



## ROCKY OUTCROPS, SMALL FOOTPRINTS

Redefining Livelihoods and Conservation



REGISTERED & MAILING ADDRESS:

**KEYSTONE FOUNDATION**

Groves Hill Road, P.B.No. 35, Kotagiri, The Nilgiris, Tamil Nadu

Ph: 04266 – 272277, 272977, Fax: 04266 – 272277

WEBSITES: [www.keystone-foundation.org](http://www.keystone-foundation.org) • [www.nilgirisswaterportal.in](http://www.nilgirisswaterportal.in) • [www.shola.in](http://www.shola.in)


E-MAIL: [kf@keystone-foundation.org](mailto:kf@keystone-foundation.org)





THE NILGIRIS BIOSPHERE RESERVE:  
A COMPLEX BIODIVERSITY – LIVELIHOODS – CULTURAL MOUNTAIN ZONE

**KEYSTONE FOUNDATION**  
**1993 -2007 & BEYOND**



**W**e are at a threshold of a new beginning. The origin started in November 1993 when three friends decided to explore the lives of traditional honey hunters and beekeepers in hill areas of Southern India. This opened a whole new world. Back-packing mountain trails for a year, we discovered Kotagiri – a small town in the eastern slopes of the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve and found indigenous people who lived close to cliffs and forests, whose lives merged with nature – well almost. From a small rented place, our exploration began on bees, forests and lives of indigenous people. What began as a humble effort and exploration has now transformed into an institution. The experiences and learning from this place has potential of significant change in man-nature interrelationships. We have a dream to share.

We wish to explore partnerships with like minded organizations, individuals who want to be part of this adventure. To make things happen, we are now looking to source funds towards a corpus of 2.5 million USD for the next 5 years. We have a story.

THE NILGIRI BIOSPHERE RESERVE (NBR) was declared as a Biodiversity Hot Spot by UNESCO, 1986 under its Man & Biosphere Programme. Located in Southern India, NBR straddles the forests-river basins of Kerala, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu provinces - one of the few places on earth that are significantly diverse in ecology, economics, societies and cultures in a span of a few hours of travel time...

This zone has 7 main ecosystems including sholas, grasslands, wetlands, agriculture systems in the plateau, evergreen forests, moist and dry deciduous forests and riparian areas in the foothills. Given the geography and high rainfall area, a number of streams and rivers are found which have been converted into reservoirs at various altitudinal levels for tapping kinetic and potential energy sources. Plantation economy has boomed here since 1875 when the British introduced tea, coffee, rubber, cardamom and other spices.

*With an area of 5520 square kilometers, 3700 plant species and 684 vertebrate species, of which 156 are endemic, 100 species of mammals, 350 species of birds, 80 species of reptiles and amphibians and the list goes on. Juxtaposed on this are 200,000 adivasis – Indigenous People from 14 distinct ethnic tribal groups and another 300,000 non-advasis who are directly or indirectly engaging through economy, ecology, social and cultural forces.*



## MOUNTAINS, PLANTS & PEOPLE



## ISSUES & LEARNINGS FROM THE FIELD



- Most of the land in NBR is owned by the Forest Departments of the three states. Access laws and issues to Non Timber Forest Produce vary from state to state. Markets have made inroads into this zone only since the early 1900s: Earlier a barter lifestyle, the economy has changed to a wage-gathering subsistence one.
- Disease, health issues have linkages to the ecology and the food habit. This has changed due to customs and modernization processes. Mortality is high amongst primitive tribal groups, till date – they remain vulnerable.
- Due to lack of numbers compared to non-tribal state populations (e.g., dalits) – they do not have political clout.
- Their intrinsic behavior of shyness and remoteness makes them most of the time out of the orbit of popular government schemes.
- They remain marginalized and mankind loses a chance to preserve, develop, conserve and innovate systems of delivery, interventions to a group of people who are found nowhere on earth. They are endemic to this zone.
- Protection alone through limited protected area systems of parks, sanctuaries cannot be sufficient to engage these populations in a culture that is forward-looking, in an economy that is small yet significant and an ecology that is adapting.
- There are several role players – Forest Departments, Traders, Plantation companies (Tea, coffee, cardamom and other spices), Tourism, Migrant Labour, Tamil repatriates, Schools and Research Institutions, Agriculture and other services like hydro power, electricity, roads and communication and large, medium and small settlements. Each of them has a huge stake in this environment.
- Indigenous People being small in number have to team-up with biodiversity to highlight their issues.
- Contexts rapidly defer – large differences in small spaces – this is a very diverse zone. Land use, culture and patterns of lifestyles differ from area to area.

