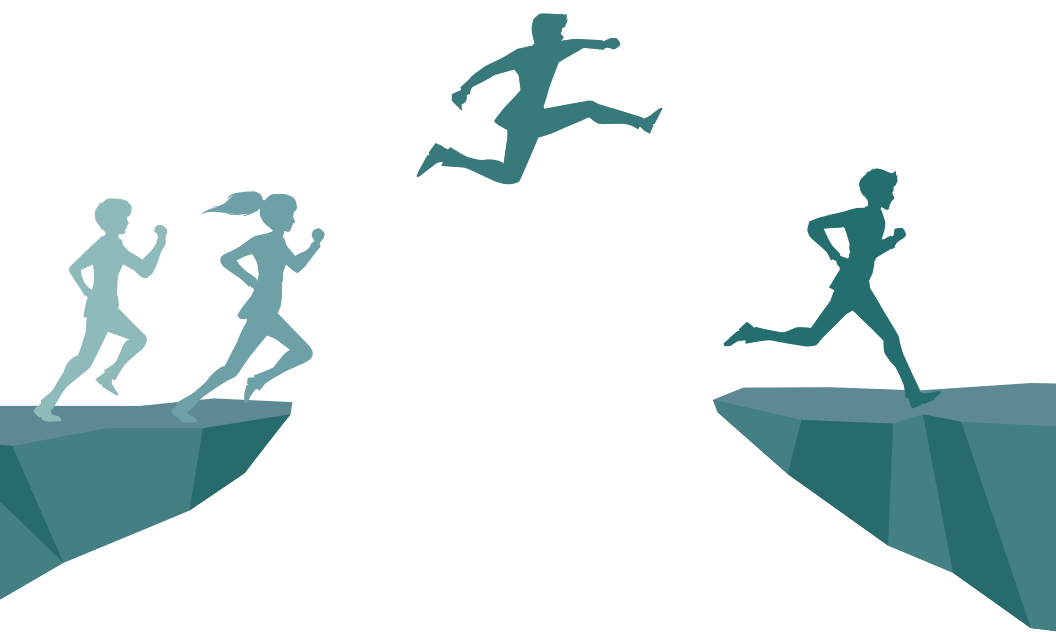


UNSUNG BEACONS

Volume XII

Stories of people for whom humanity matters



A compilation of articles featured in
Conversations Today 2021

Centre for Social Initiative & Management

Unsung Beacons

Volume XII

*Stories of people for
whom humanity matters*

*A compilation of articles featured in
Conversations Today – 2021*

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FOREWORD

I am grateful to Ms Marie Banu for sharing this book for my perusal. The review of work given in its articles is very inspiring. The title (“Unsung Beacons”) as well as the subtitle (“Stories of people to whom Humanity Matters”) sum up the essence and the connecting thread of the articles. These are stories of persons and organisations that focus on people who suffer some handicap, because of personal or social deprivation, and provide them a helping hand.



An unsung hero is driven by an urge to serve rather than by the desire to gain name and fame. Such a person is by nature high in empathy and fellow-feeling and feels the agony of those around himself / herself.

The first part of the book gives an account of various individuals and the organisations founded by them. Their yeoman service to the society, especially to children, is remarkable.

The 500-word limit given for my Preface does not permit of a detailed review of any of the organisations. Here, I give a listing of the articles in part one of the book:

- Ashray Akruti’s work in mainstreaming hearing-impaired children is a great contribution.
- Mahasakthi Welfare Society is imparting economic independence to women.
- RPWO has been helping the marginalised people become self-reliant.
- Manivannan’s contribution to the promotion of higher education is admirable.
- The work of HCHW in rescuing, rehabilitating and mainstreaming children living on the streets is remarkable.

- Networking and Development Centre for Service Organisations (NDSO) has 1,600 organisations which have vowed to collaborate for social work. Health, education, organic farming, environment, governance, and rural development – no sector is left untouched by the network.
- Mr. Radhakrishnan's Thozhan Trust in Chennai focuses on creating awareness about traffic-related laws and training volunteers and the members of public on the 'Golden Hour' and about First Aid methods.
- Need Base India ensures that orphans are looked after well.
- Street Vision Social Charitable Trust is another organisation that helps deserted children and street children.
- Kumaran Special School helps children with autism.
- Child Trust is another organisation that looks after the needy children.

The second part of the book is a set of interviews with highly distinguished people. Their interviews are very inspiring as well as enlightening. I have learnt a lot from a perusal of these.

The third part of the book gives details of NGOs which are attending to various needs of the society. Put together they could all be called a mini-government that provides welfare to the masses. These NGOs integrate the potential of large numbers of people to bring about changes in their lives. Great job!

The fourth part of the book deals with various aspects of finance and financing. A very well-organised quantum of information!

The fifth part is another compilation of articles about various NGOs, trusts and other organisations. The work of these organisations is admirable.

To conclude, the book is a compendium, very well drafted and full of wisdom, experience and inspiration for the reader.

Shri S.K. Dogra, IPS (Retd.)
Former DGP, Author, Trainer & Motivator

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As I bring this book on social entrepreneurs to fruition, I am filled with immense gratitude for the collective support and contributions that have made it possible. The journey of exploring the inspiring work of social entrepreneurs has been a collaborative effort, and I would like to extend my heartfelt acknowledgments to all those who have played a part.



To the social entrepreneurs who have dedicated their lives to creating positive change, thank you for your unwavering commitment, innovative ideas, and tireless efforts. Your inspiring stories have served as the backbone of this book, and it is through your work that we witness the transformative power of entrepreneurship for social good. Your passion, resilience, and relentless pursuit of impact have set a benchmark for us all.

I would also like to express my gratitude to the corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives and organizations that have partnered with social entrepreneurs to drive meaningful change. Your support and investments have been instrumental in enabling social entrepreneurs to scale their solutions and create a lasting impact. Your recognition of the importance of blending profit with purpose is paving the way for a more sustainable and equitable future.

A special thanks to Mrs. Latha Suresh for embarking on this journey with me and for lending her expertise, insights, and unwavering commitment. Her passion for the subject matter and meticulous attention to detail have been instrumental in compiling and shaping the content of this book.

To my writers who have contributed their expertise and skills to this project, thank you for your dedication and commitment to capturing the essence of the social entrepreneurs' journeys. Your meticulous research,

thoughtful storytelling, and ability to convey the passion and impact of these individuals have given life to their stories and brought their visions to the forefront.

I would also like to extend my gratitude to the readers of this book. Your interest in understanding and supporting the work of social entrepreneurs is a testament to your belief in the power of business as a force for positive change. It is through your engagement and willingness to learn that the impact of these entrepreneurs can extend beyond the pages of this book and into the real world. Your enthusiasm and support for the social entrepreneurship movement are vital in creating a more inclusive and sustainable society.

To my parents and sons, I offer my deepest appreciation for their unwavering support, love, and understanding throughout this journey. Your belief in my vision and your encouragement have been a constant source of inspiration. Your presence and encouragement have provided the foundation upon which I have built my endeavours. Thank you for being my rock and for always being there to celebrate the highs and navigate the lows.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to all those whose contributions may not be explicitly mentioned here but have been significant in their own ways.

With deep appreciation and gratitude,

Marie Banu Rodriguez
Chief Editor – Conversations Today
Director CSIM | Director, SAN UK

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ALUMNI TALK

1. Mr D P K Babu

Are we listening?...



Listening is an art. It is a gift, an inherent part of all our personalities. It is a joint product of all our senses combined together. How does one with hearing impairment imagine or perceive listening to be? “It was this question that urged me to work for the hearing impaired children. Closely observing a family member tide through this disability prompted me to think from their side. I was overwhelmed by little things that could help them listen and respond better. I wanted to help other children too, with the same disability,” says Mr. D P K Babu, Founder of Ashray Akruti in Hyderabad, Telangana.

Babu’s Diploma in Education from Aliyavar Jung National Institute for Hearing Handicapped opened his knowledge base and encouraged the learner in him to explore all details to work for such children. Soon after his B.Ed, Babu wasted no time in establishing Ashray Akruti, a non-profit organisation to work for hearing impaired children. “It was 1996, when social marketing was still naive. So, I had to

convince stakeholders about imminent programs, safety of children and the credibility of this initiative. A lot of ground work was done and all that has given Ashray Akruti its credibility today,” shares an emotional Babu, who could not see poor parents giving up on their children due to this impairment.

Ashray Akruti’s Special School started with only five children; today, the NGO runs five special schools, four in Hyderabad and one in Andhra Pradesh, catering to over 550 children. Customised curriculum and tailor made use of teaching aids suiting the development needs of every child have been Ashray Akruti’s strengths. “I believe it all flows from your vision – Inclusive Education. We deliberately maintain a low teacher student ratio (1:8) to be able to focus, observe and build on the improvements we see in our children. With parents stepping in as partners, our team’s efforts are complemented, and children begin to trust and enjoy their growth. Every smile moves me to work further and better,” smiles Babu.

As mainstreaming hearing impaired children in schools was successful, Babu and team wanted to work out a market relevant skill development program that made them independent. Multimedia and Animation Training centre was initiated in 2010 where over 600 children got trained and 270 children were employed in visual effects, graphics and post production companies based in Hyderabad.

Babu conceptualised the first of its kind Mobile Hearing Clinic and its launch in 2015 marked a significant milestone in early diagnosis of hearing related complaints. It helped reach out to underprivileged children in government schools, anganwadi centres and refer them to corrective services. Having screened more than 1.2 lakh children, this outreach initiative has

reiterated that hearing impairment can be treated and is not a permanent disability. “In many remote pockets, this realisation is a big step. Lack of awareness is a huge barrier and going to communities was the only way out to move across. We did that,” he adds. The Early Intervention Centre and Hearing Clinic in Srinagar Colony provide state of the art diagnostic facilities and clinical services. Everything, right from walls to furniture, is designed to suit the treatment needs of hearing impaired children.

A multifaceted team comprising of audiologists, surgeons, ENT specialists, special educators, listening speech language specialists, volunteers, etc. is Ashray Akruti’s backbone and Babu values their contribution in every opportunity. As a team, their application of oral-aural method and audio visual therapy calls for applause as listening is consistently stressed upon as the means of speech acquisition. “The challenge is in building instructions that are in line with a child’s speech, understanding, response ecosystem. As they develop, we are touched to see the result of all our efforts,” shares Babu, who has learnt every little step in this long journey, by doing.

His association with CSIM was timed rightly, he feels. Six years after Ashray Akruti was born, CSIM showed him the mirror for reality check. “My lessons from CSIM helped me analyse my objectives organically. I was able to better articulate my vision and long term plans. I was able to recognise gaps in understanding the genuine needs of hearing impaired children. Impact, as I learnt here was multifarious, heterogeneous. As a Founder, I must be able to see every face of it. The success of every program brings me to this lesson and prompt new questions that lead me further,” shares Babu.

From a single man's dream, Ashray Akruti has transcended into a holistic, hearing care institution. Residential care, special schools, diagnostic/treatment centres, camps, college to build a new cadre of special educators, skill development centre and many more programs continue to inspire communities and the team, alike. "A member of World Hearing Forum and many prestigious collaborations, Ashray Akruti has come a long way in the last 25 years," says Babu who is committed to work on every new opportunity and space that can improve, mainstream the lives of hearing impaired children from all walks of life.

Shanmuga Priya.T

2. Ms. Kala Palaniappan

Women Empowerment for Community Development



Observation and reasoning are two different traits whose co-existence adds great value in any context, especially parenting. Ms. Kala Palaniappan, Secretary of Mahasakthi Welfare Society in Sarathupatti village, Theni district, Tamil Nadu, founded in 1998, is in complete agreement as these two traits determined her course of life, personally and professionally.

Hailing from a backward village in Dindugal district, Kala grew up witnessing the lives of women and children. “I wondered why women and children’s lives revolved around what men in their families did. As I grew older and understood about the family ecosystem, it was my parents actions that helped me understand the family society interface,” recalls Kala.

As the daughter of an ex-army man who was wounded in the 1962 China War, she saw how her father’s role and identity in the community changed. It was her father who taught about basic hygiene and first aid to people in the village. His social engagements further exposed her to the nuances of decoding needs and resources within a community. Eventually, she

started her independent organisation ‘Mahasakthi Welfare Society’ to work for women and child development. “All that grooming I received since young made me realise that a structured approach and reach was essential for sustainable results as work in this sector cannot be retracted,” she warns.

Women’s economic independence not only answered many questions, but also eased the entry and execution of new ideas that could benefit both families and communities. Having cracked this early on, Kala was encouraged to map the journey of her SHGs appropriately. She formed 500 SHGs and trained them in account keeping and a wide variety of skills like making jute bags, vermi compost, fur toys, embroidery, tailoring, dairy farming, etc. For every 30 women trained, Kala ensured that at least two women started their independent enterprise. Loans, mentoring and other support was ensured to make the effort successful. “Two is a small number, but it helped build trust. It took a lot of time to convince women about the potential of earning independently and when they did, it was overwhelming to see how families and communities adapted to the change. With this new found identity, women were coming forward to support initiatives that could improve the lives of their children. The importance women began to give to education had a strong impact,” adds Kala.

When children, especially girl children dropped out or took long toilet breaks, women from four SHGs came forward and erected a water tank that made the toilets in school functional. Impressed by women’s skills in decision making and prioritising needs, Kala encouraged every such initiative genuinely. This, she feels, is true empowerment!

Local schools and balwadis were supported in many ways. Right from painting of schools, providing books, play equipment, and furniture to planting saplings for school garden - SHG women ushered in a new phase in their village

schools that made learning fun and engaging. Interest in education increased as the Society awarded school toppers and talented students. Starting with women, Kala and team were now able to bring all children in the community to school. Awarded thrice by the District Collector for her work, Kala reiterates that this was no easy feat, considering the level of backwardness in the village when she began her journey. Her SHGs have also been awarded many times by the District and State authorities for their contribution to community welfare.

So far, 700 women have set up independent businesses. 876 women have been pooled together under Sakthi Farmers' Producer Company to manage all agriculture and allied activities. They are supported with loans, marketing and also provided natural fertilisers. Once the membership reaches 1000, the group will be enrolled under NABARD scheme where funds and cows will be given to these women to engage in dairy farming. Kala has been very hopeful about this venture as this is the first time the SHG women will be engaging on a scalable business model.

Kala was always intrigued by the idea of social businesses, but she was not very sure about her skills in writing or presenting business plans. She did know that it was definitely a need to take her enterprising SHG women to new heights and therefore, came to CSIM. "It is not just the technicalities of writing a business plan. It is the whole thought process that must be nurtured from an early stage. How much we manage to trace the root of our ideas reveals their potential to transform lives. Now, I not just write business plans but have also learnt the art of studying the business idea from a different perspective. The exposure at CSIM not only teaches what you need but also prepares us for something bigger," shares an overwhelmed Kala, who was awarded a Doctorate by Chennai's Peace Global Institute.

3. Mr. G. Kumar

Parenting the marginalized



Seven decades after independence, India has come a long way in every aspect. But, the story of development also has its pitfalls. There is still a section of the population that is not visible, their existence is not often relatable and the intentions behind their mobility is mis-interpreted. Always being judged upon, tribals continue to live with fear – a fear which only they comprehend and learn to live with. “Political representation is slowly changing the tide but recognising their presence is an important pre-requisite. That is where the larger picture emerges,” says Mr. G. Kumar, Founder of Rural People Welfare Organisation (RPWO) in Chengam Block.

Coming from a middle class background, Kumar was not unaware of the marginalised sections of our society. As he grew, he was startled by the systemic factors that unintentionally contributed to sustaining inequality. Unable to complete his education, his compulsion to work exposed him to harder realities. The organisation he was working

with conducted a baseline survey on Scheduled Tribes in two blocks of Tamil Nadu. “These people were completely dependent on forest resources. There were no roads or pavements. Their locations had to be discovered. It was a painstaking effort, but the observations became a strong driving force for me. They faced several issues, but were adapting to manage with what they had. It was evident that they did not know about their rights and what they were entitled to. So, the fact that someone from outside would come and resolve their concerns was a distant thought,” shares Kumar, who has now spent about three decades working for the welfare of the Irula tribes.

RPWO began in 1986 with hardly any resources. With few volunteers, Kumar embarked upon an arduous journey where his benefactors did not know that he was working towards improving their lives. Respecting their work routine, Kumar and team waited for the sunset to interact with tribal families. Self-help groups, he thought, provided a relatable objective for them to come together but it turned out to be a difficult task. After about a year in the field, Kumar and team earned the community’s trust and helped them open up about their concerns. “Now that they trusted us, we had a huge responsibility in hand. Communities, for whom outsiders were no more than visitors, started hoping that their lives will improve for the better. They began to cooperate,” recalls Kumar.

Rigorous homework and documentation helped provide land pattas for more than 300 families. With pattas in hand, as land owners they were able to claim their rights for basic amenities. Kumar and team also worked on the provision of caste certificates. “Giving them their identity in the form of a legally valid document was extremely difficult but imperative. Scheduled Tribes who were once reported as non-existent by field officers

from government departments were now listed in the census. With consistent work, we were able to convince the government officials that tribal people also lived on plains and not only on the mountains. This was a big leap for us. We were able to help the authorities identify the Schedule Tribes who did not fit into the conventional criteria,” he adds.

RPWO also intervened to release bonded labourers. Having rescued more than 200 families from bonded labour, the team started working on their livelihood options. In order to secure livelihoods, Kumar and team approached banks, but the very nature of the lives of the Scheduled Tribes’ became an impediment. So now, the team created space for banks and the community members to interact. With new access to credit facilities, construction of houses became a possibility. “Four years back 35 families got their pattas and they are now building their houses. Children are regular in school and new vocational training programmes have also been launched,” Kumar sums up.

Describing how difficult the issue of identification and rescue of bonded labourers is, Kumar goes on to elaborate how the team works to map the movement of these communities. Extremely complicated and thoroughly dependent on local linkages, every effort in this mapping, he strongly believes, helps watch over the micro and macro realities. “You miss one or two links, the communities will become invisible again,” he warns.

For how long will RPWO handhold them? Kumar, after deep introspection, says handholding marginalised communities is very much like parenting. “CSIM is the place where I saw the need for a long term field presence. We facilitate all our work with people’s cooperation and this is only the beginning. Scheduled Tribes must be able to

claim their rights themselves without any fear. We must not only educate them, but make them claim their rights. At the end of the day, it is not what we do for them that matters, it is what we make them do for themselves. CSIM mentors have guided and prepared us for this larger responsibility,” explains Kumar.

Shanmuga Priya.T

4. Mr. M. Manivannan

Learning to Inspire



Education sector is intriguing, challenging, and confusing; but it has a huge potential for those who can recognise the multitude of verticals and the hidden opportunities in it. “It is not only me. Every first graduate from a village is bound to notice this and what they do next re-defines their life. Although graduation is the first, significant step, one has to push himself to look beyond. Else, we will remain where we are,” warns Mr. M. Manivannan, Founder Trustee of Thisaigal Charitable Trust, Villupuram, Tamil Nadu.

Hailing from Veedur village in Mayilam Block, Manivannan had a successful schooling life where he topped in both tenth and twelfth board examinations. Along with success, a student needs timely guidance to be able to decide on his next steps. Manivannan and his friends were not aware of entrance examinations and the registration process. Their quest to pursue higher studies took one long year for them to understand these processes. “For rural youth, progressing from school to college is not a natural and pre-planned

transition as it would happen for those in cities. For me, it was not! It was the most challenging phase where I had to be determined to study further instead of succumbing in local labour opportunities. Thus, I chose to study Electronics and Communication Engineering and became the first graduate in my family and village,” he proudly shares.

The uncertainty and anxiety in each step of graduation moulded the mentor in him. Thus, Manivannan prepared himself to reach a position where he could guide other school and college students who faced similar challenges. At first, he explored opportunities in Chennai and Pondicherry and in a year he secured a job at Chennai. As he was unable to be of assistance to his parents as well as to students in his village, he decided to return to his hometown. “I managed to clear bank entrance exam and returned to Villupuram. Working in a bank exposed me to different opportunities available in the villages,” he says. Manivannan, by now, understood the significance of quick decisions and within a year of starting his job with the bank, established ‘Thisaigal Charitable Trust’.

In 2007, he and his friends formed men’s self-help groups and undertook small initiatives to help farmers and their children. The Trust attempted to prevent children dropping out from schools in every possible way. “As long as parents tide through family crisis efficiently, there wouldn’t be any pressure on their children and force them to engage in labour,” he adds. Two years later in 2009, he registered ‘Veedur Hope Society’ and worked in other neighbouring villages. “Surprisingly, the name created hurdles when we tried to start work in other villages. We had to face naive questions,” he laughs.

