

Tree Fall Gap

Keystone Foundation

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This, and other Keystone publications can be accessed here:

What still stays:

Ecology. Economy. Equity.

Mission:

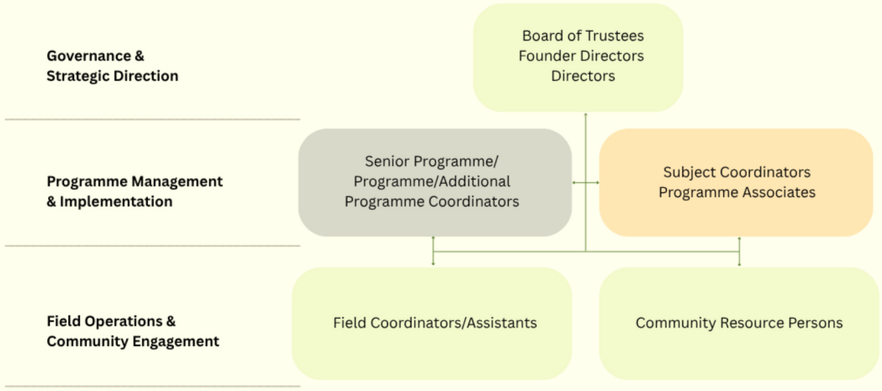
To enhance the quality of life and the environment.

Vision:

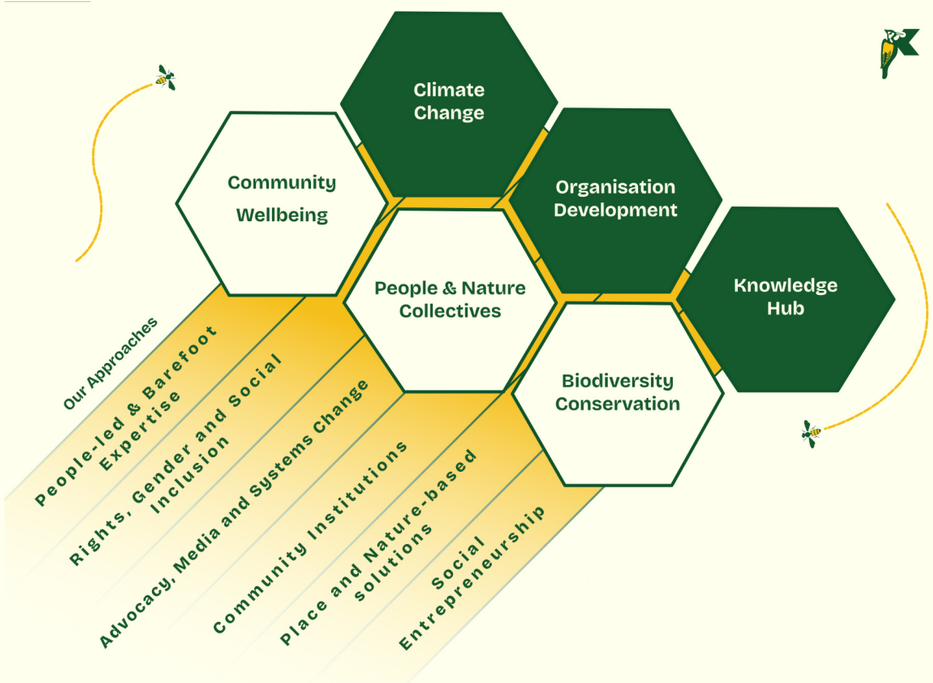
Empowering indigenous people and local communities by building socio-ecological resilience through green growth and sustainable development. To work on issues of natural resource and rural development, and addressing the challenges of conservation, livelihoods, and enterprise development, through appropriate knowledge and action, technologies, socio-economic innovations, and institutions.

Our origin story, history and timeline of Keystone Foundation is captured on our website, and we encourage the reader to go through that/ose section/s to understand the drivers and passion behind the work of the organisation.

ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE



PROGRAMME STRUCTURE



What we work to achieve:



A Recap

Keystone Foundation recently finished 32 years of work as an NGO based in the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve. Broadly, the successes have been:

- New ideas and innovations in eco-development, balancing ecology, economy and equity while building programs on land, water and forests
- Community representation for their rights and knowledge, with our role being to build capacities of leaders and create/strengthen community institutions
- Community based and led conservation practices and initiatives which have integrated streams of science and traditional indigenous knowledge
- Social enterprise model which integrates ecology, equity and economy to empower communities, especially women
- Collaborating with educational institutions, making Keystone a field learning center
- Building advocacy through environmental diplomacy, back-channel approaches and civil society networks
- Pioneering NGO networks, building partnerships and collaborations and participating in relevant forums nationally and internationally, which brings local to global together.
- Strengthening the Organization Development portfolio for enabling transparency and efficiency, best practices and good governance for the NGO sector

Staying Relevant

Some of the key strategies that have helped us throughout the 32 years have been:

1. An external or self-evaluation every 5 years – program and internal management for building a shared leadership and moving with the times. These evaluations have helped us to refocus and realign with the changes in the landscape.