- Conservation Enterprise, can it have an answer for the future for sustainable livelihoods?
- Given that this is truly a challenging zone in all terms – can research, training, capacity building, value addition of local resources, innovation in health and education which has contexts, discovery trails of new species, new business models for small, natural and home stead enterprises. Can all this be in a mosaic which has recognition and markets and local branding make a significant contribution?
- Culture, Biology, Health are linked – the inter linkages with forest people is high. How do we build the bridges – which has sensitivity and robustness to set up ecological homes and clinics which have forest gardens that produce the ingredients for the cure.
- How do we make the system work in a sustainable manner? So that knowledge and experience of generations is not lost due to lack of imagination, insight and feeble decision-making.



## EMERGING INSIGHTS TO ADDRESSING ISSUES





## LOCAL INITIATIVES: GLOBAL OUTCOMES

Conservation, Livelihoods and Enterprise in hill areas and adjacent plains – foothills needs a special economical, ecological and political status. Natural resources that occur in this zone require special management and tools. Take the example of Non Timber Forest Produce – there is a huge ayurvedic industry combined with tourism that has established and expanding from Kerala. Conservation concerns of species and products harvested, sustainability issues are often neglected. By traditions products from these areas have found their way into medicinal and pharmaceutical industry in the plains. Issues of harvest rights, collection royalties, indigenous knowledge of these products – where it is found, who collects and when. These are local livelihood issues that need to be addressed so that there is more industry-conservation – livelihoods linkages and collaboration.

Like NTFPs, there are several natural resource issues which have a niche that needs to be cultured, protected, and developed. There are issues of tenure and ancestral domains which need to be taken into account and also a whole range of produces, processes which are cultural, subsistence-oriented, have 'other' values than markets and trade. How to work on these in a sensitive and broad-based manner?

Aspects of culture, music, arts, crafts and lifestyles need to be documented, displayed, used and appreciated in appropriate ways so that it is not lost with land use changes and other real estate developments and urban-rural infrastructure.

Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve: Mountain Knowledge Centre

Create the NBR Centre where all the above is happening practically – through teams, business, research, community initiatives, advocacy and action.

·The NBR Centre becomes a grassroots, forward-looking, centre of excellence using the best of science, ideas, markets, enterprise combined with a deep understanding of local contexts and culture. Keystone facilitates this through people, projects, training, capacity building, and some seed money. For South Asia this mountain centre becomes a place of practical learning about lesser known mountain issues, communities, ecology and economics – which need a new approach to "main-streaming". Local benefits, global knowledge

Governance is a sector that we need to engage – be it forest

governance or governance related to rural people and natural resources.

This Mountain Centre becomes a policy think-tank for bridging reality with perceptions.

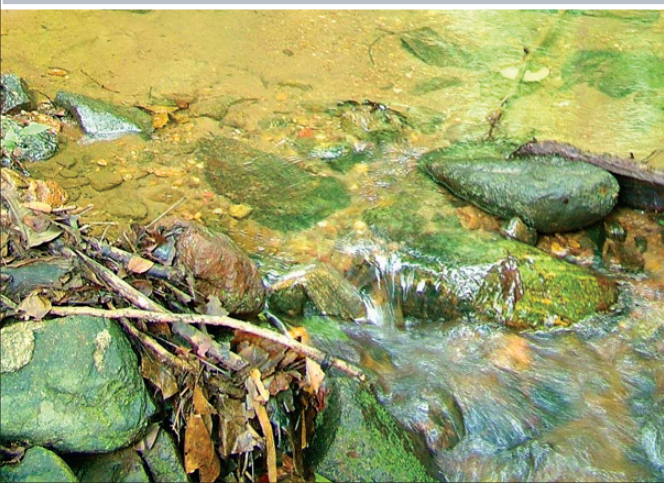
We want to broad-base the debate of the Environment / Ecology / Indigenous People. Today it finds little recall. It does not carry the funds / political mileage of Information Technology / Special Economic Zones for example. How to relate it to all in the coming 10 years? How to make it tick with youngsters, school children, and village folks – how to create a smart profile in this sector – that urban, rural people take it up with passion and initiative.