In 2011, he revived his NGO and registered it as Thisaigal Charitable Trust. The objective of the Trust was to work

with children and women to provide an education-friendly atmosphere within the village and guide the children in their higher education. The Trust networked with a forum called the Children Protection Committee that comprised of 20 children (students) in each village. These children are trained on how to observe their peers in the village and raise issues/concerns that disturb their education. A wide range of factors started coming by and children began to see their way out too. It all seemed as if this platform for open communication where children and parents can express their needs fearlessly was missing all these years. Issues like need for computer literacy, need for play equipment and laboratories, imminent school drop outs, need for additional rest rooms in schools, etc. emerged and kept the team engaged. The Trust formed such Children Protection Committees in Villupuram and Kallakurichi districts and has been approached by children from Cuddalore now.

Recently, a Night School Programme has been launched by the Trust to enable children discuss lessons from a broader perspective, improve their communication skills, and encourage them to speak in English.

Manivannan, from his own experience has learnt that being perceptive alone does not help in one's career; it also needs confidence to articulate at the right time. The night schools focused on addressing this fear and help children relate their lessons with current affairs.

Women self-help groups, teachers and staff form the base network for the Trust's operations. Manivannan's team handhold students, educate them about higher education opportunities and make them overcome the challenges they face in pursuing their dreams. As the need emerged, the Trust also initiated book reading sessions and coaching

classes to train interested students to appear in State and Union Public Service Commission examinations.

Alongside children, the Trust also works with women to break the cycle of year-long debts. Manivannan, during his field operations, observed that self-help groups have been taking loans without working on a productive way to repay them. Hence, loans build up and so is the financial pressure on their families, forcing them to forego many aspirations, including their children's education.

Consistent guidance is the key according to Manivannan. He decided to work with women and build their entrepreneurial skills. Most of the rural women were unaware of the government subsidies that were available for SHGs, thus Manivannan's inputs and guidance were a boon. Now, 100 SHGs have procured machines to produce incense sticks and the Trust has collaborated with Cycle and ITC brands for promotion. Thus, even the fear of marketing has been taken care of, and women have become more confident to don their new role.

CSIM was a place where Manivannan learnt that social responsibilities aren't time bound. "It was my passion and idea, but CSIM moulded and designed my path. The way they teach each of their students and mentor them is enlightening," he says, in awe of the charisma and positivity one begins to see in everyone. "I not only learnt about sustaining a non-profit organisation, but also the need to diversify actions and set a model for those very students I was aiming to inspire. Opportunities are aplenty for all of us," he insists.

Shanmuga Priya.T

5. Dr. Mohammed Rafiuddin

Streets to Success



Dreams and destiny, whether they cross paths or not, it happens to be for a good reason. “At least, I knew I was doing good!” laughs Dr. Mohammed Rafiuddin, Founder of Hyderabad Council of Human Welfare (HCHW) in Hyderabad, Telangana. Brought up in the city of Hyderabad, much like most other students of his time, Mohammed aspired to be a doctor. His rank led him to the only private college in the city at that time. “Everything made me wait. My college was prohibited from admitting students for that year. So I had to wait for a year and repeat my entrance exam. I aspired to be a doctor so the idea of waiting did not scare or bother me,” he recalls.

One year was a long time for his family, who convinced him to take up a regular degree - Bachelor of Science. Just when he had made up his mind to take up BSc, his cousin suggested the idea of joining a professional course on Social Work. “Out of the blue sky, somebody told me I could study to do something good for society. I was taken aback but eventually wanted to try. I still held on to the thought of giving my medical entrance after a year,” says Mohammed.

As he insists, that one year became life changing for him. He was amused by the idea of being a professional social worker and felt that he belonged here.

Graduating as a University Topper, he was very observant of initiatives in the city and mapped issues, contexts and opportunities to intervene. “At once, it may all seem part of a whole. Which is true. But to address these issues, resources restrict our focus. With the holistic picture in mind, it is very intriguing to learn how a social worker decides on a specific approach or strategy,” says Mohammed, who was also aware of the distance NGOs maintained from professional social workers. With field experience, he felt that he must establish his own organisation to be able to act independently. “I did not undermine others’ work. But, what if I wanted to do things or approach a situation in a different way? My organisation can give me that space. That’s why I established HCHW even before completing my Master degree,” admits the gold medallist.

Mohammed took on the responsibility of his NGO with ease and anxiety. His college project with street children made him realise that they were capable, responsible, ready to take on challenges, but lacked direction. He wanted HCHW to fill this gap. HCHW was founded in 1990 with a vision to rescue, rehabilitate and mainstream children living on the streets. Challenges were plenty when he started. His patience, perseverance and small but dedicated team managed to cross one hurdle after another. “The best thing about social work profession is that each individual comes with his or her own skill set and perspective. I found it amusing because things fell in place in a different way each time. It has been three decades but this continues to amuse me,” says Mohammed.

With each child, HCHW also grew in its capacity. As children grew, HCHW began to look at other factors that could help them live an independent life. With street children, Mohammed insists, it is a long journey. It takes time and lot of effort to prove themselves against the place they are from, streets. They have to prove themselves against all the stereotypes, biases and prejudices. HCHW did all that was possible to keep the children motivated and focused. Over 40,000 children have been mainstreamed in schools after brief bridge school programmes and more than 20,000 children have been repatriated with their families. Skill development and youth empowerment programs, with a specific focus on children from poor neighbourhoods tuned the tide. “While caring for street children is underway, it is also crucial to look at the prevention of children landing on streets. So poor neighbourhoods with migrants, marginalised population and orphaned children had to be looked at,” he says.

DMR International School was established under HCHW’s management to educate children from these areas. Ensuring quality education for marginalised children further opened inroads for skill development of youth in a variety of vocations, including banking and insurance services. Younger children in schools, older teenagers engaged in skill training, women trained in vocations to provide alternate livelihood opportunities – HCHW attempted to address a gamut of issues that brought children o streets. “Once on the street, it becomes their identity,” laments Mohammed. From an institution with less than 20 children, HCHW has transformed into a multifaceted organisation with a strong field presence, facilitated by the beneficiaries themselves. “Their participation is the symbol of our success,” he adds. A rehabilitation centre, mobile clinic, two skill development centres, day school for marginalised children and a wide

range of collaboration with national and international organisations – HCHW is a resource centre in itself.

CSIM helped Mohammed see the value of management lessons in his field. “Managing human resources in my field is a challenge. Sustaining a good team that shares the values of the institution is extremely important and difficult too. The way CSIM worked was in itself a big lesson for me. The ease with which staff can fill in the shoes of each other is something I learnt from here. Keeping the whole team informed about work in all spheres is an art and CSIM taught me the nuances of both internal and external communication,” shares Mohammed.

— *Shanmuga Priya.T*

6. Mr. J. Prabhakar

Together, Interested and Committed



The social service sector has evolved by leaps and bounds reaching such remote corners in our country, making them visible, significant and at times, functional too. “Today, it is very heartening to see efforts led by committed individuals from different communities. In spite of being restricted to their communities, with limited capabilities, all such work have strived to improve the lives of the needy. They all have lessons to offer and also wish to engage in continuous learning to further develop their communities. In such a scenario, it is critical to bring them all together in one platform. This opportunity opens up many possibilities and allows us to make the best use of all resources – physical, social and human,” says Mr. J. Prabhakar, Founder of Networking and Development Centre for Service Organisations (NDSO) in Chennai.

Popularly known as ‘JP’, Prabhakar comes from a humble background that gave him the space to identify his interest in Art. After his schooling in Uthukottai, Tamil Nadu, Prabhakar came to Chennai in 1973 to study Arts but he couldn’t pursue his dream. His search for opportunities led him to Ashok Leyland in Ennore where he joined as a labourer and gradually grew in his 29-year-long career with this company. His interest in social service and community

welfare work was apparent and he soon became the leader of ‘Nallor Vattam’ – a small group of employees who pooled in resources and offered services to the villages around the company premises. “We worked in juvenile homes, orphanages, organised medical and blood donation camps. Different activities allowed me to visit different places and communities. This experience enriched my knowledge and further enthused me to engage in social service constructively and on a bigger scale,” he adds.

In the Theeyambakkam village near Manali Refineries, the Nallor Vattam team under Prabhakar decided to ban illegal liquor which was almost the identity of that community. The multifarious consequences from this act affected the future of children living here and Prabhakar was determined to reform the village. Taking inspiration from Anna Hazare’s ‘Ralegan Siddhi’ in Maharashtra, his team worked on all the possibilities based on the people’s needs assessed during their visits. Anna Hazare’s guidance was a big boon and soon liquor banished from here. Prabhakar and team initiated Vivekananda Vidyalaya, a local school that still caters to the education of children at Theeyambakkam and neighboring villages.

After Ashok Leyland, he worked with Ananda Vikatan as an Artist. “From 2001 to 2005, my work here helped me travel across India. Over 3,000 drawings of temples and leaders brought me closer to the ideals I held closer to my heart. The idea of social service became a strong drive and I was eager to do something on my own,” says Prabhakar who was very much aware of the different kinds of developmental work happening around him. He felt the need for a networking platform where service oriented organisations and individuals could come together and complement each other’s efforts. “Like I already mentioned, social work is happening everywhere in different forms and modes. Bringing them together not only offers experiential

learning for a larger group but also demonstrates the need for efficient use of resources in hand. Together we can move a bigger mountain,” he smiles.

Ennangalin Sangamam was initiated in 2005 with 100 organisations coming together to recognize and learn about each other’s work. Having been personally involved and visiting these organisations, Prabhakar naturally thought of a trust that could take this effort forward with better management and strategies. “Meeting once a year is only the beginning. What we did together, post the meeting, is important and everybody’s energy motivated me to prepare an organisational framework that could lead the way forward. I was soon at CSIM where I acquired all the functional competency required for my mission,” he shares.

The NDSO Trust was formed in 2007 and since then, on the first Sunday of every year, 100 NGOs come together. It has been sixteen years and Prabhakar’s trust is now a network with the strength of 1,600 organisations who have vowed to come together and collaborate for larger efforts. “It was all a natural chain process and the growth was visibly organic, like I had learned in CSIM,” says Prabhakar. Health, education, organic farming, environment, governance, rural development – no sector is left untouched by the network and he has recommended CSIM to many enthusiastic social workers like him. “We learn together, we grow together and then, together we live the change,” he reassures.

Prabhakar admits that great challenges are an opportunity to realise the limit of our strengths. During the 2015 Chennai Floods, the network focused on Scheduled Tribes who had lost almost everything that they had built for themselves. In Cuddalore and Thiruvallur districts, 150 houses were built and 500 toilets were constructed – all with the support of network funds, government aid and support from network associations.

Mahatma Gandhi Tuition Centres were built in 20 villages in Cuddalore district to support the education of tribal children. These centres also spread to Dharmapuri, Pollachi and Thiruvallur districts. 563 children are studying in these centres presently and they were provided with mid-day meals every day, even during the COVID pandemic. For livelihood, NDSO provided them with three sophisticated boats with the help of Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) and other support to revive their economic ecosystem. Provision of solar lamps to more than 1,000 families and many more activities, all with the support from organisations in the network brought about a visible change in their lives. The rebuilt Thazhainallur village in Cuddalore district is now a model village.

NDSO offers awards and cash prizes to organisations and individuals every year to recognize and encourage social service efforts in different sectors. Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi Awards to youngsters in the august presence of dignitaries like Governor of Tamil Nadu has motivated many more youth to come forward and reform their communities. The Covid Pandemic threw in new challenges and the local networks successfully supported all NDSO efforts in the region. “Work keeps happening and the involvement of youth is our biggest strength. Our focus right now is to revive interest in local self-governance. We want to develop model panchayats in Pudukottai, Sivagangai, Madurai and Ramanathapuram districts.

Work is underway and we are in communication with 20 panchayat leaders who have a vision for their villages. We are dreaming and working together for a better future,” says a committed Prabhakar.

Shanmuga Priya.T

7. Mr. Radhakrishnan

Making the Samaritans ‘Act’



Lessons on civic sense are an integral part of a child’s upbringing. As children grow and begin to realise the value of these principles, they also witness the obstacles in practicing what they have been taught. “This is exactly what happens during road accidents. In spite of the desire to help the victim, people step back out of fear for the consequences. “The Good Samaritan Law that protects the rights of such kind men is a breakthrough. However, I do feel disheartened that a law was needed to encourage people to show care for fellow men,” says Mr. Radhakrishnan, Founder of Thozhan Trust in Chennai.

As a young boy, Radhakrishnan aspired to become a civil servant. He dreamt of influencing the concept of care and concern for fellow human beings. His parents’ demise affected his education and he had to work to support his education expenses. With challenges everywhere, Radhakrishnan managed to complete his graduation. The prospects of a job and higher studies and the ensuing observations in society rekindled the spirit of care in him, compelling him to act. “My friends paid my fees when I

was pursuing my diploma. It was a collective effort where each one of them contributed as much as they could. While I worked hard to bring in money, their efforts helped me realise the strength of collective effort for a good cause. I was overwhelmed!” says an emotional Radhakrishnan.

Thozhan Trust was established by a group of four friends who spent time in orphanages and homes for the aged during weekends to help the needy. They registered the Trust in 2007 and began to engage themselves in different social causes. In 2013, the idea of ‘Accident Free Nation’ came up and the team organised group efforts to sensitise the public about how critical their participation could be in saving the life of an accident victim. “We witnessed an accident where the victim, a college student died on the spot. We, four friends, were appalled by an inactive public and how they held themselves back from becoming a part of this accident story,” he reminisces.

Thozhan was founded to change this public behaviour. Their first awareness campaign in 2013 at T Nagar signal in Chennai was successful. With some commuters showing interest to volunteer for such efforts, Radhakrishnan and friends invited them to join hands. “Little did we know that we would grow into a movement that was backed by thousands of volunteers across the state today,” Radhakrishnan exclaims.

Thozhan’s chain of support grew and they became more visible in the traffic signals. Weekly and weekend traffic awareness campaigns in more than 36 areas gave them the visibility they endeavoured to build to pass on the message. They became more visible in public places like parks and beaches too. Successful traffic awareness campaigns in 100 signals on same day at the same time with the help of volunteers, students’ groups and public for three

consecutive years (2014, 2015, 2016) was a big milestone for Thozhan. With such a dedicated team, the dream of an ‘accident free nation’ became their mission and the Good Samaritan Law that was passed in March 2016 to protect the rights of good samaritans who help save many lives during the critical hours, initiated a new phase of operation for the Thozhan Trust.

From 2017 to 2019, Thozhan focused on creating awareness on the aforesaid law and training volunteers and public on the ‘Golden Hour’ First Aid methods. “This was very critical. To be able to help, one must know how to help and the priorities to focus on while attending to an accident victim before he reaches a hospital. This training that was organised in 75 parks was another big milestone as we came to know about many individuals who stepped back earlier out of fear of doing something wrong. That is when we saw the role of early education in building life-saving skills,” he notes.

Radhakrishnan learnt about CSIM from a friend and felt that an external source might help him evaluate his work. “CSIM did more than that. Engaging volunteers and contributions in line with work objectives was the first step and I was surprised that I could go further and strategise the same. Theoretically and practically, I began to understand the impact my organisation could create. I learnt to run Thozhan with a sustainable fund where money was invested in priority areas. I worked on principles that ensured volunteers followed what they preached,” shares Radhakrishnan. Recognised by many like-minded groups, traffic department and concerned personnel, Thozhan’s team of Accident Warriors not only promoted what they practiced but also initiated a chain of learning within their families and social circles.

Adding around 8,000 volunteers to their base every year, Radhakrishnan feels that his principles are not a test, rather a preliminary ground for them to see what they were insisting the public to follow rigorously. In August 2020, Thozhan organised the first ever, large scale, digital awareness campaign in India on road safety, engaging around 2800 participants from across the country, from different age groups.

School and college students, retired teachers, senior citizens and others pledged to help accident victims. “I was heartened to see that people care about their fellow men. I am proud to see that Thozhan is helping them face their fears and insecurities,” says a contented Radhakrishnan, embracing this long journey with confidence and grace.

Shanmuga Priya.T

8. Mr. Rahim Shaik

On the right track



Railway stations have been a memorable part of all our summer holidays and family get together events. The multitude of sounds, food, those few taps where fathers and brothers queued to fill bottles before the trains slipped off the platforms, the multilingual announcements, passenger charts, the invincible TTRs and a lot more comes to our mind. We have also noticed many children on the railway platforms, but hardly wondered why they were here without their parents. “Do their parents even know that they were here?” says Mr. Rahim Shaik, Founder Secretary of Need Base India in Bangalore.

Rahim’s father worked for the Indian Railways and therefore life in the railway colonies exposed him to the vulnerable children and the lives they led. “Every time I crossed stations I used to see children running here and there. Sometimes I saw well-dressed people behind them and sometimes police too. Now I know that

they could be Child Welfare Officers,” he smiles. Rahim was disturbed by the lives these children led without their families and wanted to help them. He also came across children who were happy living here as well as those who were extremely scared of going back to their families. Rahim wanted to get closer and find out ways to help them.

After completing his higher studies in his hometown Raichur (a district in North Karnataka) Rahim was sure enough to not get into a corporate job. He joined the local NGO Sathi that worked towards rescuing vulnerable children on streets, railway stations and repatriate them with families. “This new job was enlightening. Child Rights was no longer theoretical for me. I applied it in every situation but was disheartened to see that not all families cared enough for their children. We, in spite of desiring to protect them, are strangers to them, why would they trust us? In fact, living in an unpredictable environment, coming across caring individuals could be scary for them. I could completely understand why they ran away from us,” says Rahim empathetically.

Childhood, he believes, is that foundation that shapes personality and value systems. It is also that phase in one’s life when judgements do not influence decisions because mind is free in real sense. “Which is why we cannot leave them there,” urges Rahim. Ten long years with Sathi made him realize the challenges in repatriating children from critical backgrounds like children of sex workers, beggars, abandoned children, orphans and also some who are abused within their families. Evidently, they needed a different intervention that could nurture their lives outside their families. Rahim wanted to create that space for them and founded Need Base India in 2009.

Long term residential care was the idea and what made it unique was the thought of using space within the premises of government schools. “Funds may never be adequate for a long term intervention like this. Given the number of children out there, I could not afford the time to raise funds and build homes. When I came across government schools with good infrastructure but small strength, I wanted to make the resource useful for vulnerable children too. So, our children get play area, benefit from a wide range of schemes like free uniforms, mid-day meals and also access to good quality education. With the running costs coming down, we also had the liberty to spend better on skilling them,” he explains.

12 years down the lane, Need Base India runs eight homes (four boys’ and four girls’ homes) for children aged 6-18 years, benefiting 500 children. Extremely sensitive and aware of children’s mixed emotions, the team organizes a variety of programmes and events to help children mingle with the local communities. Rahim feels that being raised in a home need not and should not take away the larger sense of belonging to a community. Helping them interact from early on not only makes children confident and positive but also ensures that the community begins to value child protection. “This is possibly the only way to sensitise public about vulnerabilities children are exposed to. They can then play their respective roles,” he adds.

Having reached out to more than 1,900 children, Need Base India’s growth reminds Rahim of his valuable lessons from CSIM. “First of all, I learnt to communicate issues. Nobody ever says you are wrong. They try to learn why the issue is important to you and help you add in your perspective. The immense respect for students’ knowledge inspires me and has actually helped me in interacting with our inmates. And the most important thing is, my organisation’s growth

is much beyond what I decide before hand in my plans. As every child passes out, graduates, finds a job and becomes independent, responsible and a productive adult, they come back and share what more could be done for their juniors in the homes. Their sense of belonging and responsibility is reassuring. They know to attend to vulnerable children. They do what they can,” shares Rahim, hoping that protecting children will be a common social goal very soon.

Shanmuga Priya.T

9. Ms. Seetha Devi

Lessons from Poverty



Indian streets allow us to examine every socio economic factor that defines living standards in an economy under rapid transition. “What might be missed or could be invisible in cities or villages are blatant here. Micromanagement can be seen from a different perspective here. Competition is more rigid and the population grows creative in taking the best slice of the anecdotal fixed pie. You naturally begin to sense how universal inequality is,” says Ms. Seetha Devi, Founder of Street Vision Social Charitable Trust in Chennai.

Having been a street child herself Devi is not only aware of the vagaries of street life but has grown wise to appreciate the little opportunities it provides to grow beyond the streets. Her father was a porter in Central Railway Station and mother managed the household with her six undernourished kids. “We waited patiently for that one time meal in the night which was completely dependent on what my father earned that day. We never knew what breakfast

was. Education was a luxury and future was dark,” recalls Devi, whose struggle gave her the determination to protect the next generation from living such uncertain lives.

With the help of charity and scholarships, Devi completed her graduation and alongside studies, she organised simple games and events to mobilise neighbourhood kids. She left no stone unturned in reviving their interest in education. Behind the Kannagi Statue in Marina Beach, she brought together small batches, taught them basics and ensured their admission in government schools. “Over 2000 children benefitted from this effort. All they needed was little motivation and after school study support to be able to continue their studies without dropping out. Streets encourage dropping out as the very nature of street life allows kids to feel independent at the cost of all their fundamental rights. Education was my priority,” she adds.

