



3rd International Conference on
RURAL INDIA
ACHIEVING MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS
AND GRASSROOTS DEVELOPMENT

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Hyderabad, India

Significance of the Event

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Partner State



Govt. of Andhra Pradesh

Organised by



Bhoovigyan Vikas Foundation
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In association with



Hyderabad

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE EVENT

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Five years ago, we took a leap in the dark and launched this Organisation, called the Bhoovigyan Vikas Foundation, with the First Earth Day Celebrations of the Millennium and an International Conference, marking its beginning. Since then, with a creative urge and tenacious determination, we have moved forward, shaping, inspiring and steering its activities, to be recognized as a leading Organisation in the non-government sector, embracing an “**Earthcare Charter**” for a Sustainable Future.

During the 5 years of our endeavour, we believe that we have planted some ideas, out of which we hope that some sound thinking and serious action will blossom to conserve our Earth’s vitality and diversity and to pave the way for a new world order, that is attainable desirable and sustainable. In the brief time at my disposal, I do not propose to dwell at length on the Foundation’s activities and its modest achievements. By and large, these are centred around advocacy, awareness-building, networking and research functions. On the action front, the outcomes are reflected in pioneering the Earth Day Celebrations, in the meetings, seminars and conferences that we held, in some training programs which we sponsored, in some research projects which we have initiated and in our vigorous advocacy for a “**Museum of Earth, Man and Environment**”, which has found its expression in the State of Chhattisgarh. Now we are poised to set up an Earthcare Policy Institute, as a High Performing Knowledge Institution and as a Regional Centre for South-South Cooperation. I may not have the time to expatiate on our ‘**unfinished agenda**’. I move on quickly to my legitimate role to explain the “**significance of this event**”.

Our First International Conference held in April 2001 at New Delhi dealt with the issues of sustainable development in a broader context. In our Second Conference, we narrowed down our choice to select issues in Sustainable Agriculture, and Natural Resources Management. In the current 3rd International Conference, we are moving down **from a global to a local perspective** and are targeting our deliberations to issues pertaining to **“Rural India – Achieving Millennium Development Goals and Grassroots Development”**. We feel that this is very timely and appropriate and is also in keeping with our own Government’s major thrusts and priorities in development.

We are all aware that Rural India presents a baffling multiplicity of images and problems. During the last more than 50 years of our **“Learning Curve”** in development planning, we have initiated a large number of development programmes, with changes in focus, style and content. How much of this effort has yielded the intended benefits is anybody’s guess. Our discussions in this conference, I hope will bring out our successes and failures and project practical and workable plans for the future.

In a vast country like ours with more than 6 Lakhs of Villages, caught in ‘poverty trap’, a mere linear expansion of plan outlays alone cannot ensure the required order of socio-economic change and impact on development. It has to go beyond outlays to **“outcomes”**. For this, we need to adopt a holistic and integrated approach, involving the ‘interplay of policy, strategy, planning and programming design, adopting the effective means and methods of implementation with people’s participation in development. This calls for a huge task of promoting Social engineering through a **“Rural Renaissance Movement”** in the country and to put in place, what I call **“Capillary mechanisms”**, that will make development **voluntary and self-driven**.

It must be spearheaded through a spatially – oriented strategy of Community Action Planning ‘**in viable rural space**’ in “**cohesive village clusters**”, with developments steered through effective connectivities, linkages, flows, and iterative interactions, both top-down and bottom-up. It is only in this way, that a **renewed vigour** towards rural development can be imparted, involving the reorganizing and reorienting of the entire rural economic and social systems which will address both ecological restoration and sustainable livelihoods. With the Panchayat Raj Institutions now in place, and hopefully functioning with accountability and efficiency, the people’s organisations must now function as the principal “**drivers**” of social and economic change. How to bring about this radical transformation, from the local level upwards, is our major challenge? It is my hope that the present conference will deal with some vital aspects of this wider problem.

In organising this conference, through our Local Chapter, the Bhoovigyan Vikas Foundation has introduced a major departure in style and stance, by tying up the effort in collaboration with a progressive state like Andhra Pradesh and a dedicated local NGO, “**SAHANAV**”. This **Triple Alliance** illustrates the tacit acceptance of the collaborative roles that organisations at different levels can play, in orchestrating development efforts from the local to the global levels and at the same time, **lending weight and credibility** to our discussions here. We are indeed immensely grateful to the State Government of Andhra Pradesh, for willingly coming forward to host this conference and making such a unique collaboration possible. We owe our immense debt of gratitude to the Hon’ble Chief Minister of the State and his cabinet of Ministers as well as the dedicated and efficient team of officials, from a whole range of departments of the Government, who have been instrumental in making this meet possible.

Friends,

As we step into this New Millennium, we have been confronted with cataclysmic problems, which have surfaced all over the world, causing a colossal break down of our economic and social systems. This calls for a clearer diagnosis of the depth and nature of our real crisis and creating a new awareness of the global interdependence and shared responsibility, for the well-being of the human family and the larger living world. It also calls for a special understanding of the environmental challenges we are facing, as well as a change in our paradigm of thinking, encompassing an **“inclusive ethical vision”**, that recognizes earthcare, environmental protection, human rights, equitable human development and an interdependent world community. In other words, we need a fresh and broader conception of what constitutes a **Sustainable Community and Sustainable Development**.