Create a living field university – where learning is by doing and experiencing. A place where politics of the local, the regional, the national and global is understood, analyzed, put in context. Where institutional memory and experience is constantly updated, revised and put back into action like a reservoir of talent and application filled up after use. For example if it is the NBR – the states of Kerala, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu – the three leading southern states have to be fully understood – what do they know about this zone? How to make it their priority? How can NBR leverage on the Western Ghats and other mountain systems in South Asia – Hindu Kush Himalayas, Eastern Ghats to bring in more attention, to approach issues in different ways and talk about healthy peaceful robust mountain environments – which provides services and goods to plains and nearby economic corridors.





## KEYSTONE FOUNDATION: WHO WE ARE? WHY SUPPORT US?



### Introduction

Keystone Foundation [www.keystone-foundation.org](http://www.keystone-foundation.org) has been working in the heart of the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve since February 1995 on Natural Resources Management, Enterprise Development and Institutional Development and Local Governance with local communities – mainly honey hunters. The implemented projects in the fields of Environment & Development have been with specific reference to mountain ecosystems and indigenous communities. We have a team of 40 persons from diverse backgrounds, which include:

### Disciplines: Grassroots Science

Indigenous Knowledge – Culture, Ecology, Anthropology, Ecology, Botany, Socio-Economy, Rural Management & Development, Extension Systems, Forest Management, Enterprise & Marketing, Geographical Information Systems, Computer Science, Mathematics & Statistics, Entomology, Design & Use of Local Materials, Field Engineering & Renewable Energy.

### What do we want to become?

Keystone Foundation becomes a centre for excellence in the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve/Western Ghats, demonstrating methods & community action for conservation, enterprise and livelihoods

### Why Support?

Currently Keystone Foundation works in 46 tribal villages (what population?) directly through its programme on Non Timber Forest Produce – Conservation & Development; Water & Wetlands Resources; Land Development – Agriculture; Enterprise Development; Developing Village Institutions; Local Capacity Building. There is a significant demand for expansion to other areas of the NBR. There is also a good collaboration with the Forest Departments and Village Forest Councils in the areas of training and capacity building. With this support we can reach out to a larger area and population and make an impact that is tangible. At a National scale – the NBR is being brought centre-stage as a model for harmonizing conservation – development issues in an ecologically rich yet threatened zone.

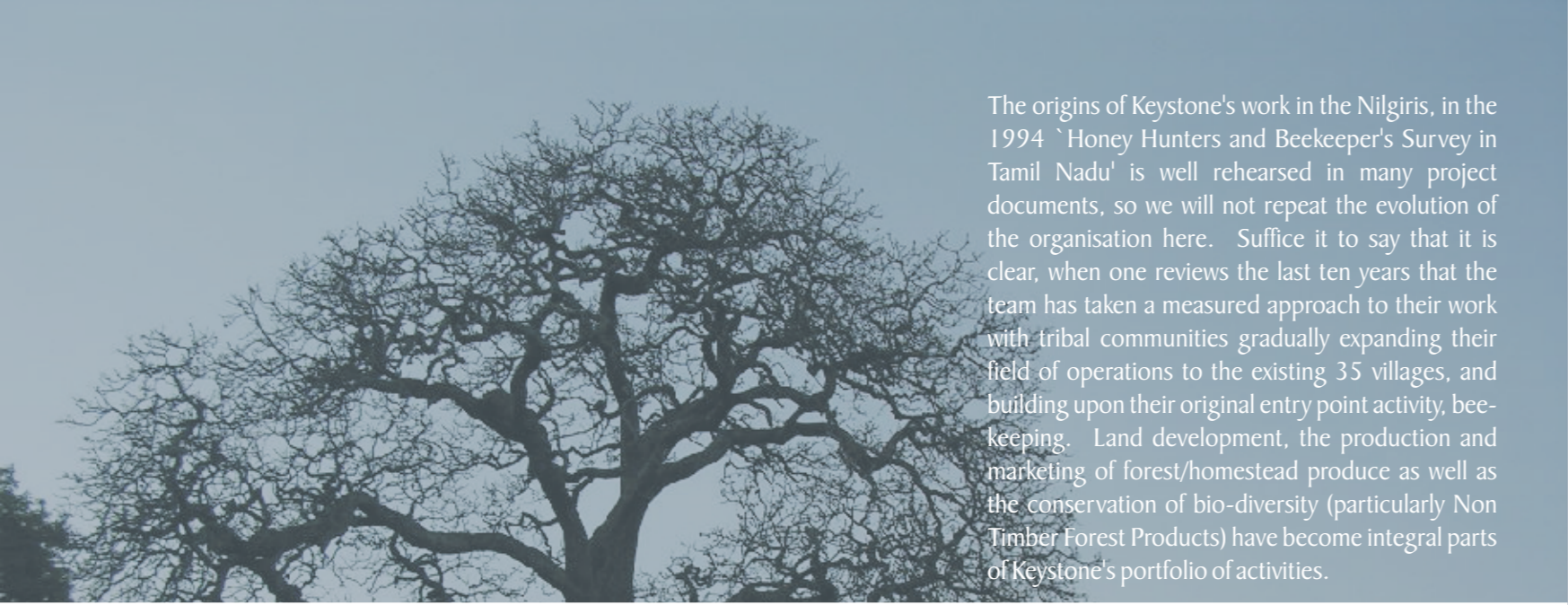
### What is the Rationale?