Her work experience and association with other like-minded organisations gave her the strength to establish her own trust in 2002. Street Vision Social Charitable Trust organised consistent bridge courses and evening tuitions to support education of children from slums and streets. Free tuitions are organised for more than 3000 kids in eight slums. “From the 42,610 streets across Chennai, we began to identify different groups with different needs. We decided to look beyond education because social stratification in slums and streets is very much a reality. Gypsies, children infected and affected by HIV, children suffering from Cancer, begging children – all of them needed a helping hand. After all, they too deserved a better life. Occasional supply of food packets wasn’t enough and we had to chalk out a constructive plan to help them aspire for and achieve better living standards. We adopted two gypsy tenements in Kanakulam, Redhills, Chennai to provide for housing, education and a range of other services,” says Devi.

Street Vision regularly supplied food for children suffering from terminal diseases like Cancer, Tuberculosis and HIV. They also reached out to leprosy patients, transgender, orphaned street kids and senior citizens in more than eight slums. Food, health and personal care, Devi feels, are the basic things which ensure respectful survival. She also studied Child Psychology to further unlearn her assumptions about street kids. “The fact that I come from a street family is both a boon and a bane for my work. I had to guard myself from labelling their regular habits and attitudes. I wanted to prepare myself to see them as children, without any labels, to plan their future,” she warns. Skill training programmes for women and transgender are also organised regularly.

With experience and new sources of support, Street Vision is trying to reach far to the underprivileged families in Irukam Island in Andhra Pradesh. “The 300 odd Scheduled Caste families in this island are fifty years behind in development and still struggle to make ends meet. Street Vision offers clothes, rice and simple awareness programmes to learn the community’s interests,” says Devi, who has always taken time and effort to understand communities.

CSIM happened at an unexpected time in her career and Devi is glad she made the choice to further upgrade herself. “CSIM was a surprise to me and brought about a big change in my life. I learnt to vouch for my work on different platforms. I began to channel my interactions with beneficiaries as a participant. I personally felt I have become closer to them. I believed in women’s social strength but the intimacy I developed with communities enabled me to see social strength everywhere. I had to see to believe. CSIM enabled me to see all such community strengths and this came in very handy during corona relief work,”.

Street Vision was one of the 120 NGOs engaged by the government for relief work during the Covid 19 pandemic and Devi was awarded by the Chennai Corporation for Street Vision's tireless efforts in reaching out to the needy people. She was awarded the Love and Peace Award by Care India Network in 2019. Madras School of Social Work recognised her work by presenting her with the Best Woman (North Chennai) award in 2016 for her successful work with multiple beneficiary groups in the slums. Also a recipient of the Gandhi Award for Young Achievers from The Governor of Tamil Nadu in 2019, Devi feels overwhelmed and grateful that she could come this far. While basic needs has been the focus so far, Devi also feels she must build shelter homes for senior citizens without families, street kids and tribals. "Street Vision does not only think about a dignified life. It also knows the value of respectful death. We do not wish to see anybody from the streets left to die all alone. I envisage our shelter homes to build a family ecosystem that takes care of all physical, social and emotional needs," says a committed Devi, looking forward to the inauguration of the boys' home.

Shanmuga Priya. T

10. Ms. Senthamizh Selvi

Parenting Communities friendly to Special Children



Parenthood is a very special journey and every parent ardently tries to build a strong support system that can help children build their personalities. “I also dreamt of doing the same. However, being the mother of two special children, I had to evolve and become that support system itself. It calls for a lot out of you,” emphasises Mrs. B. Senthamizh Selvi, Founder and Principal of Kumaran Special School in Ennore, Chennai.

Selvi’s is a story of patience, perseverance and determination to help children with special needs realise empowerment. “Empowerment is a very strong feeling for children with special needs who go through so much pain and effort to accomplish their daily tasks,” she adds.

Selvi’s first son was autistic and her second son had cerebral palsy. Ignorant initially, the diagnosis got her looking for ways and means to get her children treated. “I got to

know about my elder son's autism only during my younger son's therapy sessions. In the case of children with special needs, early diagnosis is extremely significant as it helps in shaping the right habits," says Selvi, who also noticed the struggle of parents like her. "I can understand the anxiety each parent goes through while travelling with their autistic children. I wanted to bring training and therapy sessions closer to their homes so that children can befriend their peers sooner and parents can focus on widening the scope of their children's treatment," she adds.

Selvi soon got trained as a Special Educator and in an effort to help other parents, founded the Kumaran Special School, a day care centre for special children, in 2002 to give equal social opportunities to mentally vulnerable children from poor socio economic circles. Starting with five children, the Special School now hosts 65 children from different age groups. Striving for their social integration, the Special School uses a combination of therapies and simple vocational training programmes.

Age appropriate development tasks are the first priority and as children begin to show improvement, they are engaged in a range of activities curated to suit the capacity building of each child. "Every child is different and each therapy like yoga, music therapy, behaviour therapy, physiotherapy, speech therapy, occupational therapy is designed to promote constructive, positive behaviour in them. A mixed age group exposed to a combination of therapies calls for a meticulous monitoring system. This is where we involve both community and parents, giving the children a real life experience of being a part of the outer world," explains Selvi.

So far, over 225 children have been trained by Kumaran Special School and those who are old and need external support are accommodated in residential programmes

through the School's network. Pick up and drop services are also provided for the special children to make it easier for their parents. Surgeries have been supported whenever required, and accessibility to assisted technology devices like the wheel chairs for children with cerebral palsy has also been assisted.

“Kumaran Special School's strength comes from the parents of the Special Children. They are a key resource helping us understand the needs and behaviours of their children. As associations become manifold, children find it easier to relate to the activities here and are thus, more productive too,” she shares.

“CSIM not only built my capacities but also helped me widen my perspective in visualising the future of mentally challenged children. Our community has a big role to play and engaging them from the beginning has helped both children and community understand each other better. CSIM taught me the significance of taking both these stakeholders on board. Such initial steps eventually gave me the confidence to work on vocational training,” says Selvi.

Selvi feels that equal focus on children and communities has facilitated social integration organically. “Children put in all their effort and when the community is sensitive about their development, social integration flows naturally. It is easily said than done and it takes year-long efforts. CSIM gave me this vision and this vision shows me the way ahead,” she adds.

Making candles, mats, jewellery, diyas, phenyl and packaging incense sticks are some of the vocations explored so far. Making pens is also on the cards and Selvi's team is finalising work on acquiring the required machinery. With

financial literacy also being taught, she believes children will realise both independence and empowerment.

“With every successful child, I feel I have helped one more son. This personally gratifying experience motivates me to do more. For an organisation like ours’ it takes longer than usual to feel accomplished and identify that next significant step towards our vision. As I learnt in CSIM, I strongly believe that my children, my primary stake holders, will take me towards my goal,” smiles Selvi, hopeful of reaching out to many more Special Children.

Shanmuga Priya.T

11. Mr. Senthil

Stigma - a multifaceted phenomenon



Social Work has been a very intriguing profession to many. Beyond all the curiosity and fascination, one begins to sense the need for professionalism and resource management in dealing with real human problems. “Health, for example, is an outstanding example. Social Workers are instrumental in ensuring that required services meet the needy at just the right time. A dedicated official is thus needed to ensure that services reach the desired patients. We build an interface where both sides can come together and this has not only saved but also changed lives,” asserts Mr. Senthil, Founder of Child Trust in Chennai.

Hailing from Sozhavandan village in Madurai district, Senthil was driven by thoughts of community well-being. His parents’ lives influenced him to see the benefits of thinking from a community perspective. “In a village, one

gets to see why this is important. One family's decision could easily affect another family and therefore such a perspective engages younger generation in understanding community interests and work for common good. So, it was only natural that I developed interest in community development," he shares.

Soon after his MSW, Senthil came to Chennai in search of a job. Accustomed to notice and engage the capacities of friends from village, he recognised his interest in human resources. His job with Chennai City Corporation's HIV/AIDS counselling unit exposed him to the struggles that children of HIV/AIDS infected and affected parents faced. "Two decades ago, the stigma and anxiety were on a different level. A child of HIV/Aids infected parent/s became easily rejected. I could not take in the fact that a child could become so unimportant. Why aren't people ready to check facts and work out options for the child? Why is abandoning a child so easy in our society?" wondered Senthil.

After two years of counselling, Senthil felt so connected with children and joined a Residential Home for Children to work for their welfare. This home prepared him to learn the operating modalities and approaches to handle children emotionally. "This is the real task and challenge. Children knew that they have been rejected by their own family, hence bringing them out of this emotional bubble is extremely important. When one child breaks down, there is a ripple effect. This is also the case when one child tries to support another. The Home had to be equipped to manage all these social and emotional upheavals. It is literally their Home!" he explains.

Senthil kept himself open to new ideas and thoughts while also exploring the needs of abandoned children. As a Field Worker with Family Planning Association of India,

he worked with migrant labourers to educate them about HIV/AIDS. “This was the experience that helped me relate to what I learnt at CSIM. I knew about CSIM soon after coming to Chennai and decided to join the course before taking up a full time job. I listened to entrepreneurs and social workers shared their experiences. My mind was a clean page and all that went into it started coming to life as my career graph expanded. Most importantly, I could easily accept that a situation could be understood and approached from different perspectives. For a social worker, this acceptance must happen at the earliest so that he or she can see ahead while planning programmes for a target group,” he urges.

Stigma is a multifaceted phenomenon but unfortunately we are all accustomed to see the negativity associated. In the context of HIV/AIDS, Senthil feels that stigma defined strategies and programmes. It was stigma that helped design awareness programmes and materials. The fact that stigma exists is in itself a helping factor because had we not acknowledged the same, it would have taken years to see what distanced HIV infected and affected people from accessing help. “The psychology of stigma allows you to identify specific factors that must be addressed to bring about the desired behavioural change in the target group. Observation is the key,” smiles Senthil.

This positivity, he explains, touches you at CSIM. “Every individual’s effort is thoroughly discussed to help beginners relate to needs at all points in time. You begin to see a situation from a cause-effect plane and then build the multi-factor ecosystem around it. You master the situation you want to improve. This meticulous thought process is the key to design and influence change. CSIM takes you through this effortlessly,” he adds.

Senthil founded Child Trust in 2005 to support children of HIV/AIDS infected and affected parents. A residential centre for such children was always in mind but Senthil's experience helped him refine simple aspects so that children could easily adapt and accept their new identities. He began with three boys and now the home's strength is 22.

"35 boys have passed out and are in different jobs. Every child is capable of coming out in flying colors. They only need their space." he says. Apart from residential care, Child also focused on building a network of HIV parents. They initiated this in 2015 and has now reached out to more than 600 families allowing the team to understand decision dynamics in HIV/AIDS affected families. This led them to see the plight of HIV orphaned girls from around 2000 families in Thiruvallur district. Soon, 'I support a girl child' program was launched and 128 girls have benefitted so far.

The idea of one donor for one child not only made things transparent, but it also helped focus on specific interests of the child. The team could see beyond basic needs and work on the child's aspirations. Complementing all this is the life skills and career guidance programme regularly organised to keep the children motivated. The successful reach of these initiatives has encouraged the team to establish a skill training centre for girls. Explaining the efforts in this direction so far Senthil tries to throw light on why such efforts are always relatable and significant. "I have seen the work from Chennai City Corporation. I have seen the dynamics in operating from an NGO. There are gaps everywhere because of the enormity of the situation. I honestly feel that small efforts like mine complement the whole picture. In a populous country like ours, with diverse levels of education, awareness and prejudices, such small efforts not only give results but also help the population relate to facts and learn the better way out".

Still a HR consultant, Senthil has carved his own way out and is quite content with his career graph. “I am 44 years old now. My work and passion have all fallen in place at just the right time. I feel happier and more accomplished when my children graduate, achieve new things in their profession. As they build their own identities, I not only feel elated but also useful,” says an insightful Senthil.

Shanmuga Priya.T

INSPIRING CONVERSATIONS

1. Justice K. Chandru

“It is high time that a scientific caste census is taken to help the State formulate its future.”



Justice K. Chandru, an Indian advocate and former judge of Madras High Court, was a well-respected judge among the judiciary and. He practiced in the constitutional side of the Madras High Court and was made an Additional Judge of the High Court on July 31, 2006, and he retired on 8th March 2013.

Justice K. Chandru is known for his judgments that impacted the lives of many impoverished and downtrodden people. During his judicial career, Justice K. Chandru pronounced over 96,000 verdicts. He was known for fighting against caste discrimination and for the rights of all oppressed communities in Tami Nadu.

In an exclusive interview, Justice K Chandru shares with Marie Banu his inspiration to advocate for the neglected sections of our society.

From being a people's lawyer to a People's Judge, what was your inspiration to advocate for the neglected sections of our society?

I was working with the working class and their trade unions since my student days. Therefore, when I became a lawyer I wanted to join a law firm which works for the interest of the workers and the poor people. Thus, I joined M/s. Row & Reddy, a leading law firm that was started in the forties by two famous barristers including Mr.V.G.Row. I worked in that firm for seven years that mainly dealt with labour matters and also certain human rights issues. It was my Marxist ideology and working with trade unions that inspired me to work for them as a lawyer. When I became Judge, the same training and motivation continued even on the bench.

Known for taking pro-justice stances, can you share your experience with Justice Sathya Dev and Justice Krishna Iyer?

As a law student, I knew about Justice Krishna Iyer. He was instrumental in starting a legal aid movement in Tamil Nadu and formed a Society called Tamil Nadu Legal Aid and Advice Board. It was first of its kind in India and did many wonderful works in rendering aid to poor and needy. As a lawyer, I was part of its panel and conducted many cases for the poor pro bono.

Justice Iyer was our motivating force. His tenure as a Supreme Court Judge saw many judgments which are pro-social justice and we were inspired by the same. His contribution to labour jurisprudence is immense and I have published a book exclusively dealing with Justice Krishna Iyer's contribution to labour law. Initially as a labour lawyer, his judgments gave immense strength and binding legal

precedents to argue in courts. Later, he was instrumental in my accepting the office of judgeship and was continuously monitoring our work with occasional notes of appreciation.

Justice Sathya Dev became a judge only in 1978, the time when I was a Junior lawyer. He took a lot of interest in me and our friendship grew over the years. He was known for his uprightness and integrity which was a great inspiration to me. He advised me: “You should accept judgeship. Being a Senior Lawyer earning money is not enough. You must render service to the society.”

When the *Jai Bhim* was filmed and the court hall set was created, I suggested to the Art Director that portraits of Justice Krishna Iyer and Justice Sathya Dev must adorn the walls of the court hall set which was complied with.

That was my least contribution in perpetuating their memories.

What were the challenges you faced at the time of Parvati Case trial which is the story of *Jai Bhim* film?

The challenges I faced in handling the case of Parvati were manifold. First of all, she did not have enough information about the fate of her husband Rajakannu. Thereafter, when we filed a habeas corpus petition, the Judges were initially reluctant to record evidence in that case. The whereabouts of the two nephews of Rajakannu (who were also kept in the lockup and tortured) were unknown. It took several efforts to locate them in a remote village in Kerala, bring them to the High Court to be examined as eye witnesses to the murder of Rajakannu that was committed by the police inside the lockup.

While the case was ongoing, the Sub-Inspector attempted to bribe and influence me to withdraw from the case. This

led me to complain to the High Court about his misconduct. The High Court took a stern view and summoned the DGP. After a reprimand, the Sub-Inspector was suspended from service for improper conduct of approaching the other side counsel.

Similarly, a special Public Prosecutor was appointed by the Government to conduct the murder trial before the Sessions Court in South Arcot that was also challenged by the accused police. On my intervention, their writ petition was dismissed.

Mr. Venkatraman, an advocate from Chidambaram town who was appointed as a Special Public Prosecutor (SPP) also faced severe strain. His house was attacked by hooligans and his library, furniture and car were burnt, while the police was watching the other way. This made me to move a resolution in the High Court Advocates Association calling for police protection for the SPP. Finally, on my application, two gunmen were provided to guard them. I also filed a case for the loss of property and the High Court granted compensation to the lawyer.

Likewise, I had enough problems in pursuing the Parvati case. However, thanks to Justice P.S.Misra, the Senior Judge in the bench and who came from Patna and his stern approach resulted in not only compensation being awarded to the tribal woman and her nephews, but also a house plot given to her on directions from the Court. The accused policemen were convicted with life term imprisonment and their appeal in the High Court was also dismissed thus making them to undergo the full sentence in jail.

Do you think the Jai Bhim film will trigger the formation of policies or plans to benefit the neglected communities?

The Jai Bhim film drew the attention of the cine viewers and sensitized them about the plight of the tribals and the fact that they are being excluded from several government schemes. The Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, who was invited for the Jai Bhim film preview, wrote a letter to the production company stating that the film will light a lamp in the lives of the Irulas and that everyone must emulate such actions. On the Diwali day, the Chief Minister also spent a day in a Kuravas colony in Poonjeri, Chennai. During that time, he ensured that the Revenue Officials were also present and attempted to sort out some of the long pending demands of the Kuravas. He also made the Chief Secretary to Government of Tamil Nadu send a circular to all District Collectors to provide details of the tribals living in their districts on a weekly basis with a view to sort out some of their fundamental problems like: roads, street lights, water and drainage facilities, provision of anganwadis, distance from schools and primary health centres.

I am sure that once the statistics are collected, certain development work will be undertaken by the government since the circular itself said that the Chief Minister was directly scanning all the work relating to the tribals in the State.

Caste being an indicator of Class, do you think we should insist on a caste census? (Article 15 and 16 talks about Social and Economically backward class.)

The Socially and Educationally Backward Classes (SEBCs) have to be identified by the State for the purpose of affirmative action. Though the word “class” alone is mentioned, the courts have interpreted that a caste can be an indicator for identifying an SEBC. Since new claims for inclusion in the SEBC list are coming from different quarters

and some of the already included OBC communities are demanding exclusive quota in reservation for them, it is high time that a scientific caste census is taken to help the State formulate its future policies. Therefore, a caste census which was given up long ago must be renewed and a fresh census must be undertaken.

2. Mr. R. Elango

“Truth is the basic driving force; our lifeline.”



Shri. R. Elango was born and brought up in Kuthambakkam village, in the adjoining district of Chennai City and was involved in the social work right from his childhood. After completing his B.Tech in Anna University, he joined Oil India and shifted to CSIR as a Scientist. He resigned from his government job to contest the village elections after he saw the miserable conditions liquor had created.

Having demonstrated that effective and participative planning in local governance can dramatically improve village development, Elango is now using his Panchayat Academy to build networks of emboldened local leaders who embody a common vision of good democracy and governance.

Shri. R. Elango shares with Marie Banu Gandhian principles and his inspiration to launch egalitarian villages.

In what ways has Mahatma Gandhi inspired you and your work?

Gandhi is big inspiration for everyone. He was a man known for simplicity, for non-violence and above all truth. From one's childhood, Gandhi's ideologies are conveyed to you in one way or the other and his teachings closely track you.

When I was 9 years old, Mahatma Gandhi's 100th birth anniversary was celebrated in a big way. His portrait was decorated like a deity and there were many processions organised by the villagers, especially school-going children. This was during the month of October when people worshipped Lord Vishnu. When I witnessed the celebrations, I perceived Gandhiji to also be a God.

While at school, we were taught moral stories of Harichandra and how he spoke only the truth; about Shravan and how he obeyed his parents, etc. This makes us inculcate attributes like truth and obedience while young.

Later, witnessing the poverty in my villages and seeing the lives of farmers and their humble way of life, I was further attracted towards Gandhi's principles. I was touched by Gandhiji's commitment and truthfulness and decided to follow his path.

Do you think Gandhi's philosophy is still applicable in today's world?

Truth is the basic driving force; our lifeline. Be it a father-son or husband-wife – you should have faith in the relationship. Else, misunderstandings will be caused and might lead to abuse.

All religions also advocate for truth through their scriptures – be it Gita or Bible or Quran. I would say that these are all hypothetical, whereas we have witnessed Gandhiji living in our own country. As long as the truth exists and we kindle it, there is a chance for each of us to be a Gandhian.

The prominent face of Gandhiji is in our Indian Currency which is meant not only to commemorate his life but to also drive his values in each one of us.

What was your motivation to create model villages?

I gave up my government job and started my life as a villager in my native Kuthambakkam. When I was elected as the Panchayat leader, I had the opportunity to build a model village. Issues like discrimination, caste conflicts, domestic violence and alcoholism were prevalent in those times.

Caste plays a crucial factor in villages. While all the caste groups worked together during the day, sharing their food and tea, they went back to their homes in the evening – and interacted only with people who belonged to their own caste/community. This led me to conceive the idea of having a model village where people of all castes live together so that the vehemence between castes can be mellowed down.

