

**Dr. Kartik Shanker**  
**Director**  
**Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the**  
**Environment (ATREE)**  
**Bengaluru, India**

You have had associated with India's premier research institution IISc Bangalore; ATREE- an institution with a mission to generate rigorous interdisciplinary knowledge to address challenges in achieving socially just conservation and sustainable development; Dakshin Foundation--a not-for-profit charitable trust aimed to inform and advocate for conservation and natural resource management, etc. Do you think that a specialised and successful research institution like ATREE with a very clear policy and outreach programmes would produce bigger impact in society than universities in the existing Indian situation?

Considering the scale and severity of environmental problems, our institutions are grossly inadequate to address issues that lie at the interface of society and the environment. Tackling such issues requires knowledge that cuts across disciplines, scales, and knowledge systems. It requires evidence-based policies that take into account multiple linkages and associated trade-offs among possible actions and application of transdisciplinary knowledge to foster social entrepreneurship and leadership at the grassroots level. We need to build a new generation of environmental leaders that can generate transdisciplinary knowledge to address complex problems and apply such knowledge to improve policy on the one hand and action on the ground on the other.

In essence, we need institutions that can simultaneously generate relevant and credible knowledge, apply this knowledge upstream to influence policy, and downstream to foster societal action on socio-environmental problems while building leadership at multiple levels. This would be an uphill, but we believe, a possible task.

For almost two decades, the Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE) has evolved its programs and broadened its approaches to address contemporary environmental challenges. ATREE has emerged as among the top 20 environmental think tanks of the world. Today, it has one of the only interdisciplinary environmental doctoral programmes outside of North America with a full suite of coursework and field research.

It has also effected change on the ground through the Community Conservation Centres. Working across domains, ATREE has evolved into a unique organization combining the roles and functions of an academic institution, think tank and an NGO.

ATREE is uniquely placed to provide critical inputs for greater impacts because of its past and ongoing research in the broad area of conservation, sustainable use, social justice and environmental governance. Specifically, ATREE has carried out pioneering research on forest cover and biodiversity mapping, forest-hydrological relationships in multiple ecosystems, tree-grass dynamics, long-term forest growth measurement, forest productivity and sustainability under community forest management, on NTFP markets, forest rights regimes, and analyses of forest law and governance. In recent years, ATREE has made substantial contributions to research on water access and quality. ATREE has also been deeply involved in supporting the implementation of the Forest Rights Act, and in broader policy-research on institutional approaches to decentralized and sustainable forest governance.

### Could you tell us about ATREE's major international partnerships?

ATREE has numerous international partnerships with universities, foundations and other non-government organisations. We have signed MoUs with Oregon State University and Colorado State University to develop mutual cooperation in teaching and research, which will include exchange of faculty, joint research activities, submission of joint proposals to national and international funding agencies based on faculty interests, participation in seminars and academic meetings, exchange of academic material and other information, special short-term academic programmes, and student exchange for research and study. Over the years, ATREE has hosted many Fulbright fellows from many different US Universities.

A grant from the Royal Norwegian Embassy fostered increased collaborations and engagements between ATREE and Norwegian Universities and Institutions for furthering cooperation in research and sustainable development. In particular, ATREE has entered into a 3-year research partnership with NORAGRIC faculty towards joint research and developing interdisciplinary courses for ATREE's PhD programme in Conservation Science.

### What are the priority areas of ATREE for international collaborations/joint research?

ATREE works in the areas of biodiversity monitoring and conservation, ecosystem services, forests governance and livelihoods, water management, sanitation, urbanisation and climate change. ATREE would foster international collaborations and joint research in all the above areas. ATREE also seeks collaborations for its Academy for Conservation Science and Sustainability Studies which runs its flagship PhD programme. As in the past, ATREE would be greatly interested in promoting student exchange programmes as well as faculty exchange programmes.

Kartik Shanker is Director of Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment, Bangalore. He is on deputation from the **Indian Institute of Science**, Bangalore where he studies the **ecology and evolution of various terrestrial and marine groups**. Kartik has worked on the biology and conservation of sea turtles for the last 25 years, and is the author of *From Soup to Superstar*, a historical account of sea turtle conservation in India. He is a founding trustee of Dakshin Foundation and editor of the magazine, *Current Conservation*. He is also the author of several children's books.