentary Policy Dialogue bringing together Hon'ble Members of Parliament, policymakers, development experts and civil society leaders to deliberate on the holistic development of Bharat's Border Regions.
Sh Sujeet Kumar
Sh K.G. Shyam Parande
Border Villages are not Bharat's last villages; they are Bharat's first villages.
August 11th PM 07:00
Maple Hall, INDIA HABITAT CENTRE
Together, let us build stronger partnerships to create secure, prosperous, resilient, and self-reliant border communities, contributing to the vision of a Viksit Bharat.
Please Visit Our Website
www.sewainternational.org







Together, we've sketched stories of change, etching hope into hearts. We want to express our sincere gratitude for your continued support and partnership.

sewa International

Published by :
Sewa International
First Floor, Plot 8, Site 11, near SD Public School,
West Patel Nagar, New Delhi, 110008
contact@Sewainternational.org
www.Sewainternational.org

Follow Us On