As Kuthambakkam panchayat was in the belt of Chennai, I had to seek the approval of the then Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu Dr. M. Karunanidhi to allocate the Panchayat Land for the model village. He was a great leader and a social emancipator who said that this was a historic initiative. He named it ‘Samathuvapuram’ and his government granted us permission. After a lot of discussions on how to bring the communities to live together, we finally decided

to have twin houses where the neighbour belonged to a different caste.

The then Collector of Tiruvallur District and present Home Secretary, Shri. S.K.Prahakar IAS took the lead and created the first model village in Mapedu and later at Tirutanni. Dr. V. Irai Anbu IAS, the present Chief Secretary, launched the model village in Kanchipuram when he served as District Collector here. Later, the State Government of Tamil Nadu advised all the District Collectors' to create one model village in their respective district.

The 77th model village was launched at Kuthambakkam to commemorate the 77th birth anniversary of Dr. M. Karunanidhi. I am now pursuing a research on the effectiveness of Samathuvapuram and lobbying with the government to launch it in more villages.

About Panchayat system in India and your efforts to transform the villages?

Interestingly the Panchayat System in India is very much in existence for a very long time now. When Dr. B.R. Ambedkar was working on the constitution, he recognised the villages to be dominated by caste and felt that the panchayat would be dominated by the upper caste alone. Thus, he did not focus on this much. With pressure from Gandhians, he included a schedule 40 in the Constitution, but did not give much power to panchayats.

When Shri. Rajiv Gandhi came in; he analysed the reasons why villages did not to grow as expected. He recommended the 62nd amendment to Panchayat Raj in the Indian Constitution and aimed to connect Panchayats with the Parliament. Unfortunately, his efforts failed in the Rajya Sabha due to the state level leaders opposing it as they

perceived it affecting the power of the state. However, in 1992, during the regime of ninth Prime Minister of India, Shri. Narasimha Rao, the Government passed the 73rd Amendment in the Parliament to implement Panchayati Raj in the entire country.

I focused on creating a ripple effect by creating model villages and succeeded at that. In the first five years, I tried to solve the problems in my own village. Later, I focused on the neighbouring villages, started traveling across the state and coordinated with the District Collectors in identifying locations for model villages. We created a network among the Panchayat leaders in these villages and offered training to them on how to develop their panchayats.

Please share the future plans of the Panchayat Academy?

Shri P.N.Devarajan, Founder of CSIM, has been my inspiration. His concept of making young people to think for others is laudable.

Interestingly, after 20 years of my journey in the domain of sustainable livelihood, and the results of Samathuvapuram, I am now focusing on Panchayat Academy to train Panchayat leaders on village administration and how they can align their work with UN sustainable development goals. We are calling it Centre of Excellence for Sustainable Solutions. We are looking for partnerships and am sure that the academy will benefit many villages in the years to come.

3. Mrs. Gayatri Subramaniam

“CSR is here to stay and corporates are doing their best to meet this obligation.”



Smt. Gayatri Subramaniam is the former Convenor of National Foundation of CSR (NFCSR under Ministry of Corporate Affairs) and Head – CSR for HDFC Life. She has co-founded international centre for socially responsible businesses (ICSRB) a think tank to provide all CSR and sustainability solutions to corporates. In addition to her role at ICSRB, she also sits on the Board of Association of Women in Business and mentor Women non-profits and Women Directors. She conducts capacity building of CSR teams and Directors for MNCs, Corporate and PSUs. She has an academic and industrial experience of over 32 years and her main area of work is to contribute towards policy advisory service and undertake capacity building and knowledge dissemination initiatives in Corporate Social Responsibility. Gayatri has been a part of the evolvement of the new legislation on CSR

in India representing IICA at various national stakeholders' consultations and has also represented IICA at various international forums. She is also on various advisory committees of leading Corporates and NGOs.

In an exclusive interview, Smt. Gayatri Subramaniam tells Marie Banu about the recent CSR Amendment Rules 2021 and its implications.

Do you perceive that CSR projects would contribute better to the socioeconomic development of India?

Yes! CSR is here to stay and corporates are doing their best to meet this obligation. They need to establish mutually beneficial partnerships with implementing agencies and need to create win win situation by integrating their respective strengths together to find good CSR projects and implement it effectively.” What Section 135 of the Companies Act is looking forward is a combination of Corporates and NGOs working towards development initiatives. The combination of the project management skills, professional attitude and funds from corporates amalgamated with the passion, connection and communication of NGOs with the community will certainly be beneficial. Believe me, this combination is really going to do wonders and will hopefully change the scenario of social economic development of India for the better.

Corporates are not expected to do CSR by themselves. How can corporates identify NGO, Trust or Section 8 Company to network with?

True! Corporates are not expected to do CSR by themselves. They can either have their own foundation established as a Trust, Society or Section 8 Company or can use any such independent entity as their implementation partners,

provided it has an established track record of three years. The fact is that there is a huge trust deficit between the corporate and the NGOs. Therefore, corporates would definitely like to conduct a due diligence on the NGO partners before they engage them.

Do you think CSR will enable corporate employees to be sensitive to social needs and respond to it?

That is a very good question! Although the concept of CSR has been advocated for decades and is generally propagated by companies globally, argument on how CSR should be defined and implemented remains a contentious debate. This gap is problematic because corporates are generally being required to align with societal norms while generating financial returns and maintaining balance between the two becomes difficult at times. Therefore Section 135 of the Companies Act has endeavored to bring CSR from backroom to boardroom. By doing so, many of the corporates have started thinking about CSR and also on how to implement it. Once they get involved in the process, the comfort level between corporate employees and community will increase, thereby resulting in the sensitivity to social needs and forcing them to respond to it.

What are the major social issues that you think that the CSR projects should focus upon?

In India, the gap between “have” and “have-not” is tremendous. The need is huge! Schedule VII of the Companies Act (which the companies have to follow) has taken care of almost all the major social issues on which the CSR projects could be focused upon. Other than this, the Ministry of Corporate Affairs through a clarification (issued on 18th June, 2015) has allowed “liberal interpretation” of Schedule VII. However, any CSR project should be need

based and should focus on all the stakeholders. A good CSR project should have a baseline survey, in consonance with the need of the beneficiaries; a specific timeline; defined objectives; clear milestones; and specific output and outcomes to have a greater impact.

The Key issues in the recent CSR Amendment Rules 2021?

The “Companies (Corporate Social Responsibility Policy) Amendment Rules, 2021” released by Ministry of Corporate Affairs have further brought some major pathbreaking changes in the way the companies are looking at and are implementing their CSR mandate. Some of the changes are as follows:-

- Annual action plan for CSR by Board every year in addition to CSR policy
- Mandatory disclosures of CSR projects and activities on company’s website
- Capital Asset acquisition and its holding restricted to three bodies broadly
- Carry forward and set off of CSR expenditure
- Transfer of unspent amount to government notified fund
- Impact Assessment for big CSR projects
- Mandatory registration of every entity intending to implement CSR activity with the Central Government by filing form CSR-1 electronically with the Registrar of Companies, w.e.f. April 1st , 2021
- Engagement of international organizations for designing, monitoring and evaluation of the CSR projects as well as for capacity building of personnel for CSR
- Up gradation in reporting formats of the Board Report of Companies

The amendments also lists a penalty clause for companies who fail to disclose unspent amount in Annual Report on CSR or transfer the unspent amount relating to other than ongoing project in Fund Specified in Schedule VII within specified Time.

Will Social Audit of CSR programmes make reporting more effective?

CSR activities has become a critical part of the business strategy today and this is particularly important in India, since we are the first country to have legislated the need to undertake CSR spending and make CSR reporting mandatory under the Companies Act 2013. As of now, the companies are required to constitute a CSR committee of the Board, make a CSR policy and undertake to spend two percent of their profits in pursuance of their policy. The companies are mandated to report in the prescribed manner on how they have spent and disclose reasons for not spending. The Social Audit of CSR programmes would definitely make reporting more effective as social auditing would help to narrow down the gaps between vision/goal and reality, between efficiency and effectiveness. Social auditing would also be able to provide information for effective response to external claimants that make demands on the organization. The social audit would be able to bring out all the weaknesses and strengths of the organization's endeavors to social initiatives, thus bringing in more transparency and give room for further improvement if required.

4. Mrs. Mamta Saikia

“The higher education partnerships are designed to fulfill the education paradigms of the 21st century.”



Smt. Mamta Saikia is the Chief Executive Officer of Bharti Foundation, the development arm of Bharti Enterprises, one of India's leading business groups with interests in telecom, agri business, financial services, retail, realty, and communication & media devices. She leads the development of the organization and its education programs at primary, elementary and senior secondary standards. Through her experience, clear vision and strategic thinking, she has also been able to establish a successful and replicable model of Public Private Partnership.

Mamta has recently been honoured in the 100 Women Achievers of India, an initiative by the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD), Govt. of India. She has been honored among 2019 Class of Influential Leaders

by AACSB International – the world’s largest business education alliance. Under her leadership, Bharti Foundation also bagged the ‘Hurun India CSR and Philanthropy Award 2019’ at its very first edition. She has also been awarded the Karmaveer Puraskaar – National Citizen Awards for Social Justice and Action for her contribution to the field of development and corporate social responsibility. She authored a book titled “Money matters...People Too” which is based on the issue of self-reliance in the Indian NGO sector and was released in Germany in June 2005.

In an exclusive interview, Mamta Saikia shares with Marie Banu Bharti Foundation’s CSR programmes.

About Bharti Foundation and its key CSR Focus areas?

Bharti Foundation was set up in the year 2000 as the philanthropic arm of Bharti Enterprises. Since its inception, the Foundation has been proactively engaged in formulating and executing education programs in primary, secondary and higher education as well as sanitation.

Since 2006, the flagship Satya Bharti School Program has been providing free quality education to thousands of underprivileged children in 183 schools in rural areas across six states, with a focus on the girl child.

The impact of quality education has been scaled-up by transferring the learning and good practices of this program to over 2,45,000 students studying in nearly 800 partner government schools across 13 states and union territories, through the Satya Bharti Quality Support Program, since 2013. Satya Bharti Learning Centre Program (SBLC) was started in 2013, to identify and mainstream ‘Out of School Children’ in the rural areas, by offering remedial/bridge courses in collaboration with the government. SBLC

Program has been integrated with the Satya Bharti Quality Support Program since the year 2018.

Satya Bharti Abhiyan, the sanitation initiative started in 2014, has helped over 2,17,000 beneficiaries by improving sanitation conditions in the districts of Punjab, providing access to toilets and by fostering behavioral change in communities. Together, these programs have cumulatively impacted over 2.2 million community members.

Increasing emphasis on CSR has only strengthened our relationship with the partners on field. The Foundation continues to play a significant role in complementing government and civil society action in support of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in close partnership with local communities.

Our Satya Bharti School Program, Satya Bharti Quality Support Program and Satya Bharti Abhiyan are aligned with Sustainable Development Goals of Quality Education, Gender Equality, Clean Water & Sanitation and Partnership for the Goals, and with government programs, like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, National Nutrition Mission, Swachh Bharat Abhiyan etc.

The higher education partnerships undertaken by Bharti Foundation are designed to fulfill the education paradigms of the 21st century. The Foundation has established centers of learning and research partnerships in collaboration with leading national and international institutions including Bharti School of Telecommunication Technology and Management (IIT, Delhi), Bharti Centre for Communication (IIT, Bombay) and Bharti Institute of Public Policy (ISB, Mohali).

Bharti Foundation has recently entered into a strategic collaboration with Plaksha University, which also includes providing scholarships to undergraduate/graduate students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

What has been the impact of Satya Bharti Learning Centre Program?

Started in 2013 the Satya Bharti Learning Centre Program was aimed to support ‘Out of School Children’ in the rural areas, by offering them remedial/bridge courses.

Partnerships were established with the governments of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Jharkhand. Under this program children from remote villages, who had never been to school or had dropped out were identified. Remedial education was provided to bridge the learning gaps so that these children could be mainstreamed in age-appropriate grades and admitted to government schools.

The Satya Bharti Learning Center Program worked with the community influencers to mobilise children while ensuring their parent’s active participation in various initiatives. We had 1,522 learning centers spread across 3 states, to provide free education to 37,500 ‘Out of School Children’. In this process 33,816 children were brought to mainstream learning. Satya Bharti Learning Centre Program has been integrated with the Satya Bharti Quality Support Program since the year 2018.

What are the success and challenges of the Satya Bharti Abhiyan programme?

Bharti Foundation launched the ‘Satya Bharti Abhiyan’ program in Ludhiana and Amritsar districts (rural) in 2014

to improve sanitation conditions by providing toilets to households and institutions to foster behavioral change among community members. The Foundation partnered with various organizations for construction of over 31,000 toilets, benefitting over 2,17,000 beneficiaries.

Through this program we were able to spread awareness on the importance of toilets highlighting the potential health risks of open defecation. The community leaders and influencers were involved in the process of monitoring and evaluation. While the Foundation's team conducted regular quality audits, the state government supported in quality assurance of the toilets and mobilizing people.

One-on-one interaction with beneficiaries, use of easy-to-understand booklets, gram sabha meetings and rallies etc., helped encourage regular use and maintenance of toilets.

About your partnerships and learnings from them?

Partnerships with key stakeholders, including government, corporate sector, civil society, professionals, entrepreneurs and community is the backbone of our programs. Our corporate partners not just offer technical expertise and resources but also extend volunteering opportunities to their employees. Employees from these corporates are encouraged to engage with students to conduct sessions (recently all virtual sessions) as per curriculum and co-scholastic programs.

At Bharti Foundation we engage with our partners and donors through different types of partnership, be it financial, material support and support in terms of time & expertise. All our partners are kept informed about the progress at

regular interval. Our teams also share success stories as well as evaluation or outcome reports from the program.

We have found that close engagement with the program leads to sustainable partnerships as well as students gain tremendously by the exposure various volunteering programs provide. Collaborations also encourage exchange of ideas and new prospective that helps us enhances our work in the field.

5. Mr. V.P. Nandakumar

“CSR have emerged as an effective way to supplement the efforts of the government in an impactful way.”



Shri. V.P. Nandakumar is the MD & CEO of Manappuram Finance Ltd., one of India's leading NBFCs and the pioneer of the institutionalised model of the gold loans business. Shri. Nandakumar took over the reins of a single branch family business in 1986, and over the next three decades presided over its growth and transformation into a financial sector powerhouse. His vision, values and leadership were instrumental in scripting this story that today touches millions of lives in India.

Manappuram's origins go back to 1949 when it was founded by the late V.C. Padmanabhan, father of Shri. Nandakumar. In those days, the firm was into money lending, and pawnbroking carried out on a modest scale at Valapad, a backward coastal village in Thrissur district of Kerala.

After taking over in 1986 (the year his father expired), Shri. Nandakumar soon set about expanding the business in line with his ambitions and vision.

In 1992, he incorporated Manappuram Finance Ltd., and within three years (in 1995) managed to get the company listed on the Bombay Stock Exchange. Since then, he has led from the front to transform Manappuram Finance Ltd. into a leading NBFC present across India with 4,611 branches in 28 states and UTs, with Assets under management (AUM) of about ₹269 billion, and a workforce of over 27,000.

In recent years, Shri. Nandakumar has resolutely steered the company's diversification into microfinance, home loans, vehicle finance, SME and personal lending to reshape the company into a full-spectrum NBFC. Today, about 30 per cent of the company's total business comes from the non-gold side.

Shri. Nandakumar's achievements in business have earned him national recognition. On May 26, 2018, a special issue of the Business World magazine profiled him as one among 40 of India's most valuable CEOs. Besides, Manappuram Finance Ltd. has emerged as one of the leading wealth creators in the Indian stock market. In December 2019, the Economic Times newspaper published the ET500 list of Top Wealth Creators of 2019 with Manappuram Finance Ltd. as the chart topper.

Other than the focus on business, the cause of the wider community is central to his vision. He established the Manappuram Foundation at Valapad in 2009 to drive the corporate social responsibility (CSR) programme of the Manappuram group, even before the Companies Act made it mandatory. Today, the Manappuram Foundation oversees

a wide range of projects in education, health care, and overall development of the rural communities.

Shri. V.P. Nandakumar was born in 1954, holds a post-graduate degree in science and additional qualifications in Banking and Foreign Trade. He is a managing committee member of leading trade and industry associations such as FICCI, Assocham and FIDC. In January 2019, he was appointed to the Board of Governors of the Indian Institute of Management, Kozhikode. In July 2019, he was elected as an International Director of the Association of Lions Clubs International at its Milan (Italy) convention.

In an exclusive interview, Shri. V.P. Nandakumar shares with Marie Banu Manappuram Foundation's CSR programmes.

What inspired you to initiate CSR before the ACT was passed in 2013?

The CSR projects and initiatives of the company are mostly routed through the Manappuram Foundation, a charitable trust we had set up back in October 2009, well before it became mandatory for large companies.

I would say our CSR is part to a wider quest to build sustainable businesses that create both market value as well as lasting social value. The Foundation brings resources and commitment to select projects that enrich people's lives and make a visible difference to their lives. With this objective, the Foundation works in close co-ordination with local government official, social workers and NGOs, to promote programmes that advance well-being of disadvantaged sections of society. In this way, by integrating social imperatives into our corporate processes, we are trying

in our own way to shoulder those extra responsibilities expected of a good corporate citizen.

What made you choose rural development and education as Manappuram Foundation CSR focus areas?

As a company, we are deeply rooted in the coastal village of Valapad because this is where Manappuram began its journey in 1949 and this is where we have our head office. Therefore, the predominant focus of CSR has been to try and improve the lives of the local people who are mainly into fishing and agriculture. To this end, efforts are largely directed towards rural development and education levels of the local population.

Traditionally, agriculture and fishing were the main sources of livelihood in these parts. Migration to the Gulf in search of jobs began in the early 70s and intensified within a decade. Many families benefited from the Gulf wave but those who belonged to socially and economically backward sections and lacked skills and were left behind. This section of people depended on traditional activities like fishing and coconut harvesting for a living and they suffered even more when the Gulf boom led to a decline in agriculture and consequently the demand for unskilled labour. Today, we believe that rural development and education will help reshape the future of those sections left behind in society.

How were you able to contribute to the rural communities during the COVID pandemic?

We have contributed generously through our professional, technical and financial interventions especially in the coastal belt of Thrissur District. The early focus was on creating awareness and dissemination of information to prevent spread of Covid-19 through posters, boards etc.

We distributed such material to most of the Government offices including Health Centre, Police Stations and Gram Panchayaths. Announcements regarding prevention methods and the importance of social distancing were made in the remote areas of Trissur District in collaboration with IMA Thrissur.

As part of preventive measures, the Manappuram Foundation distributed Sanitizers, Gloves, Face Masks, N95 masks, three- ply masks, etc. through Gram Panchayaths, local Health Centres and Police and Fire forces. The Foundation donated 42 cots and 55 mattresses (for quarantine purpose) along with 5,000 face shields, thermal scanners, sanitizers, gloves, masks etc. to the police force. To minimise disruption for school students from poor families, 20 televisions were donated in the coastal area of Thrissur and a further 500 televisions were donated through the Lions Clubs International District 318C. A High Dependency Unit (HDU) in Kannur Medical College was implemented in collaboration with Lions Clubs International District 318E. Community Health Centres and Primary Health Centres were supported with sanitizers and masks, while 60 litres of Sanitizer and a 100 hundred Pulse Oximeters were handed over to Alappuzha District Collector. Besides, over 400 poor families were supported through free supply of grocery kits.

Do you think CSR in India has augmented development and helped in resolving social issues?

In relatively poor countries such as India, where the government has limited capacity to take care of all the pressing needs of its people, projects under CSR have emerged as an effective way to supplement the efforts of the government in an impactful way.

For example, soon after the Manappuram Foundation came into being in 2009, the first major project it implemented was to extend free health insurance (up to Rs.60,000 per family) to 20,000 BPL families extending benefit to approximately 1 Lakh individuals in the coastal belt of Thrissur district. Essentially, the project was about deploying manpower and other resources to ensure that the benefits of existing government health schemes like RSBY (Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana) and UHI (Universal Health Insurance) were properly extended to people who otherwise were not even aware that such schemes existed, or were unable to pay the nominal premium required to be met.

How has the Social Audit of Manappuram Foundation help in realigning the CSR deliverables effectively?

Social Accounting and Audit conducted for the period 2016 - 2018 by SAN INDIA helped us to analyze the social impact of our CSR activities and to realign the CSR deliverables with the mission and vision of the Manappuram Foundation. As part of the Social accounting exercise, we could identify that education is the sector most deserving of attention by the Foundation. The suggestions shared by the team were well accepted and it's being implemented across primarily education, health and community welfare activities.

6. Mr. Niraj Lal

“Our vision is deeply embedded into the independence struggle.”



Shri. Niraj Kumar Lal is the Group Head of Corporate Social Responsibility, Arvind Limited and brings two and half decades of experience in Corporate Social Responsibility. His domain includes health education, skill development and slum networking. He is a member of CII National Committee on CSR and Convenor of CII Gujarat State Panel for CSR and Social Inclusiveness. Mr. Lal has facilitated collaborative relationships and partnerships between the Industry, Academia, International Development Agencies and Consulting organisations for greater productivity and holistic development.

