

## Data Capacity Building Project: Keystone Foundation

Organizations that are working to improve the water situation in India are diverse and widespread. From large NGOs like UNICEF to small village associations, they come in all shapes and sizes with a varied understanding of the water situation in India.

The one thing that seems to connect them – other than a dedication to better and sustainable water access – is data. There is a lot of water related data in India because it is essential to understand the resource and also maintain it so that everyone can get enough water. However, the collection, use, and management of data is not always easy for small NGOs.

The India Water Portal Data Project is involved in a project to look at two instances of local NGOs who are collecting data to help the communities they aim to serve. We hope to explore what the history and vision of these organizations is and to look at how data is a part of their goals. Then, we want to look at their data for various projects and offer ways to improve the way they manage the data and for future projects, give suggestions on how to best collect it.

This first case study will be with the Keystone Foundation in the Nilgiris who work on improving the quality of life for people in the area.

### Introduction to Keystone

Keystone Foundation was started in 1993. The work started with a survey of Honey Hunters in the hill areas of Tamil Nadu in 1994 and has now expanded to many parts of the Nilgiris Biosphere Reserve covering 89 villages and more than 4000 families. Keystone works with the indigenous communities in the region with an eco-development approach on aspects such as sustainable livelihoods, biodiversity conservation, enterprise development, environmental governance, indigenous culture, ICT etc. The mission is to improve the quality of life and environment. In 2010, Keystone successfully hived off its marketing function into a profit making private company called the Last Forest Enterprises Pvt. Ltd. It has also hived off the NTFP value addition units of indigenous communities into a Producer Company in 2013. It has worked on water over the years through various projects which are summarized below. At present Keystone is planning to pilot the Payment for Ecosystem Services Model on water in the Kallar river catchment area around Coonoor town.

Keystone Foundation has over the years worked on various issues around water. With its focus on development of the indigenous communities, Keystone started off with setting up a water supply system for one village in 1995. This was quickly picked up by the Forest Department who replicated it in the nearby villages. This was followed by a study of the water resources of the Nilgiris District as a tool for advocacy. Wetlands have been a major focus area for Keystone as there are hardly any voices in the Nilgiris for conserving these critical ecosystems that are facing the brunt of urbanization and expansion in cultivation. Even though the Nilgiris is a water-rich district, there is a poor access to clean water in many areas. Keystone has worked in the Sigur plateau to set up village-level water distribution systems that are being managed by water user groups in those villages. Over the last two years, the river flowing through the Coonoor town and its catchment area have been studied to assess the state of the water resources and to advocate for better planning across various departments to conserve them.

The major challenges Keystone is facing with respect to data are:

- Standardization of formats for data collection and storage across projects and over time so that different datasets can 'talk to each other'
- Managing the data in a database for efficient storage and retrieval
- Capacity within Keystone to responsively design databases for various needs

- Cleaning up existing data to enable them to be shared as open data

## **Role of IWP**

IWP will be a platform for Keystone to share its datasets and stories in the public domain under a Creative Commons License. The Portal can also help Keystone get access to resources shared by others working in the domain of water so that Keystone is able to improve its work. IWP will also attempt to help Keystone build data capacity through a partnership over time where we work together on ongoing water projects and improve the data management systems within Keystone. IWP can also bring together various NGO partners for experience sharing , cross learning and training.

## **The Case Study**

Over the next few months we will be posting write ups on the data experience of Keystone's prior and ongoing work. IWP will help Keystone look at better data management systems and strategies. This will be documented for an ongoing blog series as the project unfolds.

The goal of the partnership is to improve capacities within Keystone to handle water data efficiently and effectively, which in turn will impact the way data is handled in other domains within the organization. An outcome of the partnership is that Keystone's datasets, where relevant, would be cleaned up and shared in the public domain with the help of the portal. We hope that this series will help bring to light to some of the data problems that local NGOs face and help provide examples of how to fix them.

## **The Series**

A series of posts about Keystone's work around the theme ' Hill Water and Livelihoods'

- i. Background
- ii. Cultural flows
- iii. Keystone's work on water over the years

A series of posts about skill-building and best practices on working with data for people who are struggling to do so, e.g.:

- i. Data management in spreadsheets – Dos and Don'ts.
- ii. Data entry and manipulation
- iii. Graphs and Charts
- iv. Using Pivot Tables

We are looking forward to sharing this journey with you.