

Regional Centres of Expertise

on education for sustainable development

RCE KODAGU

The region

Kodagu District in the state of Karnataka in southern India covers an area of 4106 sq. km. and has a population of 545,000. A large part of the district lies in the Western Ghats, one of the most complex and fragile ecosystems in the world. Two thirds of the district is covered by forest of which the government controls half and the rest is owned privately and by the community. Much of the district has coffee and spice plantations, and sacred groves.



The Kodavas are the most prominent ethnic group in the region. The population of the district also includes indigenous communities, permanent migrants and floating populations from other areas.

Agriculture is the mainstay of Kodagu's economy, and some important products include rice, finger millet, maize, pulses, oil seeds, tobacco and spices such as pepper and cardamom. The district is the largest coffee producer in the country.

Regional challenges

- Biotic interferences such as cattle grazing, fuel wood collection, illegal felling of trees and expansion of agriculture resulting in encroachments have led to the degradation of natural forests.
- Price fluctuations in plantation produce of Kodagu, increase in production costs and minimal exploration of alternate avenues for income generation have led to economic instability in the district.
- Changes in economy, such as the fall in prices of produce such as coffee, cardamom, pepper and orange has resulted in landholders needing to augment their income. Loss of tree cover and diversity in private plantations are results of these landholders trying to meet their domestic needs of timber and fuel wood.
- Encroachment of river banks, sand mining, degradation of wetlands due to changes in land use, deforestation leading to inadequate recharge of groundwater, excessive water usage for agriculture and domestic consumption, pollution through pesticides, insecticides, and the flow of effluents from towns and coffee pulping units have led to a loss in aquatic biodiversity and depletion of groundwater resources.

- Some gaps in awareness that need addressing are the lack of information and knowledge on legal aspects of natural resource management, wildlife protection and biodiversity, forests, land & pollution laws, scientific data and its use in sustainable natural resource management, and the sustainable extraction of natural resources.
- Fragmentation of forests from encroachment and degradation, conversion of natural forests to teak plantations, non-availability of fodder inside forests from grazing domestic cattle, and non-availability of water inside forests due to the silting of waterbodies have all led to an increase in human-animal conflicts.
- Marginalization of indigenous communities, change in socio-cultural lifestyles due to modernization and the dilution of cultural values have contributed to their loss of livelihood and a resultant socio-economic crisis.
- Biotic interferences mentioned earlier, growth of settlements and expansion of agriculture resulting in encroachments, non-involvement of native communities in governance leading to loss in social, religious and cultural relevance of sacred forests have resulted in degradation of common lands such as meadows and sacred groves.

Regional role

RCE Kodagu, through its activities, aims to become a resource and model for all of the Western Ghats region. The RCE will initially work in the catchment areas of the river Cauvery, such as Kodagu, Hassan and Mysore districts of Karnataka, Wynad of Kerala and Nilgiri hills of Tamil Nadu, and later spread to other parts of the region. The Western Ghats are a vital biodiversity hotspot in India, home to millions of people, flora, fauna, the source of several rivers and a very important controller of climate and resources in western and southern India.

Goals of the RCE

The vision of RCE Kodagu is to involve all stakeholders and experts in the field of education and sustainable development to contribute to and participate in the conservation of environment in the Western Ghats to achieve a healthy and holistic life. The long-term objective of the RCE is to motivate people to know, understand, appreciate and act on behalf of conservation of the environment, betterment of the lives of the people and the values associated with these.

Organizations involved

The Kodagu Model Forest Trust (KMFT) as the registered local consortium of a few NGOs, institutions and the district administration bodies, will be the key responsible entity, and all others who are inducted for broader and better implementation of the programmes of the RCE will function through the various committees and groups of the KMFT. Thus, initially, the RCE's key institutions are the Centre for Environment Education (CEE), the Coorg Wildlife Society (CWS), the Forestry College, the NGOs Samvrudhi Trust and Nirmala Kodagu, the Office of the Deputy Director of Public Instruction (DDPI), and EMBARK, a youth NGO.

Specific activities relating to high school and college teachers' training will be coordinated by the Forestry College. Nirmala Kodagu along with the DDPI will coordinate ecoclubs and teachers' training in primary and middle schools. Conservation education, establishment of a centre for promoting rainwater harvesting and conservation, and training Eco-Development Committees (EDCs) will be CWS' responsibility. Ecotourism will be coordinated by CEE. Samvrudhi will coordinate health education and women's self-help group programmes, while EMBARK will coordinate all youth activities.

Decision-making structure

The KMFT, through its various component organizations and members, will promote and sustain the RCE, organize orientation, capacity building, monitoring and evaluation. However, other state, district and local institutions will be inducted from time to time to strengthen and sustain the programmes.

Good governance practices will be inculcated among the citizens through village knowledge centres in the district.

Initially the Executive Committee of the RCE will consist of seven organizations, with CEE's Coordinator playing the Chairperson's role and Samvrudhi Trust's representative playing the Vice-Chairperson's role.

Activities

- Setting up of the Kodagu Heritage Interpretation Centre at Madikeri to explain Kodagu's natural and cultural heritage, the Kodagu Ecological Centre at Gharwale in Somvarpet taluk to set the stage for a livelihoods training programme including adventure and camping activities, and the development of the Kodagu Ecotourism and Sacred Groves Interpretation Centre in Virajpet taluk to promote biodiversity conservation through the protection of sacred groves.
- Creating a demonstrative nursery to raise seedlings of plants that play an important role in the lives of local ethnic groups, and setting up a training centre on economically viable cultivation of selected plant species and publication of manuals or ethno-guides.
- Setting up a platform to encourage local traditional health practitioners.
- Promoting nature trails in forest areas and creating a snake park to promote awareness of species that are part of Kodagu's natural landscape, and training of guides for the promotion of eco-friendly and sustainable tourism in the area.
- Establishing a demonstrative organic coffee farm.
- Promoting the existing training unit for utilizing recyclables from municipal waste, and teaching the public to reduce waste and recycle source-separated waste.
- Establishing Village Knowledge Centres (VKC) equipped with information services, alternative sources of energy, GIS interpretation and capacity building services.
- Starting ESD programmes in schools through eco-volunteers and eco-clubs.
- Documenting the biodiversity of Kodagu and helping develop strategies for conservation.

A KODAGU DEITY



For more information

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