

What we do to water, we do to ourselves and the ones we love" -
Ancient Mayan saying

Splash

October 2009

Is Gen Next more
environmentally conscious?



New media and
development

Can we stand up to the challenge?



Dying tigers,
hidden numbers





Photograph by Anshu Arora

**We cannot always
build the future for
our youth, but we
can build our youth
for the future.**

Franklin Delano Roosevelt

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Thirteen month guarantee



Prime Minister Manmohan Singh announced at the Planning Commission meeting on 1st September 2009 that India is in a “very strong position to manage the consequences of drought”. He laid emphasis on the fact that India had “very high” levels of food stocks. A buffer stock of 50 million tonnes of food grain he pointed out, is enough to meet the requirements of Public Distribution System (PDS) for 13 months.

While I appreciate the PM’s need to stay optimistic and calm any panic arising from what is now termed by some experts as the worst-ever drought that India has faced since Independence, the assurance of the country’s food security for 13 months is hardly comforting, given the history of India’s ability to cope with past droughts, hunger and malnourishment, despite good buffer food stocks. Persistent and pervasive food and nutrition insecurity and stagnating agriculture productivity, in addition to the growing water crisis, mounting new environmental challenges with prolonged periods of droughts, erratic rainfall, and higher than normal temperature requires more than a 13-month guarantee.

During the drought of 2002, despite a 60 million tonne surplus in food grains, newspapers reported 18 chronic hunger and deprivation deaths, which included 12 children, in Rajasthan’s Baran district as a result of breakdown in the delivery of government and state aid to hunger-stricken rural areas. The 2009 drought has already claimed at least 20 lives in Palamu, Jharkhand from hunger, according to reports in the September 16-30th 2009 issue of Down To Earth. The failures, abuse, and rampant corruption in the PDS (which means the food never reaches the poor), is well reported. More importantly, many of the poor do not even have ration cards.

The Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission, Montek Singh Ahluwalia, in his presentation at the same Planning Commission meeting on 1st September, highlighted the fact that the impact of drought could lead to a fall in growth, and said strong rebound is possible if the monsoon in 2010 – 11 is normal. Further assurances were on offer from the Finance Minister, Pranab Mukherjee who said India will import food grains, pulses and step up purchases of edible oil in global markets to boost its buffer stocks as a prolonged dry spell threatens to shrink supplies.

This optimism and assurances of our food security are wholly dependent on nature’s generosity and imports from abroad. But as we are now all experiencing, nature’s generosity has been undermined by our own actions – the change in climate is our own making; lack of water in our lakes, rivers and wells is our own creation; the pollution in our water and soil is a direct result of our polluting behaviour. So we cannot now blame it on nature if the monsoon next year and the year after is not “normal” and we once again suffer from food and water insecurity and further deprivation for our country and its people.

It is indeed a blessing from nature that the country received good rainfall in the later part of September and no doubt the recent downpour will help in reviving some of the dried out tanks and wells and help in the recharge of the aquifers. But the ability for agriculture to positively gain from nature’s generosity will largely depend on how well we have prepared our ground to receive this rain and store it to mitigate the severity of the drought.

This will only happen in areas that have invested in water harvesting structures, rejuvenated and protected the traditional water bodies such as tanks, channels and streams, protected forests and watersheds. Following the continuous good rainfall in September, the watershed area Svaraj is working in, farmers informed us of filling up of the local tank (Chikkarayappannahally), in the upper catchments of River Arkavathi in rural Bangalore. The farmers are celebrating in anticipation of a few more days of good rainfall which will lead the tank to overflow, kicking off the water flow in the traditional cascading tank system built in centuries past to help agriculture in the region.

Anupam Mishra says, “*Akele nahin aata akaal.*” He makes the point that the drought of good ideas and practices, and abundance of bad ones precedes such calamities. He quotes the example of Alwar in Rajasthan, which gets 25-26 in. of rain, which has been halved in the current season. In spite of this, as a result of 27 years of work in that area the effect of drought is not severe. Tushar Shah et al, writing in the Economic and Political Weekly, 12 September 2009, advises “If every village were to construct five new water harvesting and recharge structures, and de-silt existing ones, it will be better prepared to survive the next drought when it comes.”

But without a comprehensive and integrated long term vision for water, food and livelihood security, a coherent strategy and adequate investments in agriculture and the protection of the ecosystem in India with the direct involvement of the community, there can be no long term guarantees.

That the youth of today need to wake up to their sense of responsibility in response to the crisis of climate change is reported in the cover story by Samira Prasad, while Jayalakshmi points out in “Tell us what you think” that the youth need to be educated and capacitated to take up the cause for society at large.

Bharti Patel
Director

Dying tigers, hidden numbers

Dr N S Prashanth

The official website of the Panna Tiger Reserve displays the pugmarks of a tiger on its homepage. It carries a nice news ticker about one of the many awards it has got from the Ministry of Tourism of the Government of India for being the best maintained tourist-friendly national park of the country. Panna is a fairly small one among the national parks in the country but it is one of the most sought after places for those interested in spotting tigers.

The media recently reported that the tiger whose marks the website bears are not found in the park anymore. A survey conducted in December 2008 by the Wildlife Institute of India and several reports in March stated the possibility of Panna doing a Sariska (another famous park which had lost all its 22 tigers by 2007). The National Tiger Conservation Authority sent a team to investigate what the State Government had been attributing to natural deaths of tigers. It was only in June this year that the Chief Minister accepted publicly that there were no tigers in Panna.

On July 17 2009, an article in *The Pioneer* stated that a report by the Wildlife Crime Bureau (WCB) attributed the tiger deaths in Panna to radio collaring. The report had attributed 80 per cent of tiger deaths in Panna, who had met their deaths at the hands of poachers to radio collaring. It however glossed over the fact that their fates became known only because they were radio-collared, thus making science the scapegoat.