In an exclusive interview, Shri Niraj Lal shares with Marie Banu about Arvind Mill's CSR programmes

Arvind Mills and its Swadeshi spirit?

Our vision is deeply embedded into the independence struggle. Before becoming pioneers of denim in India, Arvind began its journey in 1931 in response to Mahatma Gandhi's call for Swadeshi. During the struggle for Indian Independence, the Lalbhai family founded Arvind Mills, creating capacity to compete with the world's finest textile mills. Three brothers, Kasturbhai, Narottambhai and Chimanbhai, came together to produce international quality fabric using superior quality Indian cotton to support in the freedom struggle.

Arvind's early years in the CSR space?

CSR for Lalbhai Group has been in practice even before the term 'CSR' was coined. If you look at the educational advancement or the cultural and social milieu in Ahmedabad, our founders have contributed greatly to its development. We have been bringing people together and setting up institutions of importance because we believe that institutions are the actual founding stone for any society to grow.

Our founding father Shri. Kasturbhai Lalbhai had set up Ahmedabad Educational Society with a group of local industrialists. This Society runs schools, colleges, technical institutions, besides social, cultural and religious institutions. Ahmedabad is a city of institutions, and you will see our footprint in top institutions like IIM Ahmedabad, Centre for Environment Planning and Technology, Physical Research Laboratory and many others. These institutions are backed by industry leaders who believed that the importance of a vibrant city and its growth can only happen if you have a strong institutional base.

Our CSR policy is based on the belief that healthy businesses prosper in a healthy society and Business leaders have a huge role in shaping the socio-cultural development of a geography.

Talking about our early social programmes, Narottam Lalbhai Rural Development fund (NLRDF) was launched by Arvind Mills as a registered NGO in 1978. This was basically to take care of the rural development programmes aimed at promoting and strengthening livelihoods and welfare and development of rural communities across Gujarat. NLRDF was instrumental in setting up educational institutions, health infrastructure, hospital, technical institute, ITI in remote areas in Khedbrahma in Sabarkantha district in Gujarat. We not only created, but also empowered the local communities to manage these institutions.

Overall, over the decades, we have a better organisational structure where education, social, and health initiatives are being run.

Tell us about slum upgradation programme?

In 1995, we were created 'Strategic Help Alliance for Relief to Distressed Areas' (SHARDA). While NLRDF was managing the rural programmes, SHARDA focused on urban poor.

In 1998, our slum upgradation programme was included amongst the 100 best global practices.

Slums are usually known to be resource draining liabilities and they usually do not have good infrastructure. We believed that slums actually have lot of resources which can be put to better use in providing them quality infrastructure facilities. The local government requested us to manage

this programme, and we were successful in completing the programme well within the stipulated time and budget.

We ensured that every house had a toilet, access to water and electricity, and concrete roads. It was well-managed and we asked the people to pay for the facilities offered to them. While the slum dwellers paid one-third of the cost, Arvind limited contributed one-third of the expenses and the rest was borne by Ahmedabad municipal corporation and community making them the equal partner in true sense.

Any notable programmes of Arvind Foundation?

We are managing the rural programmes for over 40 years and the urban programme for 25 years now. In 2015, we launched Arvind Foundation and all our initiatives have moved into this umbrella organisation without compromising on the operational independence of NLRDF and SHARDA.

Arvind's CSR has three thematic focus areas: educational advancement, rural advancement and cultural advancement. On Educational advancement, we created a program Gyanda. It is Arvind's flagship programme in the area of education.

Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation runs over 450 schools that provides free education to over 1.3 lakh students. Most of the students live in congested urban settings and given the social and economic constraints, many students tend to drop out after primary education.

Gyanda programme mentors children from the urban poor families, and provides supplementary education to those studying in schools run by Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation. The idea is to ensure that these children

complete their education at least up to Class XII. They get quality education and we help them in establishing Education - Employment link, thereby making them the last generation in poverty.

Another important initiative undertaken by Arvind is a programme that empowers tribal women. We conceptualised the programme of training and placing the trained girls with Arvind and ensure that they work and stay with us. It is a unique residential programme based on a 6E strategy of Equipping (skilling), Employing (Job), Earning (Salary & saving), Educating (Higher Education), Empowering (Decision making and pursuing aspirations), Exploring (their potential).

We identify girls from dense tribal areas like Godhra, Banaskantha, Sabarkantha, Narmada, Valsad etc. The identification, selection and training is done through our civil society partners like Gram Vikas Trust, Shroff Foundation Trust and Arul Rural Development Foundation. Candidates are selected based on their academic qualifications, dexterity, aptitude and health. Once selected, Arvind takes care of all their basic needs – housing, food, health and transport – as well as helping them in pursuit of higher education in addition to the statutory salary and benefits.

This did the magic as once they start living in the dormitories and work for Arvind, they are paid a salary with complete social security benefits and insurance. We realise that they had 5 to 6 hours free every day. We tied up with Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University for graduation studies. Over 150 girls who stitched garments in Arvind graduated from the program and we add over 100 girls to this programme each year. They are also provided computer education, English literacy, career counselling and many of them have started moving from Blue-collar to white collar jobs.

With a little help, two of our girls are now serving as Police Constables drawing a salary close to 30,000 rupees. This is the journey I believe every development programme must have!

Pandemic has disturbed the pace of all initiatives but things are getting back to normal now.

7. Mr. Pankaj Kamaliya

“The synergy between economic and social development is the key for a sustainable future.”



Shri. Pankaj Kumar Kamalia is the Chief Operations Officer of Gujarat CSR Authority.

GCSRA was set up by the Government of Gujarat in 2014. Gujarat CSR Authority helps public and private sector companies optimally utilise the CSR funds, and also contribute to the welfare of the state. The purpose of the organisation is to manage the CSR funds and coordinate, monitor and implement the various CSR activities in the state.

GCSRA provides support to the companies and PSUs in development of CSR strategy and Annual Plan. It also offers training and capacity building support on a common platform to corporate, government agencies, NGOs and civil society members to share their expectations, aspirations and responsibilities to implement various projects.

In an exclusive interview, Shri. Pankaj Kumar shares with Marie Banu about GCSR programmes.

What is the CSR spend for companies in Gujarat?

Under section 135, CSR rules, on an average, 12,000 crore rupees are spent every year by companies on CSR. Education Sector received the maximum funding (38% of total) followed by hunger, Poverty and health care (25 %), Environment & Sustainability (12%) and Rural development (11%).

Gujarat has consistently been in the top 5 states in both allocating and attracting CSR funds. Gujarat along with Maharashtra, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu has received approximately 40% of CSR funds in the country. Gujarat contribution for CSR is steadily increasing from year 2014 to 17. The contribution of CSR funds accounted during the period 2014-2019 is Rs. 3,569 Crore.

What are the key CSR programmes in Gujarat?

Since its inception, GCSRA envisioned to not only act as a means to social development but also serve as replicable models that can be adopted and improved across the state benefitting thousands of people.

GCSRA focuses programs on skill development and special children and have been instrumental in empowering individuals and providing sustainable livelihood opportunities. At GCSRA, we believe that the synergy between economic and social development is the key for a sustainable future. Our progress in facilitating initiatives that catalyse social change would not have been possible without the generous support of our partners.

Please tell us about the Machine Hole Robot and its functions.

Machinehole robot is made from India to promote the Mantra of Atma Nibhar Bharat. It is a multi-utility robot that can be utilised for sewerage man hole cleaning, rescue operations and for agriculture purpose. The entire project is conceptualized and monitored by Gujarat CSR Authority (GCSRA) while the financial support has been provided by DGVCL.

The robot is solar powered battery based and can work up to 7 days in single charge. It is fully water proof and can work in any environment.

It is integrated with 12 Type of GAS detection sensors, and alerts while detecting gas from chambers. It can collect up to 100Kg sludge at a time and can dive up to 15 Meters. As it is GSM enabled, the Robot can be tracked remotely. It has a live monitoring camera, Ultra HD Color Image in Night.

GCSRA has handed over the two solar operated Machinehole Robot along with electric cart to Surat Municipal Corporation on 25th May 2021.

How effective are the 3 robotic nurses deployed at SMIMER Hospital?

The Robot Nurse and Temperature Scanning device, donated by L&T, have been extremely helpful to hospital and Medical Staff at SMIMER Hospital. It has lessened contact between medical staff and patients, thereby significantly decreasing chances of Covid Infection among our frontline medical workers.

The screening device has been placed at the entry gate and has proved to be crucial in developing a culture of self-assessment. Service Robot Nurses has benefited more than 700 Patients at SMIMER Hospital so far.

Any notable entrepreneurship programmes initiated by GCSRA that you wish to share?

GCSRA had initiated multiple entrepreneurship programmes especially related to income generation programmes for rural people. One of the notable programmes is the Community Help Desk.

Help Desks with basic infrastructural requirements such as Computer, Printer, Scanner and working internet connection have been set-up in the intervention areas to facilitate and ensure effective coordination of the programmes.

As per the internal feasibility study of this project at GCSRA, it is estimated that facilitation support of corporates who run CSR Projects can bring wonderful results as the cost to cover one household is around Rs. 1200/- and the amount of Scheme benefits to one household ranges from Rs. 500 to Rs. 2.4 Lakhs. The cost benefit analysis of the project has made this project a replicable model across various geographies in the State.

The “Rural Entrepreneurs (Tissue Culture Plants)” was implemented in different phases. A total of 30 Agri-entrepreneurs were selected from major Banana growing districts, such as Valsad, Navsari, Surat, Tapi, Chhotaudepur, Bharuch, Panchmahal, and Narmada. An in-depth training and Technical knowledge was imparted at the high-quality tissue culture lab. The cost economics of the project estimates the Agri-entrepreneurs to earn Rs.30,000 in the

first year and Rs 1 Lakh until the third year. These high earning projections has made this project viable.

Another notable Project is the ‘Promotion of Agri Entrepreneurs (Tool Bank)’. Tribal farmers have small farmlands and lack modern agriculture equipment, which sometimes make the process labour intensive. Now, with the tool bank, they are able to use farm equipment, which they could not afford earlier.

The small tractors with agri-equipment is the most feasible and affordable alternative to small and marginal farmers. The Agri-entrepreneurs were able to recover the cost of the tractor and repay their loan.

8. Mr. Praveen Karn

“Social Change for Nation Building.”



Shri Praveen Karn, a Post Graduate in Rural Development from Xavier Institute of Social Services is the Group Head for CSR and Communication at Spark Minda Group. While working for CSR & Communication in the industry for more than 14 years, Praveen was also ranked among 25 CSR professionals in India by the CSR Times, declared among the 50 most influential leaders in CSR by World CSR Congress and was placed among 25 Impactful CSR Leaders by India CSR.

His program for PWDs has won The National CSR Award 2019, conferred by the Ministry of Finance & Corporate Affairs, Government of India and the President of India. He is appointed in the expert panel of IICA, is a member of CSR Committee of ASSOCHAM, a member of CSR for Northern

Region of CII and has contributed in more than 50 national and international forums as an accomplished speaker.

In an exclusive interview, Shri Praveen Karn shares with Marie Banu Spark Minda Group's CSR Programmes.

About the founder of Spark Minda group and his philanthropical work?

Spark Minda Group was founded in 1958 by Late Shri Shadi Lal Minda, a leading industrialist and renowned philanthropist who had steered the group to emerge as a leading player in the Indian automotive industry since its inception. His firm belief in “Social Change for Nation Building” provided the impetus for how the group is known today – ‘delivering uncompromising quality in automotive parts’.

In 1987, he founded the Moga Devi Minda Charitable Trust that has successfully accomplished several social projects like, a children home in Delhi “Minda Bal Gram”, a vocational training center for youngsters across several villages in Adampur Block, Haryana, known as “S. L. Minda Seva Kendra”, a value based, not-for-profit, co-education school “Moga Devi Minda Memorial School”, and established the “S. L. Minda Memorial Sports Academy” in Bagla, Hisar, Haryana. He believed that any form of service towards destitute society will ultimately serve the nation, besides offering service to God.

What are the focus areas of Spark Minda Group's CSR programmes?

Spark Minda Foundation (SMF) is the CSR wing of Spark Minda Group with a vision of building a sustainable society and improving their quality of life. Since its inception in 2014, SMF has been carrying out various programmes that

focus on Education, Livelihood, Women Empowerment, Healthcare and Persons with disabilities. SMF's objective is to protect the planet through affirmative action, thereby leading the integrated and inclusive growth of people and environment.

SMF's aim of enabling sustainable community development drives the foundation to run projects that benefit children, youth and women in rural communities across five states of India, namely, Haryana, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu, Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh.

About the 'Saksham' programme?

Saksham Programme was conceptualized in 2014. It was a result of the determination of the board to bring value to the society, especially towards the most marginalized and discriminated sections. This programme takes a holistic approach to empower and uplift Persons with disabilities.

Saksham attempts to provide assistive and accessible aid, support to gain financial independence by creating inclusive spaces and job opportunities, and also help the PWDs to access governmental support policies through UDID registration.

Started in 2015, camps were organized between 2016-2018 in several domestic locations of Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra, and also in Indonesia and Vietnam for the empowerment of PWDs. The foundation also collaborated with the Sadhbhavana Programme of Indian Army's Pir Panjal Brigade and conducted camps in Baramulla district of Uri in J & K.

A Center for Empowerment of PWDs was established in 2018 in Pune, that caters to more than 10 blocks spanning

over four districts of Maharashtra, particularly the rural pockets, where healthcare facilities for Divyangs are not easily accessible. Till date, the programme has reached to more than 8,500 Persons with Disability with 7,951 accessible and assistive aids, 282 UDID registration facilitations and 564 employments. By 2025, it aims to reach 19,000 PWDs through fitments, UDID registrations and employment.

A major area of intervention for the Saksham programme is the facilitation of skilling and employment through a Deployment Matrix that was created to identify roles that can match with the type of disability. This exercise is performed at all production locations and helps in deciding on recruitments. SMF has partnered with more than 35 organizations for this project including NGOs, Trade Associations, Government and other Foundations. This programme aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 10 established by the United Nations in 2015 – Reduce inequality within and among countries.

What are the successes and challenges of the Business Integrated Prison Programme?

Under the Business Integrated Prison Programme, Spark Minda Foundation develops manufacturing facilities inside prisons where the inmates can work and earn a payment. The programme focuses on training and rehabilitation of prison inmates with the aim to reduce propensities towards crime in society. The Prison programme will not only help the inmates to develop a skill, but also show them a way for a brighter tomorrow.

Spark Minda Foundation is currently coordinating this programme in four prisons of Maharashtra – Yerwada

Central Prison, Pune (for men and women); Harsul Central Prison; Aurangabad Prison (for women) and Nagpur Central Prison (for men). Being the first Automotive Company in India to set up an automotive facility in Tihar Prison in the year 2014, SMF has engaged around 150+ inmates till date through this programme.

The experience of running this project has a brawny takeaway – what initially was felt difficult for the supervisors eventually resulted in a cooperative affiliation with the inmates. In spite of challenges in internal sourcing or operative challenges (due to prison protocols), like complete checking of each packed container of raw materials and the final products etc., the programme has largely witnessed mutual cooperation and willingness to a great extent.

What are the efforts taken by Spark Minda to support those affected by Covid-19 pandemic?

The effects of Covid-19 loomed large across the globe, and fairly took a front seat in SMF's interventions. Persons with disabilities are the most vulnerable group during this pandemic and the team rushed to provide raw food items under the Covid-19 relief and rehabilitation to the PWD shelter homes, in collaboration with CII.

SMF team supported in arranging food and hospitality for the healthcare staff of Safdarjung hospital, New Delhi, in collaboration with ASSOCHAM. In Maharashtra, more than 19,000 cooked food packets were distributed to the under-served community. Medical kits and other utilities like bench partition were provided to Jawaharlal Nehru district hospital in Uttarakhand along with testing kits, personal protective equipment and sanitizers.

The foundation also collaborated with the Indian army under the Sadbhavana project and distributed ration and medical kits to over 300 people in Jammu villages at isolated areas along the border. The Aakarshan Skill Development Center has been converted to online e-certified courses so that it does not stop imparting knowledge and skills. Further, SMF have initiated mask production in all project offices that had produced over 33,000 masks so far.

During the second wave of the Pandemic, the foundation remains committed to provide support to the disadvantaged and marginalized sections of the society. SMF is delivering monthly ration kits to people with leprosy in Manav Seva Kusth Ashram, Uttarakhand, alongside distributing Covid-19 Arogya kit in Vengadu, Tamil Nadu and distributing grocery kits for PWD employees across the country.

In order to further improve access to healthcare internally, Spark Minda Group has also launched a programme to vaccinate all 15,000 employees across the country, free of cost. In addition to this, the group will also provide medical tele-consultation services to all employees for the entire year.

9. Mr.Rajiv Williams

“It is important to bring all CSR projects under the SDGs and map the outcomes through the prism of the UN 171 indicators.”



Brigadier (Retd) Rajiv Williams joined the development sector, after taking premature retirement, and currently heads CSR for the Jindal Stainless Limited Group of companies. His focus has been Corporate Community Connect through various projects initiated by him like education and skill training, integrated healthcare, women empowerment and livelihood generation, environment, rural development, business and human rights.

Rajiv Williams is a member of the CII National CSR Council and several other CII Committees like Water, Backward District and Affirmative Action Committees. He is also an advisor to advocacy groups and Academic Institutions

and member Governing Council of UN Global Compact Network India (GCNI). He is a member of various boards and has been an Independent Director of CSR Committee. He is also a member of the UN Women Empowerment Principles Leadership Group, New York.

In an exclusive interview, Rajiv Williams shares with Marie Banu Jindal Stainless Limited's CSR programmes.

In what ways does Jindal Stainless Limited ensure PPP approach in its CSR programs?

CSR, by definition, has a lot to do with the 'Triple Bottom Line Accounting Framework', which incorporates three dimensions of performance: 'Social, environmental and financial', commonly referred to as the 3Ps – 'People, Planet and Profit'. When we deep dive into the rudiments of engagement, the 'Social' aspect remains central in the sustainable development agenda, because the other 2Ps- 'Planet' and 'Profit'- have a direct impact on the first 'P'- People.

At Jindal Stainless Limited (JSL), we believe that it is all about a continuing commitment to behave ethically and contribute towards the overall economic growth by improving lives of the workforce, their families, communities, and societies at large.

Can you share the key CSR Initiatives of Jindal Stainless Limited ?

JSL implements its CSR programs either directly or through its Foundation or in collaboration with other implementing partners and is an enabler of sustainable community development. Through its initiatives,

the Company creates an environment by providing opportunities to its employees to connect with each other and with the community at large.

JSL aims to provide a platform that empowers the community through need-based programs, making beneficiaries self-reliant through a process of direct intervention. The Company focuses on going ‘Beyond Business Responsibilities’ stressing on the importance of seeing a change in lives of communities around its plant locations as well as in other geographies.

Some of the key focus areas of JSL are Education and Skill training with a strong focus on self-reliance and Entrepreneurship development, Women Empowerment and Integrated Health Care. In the area of health care, we specifically focus on eradication of disease incidence from a specific target area.

About JSL’s flagship Project?

One of JSL’s flagship CSR projects is the Agriculture extension project, where much effort has gone into mitigating the problems being faced by farmers especially during the post demonetization period as also the current pandemic phase.

The project design, which essentially focuses on various areas – from soil testing to training by experts across geographies; from price actualization to linking farmers directly with buyers. This has resulted in a lot of interest amongst various stakeholders. Efforts have also been made towards improving the logistical nightmare being faced by the farmers and prompt payment systems through high-end IT interventions.

All of this has been championed by our implementing partner “Gram Unnati Foundation”. In fact, Niti Aayog has been encouraged to adopt some of our practices.

JSL has been engaged with both the Government of Odisha and Haryana as also with some other States with relevant MoUs in place to support farmers. Gram Unnati Foundation has been given a license to procure directly from farmers and mitigate their distress sale problems.

In order to understand the needs of farmers urgently requiring agricultural inputs, we organized a major outreach campaign with Bayer Crop Sciences. Working with the local district administrations, we even delivered inputs at farmers’ door steps in safe and sanitized conditions. Additionally, during the early lockdown stage we teamed up with the Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board to supply 2,000 kgs of fresh vegetables daily to community kitchens serving food to the most affected by the lockdown.

What were the challenges faced by JSL in the Agricultural Extension project?

Some of the major problems encountered during the post demonetization phase was availability of liquid cash for transportation of the harvested crops. Since the backward integration with digitalization of payments was already in place, the farmers who had joined in the project did not face much difficulties in money transfer. The other major problem especially during the pandemic, which was faced by farmers and when the crop was ready to be harvested was very little or no labor that was available to cut the standing crop. There were other problems as well like logistical support, marketing support, availability of pesticides, fungicides and availability of seeds for planting for the next kharif crop plantation season. In addition, the

limited time window that was available for such planting, etc. compounded to the challenges. While some of these challenges have since been addressed, solutions to other issues are still being worked upon to ensure farmers do not suffer due to the prevailing conditions.

