

Brief May 11 Report-Back

Outline report on Udaipur Green Festival For Educators

- May 11, 2009

(All event photos courtesy of Tribhuvan Ameta and Shikshantar)

Dear Friends, Allies and Well-wishers,

Yes, the future is in our hands and we are all in this together. Building a green and sustainable world is everybody's work.

Our first, modest, collaborative effort was launched in Udaipur this month entitled a Green Festival For Educators. Ecologists and environmental experts from many fields gathered together to show and tell local educators how we could pull together to create a sustainable heritage city, steeped in its best cultural and ecological traditions, both for our own sakes and the future of our children's children's children.

The festival offered participants a variety of educational and interactive venues - one-on-one encounters at our many booths, round table gatherings, lunch discussions, and our morning coffee house, besides the formal presentations in the afternoon. The educators who attended got a chance to meet, hear and discuss questions with experts on local forestry & reforestation, biodiversity, lake clean up, alternative energy, homemade zero waste technologies, rainwater harvesting, medicinal herbs, organic farming, climate change, alternative energy resources, the plastics problem, and democratic dialog. There was also a lot of attention devoted to local resources for technical assistance in all these areas and how to turn this rich knowledge base into actionable projects in their institutions and communities.

Big Medicine co-director and lead event organizer, Premilla Dixit addresses an afternoon session to sincerely thank our many collaborators and invite students and citizens as well as educators into the Greening India process.

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Major discussion themes:

- Water/lake reclamation - using both new and ancient wisdom and tech to restore the local lakes and aquifer and protect them from increasing pollution, silt, invasive species and unsustainable usage patterns

- Energy - recognizing in the increasing load-shedding (brown-outs) an old and endangered energy system that must be

augmented (or reinvented) with sustainable new green tech as well as shared more equally and frugally by all communities and institutions in town.

- Forests - or more accurately, combatting deforestation and reclaiming the verdure of the recent past that attracted rainfall, moderated the local climate, and offered a sustainable supply of vital forest produce to villagers and tribal groups.

- Medicinal plants & biodiversity - restoring and enriching the great natural apothecary that the region's traditional healers have depended upon for centuries.

- Waste management - reducing and reusing the surfeit of modern waste and by-products, targeting a zero waste society and fully recycleable production chains.

- Heritage preservation - extending the concept of heritage protection beyond historic architecture to the region's critical ecological infrastructure without which we all sicken, bake and starve. Collaborating Group Booths in the Expo Area

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Media Turnout

The local mass media -- which occupies an overarching teaching-learning role in current public space -- was in good attendance. We want to sincerely thank Udaipur's Dainik Bhaskar, Rajasthan Patrika and Pratah Kal, and the Dainik Navajyoti of Ajmer, all mass circulation vernacular newspapers with several hundred thousand readers, for their prominent and substantial reporting on the festival. Channel 24 television, the local station watched by most Udaipur citizens, also highlighted the festival in repeated broadcasts from the night of the event and throughout the next day. Yes, the local mass media did a very gratifying job of delivering the festival's message to the community and family learning spaces. We intend to follow up on this initial interest with more concerted media work to keep public attention focused on the promise and progress of these initiatives and how they can get involved.

Principal Reactions

Some school principals were regrettably unable to attend as they were called out as poll monitors for the national election underway. Others supported the aims of the festival but privately voiced their frustration, feeling their hands are tied by their schools' lack of adequate financial resources to implement environmentally meaningful reforms. Furthermore, they face increasingly daunting obligations within the structure of the current education system, the demands of state and national school boards, and political pressures on their jobs. Rajaram S. Sharma, Professor of Education Technology at the Regional Institute of Education, observed,

"Rigid curricular formulations, over-emphasis of examinations and consequent stress on cognitive achievement, absence of multiple-texts (read sources of information, especially, the local-contextual ones), seriously hamper the possibility of broader issues of environment and society being addressed in the school context."

Nonetheless, given the festival's enthusiastic turn out, the heartening mass media coverage, the rising public awareness, and inspiring presentations on critical local issues, zero waste systems & sustainable green values, the principals in attendance all seemed keen to consolidate the insights offered and to work with us to concretize practical next steps.

Roundtable Discussions & Outdoor Project Displays

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Credits & Appreciation

We wish thank our dedicated partners, the hard working members of Shikshantar, the Mohan Singh Mehta Memorial Trust, Jagran Jan Vikas Samiti, Dr. Lena and many others who pulled together an impressive network of local resources, ready to work together to green education in Udaipur both for her citizens' sake and as a model for the nation as a whole. Our heartfelt thanks also go out to the many people who helped from the Udaipur Forest Department, the Agricultural colleges and other local NGOs who took time out from their very busy schedules to participate in and generously contribute to the festival.

Big Medicine and all the festival participants also thank the very busy Bill McKibben, Fran Korten, Jerome Ringo, Sean Miller, and Craig Altemose, for the time they took from their vitally important work to send us truly moving and deeply appreciated solidarity messages. See and hear their words of wisdom here.

Yes, we are all in this together. After all it is local actions that will ultimately achieve a thriving sustainable human civilization globally. Big Medicine is already working with some local school principals, ecological designers, rainwater harvesting experts, and other allies to create some green playground models for the region. We are also planning a major drive to help make Udaipur school district buildings major contributors to groundwater recharge in the city using rooftop rainwater harvesting systems in as many schools as possible before the 2009 and 2010 monsoons.

We are already seeking donors to adopt individual schools for this rainwater harvesting program, and will be posting more info on this initiative here at the Greening India website soon.

Also please watch this site for a more detailed report on festival participants, future plans and event photographs in the coming days. In the meantime, thank you all for your continuing interest and support.

Sincerely,
Big Medicine and the Udaipur Green Ed coalition