Radio collaring and tracking of wildlife is widely used for scientific studies, management and conservation of several species across the world - from birds to camels and from turtles to tigers. In fact, critical questions on behaviour and ecology of large mammals become evident only through such methods. Tracking tigers by radio collaring has given us an understanding on important questions such as home ranges, carrying capacity of tigers in the continuously shrinking reserves, causes of mortality and the reasons and consequences of conflict with people. Latest techniques such as camera-trapping and radio-collaring are increasingly being used in India following their widespread application in several African countries.

Tiger, being the national animal in fact is an umbrella species with several critical habitats gaining state protection because of the presence of tigers in them. The extinction of tigers at Sariska Tiger Reserve spurred the Government to establish *The Tiger Task Force* which reviewed the situation of tigers all over the country. It accepted that population estimation techniques relying purely on tiger pugmarks were outdated. Several studies have underscored the need for

supplementing older methods like pugmark counts with modern techniques like camera-trapping. Periodic and accurate estimates of tiger numbers in our dwindling tiger reserves, along with research on their ecology using radio collaring provides critical information that wildlife managers need to protect tigers.

In Panna Tiger Reserve, a total of eight tigers were collared and the last one collared was over five years ago. While it is legitimate to further investigate the type of collars used



Radio collaring

A technique where animal movements are tracked by means of a non-intrusive collar with a radio transmitter

Tranquiliser dose, collar weight are standardised and internationally accepted guidelines govern these

Animals are tranquilised by scientists and then collared, much like the collars used on domestic pets

Ideal for tracking elusive mammals such as tigers and animals migrating large distances like elephants

Widely used across the world in wildlife management, scientific research and mitigating conflict between wildlife and people

and safety of tranquilizers used, the conclusion of WCB is illogical. The WCB committee has not involved scientists with experience in radio collaring. Nor did it do an analysis of the equipment and data obtained from radio-collaring in Panna and elsewhere. The declaration of radio-collaring as a reason for tiger deaths discredits a huge body of scientific literature about this technique worldwide.

The developments at Panna display lack of an information culture, and poor scientific temper in state institutions. The usual reaction to smaller tiger numbers reported by trained people outside the system is retribution. This attitude in the bureaucracy results in reluctance on the part of the field staff to truthfully report information and act on it. Routine institutional data focuses merely on portraying a sense of status-quo or sometimes improvements rather than providing actionable information that should feed into management.

The facts are that Panna lost its tigers not on the day when the Chief Minister accepted it, but over years of poaching and that radio-collaring as a technique for conservation and

management with well-established safety guidelines, and is widely accepted. Viewing the tiger extinction in Panna as an isolated event owing to errant forest guards or radio collaring is illogical. Rather the focus should be on examining the socio-political, economic and biological reasons for decline. The survival of tigers depends on a complex inter-play between factors such as protection, human-animal conflict, irresponsible tourism and poverty.

There is huge money to be made from killing tigers to meet the demand from China and other countries for tiger products. Criminal enterprises are at work in a systematic way to wipe out tigers. This network includes powerful middlemen in large Indian cities as well as highly skilled local people lured into using superb tracking and trapping skills for poaching tigers. This combination is an important reason for loss of tigers in Sariska, Panna and several other parks. Transferring forest officers, suspending guards and blaming radio-collaring are non-solutions.

As long as we continue to produce poor quality data within state

institutions, it is only logical for the Government to encourage applied research and act quickly on the issues that the scientific community brings up. The forest department is more closed to science and research than any other department today. Permissions to work in protected areas on important conservation activities are rarely based on the merit of the proposal but on whether it will report poor tiger numbers or dwindling habitats. Where researchers have been candid with their findings, they have only been faced with cancellation of permits.

The day has to come when forest officers in a protected area are empowered enough to publicly discuss issues in national parks and network strongly with the scientific community, rather than play with numbers. We saw this with Sariska and now with Panna. And these are the parks we know about.

Prashanth is an MMBS from Mysore Medical College. He has a strong passion for wildlife sciences and works closely with several wildlife and conservation NGOs. He is also an avid birdwatcher and writes regularly on birds and wildlife.

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‘Be The Change’

Conference on Food, Health and Climate Change by Bhoomi Network

(December 4th & 5th, 2009 at St. John’s Auditorium, Koramangala, Bangalore)

This conference is focussed on dissemination of the harmful effects, including behavioural problems and learning difficulty, caused by junk / processed foods, particularly on children in schools and colleges.

The conference is aimed at heads of educational institutions, parents and others with a view to encouraging a ban on processed foods and colas in campuses and appealing to the Government for effective regulatory bodies for processed and GM Foods. An additional focus at the conference would be on healthy alternative foods - organic cereals and vegetables, healthy fats and unpolished cereals. Speakers at the conference include Dr. Vandana Shiva, Shri Satish Kumar, Dr. Shekar Seshadri, Dr. Vijaya Venkat, Ms. Sumitra Gautama (The School, KFI, Chennai).

To register, visit: www.bhoomiconference.org

Is Gen Next more environmentally conscious?

Samira Prasad

Indian Youth Climate Network (IYCN) is a society of dedicated youth working across the Indian subcontinent to raise awareness on the issue of climate emergency and link grass roots mitigation and adaptation solutions to national and international policy. Soren (24), Research Director, IYCN says, “The time has come for action, it is imperative that we give our best during these productive years of our lives. Awareness is the first step to creating change.”

Best intentions aside, what is the situation? How deeply is the youth really involved in combating climate change? Splash attempted to find out through an informal survey. Both rural and urban respondents were asked basic questions to gauge their awareness on and commitment to the issue of climate change...