About the women livelihood development initiatives?

JSL has undertaken a number of initiatives on livelihood generation and Women Empowerment with the aim of ‘Entrepreneurship Development’. The projects undertaken included creating Self Help Groups and providing various activities around capacity building from activities linked projects, to sourcing and marketing initiatives. Trainings have been organized for the women in the rural areas from the usual badi, papad, achar, jam and chutney making to creating boutiques and beauty salons.

Women have also been trained in dress designing and fashion technology and finance management. In addition to empower women in the urban rural areas in states like Haryana and Odisha, JSL in partnership with Xynteo, a Norwegian organisation, and the UNDP have empowered women to work in the stainless-steel sector by imparting training to women in cutting, welding, quality check and marketing of stainless-steel products.

What efforts have been taken by JSL to align its CSR Projects to UN Sustainable Development Goals?

It is important to bring all CSR projects under the Sustainable Development Goals and map the outcomes through the prism of the UN 171 indicators. It is in such alignment that the way forward based on data can help in accomplishment of a select pathway of growth and development. JSL intervention could be included under SDGs, 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 11

and 17, besides some other SDGs, where the process of M & E is underway.

Poverty Alleviation is addressed through interventions of providing food for the poor and the migrant workers, especially during the Covid crisis. This has been mapped under the Indicator of 1. 5. 1. Similarly, SDG 2 has been addressed through our farmer intervention projects in partnership with Gram Unnati Foundation and Claro Energy and both activities have been mapped under the SDG 1 indicators 2.3.1 and 2.3.2.

SDG 3, which deals with integrated health care, has been adequately addressed through partners like Roko Cancer, besides other projects around health interventions through the Indicator 3.4.1 and so on. Then we have the Education indicators 4. 1 and 4. 5. 1 where ITES education and providing quality education to the differently abled, especially Hearing Impaired is being imparted through our partner NDS and the data is well captured.

SDG 6 i.e. Clean drinking water is also directly linked with health SDG 2. This project is being implemented by our partners Piramal Foundation and Swajal. It is also important to note that menstrual hygiene project with Sachi Saheli is a component of WASH project and is included under the same SDG. The Environment impact and sustainable cities linked to SDG 11 have benefitted communities in a positive manner as recorded under the Indicators 11. 7. 1 and 11. 2. 3. The partnership for developing parks rests with Prabhav Foundation and through their intervention the local self-government wants to take the project to other locations in the State of Haryana. You will acknowledge that the partnerships listed above adequately lend toward SDG 17.

10. Ms. Shabnam Siddiqui

“The more we work together the greater impact will be; otherwise everything will be like a drop in the ocean.”



Shabnam Siddiqui is Executive Director at the United Nations Global Compact Network India. An academic practitioner with twenty-five years of experience, Shabnam specialises in developing and executing strategic intervention through multi-stakeholder networks, is skilled at training and research and has several national and international publications to her credit.

Shabnam is a great believer and practitioner of Collective Action, and believes that the private sector plays a critical role in the attainment of Sustainable Development Goals. She has made significant contributions to creating an active community of changemakers committed to accelerating positive change and innovation to achieve SDGs. Academically, Shabnam has a Masters in Sociology from

India, a second Masters in International Peace Studies from USA and embarked on a PhD in Public Policy at Singapore. Additionally, every couple of years Shabnam is engaged in academic pursuit so as to be abreast of new knowledge and thought leadership. Her most recent foray was to the University of Oxford as a Chevening Rolls Royce Innovation, Science, Policy and Leadership (CRISP) Fellow based at Said Business School, St. Cross College.

Shabnam is also an amateur wildlife photographer, a biodiversity conservationist, passionate about wildlife and forests and intends to work towards their holistic development.

In an exclusive interview, Shabnam Siddiqui tells Marie Banu about United Nations Global Compact Network India and its role.

Your tryst in the social sector?

I started my professional career in 1990s working on women issues. I went to a girls educational institute right from school to post graduation, hence was in touch with women's issues. While conducting a session with a Jhuggi group in Delhi, one lady said, "we understand what you are trying to say and are in agreement, but please explain the same thing to our men. If they change, we will change." That was such a basic thing that we needed to do and I realised that it is not only a 'women' issue, but a 'gender' issue – as that is the way our society is programmed. Being a sociology student, that understanding was clearer. From there on, I adopted a systems approach to understating and solving societal problems.

In my current position at United Nations Global Compact Network India, I have been working for over 10 years now

and it has been the longest period that I have stayed with an organisation. Still, there is so much to do on the SDGs and much to do with the organisation.

About United Nations Global Compact Network India and your association?

United Nations Global Compact Network India (UNGONI) is a voluntary initiative for corporates to join in the change that's happening in the world. It was founded two decades ago when Kofi Annan at one of the World Economic Forum meetings got together business houses and said that because businesses are part of the problem of the society they need to also be a part of the solution.

Currently, we are working in 63 countries where we have established the Global Compact Networks. This Network is based on 10 principles around the issues of human rights, environment, labour and anti-corruption.

Our role is to facilitate businesses in understanding, inculcating and transforming their actions based on these 10 principles. For instance, we are working on the issue of anti-corruption and looking at the issue of public procurement.

When we met business houses, the public sector thought that the private sector were more privileged as they had more independence while the private sector thought that the public sector was more privileged because they were close to the government. After hearing their individual stories, we got them together in a room and businesses realised that the issue was the same and it was just that they were not speaking with each other.

In what ways does UNGONI promote networking?

We have both corporates and non-corporates (civil society organisations, academic institutions, and think tanks) as UNGCNI members. We try to engage a dialogue with them as both come from different angles.

We have been promoting collective action to a large extent. The idea is to do internal reporting and share it with the external world. You then work together on different issues – for instance in your CSR programmes. No company can sustain any particular CSR initiative for a long time as their role is limited only for few years. So, Company B can take over the responsibility after Company A's period to ensure continuation of the programme, thus sustain its impact for the future. This Collective Action can be based on geography or social issues like health, water, or education. The more stakeholders work together the greater the impact will be; otherwise everything will be like a drop in the ocean.

Businesses have evolved nationally and globally in the last decade. If you see the issues of child labour that were in a lot of manufacturing companies, it has substantially come down because people wanted to be seen on the side of progress. So, labour issues are now been tackled and human rights issue is no more an exclusive issue.

Presently, we are dealing with a case of human rights abuse of an Indian company in Myanmar which is being tackled by lawyers in Australia along with our headquarters. We are living more and more in a global situation now and we need to see how we can connect together – both for progress and accountability. The challenge though is in communication.

My colleague was recently part of a dialogue between a US company and local government officials. The US company were waiting for government to engage with them for their CSR activity while the government was

waiting for the company to approach them. In such a situation, there is a need to facilitate the dialogue and this requires an external neutral non-profit agency. That's the role of UNGCNI, to act as neutral facilitators. We speak the universal language of the 10 principles, hence facilitating dialogue becomes important.

For instance, during the COVID phase, many companies did substantial work and published it in their individual reports which was meant for a limited audience. We asked our members to share with us and we reported the work of the 35 members that we managed to gather in the limited time frame. The collective contribution of UNGCI members was valued at millions of rupees – right from philanthropy to setting up hospitals and opening community radios for awareness. The scale of their work was tremendous and the global audience was appreciative of the work done by our members.

How does UNGCNI ensure transparency and accountability?

When the Global Compact was found in 2000, initially we had only 9 principles. In 2004, we realised that not much has not been achieved hence we added the 10th principle of anti-corruption to ensure that all the gaps/loop holes were tightened. Ant-corruption reporting and transparency and accountability systems were ensured in the organisation's internal and external reporting systems and we also have a team of compliance and vigilance officers on board.

I was attending a meeting in Mumbai where we were talking about values and giving examples of Tata and Birla when a participant asked "at what point of profit do you start becoming transparent?" That was an interesting question for us to mull over as small agencies do not have

the wherewithal or resources to focus on transparency and accountability.

As UNGCNI works with big corporates, we have ensured that their entire value chain and their vendors also follow the principles and when we get reports of any ill doing, we take suo motto action.

What are the efforts taken by UNGCNI for corporates to report on SDGs?

The UNGCNI has come a long way. Since September 2015, when the Sustainable Development Goals came in, our work was to ensure that the corporates and governments follow the SDGs and take priority in setting their goals in their respective areas of work.

UNGCNI is assisting companies to align their CSR work with SDGs and report to the nodal ministry for SDGs and CSR as they are both different.

In the last year, beyond SDG, ESG has come in and is taking a dominant position, especially with the entire focus on climate. From CSR to SDG to ESG – this has been the journey for corporates and CSR reporting.

11. Dr. Suresh Reddy

“CSR is an opportunity for companies to come up with innovative solutions for social problems.”



Dr. Y. Suresh Reddy is the Director of SRF Foundation and oversees the SRF’s corporate social responsibility and philanthropy programs. SRF Foundation’s network has grown significantly under his leadership. He is a prolific writer, and has authored various books, such as the “Co-operatives & Rural Development” and “Child Labour in India”.

Dr. Reddy is a Ph. D. in Public Administration from SV University. He brings more than 24 years of experience in philanthropy, social change, and non-profit leadership. Prior to joining the SRF Foundation, he worked with the Byrraju Foundation, Hyderabad; Dr. Reddy’s Foundation, Hyderabad; CARE India (International NGO), New Delhi and the State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT), New Delhi.

In an exclusive interview, Dr. Suresh Reddy shares with Marie Banu his thoughts on the future of CSR in India.

Can you tell us about SRF and SRF Foundation?

SRF Limited is a multi-business chemicals conglomerate engaged in the manufacturing of industrial and specialty intermediates. The company's business portfolio covers Fluorochemicals, Specialty Chemicals, Packaging Films, Technical Textiles, Coated and Laminated Fabrics.

At SRF, we believe that it is essential for companies to have a purpose, more engaging than profits and that purpose should be intrinsic to the fabric of the organization. Building on this belief, SRF Foundation (SRFF), formerly known as the Society for Education and Welfare , was set up in year 1982 as the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) arm of SRF Limited.

Drawing inspiration from its founders, Late Sir Shri Ram and Late Dr. Bharat Ram, who believed in contributing to society through education, SRF Foundation is dedicated to the transformation of education in the country.

SRF Foundation implements CSR programmes for SRF Ltd. as well as for 11 Corporate houses like IndiGo, IBM, Capgemini, HP, etc. This is a unique feature of the SRF Foundation. Our focus areas are Education and Skill Development.

What are the advantages of implementing the CSR programmes directly?

I joined SRF Foundation in 2009 when our annual CSR budget was only Rs. 1 crore. Significantly, continuing the journey to FY 2020-2021, our budget was 13.25 crore

rupees, and we expect our next year budget to be around 15 crore rupees. Similarly, an equivalent amount is our Corporate partners' budget too.

I have developed the institutional processes and capabilities of my team to take up these CSR projects. We implement the projects directly in 21 locations in 9 states of India. We have set up our project offices and SRFF project officers stationed here.

SRF Foundation acts like a conduit in bringing the people together – local communities, government, and corporates. By timely delivery of CSR programmes, we have garnered goodwill for SRF Foundation.

The advantage of implementing your own CSR is that you can have more vision driven control on the quality of the programmes. You know what you want and, with the experience you gain over time, you know what works and what does not work on ground.

Secondly, you have an opportunity to try out some innovations. By directly implementing your CSR programmes, you get well connected with the local communities and government. This helps you to understand their actual needs over felt needs and engage them in their own development process.

What are the challenges faced during programme implementation?

It is obvious that challenges are faced by all organisations, not just SRF Foundation, while implementing the CSR programmes on ground. It takes about three to six months' time to build the trust of the local communities. This is

crucial as our project team needs to work with the local people while designing the programme.

SRF Foundation operates in nine States of India and the norms/systems followed by each State Government while engaging with NGOs, are different. In some cases, we need to sign a MoU with the Government.

SRF Foundation is well-equipped to deal with our Corporate partners who are unique in their own ways. They have their own way of funding, their own expectations from the CSR programmes, and different reporting systems.

SRFF's aim is to bring people together and serve as a single platform for corporates, government, and communities. We adopt an inclusive approach with differential strategies. For example, for a school programme, few corporates want to provide physical infrastructure facilities like toilets, drinking water, library, labs, etc.; some focus on digital literacy programmes; few want to offer teacher training programmes; and some want to work on girl child education. Each one of them have their individual focus areas.

SRF Foundation follows a holistic approach. We work towards transforming the school into a 'model school' where children gain holistic development. The challenge we face in this process is allocating more time and resources to bring about this change. I would argue that the physical change process of a school is more resource intensive but less time consuming. However, the academic transformation of a school is more process driven as well as time intensive. It takes around three to five years to build the capacity of the teachers and enhance the children's learning outcomes.

In providing a holistic education programme, with the limited resources available, we prioritise the activities.

When we have corporate houses expressing interest to collaborate with SRF Foundation, we link them with our relevant CSR projects. For instance, IBM offers training programmes for school teachers, Coca Cola contributes towards physical infrastructure for schools; Times of India wants to work with Spoken English programme; Schneider prefers to work for school drop-outs and electrical training programmes; etc.

SRF Foundation's approach facilitates corporates to participate in our CSR activities and at the same time enables us to address issues faced by the children, schools, and local communities at the ground level.

In what ways do you strengthen the interface with the government, corporates and the communities?

Strengthening happens at two levels: at SRF Foundation head office level and at the program level.

At head office level, we sign a tripartite agreement with the respective State Government, Department of Education and the Corporate and clearly outline the programme outcomes and roles and responsibilities of each of the partners involved. Our team visits the programmes periodically to ensure that the programmes are implemented as planned and identify the gaps for applying better solutions.

At the micro level, we coordinate monthly meetings and interact with our key stakeholders —children, school teachers, headmasters, panchayat, government officials at block and district levels, etc. We encourage community ownership so that they are capacitated to handle the programme after our exit.

How do you ensure transparency and accountability for your CSR programmes?

Corporates, who wish to partner with SRF Foundation, conduct due diligence to assess our capabilities for implementing their CSR programmes. They visit our programme areas and also review our annual reports, governing structure, systems and processes, and legal documents (12A, 80G, FCRA).

Once the Corporate expresses interest to collaborate with SRF Foundation, we submit a proposal with a budget, detailing the programme area and activities. Likewise, on obtaining consent from the corporate a formal MoU is signed.

Notably, periodic monthly / quarterly reports as desired by the corporate partner is shared by our programme team. We also publicise our programmes' best practices in social media. The fund utilisation certificate is shared with the corporate partner on a quarterly basis. We ensure that the funds are spent as per the proposed plan.

Your thoughts on the future of CSR in India?

CSR is an opportunity for companies to come up with innovative solutions for social problems.

Since independence, our Government has been spending crores of money in the development sector. The welfare schemes offered by the State and Central Government are laudable. The CSR spend is only around 20,000 crore rupees. The reason the government has made CSR mandatory is because they want the corporate houses to apply their technology, management practices, and develop

innovative solutions for issues concerning education, health, sanitation, drinking water, etc.

The CSR space is evolving and getting matured. The recent CSR Amendment has stated Impact Assessment as mandatory for projects with a budget of over one crore rupees. This is good! The CSR programmes will be carried out not for the sake of spending the allocated funds but rather to make an impact in the society which can be measured, reported, and documented as best practices.

12. Mr. Vishal Bhardwaj

“We follow the business philosophy of ‘Clean & Green is Profitable and Sustainable’ and endeavour to create positive environmental and social impacts.”



Dalmia Bharat Foundation, popularly known as DBF, is a registered not-for-profit organisation set up under the Income Tax Act, 1961. The Foundation started its journey in the year 2009, as the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) arm of the group companies, along the lines with UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It is committed to carry forward the eight-decade long legacy of Dalmia Bharat Group through conscientious corporate citizenship. The foundation operates in 18 districts across 12 states and covering vast regions in the South, North, East, North-east and some areas in the West as well.

Vishal Bhardwaj is a Deputy Executive Director and Group Head, CSR, at Dalmia Bharat Group. He has been in the

Social Development and CSR circuit for the last 20 years and during this period, he has worked with the Government of India, a leading NGO, and 2 leading Cement companies before joining the Dalmia Bharat Group. He holds a Master's degree in Social Work and a Diploma in CSR from the Swedish Institute of Management, Stockholm.

Vishal has also undergone a Management Development Program at the prestigious SP Jain Institute of Management and Research, Mumbai. He is a Certified Sustainability Assessor of the CII-ITC Centre of Excellence for Sustainable Development. He has been awarded the Responsible Business Leader Award at the Responsible Business Summit and has also been amongst the 100 most impactful CSR leaders (Global Listing) listed by World CSR Day and World Sustainability.

In an exclusive interview Vishal Bhardwaj shares with Marie Banu Dalmia Bharat Group's CSR programmes.

What was the philosophy and vision of Dalmia Group setting up a separate foundation for its CSR initiatives?

The Dalmia Bharat foundation as a separate entity was set up in 2009. Prior to that, the CSR projects were implemented by collaborating with NGO partners. However, with expansion in programs, expansion in geographical areas and coverage of projects, the company felt the need of setting up an institution which could take care of their work in a large scale in the future.

It also gave the opportunity to directly connect with community. Also, it increased the opportunity in networking, partnering more conveniently with government, NGO's and community based organizations. These were some of the advantages of setting up a separate entity.

How has the CSR & sustainability program evolved at your company?

CSR and sustainability have evolved historically in our group companies and we have had the privilege to experience various phases of CSR evolution in India. We have had the honour to rise to Mahatma Gandhi's call for Trusteeship and serving the community through various philanthropic projects. Transitioning through various phases, presently, our CSR is more aligned to the principle of 'Shared-value'.

In what ways does Dalmia Bharat Group contribute towards global sustainability efforts?

Dalmia Bharat Group is committed to the environment and consistently focuses on sustainable practices. The group's cement business is globally ranked No. 1 by CDP in 2018 on business readiness for a low carbon transition and has achieved the lowest carbon footprint in the cement sector globally. We follow the business philosophy of 'Clean & Green is Profitable and Sustainable' and endeavour to create positive environmental and social impacts. We are replacing conventional fuels and raw materials with alternative solutions to expand our overall renewable energy portfolio. Our blended cement portfolio and continued investment in technology reduces any adverse impact on the planet.

With a clear thrust on improving efficiency in all practices and technological innovations, we are dedicated to operate our facilities with the utmost respect for the communities and environment it exists in.

Can you tell us about your key CSR programmes?

CSR to our Group means "Giving Back to the Society" so when we were strategizing on the focus areas, we

analysed how the ecosystem is getting impacted due to our businesses. We realised that the issues of water, energy and livelihood are both material to the sustainability of the community as well as for the company. Therefore, we chose to focus on three major areas of concern for our CSR programme – Livelihood where we could skill the people on farm and non-farm sectors and develop human capital of the community to improve their livelihoods and income.

Our second focus area is Climate Change where we focus on harvesting and conserving water for productive use and also ensure access of clean cooking and solar lighting solutions to the communities. The third focus area is Social Infrastructure in which we focus on addressing basic health, sanitation and infrastructure needs of these communities.

About the programmes coordinated in partnership with government?

All our programmes are designed and driven in partnership with our stakeholders, especially the government. We partner with local government bodies like District Collectorate, BDO, Health department, Agriculture department, etc. and National level government bodies like National Scheduled Castes Finance and Development Corporation (NSFDC), National Backward Classes Finance & Development Corporation (NBCFDC), etc. We collaborate and work in convergence with government schemes and ensure last mile delivery of these schemes. Our programmes have contributed to many government schemes like National Skill Development Mission, More Crop per Drop program, Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayi Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana, Swachh Bharat Abhiyan among many others.

What is the level of employee engagement in your CSR activities?

Right from our promoters, top management to all the functions and departments across all plants, our employees pitch in for CSR activities.

Management at plants are very proactive towards CSR projects of their areas and guide the team in the execution too. The accounts, civil, commercial department personnel help in the design and implementation of these projects.

We also have an Employee Volunteering programme, ROSHNI, under which employees volunteer with Dalmia Bharat Foundation's community initiatives and also with other Civil Society Organizations. Recently our employees volunteered in Covid-19 awareness and relief campaigns during the pandemic and Jal Shakti Abhiyaan.

NGO PROFILE

1. Agewell Foundation

Age and Wellness



Parents' lives have a strong impact on their children's decisions and approach towards society. Within the family ecosystem, incidents compel children to relate to many social issues; but how they choose to respond evolves into a personal journey. All along, one incredible difference lies in the way parents and children are looked at – children are growing adults while parents are ageing adults. That says it all! This perspective underlines our approach towards senior citizens. They will soon be a huge chunk of our population awaiting attention and space to live up to their abilities. "How prepared are we in accommodating the rights of senior citizens and their needs is a question we must all pay heed to, right now," warns Mr. Himanshu Rath, Founder and Chairman of Agewell Foundation in New Delhi.

