

DG Blog

Dr R K Pachauri, January 12, 2011

The Delhi Sustainable Development Summit is round the corner, and I am happy to see that over a period of ten years this event has evolved into a major gathering which attracts attention from a large number of leaders drawn from different professions and different parts of the world. What is even more heartening is the fact that the organization of this event has become institutionalized with a methodology and 'technology' that requires much less attention from me than was the case in the past. The genesis of DSDS lies in the major event that we had organized in the year 2000 to commemorate 25 years of TERI's formal existence, because the Institute was formally registered in 1974. When we held that set of conferences, inaugurated by the then President of India, Mr. K.R. Narayanan, we attracted persons like the legendary Dr. Robert McNamara, Mr. Ola Ullsten (former Prime Minister of Sweden) and many people of some significance in the intellectual arena known to me personally or other colleagues in TERI. This form of celebration of TERI's silver jubilee was an exciting event in which all TERI staff participated enthusiastically, but I recall that I had to take care of every single detail including the choice of facilitators for speakers etc, choice of accommodation, menus for all the meals, transport arrangements, etc. We have moved substantially beyond that situation.

I believe DSDS still has untapped potential as an event which can influence the course of development worldwide, such that human society exhibits a deeper adherence to the principles of sustainability. However, this requires substantial refinement in the manner in which we plan this event and by tapping every opportunity by which we create awareness and outreach on its importance and prominence. My own hope would be to see that not only we get a dozen heads of states and heads of government to DSDS each year, but that we also have massive and targeted projection of this Summit on a continuous basis. I would also like to see that we have at least a thousand persons wanting to attend the event each year through payment of fees and that we are able to accommodate only a limited number other than those whom we invite.

The Davos Summit that is held each year has been remarkable in projecting its appeal, because each year despite the hardship that many people from the world encounter in the snows and chill winds of that Swiss township, everybody and his brother wants to be part of Davos. What is also worth commenting on is the fact that Davos has changed its style and content distinctly to focus on social and political issues. However, in my view it lacks depth because those who unload their heavy wallets in Davos are primarily people who are engaged in business and whose main preoccupation is with profits the next quarter. Our preoccupation in DSDS is with the progress of human civilization in the next quarter century and beyond.

Without being conceited, I view Davos as a "Disgusting Assembly of Very Opulent Snobs". It has glamour, snob value and the opportunity for big deals being made. DSDS must engage all stakeholders equally, but if we wish to influence policy in the direction of sustainability, then this Summit has to provide primacy to government, knowledge organizations, business and civil society, and to the power of ideas in bringing about change. Governments in the end are accountable to people and have to work in partnership with other stakeholders. I hope all of us in TERI respect these crucially important stakeholders with equal emphasis on business, research and academia as well as civil society. DSDS, therefore, should become and remain an accurate reflection of those partners that TERI seeks opportunities to work with.

As we have entered the year 2011, let us work hard to raise the effectiveness and profile of TERI's flagship event.