“Climate change; it’s like the earth has got fever”- Rajesh (21)

“Climate change? Yes, I have heard about it. People cut down trees; there is less water in the lakes now. All this happens because there are more sunrays entering the earth. Because of this water gets evaporated and living creatures die.” - Shiva (25), Madurana Hosahalli, 13 kms from Doddballapur near Bangalore.

“I have never heard of climate change or global warming before. Where the use of plastics is concerned, I am aware that it is bad for the environment but I don’t take any measures to reduce my consumption. Everybody uses them.” - Lekha (22) a diploma holder in engineering, presently working as a technician in Gadag.

“Environmental consciousness comes from within. By instinct I switch off fans and lights when I leave a room and opt for cloth bags to avoid use of plastic if I can help it.” - Piyali Sharma (28), PR and corporate communications executive, Bangalore.

“Our earth is at the tipping point and the cause is our growing population and irresponsible behavior. It irks me when I read about households that own several cars. I do not believe that a family of four needs more than one car to get by, no matter how rich or successful they are.” - Anirudh Mehta, a final year law student.

These are some of the responses that emerged from informal interviews with a cross section of people from urban, semi-urban and rural settings. The interviews revealed that urbanites are probably a little more conscious and aware than rural people of threats to the environment, and the challenges posed to it by climate change and other issues. The cause for greater awareness among the urban population could be attributed to greater access to information and greater levels of literacy.

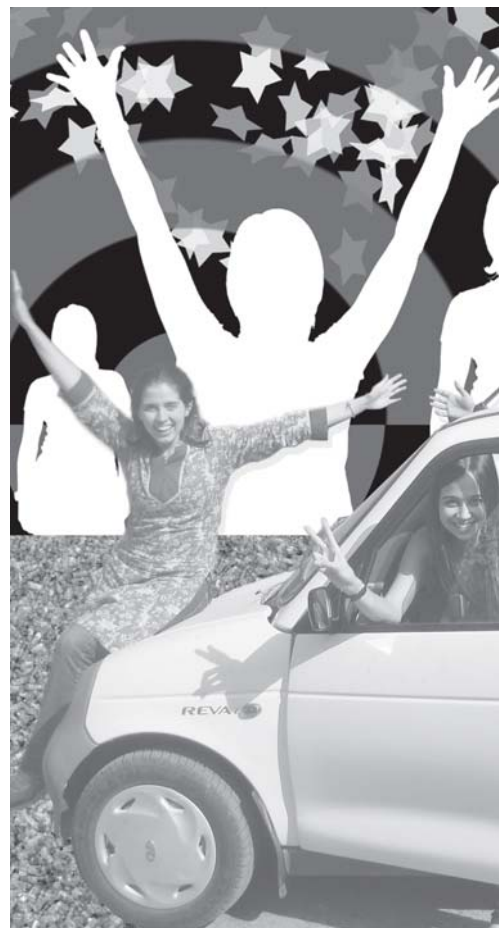
There are several questions however. Has increased awareness among the youth helped? Has that awareness made a difference? Is it enough

to be aware? Should that not be followed by action? The youth of today has an abundance of choices and a lot more freedom to exercise those choices. It is however that very freedom that has placed greater responsibilities on them to use those choices well. Are they doing it?

This piece attempts to explore whether Gen Next appreciates the huge responsibilities it carries in order to ensure that the coming generations will continue to enjoy a healthy world.

Climate change – should youth be worried?

One of the most debated topics of the century is climate change. Is it a myth or a real threat? In the last few decades, reports and assessments of scientific evidence have shown that the earth’s climatic balance has been disrupted greatly as a result of human activity. Changes in rainfall patterns; rise in average temperatures and changes in monsoon timings will affect India’s entire environment, particularly the agricultural sector.



According to a report by the UNDP titled “Climate Change Impacts and India”, India is already facing climate related problems like desertification, floods, threat to biodiversity and frequent natural disasters. The report states that “...global warming has caused the Himalayan glaciers to shrink at the rate of 10 to 15 mts per year. This rapid melting of the Himalayan glaciers will first increase the volume of water in rivers, causing widespread flooding, but in time the situation will change and the water levels in rivers will decline causing water shortage for 500 million people in South Asia. As a result of the changes in the average temperature, forests will dieback, thus endangering a significant number of plant and animal species...”



Despite the fact that these and other findings indicate the need for urgent action, evidence shows there is little commitment from the youth towards change. According to the findings from a survey titled “Young India and Climate Change” conducted by the British council in four major cities in India (Kolkata, Mumbai, Delhi and Bangalore) on youth between the age of 18-35, in Oct 2008., 83 per cent were aware of climate change but only 12 per cent were willing to fight it. These statistics show that there is a serious lack of urgency and motivation from people to act against this global disaster.

Gen Next- the agents of change?

India, a country with the world’s oldest civilization, is also home to the world’s largest youth population; nearly 54 per cent of the population is under the age of 25 and 70 per cent under the age of 35. This generation of youngsters is healthier, better educated and more aware, and lives in a world with more opportunities than the previous generations thanks to technology and medical advancement.

The youth today recognize themselves as capable, aware and conscious decision makers of the country. They are global citizens ready to take on the world armed with greater confidence and ambition. They bring in fresh perspectives and challenge conventional thinking on current issues and practices, as every decision taken today by our global leaders, particularly in the interest of the environment will shape their future and the world they live in.

Less talk more action?

While several youth groups are already making powerful contributions to the climate change agenda across the world, there is also a considerable amount of apathy and indifference among the youth.

Salil Mukhia Campaigner for Climate Change and Youth Mobilization, Greenpeace, says, “The climate crisis is a common and shared responsibility. I believe that every step in the right direction big or small will help make a difference. Today’s youth are very aware of the

implications of climate change and are playing an active role in climate action.”