Since 1995, Keystone Foundation which started as a 4 member team in three villages have significantly grown to address more than 15,000 tribal people today in 46 villages through a team of 43 persons. The complex field of Conservation, Enterprise and Livelihoods are being addressed through several initiatives – which have been successful. It has gained international and national recognition as a NGO that works in the interface of practical action, applied research and enterprise – a rare combination for sustaining this effort since 1995. There is a need to develop this institutional framework and ethos so that the multi-disciplinary approach, the results on the ground, the potential of replication in other parts of the world / country where forests – indigenous people co-habit is possible.

### What impacts?

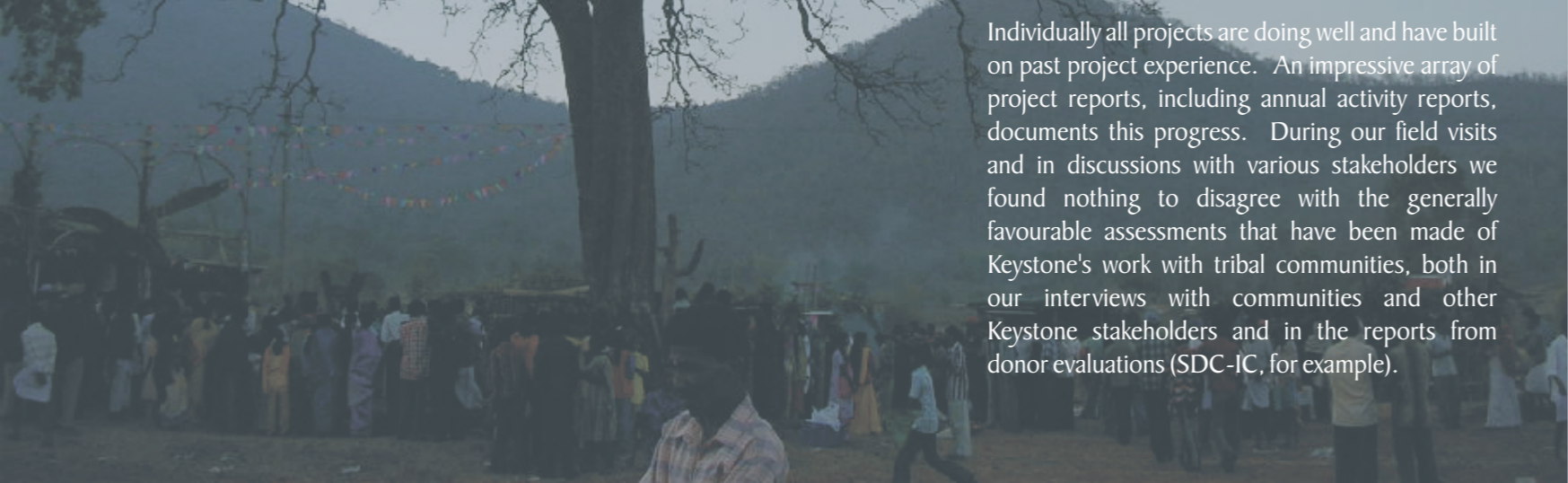
Livelihood options are available through the establishment of production centres in the villages which deal with a range of NTFPs – honey, gooseberry, grasses, beeswax, nuts, fruits, handicrafts. The guarantee for a better price for homestead products and promotion of organic, fair trade practices have led to sustainable practices and increased purchasing power. Basic needs intervention in drinking water supply, micro-irrigation and protection of wetlands and nurseries have helped the natural resource base. In 1995 we picked 250 kgs of honey from one village – today we deal with 16 tons of honey from a large network of honey hunters and beekeepers. Our work has spread to other parts of South – South East Asia through the NTFP Exchange Programme – where indigenous community leaders have had hands-on training and exposure from our 10 year+ experience. Similar efforts through networks are taking place in Orissa, Chattisgarh, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Kerala.





