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**Tewa:** And then, of course, there are the environmental courses run by Convergence in Evergreen as well as the weekly Sadhana Forest environmental film showings, which are very popular with adults and children. As to environmental outreach programmes, there is the great work being done at the Botanical Gardens – they host many schoolchildren and Women’s Groups – and Joss at Pitchandikulam Forest and Nadakuppam.

**So a lot is happening in terms of environmental education in Auroville.**

**Tewa:** Yes, but much more could be done, particularly for the adults. This is one of the reasons we would like to start a Green Centre in Auroville. The idea is to create a better understanding of what is already happening here in terms of environmental initiatives, and initiate action in order to promote resource sharing and to try to fill the gaps. It’s difficult because few people are involved in environmental awareness work at present. If there was a central place where visitors, Newcomers and Aurovilians could learn about the green initiatives in Auroville and how they could get involved, we are sure we could increase this pool.

**Isabelle:** I see the need for a coordination centre because I am involved with the Auroville farms and I’m aware of how many problems are created because of lack of coordination between the farms. Some years ago, Foodlink was created and this has helped with central collection and distribution, but much more could be done.

For example, new crops are tried but the experience is not documented so people forget or don’t know what happened. Then, if someone wants to start a new farm, the only way he or she can find out which crops are worth growing is by visiting all the farmers

individually.

The Green Centre could document these experiments. It could also give information about the farms to visitors and guests, so that the farmers themselves don’t get overburdened. And it can be a place where only organic or fair trade products can be sold and explained.

I also see the Green Centre as a place where we can promote ecological solutions as well as keeping up with the most recent ecological initiatives in the world so we can feed these in to the Auroville experience. Other ideas include a green movie night in central Auroville. We will be screening eco-movies, then follow them up with discussions and the signing of relevant petitions.

**Lisbeth:** Another idea is to have a regular ‘green’ column in the News and Notes and on AVNet and Aurowiki which will give environmental tips, information about interesting websites etc. It will also mention upcoming campaigns. Past campaigns in Auroville have included activities on Earth Day and

International Peace Day, and the 350 Action Day (350 parts per million of CO2 in our atmosphere is now considered the limit to prevent catastrophic global warming).

**Tewa:** And then, on 12th December, the Farmers Market, renamed the Auroville Market, will restart at the Solar Kitchen. The topic on the information boards at this first Market will be climate change, to coincide with the Copenhagen Conference. Each week thereafter we will have information on different topics, including water, plastic, waste etc. So in Auroville we will be trying to keep people aware of the larger picture.

**Is Auroville close to a tipping-point concerning environmental awareness?**

**Lisbeth:** I think something is happening, it’s bubbling under the surface; when you come together with Aurovilians at environmental events, it’s there. I see these young Aurovilians who have studied abroad and now come back with the energy to change things.

*But is this enough? Such events tend to attract those Aurovilians who are already concerned about environmental issues, but there are many others who seem unconcerned. How do you make contact with them?*

**Lisbeth:** We have to keep on hammering away with awareness campaigns and publications, but in a nice way: it has to be done with a smile. If you get militant in Auroville, it doesn’t work. Of course, people will never protect nature if they don’t love nature, so this is where education comes in. You have to help people love nature.

**Appie:** It also depends on how much people are personally impacted. The beach erosion is a good example. It’s been happening for years in Pondicherry, but Quiet community only got involved when they saw their



From Left: Tewa, Lisbeth, Isabelle, Appie

own beach disappearing, and the beach communities further north, which are so far unaffected, don’t seem concerned. Things have to be bad before people get involved.

**Tewa:** What is it about us that it needs to get so bad before we wake up? We love our comforts so much, I think our desire for comfort is the single thing that’s brought the world to the state in which it is in. I sometimes wonder how to get the sense of urgency across to Aurovilians with a smile. I feel we have to get real.

**Lisbeth:** There’s no excuse any more for us in Auroville to ignore what is happening. So many influences are seeping in from outside – the uncontrolled development, the destruction of greenwork etc. – it’s right in our faces now. It’s happening very fast, so it’s urgent we have to find a new paradigm, a new way of dealing with it, before it overwhelms and engulfs us.

**Tewa:** There’s a need for a huge leap now, a quantum shift, both in Auroville and the larger world. If Auroville was really a sustainable community, then Marti and Luigi who are representing Auroville at Copenhagen would have something to talk about. We need to become a model before we tell others what to do, and there’s still a lot of work to be done there.

**Are you optimistic?**

**Lisbeth:** You have to be. However it looks as if Copenhagen will not result in binding agreements but at best some vague statements. Meanwhile the Kyoto Protocol is running out in 2012 and it is predicted that one billion people will soon be starving and one billion are threatened by rising in sea-levels. India is losing a quarter of its land to desertification. These are huge problems that need to be dealt with globally.