Anuj Bhatra (24) a software professional from Bangalore reminisces about walking to school. “Times have changed. Today, I can’t go to my gym situated 2 kms from my house if I don’t have my car. I have an extremely demanding work schedule and do not have the time to be environmentally conscientious. My knowledge of waste disposal begins and ends at the waste paper basket. I do have some understanding of the climate change debate and I wish there was more I could do.”

The question that remains is whether the youth is moving towards action. Youth participation in decision making is undoubtedly crucial; however a lot depends on how the young channel their idealism, energy and enthusiasm towards creating a healthier planet through their actions.

The youth are somewhat jaded in the

face of financial meltdown, unemployment and terrorism. And yet, poverty, economic and environmental degradation will perpetuate as a vicious cycle if changes are not made today on an individual and collective level.

The solution - it is our responsibility

Rishab Khanna from IYCN says, “Youth representation in policy making is imperative. Every decision taken today by our global leaders will impact the world we and our children live in and we as youth have a right to be involved in the decision making process. People have to take responsibilities for their actions and realize that ‘more is not better’. I would urge every person to be a social contributor and help make a real change to society and the environment”.

Rishab goes on to mention that as part of his individual contribution to combating climate change, he rides a bicycle to work, even in the face of questions from his peers. “People ask me if I am suffering from some kind of financial crisis if I don’t bring a car to work,” he quips.

Trina Talukdar final year MSW student from Christ University and British Council’s International Climate Champion 2009 says, “Most young people today are aware of the effects of climate change and believe that sustainable living is key to combat this issue. I believe that the urban youth should move beyond taking arm chair attitudes to the situation and do what they can to spread awareness amongst the rural population, who will be affected the most. Street theatre is an important medium to communicate the message of climate change to the rural youth and encourage them to practice sustainable living.”

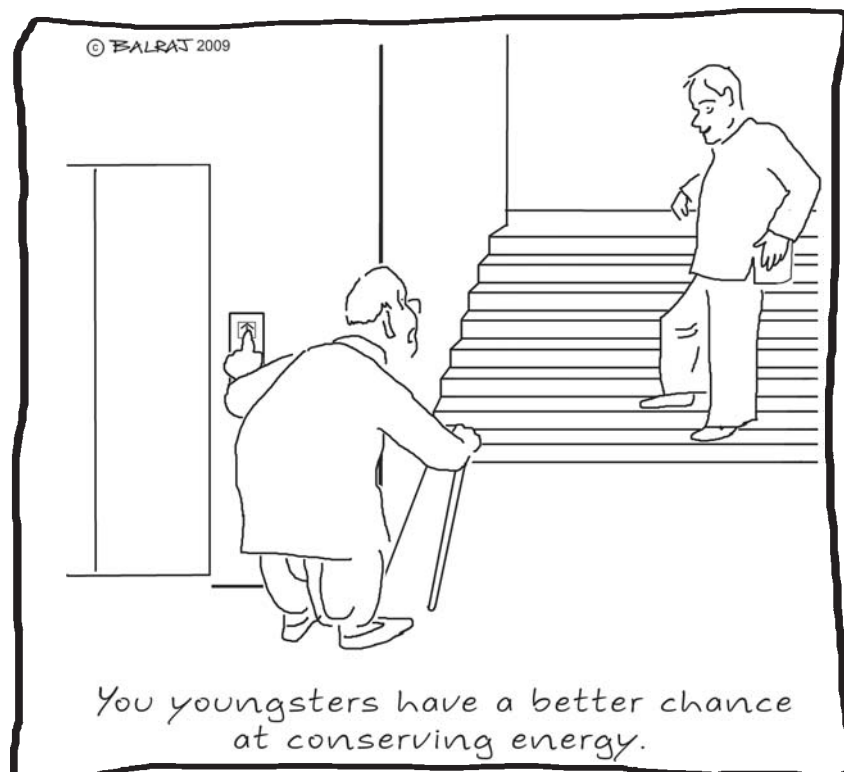
Individual responsibility is the most effective solution to combat



climate change. More sustainable lifestyles and adoption of eco-friendly innovations for home and offices are non-negotiable. Increased awareness and increased commitment towards preserving natural resources is also a need of the hour and the youth is positioned to take on these tasks. But this requires mass involvement and not stray clusters of people who are willing to do what it takes. Is the youth ready for this?

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New media and development

Can we stand up to the challenge?

Bharathi Ghanashyam

News is made in strange ways of late. A stray remark, which would have at best got a 'titter' out of guests in the cocktail circuit, and been forgotten before the night was out, is suddenly taking up whole pages of newspapers, hours of time on news channels and is being discussed and debated by anybody who has an opinion. Reference here is to Dr. Shashi Tharoor's somewhat infamous reference to 'cattle class' travel. Enough has been said about the political incorrectness and insensitivity of the remark and no more needs to be said here.

This piece is less about Dr. Tharoor's tweet and more about the way news is currently made. Till recently, it was unheard of for a politician, much less a minister to connect with people through any means other than public speeches made at meetings, which were largely in rural areas. But public figures are increasingly expressing their opinions through their own blogs, websites, and now, Twitter and Facebook. Our new crop of politicians is younger, more tech savvy and prefers to use the newer modes of communication that are now available, as these modes allow them to reach out to a greater mass of the educated, urban classes, and on an almost daily basis.

This is probably the need of the hour, because while conventional routes such as newspapers and television channels are still widely used for getting news, the sense of leisure

among readers and viewers is absent. The luxury of spending hours poring over every page of a newspaper, or dedicated time to view news is not available anymore and will become less and less as time goes by. Newspaper readership is reported to be going up in India, but figures show that these increased numbers are coming from rural areas. Urbanites seem to prefer to get information in bite size feeds, on the go, and with more frequency. This is probably the reason that Twitter and Facebook have gained such huge support. Dr Shashi Tharoor is supposed to have a record 1,00,000 people following him on Twitter.

