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"We can be a provider of solutions to developed countries"

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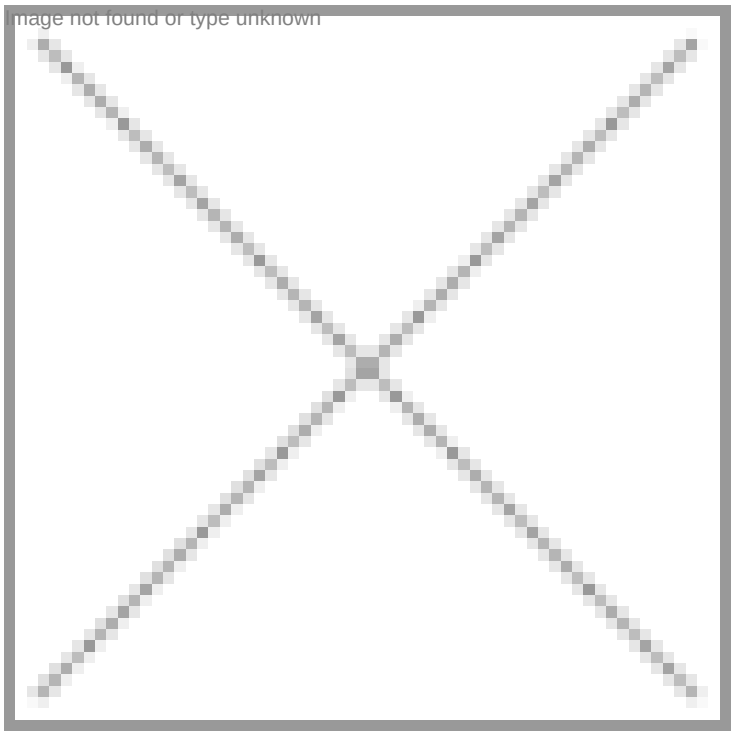

"We can be a provider of solutions to developed countries"

- Dr RK Pachauri, director-general, The Energy and Resource Institute.

Dr RK Pachauri has been at the helm of affairs at TERI, since 1981, first as director and then as director-general since April 2001. A recipient of the Padma Bhushan award (2001) for his immense contributions to the field of environment, he has been guiding TERI with his visionary leadership. In an interview, Dr Pachauri shares his views about the future of the institute.

What is the positioning of TERI and how did its biotech division come into being?

TERI as a whole is a unique organization with a global vision and a local focus committed to every aspect of sustainable development. On one hand, we try to help in evolving policies at a global level but at the same time, we are also involved at the grass root level too. We work at both levels and have developed a link between the two. This is crucial because we will miss out an important part of the framework by a lack of involvement at either of the two ends. We are consciously trying to cover the entire spectrum in order to make a difference to the world.

When the institute was set up in 1974 by a few leading lights of the Tata group, the focus was on energy research and the non-polluting aspects of energy. In 1981, I joined the institute with an engineering orientation and a policy focus to facilitate the development of right kind of policies. At the same time we also developed some technologies in the area of renewable energy sector. Since there has been a strong focus on the environment and also a deep desire to develop an institute of biotechnology. So we integrated the two and the Bioresources and Biotechnology Division, was developed. Synergy between the institute's mandate and the research programs of the division was established and then the programs started delivering.

What is the mandate of TERI?

We try to look at the larger strategic issues in total and anticipate the challenges of the future. We try to interpret the kind of problems/challenges that we will face and then accordingly design the kind of technologies needed. Today we have a presence in different parts of the world and are a part of a much larger strategic picture.

What drives us is a dynamic philosophy. If I could characterize what we are doing, then everything we develop should be also to make a difference to the people. If it could bring a change in policy and if it is likely to have an impact on the ground than what we are doing is large and profound. And this is our mandate. We have always tried to have the practical or application orientation, and serve the society by providing them sizeable and lasting solutions.

How do you envisage TERI's future?

Looking at the future, infrastructure and skills are two things that we feel good about at TERI. The next few years are a period of consolidation for the institute and getting a little more global. Five years from now we would be a far more global organization and would have lot more to show which could be emulated globally. We can be a provider of solutions to the developed countries and the poor, which could bring a qualitative, if not a quantitative change in their lives.

The future research technologies could include nanotechnology as we are coming to grips with this technology and its potential. In the area of new biology research, we are looking at hydrogen production and have started a small amount of it. In the area of agribiotech, we are doing work related to biomass, whereas in plant biotech it is clean-up related work, which is beneficial for the health of human beings. I also see immense opportunities in the area of climate change and hydrocarbons.