Our Earth, **“the one and only living planet in our solar system”**, as the Late Barbara Ward, the great humanist and environmentalist, often used to say, is in a deep crisis. We need to search for the common ground in the midst of our great diversity, and to embrace a new ethical vision.

With the repeated bludgeonings of a **relentless Providence** through different forms of natural disasters – Tsunamis, Earth Quakes, Climate Change, melting of glaciers, sea-level rise, floods, drought, acid rains etc, life on the Planet is now in great peril.

The Government has recently set up a Disaster Management Authority. But it is only a partial solution. More important is **Disaster Prevention**. For this, the authority should be empowered by a **Policy**

Research Institution, which will formulate integrated policies that will help prevent the *occurrence and recurrence* of disasters by pointing to those approaches and policy instruments, that will help prevent those insidious human actions that disturb Nature's equilibrium and lead to such disasters. On the planning and management front, the sectoralism in our planning process has encouraged the formulation of **fragmented** policies, which do not relate to each other, some time overlap among themselves, and perhaps even negate each other. It is in this context, that we seriously advocate the setting up of a pro-active, policy-oriented Think Tank and '**Change Agent**' i.e an *Earthcare Policy Institute*. This is intended to fill up an "**Organisational Vacuum**", which will look at Earth Systems in their totality and view the Earth's problems in an integrated and holistic manner. Our ultimate vision is that the *Earth Policy Institute* should establish linkages with surrounding countries and emerge as the Regional Center for **South-South Cooperation**, serving as an agency for promoting a new era of "**Ecological Diplomacy**". It is my earnest dream that such an organisation should emerge to heal the wounds that Man has inflicted on Mother Earth and save our Biospheric Environment by "*Working with Nature*" and establishing a harmonious relationship with it.

Friends! ,

The problems of the developing countries are more challenging than of the developed world on account of acute poverty, hunger, employment and falling productivity of the land. Technology, of course, is moving at a galloping pace to solve the resource management problems. The current millennium will no doubt considerably benefit from ICT-led development. But we should be under no illusion that all problems can be ameliorated by devising new and more and more

sophisticated technologies. The grim reality is that technologies are not that much sophisticated enough, to carry out all the “**life-support functions**” performed by Nature. Technologies are subject to fallible human control and also may have unanticipated side effects. There seems to be no alternative, but to perfect and promote *an ethic for living sustainably* and thus to adopt a sound strategy of “**Sustainable Development**” and Nature Conservation. This approach espouses cooperating with Nature, rather than conquering her. Let me quote our mentor, the Late Shri C. Subramaniam, who said “**There is not much time left. The Earth has to be saved at any cost**”.

The theme of the present Conference has three major components viz. Rural Well-being and Development, Achieving Millennium Development Goals, and Grass roots Development. For achieving rural well-being and development in a country like India, we advocate a spatially-oriented “**village cluster development strategy**”, engineered as a participatory movement, with total dedication by village youth, the academic and student community and all community – based organizations. The Bhoovigyan Vikas Foundation has prepared an “**Auto-Kinetic Model of Development**” to move in this direction. There will be a special presentation on this model in the conference.

The second major theme of the Conference is the Millennium Development Goals strategy, which embodies a set of UN targets that, if achieved, could in principle, go far towards eliminating poverty and social deprivation on a global scale. I understand that the Government of Andhra Pradesh has done an excellent review and analysis of the State’s progress in this direction, which I am sure will help in putting rural development on the fast track. We look forward to interesting discussions that will throw light on “**how close are we**” in achieving

these goals. A positive way of thinking could be, that even if the MDG'S are unachievable within the stipulated time, they will push the developing countries to stretch their effort **as much as possible**, towards narrowing the gap.

As for the third Theme, “**Grassroots Development**”, the conference, I suppose, will critically analyse our country's transition to democratic decentralisation, and the challenges and the serious limitations being faced. However, we have to see this as an evolutionary process, in our socio-political context, with its possibilities and limitations. The three elements of this evolution are **Enfranchisement, Empowerment and Ethical Functioning with a moral code of conduct**. If this is viewed as a “**stages approach**” in transformation, I would as an optimist, interpret that our country has crossed successfully, the first two stages and is now poised to achieve, what is called the “**Third wave of democratic transformation**”, which is a process of consolidating democratic institutions, materialising a multilevel planning process and ensuring democratic functioning with some social justice, work ethics and managerial efficiency.

Friends!

The B. V. F., since its inception has been vigorously advocating for sustainable Earthcare Policies to make a dent into more rational policy choices by governments, characterised by what Amartya Sen has recently emphasized, as the three R's of an ethics-oriented reform, viz: Reach, Range and Reason. Having said this, the question is “**where do we go from here**” to reinvigorate Rural India. This reminds me of a quotation from Lewis Carroll in “*Alice in Wonderland*”.

“Would you tell me please, which way I ought to go from here? Said

Alice. "That depends on a good deal, where you want to get to" said the Cheshire cat".

Obviously, our answer is for a higher commitment to the spirit and aims of achieving a Sustainable Rural India through sound Earthcare policies. It may perhaps sound a dream. But let me quote T. R. Lawrence and end my speech

**"... dreamers of the day are dangerous men
For they act their dream with open eyes
To make it possible".**