How does this trend impact development news? There has been debate about the marginalization of development news within the conventional spaces. Development news, whether it has to do with agriculture, water and sanitation, health, rural infrastructure, education or any other, has always been perceived as something that stays on the fringes and does not get covered enough. Studies and research have reported that very little space is given to news on development in the conventional, mainstream media that was till recently, almost the main source for news. With these new trends, it is obvious that development news will get even more marginalized, because even the little that is put out might not be read or viewed.

A recent article in a mainstream newspaper pointed out "...Being an erudite scholar who worked with the United Nations for over two decades, Tharoor must be aware of India's shameful record in dealing with poverty and malnutrition. Now, when the Indian democracy has given him – completely out of the blue – an opportunity to do something to improve governance, he is more worried about being bracketed with the 'cattle class..." (The Cattle Twitter, Deccan Herald, 19

September 2009). Is there a message for development as well here? Considering the large following he has on Twitter and the large numbers of people who can get information, shouldn't he be using that space to better advantage rather than to put out trivia of the kind he has been putting out? Does this have a message for development agencies and practitioners as a whole as well?

Development news needs to reinvent itself and use the newly available spaces to get exposure. Even within the mainstream media, development news suffered because of lack of proper packaging. To touch people, development stories need to be packaged in a manner that will appeal to the general reader, sans jargon, and achieve the right balance of conveying negative happenings or trends, laced with positivity. Within the new spaces, it becomes even more challenging because you have to say 'more in less'. And yet, these spaces cannot be ignored. They might even be the way to depending less on the generosity of the mainstream media to give space for development coverage. Will development news stand up to the challenge? We have the audience, we have the means, but do we have the will and the capacity?

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Youth in governance

Time to get going

Jayalakshmi K

Why is there no revolution worth its name nowadays? Not that there are no issues as chaos has only been on the rise. Could it be that there is no freedom to protest? No.

A little probing brings out the unpleasant fact that issues being protested are mostly those of personal rights. There is no one willing to take up a cause for society at large. Whether it be poverty, corruption, unemployment or price rise, indications are that we as a community have become immune to problems that impact society at large. That is a dangerous trend, which could lead to the decay and death of a civilization.

Corruption has become a widespread malaise we take in our stride. Less than 15 per cent of public expenditure truly meets public objectives. Witness the expose by a recent CAG report that Rs. 51,000 crores of investment in programmes like NREGA was unaccounted.

Over 5,000 acres of public commons in Bangalore is encroached based on bogus documentation, according to the revenue department and most of the encroachers are wealthy people. Do we care to demand eviction?

Roads disappear. Storm water drains claim lives. Drinking water is diverted. Appealing to authorities is of no use. Direct action alone helps. In many places, people have given up on civic authorities and take up these tasks themselves. What could be at the root of this apathy? If there is one reason that stands above all others, it is the non-participation of the majority in governance. By majority, we mean the youth who constitute a large section of society.

The youth today is lost in making merry. The sole pursuit is that of wealth and pleasures. However, they are not to blame. It is the way they have been brought up – at home, school and college. Artifice has taken the upper hand, and materialism the ultimate goal propagated by most. Today's youth by and large seem to lack ideals. But youth is also the time when ideals strengthen and concretize.

Part of being a responsible citizen is making one's voice heard. This includes voting, signing petitions, writing letters to the newspapers, lobbying with legislators, and other activities. A very small percentage of today's youth believes in these duties.

The change has to happen from the beginning, in fact, from home and from school. The way the youth think must be shaped anew. They must be involved in campaigns and community activities; they should be encouraged to initiate these as part of school project work. Social work must be a component of education right from primary school. For instance, the practice in government schools (more out of necessity!) where students help keep the school clean by sweeping and mopping should be widely adopted in private schools.

Students should be encouraged to think innovatively of solutions to

a community's problems. These should be awarded rather than the rote learning capabilities!

At the college levels, youth must be encouraged to engage themselves more actively in the community and have their voice heard on boards or committee that makes decisions. Through such equal partnership with governing structures at various levels, *youth can play a vital role in governance*. As voting members with equal stakes in all decisions that come before the group, including such issues as budget, staff, and strategic planning, their hands can be strengthened.

This will improve governance in many ways. For one, the enthusiasm of youth can bring much needed energy into the working of organizations. That will bring in fresh perspectives to old problems. Often, all that an unsolvable problem needs is some unlearning of 'the way things are usually done'.

Change is something that will happen when more of youth take part in governance. Witness what is happening with Rahul Gandhi's style of functioning. The doors to political bastions are being thrown open and a farmer's wife is today planning to contest elections. Anything is possible. Simply because it has not been tried before is no proof of its failure. That is the kind of fresh air our governance needs today. Youth can be the window.

What needs to be done? First, it must become a part of education to involve youth in decision making at top levels of organizations, as also to be held responsible for their actions.

This has to go beyond the meaningless participation in college syndicate elections which have become an extension of local *goondaism*. The welfare of students, how this is achieved through democratic opinion, taking responsibility for one's actions however they turn out, etc are what youth need to be groomed in.

We need to create a culture in which youth are equal partners in decision making and governance. Seek their opinion. Why, for instance, can't our political honchos, address

the youth more often on issues that concern them?

We must encourage youth community service and civic involvement as more than just lip service. These initial steps will provide the skills of active citizenship such as understanding how decisions are made and how to organize, plan, and communicate.

They need deep rooted education that begins by awakening the recognition of their fundamental right to determine how resources are used in their societies. It does not require enrolling for political education degrees as much as encouraging free thought and discussion. Only when youth become informed and thoughtful citizens will civil society be strengthened. Young people with commitment and experience should reflect on what the community needs and be able to take strong political action.

