

# Rich In Ideas: Grassroots Creativity

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**Why** are many approaches to social and economic development proving inadequate in developing countries? The elite in these countries often fail to recognize and build upon one important resource the knowledge of the poor. In India, the Honey Bee network, run by the Society for Research and Initiatives for Sustainable Technologies and Institutions (SRISTI), champions a new paradigm for development that combines the "six Es": Ethics, Excellence, Efficiency, Equity, Environment and Education. The network aims to build bridges between the environmental grass roots, contemporary innovations, outstanding traditional knowledge and values, and the entrepreneurial spirit of the private sector. Why Honey Bee? The honeybee takes the nectar of flowers without impoverishing them, and links one flower to another through pollination. In a similar way, the Honey Bee network aims to share people's knowledge while making sure they do not become any poorer.



**Mr. Gupta: "A Key resource is the knowledge of the poor"**

The challenge is to ensure that when their knowledge is documented, they will not remain anonymous; that there will be cross-pollination through local language databases accessible to them; and that they will share in any wealth accumulated through added value or otherwise. During the past 12 years, the Honey Bee Network, under the auspices of SRISTI ([www.sristi.org](http://www.sristi.org)), has documented more than 12,000 innovations. These have been either based on traditional knowledge or of contemporary origin, primarily from India, but also from all parts of the world. A large number of small devices, herbal pesticides, veterinary medicines, new plant varieties, agronomic practices and other products have been developed without outside help.

In addition, SRISTI has developed a multimedia, multilingual IT interface for the Honey Bee database that helps connect innovators with each other and with the formal sector. The Gujarat Grassroots Innovation Augmentation Network (GIAN) was set up in 1997 to link innovations, investment and enterprise. GIAN ([www.gian.org](http://www.gian.org)) has filed patents, incubated innovations into products and licensed those products to entrepreneurs.

Why are there not many more GIANS within India or around the world? There are micro-finance funds in many countries, but hardly any micro-venture finance funds. What does this indicate? With the help of M-Cam, a U.S. company that has developed a data management system for patents that helps companies better manage their intellectual property, SRISTI has licensed a grassroots green

technology from Gujarat to a U.S. company proof that these innovations can have international economic importance. In a time of global economic slowdown, it makes sense for large and small corporations around the world, as well as venture funds, to think of unleashing the power of creativity at the grassroots level by establishing a Global Innovation Foundation (GIF) based on the Honey Bee philosophy. The National Innovation Foundation (NIF) was set up in March 2000 with funding of \$5 million by the Indian Department of Science and Technology at Ahmedabad, essentially to implement the Honey Bee model all over the country. NIF ([www.nifindia.org](http://www.nifindia.org)) provides a basis for setting up the GIF, which seeks to do globally what NIF has done nationally. In addition, there is a need for a global registry of grassroots innovations under the World Intellectual Property Organization, so that any grassroots inventor or local community from any part of the world can register an innovation or traditional knowledge and get at least limited-term protection. This registry would provide incentives to millions of those who are knowledge-rich but economically poor to share their innovations. At the same time, it would provide an opportunity for investors or entrepreneurs from another part of the world to work with them to set up a business, either in their home country or elsewhere. In this way, grassroots creativity can harness global capital and entrepreneurial support for decentralized development. The forces of globalization can be mobilized in support of autonomous development at the grassroots level.

*Anil K.Gupta is the executive vice chairman of India 's National Innovation Foundation, a professor at the Indian Institute of Management (Ahmedabad) and coordinator of the Honey Bee network and the Society for Research and Initiatives for Sustainable Technologies and Institutions.*

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