

A TREE FALL GAP

The Keystone document

A tree fall gap is a syndrome which takes place in old tropical rain forests. Due to decay, over time, old trees with large canopies fall and create a gap in the canopy. Through this gap, new and young species grow with the help of a sudden stream of sunlight and nutrients. During course of time, these new species get to the canopy and fill up. This is nature's way of keeping a system stable.



Keystone A Group for Eco-Development Initiatives



The concept of “Keystone” emerges from the nest-building behaviour of some birds in nature. These permanent nest structures serve as habitat for several life forms. Such “Keystone” species become crucial in providing opportunities for other associated beings to grow and evolve. Thus, Keystone Foundation is born out of a simple ecological principle of the interdependence of natural systems.

Keystone Foundation has completed ten years in the Nilgiris, working with indigenous communities on eco-development initiatives. The Foundation's work has been concentrated in the areas of apiculture, micro-enterprise development, non-timber forest produce, land and water management, revival of traditional agriculture, and other issues concerning indigenous communities. Since December 2003, when the second external evaluation of the Foundation was completed, a series of steps have been initiated to review our focus, strategy and make changes in the way we function. The external evaluation was followed by two stakeholder workshops in mid-February 2004 - one with representatives of the indigenous communities and another with the Keystone staff team of more than 30 people. In the light of the outcomes of the above processes, this document revisits the earlier vision.

Mission

“Our Mission is to enhance the Quality of Life and the Environment with Indigenous Communities using Eco-development Approaches”

Goal

To work on issues of Natural Resources and Rural Development, with Indigenous People in mountainous and adjoining regions, addressing the challenges of conservation, livelihoods and enterprise development, through appropriate - knowledge & action, technologies, socio-economic innovations and institutions.



Expected Outcomes

Our work with indigenous people is expected to lead to the following outcomes for which the organization will directly be responsible and accountable:

1. Increasing conservation perspectives in our development interventions which are sensitive towards ecological cycles governing natural resources
2. Increasing the availability of viable natural resource-based livelihood options for indigenous people such that they provide sustainable livelihoods and lead to greater self-reliance
3. Enhancing economic status of indigenous people, based on organic and fair trade principles
4. Village groups and institutions taking greater responsibility of managing programmes
5. Sustaining traditional and cultural practices through opportunities provided within programmes
6. Knowledge developed by research and action projects, being owned by communities and put to practice in their livelihood related activities
7. Indigenous people being in a position to dialogue with decision-makers on matters affecting their lives in an effective manner for space in advocacy and policy related issues.

Origins

The beginning was made when we, four core members of Keystone, set out on a state-wide survey of apiculture in Tamil Nadu, in 1994. Trudging miles of mountain paths and dusty roads with backpacks, this field survey gave us the precious opportunity to look at the situation of 11 indigenous communities across 15 hill ranges in Tamil Nadu.

The details of honey hunting techniques, forest vines used, associated traditions and rituals, social systems and economic dependence on such an activity, were a fascinating eye-opener. More importantly, they reflected on changes in land use, dwindling forest cover, introduction of chemical fertilisers and pesticides, and other degradation, posing a growing challenge. Exploring and addressing adivasi issues of development and a natural resource from a local perspective was the key to our discovering a different approach.

Our previous work in honey gathering with the Paliyan adivasi community in the Palni Hills during 1990-1993, suggested that this traditional activity could be an effective entry point to work with indigenous communities centred on natural resources and livelihoods. The survey brought us to the lower Nilgiris, where a number of hunter-gatherer communities practise honey hunting and subsistence agriculture. A potential area for future work and learning materialised and Nilgiris, as a region, was chosen to begin our work.

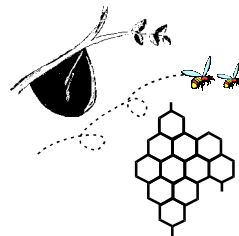
Owing to their specific environmental and resource related features, mountains provide a niche for ecological cycles, human activities, and products and services. While these regions suffer from remoteness, lack of infrastructure and other management and administrative problems, on the one hand, mountains also have potential comparative advantages over the plains in certain kinds of activities and lifestyles, e.g. a specific valley serving as habitat for special medicinal plants, a source of unique products like flowers, fruits and honey or as a source of hydropower. In practice, however, these “niche” advantages do not bear fruit unless conditions are created to harness the potential.

The transformation and management of natural resources in mountain regions pose interesting challenges since:

- * Biodiversity systems tend to be complex
- * Indigenous communities live and depend on natural systems for their livelihood, culture and daily needs
- * Markets and distribution systems are usually governed by outsiders, leading to a skewed distribution of benefits
- * Local ecology and economy govern natural resource management patterns. Issues such as encroachments, land use changes, drying watersheds, human-wildlife conflicts, fading traditions and knowledge assume paramount importance in forming better policies and programmes for the people and resources.
- * Existence of strong vested interests, like plantations and tourism, tend to overlook environmental concerns.