Once they understand how processes work, they become equipped to ask questions and seek justice. In issues that concern them and their communities, they learn how to seek redressal.

With the ownership that all this creates, involvement becomes total. They are also able to attract other youth into the process. The realization of the power they hold to effect change in society will provide the impetus to action.

Sometimes it takes a crisis to set the wheels of participation rolling. Take for example the present climate change issue. Governments all over the globe are dogged in their pursuit of 'national growth targets'. What is amazingly invisible is that there will be no growth with no resources. In such a scenario, it has been left to groups of individuals to take up cudgels on behalf of the planet. Youth are playing a big role everywhere. Even in India, many groups like the climate change group

are led by youth. The issue has evoked a response in them as they see a bleak future unless action is taken. But it does not always require bleak futures to get the youth to act. It requires a culture that draws youth into every meaningful conversation.

To prevent the absolute collapse of the governance systems, we need to engage with each and every public action, demand transparency, expose corruption and ensure that 'development' really means that! We need a new way of living that takes us beyond the confines of our homes into the welfare of the larger society. We need fresh thinking. We need youth to get going.

Jayalakshmi K is a journalist with 15 years of experience and has worked as Assistant Editor with Deccan Herald. She is currently freelancing.

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The critical link between climate change and food, water, livelihood and ecosystem security

A dialogue for effective change

Rajkumar and Mohan Paul Prabhu

Set against the backdrop of Voices from the Waters, the 4th International Film Festival on water in Bangalore, a seminar entitled **Critical link between Climate change and food, water, livelihood and ecosystem security - dialogue for effective change**¹, was held on 7th September 2009 at the Alliance Francaise, with over 80 participants drawn from the farming community, NGOs, government functionaries and others. They dialogued on the ground realities, best practices on coping mechanisms and policy direction in the crucial areas of water and land use patterns for effective social, economic and environment impact.

Questioning the role of the State in the continuing predicament of the farmers from dry agro-climatic zones in now the drought hit areas of Doddaballapur, Srinivasapur, Byadagi and Bagepalli taluks, and Gadag district of Karnataka, farmers from the region believe that it was policies and practices of state governments which pushed them into water and chemical-intensive farming.

The cultivation of high yielding varieties which has today resulted in crop failures, soil degradation, water depletion, combined with inadequate prices for their produce, has caused severe economic setbacks to small and marginalised farmers.

Voicing their concerns at the meeting, the farmers observed that there is increased wilting of crops, unknown disease occurrences, invasion of

¹ The dialogue was organised by Svaraj, Green Foundation, BAIF and Outreach at 4th international film festival on water – Voices from the Waters 2009. It was held at the Alliance Francaise, Bangalore

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Water drops

Global

Two-thirds of world species may disappear in 21st century-cut down

A biologist from the United States said in Beijing on Sunday that two-thirds of the world's species may disappear in the 21st Century and "a great majority" of them may be gone before they are even identified by human beings. Species on the earth are disappearing at a rapid rate due to habitat destruction, climate change and a wide spread of invasive alien species caused by expanding human activities. Currently, several thousand species are lost every year, and very soon the number could rise to more than 10,000.

<http://www.hindu.com/2009/07/13/stories/2009071351110900>.

A bad climate for development-cut it down

Poor countries' economic development will contribute to climate change. But they are already its greatest victims



Poor and middle-income countries already account for just over half of total carbon emissions. Brazil produces more CO² per head than Germany. The biggest vulnerability is that the weather gravely affects developing countries' main economic activities—such as farming and tourism. Global warming dries out farmland. Since two-thirds of Africa is desert or arid, the continent is heavily exposed. In India the gains from the Green Revolution are already shrinking because of local pollution, global warming and waning resistance to pests and disease. Indian crops would decline by a further 4.5-9% over the next 30 years because of climate change

http://www.economist.com/world/international/displaystory.cfm?story_id=14447171

Organic Agriculture More Than Doubled Since 2000, by Alice McKeown

Farmers worldwide managed 32.2 million hectares of agricultural land organically in 2007, nearly 5 percent more than in the previous year and a 118-percent increase since 2000. Organic farming is now reported in 141 countries; about two thirds of this land area is in industrial countries, and nearly half of the producers are in Africa. Still, more than three times as much land is devoted to genetically modified crops, and less than 1 percent of the world's agricultural land is now managed organically

<http://www.worldwatch.org/node/6199?emc=el&m=274062&l=4&v=56c7f62922>

Bleak future for Mediterranean mammals – IUCN

Malaga, Spain, 15 September, 2009 (IUCN) The latest assessment of Mediterranean mammals shows that one in six is threatened with extinction at a regional level, according to the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. The study, which assesses the status of 320 mammals in the region, except whales and dolphins, finds three percent are Critically Endangered, five percent are endangered and eight percent are Vulnerable. A further eight percent are Near Threatened, and three percent are Extinct or Regionally Extinct.

<http://cms.iucn.org/newsold/?uNewsID=3888>



Water drops

India

Water drops

India

What is unique about Renaissance Regalia Apartments, Bangalore, is its band of young green crusaders, Malaika, Soumya, Srishiti and others. These environmentally conscious pre-teens have started their own environmental club Paws and Claws, which becomes operational after school hours and during weekends and school holidays at their creatively designed club house within the apartment complex. According to Malaika (12), Paws and Claws was created with the intention of spreading the message of environmental awareness to the residents of the apartment complex, particularly on recycling waste. She says, "We try to reduce our waste and reuse things we can not reduce." Paws and Claws have also circulated a petition, appealing to the residents of their apartment to celebrate a cracker free Diwali, in the interest of the environment. Paws and Claws are open to participating or extending their support to different environmental related activities around Malleshwaram. These environment conscious children are truly an inspiration, and their dedicated commitment is beginning to make a difference.

