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Interview with
**Mr. Kartikeya
Singh**

**Co-founder of
the India Youth Climate
Network (IYCN)**

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**Ms. Isabelle-Jasmin Roth
Ms. Inga Klemmayer**
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*From an idea to
an international organization:
The story of the IYCN*

*Importance of India's youth for
India's future green agenda*





MR. KARTIKEYA SINGH

Kartikeya Singh is the co-founder and former Executive Director of the Indian Youth Climate Network (IYCN). He has been awarded the prestigious Compton Mentor Fellowship in 2007 and is also a 2006 Udall Scholar. A graduate of Yale University and presently pursuing a PhD in International Affairs at the Fletcher School of Law & Diplomacy, Mr. Singh is interested in climate change and energy policy as well as social enterprise. He has also had the privilege and honor of working as a negotiator on behalf of the Republic of Maldives in the ongoing UN climate negotiations.



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Mr. Kartikeya Singh

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Kartikeya, thanks for coming over to our office! You founded India’s largest youth network with a focus on environmental issues in 2008. Where does your interest in environmental issues and climate change come from?

Mr. Kartikeya Singh

When I was a child, I regularly went to the zoo in Gujarat and carefully observed the animals there. That is how my initial interest in wildlife conservation started. This interest grew in my teenage days, especially when I went on an exchange to Kenya to study wildlife management for some time. There, my interest slightly changed. I understood for the first time, that you need to meet the needs of mankind, and only then there is hope for wildlife. The human factor cannot be neglected if you want to achieve sustainable development in this world.

BTI

What was the trigger event for you that led to the idea of the India Youth Climate Network (IYCN)? How would you describe the organization’s development?

Mr. Singh

In 2007, I attended the UN Climate Change Conference in Bali as a member of the US-youth delegation – I was a student in the US at this point of time. In Bali, there were many young participants from Asia but I was the Indian youth representative present at the sidelines in the growing youth climate movement. I also had slightly different views on climate change and what India’s position should be than that of the official Indian delegation. The trigger point at which I became very angry and frustrated, was what an elder Indian delegate told me after I introduced myself as an Indian youth delegate. “Youth should have the same views as their elders,” he said, intending to dismiss my involvement in the negotiations. Out of that frustration came the energy to start the IYCN. After the Bali-conference, I spent some time in India. Fueled by my experiences, I decided together with my friends in Delhi including Ms. Deepa Gupta, to found a group for young Indians interested in climate change issues. Based on the large interest we received, we organized the first Delhi Youth Summit on Climate



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Change (DYSoC) in March 2008. It was a big success with more than 200 participants! Then, in August, we organized our first national summit, the Indian Youth Summit on Climate Change (IYSoCC) in Hyderabad. As a result, the first IYCN city chapters started. In December 2008, we were able to send the first Indian Youth Delegation to the UN Climate Change Conference in Poznan, Poland.

BTI

What impact did and does the IYCN have?

Mr. Singh

In India, we have achieved more than what we ever dreamt of. After the first Youth Summit in Delhi in 2008, we prepared an input paper for the government on Delhi's development in a climate constrained world titled, the "Delhi Youth Declaration on Climate". Of course, we never heard back from them but it was a start. We received a lot attention from the Indian media. For example, NDTV screened a 30-minute-reportage on the IYCN and its ideas. Over time with the success of our interventions and the persistence of the first ever Indian youth delegation to a climate negotiation, we were able to be taken more seriously by the government. We were regularly in touch with the Prime Minister's Office and the Special Envoy on Climate Change for input on policies and missions on India's sustainable future and how to involve youth in the process.

Internationally, our program 'Agents of Change', through which we send delegates to the climate change conferences, served as a role model for other organizations. At the conference in Poznan, in 2008, our team was the only organized youth delegation from the global south. Only one year later at Copenhagen, in 2009, there were Youth Climate Networks in Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh and other countries in Asia – I think we did a remarkable job in sharing capacity and helping build youth movements in these countries!
(Laughing)

People often ask us what our "impact" has been. While we could list several events organized and people connected and solutions created, our biggest "impact" is the well-being of all players involved in the climate debate in India. Because we are so vibrant and dynamic, we are creating interest amongst youth on this topic and creating the future leaders in the field. Once a young person (student or young professional) has been exposed to us, they inevitably end up joining other organizations (non-profit, corporate, government, or academia) and help drive change there. We have made the climate dialogue in India more vibrant and brought it much needed life. Indeed the old debate had gotten quite stale!

BTI

There seems to be a great deal of cooperation among these youth groups. Especially in the case of Pakistan, this is contrary to the official politics between the two countries. Why is this the case?

Mr. Singh

South Asia has very complex politics. We know that climate change will bind the whole region closer together because of its challenges. In order to prepare for these challenges, we must begin now to share knowledge about the impacts and the solutions. In 2009 and 2010, the different South Asian climate networks organized two South Asian Youth Summits on Climate Change. It was clear, that everybody was on the same page and feels that the problems arising from global warming can only be solved together. Only together can we create the change we need.

