



VOICES FOR CHANGE

STORY REPORT FORM

This form should accompany the stories of challenge / change that you collected from your partners, stakeholders, staff, community members and volunteers (one form for each story). The stories themselves can be written up or take the form of photos, short videos, drawings, poetry, etc.

Name of the organisation and person collecting the story:

The story was collected for FSL India by Raksha V Shenoy K, who works as a youth coordinator and was having a conversation with the President of FSL India on how and why FSL was established.

Who provided the story and in which form:

The story was shared in the form of a video interview accompanied with a narrative paragraph by Rakesh Soans, President – FSL India

When and where did the challenges/changes illustrated in the story take place:

The story took place along the coastal stretch of Kundapura around 2003–2004, when Rakesh Soans discovered that earlier sea turtle conservation efforts had been discontinued due to lack of funding and support. This was a turning point—realizing that a once-active initiative had been abandoned, he faced the challenge of reviving it amidst limited resources, low recognition, and the need to rebuild trust with local communities and authorities.

What kind of projects were implemented by your organisation in the place the story refers to :

In Kundapura, the organisation implemented several impactful projects focused on environmental conservation and education. These included sea turtle conservation workcamps, where local and international volunteers raised awareness among fishermen and coastal communities. Long-term volunteer (LTV) projects were also established to support sustained conservation efforts. Additionally, the organisation launched Home Based Project(HBP), later collaborated with the Forest Department, and also introduced environmental education (EE) initiatives in schools through the government-mandated Eco-Clubs—promoting sustainable practices and ecological awareness among students.

What does the storyteller believe is the significance of the events described in the story?

The storyteller believes the significance of the events lies in understanding our role within the ecosystem and the urgent need to give back to nature. For Rakesh Soans, the revival of sea turtle conservation wasn't just about saving a species—it was about rekindling awareness, responsibility, and collaboration among communities, authorities, and volunteers. He sees these efforts as a way



to restore balance with nature and inspire future generations to make informed, ethical choices for the planet.

Test Story:

Rakesh Soans' journey into the world of international voluntary service began in 1997, when he joined the movement through ICYE in Denmark. It wasn't long before he found himself deeply rooted in it, by 2003, he led his first workcamp, and a year later, he joined the board of FSL India, eventually becoming part of the Executive Committee from 2014 to 2021. Along the way, he helped host the General Assembly in Kundapura—a symbolic homecoming for someone who has always held nature close to his heart.

Born into a family that appreciated the environment, Rakesh recalls how childhood picnics were more than just leisure—they were lessons. His parents and uncles would often share the wisdom of the ecosystem: how mud and dirt feed the earth through earthworms, how lizards control insect populations, how even snakes have a rightful place. These early lessons instilled a deep question that never quite left him—where do we fit in? The balance of nature is delicate, and as humans, perhaps our role is not to dominate but to give back.

It was in 2004 that this philosophy began to crystallize into action. Through FSL, he became involved with local fishermen, international volunteers, and eventually the Forest Department. Together, they launched a conservation effort along a 50-kilometer coastal stretch, resulting in the protection of over 18,000 sea turtles. The aim wasn't just to protect a species—it was to raise awareness among communities, the government, the tourism industry, and the forest department. It was about safeguarding a nesting habitat that was being quietly forgotten due to various constraints - be it financial or in terms of human resources.

But the seed of this mission had been planted long ago. Rakesh was just a schoolboy when he accompanied his father and the Forest Department to a hatchery in Maravanthe. He still remembers the awe he felt seeing a giant sea turtle and learning about conservation from a dedicated DCFO. That memory returned vividly in 2003, when a newspaper article reported that sea turtles were being poached and sold for meat. The water had turned red. Shocked and angered, he approached the Forest Department, now as President of FSL India. He was told the earlier initiatives had long stopped due to lack of funding and care.

So in 2004, when Kundapura hosted FSL workcamps, Rakesh knew exactly what needed to be done. One of those camps focused entirely on sea turtle awareness, and it eventually evolved into long-term projects. Staff were appointed to lead these efforts, with both short-term and long-term volunteers contributing to what would become a flagship environmental program. These efforts expanded into environmental education through the government-mandated Eco-Clubs and beyond—though training alone, he realized, was never enough. There needed to be lived experiences, community involvement, and a shared sense of purpose.

Of course, there were challenges. Recognition didn't come easily. Resources—both human and financial—were stretched thin. Mobility, particularly for volunteers and local stakeholders, was another hurdle. But Rakesh has always believed that challenges are there to be overcome. Over the

years, through reviews and visioning exercises, they refined their strategy, building partnerships with local NGOs to ensure their projects reached the communities that mattered.

For Rakesh, it's also about knowing when to be present, and when to step back—what he calls “exist and exit.” It's wisdom gained from years of working closely with nature and people alike.

He shares this story now because he believes we can no longer afford to look away. The world we live in demands responsibility. He reminds us that while society teaches us many things, it's time for educators to step up and ensure that the generations to come—and those in power today—make the right decisions.

At the heart of it all is a simple truth: there is an inherent goodness in humans. Volunteering, to him, is the vehicle that brings that goodness to life.