Dr. Archana Godbole is a Founder director of the Applied Environmental Research Foundation (AERF) and currently represents it as an observer on the Forest Investment program (FIP) Sub-Committee. A plant taxonomist and ethno-biologist by training, she has been responsible for developing various programs and initiatives of AERF and has represented AERF on many national as well as international Fora.

Applied Environmental Research Foundation (AERF) has been working for conservation on the ground in Western Ghats biodiversity hotspot region in India for last 18 years though five thematic programs. AERF is committed to work through research and its implementation in order to achieve balance between conservation and development.

The organization

AERF believes in establishing a link between research and its effective use in the process of development for poverty alleviation, sustainable resource use and participatory conservation. AERF has a program called Communities, Conservation and Climate Change through which we have been trying to address issue of climate change and preparing communities to search, select or develop adaptations. In researching the adaptations in traditions AERF has been supporting the revival of traditional knowledge both for forest conservation and agrobiodiversity conservation. In the western Ghats of India AERF works in States of Maharashtra and Goa and has few collaborative projects with organizations working in Tamilnadu and Kerala.

AERF is a member of IUCN, Satoyama Initiative, GEF NGO Network and Subglobal Assessment Network inter alia. Through these strong networks the organization is in touch with various global projects on conservation and climate change and often shares their work on conservation on these international platforms.

“Conservation on the ground is a specialized area that deals with making difference to communities and natural resources for the benefits of communities need passion, commitment and expertise and skills.” Says Godbole. “Understanding climate change at the landscape level would help communities to practice conservation as an adaptation tool. Through this program, we are trying to address livelihood changes, impacts of climate change on agriculture and food security, and the need to build resilience among communities and ecosystems”

AERF has an overarching program of forest conservation and has been using the Conservation Agreements approach developed by Conservation International. AERF is the first organization that has been implementing conservation agreements in India. Through the program, the organization has brought more than 1500 acres of forests under Conservation agreements and secured them till 2020.

These agreements have provided hopes to many small holder farmers in northern Western Ghats on two levels - these agreements brought direct incentives to the farmers and these
forests will provide sustainable income through activities like value added products from the forests, certifications to NTFP, agro forestry models and other forest based enterprises like Ecotourism. AERF has also estimated the carbon stocks of these forests and is in the process of linking this to voluntary carbon markets and REDD+ mechanisms. Similarly through this program AERF has been successful in arresting the negative land use like plantations of rubber at the cost of biodiversity.

AERF has been also working to develop sustainable financing mechanisms to scale up this program of arresting the deforestation, land use changes and loss of ecosystem services and ultimately reducing the capacity of landscape to adapt and deal with climate change. AERF has a web based initiative www.myforest.co.in through a program Sponsor a Forest to cater the financial needs and to engage with urban nature lovers as well as corporate companies in the process.

As AERF works to establish balance between Environment & Development, AERF also specifically works with corporate companies through Business and Biodiversity program. This program enables to develop mechanisms for engaging companies in the meaningful long term work of saving biodiversity and offsetting the environmental losses they incur. More about AERF on www.aerfindia.org

Dr. Godbole has worked with indigenous communities from north east India for six years, documented traditional knowledge that has been used for sustainable natural resources management. Now she is promoting indigenous people’s partnerships and champions for addressing food security, food sovereignty and climate change issues. Associated with Indigenous Partnership Program, that is trying to promote indigenous Champions and their agrobiodiversity practices at global platforms to learn for adaptations.

**Working with CIF**

Dr. Godbole firmly believes in Civil Society action beyond thinking and research. Being a Civil society Observer of the Climate Investment Funds she is constantly trying to influence international processes through effective civil society networks in South Asia and Pacific including Lead. Dr. Godbole has developed a North Western Ghats conservation network of organizations working for conservation in the north Western Ghats Since 2011 and is part of the Save the Western Ghats group an informal congregation of organizations and individuals working for advocacy and action, in Six states of Western Ghats for people and conservation.

Participation in the FIP has provided her an opportunity to interact with many similar conservation programs and to develop an understanding of the broad process like REDD and REDD+. Participation in FIP and CIF meetings is an opportunity to influence the processes at international level for conservation, learning approaches and feeding back to the FIP process own experiences and learning’s. As an observer she has been constantly in touch with the networks sharing with them the process and decisions of the meetings.

Dr. Godbole is an invited NGO member representative of Clinton Global Initiative and AERF’s commitment on Safeguarding Forests and Biodiversity of north western Ghats has been felicitated in CGI annual meeting of 2011. Archana has received prestigious Whitley associated Award in 2007 for her long term work on Conservation of Sacred Forests in the north Western Ghats.

Maintaining sacred forests as strategy of adaption, linking them to private forest conservation has been successfully initiated and pursued by Dr. Godbole since in the inception of AERF in 1995.

Her commitment in life is to constantly work on innovative approaches to conservation.