Himanshu's mother was a dedicated professor. Her sudden demise shocked Himanshu, who resolved to retire by forty years and live life beyond. "It is not unusual to see parents working hard all their lives and retire. By the time they turn to spend quality time with their family, their children and grand-children are busy with their own lives. This is

a cycle and not anybody's fault. Old people have multiple needs and most of all, attention that will make them feel their worth. Unless we all prepare ourselves to age well, this scenario will not let old people see their worth. It all turns out to be a vicious responsibility," feels Himanshu.

As he promised to himself, Himanshu retired as a Copy Writer and founded the Agewell Foundation in 1999 to propagate the idea of ageing well and work for the welfare of elderly in every possible way. "Senior citizens are everywhere and their rejection is near universal. I was looking for a way to reach out and support them without disturbing them in anyway. I began by writing letters to District Magistrates, Superintendents of Police, Collectors and Chief Medical Officers, requesting them to help me identify prominent people from their districts who can help me in this initiative. Their responses helped me get in touch with so many individuals who were yearning for a direction to support old people in their neighbourhood. The chain of volunteers kept growing and today, we are a team of over 80,000 volunteers spread across all 718 districts in the country," he says. The volunteers include retired bureaucrats, professors, students, doctors, educated housewives, community social workers and many other locals who always keep themselves ready to assist any old person in need.

Agewell Foundation runs a helpline service to assist elders in need through their volunteer base. Medical, social, financial, emotional, legal – every need is assessed and appropriately addressed. Retirement age in India is 60 years and a second job post retirement is a necessity for many. Elders are a huge resource base and population dynamics show that 17,000 people turn old every day in India, which is the largest in the world.

“In three years from now, we will have the highest old age population and will remain so for many years to come. At this juncture, it is only relevant that we fight for their rights and tap their potential,” says Himanshu. Thus, in order to revive old people from feeling redundant, Agewell offers a second opportunity through its Employment Exchange. Elders’ services have come in very handy in home tuitions, reading clubs for local kids. Over 90,000 senior citizens have been placed in different jobs and this new energy has motivated them to enjoy the changes they face in old age. “One opportunity can make them feel so positive about their lives in old age. They feel connected, occupied, respected and independent. They are ageing well, I say,” points Himanshu.

As word spread, people also tried to get in touch with Himanshu and the letters he received were overwhelming. 1,200 letters every day and each running into 50-100 pages reiterated that his focus was certainly a strong need in the society. Awareness programmes, workshops on senior citizens’ rights and needs became a regular feature and Himanshu began to present his work on different platforms. With the help of volunteers, he managed to identify needs from these long letters and also addressed them immediately. The letters prompted many questions and volunteers developed questionnaires that could help study old people in a community – their characteristics, needs, challenges, etc. Research on elderly gained momentum. So far, 37 national research papers have been published with a sample size ranging from 10,000 to 100,000. Little did Himanshu realize that these papers will be a point of reference internationally for policy deliberations on elderly. Representations at United Nations and other international conferences further added value to Agewell’s advocacy programmes on rights of senior citizens.

Two decades in the field gave Agewell the visibility it needed and contributions further helped the team to contribute wheel chairs, walkers, adult diapers and food ration packets for the destitute. Himanshu leaves no stone unturned to appreciate his team of volunteers. “They are my strength and pride. Without them, we would not have come this far,” he asserts, explaining the potential role of educated housewives and retired bureaucrats in reforming policy on senior citizens in our country. As an organisation, Himanshu feels that Agewell has demonstrated the idea of ageing well and being resourceful. He hopes to see this idea become a value, strengthening intergenerational interactions and participation on different platforms. “Together, we all can build a better world for the elderly, we must!” he insists.

Shanmuga Priya.T

2. Aishwaryam Trust

Towards A Dignified End



Aishwaryam Trust has supported over 400 patients, who have lived anywhere between a few months to a couple of years in the centre

The concept of palliative care was introduced to India in the 1980's. The Indian Government at the time had introduced a policy to prioritize pain relief as one of the basic services of primary health care. Some of the earliest palliative care centres were established in Trivandrum, Chennai, Bangalore, Mumbai, Delhi and Ahmedabad. While there have been tremendous advancements in cancer research, the proliferation of pain-relieving care is still, arguably in its infancy, in the country.

Located in Vilacheri, Madurai, is Nethravathi Pain and Palliative Care Centre, a 50-bed facility that houses patients who are terminally ill with cancer or are otherwise bedridden, and in chronic pain.

A seven-member team of doctors runs this facility - Dr. R. Balagurusamy, a General Physician (GP), Dr. R. Amudhanilavan Cardiologist, Dr. Srividya Manjunath Gastro-Entrologist, Dr. S. Sabarimanikandan, GP, Dr. G. Praburam Niranjan, Anaesthetist, Dr. P. Venkatesh Neurophysician, and Dr. C.Satheesh, also a GP.

In 2014 they started Aishwaryam Trust, and started conducting medical camps and awareness programs in remote rural areas. In one of those camps in a certain village, a family requested them to have a look at a 45-year old patient, male. He was bedridden, with terminal stage-cancer. His family comprises of his wife and two young children. When the team asked the wife why they hadn't sought the services of the local government hospital (GH), she told them that in the GH, an attender (usually a family member) was required to be stationed beside the patient at all times. Since she was the only one making ends meet for her family, she couldn't additionally take on this attender's responsibility. Their only solution at the time was to keep the patient at home.

This incident sparked a series of discussions among the doctors of Aishwaryam Trust. They realized that there was a real need in Southern Tamil Nadu, for a palliative care centre. There were several below-poverty-line families who were unable to afford care for the dying members of their household. Typically, these would be people who were single, and/or childless. Where in families, caring for immediate members of itself is a tedious process, there is no scope to care for the next of kin. Sometimes patients would suffer so much pain that they'd be pushed to the brink of suicide.

Dr. Balagurusamy and his friends decided to start a palliative care unit, that would be able to take in these kinds

of patients and care for them, and ensure they lived out their last days in relative painlessness.

For six months, Aishwaryam Trust struggled to get any support from the general public. In 2015, they rented out a small space in an old building where they took in a handful of patients. However, the neighborhood was not very supportive of this palliative care unit, owners disliked that there were a lot of deaths in the space, and neighbours could not digest the frequent comings and goings of ambulances in their area.

After learning of their difficulties, Jalaja and Janardhanan, a philanthropist couple from Thirunagar area donated 27 cents of land to Aishwaryam Trust. With this, they established their own centre. Subsequently, a successful businessman Shyam Gupta, donated a 25-bed facility in Madurai, expanding the capacity of Aishwaryam Trust.

The local Social Welfare Board refers eligible patients to the centre, as also do concerned members of the public who know about Aishwaryam Trust's work. Food is made fresh in-house, using meal plans that are developed in consultation with dieticians. At the Palliative Care Centre, the patients have access to 15 nurses and additional in-house attenders. Access is also available to symptomatic care- for instance, opioid analgesics (pain relieving medication), supportive therapy and so on. When a patient with no family, dies at the facility, the centre teams up with Mr. Manikandan, a person deeply interested in ensuring dignified cremations for the dead, to conduct their last rites with dignity. Mr. Manikandan has been doing this service for the past 35 years.

When the first wave of the COVID pandemic hit, it was a terrible time for the people living here as well as those working in this sensitive field of work. Dr. Balagurusamy

recounts with a lot of pain how his team, all his staff, nurses and attenders, stayed back at Nethravathi Centre for weeks together, unable to get back to their own families, because of the fear of spreading infection. His team made arrangements for his administrative staff to stay put at accommodations near the centre, and took every effort to ensure steady supply of food to everyone. His team developed a system for outside helpers to safely deliver food, washed-clothes and other things at an outer delivery room for contactless service. At this time, they faced an acute shortage of some important supplies such as adult diapers. Since all transport was halted, they were unable to source it from their usual sources. In spite of all these difficulties, Dr. Balagurusamy says that the centre was able to survive the pandemic with minimal losses.

Till date, Aishwaryam Trust has supported over 400 patients, who have lived anywhere between a few months to a couple of years in the centre. The seven-member founding team has always enthusiastically pitched in, monetary, physical and social resources to fulfill their mission. Currently, the centre is struggling to find volunteers who can visit the patients for a few hours each day to support the patients. Dr. Balagurusamy insists that it would be easy to train volunteers if the latter would spare a little time. Efforts are underway to produce a short film to create more awareness on palliative care. Aishwaryam Trust is also in the midst of talks to start a centre for children with intellectual disabilities in the near future.

“It is our belief that care-centres like ours should cease to exist in the near future,” says Dr. Balagurusamy. While it might sound contradictory, it echoes his belief that care needs to be made accessible to patients in the comfort of their own homes, rather than being away from friends and family. A profound thought indeed.

3. Basic Research, Education and Development (BREAD)

Creating Pathways To Success, One Book At A Time



Libraries are a timeless, yet often an overlooked institution. We have all used a library at one point or another. It is one of the last few public spaces you are allowed to be without the expectation of incurring an expense. More importantly however, several studies from across the globe have confirmed that libraries are a crucial tool for development. Access to a library highly improves the average child's chances to pursue higher education. This is precisely what the Basic Research, Education and Development (BREAD) Society works on, in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. BREAD Society establishes children's libraries in government schools in these two states.

It all started when Dr. N Bhaskara Rao, a mass communication and social research expert, made a poignant observation. In 1989, on a visit to the USA, while reminiscing with his long-lost friend Dr. Ratnam Chitturi, Dr. Rao recalled how many of his childhood pals from his native village had been unable

to move beyond their ill-paying traditional occupations simply because their families were unable to afford higher education. Even though as children these friends had shown a lot of academic promise, their dreams fizzled out due to limited affordability. To address this funding gap that continued to exist in these rural areas, Dr. Chitturi started the North South Foundation (NSF) based in USA and simultaneously Dr. Rao started the BREAD Society in 1989.

The NSF would raise funds from NRIs in the US and the BREAD Society would identify meritorious students from low-income families to award scholarships to. BREAD initially selected candidates based on an annual parental income below Rs. 20,000 and their respective ranking in EAMCET and CET and IIT exams. After conducting a pilot study in 2002, BREAD arrived at common eligibility criteria to award scholarships to meritorious SSC-graduate students from government and government-aided schools pursuing all branches of education in government institutions, doing away with the “parental income” criteria. In 2004, BREAD started receiving donations from resident Indians as well. About 9,000 scholarships were awarded up until 2009. In 2009, the composite government of Andhra Pradesh announced scholarships for higher education to all students with parental income below Rs. 1 lakh per annum. Hence, BREAD discontinued their Scholarships program to avoid duplication.

BREAD moved on to establish libraries at government schools. Says Mr. Ram Mohan Rao Kakani, Secretary of BREAD Society, “Children in government schools are not exposed to reading colourful graphic-designed story books of 20+ pages. We set up an expert committee to select age-appropriate books from a broad list of publishers initially in English and Telugu. The team came up with a list of 650 books. Typically, we provide nearly all of these books at the time of setting up the library and then add more books at regular intervals.”

Students can borrow books and take them home. Prizes are given for brief book reviews. This helps them to develop writing, comprehension and communication skills. They sometimes take the assistance of their parents and elder siblings in doing these book reviews. TISS, Hyderabad did a field study of BREAD libraries in 2007 and observed that this also improves the quality of family interactions. Further, Mr. Kakani says, “We published a Handbook, “Karadeepika” in Telugu, to operate the BREAD library through Voluntary Student Librarians (VSLs) lending books to their classmates. This not only teaches the students resource management and leadership skills, but helps reduce the library-in-charge teacher’s workload.”

A total of 1,509 libraries have been set up by BREAD so far. These libraries can be accessed by 6,50,000 children at any point of time, and over the last 12 years, more than 12,50,000 students have benefited. Teachers have reported that students show greater enthusiasm to read and learn, because of their newfound access to books.

As a way to reward teachers who go above and beyond their call of duty to assist their students with competitive exams and government scholarships, BREAD offers felicitations. Each year, teachers and heads of schools securing five or more NMMS scholarships (a nationwide scholarship) are awarded a token of appreciation for their dedicated services.

What is also interesting is that BREAD Society is a completely volunteer run organization. The management team is comprised of experts in diverse fields, who lend their expertise to the organization for free. Overhead expenses are less than 1% of program expenses. A free office space has been provided at Hyderabad and a huge workspace at Kakinada to receive, organize and distribute

over one lakh books to the identified schools. Management members meet their own expenses on travel and stay.

BREAD advances research through their various impact studies, conducted both in-house as well as in collaboration with major schools such as TISS, SPJIMR and SIMC. Transparency in their processes allows them to build lasting relationships with their donors. This however, does not mean there are no challenges. Says Mr. Kakani, “Interest rates on corpus funds are declining. With the surging prices of books, it is getting more and more difficult for us to replenish books at each library. We are trying to publish our own books as a way to mitigate this concern.”

The pandemic has resulted in donations plummeting. In spite of that, for two years in a row, BREAD has established a record number of new libraries. In the last year and a half, they have set up 199 libraries in Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas (KGBV). KGBVs are residential high schools set up by the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan for disadvantaged girl children in Mandals with low women’s literacy rates. They hope to continue adding libraries to more of these KGBV schools.

“Bad libraries build collections, good libraries offer services, great libraries build communities,” goes the saying. By vastly improving the chances of underprivileged children to pursue far-reaching ambitions, BREAD Society is truly levelling the playing field.

Speaking of a vision for the future, Mr. Kakani says, “We hope that someday soon, BREAD scholars who hail from marginalized sections of society, will take charge of BREAD and take it forward to newer heights.”

Archanaa Ramesh

4. Ekjut

Resilience through Community Learning



Perinatal period is the most crucial in the lives of both mothers and children. Maternal Mortality Ratio in India for the period of 2016-2018 was 113 per 100,000 live births. This is a roughly 5% improvement from the previous two-year period. Neo-natal Mortality Rate has declined from 52 per 1000 live births in 1990 to 28 per 1000 live births in 2013. Studies have repeatedly shown that skilled professional care, timely management and treatment usually tips the scales in terms of life and death of both mother and infant.

As we well know, access to the above-mentioned care continues to be a challenge in rural and remote geographical locations in countries like ours. How then are these numbers improving, gradually but steadily each passing year? We have organizations like Ekjut to thank, for that.

Since its inception in 2002, Ekjut has been working with marginalized and tribal communities initially in Jharkhand

and Odisha, and then expanding to Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, primarily addressing issues of maternal and child health and nutrition, but eventually expanding to other thematic areas. Managed and run by a diverse group of people with expertise ranging from Medicine and Healthcare, Development and Academics to Management, the organization uses evidence-based approaches to operate and scale up their work. Co-founders Dr. Prasanta Tripathy and Dr. Nirmala Nair, both medical professionals with an impressive combined experience in community health, pediatrics and maternal health, have ceaselessly worked towards effecting policy changes at the national level, through their research work as well as engagement with the National Health Missions (NHM) and other state and central government programmes.

We spoke with Priyanka Yadav, from Ekjut, to learn more about their work. Says Priyanka, “We at Ekjut have been early adopters of the Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) approach to address issues of maternal and newborn health and nutrition. Trained facilitators work with groups of women at the village level to collectively explore the effect of their behaviour, become engaged in decision making and proactively participate in problem solving. PLA meetings are facilitated on a monthly basis by a trained village woman or a frontline service provider. Participating communities identify and prioritize problems, plan, initiate and implement agreed-upon strategies and evaluate the same, together.” She shared that the approach has not only been effective in reducing maternal and newborn mortality and post-natal depression, but it was also found to be sustainably cost effective. It was endorsed and globally recommended by WHO in 2014. Ekjut earned the ‘ImPACT’ Trial of the Year Award for its evidence-based work by Society of Clinical Trial and the ‘Public Health Champion’ award by WHO in 2015.

In 2016, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India recommended the PLA approach to be scaled up in 10 Indian states to improve maternal and newborn health outcomes. Ekjut has since supported the Governments of Jharkhand, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan in scaling up their community programmes. They have also broadened their work to combat malnutrition, improve youth engagement and development, adolescent health and wellbeing, address gender-based violence and mental health.

Summing up the philosophy of the organization, Priyanka says, “We believe in peoples’ knowledge systems and abilities, ensuring community accountability and transparency, a belief that women should have more than an equal share/say. We recognise that the state has primary responsibility in ensuring equity and entitlements, strengthening democratic practices. We are working towards a world in which the voice of its people guides the decisions that shape the quality of their lives.”

More than a year into this pandemic, Ekjut’s work has rapidly evolved to cope with changing times. Priyanka admits, “The initial lockdowns at the start of the pandemic left us feeling a little helpless. We started off distributing cooked food and providing dry rations to various vulnerable groups. However, we soon started working with the state-run Control Rooms initiated by the Department of Labor Training and Employment to support migrant workers stranded at various parts of the country at present we are engaged in encouraging rural communities to get themselves vaccinated.”

Working together with NHM Jharkhand, Ekjut supported Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) workers with

digitization of individuals under home quarantine across the region in a spatial-temporal manner during this pandemic. How did they do this? The PLA app template developed for program purposes was adapted to report five consecutive, intensive public health surveys (IPHS) done by ASHAs to trace migrant returnees and identify vulnerable populations in their catchment areas. This already familiar, digital mode of reporting helped the department in real time tracing the scenario, consequent planning and decision making in discussion with other line departments. A publication of the National Disaster Management Authority & Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure recognized both the use of geo-spatial technologies and app-based IPHS reporting as “Innovation & Outcomes” from Jharkhand. Use of these tools and technologies not only strengthened the health services surveillance framework and managing the work better but also helped in reducing the risk to front line workers by limiting their exposure from multiple visits.

In order to boost adolescent mental wellbeing during the time of lockdowns, Ekjut encouraged youth to distribute over 10,000 saplings in and around their communities to help create kitchen gardens in every home. This initiative also steered the communities towards achieving better food security. Many adolescent facilitators created wall writings of COVID-19 safety measures in the local Ho language, and demonstrated ways to overcome stigma and discrimination associated with the virus. Small groups presently conduct informal coaching, online classes and online quiz competitions for all classes through the Jharkhand Education Department’s portal.

In spite of doing so much, challenges continue to haunt Ekjut. Some of the most remote vulnerable tribal groups remain inaccessible at this time. Dissemination of services

is difficult due to prolonged travel and funding restrictions. However, Priyanka says optimistically, “Adaptability, resilience and creating an environment of perseverance for our colleagues and communities is our focus moving ahead. We are working on building virtual platforms and digital tools to continue building the capacity and skills of our communities.”

Archanaa Ramesh

5. Islampur Ramkrishnapally Rural Welfare Society (IRRWS)

Making Livelihoods Sprout Again



Uttar Dinajpur is a district in West Bengal, known for its historic sites and biodiversity. It is home to Raiganj Wildlife Sanctuary, the second largest bird sanctuary in all of Asia. The soil in the region is very fertile, its alluvial deposits aiding in the growth of paddy, jute, sugarcane, etc. However, Uttar Dinajpur was also named one of the country's 250 poorest districts, by the Ministry of the Panchayati Raj in 2006. Years prior to this, sensing the need for a grassroots movement towards holistic, multi-sectoral development, the idea for a voluntary organization was born. The Islampur Ramkrishnapally Rural Welfare Society (IRRWS) was founded in March 1995, as a platform to address issues of rural and urban development in Uttar Dinajpur district. Founders Mokter Hossain and Abdul Alim Parvej mobilized energetic youth, social workers, educators, retired government officials and other volunteers

to get together to carry out a host of projects, which have helped transform the region over the last 25 years.

Today, the organization runs several programs addressing livelihood needs and agricultural reforms, education, health needs, training programs, consumer awareness and advocacy programmes, as well as seminars and awareness programmes on various topics. Through their LIFE program, in 2019-2020 alone, IRRWS managed to establish eight community mushroom cultivating units, six new self-help groups (SHG), one producer's organization, and four farmers clubs. The organisation also enabled farmers in the area to adopt natural fertilisers through vermi-compost pits and azolla cultivation.

Out of 168 new kitchen gardens that were started in this same period, the story of Asiha Khatun (50) is noteworthy. Asiha and her husband Mohammed Salaluddin own 2,100 square feet of land in their backyard, that was left untouched for years. In October 2019, Asiha was a participant of the LIFE project meeting that was conducted near her home. She felt convinced to start a kitchen garden in her backyard and her family initially sowed leafy vegetables, gourds, green chillies, and herbs such as coriander. Having invested around 200 rupees for seeds and 300 rupees for organic manure, they were able to harvest vegetables just enough for their own consumption. Asiha used old and worn clothes to fence her garden, to keep away trespassing animals. As she kept regularly attending meetings and information sessions of IRRWS, she learnt to handle the challenges that came along the way – how to get rid of pests, how to increase the harvest, etc. After a year, she scaled up her operations, prepared a vermicompost pit as well as started cultivating azolla which served as feed for her cattle as well as a natural manure for her plants. Asiha is now producing vegetables in abundance and is sharing her knowledge with new trainees

who wish to learn about organic vegetable farming. Her family has thus far been able to save Rs. 15,000 in fresh produce alone.