Thanks to NREGS, farmer reclaims land

Reclaiming of fallow land is a suitable occasion for celebration in the life of a farmer. Lingamaiah, a marginal farmer at Tammarajupalli in Panyam mandal of Kurnool district. The NREGS programme gave a rare opportunity to the farmer to fulfill his 20-year-long wish to sow crop on the land. Mr. Lingamaiah himself enrolled as a wage seeker and

mobilised co-workers to work on his plot which was cleared of jungle and stumps. Now the plot is fit for sowing crops this season. He is planning to sow *jowar* crop this year and would think of some better income crop like paddy next year onwards if he succeeds in harnessing the stream flowing next to his field. According to Field Assistant Govindarajulu, 36 wage seekers worked on Mr. Lingamaiah's plot for five days earning Rs. 18,000. In the village, 4,297 mandays were generated under the NREGS earning Rs. 4,29,656. A total of 24 acres were developed and crops were sown on 18 acres this season. Seven farmers received the incidental benefit.

<http://www.hindu.com/2009/07/13/stories/2009071355480300.htm>

India: Rural communities turn to traditional climate mitigation

In Tamilnadu, southern India, and Uttar Pradesh, northern India, villagers have revived ancient systems of storing surface and groundwater that are putting them in a good position to contend with today's changing climate. The villagers' initiatives, helped by NGOs, are supported by Oxfam India which now advocates these practices as adaptation models for all of India. In the rain-shadow state of Tamilnadu where rivers flow only during the brief winter rains following the northeast trade winds, the Gundar river basin supplying water to Madurai and its surrounding four districts, remains the most drought-prone. Climate change has currently turned the rains here unpredictable and intense when they do fall – causing destructive flash floods and related disasters.

Now, an ancient watershed system dating from 300 BC to 200 AD that channelled these seasonal rains through anicuts and feeder canals into manmade water-troughs called 'tanks,' is being revived. Historically, water was stored in different systems dug into the earth for agriculture, drinking water and domestic purposes. Tamilnadu's granitic rock-base provides an ideal leak-proof base for storage.

<http://en.cop15.dk/news/view+news?newsid=1838>

On hunger and child mortality

Raghav Gaiha

Despite rapid strides in macro-economic liberalisation, and huge expansion of anti-poverty programmes, India's track record in mitigating the scourge of hunger remains worse than that of the poorest countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. India has recorded an unprecedented growth in recent years. GDP per capita grew at 3.95% annually during 1980-2005, and at 5.4% annually from 2000 to 2005.

Yet per capita calorie intake has declined, as also of many other nutrients. More than three quarters of the population live in households whose per capita calorie intake is less than 2,100 in urban areas and 2,400 in rural areas – calorie intakes regarded as 'minimum requirements' in India.

<http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/Opinion/On-hunger-and-child-mortality/articleshow/4916770.cms>



Continued from page 9

agriculture land by wildlife and increased monoculture cropping of invasive plant species such as eucalyptus. The mining activities, quarrying of water sources and sand mining have significantly contributed towards disorders in the hydrological cycle. The farmers expressed fears of losing more crops if current conditions prevail on their farms.

Dr. Nayaran Reddy, well known for his long time practice of organic farming (albeit on a large farm-holding), informed farmers about the right practices in soil conservation, application of manure, tree crops and biodiversity to increase the carbon content of the soil. He pointed out that it is the deficiency in soil nutrient availability which is the cause of crop diseases and failures.

He informed the farmers that the required carbon content in soil should be four per cent, but in many cases it is less than 0.25 per cent. The composting system practiced by farmers may not be suitable, as many of them simply throw on the cow dung, which when exposed to wind, sunrays and rain, leach out the much needed nutrients.

The farmers responded that although soil testing was carried on some of the farm land by agriculture extension departments, the results were not shared with the farmers so they continued to remain ignorant of the quality of their soil.

With 86 of the 176 taluks in Karnataka State declared drought-hit, the consequences of further deficiency in rainfall poses a serious threat to food, water and livelihood security as well as to the ecosystem. Accepting the government's role in addressing the concerns raised by farmers, Mr. Veeraraju, Joint Director of the Water Resource Department raised his concerns over the misuse of natural resources and the need for effective regulations. He commented that rainwater harvesting for ground water recharge and perennial tree cropping to reduce water loss are part of the immediate measures.

Presenting the case for locally available organic produce as a way of reducing the carbon footprint of food production and consumption, the Era Organic spokesperson expressed that this is an effective and sustainable way of reviving local economy, moving away from fast food to "slow-food, slow-money and slow-life". He strongly believes that India's climate is more than conducive to natural farming methods.

Although there is wide concern amongst all sectors, of the increased stress on our agriculture, and the community is directly dependent on rainfall and groundwater for their livelihood and food security, actions to address and mitigate the impact remain small scale and individual.

Given that India's food production, rural communities dependency on climate sensitive sectors and the heavy use of pesticides and monocropping over the last two decades has affected its health and created an artificial thirst in the soil, the challenge is how to shift to more natural indigenous farming practices. The greater challenge is also to ensure that there is much greater investment from the government to revive small and marginalised agro-economy and lobby for the right policy framework for Indian agriculture.

The dialogue and deliberations threw up several useful suggestions and recommendations. Important among them are:

Recommendations for enabling policies

- Ensure effective support to agriculture and practice of agriculture which ensures
 - Credit on favourable terms from banks supported by proactive measures by the government during drought and crop failures
 - Recognition and respect for the farming profession
 - Arrest of the trend of younger generations ignoring farming as a viable livelihood source
- Children and the young to be educated on needs of the environment and eco farming by:
 - Providing them with awareness and exposure visits to agriculture farms as part of their curriculum
 - Interaction with farmers to better understand the growing challenges to the food sector, and the struggles of farmers.

