

XI Conference of Parties (COP11)
Convention on Biological Diversity
Report – 2nd week
Hyderabad India, 8th – 19th October 2012

The second week of the Hyderabad conference marked the beginning of the COP11 Convention on Biodiversity, a meeting which served to support and promote implementation of the objectives of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity and the Aichi Biodiversity Targets. Held during the United Nations Decade on Biodiversity, its goal was to mainstream biodiversity at different levels.

Cooperation between the BK Rural Development wing and the International members from the BK Environmental Initiative continued. On Monday 8th October the BK delegation attended the opening ceremony of COP11 and the Brahma Kumaris added another booth to their other two stands (HITEX Exhibition stand and the Silparamam). This stand was a smaller display booth at the CEPA Fair and, though it was only open to accredited conference participants, it was located in front of the registration desk so lots of people had access to BK information pamphlets and cards.



BK CEPA Fair Stand with BK Andrea and Klaus Peter

Apart from the daily negotiations of the COP this Conference also offered a great variety of side events that were divided into 2 groups - a lunch time session, from 13.15 to 14.45 and an evening session from 18.15 to 19.45. The BK delegation actively participated in many of these very interesting side events. (Short accounts of a few are at the end of this report.)

HITEX Exhibition

In contrast to the first week where many stands were not yet ready, all the stands were up and running the second week, and the HITEX Exhibition hall was filled with positive and happy energy. Lots of people showed interest in our activities to preserve biodiversity; school children, farmers, international delegates, and the general public constantly visited us. The number of international delegates increased day by day. Delegates from Chile, Finland, and Sri Lanka were particularly interested in the BK's activities. BK delegates also enjoyed visiting other stands and sharing ideas with the exhibitors.



BK stand at HITEX Exhibition



Welcome Billboards around the city of Hyderabad

The BK international delegation expands.

BK Claudia, a young biologist from Costa Rica, joined the delegation on Wednesday, and BKs Julia from New York and Ingrid from Gibraltar arrived the following morning. Their

first impression of Hyderabad was of quite a modern city with the road from the airport - green, tree-lined, with blooming flowers - equally modern and more beautiful than many roads seen elsewhere in the world.

Shanti Sarovar Retreat Centre, where the delegation was staying, is a large complex and a good example of positive environmental change based on the application of spiritual values. In 2002, after more than 25 years of heavy granite quarrying, the land was barren. Trees were scarce, there was little greenery and the soil quality was poor. Ten years later, after being taken over by the Brahma Kumaris, there are over 6,000 trees, both herbal and fruit bearing. After low impact water harvesting, bore wells, and low use sprinkler systems there is an expanding and diversifying wildlife population. Shanti Sarovar also has its own cows, which wander freely during the day and are 'tucked in' at night. A particular favorite is the blind mother of the little heard.



Shanti Sarovar Retreat Center - Positive environmental change

On arrival after dropping off bags in rooms, the new arrivals joined the rest of the delegation for breakfast and then went straight into the morning planning meeting. Most of the delegation left for the conference, while BKs Usha, Julia and Sumanth stayed behind to edit a film on Yogic Agriculture. This short film was made especially to show at the BK stand at HITEX convention center. A copy of the DVD would also be offered as a take-away gift for participants at the Interfaith Program to be held on Sunday.

The first impression of the conference was busy, dynamic and interactive. Because of the conference theme, there had been an attempt to bring nature into the exhibition areas by adding bamboo poles, but it was the friendly, down to earth quality of the interaction, which spoke loudest. We met many people in the corridors on the way to a variety of interesting side events.

The following day, (Friday October 12th) we were asked by BKs Vamsi and Sumanth to write a press release, as it seemed there were many opportunities to meet the media. On arrival at the conference our stand was active with many visitors and lots of enthusiastic school children and teachers with whom we all got busy interacting. After about an hour and a half we managed to sit down together to see what we wanted to say for our press release. We did an outline and then went off to attend various side-events. It was Andrea's last day before returning to Madhuban, and so after our lunch we returned to Shanti Sarovar to finish off the press-release with BK Sumanth and then met with parents (who lived locally) of BKs at our respective centers in our countries. It was a sweet meeting of chat, exchange of gifts, and the giving of love and remembrances. BKs Usha and Julia then finished editing the film on Yogic Agriculture with Shaktibhai, which from then on played continually at our stand.