The origins of Keystone's work in the Nilgiris, in the 1994 'Honey Hunters and Beekeeper's Survey in Tamil Nadu' is well rehearsed in many project documents, so we will not repeat the evolution of the organisation here. Suffice it to say that it is clear, when one reviews the last ten years that the team has taken a measured approach to their work with tribal communities gradually expanding their field of operations to the existing 35 villages, and building upon their original entry point activity, bee-keeping. Land development, the production and marketing of forest/homestead produce as well as the conservation of bio-diversity (particularly Non Timber Forest Products) have become integral parts of Keystone's portfolio of activities.

EXCERPTS FROM KEYSTONE FOUNDATION Evaluation 1993 – 2003, Janet Seeley & Bharat Krishnan, p 11.



Individually all projects are doing well and have built on past project experience. An impressive array of project reports, including annual activity reports, documents this progress. During our field visits and in discussions with various stakeholders we found nothing to disagree with the generally favourable assessments that have been made of Keystone's work with tribal communities, both in our interviews with communities and other Keystone stakeholders and in the reports from donor evaluations (SDC-IC, for example).

**What are the indicators that have worked? What are the challenges?**  
 An enterprise approach to conservation has worked to some extent. Working with indigenous groups through traditional systems of governance is a way forward – but it is taking time. Field research and application which can be embedded to local use, collection protocols, harvesting techniques is a winning point as the linkage of sustainability is quite evident. Exposures, study tours, bringing in appropriate tools and techniques and methodologies of work team building, appreciative inquiry is also helping in many ways to develop and tap potential of so many who have not had necessarily conventional educational system.

**Challenges are:**  
 To build village institutions those are robust.  
 To work in partnership with Government.  
 To play an active role in markets that impact marginalized people.





A SAMPLING OF MOST CURRENT PROJECTS  
/DONORS/FUNDING VOLUMES  
(April 1<sup>st</sup> 2006 – 31<sup>st</sup> Mar 2008)



- Poverty Alleviation of Hill Communities – Working Through Local Biodiversity, Livelihoods and Enterprise - Ford Foundation – Phase II – US \$ 254,200; Phase III – US \$ 300,000
- Bees, Biodiversity & Forest Livelihoods: Darwin Initiative, Defra, Govt. of UK, University of East Anglia, Overseas Development Group, Bees for Development, Centre for Agri-Environment Research, University of Reading, US \$ 40,000
- Wetlands Conservation & Local Development - Netherlands Committee for IUCN — US \$ 36,500
- Nilgiris Water Resources Project – Swallows in Sweden - US \$ 96,000
- Polavaram Project, Andhra Pradesh – Both Ends, Netherlands US \$ 10,000
- Bastar Project – Both Ends, Netherlands \$ 5,000
- Non Timber Forest Produce Exchange Programme – India Network – Cord Aid - Phase I – \$ 161,350; Phase II - \$ 487,000
- Honeyhunters of the Western Ghats – Siemenpoo Foundation, Finland \$ 13,900
- Ecology of Invasive and role in hydrology – International Foundation for Science, Stockholm - \$ 11,500
- Revolving Fund for Village Production Centres – DOEN Foundation, Netherlands - \$ 48,900
- Community Based Ecological Monitoring – IDRC, New Delhi – \$ 93,500
- The Cycads Society \$ 2,500

- Traditional Agriculture Revival; Documentation & Revolving Fund – Swiss Development Cooperation – IC - \$ 41,000
- Beekeeping for Sustainable Livelihoods – Bees for Development US \$ 20,000
- NTFPs – Wild Certification and Improving Marketing Channels – Sir Dorabji Tata Trust US \$ 171,000
- I. Bee Museum Tzedakah Trust US \$ 21,000
- Villages of NBR where we work: (population, projects, gender distribution, year started, type of indigenous community) a table with all the details

Region	Number of Villages	Community	Families	Working since
Sathyamangalam	10	Irula, Solega, Kurumba	500	2005
Sigur	7	Irula, Solega, Kurumba	400	2000
Coonoor	9	Irula, Kurumba	158	1995
Nilambur	5	Kattunaicken Cholanaicken, Paniya	180	2005
Pillur	10	Irula	160	2000
Kotagiri	14	Irula, Kurumba	150	1995