BTI

What is the vision of the IYCN?

Mr. Singh

We want to address the needs of as many stakeholders as possible and expand the reach of the Network in order to create awareness and understanding among the Indian population on the effects of climate change. Furthermore we wish to



“For a green economy, you need a transformation of existing policies and young political leaders who understand also the business side and benefits of green markets.”
Mr. Kartikeya Singh

leverage the power of the network to generate indigenous solutions to address the problem. The IYCN is a platform to incubate ideas and it is the character of the network to test the limits of what is possible. We have the vision of a green economy with green offices and campuses. Therefore, we started an eco audit program for offices, which is based on the Jane Godall – Shanghai Roots and Shoots eco audit program. Companies that sign up for this program will be visited by one of our trained auditors. The auditor will do a walk-through observation at the office and conduct short interviews with the staff on their electricity consumption and have a specific interview on the overall resource consumption with the facility management employee. Based on the observations, the auditor delivers a report on the resource consumption of the office space.

BTI

We also had an IYCN auditor at our office!

Mr. Singh

That is great! *(laughing)*. I hope it was successful!

BTI

Yes, we received some valuable feedback but our overall performance was already quite good... Do you think, that a green economy is currently possible in India?

Mr. Singh

We need policies, which make such an environment possible. We took a first step in that direction when the Prime Minister’s Office and more recently the Planning Commission asked us for consultation. For a green economy, you need a transformation of existing policies and young political leaders who understand also the business side and benefits of green markets.

BTI

How did the network change since it started?

Mr. Singh

Today, the network is much more organized and professional than when it started in March 2008. We have offices in 6 cities and 1 village which employ several full and part-time people. The network was becoming too big to be run completely on a volunteer basis but still largely continues to do so—that is the success of IYCN. Also, the IYCN is decentralizing as more and more local chapters have been founded. Chapters exist in 19 different states and some have won awards from state governments for their service and dedication to protecting the environment. This includes the IYCN Jammu & Kashmir and IYCN Karnataka state chapters. This is a remarkable achievement especially to think that we are actively engaging the population about climate change in a state (J&K) that is often in the news for conflict and unrest.

IYCN has over time come to understand itself as an example of a new form of activism. I like to call it “vertically integrated activism”. If we want to truly transform India and the world, we must engage a diverse range of stakeholders in order to be able to influence policy. We do so by engaging youth on college campuses (through awareness programs and campus climate leadership trainings), engaging people in rural India (through our Rural Climate Fellows and Rural Energy Projects), engaging companies (through participation at industry expos and conducting climate leadership programs for corporates as well as the Eco-Audit program), and creating the next generation of climate policy wonks (through our Agents of Change Program). By doing all this, we are able to demand our right at the decision making table and give inputs on policy. All the while the network remains an open platform for individual projects and local campaigns. Its quite exhausting but this is what makes IYCN “something new, something bold!”



INDIA YOUTH CLIMATE NETWORK (IYCN)

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In Cancun, the Minister for Environment and Forest, Jairam Ramesh¹, said that India would participate in a global protocol on binding emission targets. This created an outcry among many Indians who fear that emission targets will reduce economic growth and the overall development of the country. How do you feel about this?

Mr. Singh

Jairam Ramesh gave a voice to the environment ministry in India. The perception that environmental concerns slow down the development is mainly found in the elder generation. Young Indians do not feel that way. India will have 1.6 billion inhabitants in 2050 and already now, with 1.2 billion inhabitants, people are starving. This

scares me. The only way for India to be able to provide food and services for these 1.6 billion is through sustainable development. This includes sanitation, access to drinking water, waste management, access to electricity, education etc.

India should use the climate change argument to seize the opportunity for sustainable development. Ramesh had the winning argument, but having the winning argument does not mean you won the game.

BTI

Thank you very much for your time and all the best for you and the future of the IYCN!

- IYCN is a network of young people who are concerned about climate change and environmental issues.
- Started in 2008, IYCN was registered as a society in 2009 with representation from eight Indian states. Today, it has 19 chapters in different states and offices in seven locations with outreach to thousands of youth in colleges, schools, corporations and institutions in India.
- The purpose of IYCN is to bring the voice of Indian youth to global discussions as South Asia is one of the most vulnerable regions affected by potentially catastrophic climate change.
- For this purpose, IYCN provides technical, financial and administrative support to select members.
- Contact: www.iycn.in



1 On July 12th, 2011 Jairam Ramesh was moved to the Ministry of Rural Development as a Cabinet Minister. At the time of the interview, he still held the position of a State Minister (Independent Charge) at the Ministry of Environment and Forest.



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BRIDGE TO INDIA is a consulting company with an entrepreneurial approach based in New Delhi. Founded in 2008, the company focuses on environmental technologies in the Indian market. Furthermore, BRIDGE TO INDIA links this expertise to urban planning and processes. Through customized solutions for its clients, BRIDGE TO INDIA contributes to a sustainable world by implementing the latest technological and systemic innovations where their impact is the highest.

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