

Mandara

Vision

An environmental resource and research center enriching and empowering ecological work undertaken in Auroville and the bioregion.

Introduction

Auroville since its inception has been extremely active in many aspects of environmental work, and is now mature enough to extend itself on a broader scale where its efforts can reach out to wider audiences. In this age of rapid development the urgency to harmonize Man's imagination with the practicality of Nature is something that one can no longer overlook. This environmental awareness becomes possible through education, the accessibility of information, and our direct experiences in the fields of ever-growing research and development.

Access to in-depth information and its communication is extremely crucial. The more well-informed individuals there are on this planet, the greater the potential of large-scale qualitative action. And with an environmental sensitivity ingrained in each one of us, not only does the planet get a chance to heal itself, but the world we live in is also enriched.

Mandara[?] aims at being a processing and linking center of information relating to environmental activities in Auroville and its bioregion. As an accessible resource center, we will be able to inform people about the surrounding environment, thus creating a more symbiotic relationship between them and the ecological space they inhabit. Our motive is to communicate and share knowledge empowering people to live sustainably by learning to accept what is.

Goals

- (1) *Student research facilitation and support* for visiting students.
- (2) *Linking* environmental work centers in Auroville and the bioregion.
- (3) *Contact point* for guests, visitors, Aurovilians and locals.

(1) Student research facilitation and support –

The richness and diversity of the environment in and around Auroville invites research, the more so since to date it has been studied so little. Through direct contact with relevant colleges and universities in India and abroad (email, posters, brochures) and a website that highlights the diverse ecology of the region, students will be encouraged to undertake short-term independent research projects here (laboratory and experimental plot experiments will also be possible). Assistance to visiting students will be given regarding potential research topics, contacts, and all practical aspects of their stay, against a fee which will assist the center in becoming self-funding.

[?] The name 'Mandara' has two meanings. It is one of the five trees of Lord Indra's paradise, *Erythrina stricta*, with scarlet flowers in horizontal clusters at the ends of its branches, whose shade relieves one of physical ailments and mental stress. It is also described as the peaked mountain which was upturned and used by the gods in the churning of the oceans, resulting in the creation of fire, the sun and moon, and ambrosia.

(2) Linking –

Mandara will link the existing environmental centers in Auroville (including project-based centers such as Palmyra and Pitchandikulam, farms and forests), and the bioregion by maintaining two databases – one of ongoing activities and general environmental information and a second one cataloguing existing library resources. It will make available the large bank of environmental knowledge, materials and experience that has been generated over the years of Auroville's Greenwork but remains at present dispersed, not recorded and therefore inaccessible. Mandara will enable the environmental work of Auroville to link with that of the surrounding bioregion and India at large, facilitating communication and interaction between the various groups and centers. Support and endorsement for Mandara has already been gathered from many environmental work centers in Auroville (eg. Pitchandikulam, Harvest, Ravena, Shakti, Auroannam, Samriddhi, Aranya, Aurogreen etc.).

(3) Contact point –

Guests arriving in Auroville or contacting Auroville who are interested in participating in environmental work at present often have disheartening experiences when they try to connect with possible workplaces. Mandara will be a 'reception desk' for such people - it will be publicised at the Guest Information Service, on bulletin boards, in guest houses, and on Auroville websites as the outreach contact for Greenwork in and around Auroville. It will provide all the necessary information on available work possibilities and on the environment and Greenwork in general.

Outcomes

Mandara's activities will result in the following outcomes after the first year:

1. Database cataloguing all library resources in Auroville, their location and availability.
2. Database (also available online) detailing the activities of environmental work centers and the work or research possibilities available there.
3. Website, poster and brochure describing the regional environment and suggesting fields of student research.
4. Contacts established with a range of Indian and overseas colleges and universities.
5. Features on the Auroville website describing the services offered by Mandara.
6. Hard-copy (posters, leaflets, written descriptions) information about the various environmental work options available at the Mandara center.
7. Identification of the specific requirements for future infrastructure and a written proposal.

Future Perspective

Mandara is envisioned as a center within the Botanical Gardens (welcomed by the Botanical Gardens team) from which its various functions will be managed, and which will house facilities such as a library, laboratory, meeting room, computer room, and outdoor space for experimental plots. A proposal for the center complex will be submitted during this first year. The library facility will be further developed largely through online subscriptions to relevant journals and a continually updated list of relevant websites. The information available through Mandara will therefore be topical, current and relevant.

Mandara will develop economic independence and become self-financing largely through the fees paid by the students using the research and support facilities of Mandara. The exact level of the fees charged will be calculated taking into account the running expenses and maintenance of Mandara and the resources used by the student (eg. if using laboratory items), and will be realistically affordable for students while also covering the economic needs of Mandara.

Over time further income-generating schemes will be developed, such as running educational programs for students of different levels or initiating independent related projects.

Activities, Budget and Timing

Activity	Parts	Budget US \$	Budget (Rs.)	Timing of activity/ Budget requirement												
				2004						2005						
				A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	J	F	M	
<i>1. Set up office</i>	a) Computer x2*	N	2113.64	93,000												
	b) Digital camera*	N	454.55	20,000												
	c) Office expenses*	N	579.55	25,500												
	d) Office equipment*	N	1090.91	48,000												
	e) General information*	N	454.55	20,000												
<i>2. Develop database of Activities</i>	a) Questionnaire design		n/a	n/a												
	b) Data collection: i) AV		n/a	n/a												
	ii) Bioregion		n/a	n/a												
	c) Database design		159.09	7,000												
d) Data input		n/a	n/a													
<i>3. Develop database of library resources</i>	a) Data collection*	N	181.82	8,000												
	b) Database design		159.09	7,000												
	c) Data input*	N	181.82	8,000												
<i>4. Publicity for colleges and universities</i>	a) Compose website, brochure and poster		n/a	n/a												
	b) Website design		90.91	4,000												
	c) Brochure printing*	N	454.55	20,000												
	d) Poster printing*	N	352.27	15,500												
<i>5. Miscellaneous</i>	a) Personal maintenance*	N	2672.73	117,600												
	b) Miscellaneous*	N	408.07	17,955												
Budget Total			\$9,353.52	4,11,555												

Key:

	The main activity is completed but due to updates it will be to some degree ongoing.
n/a	The activity will be undertaken by Gemma and/or Shiraz and therefore a separate budget is not applicable.
N	Further explanation of budget point is found in 'Budget notes'

Budget Notes

1. Set up office

- a) *Computer.* Two computers are required because there will most often be two people working in the office, and also visitors wishing to consult one of the databases. The budget includes a printer, scanner and suitable software, and LCD screens which use less current to enable efficient use (of particular importance in the Botanical Gardens where only solar power is used).
- b) *Digital Camera .* This will be of initial use for the efficient cataloguing of library resources. It will also be necessary for compiling the website, posters and brochure.
- c) *Office expenses.* A room is available at Shakti with no rental charge. Recurring expenses include electricity and telephone bills, Internet access and contribution towards daily cleaning.
- d) *Office equipment.* The general outfitting of an office, plus initial refurbishment costs. The cost of establishing a wireless Internet connection is included.
- e) *General information.* The development of hard-copy informative presentations (about the general environment and specific projects), including posters, brochures, photographs and simple write-ups.

3) Develop database of library resources

- a and c) *Data collection; Data input.* These tasks will be undertaken by an employee hired for two months to collate and input the relevant data.

4) Publicity for colleges and universities

- c) *Brochure printing.* 2000 brochures are accounted for.
- d) *Posters.* 50 posters are accounted for.

5. Miscellaneous

- a) *Personal Maintenance.* A full maintenance of Rs. 4500 is calculated for Gemma, and Rs. 2500 for Shiraz. Central Fund contributions (Rs. 1200) and Health Fund payments (Rs. 200) are also included (monthly totals of Rs. 5900 for Gemma; Rs. 3900 for Shiraz).
- b) *Miscellaneous.* The unpredictable, calculated at 5% of the total budget.

Relevance in the Auroville context

At present there is no facility in Auroville providing such a wide range of resources, services and information such as that proposed for Mandara. The facility as a whole relates in several ways to broader current movements in Auroville: the linking with bioregional centers, creating an open channel of interaction between Aurovilian and bioregional environmental work, relates directly to the imperative movement towards further integration of Auroville within its regional context. Likewise the emphasis on encouraging and welcoming students to conduct projects in the region correlates with the current SAIER/CIRHU project and also complements the Botanical Gardens project. There is a need for a physical center to which the various Aurovilian greenwork places can relate, and this has been absent since the Auroville Greenwork Resource Center (AGRC) ceased functioning over a decade ago.

Project Management

Mandara is managed by Gemma, with the help of Shiraz.

Gemma has been involved in various areas of environmental work in Auroville since 1995, and has evolved a good contact with a wide range of people in the field over the years. She graduated from Aberdeen University (in Scotland) with a 1st Class B.Sc in Tropical Environmental Science in 2000. Work with which she has been involved in Auroville includes: the starting of Solitude farm and community, general forest work, member of the Green Group, undertaking an independent scientific research project (measuring the survival and growth rates of indigenous forest timber trees under different planting conditions) and participation in the EU-funded Tropical Dry Evergreen Forest project as part of the Botanical Team.

Shiraz has been in Auroville periodically since 1999 and has now returned to complete his Newcomer process. He is participating in Mandara because of the opportunities for learning and involvement that it offers and out of an interest and care for the local environment.

For more information please visit http://www.aviusa.org/projects_main.html or contact Gemma at gemma@auroville.org.in.