

Building up TERI's convening power

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Last week we had organized the 13th Delhi Sustainable Development Summit, and I must express my deep satisfaction at the way this particular event has evolved over the years. DSDS is now not only a platform for ideas related to specific aspects of sustainable development, but it also provides a unique opportunity for networking among leaders and professionals of high caliber from all over the world. We at TERI can feel reasonably happy that we have been able to develop our convening power to an extent where we are able to get people of distinction to join us for this event on an increasing basis.

I recall the first time we held a conference, which was a precursor of the DSDS series, way back in the year 2000, when we celebrated 25 years of TERI's formal existence. At that stage our ambition was necessarily very modest. We did manage to get the President of India for that event, mainly because he was a good friend, but to get others of distinction was a struggle. No doubt, we also managed to get the late Robert McNamara, former Secretary of Defense in the US and later President of the World Bank. He came largely because we had him as a member of the Advisory Board of TERI North America. Among other political leaders we got a former Prime Minister of Sweden, H.E. Mr Ola Ullsten, who I knew quite well. But the others were certainly not high profile leaders. Our reach has expanded and moved upwards to a higher level since that occasion. But I, certainly, am not willing to see that we rest on our oars at this stage, because we must strive further, and make DSDS the most prominent platform in the world in the field of sustainable development.

People often ask me why I never considered getting into politics and government. The more I see politics and politicians in this country the more relieved I feel that I have missed some opportunities that may have taken me in that direction. It is far more exciting in my view to be able to establish a position of respect and credibility outside the system that to be part of a system which is increasingly under fire, important as one might become as an individual within that system. We are living in a changing world, where governments will have to be subjected to much greater scrutiny and held accountable by the public for all their actions. Also, development and the future evolution of human society will be determined by actions to be carried out by governments, corporations, civil society, and the intellectual class, working together. In my view, therefore, convening power is going to become almost as important as governing power.

TERI is in a unique position to build on the strengths we have and we must simultaneously shed many of the weaknesses that we have developed over time. We are unfortunately quite ineffective in projecting ourselves in what we are doing. In this day and age when communications are crucially important in the real world we have to improve the way we project ourselves and communicate with the outside world. It is just for this reason I have suggested that our next Vision Retreat should focus on a broad range of issues that would help us enhance our ability to communicate both with the world external to us as well as the world within.

Source: TERI Intranet