

GOA DIALOGUES

THE INTERNATIONAL CENTRE, GOA

On Education

HUMAN CAPITAL AND DEVELOPMENT IN GOA Issues of Higher Education

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The International Centre, Goa, Dona Paula, Goa, India

Introductory and Welcome Remarks of M Rajaretnam, Director/Chief Executive, The International Centre, Goa

Ladies and Gentlemen

On behalf of the International Centre Goa I extend a warm welcome to all of you to a very important event of the Centre, the Goa Dialogues, to discuss a concern that is close to the hearts of the people of this state.

According to Simon Anholt who is the editor of the Nation Brands Index the image of a country only changes “when government, business and society undergo a renaissance in innovation: new ideas, policies, laws, products, services, businesses, buildings, art and science”. He gives the example of Africa which he says suffers from “continent brand effect” and is perceived as a poor, violent and corrupt continent, an image promoted with skill by certain celebrities. “Brand Africa” he says is projected as a uniform, hopeless, basket case, and not as 53 countries in various stages of development and struggle for independent existence and identity.

It is becoming increasingly apparent these days that image does count. Perception is as important as reality. In the case of Goa what kind of image does the state project and is that a desirable image? We are here to discuss the state of education and a major reason we are focused on this subject is due to the images of education in Goa.

This morning we will begin in earnest to initiate a process that will help us understand the implications of undesirable images. For the last one year I have seen the effects that positive and negative images may have on an institution like the International Centre, Goa. So this morning I want to introduce the concept of the Goa Dialogues and this first roundtable. My erstwhile colleagues on the podium and the rest of you in this room will surely debate and dialogue about the issues concerning higher education in Goa and the importance of human capital in shaping the future of this state.

Twenty years ago the founders of the International Centre, Goa conceived it as a forum to bring together thinkers, scholars and academics, achievers, developers and creative people from India and the world to develop new approaches and perspectives to deal with a fast changing world. Goa and India needed such a centre of intellectual excellence, a centre which could take the lead in defining a new agenda of ideas and to initiate cutting-edge activities; and an institution which should ultimately become one of the best modern-day venues for all kinds of meetings and activities organized by governmental, business and non-governmental institutions, private individuals including members, and regional and foreign-based institutions.

We should therefore strive to become a major centre for dialogue among local, national, regional and international groups. It will be a hub for many different kinds of activities – research, training, publishing, scholarly exchanges, cultural performances, study-in-India programmes for foreign students, etc – a hub where people and ideas can mix seamlessly, and working with academic institutions, government, the private sector and non-governmental organizations. These new programmes, as the founders of the ICG designed them to be, will define issues that ought to be of concern to domestic as well as global audiences.

As a new initiative of the International Centre Goa, therefore, the *Goa Dialogues* intends to promote Goa as a focal point of radiating influence in the larger pan-Asian and Indian Ocean regions for ideas of freedom and sustainable development, human security and the importance of discourse and as a catalyst in human and social development. It will promote dialogue, interaction and cooperation among countries and civilizations.

We hope that the *Goa Dialogues* can become a forum that can be well-known not only in India but in the world as well. The *Goa Dialogues* can become a transmitter of ideas and activities that will contribute to building a resurgent Goa, a progressive India, a better Asia, and a safer world.

Dialogues are the essence of a democracy because they focus on finding collective solutions for mankind. The International Centre Goa should and can contribute to the formulation of ideas and human activities on domestic and global issues for India and the world. Hence, the importance of dialogues through seminars and conferences. The use of the name “Goa” in the *Goa Dialogues* is consistent with the image of Goa being a gateway to the country and of India as an important political, economic and technological entity on the international scene in the 21st century.

Today’s roundtable is the first in the series of the *Goa Dialogues* and it focuses on higher education. Others in the series will focus on social and economic issues and at the larger national and global levels on such issues as security, poverty, health and environment.

We chose to start on education because it is a subject that is close to the heart of most Goans as well as the importance attached to having good educational institutions

within Goa and providing its people access to such institutions at primary, secondary and tertiary levels. The continuing progress of the state will rely on the nurturing of young minds through the provision of good education both public and private. Everyone here will agree that if Goa is to remain in the top league among the states of India it must be prepared to stand on its head and re-look at its policies on education and consider major policy improvements that affect both quantity and quality of education.

We hope that the *Goa Dialogues* is also a platform where debates and exchanges will transform into activities of value and meaning. It is imperative to go beyond thinking and talking.

In April last year the ICG, in collaboration with the Directorate of Social Welfare of the Govt. of Goa, organized a seminar on the Goa State Policy for Differently Abled Persons which resulted in the Goa Act for differently abled persons. The Directorate of Social Welfare won national recognition when it was given the prestigious national award for the creation of barrier free environment. Earlier the Bombay High Court had even directed the State of Maharashtra to refer to the Goa Act when drafting its own state policy. It is also worth mentioning that the Directorate of Social Welfare has not stopped there. A few days ago the Directorate conducted a training programme here for "Access Auditors" of the Government of Goa.

Two months ago the Centre collaborated with the Media Information and Communication Centre of India in organizing a Regional Seminar on the Right to Information Act. The seminar was well received and has resulted in the formation of the Goa RTI Forum by the participants. This will soon be registered as a Society that will educate the public and civil servants and ensure implementation of the RTI Act in Goa.

So we should be inspired by these developments and the *Goa Dialogues* can be a platform where serious discussions of important domestic and global issues will not only educate us but can result in concrete actions. So we are confident that if these issues for discussions are carefully prepared and considered, as they are in the *Goa Dialogues* series, more good will come out of it.

As I mentioned earlier my colleagues on this podium, especially Prof Sreekumar, will elaborate on the issue of higher education in Goa and I will not go into it except to say that we have to start somewhere and we chose to start with higher education knowing full well the importance of primary and secondary education.

It has taken time to prepare the *Goa Dialogues* which has required patience, thought and support. For this I want to acknowledge my appreciation to the Centre's Board of Trustees for endorsing it. Since each part of the series is a separate entity with a coordinator it was imperative that we found someone who understood and was willing to dedicate himself to the task. I want to thank Prof. Sreekumar for spending the last 4

months working with us on this and to write the background paper. He was ably assisted by Fernanda Andrade our research assistant on the project.

I want to thank Mr Yatin Kakodkar for his presence this morning and in sharing his thoughts and Mr PXF D'Lima for consenting to assume the difficult task of chairing the entire day's session. That was the way we wanted it to be. Finally, I want to thank the Atmaram Pai Panandiker Charitable Trust for its unsolicited and generous grant that allowed us to launch this series. Without this sponsorship the launching of the *Goa Dialogues*, I suppose, would have been slightly delayed. What is more important is the spirit that lies behind that sponsorship and in this particular case it is the sense of urgency to address the issue of Goa's education.

Let me conclude my remarks by again referring to Simon Anholt whom I quoted at the beginning: "it is deeds, not words that change people's minds about countries, or at least open their minds to the possibilities of change, and as Socrates said, 'the way to achieve a better reputation is to endeavour to be what you desire to appear'".

Thank you

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