



## **Strengthening Academic Collaboration and Rural Innovation: Engagements between BIRD Mangaluru and NITK Surathkal**

### **I. Observance of Hindi Diwas at NITK Surathkal**

On 16th September 2025, the National Institute of Technology Karnataka (NITK), Surathkal solemnly celebrated Hindi Diwas, reaffirming its commitment to the promotion of Rajbhasha Hindi in institutional governance and academic discourse. The event was presided over by Prof. B. Ravi, Director, NITK, and featured Shri V. S. Balasubramanian, Joint Director, BIRD Mangaluru, as the Chief Guest.

The programme commenced with the traditional lighting of the lamp, symbolizing the illumination of knowledge and cultural unity. Dr. Mallikarjun Angadi, Rajbhasha Officer, NITK, welcomed the dignitaries and emphasized the constitutional relevance of Hindi Diwas, which commemorates the adoption of Hindi as an official language of India.

A message from the Hon'ble Union Minister of Education, Shri Dharmendra Pradhan, was read by Prof. A. Sharma, highlighting the role of Hindi in fostering inclusive communication and national integration.

In his keynote address, Shri V.S. Balasubramanian underscored the strategic importance of Hindi as a linguistic bridge across India's diverse regions and reiterated the Government of India's directives for the progressive use of Hindi in official correspondence. Prof. B. Ravi, in his presidential remarks, endorsed these views and assured that NITK would continue to strengthen its efforts to integrate Hindi into its administrative and academic processes. The event concluded with a vote of thanks by Prof. Ratnakar Sahoo, Faculty Assistant, Hindi.

### **II. Strategic Dialogue with Director, NITK: Launching the "100 Village Engagement Programme"**

Following the Hindi Diwas ceremony, a strategic meeting was held between the BIRD Mangaluru delegation and the Director of NITK to explore



collaborative opportunities in academic innovation and rural development. The BIRD team comprised Smt. Sheela Bhandarkar and Shri Baidya Nath Singh while NITK was represented by Dr. Subray R. Hegde, Director In-Charge, NITK – Science and Technology Entrepreneurs’ Park (STEP), and Dr. V. Gangadharan, Professor and Coordinator, Centre for System Design.

During the interaction, Prof. B. Ravi proposed a transformative initiative titled the “***100 Village Engagement Programme***”, designed to integrate experiential learning with grassroots innovation. The programme envisions a structured four-year engagement model for undergraduate engineering students, as outlined below:

- **Year 1 – Immersion and Discovery:** Students will visit selected villages to interact with farmers, artisans, and local entrepreneurs. Through participatory observation and dialogue, they will identify key socio-economic challenges (specific to village) and developmental bottlenecks.
- **Year 2 – Ideation and Solution Design:** Based on insights gathered, students will conceptualize innovative, context-specific solutions using engineering principles, digital tools, and design thinking methodologies.
- **Year 3 – Validation and Proof of Concept (PoC):** Proposed solutions will be tested and refined through pilot implementations, field trials, and stakeholder feedback. This phase will be integrated into their academic project work.
- **Year 4 – Business Model Development and Launch:** Viable solutions will be transformed into scalable business proposals. Students will be mentored to develop business plans, explore funding avenues, and potentially launch startups or social enterprises aimed at rural transformation.

This initiative aligns with NABARD’s strategic objectives of promoting rural innovation, youth engagement, and sustainable development. The Joint Director, BIRD Mangaluru, welcomed the proposal and assured full support



in identifying suitable villages, facilitating field-level coordination, and integrating the programme with BIRD's training and research ecosystem.

The Director, NITK suggested to have next round of discussions at BIRD Mangaluru to formalize the collaboration framework and explore avenues for joint implementation.

### **III. Engagement with NITK-STEP: Fostering Innovation and Entrepreneurship**

The BIRD team also held a focused interaction with Dr. Subray R. Hegde, Director In-Charge of NITK Science and Technology Entrepreneurs' Park (STEP), a premier incubation centre established to promote innovation, entrepreneurship, and technology transfer.

Dr. Hedge provided an overview of STEP's initiatives, which include incubation support for startups in sectors such as IT, healthcare, agriculture, and clean technologies. The centre has successfully nurtured over 55 startups, including faculty-led ventures in radar systems and nanotech-based water purification.

During the meeting, both parties expressed interest in co-organizing a workshop or seminar focused on the startup ecosystem, targeting early-stage entrepreneurs, MSMEs, and student innovators. The possibility of executing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between BIRD Mangaluru and NITK-STEP was discussed to institutionalize the partnership and facilitate joint initiatives in:

- Capacity building and training
- Incubation and mentoring
- Rural entrepreneurship development
- Technology dissemination

This collaboration is expected to enhance BIRD's outreach in promoting innovation-led rural development and provide NITK-STEP with access to field-level insights and policy frameworks.

Some photographs of visit are appended below:















