

## **About Georgescu-Roegen Learning Forum**

The world we live in is marked by crises – of energy, food, water, health and ecological risks and uncertainties. While many acknowledge these crises, there are only a few who emphasise the need to revisit our theoretical frameworks and analytical categories that help us comprehend and perhaps resolve these crises. Whether these crises and associated development concerns are presented as arising from ‘a deranged social system wheeling out of control’ or as aberrations that can be fixed by applying ‘the micro-economic foundations of Keynesian macro-economics’, the ideologues from different ends of the political-economic spectrum refuse to acknowledge the critical role of the environment and energy flows that shape and are shaped by social systems.

This learning forum will facilitate learning and understanding ecological changes and energy flows associated with human activity, by studying the work of Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen, the Father of Ecological Economics, who had not only warned the world of an impending crisis, but also had given us the analytical handle to comprehend its ecological and social systems in all their contextual and evolutionary complexities (Georgescu-Roegen (1971) and (1979)). New generations of decision-makers confront multifarious complex interactions between social and ecological systems; there is a need at the very least, for informed academic insights and inputs that are conscious of and have the capacity to include ‘inconvenient variables’ like energy flows and processes like institutional inertia in their analysis of the interface between ecological and social systems. This is the rationale for INSEE to host a learning forum on the work of Georgescu-Roegen.

Concerned environmentalists, development economists, sociologists, political scientists, physicists, biologists and chemists, philosophers along with multitudes of inter-disciplinary specialists and policy makers have led world through eco-development to sustainable development, and now to climate-friendly development. Concerns about ecological degradation or upheavals, resource insecurity and poverty, as well as voices that question the legitimacy of knowledge – the very intellectual engagement with these processes, the theoretical frameworks used, the analytical categories ignored, etc., have been with us through-out the twentieth century. While many ask whether the twenty-first century should continue to live with the legacy of selective perceptions and denials, this learning forum proposes that it is critical at this juncture to check out the work of a pioneer whose contributions to understanding the economy and energy have been substantial.

The purpose of this proposed INSEE learning forum is to learn about Georgescu-Roegen's work before the memory of those insights get erased by the customary responses to crises that will keep all of us (academics, industry, politicians, and policy makers, as well as all concerned citizens) on our toes, trying to battle ‘forest fires’ with lesser capacities to understand why and where they come from. The expected outcome is that armed with the analytical insights that come from Georgescu-Roegen's work, the forum will bring ecological systems and energy flows and the interactions of these systems with social systems (especially activities of

production, distribution and consumption), back into academic and policy dialogues in India.

The forum will enable (a) a dialogue among scholars, practitioners and policy analysts working on different aspects of the economy, ecology and the environment, (b) read, discuss and compare Georgescu-Roegen's work in the light of given theoretical frameworks in the social sciences (institutional and evolutionary economics, ecological economics and environmental economics, conservation sociology, economic geography, environmental history, political ecology), and in the natural sciences (climate sciences, sustainability sciences, forest ecology, bio-physics, bio-energy, and environmental chemistry) these being areas where published material on these sciences with reference to G-R's work is available – other theoretical formations or analytical categories or frameworks may be added . Activities will include study groups and discussions on the contributions of Georgescu-Roegen, with a focus on communication across disciplines and into disciplinary boundaries, seeking arenas of epistemic convergence, shared causal understandings between disciplines, etc.

Deliberations of each meeting/forum activity will be facilitated through the virtual domain by the INSEE website - hosting discussions, short articles, reports from yesteryears (for instance, about G-R's visit to India ). While this learning forum will maintain a course that is unabashedly hedonistic (with the sole purpose of enabling learning about G-R's work), there will be many spin-offs and gains in terms of policy insights, questions on the interface between knowledge and policy, etc. which will be bonuses that will enable INSEE and other committed ecological forums to take up these issues for further seminars/books/other events or publications.

The learning forum will be guided by a core group, involving Dr. Mihir Shah, Prof. Kanchan Chopra, Dr. R. K. Pachauri, Prof. Shiv Vishwanathan, Dr. Ashok Desai, Dr. Ajit Mozoomdar, Dr. Sharad Lele, Dr. Vasant Saberwal. The activities and deliberations of the forum will be organized by Rajeswari Raina and Shailly Kedia (who has an informal virtual forum on Georgescu-Roegen on facebook).

This forum may kindly be seen as a commitment and an experiment facilitated by INSEE to further its mandate to ensuring sustainable social and ecological systems.

### **Rajeswari Raina\* and Shailly Kedia\*\***

Please note that we have not explicitly asked any of them yet – we know of their interest in G-R's work and their commitment to socially and ecologically just development though they are engaged in different areas and have different ideological positions.

Rajeswari Raina is a Scientist/Economist at the National Institute of Science, Technology and Development Studies (NISTADS- CSIR), and Shailly Kedia is a Researcher at The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI), in New Delhi .