

Greetings,

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It is pleasure and honor to be here today and to represent the bioRe Association in this august gathering. To share our experiences in what we believe are small steps taken to build a better future for the generation to come.

The first question put to me to start my presentation was to describe in few words the corporate social investment model followed at bioRe. I thought pensively, only to realize that ours is truly a unique model, rare to find, not defined in a book. This model has evolved out of a process, the aim of which was to link the consumers and producers, where both become beneficiaries of the others existence and commitment. Thus establishing that the bioRe chain is inimitable.

Technically speaking the bioRe module is an amalgamation of the direct investment, indirect investment and community foundation model.

It is comparable to the direct investment model, in a sense that we implement projects with communities and can monitor immediate development benefits

One of the major draw backs in the direct investment model is that the physical gap between investor and the beneficiary is large thus always leaving a lot to be desired. At bioRe we have created a platform in the rural areas to facilitate a dialogue between the community and us so that decisions are taken amicably and based on the needs of the community. We have farmer representation in our managing committee.

In the community foundation model, there is a corporate engagement through establishing a community foundation. The problems here are that there is difficulty in transferring to the community and at times there is a long time frame which may result in loss of interest.

The bioRe association facilitates a process where by we are registered organization and have a legal permission from the government to receive funds. Projects undertaken are discussed with the community, presented to the bioRe foundation annually and then implemented and monitored effectively.

There is total transparency and we are accountable to our farming communities, to our government authorities and to the bioRe foundation. For this we have financial and social audits conducted annually.

Indirect investment module is one in which companies contribute to a social fund without any involvement – the main limitation here being the short term interest of these organizations which may lead to wastage of funds and ineffective projects

It gives me great pleasure to say that we are very fortunate to be associated with committed people and organizations, who have understood our functioning and have always supported us at all times. We on the other side have worked to strengthening this faith placed in us by both the farming communities and the investors.

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Our vision therefore is to empower organic and biodynamic farmers and communities by facilitating education and infrastructure, by addressing local needs and thus leading to holistic and sustainable development.

We categorize our work under the following heads, namely

Education

Infrastructure

Health and Hygiene

Environment

Livelihood promotion and youth

I would now like to present to present an overview of three of our projects - these have been chosen on the basis of their community participation, the responsibilities as taken over by the investors and the role of the bioRe Association.

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Firstly the bioRe mobile health unit

Health and hygiene is one of our areas of work. There are no primary health facilities available in remote rural areas. One may find a doctor, but there are absolutely no diagnostic facilities and people have to travel quite a distance for the basic diagnosis. After thorough surveys, a proposal was put up at the Annual general meeting of the Association and the general consensus of the farmers was obtained, a proposal of the costs and functioning was then made and presented to the foundation.

A state of art mobile health unit was donated to the farming community by COOP Switzerland in December 2006

. This bus equipped with the latest diagnostic facilities and aims at reaching those areas which do not have the primary health facilities. It aims at providing diagnostic, educative and curative facilities to farming communities. An alternate line of Homeopathy medicines is also available, but the choice is left to the individuals. It has a permanent, technically qualified staff on board (including a lady doctor) and has defined movement plan.

We work in close association with the local doctors, making available to them diagnostic facilities, enhancing their capacities, so that line of treatment is well defined. These doctors are from the local areas and their services are available to the patients even when bus moves away from that area.

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We also have specialist doctors attending the camps on various days. Special eye, gynecological, orthopedic, pediatric camps have been organized.

A recent highlight has been “cataract surgery” for 10 of our patients performed under the expertise of a leading eye specialist of our area.

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The costs incurred by patients are almost 50% less than the market rates and what is more important is that these facilities are not easily available to most people. They normally have to travel very far, take an attendant along thus spend on transportation and at times a day of loss of wages for the person accompanying them. We are at present covering 50 villages and cover an area of 100 sq km.

Since its inception in 2007 we have completed 605 camps till August 09. This project has now earned the trust of the people whom it reaches out to and this is primarily because of the efficiency of the machines, staff on board and the regular visits of the bus.

