



No. In fact, there isn't any other answer to the question in the title except an emphatic "No!".  
And here's why.

Does Goa Need 'Development'?

In Goa, 'development' does not mean an improvement in the quality of life but rampant destruction of natural resources, corruption in various sectors of the administration, and disparities in wealth and opportunities. Further, most of the infrastructure projects built in the name of development rapidly deteriorate after a few years, either because of poor construction quality or the failure to maintain this infrastructure regularly. In promoting development, the Goan exchequer loses money in the short- and long-term.

In the existing situation, Goans are placed in a lose-lose situation. Such public infrastructure as roads (for instance) is indeed needed but a 4- or a 6-lane highway does not need to be built across the rural landscape, making Goa a transit point to facilitate the movement of goods. Thus, the public demand for simple infrastructure, such as 2-lane roads, is, in the eyes of the government, an open invitation for constructing ever larger highways.

Another reason Goa does not need 'development' is that the government is not investing in the maintenance of public infrastructure. In fact, the government is not serious about maintaining or fixing the existing infrastructure. The government bodies build public infrastructure like roads, bridges, parks, and so on, but after a few years, there is hardly any upkeep—leading to many projects turning into white elephants. Thus, the way forward is not more development but the preservation and maintenance of the existing natural and built landscape.

The heavy rains and the subsequent flooding, after a frighteningly dry spell in June, indicates the value of maintaining, in fact nurturing the existing public infrastructure rather than building more roads, highways, and apartment complexes. Despite having inherited a good network of drains, both natural and artificial, Goa's roads and streets get flooded, leading to substantial losses. Such flooding happens not only because of rampant and haphazard construction but also due to the failure of maintaining the existing drainage system.

The images of Panjim flooding "like Bombay" underscores the failure and negligence of the municipality and the concerned governmental authorities. Panjim is such a glaring example of the government's failure to *maintain* existing infrastructure as the city already had a well-designed drainage system before it was torn to bits by piece-meal real-estate development. Panjim's fate is the result of years of neglect together with the Goan authorities allowing the construction of new buildings haphazardly in recent times.

The monsoon season also exposes the poor quality of work of the many mega projects recently commissioned. A couple of weeks ago, and the most recent example of the administration's misguided priorities, a retaining wall of a newly-constructed bridge in Mashem, Canacona collapsed, luckily before it was commissioned. The project consists of a 7.7 km four-lane highway, with three bridges in Galgibaga, Talpona, and Mashem at a whopping cost of 190 crores. The collapse of the wall means not only a wastage of a considerable sum of money and precious natural resources for the construction but also highlights poor quality of work. Many infrastructure projects, such as new highways are not necessarily what Goa needs or something that the people of Goa have demanded.

In contrast to mega highways, and as stated earlier, Goa does need its existing roads to be in proper condition, that is, Goan roads should not end up being washed away after brief spells of heavy rains. But what we observe is that most Goan roads get easily riddled with potholes with the first drizzle of the season. Once the roads get damaged, the authorities take forever to fix them. Even if they do, the job is so shoddily done that the condition of the road does not improve, and the next season washes away the previous year's 'repairs'.

The recent state-wide protest against the proposed Coastal Zone Management Plan (CZMP) is a step in the right direction. The CZMP proposes, amongst other things, to reduce the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) limit from 500 meters to 50 meters—this means more construction activity in eco-sensitive areas if the proposed changes go through. The logical conclusion of such a plan would be more destruction across the coastal and riverine areas, destruction of sand dunes and other mechanisms of nature which help against flooding.

The residents of Goa's coastal and riverine areas have rightly rejected a model of development that is only interested in taking over the coastal resources and making them available for the exploitation by corporations. Instead of the government's plan to intensify construction activity, in other words, development, the people have rejected the move as they do not want the destruction that development and construction activity brings in its wake. With the rejection of the CZMP, as with other such projects, the people have asserted that they want the preservation of the existing natural and built environment and a better quality of life.

Therefore, Goans need to redefine the significance of development radically. As it stands, the vision of both the central and state governments and big businesses is driven by profit for few and the destruction of the Goan landscape. The challenge, then as it is now, is to create an environment-friendly model of public infrastructure beneficial to the public at large.

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