**Tewa:** Yes! I was very happy to hear that a Climate Camp will be happening in Delhi during the Copenhagen Conference. Perhaps India is waking up.

**Isabelle:** I think it’s very important that we find out what’s happening in India, because we always hear what America or Europe are doing environmentally and that gives the feeling that the developed world knows better. But a lot of things are happening in India. We talk about Copenhagen, but we don’t know what is happening on our own doorstep.

From an interview by Alan

For more information see: [www.350.org](http://www.350.org); [www.whatshappening-withthecimate.org](http://www.whatshappening-withthecimate.org); and [www.avaaz.org](http://www.avaaz.org)



PHOTO COURTESY LISBETH

Regina with a class at the Pondicherry garbage dump.

UNESCO

**UNESCO’s Executive Board passes resolution on Auroville**

In October this year the Executive Board of UNESCO passed a resolution on Auroville inviting its Member States to actively participate in Auroville’s development by contributing a permanent or temporary exhibition in the International Zone.

The Executive Board,

1. Recalling General Conference resolutions 14 C/Resolution 4.36 (1966), 15 C/Resolution 4.02 (1968), 16 C/Resolution 3.323 (1970) and 22 C/Resolution 11.19 (1983) as well as Executive Board decision 177 EX/Decision 70, 182 EX/71 – page 6 (August 2007),
2. Noting the commitment of UNESCO and its Member States to provide support to the Auroville experiment and participate in Auroville’s development as an International Cultural Township,
3. Noting that the Charter of Auroville declares that Auroville belongs to nobody in particular but to humanity as a whole,
4. Appreciating the broad range of activities undertaken by UNESCO Member States in promoting Auroville’s development as the living embodiment of a unique experiment in human unity,
5. Recognizing the value of such civilizing experiences as an invaluable and integral part of the commonly shared human experience,
6. Conscious that the Auroville township is conceived and designed in form of a spiral galaxy, divided into four zones radiating outwards from Matrimandir, the soul of Auroville, and are respectively designated as the Residential, the Cultural, the Industrial and the International Zone,
7. Also recognizing that the International Zone is planned to house permanent exhibits from each Member State showcasing its unique genius in the realm of cultural and social ideals and its development in diverse spheres of national endeavour,
8. Invites UNESCO Member States to actively participate in Auroville’s development by contributing a permanent or temporary exhibition in the International Zone, as an expression of its commitment to the ideal of human unity that Auroville represents.

LETTER

Dear Auroville Today team,

I have read with interest your report on “Sri Aurobindo’s statue unveiled at UNESCO” in Auroville Today of October 2009. Your report depended upon your interview with Lalit Verma, who was not in the loop in regard to the moves made to get the statue installed within the campus of UNESCO headquarters in Paris. This is borne out by his statement “Nobody knows how this came about”. As a result, your report creates the impression that Permanent Delegate of India to UNESCO, Ms Bhaswati Mukherjee, was the prime mover of the development. As India’s Permanent Delegate to UNESCO, she is the person on the spot to coordinate the logistics of the event but not its prime mover.

The fact is that the ball was set rolling by our Chairman, Dr Karan Singh, when he wrote to Mr Arjun Singh, then Minister of Human Resource Development India, on 10th March 2008. In his letter, Dr Karan Singh wrote that he had been “in touch with Dr Kapila Vatsyayan” regarding “an interesting proposal for installing a statue of Sri Aurobindo in the UNESCO complex in Paris”. Dr Kapila Vatsyayan, who is India’s representative on the UNESCO Executive Board, advised that India should “formally present the proposal for discussion” at the forthcoming Executive Board meeting. As a result, Dr Karan Singh wrote to Minister Arjun Singh who instructed India’s Permanent Delegate to UNESCO to act. Thereafter, Dr Vatsyayan followed it up as a member of the Executive Board. She was, no doubt, assisted in it by India’s Permanent Delegate.

Lalit Verma says that “many people at some point in time helped to get this realised”. He is right but then he singles out Bhaswati Mukherjee for special mention. That tends to distort the picture. I am sure neither Dr Karan Singh nor Dr Kapila Vatsyayan crave to be mentioned for this development. However, I felt that I should set the picture right.

Ajoy Bagchi  
Member, Governing Board, Auroville Foundation



At the inauguration of Sri Aurobindo’s statue, from left to right: His Excellency Mr. Yai, Ambassador and permanent representative of Benin & chairman of the UNESCO Executive Board; Lalit Verma, President Aurodhan, Pondicherry; Mr Koichuro Matsuura, Director General, UNESCO; and Dr. Karan Singh, President ICCR and Chairman Auroville Foundation.

PHOTO COURTESY LALIT