This particular project has a single donor and it is a facility available to the entire community. Launch of this project was a challenge; it was the first of its kind in the entire state of Madhya Pradesh. It was important to get qualified personnel, develop the competency of local expertise to earn the trust of people. It was important to keep the medical fraternity with us, educate the people on matters related to personal hygiene and health, which is now a regular feature.

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I now move on to our second project

Animation schools

Education is the fundamental right of every child. In the struggle for existence and lack of infrastructure related to providing education this right of children has been overlooked in most rural areas. We needed to address this problem and started with 3 animation schools in 2006. An animation school is a preparatory ground for those children who have never been to a school. This was a trial project and we were not sure of the kind of response we would get from the community, whether the children would come to such schools at all. These initial schools were started in the homes of farmers, had a local teacher and the children had basic facilities.

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Today these have evolved to a stage where

- we have 14 schools and about 600 children
- 12 schools are recognized by the government as community schools
- 16 animators
- all schools follow a government curriculum so that if any of the children wish to study further they don't find themselves out of place in a new situation
- 13 children will appear for a state board exam for the 5th grade with other government school children
- we have constructed 4 school buildings, where the land for the building has been donated by the farmers, reflecting the community's commitment and involvement
- all schools have basic amenities of furniture, books, sports and recreational material and uniforms
- there is a parent – teacher association for every school

- all academic records are maintained
- regular health check up and vaccination to all the children – this done by the mobile health unit staff
- all schools have a hygiene kit
- exposure visits - where children of 1 school interact with children of another bioRe school and also nearby public schools

The joy on the faces of these children is to be seen to be believed. This particular project has evolved tremendously, its growth has been mainly because the community participation is commendable, our schools are regular and demand for new schools now comes from the community themselves.

In this particular project the investment model is unique. Here every donor has the responsibility of a school. There is a direct connection. There is total transparency of the flow of funds and a deep connection is developed between the investor and the beneficiary.

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The third project is the
livelihood promotion programme

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This project has developed from our ‘self help group’ programme. An SHG is a group of 10 or more members who set aside a small amount of money as savings every month and when they have a substantial amount, inter loan it among its members or use it for creating a livelihood for additional income or for personal requirements for which loans are not available from the banks.

The concept of shg’s exists and our role has been to

- motivate people,
- create an awareness,
- facilitate the process, - linking them to banks
- provide guidelines,
- help in maintaining records.

We have given a loan to an SHG to develop a fishery – which was successful and the loan amount has been returned to the association.

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Our biggest effort here has been the development of ‘Aavran’ a society formed by various SHG’s, wherein its members are involved in hand spinning and hand weaving of organic ‘khadi’.

This project is now a community enterprise and is being managed by the members of the society. It is now a registered society and has sold its products in the market. The initial investment for the infrastructure was donated by the foundation, it is mainly a project empowering women, who can now work from their homes and add to their family incomes and their personal savings as well. Our biggest challenge here has been the training of the community in manufacturing of the product, maintaining records, and now establishing the quality parameters and effective marketing. The highlight being that it is the people of the group who are taking it forward.

Our next venture in this year is that we will involve 5 such SHG's in the making, implementation and monitoring of 2500 smokeless stoves. This is related to the CO2 neutral project of the association and we have taken it into the community. Instead of buying the stoves, we will organize professional training for these groups and they will be trained for installation and will monitor its use in the next year. In this we are empowering the people by educating them and making them responsible.

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Conclusion

We at bioRe strive to build capacities and believe in community driven development at making people self dependent and directly responsible.

The credit of our growth has been a dedicated team, which ranges from -
Our respected members of the bioRe foundation, - who have full faith in our operations and their foresight and understanding gives us the impetus and courage to do our work better
Our dedicated team at the bioRe Association in India - who leave no stone unturned in being effective and reaching out to remote and some sometimes inaccessible areas of our region.
Our farming community - an example of this being that the farmers contribute a part of his land - something so dear to him for the school buildings in the villages.

It is hard to believe that all this and a lot more has happened and its dynamism continues.

Thank you

Ritu Baruah