On Saturday, Vamsi arranged an **outing for most of the delegation to Pragati Biodiversity Knowledge Park, also called Pragati Herbal Healing Garden and Resorts**. The UN Conference was not convening over the weekend so only a few needed to stay behind and look after our stands, which were accessible to the general public. We had an absolutely fantastic day. The owner, G.B.K. Rao, loves nature and animals, cares deeply about ancient Vedic knowledge and is an entrepreneur who makes things happen. He spent the whole day with us explaining the healing power, use, and meaning of each herb, tree, and flower. What he has done is truly amazing - rejuvenating thousands of acres of wasteland and introducing rare and near extinct plants from all over India. We had a picnic lunch in one of the bedrooms with a balcony overlooking the gardens and he related stories of how he became a BK and how he came to create such a wonder. He told us that 400 year old Hyderabad was famous as a Garden City and how over time the city had become more and more like a concrete jungle, with barely a small public garden for the 75 lakh (7,500,000) people living in this capital city of Andhra Pradesh. He became determined to offer the residents of Hyderabad and national and international tourists an oasis of green filled with gardens, waterfalls, lakes, ponds, green fields, flowering and fruit bearing plants, and more than 650 varieties of medicinal plants. He wanted to create a place where people could breathe fresh air and feel the pulse and power of nature once again. We all returned to Shanti Sarovar refreshed and happy - a lovely day spent together on land that gave us a glimpse of heaven!





BK Delegation enjoying Pragati Park. (BK Rao top and bottom right)

On Sunday October 14th a **special event on Interfaith for Biodiversity** was arranged by the **Andhra Pradesh State Biodiversity Board** and hosted by the **Brahma Kumaris at the Global Peace Auditorium of Shanti Sarovar Campus**. This event was arranged to emphasize the critical role that spiritual leaders play in spreading the message of biodiversity conservation. It went very well with spiritual leaders from various faiths, senior officials from the Andhra Pradesh State Government, and Brahma Kumaris addressing the audience. The international team was asked to come early to meet with the speakers and also welcome the **Executive Secretary of the Biodiversity Conference, Mr. Braulio F. de Souza Dias**. Mr. de Souza Dais, with many duties and concerns (as he was managing the whole UN conference) was meant to only stay for 20 minutes but he ended up staying for the entire program.



BKs Raju, Mruthyunjaya, Julia, and Usha (left to right) and others greeting Executive Secretary of the Biodiversity Conference, Mr. Braulio F. de Souza Dias to the Interfaith Event

There were wonderful cultural items and skits from school children who had been making consistent efforts to spread the message of biodiversity conservation in the area. Also, there was an excellent group of young dancers who gave a truly stunning visual treat of a medley of gorgeous dances.



Spectacular young dancers with amazing balance and grace.

Dr. R. Hampaiah, Chairman, of the Andhra Pradesh State Biodiversity Board hosted the event and Dr. Balakrishna Pisupadi, Chairman, NBA India was the Convenor. Besides the Chief Guest, Mr. de Souza Dais, there were many other dignitaries including Dr. T, Subbirami Reddy, MP, Sri Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka, Deputy Speaker, A.P., Legislative Assembly and BK Mruthyunjaya, Executive Secretary Brahma Kumaris, Mt Abu. The presentations from the various dignitaries and religious leaders were followed by the lighting of a lamp and the planting of a peepal (a sacred tree) sapling. This was followed by a beautiful collective meditation led by BK Usha (South Africa), which filled the large auditorium with peace and through which she even encouraged the film crews and photographers to pause and reflect with the rest of the participants.

In recognition of their extraordinary contribution to biodiversity conservation, Justice V. Eshwariah; BK Sarla, National Co-ordinator, Rural Development Wing; Dr. GBK Rao; Nagaratnam Naidu and Kongara Ramesh Visaka were felicitated.



BK Sarla, National Co-ordinator, Rural Development Wing, receiving recognition.

Leading the main addresses, Mr. de Souza Dais stressed the vital role that spiritual leaders played saying it was important to, “go beyond words and get into action, we need to provide good leaders.” “We are given minds and still we cut trees and kill animals,” remarked Chinna Jeear Swamiji as he spoke of how human activities are destroying the earth. “Nature protects if she is protected.” said Ramadhutha Swamiji laying emphasis on the importance of a peaceful coexistence with nature. BK Mruthynjaya spoke of the importance of meditation and asked everyone to chant “Om Shanti.” He stressed that all countries who are part of the UN should strive hard to protect and promote biodiversity. “Clean the mind and Green the Earth,” he remarked. Janab Moinuddin Ahmedji recited a verse from the Quran which stated that every human should plant a tree before he dies. He said that loss of biodiversity was due to humans’ misdeeds. “Humans are living for greed not need.”