Why Mountain Eco-development?

Eco-development attempts to look at activities that use resources in a sustainable manner to provide people livelihoods and improve the quality of their lives. It combines traditional knowledge and activities with appropriate modern scientific information, and attempts to upgrade living systems with better technologies and methods, village level institutions and enterprises with marketing support.



Programme Areas

Keystone has been working in the last 10 years on Apiculture, Land Development, Organic and Fair Trade Marketing, and Non Timber Forest Produce with indigenous communities. A strategic outlook for the next decade keeping these program areas as the basis to holistically approach the issues of Livelihoods, Conservation & Enterprise was necessary. In the coming 10 years, an integrated approach towards indigenous people will be made through the three programme areas of Natural Resources Management, Enterprise Development and Institutional Development & Local Governance.

Natural Resource Management

- * Apiculture - Honey hunting and Beekeeping - exploring the role and linkage of honeybees and traditional communities in rural development and culture. Understanding the role of bees as biodiversity indicators and pollination agents of wild and cultivated plants.
- * Biodiversity - NTFPs, Conservation & Community - ecological monitoring of NTFPs, harvesting systems and technology, trade and value addition aspects, information and documentation of NTFPs collected and the role of forest communities in conservation.
- * Water Resources - study communities & water management systems in hill areas and their livelihood systems. Implement small drinking water projects for indigenous communities. Research on issues of access, control, use, up-land and low-land water sharing mechanisms and advocate changes in hill water policies.
- * Land Resources - revive traditional agriculture systems with indigenous communities which have a direct contribution to food security and improvement of household nutrition. Implement soil and moisture conservation measures; establish seed banks of threatened hill food species; understand the present trend of growing cash crops against food crops and accordingly design and implement interventions.

Enterprise Development

- * Local Marketing - promote local trade and marketing in local / rural areas with indigenous groups and establish a chain of Green Shops in urban areas. Diversify food, craft and artisan products for larger benefits to primary collectors and producers and build their stake in the enterprise.
- * Certification - initiate organic certification for small farmers to retain the biodiversity in small homestead farms and arrest drastic land use change. Contribute to the knowledge of forest - certification for encompassing biodiversity and cultural practices which go beyond non-chemical presence.
- * Value Addition - add value and generate income at the village level through products brought out from projects and produced & gathered traditionally in farms and forests.



Institutional Development & Local Governance

- Study the traditional organizations amongst indigenous hill communities. Initiate through a participatory process, the establishment of village institutions which will manage, handle and spin-off future activities at the following levels:
- * Producer Groups - village production units value-adding natural resources through training and enterprise development.
 - * Farmer Groups - forest communities that traditionally collect NTFPs and are diversifying into land based activities of high value spices, and food crops.

- * Traditional indigenous institutions - cultural activities or gathering territories, ancestral domains which bind forest communities together. Understand both the historical aspects and the present context and trends to arrive at contemporary, relevant forward-looking institutional models.

The last mentioned programme area will work as a cross cutting thematic input to the Natural Resources Management and Enterprise Development Programmes.

Programme Principles

The following principles will be adopted by all programmes in Keystone:

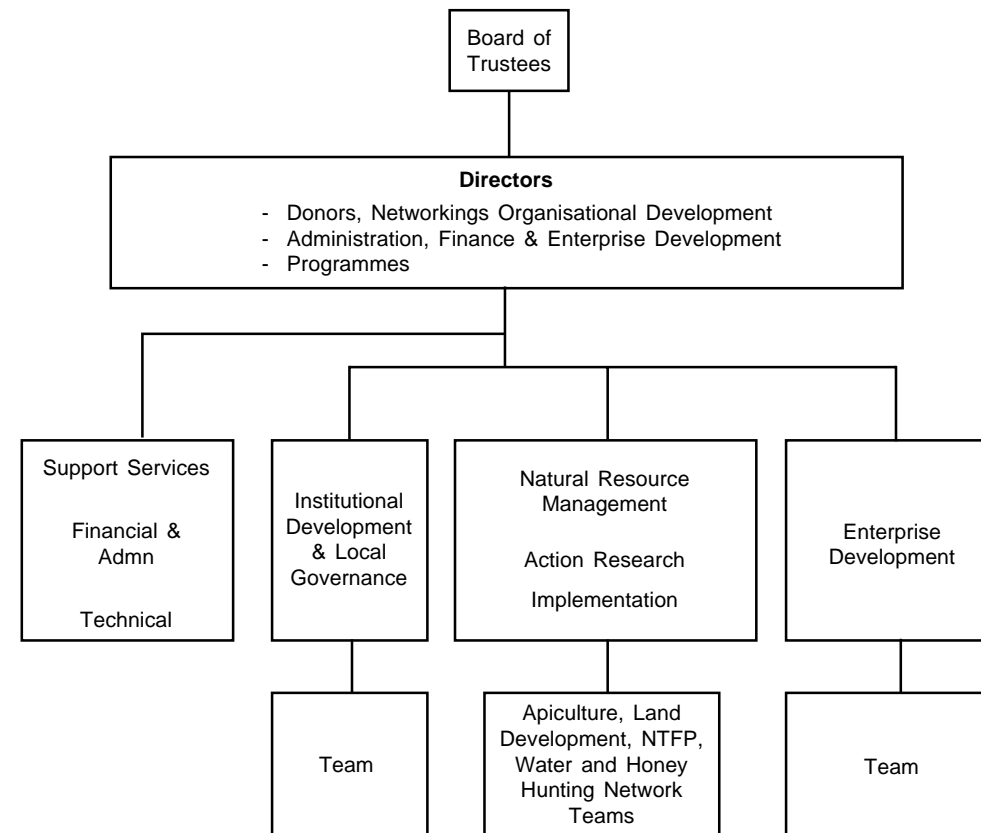
- * Social, gender impacts and analysis along with participatory planning, analysis, management, monitoring and evaluation will be carried out
- * Use and documentation of indigenous knowledge and culture
- * Environmental sensitivity, institutional options for sustainability, and an enterprise orientation
- * Advocacy and policy engagement with different role players
- * Networking for enabling a global-local sharing
- * Integrated and innovative design, approach, technology, process and delivery

