

Developing leadership in climate change adaptation in India



Ulka Kelkar is Director, Climate, at the World Resources Institute—India. Ulka first encountered START in 2004, when she participated in a START Advanced Institute on “Vulnerability to Global Environmental Change” at the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA) in Laxenburg, Austria.

Up to this point in her career, Ulka had some fieldwork and statistics experience, but was looking for guidance to take ideas forward to the next step. START’s Advanced Institute offered two unique benefits. First, Ulka received a small amount of funding for follow-on research and was put in touch with a mentor, Barbara Huddleston. Barbara helped Ulka turn her raw idea into a solid research plan with participatory methodology to assess adaptation options with farming communities in the Himalayas. A second benefit from the Advanced Institute was that one year later the participants met at a culmination event where they shared their research. They were encouraged to write

journal articles, which were eventually published in a special issue of Global Environmental Change. Ulka's Advanced Institute experience of receiving expert training at IIASA, working with a global cohort of researchers, and getting published in a scientific journal, was a pivotal point in her career.

Two years later, she was teaming up with START again when she served on the steering committee of the 2006 Young Scientists Conference. START's unique spin on this event was that each researcher got 2 minutes to present at a plenary session. This went far beyond the usual 'poster in a hallway' recognition and gave participants real-world experience in public speaking.

Since connecting with START early in her early career, Ulka has stayed in touch and collaborated on other activities. In 2014 she spent a week in Paris to help design a transdisciplinary training program on global change research. Although the proposal was not funded, Ulka hopes to do similar work on a smaller scale in India. The START model of hands-on learning and training that incorporates research grants and follow-on networking events is something that Ulka strives to incorporate in her research program design. "That has a tremendous impact," she says.