

India Turning Green by Voluntary Actions and Ideas

By UNV PO, Anoj Chhetri

India is a rapidly developing country where a billion plus people live, but paradoxically many of them with a huge gap in living standards. Environment is a major concern for the Government, UN and other many development organizations. Low literacy rate, poverty, changing lifestyle and rapid industrialization are reasons, among many others, to climate change, pollution and other impact of global warming. It is therefore that UNV India has always accorded a top priority to environment and climate change through our voluntary actions.

Following 2009 IVD theme "volunteering for our planet", UNV India has been making all possible endeavors tirelessly to make IVD 2009 a grand success. It has already organized several events right from June this year beginning Indian capital Delhi in collaboration with IEEE (Institute of Electricals and Electronics Engineering). UNV India organized a training programme for 50 university volunteers who are conducting environment related functions at various places. UNV India has also inspired more than 100 universities graduates to volunteer for our environment, particularly to raise awareness of people on using energy efficiently. The drive was organized in various housing societies in Delhi. Students organized street plays and dramas and raised awareness on conservation of fuel, water and electricity amongst households. This event took place in many parts of Delhi for many days. The Delhi Tourism Board had supported the events in June and July 2009.

The 'Green Orissa' campaign was launched in Orissa in July amidst boundless enthusiasm, hope and promise to make Orissa green through volunteering efforts. The campaign was launched in a Government Girl's High School to promote tree plantation as a first step to meeting the challenges posed by climate change. UNDP Deputy Country Director, Mr. Bengt Messing and Orissa State Capital Mayor, Mr. Anant Narayan Jena inaugurated the event jointly in a brief function. A prominent media The Hindu, among many others, had covered it well. Other rich and powerful companies such as Airbus had also shown interests in the campaign in order to replicate this model in other parts of India. Online volunteers took part in designing campaign logo. UNV field office based in Orissa facilitated the process and recognized online volunteers' work. This campaign will continue for many months and years.

UNV India is a lead agency in organizing informal meetings with various organizations involving volunteers. In 2009, It has organized more than 10 such meetings involving UN agencies, media, NGO and Government representatives. It has developed a collaborative project with resource commitment by many organizations of \$ 70,000 from various sources. The contribution from UNV India is \$ 4,000. However, the events that took place in India costs more than \$300,000.

This collaborative project includes a school program which entails 30 workshops in 30 schools with "Volunteering for the Planet" as the central theme. The program targeted students of grade 9 across schools of Delhi and showcased the work of community volunteer heroes. VSO India has also extended

resource support for the school program.

The mega event on 5th December received supports from many organisations. The event brought together thousands of citizens of Delhi for a massive Yamuna¹ clean up along with musical performances by renowned artists like Terra Naom and Indian Ocean.. NDTV, a powerful television network in India covered the entire project interviewing UN RC [Mr. Patrice Coeur-Bizot](#). India Government also extended solidarity to the event.

In Mumbai (the financial capital of India), TATA Power Company Limited organized IVD events with the technical support UNV India. UNV India organized a planning workshop in Mumbai in the first week of November 2009 involving corporate volunteers and developed a full scale plan for IVD 2009. It awarded and recognized corporate volunteers with certificates. Similarly SAHER Team organized environment education and interaction in Mumbai with the technical support of UNV India.

A separate collaborative project with civil society members was already in place on the leadership of People's Institute for Development and Training. It was designed for recognizing students who participate in the photography, painting and poster competition. It is expected that more than 500 schools participated in the competition. The theme of the competition is "capture climate change".

UNV India has coordinated signature campaign for "seal the deal" and "volunteering for our planet". It organized the event on the occasion of UN Day on 23 October. UN agencies, NGO, private companies, diplomats and Government representatives have expressed solidarity and participated in the signature collection campaign. UNV Volunteers also took part in the signature campaign online. A link has been created in the CO website. National UNV Volunteers who are working all over India will take part in various events related with IVD 2009.

Times Foundation – a NGO is coordinating to publish a book on environment. Cambridge University Press will publish the book which will include UNV PO's article, as approved by UNV, on "Harnessing Volunteerism and Active Citizenship for Environmental Sustainability".

In conclusion, UNV India put together all possible efforts and resource in close coordination with various types of like-minded organization to mark IVD 2009 following the given theme "volunteering for our planet". India where a billion plus people live with gap in socio-economic condition, will make a dent in protecting our planet through our voluntary actions of various nature equivalent to millions of dollar in monetary value. Our involvement consistently in coordination, programme formulation, monitoring and resource mobilization, remained very fruitful and learning events, both from organizational viewpoints and at personal end. It is believed that our tireless efforts will be counted in the overall process of sustaining our generations to come.

¹ Yamuna is a most polluted river in Delhi in India. Please refer to a separate article on this river prepared by a university volunteer, published in the UNV website.