Scale and Impact

Keystone’s projects will primarily be located in the Nilgiris Biosphere Reserve covering the states of Tamil Nadu, Kerala & Karnataka. Work shall be also taken up through other partners and agencies in the state of Tamil Nadu and other regions of the country as and when the need and opportunity arises.

Keystone believes in “small is effective/small is global” and hence, wishes to focus on the selected region whereas we will contribute to and learn from partners working elsewhere.

Organizational Structure of Keystone Foundation



Our Partners

Besides the role of Keystone as a group in the local area, it links up, interacts closely and works with many other individuals and institutions working in the same field. Our sharing of experiences and efforts has been mutually beneficial for further learning and application. Some of these partners are:

- a. TARU Leading Edge, New Delhi and Hyderabad
- b. South and South-East Asia NTFP - Exchange Program (Keystone currently holds the Presidency of its Steering Committee)
- c. Bees for Development, Monmouth, U.K
- d. Austroprojekt, Vienna



Our professional associations:

Keystone is a member of:

- * IFOAM - International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements
- * IFFAD: International Foundation for Fair Trade & Development
- * INDOCERT: an Indian Organic Certification and Inspection Agency
- * APIMONDIA - Association of World Beekeepers Federations. Keystone is a Member of the Standing Committee of the Commission on Rural Development.

Keystone members are part of the 'Shola Fellowship', a national network that meets annually to discuss issues relating to philosophy, environment and development.

Donor Partners of Keystone (1993-2003):

- * The Swallows in Sweden, Lund
- * AusAID, Govt. of Australia, New Delhi
- * DFID India, Govt. of U.K., New Delhi

- * Swiss Development Cooperation, Inter-Cooperation, Bangalore
- * Hill Area Development Program, Government of Tamil Nadu, Udthagamandalam
- * The Ford Foundation, New Delhi
- * Winrock International, New Delhi
- * India Foundation for the Arts, Bangalore
- * The Netherlands Committee of IUCN, Amsterdam
- * Small Industries Development Bank of India, Chennai
- * Danish Beekeepers Federation, Denmark
- * Both Ends, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
- * The Global Green Grant Fund, USA

About Keystone

Keystone Foundation, is registered under the Indian Trust Act, 1882, (Registration No.1833 of year 1993). The registered office is at:

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Profile of Founders

Snehlata Nath, MA, Economics : A socio-economist, she has done projects in Delhi, Uttaranchal, Himachal, Tripura, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Bangladesh. At present she is working on local natural resource related problems with indigenous people, in the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve, which involves land development, forest resources conservation, training and value addition of NTFPs. She is Director - Programmes.

Pratim Roy, MS, Ecology: An energy-ecology background, has worked in different regions of Bihar, Tamil Nadu, Himachal, Madhya Pradesh, the Andamans & Nepal. He evaluates programmes and provides strategic and planning inputs in eco-development projects. In the Nilgiris, he works with NRM issues, mainly related to Apiculture and Water Resources. He liaisons and networks with Government, donors and other partners. He is Director - Donors, Networking and Organisational Development.

Mathew John, Rural Management, IRMA: A background in administration & finance for rural development organisations and field projects. He has an active interest in enterprise development and organic certification for small growers. Mathew has varied experience in working on projects in Bihar, Gujarat, Himachal, Andhra, Kerala, Tamil Nadu & Bangladesh. He is Director - Administration, Finance & Enterprise Development.

