**Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment**

January 25, 2017

For immediate release:

**Day 2: ATREE@20 Conference on Conservation Science and Environmental Sustainability**

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**Day 2: ATREE@20 Conference on Conservation Science and Environmental Sustainability**

Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE) concluded Day 2 of the two-day ATREE@20 international conference, marking 20 years of ATREE, on biodiversity conservation and sustainable development. Sessions today deliberated on the issues of Forest Livelihoods and Water & Society.

One of the key highlights of the day's proceedings was the TN Khoshoo Memorial Award. The TN Khoshoo Memorial Award is given to an academician or a practitioner whose work has had an impact in the fields of environment, conservation, or development. The award for 2016 was given to Mr. K.J. Joy, co-founder and Senior Fellow of the Society for Promoting Participative Ecosystem Management (SOPPECOM) and Forum for Policy Dialogue on Water Conflicts in India, in recognition of his activist and research work, spanning 30 years, in the development sector.

The TN Khoshoo Award function included a panel discussion moderated by Sharachchandra Lele, Senior Fellow at ATREE. Panellists included Prof Lyla Mehta, Noragric;  Brij Gopal, Centre for Inland Waters in South Asia; Himanshu Kulkarni, ACWADAM, and KJ Joy. The panellists deliberated on whether interlinking of rivers is the solution to India’s water problems.  On the skewed benefits of technological interventions, Lyla Mehta said, “Scarcity is not just volumetric, but also social and political – it is a question of exclusion and inequality. Lot of interventions assume technology is the solution to a whole gamut of problems, but dams lead to displacement, which have multi-dimensional impacts. We are now in a place where there are private and corporate players along with the state, and there is rampant water grabbing. Rivers are unpredictable, with climate change even more so.”

The day began with a key-note address by Esther Mwangi, principal scientist with the Centre for International Forestry Research (CIFOR). Elaborating on the inequality in forest resource governance, and gender inequality in particular, Ms. Mwangi said "When it comes to land tenure rights, no one talks about cultural issues. But when it comes to women's empowerment, local culture is used as an excuse to question change. We need to see culture as something dynamic, that can change, can be negotiated."

This was followed by a series of invited talks on Forests, Governance, and Livelihoods. Sharachchandra Lele, Senior Fellow, ATREE presented insights and challenges of forest governance in India. Prof Tamara Ticktin, University of Hawaii at Manoa stressed the need to understand Non Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) as a part of a larger socio-ecological system in order to harvest them sustainably. Prof Tor A. Benjaminsen, Norwegian University of Life Sciences critiqued the equity impacts of pilot REDD+ projects in Tanzania.

A panel discussion on the challenges posed by conservation to local populations was

moderated by Nitin Rai, Fellow, ATREE and featured Sandeep Virmani, Hunnarshala Foundation, Bhuj; Prof Charlie Shackleton, Rhodes University; Tushar Dash, Vasundhara and Ilse Kohler Rollefson, League for Pastoral People. “There is no such thing as a pristine nature left anywhere in India, communities have played a key role in shaping ecosystems” said Rollefson while talking about the complex interactions that the pastoral communities and livestock have on the grasslands in Madhya Pradesh. Most panellists agreed that there are shortcomings in our educational system, which are making young people disconnected from nature.  Many children from tribal areas are sent to residential schools where they promote a kind of education, which is contradictory to their culture.

The Forests and Livelihood session ended on a lively note with spirited **“Young Scholar Presentations**” by ATREE’s PhD scholars:  Urbashi Pradhan investigated why bees are disappearing even from an organic pesticide-free state like Sikkim, and found that the old forest has declined and the new forest is empty of nectar. Annesha Chowdhury found that most tea estates in Darjeeling pay lip service to organic certification. Poorna Balaji describe how subsistence farmers in Odisha are being forced to give up their lands for Government CAMPA plantations. Finally, Vikram Aditya warned that the Eastern Ghats are being lost to dams even before their rich biodiversity is fully known.

Other sessions on water included a keynote talk by Upmanu Lall of Columbia University, who said, “We can argue that we have consumed the environment mightily over the years”. His extensive research on water use patterns in India revealed the role perverse subsidies play in influencing cropping patterns. The study showed that if these are eliminated, the net benefits would far exceed any cost to farmers. India’s PDS system should be targeted to meet nutritional requirements.

In a series of invited talks on the global water crisis, Chris Scott of the Udall Center for Studies in Public Policy, University of Arizona wondered if in pursuing food security, we are jeopardizing water security.  Margreet Zwarteveen,UNESCO IHE Institute for Water Education and University of Amsterdam said “Metrics like the Water Footprint are useful to show people in rich countries how much water they are indirectly consuming. But it should not form the basis for disciplining small farmers in developing countries”. She also stressed the need for more scientific research in developing countries, saying “where science is being produced matters”. Richard Allan, James Hutton Institute and Strategic Advisory Board: Environment European Committee for Standardisation spoke about Scotland’s experience in providing safe drinking water to rural communities.

**Venue**: J.N Tata Auditorium, National Science Symposium Complex, Sir CV Raman Avenue, Near Indian Institute Of Science, Malleswaram 18th Cross, Kodandarampura, Bengaluru, Karnataka – 560012

**About the Conference**

The ATREE@20 conference marks 20 years of ATREE’s work in the areas of environmental conservation and sustainable development. The themes of the conference are Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services; Water, Land and Society; Forest Governance and Livelihoods; and Climate Change and Development.

By bringing together national and international academics with diverse expertise, the conference aims to call attention to current environmental challenges.

**About ATREE**Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE) focuses on research and education to engage and influence policy and practice in the conservation of nature, management of natural resources, and sustainable development. Established in 1996 as a non-profit organisation, ATREE works in the forests of Western Ghats, the ecosystems of Northeast Himalayas, grasslands of Kutch, wetlands of Tamil Nadu and Kerala, the expanding urban cities of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, and other parts of India.

ATREE focuses on biodiversity conservation, climate change, livelihoods, energy, and water using a unique multidisciplinary approach in its research and outreach activities, which have contributed significantly across local, state, and national stakeholders to meet current environmental and social challenges.

ATREE’s mission is to generate rigorous interdisciplinary knowledge for achieving environmental conservation and sustainable development in a socially just manner, enable the use of this knowledge by policy makers and society, and train the next generation of scholars and leaders.  
[www.atree.org](http://www.atree.org/)

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