

Rethink envrn: Redefine carbon footprints

There is a need to build upon a vast reservoir of grassroots creativity and innovations



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The technological change is one of the prime movers for redefining the way we look at the environment and our contribution to conserve or destroy it. Several grassroots innovations have the potential to change the way the rules of games are defined in the field of public policy not only in India, but globally. Let me illustrate.

During the Shodh Yatra in Champaran, Bihar, we met Virendrakumar Sinha who was faced with a great social and technological dilemma in Motihari. His neighbour was disturbed by the loud noise of the diesel engine, which he used for making various iron grills and other products in his workshop. The children in the schools opposite the workshop could not focus on their studies because of both smoke and sound. Given all the pressures on him, Sinha had no choice but to find a solution. He developed a pollution control device which reduced sound considerably and captured about 12-14 kg carbon in a year using 10 HP engine.

Now begins the dilemma for public policy. If he wants to improve the quality of environment and create market for green technologies, he has to modify the standards for pollution control in every diesel or kerosene engine. Once standards are modified, a huge market will emerge for the technology of Sinha and other grassroots

innovators who have developed pollution control devices. It will also give a competitive edge against China and other countries. The challenge is to use such technologies as an option for game changing strategies.

Recently, when Dr VL Kelkar, chairman of 13th Finance Commission, and his team visited Orissa, they noticed sound and carbon pollution in Chilka lake because of the engines used in the fishing boats. The state government responded to their suggestions and invited several innovators from different parts of the country, including Assam, Bihar and Tamil Nadu asking them to find a solution to this problem. The local authorities invited the innovators and offered all supports. National Innovation Foundation (NIF) facilitated the cross-cultural confluence of grassroots innovators to pool their knowl-



Virendrakumar Sinha of Bihar; (R) the pollution control device that was developed by Sinha

MINDS ON THE MARGIN

edge and insight to find a solution. Several of them have worked out interim solutions which they shortly are going to test in Chilka lake. By pooling the best practices of different innovators from various parts of the country, Honey Bee Network and NIF offer a unique opportunity to solve persistent problems which have remained unsolved for a long time.

There is a need to build upon a vast reservoir of grassroots creativity and innovations to find solutions which formal sectors have ignored for so long. In the next week, I will describe similar model of pooling best practices which was followed in Gujarat for developing new herbal products to complete what Dr RA Mashelkar called as a 'journey from mind to market'.