Technology and Practices

- Revival of traditional knowledge of farming practices, such as indigenous seed preservation and use, intercropping methods, use of compost and farm yard manure and bio-pesticides

Support from the government

- Adequate policy framework and financial support to enable successful transition from chemical intensive to natural farming practices
- Better market opportunities and prices reflecting the actual cost of production

Support from voluntary organisations

- Sustained sensitization campaigns on the threats to food, water and livelihood security
- Documentation and advocacy of and for the adoption of best practices amongst small and marginalised farmers.

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Biofuels for Transport

Global Potential and Implications for Sustainable Energy and Agriculture

By Worldwatch Institute

Biofuels for Transport published by Earthscan for the Worldwatch Institute is a comprehensive assessment of the opportunities and risks of the large-scale production of biofuels. The book throws light and attempts to demystify complex questions and concerns including, the current debates such as the 'food v. fuel'. Global in scope, the book uses the experiences of five country studies from Brazil, China, Germany, India and Tanzania to bring to its readers comprehensive information on the potential, pitfalls and therefore informed decisions that have to be made.

Quoting the doubling of petroleum prices from about US\$30/barrel in 2005 to US\$ 60/barrel in 2006, the book highlights the fact that this crisis alone heightened worldwide interests and investments in bio fuels. Readers can therefore imagine the extent of impact that the recent steep increase in global crude oil prices and the cascading effect that it had on the economies of the world, would have had on the bio fuels.

The book is categorised into eight sections that bring out key defining elements:

- **current status and global trends** - while starch, sugar and oil seed crop varieties will continue to provide bulk of biomass for bio fuels, the next generation of feedstock like algae and other fibres will be important to its development
- **prospects of new technologies and crops** - bio fuels can potentially rival fossil fuels supplies although long term potential can vary and is hard to predict; policy makers may want to promote best ways of improving agricultural productivity and appropriate technologies for conversion, combustion, to use bio fuels efficiently.
- **key economic and social issues** - potential to reduce costly imports, decrease vulnerability to price shocks and disruptions in energy supply are the key economic and security advantages of bio fuels
- **key environmental issues** - one of the primary incentive for production and use of bio fuels is potential environmental benefit obtained from petroleum fuels with those based on biomass, it is important to know which bio fuels production needs more or less energy
- **application technologies and strategies for market introduction** - *increase in bio fuel production will require substantial new investments and related infrastructure; study of experience with current fuel feedstock can provide useful insight to the infrastructure and promotion needed.*
- **existing policy frameworks around the world and recommendation for policy and decision makers** - bio fuels have the potential to address many of the challenges faced by the global communities today; the threat of concentration of economic wealth, speeding deforestation and bio diversity loss and possibly accelerating climate change; the path to be taken will depend primarily on the policies put in place by leaders at national and international levels.

The potential and outlook in the India study especially highlights the constraints that we might face in expanding production and use of bio fuels. This is largely in line with the concern that many of us currently have on the likely impact it could have on food security, if not managed intelligently.

The book helps provide practitioners, policy makers and investors/entrepreneurs in bio fuels development, with valuable data and information for further study and reflections. It will help equip readers with the sound knowledge required to make considered and intelligent choices and decisions.

The book is available from Worldwatch publications at: <http://www.worldwatch.org/node/5303>

Reviewed by Mohan Paul Prabhu, Dy. Director, SVARAJ
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As part of its Joy of Giving initiative, Svaraj will launch its “Give back to the environment... take a cloth bag” campaign. This campaign will promote “green philanthropy” to encourage and support actions to protect and care for the environment. This campaign will reach out to over 10,000 students in Bangalore city and surrounding rural areas, encouraging them to say ‘no’ to plastic carry bags and opt for a cloth bag instead.

Ten colleges in Bangalore city, schools and self help women’s group in rural Bangalore, will be volunteering their time, talent and money to support this campaign

The aim of this campaign is to reduce the consumption of plastic bags by

1 lakh to begin with and help create employment and income generating opportunities for micro-entrepreneurs and SHGs.

You too can be part of our campaign:

- Corporates can donate money to support our campaign, invite Svaraj to conduct an awareness generation programme at your campus, encourage your employees to pick up a cloth bag
- Clothing manufacturing companies can donate remnants which can be used to make the cloth bags.
- Colleges and schools can encourage students to pick up a cloth bag
- Individuals can donate money to support our campaign or pick up a cloth bag
- Supermarkets and shops can encourage customers to use cloth bags instead of plastic carry bags. We can help set up reward schemes for your customers

We invite you to join our campaign today.

For more information contact rini.antony@svaraj.in or samiraprasad@svaraj.in or call + 91 80 23347491

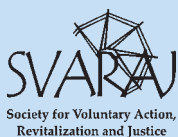
Our vision

Svaraj vision is of a just society in a just environment

Our mission

To enable communities to take control of their destiny in the spirit of voluntarism, to organise and mobilize for collective action in the revitalization, protection and equitable distribution of natural resources.

If you find our work interesting, become a friend of Svaraj. For more information on our work and partners, please contact:



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How we work

- Mobilizing and promoting collaborative action on protection, equitable and sustainable sharing of natural resources
- Supporting effective management of community based programmes
- Experiential learning, bridging technology, science and indigenous knowledge and advocating for systemic changes
- Promoting community self-responsibility and citizenship through social and civic education, organization, and action
- Ensuring transparency and accountability to funders

Programmes/Interventions

1. Integrated water resources protection and management
River Basin perspective building for Integrated water resource Management
 - Water budgeting
 - Watershed management and ground water recharge
 - Participatory rejuvenation of water bodies
 - Roof top rainwater harvesting
 - Water literacy
 - Assessment of water quality and its treatment
2. Strengthening food, water, livelihood and environment security
 - Sustainable farming practices
 - In situ soil and water conservation
 - Action Research