2. Regular and periodic consultations with stakeholders to validate and take on board critical feedback

Keeping the above strengths in mind and drawing from community consultation done in 2023/24, an emerging plan is developed.



Future Pathways

Keystone will be a Resource Centre for ideas, innovation, capacity building, learning, advocacies and conducting new pilots. Towards this overall objective we will build the People and Nature Centre at Kotagiri.

Besides the head office, we will strengthen our Field Centers as places for practical demonstration, community action and local field teams. These will be our field centers of excellence in the respective themes where they have performed best.

Keystone Foundation will engage with students, NGOs, government officials, researchers and other stakeholders to share and learn on themes of common interest.

We will continue to build knowledge collaborations with civil society groups, researchers, universities and institutions, both in India and globally to enable constant learning.





Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve

Continue our existing work BUT give it a new thrust:

1. Extend to other marginalized communities in the area. These are mostly unrepresented communities, migrants, mainly women employed as wage laborers, tea pickers, sanitary workers, etc. Many of them are in the informal sector and need a platform for coming together and accessing better livelihoods, and rights.

2. Cover the Adivasi regions in the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve (NBR) which have been neglected/unrepresented till now – Karnataka part of NBR, Attapady in Kerala, Annaikatty and Boluvampatty part in Tamil Nadu.

3. Increase youth engagement for Adivasi areas through education, scholarships, access to fellowships, courses, jobs, counselling services, linking with relevant opportunities and building skills and perspectives

4. Address the issues of natural resource degradation and climate change – forming strategic partnerships with diverse players to see the work at scale. Forest, water and soil degradation still pose challenges, and our role will be to bring communities to the center of this restoration work.

5. Engage in the development and sharing of knowledge resources involving Indigenous People of the NBR, in an ethically sound manner, aligned with key global principles of Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC), FAIR&CARE principles and Do No Harm. This includes the development of contextually relevant protocols to ensure fair and respectful engagement with diverse knowledge systems which includes- Indigenous Knowledge, local knowledge and conventional scientific knowledge, while empowering Indigenous youths and scholars to become active stakeholders in the process.





Jharkhand

We have experience of working in the state with network partners, individuals and youth associations. In the two multi stakeholder workshops we have had interesting discussions, helping us formulate our work in the state. While it will follow the vision, mission and goals of Keystone Foundation, we will adapt to the needs in the region.

1. Landscape approach to conservation and livelihoods using agro-ecological principles, keeping in focus ecology, economy and equity. This will include re-purposing abandoned mines with restoration and livelihood options.

2. Prioritizing the strength of Adivasi leaders and youth and enabling skilling/ and capacity building of adivasi youth to address their own development agenda. The Youth Leadership course being designed by the People and Nature Collectives team will be applied and adapted to Jharkhand.

3. Building on the Just Transition (JT) study and making Keystone a contributor in NGO networks, advocacy with government, technical advice for JT in alternative livelihoods, community-based conservation, etc.

4. Building programs for landless, non-natural resource bases which focus on green jobs and skilling. Build collaborations with Youth Aid and other similar efforts to see what the key sectors are – renewables, recycling, tech and AI, and other modern applications. This is very important as there is migration and due to excessive mining, many communities are rendered landless or have been relocated.



State level Engagements in Tamil Nadu

Working with government departments aiming to have a Technical Support Unit with Govt of TN, which works with departments which could use our expertise in conservation, livelihoods, Forest Rights Act (FRA), etc. Earlier work with sanitation, and more recent work in the FRA cell with Tribal Development, engagements with Education Departments in Nilgiris & beyond and the UK Pact project and related advocacies have provided a base for this. It will also increase our team capacities to work across different ecosystems and communities.

Technical support will include on the ground assessments and proof of concept initiatives to - support efficient and effective delivery of services by state agencies, or to generate evidence to inform policy or program design, or to develop necessary training and capacity building/awareness material for long-term institutional strengthening.





Women Green Enterprise Hub

Keystone is known for its work and experience with social enterprise development and has incubated Last Forest as a marketing company and Aadhimalai and other Farmer Producer Organisations and Self-Help Groups for community led enterprises. The model has received many accolades and recognitions and is all set for expansion. We will strengthen the Women Green Enterprise Hub in NBR and create similar ones in Jharkhand. Other states in India where this model can work need to be identified and partnerships established for enabling expansion. This is crucial as a landing place for all NGOs who have worked on livelihood programs – as well as for a larger brand building for forest-adivasi products. The model set up by us needs national level outreach and expansion.

Organisational Sustainability

Until now, Keystone Foundation has worked with programs and projects and grown in its outreach and in-depth work covering several themes and geographies. To take this knowledge and experience ahead to the younger generations, Keystone will actively build a corpus fund in the coming years. The corpus is aimed at covering basic institutional costs, while programs teams continue to raise funds for specific activities. Towards building sustainability for the community-based initiatives, Keystone will further strengthen peoples' institutions and its field stations to become hyperlocal hubs of information and knowledge relevant to that region.





Keystone
A GROUP FOR ECO-DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES