

Kartikeya Singh

2007 Compton Mentor Fellowship: Final Report

I had told the interview committee back in April that things can never go according to one's plans in India. But I suppose that is an expected challenge for all Compton Mentor Fellows. I feel like I had to change my project a few times. In the last report I had stated that I wanted to have a case study on one of each of the decentralized renewable energy systems completed by the time I was finished with the fellowship. I managed to visit five different places in rural areas so there is a potential for four in-depth case studies (two on solar home lighting systems and two on biogas digesters) and a brief analysis on water mills. I have only completed two in depth case studies and have yet to analyze the data collected from the other in-depth case studies.

I did not expect that attending the Bali Conference on Climate Change in December would have such a profound impact on me. When I returned to India, I was agitated. I wanted to believe that the project that I was conducting was going to help people and make a difference. At that time I was conducting the in-depth case study on biogas digesters outside Ranthambore National Park. The villagers there had placed a lot of faith in what I was doing—perhaps they were mistaking me for some government official or someone with some power to right what was wrong. Though that made me appreciate my work, I began to realize that what I was doing was not going to have an immediate impact. Writing reports is nice, but who cares to read them? At the same time I was recovering from the fact that I was the only Indian youth actively participating at the UNFCCC conference in Bali. Perhaps becoming thoroughly engaged in

starting a global South youth dialog on the topic (with the formation of the Asian Youth Caucus on the sidelines of the International youth movement present) got me thinking about who would take my place in the years to come. Who would connect these Asian youth with those in India? The vision for the Indian Youth Climate Network was born.

I shared this vision with a close friend in Delhi who has been involved with the environmental scene in city for quite some time and has mobilized a lot of youth around key development issues that are arising from the massive construction drive in the capital. He wanted to get involved and we strategized the formalization of the Delhi Greens, a highly successful environmental blog he had launched in 2006 (<http://delhigreens.com>). One of the key projects of the Delhi Greens would be engagement of youth on the topic of climate change. Things stagnated for a while but in February almost expectedly, I was connected with a girl of Indian origin in Australia who is involved with the youth climate movement there. She wanted to get Indian youth engaged on the topic as well. Before we knew it, the website for the Indian Youth Climate Network was up (<http://iycn.in>) and there was no turning back. I began to network with organizations such as the British Council, the American Center, The Energy and Resources Institute, the Centre for Social Markets, and even my own NGO affiliate, the Centre for Science & Environment. Finally, I had something to draw to people's attention. It felt so real. Little did I know that we had sparked a revolution by setting ourselves on this path.

My time was increasingly being occupied by the formation of this network and I struggled to reconcile the two seemingly different projects. The former project had long term implications but the new one—one probably more along the lines of what the Compton grant is for, seemed to

help more people and could have a greater more immediate impact. The initial challenge was making the network expand and to give it structure. Luckily I had help from my two friends who were helping in the formation of this network. Organizing myself and the day-to-day activities was another challenge. This is something that I became better and better at as I delegated things to volunteers and the vision for the network became clearer. Staying on top of the contacts I was making was a monumental challenge. When one is forming an organization from scratch there are so many people to be consulted to ensure that all the proper steps are being taken. I walked away from so many meetings with dozens of names of people I “should get in touch with.” I managed to follow through on most, but it was like on giant waiting game after sending out requests to meet with them—wait by the phone, wait by the computer.

I also had to become better at my interactions with well established people. How to deal with egos. It is an art that I am still mastering. My mentor relationship taught me a lot about this. A lot of it is about building up trust with people who are not familiar with me and who have to be convinced that I am worth their time. After our initial interaction, my relationship with my mentor could only improve. After all, being told “when I agreed to help you out, I didn’t think you’d get it (the Compton),” was probably rock-bottom coming from my environmental hero. She knew I was a capable person, but she herself was getting accustomed to this new kind of relationship—that was in a strange way forced on her. Who in India “mentors” young people, anyway? What *is* this fellowship? These are the thoughts that were probably going through her head. She gave me blocks of time so that I could meet her once a month or so for about 40 minutes. In all, I only met with her a total of five times, but the time that she did

give me, I cherished. Not many people get to spend this kind of quality time with such a dynamic woman. I got to know her a little bit better through our interactions and get insight into politics of the environmental movement in India and the world from her eyes. She was supportive of my work with the formation of the “What’s with the Climate?” blog (<http://whatswiththeclimate.org>) and the Indian Youth Climate Network. However, she wanted to make sure that her NGO’s name was separated from it—climate change is too political in India for her to get involved with.

By the end of my time in Delhi we were getting all kinds of media attention and were already involved with several projects. One of them being a public perceptions survey of the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system in Delhi—we did this in partnership with CSE—which I think is the ultimate proof of how my relationship ended with Sunita. The IYCN now has membership in every single major city in the country as well as many smaller cities and continues to expand rapidly. The Delhi Youth Summit on Climate (DYSoC) was a huge success and organized in record time (three weeks) despite my becoming ill with mono and having to be admitted in the hospital! The two day summit was a gathering of approximately 150 youth and young professionals from across the nation’s capital and many far flung cities as well (which was not expected). The two days of debate on the city’s development future in the context of climate change resulted in a Delhi Youth Charter on Climate in which we demanded a seat for youth in the Delhi Master Plan reviewing committee. I think the exercise left a lot of people empowered to take action and carry the movement forward. As I was leaving Delhi, I was getting phone calls and emails from all over of people wanting to get more involved and to partner with IYCN (if

they themselves were members of another organization or employees of another institution).

High energy is the best way to describe how the year ended.

Things are looking brighter and brighter. I'm going back to India for another year. I've deferred a Masters at Yale for one year in the hopes that in this one year I can formalize the IYCN (by registering it as an official NGO, getting funding for projects, salaried staff, office space, etc.). I'm in effect, going to be the Executive Director of what I see to be an organization that has a lot of scope and a lot of work cut out for it. The national youth summit is in the offing for when I arrive in August, the proposal for the first Indian Youth Delegation at the upcoming climate change conference in Poland is ready, and we are already beginning to train climate leaders in our first leadership training this July (while I'm not even there). Another amazing project that I will be undertaking is a six week "Climate Solutions Road Tour" from Mumbai to Delhi in electric vehicles. This 1000 km plus journey is going to profile solutions to the climate catastrophe that already exist in India that need to be replicated on a massive scale, and to highlight adaptation efforts and those solutions which need some support to become a reality. It will be an amazing adventure!

I would like to thank the Compton Foundation for this brilliant opportunity. *I cannot think of a better way to encourage young creative minds to forge their own destiny and affect positive change for humanity.* I sometimes wonder what would happen if the fellowship could be renewed. A few of the Compton fellows could be eligible in some manner for a second year—if their project could really take wings. I think all fellows would agree that it takes at least a year to get your bearings and it is only towards the end that you begin to realize what it is you are doing

and how it might work. Before you know it, it is over. What if there could be a round two to see if the fellowship could be renewed (for a limited number of spots) and thus the ideas that are emerging by the end of the first year can be bolstered by some concentrated, organized effort by the fellow in the second year?

Use of Funds (Second Half)

Rent in Delhi (includes utilities): \$4,200

Living Expenses in Delhi (food, water, office supplies, internet, transportation, fees, tips, house cleaning, etc.): \$5,000

Flight back from Delhi to US: \$1,000

Flight to Bangkok (for Post-Bali UN Conference on Climate Change: April 1-5th, 2008): \$700

Flights in India: \$400 (Ahmedabad, Calcutta, Bangalore)

Train Tickets in India: \$500

Private Charters for Field Work: \$500

Hotel Costs India + Thailand: \$700

Start up costs for IYCN website, registration and supplies for DYSoC: \$500

Hospitalization Costs (May): \$800

Trip to San Francisco: \$500

Budgeted for Tax (in process—got extension) : \$2000

Total Spent: \$16,800

Total Remaining: \$1,200

I did not feel that my mentor relationship was such that my mentor deserved an honorarium. Nor do I believe that she would have cared for one. She didn't fully comprehend why I was there and what her responsibilities were and the thought that there could be money involved wouldn't have motivated her to think otherwise. I only had a meeting with her a total of 5 times (the last meeting was in March). Years from now, I may give money to CSE but that will have to be another time. The remainder of the funds will be used for me to get back to India and for the building of the network.