Dignitaries Lighting of the lamp. BK Mruthynjaya and Mr. Braulio F. de Souza Dias (center)

There was a considerable amount of both local and national media present and afterwards various short TV interviews were given by BKs Raju and Sarla Didi, from the Brahma Kumaris Rural Development Wing. An additional short interview by BKs Julia (USA), Brigida (Brazil), Ingrid (Gibraltar) and Claudia (Costa Rica) gave the Andhra Pradesh Media a taste of the diversity of our delegation both in terms of geography as well as backgrounds.

On Monday 14th afternoon Claudia and Julia **hosted a delegate**, Juan Francisco Bascuñán Muños, **from the Chilean Ministry** who had come to our stand and who is interested in working with the Brahma Kumaris in Chile. BK Vamsi arranged for us to have tea in a small sitting room in Shanti Sarovar. Then we went for an extensive tour of the grounds, with specific interest in the emerging biodiverse endeavours. The tour, led by engineer BK Surat

Singh - one of the Shanti Sarovar residents - was very much enjoyed by all of us, especially the visit to the free roaming cows and calves, which were tucked up for the evening in their cowshed. As a result of the interest of our guest, we arranged for him to join us for our evening meditation. Claudia gave a meditation commentary in Spanish, which was powerful and much appreciated. After dinner we waved him goodbye and have stayed in contact since.



BK Surat Sing, BKs Claudia and Julia hosting, Juan Francisco Bascuñán Muños, from the Chilean Delegation at Shanti Sarovar.

Short summaries from some side events

9th October

Topic: Dynamic Conservation of Globally Agricultural Heritage Systems

Presenters/Organizer: Parvil Krofhafkan, FAO, Italy; Linda Collette, Italy; Dr. K.S.Varaprasad, NBPGR, India; Dr. Namboodri; Aban Kabaraji, Director, IUCN; Dr. Swaminathan, Swaminathan Foundation, India.

Attendees: BK Sunita, BK Sumanth, BK Janki, BK Meghna, and BK Swati

The session was about the recognition of traditional knowledge of agricultural systems, which enable dynamic steps for conservation to be taken. Especially discussed was the assessment status of biodiversity, collection and conservation, maintenance of a database, promotion of seed banks, encouraging linkages of agricultural systems, identification of the villages to support, and creating a community driven plan. The session also covered the aspects of conservation, cultivation, consumption and commercialization of this ancient heritage. Emphasis was given to the regeneration of the wealth of indigenous knowledge which is the basis of future sustainability. Later BK's met all the speakers to invite them to our side event.

10th October

Topic: College Students UN on Biodiversity Conservation. **Presenters/Organizer:** National Green Corps. **Attendees:** BK Janki and BK Swati

This inspiring and motivating event was presented by university students working with the UN. Countries represented included India, Venezuela, Russia, USA, Denmark, Republic of Korea, UK, France, and Germany. The event, run like a parliamentary discussion, was on the role of youth in conserving biodiversity and addressing climate change. The delegates discussed their current conservation policies, strategies, and projects in their countries and shared the ideas already implemented. While they agreed with some approaches and disagreed with others, all of them wish to work globally and for that they discussed how there should be accord between local, national, and international government, NGOs, and other organizations.

Delegates of USA offered an additional discussion topic – a strategic framework for environmental conservation. One more point for discussion was that every person should plant and care for at least one tree a year in order to correct the balance of oxygen and carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.

It was agreed that youth should be educated in biodiversity issues, and universities should motivate students to conserve biodiversity through scholarships, awards, and in other ways.

10th October

Topic: Citizen Science model at work: success stories of biodiversity conservation in India. **Presenters/Organizer:** EarthWatch Institute. **Attendees:** BK Klaus Peter and BK Andrea

Several projects have been created to bring people and science closer, most of them financed by HSBC. Community members donated their time and enthusiasm and cooperated with researchers in collecting data needed for the study. The volunteers were trained for different tasks, for example, measuring or marking trees. They also entered the data in the computer, did the preliminary processing, and in some cases, made a presentation of the main results and conclusions.

Despite the hard work and challenging environmental conditions, the volunteers saw the experience as life changing. It made them more aware of nature - how it was always around them but they were too busy to see or appreciate it. Most of the volunteers became so environmentally conscious that they incorporated techniques related to the conservation of biodiversity and environment protection into their everyday life.

One of the projects presented the water problem in Hyderabad in particular and India in general. Lakes are being divided into smaller pieces and allowed to dry. The land is then sold for the construction of houses. In Hyderabad's case, the city doesn't have its own water supply and there is no proper drainage system or waste-water treatment either, so this adds to the problem.