



MS. SNEHLATA NATH

Recipient of the Award for Application of Science and Technology for Rural Development - 2013

Born: December 27, 1965

Snehlata Nath has been working in the field of eco-development, livelihood and sustainability among tribal people of the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve. At the same time, she has inter connected these to bring progression in the lives of the community while preserving their traditional way of life.

Snehlata Nath is one of the Directors of Keystone Foundation which was established in 1993. She believes that environment care and pro-active involvement of the adivasis, addressing their needs through their own knowledge and experience and providing livelihood opportunities is the key to development of the tribal communities.

To address these concerns, Keystone Foundation initiated work across eight centres in the forested tri-junction of Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. The idea was to initiate activities related to ecodevelopment which enhance the well being of the community and promote biodiversity. Projects against cash crop culture (i.e. tea and coffee) and to encourage organic farming (to promote millets production) for the consumption by the tribal families is one example.

Snehlata Nath and the team of Keystone focus on the core aspects of ecology and economy like developing appropriate technology for mountain systems, biodiversity and indigenous communities, forests, water and land, livelihoods, green enterprise and environmental governance.

Some of the need-based, traditional and appropriate technologies designed and introduced by the Foundation have eased the drudgery of the villagers and helped in producing good quality and value-added agricultural and forest produce locally.

These inventions and adaptations include fruit/amla cutter, wax melting unit, wax sheet maker, solar wax extractor, honey filter, honey extractor, seed drier, soap press, soap mixture, soap making equipment, solar tunnel drier, solar tent, introducing mid-rib cutting technique to drain honey, beekeeping tools-swarm catch net, conservation and sustainable honey harvest practice, pollen removing technique, millet de-stoning machine, millet de-husker, solar powered water pumping system, etc. This has also promoted employment locally and increased opportunity for labour thereby stopping migration to urban areas.

To reach out to the community, Keystone Foundation's centers in the Biosphere Reserve promote capacity building, product and market development, community self reliance, value addition, income generation and fair trade practices. The Production Centre Development is centres or village units which are support systems of the Foundation. Here, implementation and research go hand in hand. Snehlata Nath strives to combine ecologically sensitive development with rural enterprise. Today tribal communities have formed their groups and are managing their operation successfully through the units with the guidance and supervision of Keystone's technical and marketing team. The plan of action for the future regarding these rural technologies is to build an inhouse facility to manufacture these as per orders.

Natural resources like honey and bees wax have been transformed to produce by-products through the application of these technologies. The tribal people are involved in forest collection and women are now

trained in value addition activities like manufacturing bee wax soaps, lip balm, organic fruit jams and pickles, etc. which are promoted and marketed under the brand name Last Forest. Other livelihood activities of the villagers include organic farming and enhancing crop productivity, preparing traditional medicine from forest gatherings, soap making, revival and promotions of indigenous crafts viz.

Toda embroidery, Kota pottery, Kurumba paintings. The women are empowered and actively participate in the overall socio-economic development of their community.

Keystone Foundation has helped villagers and farmers to promote soil and moisture conservation and organic farming practices. Projects provide insights into the ecology of forest fruits, resin yielding trees, cultivation of nutrition rich crops, water, wetland and mountain ecosystems. The conservation program is implemented through the area resource centres where communities take on the role of monitoring the quality and changes of their ecosystem. Keystone Foundation, with the support of the tribal people have also collected and preserved indigenous, traditional and rare seeds of the region by forming a seed bank.

The Foundation, over the years has provided extensive training to various villagers, non government organisations (NGOs), government departments etc. on several topics ranging from sustainable honey harvesting practices, beekeeping, value addition of Non Timber Forest Produces (NTFPs), organic farming to ecologically sustainable harvesting of NTFPs, Forest Rights Act for indigenous communities and advocacy. Training in Management (accounting, stock keeping) and business dealings is also conducted for the benefit of villagers.

All the activities are focused on local manpower development and capacity building. Keystone has reached and impacted 5000 families of the 9 tribal communities across 89 adivasi hamlets with the help of a young and cohesive team of 50 volunteers and 35 staff members comprising professionals and local and adivasi people. Snehlata Nath also works through NGO networks in Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Meghalaya, Andhra Pradesh wherein similar work is initiated.

The work is concentrated only on adivasi/tribal communities across these areas. Ramakrishna Mission specially recognised her for her outstanding contribution towards making a difference in the society.

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