# Overview

How quickly another year, the Foundation's 15th, has sped by! Without fuss or fanfare to mark the occasion, we continued to serve the causes to which we are devoted, while also remaining alert to new opportunities to help those truly in need.

**Landmine Survivors Assistance Programme**

Among the neglected are landmine victims, for whom we launched a Landmine Survivors Assistance Programme. This addresses an issue seldom talked about, but one which inflicts suffering. About 2½ million anti-personnel landmines were laid in the border areas in 2001-2002 during Operation Parakram; subsequent mine clearing by the army has removed most of them, but a small percentage remain in the ground, undetected. Innocent villagers and their children, chasing a goat or a cow or straying innocently into these areas, become their inadvertent victims, losing limbs, livelihoods and hope. Landmine injuries are generally horrific and cause severe psychological trauma. Our programme, the first of its kind in India, will offer medical and economic rehabilitation to the victims, psychological support and training in livelihood skills, together with mine-risk education to school children and adults alike. This 2-year pilot will cover 40 villages in Abohar Block, Ferozepur district, Punjab. If successful, it will provide a model for replication in other border areas with uncleared mines.

**Female Foeticide**

RGF has been active, too, on the issue of female foeticide, the most baleful manifestation of gender discrimination in our society. The declining sex ratio is already resulting in men not being able to find women to marry, with consequential mental health problems and potential trafficking and sale of women. We focused on some blocks in Kurukshetra district, which has the worst sex ratio in the country. Under the banner of a Smart Parenthood Campaign, mass awareness has been created, women and youth involved as never before, pro-active village health committees formed and an extensive network of some 600 activists established to carry the message further. What has been especially encouraging is the support and involvement of all the relevant stakeholders – the medical profession, panchayats, the media, lawyers, academics and others. The programme is now being expanded to other parts of the district.

**Jammu and Kashmir**

In Jammu and Kashmir the Foundation acquired further goodwill through a number of new initiatives, which provided a much-needed counterpoint to our sad but necessary work for child-victims of terrorism in the state. We instituted awards for creative writing by young writers in Kashmiri, Urdu and English. A Children's Film Festival was organised in Srinagar, the first ever to be held there. Thousands of children thronged the venue to see prize-winning films from India and abroad. As there are no cinemas in the city, the projection of the films on a big screen evoked wonder and delight. Each time the lights went down and the screen lit up, the children clapped, cheered and hooted. The Festival was a roaring success. In a series of workshops on "Discovering Srinagar", school children explored their multi-faceted heritage – the history, culture, arts and crafts of their city and its environs – in a lively interactive manner, tapping also the oral traditions of Kashmiri society. At the end, an exquisite and fascinating exhibition on Srinagar was mounted for public display during the 4-day Children's Film Festival. Based on the 'Discovering Srinagar' workshops, a manual is now being developed for use in schools throughout the Kashmir Valley for an experiential educational programme on topics such as the arts, the natural environment, crafts and culture.

**School Architecture**

One major outcome of our partnership with the Ministry of Human Resource Development was the fillip given to our BaLA programme – a blueprint for improving primary school buildings, using architecture and design elements as learning aids, and generally making the school environment more learning-friendly. Some states were sufficiently enthused by the new concepts to begin training their school-design and engineering teams and initiating, on a pilot basis, the building of significant numbers of schools in different districts incorporating these ideas.

The pictures in the chapter on education show what a vivid difference these simple innovations can make. It is our hope that SSA's massive school construction programme will encourage all states to adopt and adapt these ideas to their particular local contexts.

**South Asian University**

We organized a major consultation in August 2006 on the idea of a South Asian University, suggested by the Prime Minister at the Dhaka SAARC Summit in November 2005. Distinguished academics from all over the country participated and helped to clarify thinking on the subject as well as put some flesh on the bare bones of the idea. It is gratifying that the brainstorming at RGF provided an important input into the proposals that were considered and adopted by SAARC Heads of Government in April 2007.

**Motorised Triwheelers**

Our motorised triwheeler programme for the orthopaedically-challenged took wing. It caught the imagination of the corporate sector and we were delighted and grateful to receive sponsorship at an unprecedented level, enabling the Foundation to distribute almost 150 motorised triwheelers to an equal number of men and women from all over the country.

**Computer-based Learning**

Although our village library programme has pioneered the dissemination of books and information across the country since 1993, RGF has not been involved so far in bringing computer-based learning to children in deprived areas. In the coming year the Foundation will begin to introduce computers into some of its village libraries. A good deal of educational software is currently available in different formats but this has not been documented, nor is there any analysis available of its quality, price and educational value. We plan to compile a database of the available educational material and evaluate its quality: this will be of interest to many schools. In order to bridge the digital divide, we will also be offering fellowships for developing open-source software to promote localization into Hindi, Urdu, Kashmiri, Assamese and Oriya, followed by dissemination of the software to NGOs, schools and others.

This is no more than the briefest of snapshots of our varied activities. This report describes them in greater detail – the increasing linkage between our village libraries with local schools to enhance learning, the growing emphasis on working with minorities, dalits and tribals, the training of panchayat representatives in improved natural resource management at the local level and the promotion of agricultural innovation in some of our water harvesting areas.

Sadly, the Red Ribbon Express project to spread HIV/AIDS awareness throughout the country remained stalled in the absence of an agreement between NACO and the railways. Our efforts to secure greater official recognition and direct government funding for NGOs working in the sanitation sector also made no headway.

**A Look Ahead**

The completion of 15 years is cause for celebration, but also for stocktaking. Our capital funding effort over the last 5 years has resulted in a gradual enlargement of our corpus from about Rs. 35 crores in 2001 to Rs 66 crores on 31 March 2007. The Foundation is now better placed than before but our internal income remains inadequate to fund all our activities. Corporate and individual donations continue to be needed to fill the gap. However, even with this enlarged corpus, RGF remains – at least in financial terms – a relatively small organization compared to some of the older philanthropic foundations such as those of the Tata Group as well as a number of the newer ones.

Should we contract the wide geographical and functional spread of our activities in favour of greater concentration? In theory, this would appear to be desirable. That, indeed, was my own view when I joined the Foundation. However, I have found over the last few years that many of our donors and constituents welcome the broad spread of our activities. Even if we did only one thing, we would still not be able to make a big dent, given the scale of India's development problems and RGF's limited resources. Might it not then be better to be a catalyst in many endeavours, encouraging innovation and social entrepreneurship on a broad front? The Foundation's very name evokes the expectation that we should be doing something in as many parts of India as possible. NGOs in our country follow extremely diverse agendas. All feel that they should have some claim on the Foundation's resources: most would not qualify, and could not absorb, the large grants that the big donor agencies provide. RGF's grants may be modest, but our procedures are quick and flexible and we are able to support many deserving and innovative NGO efforts in diverse fields in different parts of the country. We are therefore viewed as an important resource by the Indian voluntary sector as a whole.

**Adieu**

I am now in my 7th year as Secretary-General and will demit office on 31 July 2007. This will therefore be my final Annual Report. Leading RGF has been a privilege. To be able to do something, however modest, to tackle widespread problems of deprivation and marginalization has been a rewarding and enriching experience. Whatever has been achieved during my tenure was very much a team effort and I express my warm appreciation and thanks to the entire staff of the Foundation. To our Chairperson and our Board of Trustees, who gave me this opportunity, I owe an abiding debt of gratitude.

M. Malhoutra

Manmohan Malhoutra
Secretary-General