Another exceptional example of IRRWS' success is that of Asila Begum (30). Asila Begum and her family cultivated paddy using traditional methods and got a yield of 10-15 quintals per year in their half-acre piece of land. Asila and her family attended LIFE Programme's training in Systematic Rice Intensification (SRI) method of paddy cultivation, which is a modern technique using a paddy transplanter. Enthused by this, Asila Begum and her husband purchased seeds worth 200 rupees and chose to grow them through the SRI method. IRRWS staff helped them with additional techniques such as seed purification using dense salt water technique, use of bio fertilizers, etc. The family's yield in the next harvest shot up to 22 quintals of rice, a substantial increase, compared to the previous year. They not only had rice stored away for their family for the whole year, but were even able to sell the surplus in the local market.

Apart from intensive organic farming related initiatives, IRRWS also helps establish technology in various aspects of their services. They run computer centres that are approved by the Ministry of Human Resources Development, for training candidates in the fields of accounting, computer applications and multilingual DTP thus enhancing their employability skills. The organisation runs a Diagnostics Centre and a Pathology Lab in the Islampur municipality where people living below the poverty line receive essential health services at half-price. Regular health camps are conducted in the region. IRRWS volunteers put up street plays, street art, and other creative expressions to help educate locals on consumer awareness. They also distribute books, bags and other school supplies to children in Uttar Dinajpur.

A wholly volunteer run organization, IRRWS has a well-established network of trusted partnerships with the local government, the Krishi Vigyan Kendra, public schools, hospitals, various regulatory authorities etc. Experts from each of these partner organizations go to the doorsteps of the people in Uttar Dinajpur to deliver their programmes, which makes it highly accessible to the target population.

In response to the COVID 19 pandemic, IRRWS, with support from GOONJ, organized the Dignity of Work programme. This program provided temporary employment to locals through Kaccha Road reparations, building ponds, as well building a tribal community hall. Over 250 families were provided with dry rations to sustain through the lockdowns.

There are multiple challenges in running IRRWS' programs. According to Abdul Alim Parvej, Co-founder, the changes in government policies, such as the FCRA act, hinders the smooth functioning of their foreign aid-dependent projects. Apart from these, local political issues and climate changes, such as unexpectedly heavy rainfall also affects their programmes.

“The COVID-19 pandemic proved to be the biggest challenge to run our programmes for the last two years,” says Parvej, adding that, “During the lockdown, it was very tough to continue field work as well as conduct our regular office work. Several of our upcoming programmes had to be cancelled. Funding took a severe beating, as we received funds after a long delay for some of our programmes, whereas for some others, previously approved funding was halted.”

Abdul Alim Parvej remains optimistic about what the future holds. He says, “IRRWS is poised to be a pioneer resource center for grassroots development initiatives. Our vision is to achieve a value-oriented sustainable society based on welfare-orientation, economic growth, local capacity-building and empowerment of people.”

Archanaa Ramesh

6. Mahila Abhivruddhi Society

Making Agripreneurs Out of Farmers



Anantapur district of Andhra Pradesh ranks second in terms of aridity, among all the districts in India, having an average annual rainfall of 526 mm. Its climate is characterised by prolonged dry spells, followed by few and irregular days of rainfall. Anantapur has been consistently facing drought conditions over the past many years, causing severe stress on the local economy, especially agriculture.

In the present decade, almost six years were rainfall deficient, resulting in severe drought conditions. These characteristics have forced the farmers in Anantapur to cultivate only those crops which can withstand drought conditions and can be sustained with limited water resources. The rich crop diversity in the district (particularly in millets and pulses that are naturally drought resistant) has eroded over time, giving way to monocropping of groundnut.

Not just Anantpur, farmers across the state continue to struggle to make their ends meet. The situation is even worse for women farmers. As per a survey conducted by

Landesa in 2013, only 13 percent of women surveyed, whose parents own land, said they have inherited land or expect to inherit land from their parents. Women inheriting land is so uncommon that 69 percent of the women surveyed said they did not know of a single case where a woman had inherited land from her parents. On the other hand, proportion of women agricultural labour is more than male labour in all the districts of Andhra. Yet, they are at the receiving end of injustice and inequality.

One organisation is trying to change this. Started in 2001, Mahila Abhivruddhi Society (APMAS) by Mr. CS Reddy aims to empower women, farmers, and other marginalised communities. It works towards strengthening Self Help Groups for holistic development of the marginalised communities.

In Anantpur, APMAS started Bhulakshmi FPO which implemented a community based seed system to decentralise the seeds for rain fed agriculture. Seed producers were linked with seed consumers and high quality seeds of multiple crops, and not just groundnuts were produced and supplied. This is just one out of many examples of community-level change APMAS has brought.

What they do?

APMAS expertises in promoting, training and mentoring women SHGs and SHG federations. They also work closely with farmer groups to create agriculture-based livelihoods and promotion of Farmer Producer Organisations (FPO). The organisation has set a momentum for promoting farming as an enterprise.

“Farmers face several issues today, like lack of remunerative prices, unavailability of quality inputs, high cost of

cultivation, lack of access to technology and information. Promotion of sustainable Farmer Producer Organisations has emerged as an effective solution to the farmers' issues in the past decade," Padmasri Nivedita, Project Coordinator at APMAS, said.

Ensuring the sustainability and business growth of these organisations is a major issue as agriculture is not perceived as a business.

They provide valuable knowledge and crucial information, build social capital and provide capacity building to the marginalised community. The organisation also offers advocacy, monitoring, research, and gender mainstreaming through its various programs. "We have also developed self-learning modules on collective marketing, primary processing and secondary processing by FPOs," said CS Reddy, Founder & CEO of APMAS.

The key idea is to make the marginalised community self-reliant and earn through dignity. APMAS has not only promoted over 47 FPOs in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana but is also a leading resource support agency (RSA) of NABARD in Andhra Pradesh & Telangana for training & providing business incubation support to FPOs and for capacity building across the country

The impact

APMAS through its various initiatives has brought the behavioural change in the community. The farmers now see farming as a viable and profitable business and themselves as agripreneurs. The people associated with the organisation have not just witnessed economic prosperity but also improved health, better nutrition, and gender equality in a thick patriarchal structure.

APMAS has trained over 4 lakh professionals and para professionals in SHG and agriculture sector. They have reached out to over 60,000 farm households through FPOs and conducted over 60 research studies and engaged in policy advocacy.

They are also directly promoting 73 FPOs in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, including 8 exclusive women FPOs. The FPOs are engaged in various business activities such as collective marketing of inputs and outputs, supply of vegetables to processing industries etc. Through the business taken up by the FPOs, the member farmers are able to avail quality inputs at competitive prices, Nivedita claims.

“Over the twenty years, APMAS has made a successful, yet a very challenging journey, in realising its vision for the empowerment of marginalised women and deprived communities and thereby contributing to poverty reduction initiatives,” said Nivedita.

Thanks to APMAS, several women farmers have found economic and social benefits. They have been able to not just become financially independent, but also enhance their social status in the community.

APMAS has direct presence in Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Bihar states and indirectly works in other states through partnerships. The team consists of 105 dedicated staff members (including 15 consultants) who are highly qualified in the streams of agriculture, institution building, capacity building, gender, research etc.

The challenges and road ahead

The organisation receives funding from various national and international donors, including the state and central

government and corporates. In spite of regular support from different agencies, the organisation continues to struggle to function smoothly. The legal framework and lack of availability of domain experts are their biggest challenges.

“In the future, APMAS plans to deepen its work in terms of promotion and strengthening of people’s institutions. It will further expand its work towards wealth creation and income increase in rural, urban and tribal areas,” shared Nivedita. Furthermore, it will also focus on creating livelihood options and improving quality of life of marginalized communities through an integrated development approach.

“Over the 20 years of journey we have learned the importance of partnerships and

collaborations in implementing development activities at ground level. It is very important to bring synergies among different players who are working towards the empowerment of marginalized communities in order to maximise the benefit,” she said.

APMAS is also working with the government to combat COVID-19 and to provide relief to the communities in the time of pandemic at the state level.

If you want to support APMAS, you can do so by either volunteering with them or by providing them financial support for various activities. To know more, check out their website (www.apmas.org).

Shreya Pareek

7. Manbhum Ananda Ashram Nityananda Trust (MANT)

People-Centred Development



Manbhum is a historically significant region in West Bengal. It has been a hub for social activism and people's movements since the days of the British Raj. It is a part of Purulia district, famed for its heritage dance-form "Purulia Chhau" and also, unfortunately, for its chronic famine and poverty. While the literacy rate among women in West Bengal is at 66% the same in Purulia is a dismal 51.29%, according to the 2011 census. It is in this context that Manbhum Ananda Ashram Nityananda Trust (MANT) began working to transform the lives of the people in and around this region. Today, 60 years since their inception, MANT have expanded their work to cover seven of the poorest districts in West Bengal and have also entered Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh with their innovative programs for creating greater access to education, healthcare, women's financial self-reliance and participatory approaches to poverty-alleviation.

MANT organizes regular mobile medical camps in 22 blocks covering seven districts of West Bengal. Director of MANT Dr. Nirmalya Mukherjee says, “Each year we reach out to 8-10 lakh people through these mobile medical clinics, providing primary healthcare services, diagnostic and X-Ray services free of cost”.

Since 2014 MANT has been organizing Tobacco Control campaigns all over the state. Their efforts have contributed to Howrah becoming one of only two South-East Asian cities to make significant strides towards becoming truly smoke-free, according to a WHO report.

Research has shown that women’s literacy and economic participation directly leads to the overall development of communities. Since 2015, women artistes, some from Purulia district and some from the Bankura Correctional Home have been trained in handloom weaving, hand embroidery, natural dye, designing using tribal motifs and latest trends in fashion and sales. Recently a handwoven garment production cum training centre has been set up in Purulia that supports nearly 500 such women. One of the artisans, Sefali Murmu says, “Our Santhali community makes a meagre earning for a part of the year through agricultural-labour. So, when we are out of work through the rest of the year, this handloom weaving unit provides us employment and supplements our income”.

MANT is also working with over 2000 households in Nagaland and in Arunachal Pradesh. Over 50 SHGs have been set up, with a membership of over 1000 women, working on different livelihood options. Dr. Mukherjee says that in the next five years, MANT hopes to create a sustainable social enterprise, a “food-park” that engages 5000 tribal women.

In order to create informed women leaders in the communities, “Nai Roshni” a six-day leadership development program, is conducted in Purulia. Supported by the Ministry of Minority Affairs, GOI, the program covers a multitude of modules, including Swachh Bharat training, health and hygiene awareness, financial system, legal rights and digital literacy, social advocacy and life-skills development.

Along with UNICEF, MANT raises awareness about sex-trafficking and child-marriage in 460 Anganwadi Centres within Purulia district. It conducts “Kanyashree Beta Sabha” a platform for adolescent girls to share their stories with others and also publishes “Amara Tara”, a newsletter that highlights the achievements of children and youth of Purulia. There is also a web portal and a mobile app that helps users to report any violations of child rights.

“Nityananda Janavani”, a community radio channel on 91.2 FM, offers programs for locals by locals, in their native tribal languages. Producing content from 6 am to 9 pm daily, the popular radio station is likely to go 24x7 in the near future. The stories from the community radio are routinely presented in international public health conferences, in Ethiopia, Indonesia and the Netherlands to name a few.

Aside from this, MANT also promotes a community video project for the Santhali and other tribal communities to showcase their ways of living, challenges, and best practices, thus empowering them with the use of dialogue to come up with solutions organically. An interactive voice response (IVR) based mobile radio called “Prantha-Kotha” enables locals to keep in touch with experts in nearby areas to help address everyday problems at home and at work. Using tollfree numbers, anyone in the villages can record their everyday problems in either Bengali or the Santhali

language. These will be listened to by experts who provide useful and practical solutions.

“The pandemic has affected the pace of work at MANT. Dr. Nirmalya Mukherjee says, “During the lockdown period, our garment production unit had to be closed, which had an adverse effect on the lives of our artisans. Our community radio and video teams were unable to continue their work as they could not meet with the locals as needed. All our outreach activities, training programs, survey work and meetings had to take place virtually. However, as it happens in rural areas, it was difficult for people to access these online meetings. Our administrative costs have significantly increased because of the various medical precautions that need to be taken.”

A number of changes have been made to their operations since the initial stages of the lockdowns. Apart from equipping their offices and centres with the required posters and safety supplies, MANT has been conducting several information sharing activities through their community radio. “Ajker Tara” is a unique program where people share positive health behaviour that they have adopted to prevent COVID-19. A community kitchen was set to supplement the food access of local people. A Knowledge Attitude and Practices (KAP) study was conducted and published in a peer-reviewed journal, using telephonic interviews for data collection.

MANT is moving ahead through these challenging times, undeterred in their motto- people-centric, participatory development. Speaking about MANT’s future, Dr. Mukherjee says,” In the next five years a number of exciting developments are on the cards, such as the setting up of a sustainable social enterprise, a technology hub for tribal women, a tribal cultural centre, diversifying into eco-tourism, and establishing MANT as a prominent research organization.”

8. Shelter Associates

Identity and Urban Poverty



Urban poverty is an intricate phenomenon and slums in India have time and again demonstrated the functional hassles in developing them. “People from slums are used to common, community facilities for basic needs like sanitation. Cluttered, squalid tenements and inadequate access to facilities like water and electricity not only indicate gaps, but also the multiplying challenges in reaching them at the current rate of urbanisation. Unless we accept slums to be an integral part of our cities and plan their development from a city wide perspective, we won’t be fair to the bulk of the labour force who are the backbone of a city’s growth,” states Ms. Pratima Joshi, Founder and Executive Director at Shelter Associates, Pune.

Pratima is an Architect from Pune who strongly believed in the concept of sustainable cities and the incredible role slum rehabilitation could play in the development of cities. “As architects we tried to refine the interface between slum communities, urban local bodies and the city as a whole. With experience we realised how valuable this was,” she emphasizes.

Founded in 1994, the organisation strives to improve the lives of urban poor. Fully aware of the need for real time and reliable data on slum households' needs, a tailored Geographic Information System (GIS) was developed and used to map slums across Pune in 2000. "This was more than a milestone for us because city corporations found the data relatable and ground breaking. Soon they also used our data for their planning exercises. For the first time, a genuine, ground level attempt was made to map poverty and infrastructure in the slums. We were building slums' portfolios, making them visible as a community bereft of amenities but fully aware of their needs," adds Pratima.

Multi stakeholder approach and a cost sharing model together made way for simple, comfortable homes for households that had once given up hopes on rehabilitation. "Their livelihood matters a lot! So we did not take them far. Every such concern was factored in and the multi stakeholder approach ensured that service users and service providers, had their stakes accounted for. Hence service delivery and usage was made adequate, affordable and accessible," says Pratima. The first rehabilitation project was undertaken in 1996 in Rajendra Nagar, Pune. The slum's journey to a housing society exemplifies people's participation in both planning and construction. First of its kind, again, community members' contribution in terms of labour motivated Shelter Associates to dream bigger. "People loved planning the layout, deciding on common spaces and toilet maintenance. They owned the project and their participation made the whole project cost effective. After a yearlong effort, every family from that slum had a house in an apartment complex. They were all home," she smiles.

With local labour comes in local materials and also suitable building materials that are friendly to local weather conditions. As families settle in appropriately built

spaces, they are very much visible to service providers. Next to housing, sanitation is an important aspect of slum rehabilitation that needs to be seen from a long term, integrated perspective. Community toilet blocks as the only sanitation solution was definitely not working and the issue of huge maintenance costs needed attention. Shelter Associates' intervention brought about a refreshing change in the sanitation space. "Ours is the most successful model in sanitation and Swach Bharat Abhiyan gave the right impetus. We provided materials at the door step and families took it upon themselves to get their toilets constructed. The fact that they were ready to allocate space for a toilet inside their small homes shows that sanitation is extremely important for them. We busted myths related to people's inability or disinterest to contribute," explains Pratima.

Infrastructure mapping and surveys were conducted to identify most needy/vulnerable families for construction of individual toilets. Workshops and focus group discussions allowed all community members to express their say on sanitation issues. Meanwhile, it also helped them recognise and reform some of their inappropriate, unsustainable practices. And, the cost sharing feature not only ensured usage but a positive behavioural change in terms of sanitation practices. "One might be surprised to learn that every age group, every gender and also the differently abled – each had their own concerns and were able to agree on a common solution," she adds.

One Home One Toilet project is a successful, sustainable and replicable project completely based on the extensive infrastructure mapping of slums to study roads, drain network, sewage management and household level data collection to comprehend user profiles. 'Over the eight years, Shelter Associates has facilitated the construction of more than 23,000 individual toilets in slums across 7 cities

- Pune, Thane, Navi Mumbai, Kolhapur, Sangli, Pimpri-Chinchwad and Panvel, reaching out to more than 370,000 persons directly and indirectly.’ This project earned Shelter Associates many awards including the LPC Honor Award at UN Habitat World Urban Forum in 2020.

To Pratima and team, data is their backbone. Over 298,000 families have been surveyed. Detailed data collected by community members and then spatially organised through GIS is also used by city corporations and made available on their websites. As a data driven organisation, Shelter Associates has not only shown how to identify needy families, rather it has exemplified a city wide vision to plan for a household in the interiors of a slum. Further, they have attempted to provide a digital location address to every individual household making it easier for the families to acquire government identity cards, service delivery through online apps and many other essential services like LPG. The project Plus Codes has answered families’ address woes that made it difficult for them to open bank accounts and also helps city corporations to provide effective and efficient service delivery (water, electricity, etc.) for slum dwellers.

Using data to redefine the right to identity of every slum household, Shelter Associates has opened a vast array of opportunities for both communities and urban local bodies to interact and work together. The disconnect which earlier existed has now reduced and all the engagement has improved the confidence of these communities. New opportunities for livelihood and interaction with the outside world has made way for new aspirations and a new identity.

Shanmuga Priya.T

9. Shramik Bharti

Holistic Community Organization



Once known as the Manchester of the East for its prolific textile and labour industries, Kanpur has traditionally been the centre of labour movements. However, towards the end of the 20th Century, the textile industry faced a total collapse and the workforce found themselves starting their lives all over again. It is in this context that in 1986, Ganesh Pandey, who was actively involved with textile mill trade unions since his youth, started Shramik Bharti, a grassroots development organization. His vision was “Sustainable living with equal opportunities for all”. Over the past three decades Shramik Bharti has grown into a community-development behemoth, helping rural and urban communities organize themselves into self-help groups, pursue alternative livelihoods, attain water and food-security, adapt to renewable energy, and increase literacy levels through promoting education.

Community Organization

Women's Self-Help Groups (SHG) are at the core of Shramik Bharti's work in the sustainable development of communities in Uttar Pradesh and Punjab. These SHGs engage in microfinance, financial literacy, innovative agriculture, leadership development, as well as in the promotion of local crafts and artisanship. In Uttar Pradesh alone there are over 20,000 women members of SHGs. In Punjab, 11 SHGs have come together to form a craftsmanship company named Virsa Woman Crafts Pvt. Ltd. Another eight SHGs formed the "Umrutsur Food Pvt. Ltd." A food processing company that sells organic foods.

Waqt Ki Awaz

A community radio station, Waqt Ki Awaz 91.2 FM was formally registered in 2013 to broadcast programs on a wide range of topics including socio-economic development, water security, gender equality and local governance among other things. The unique feature about this community radio is that its programs are all conducted in local dialects of rural Uttar Pradesh. It caters to an audience of 5,00,000 listeners from 300 villages in Kanpur Nagar and Kanpur Dehat districts of Uttar Pradesh. Heading this radio station is Radha Shukla, a social worker, who is also the most popular voice on it. She trains youth to bring in stories, prepare scripts, produce and broadcast programs as well.

"Solar Didi"

Pushpalata Rathore, a.k.a Gudiya, is a young widow who came to live in her parental village of Hadha in Kanpur in 2010. A mother of two, she had been hustling, taking tuition-classes for children, cycling 15 kms to be a tailor and earning enough to support herself and her children. In 2013, when Shramik

Bharti introduced training sessions for “solar-mechanics”, as a part of their larger renewable energy mission, Gudiya approached them and expressed an interest to be trained in what is a largely male-dominated profession. She now installs solar lights and fumeless cook stoves in the villages surrounding her home, and also looks after the maintenance and repairs of solar equipment, earning the popular title, “Solar Didi”.

Shramik Bharti undertakes the installation of solar street lights, home lighting solutions, solar lantern charging stations, and installation of solar micro grids, A/C grids, irrigation pumps, and smokeless cook stoves. Their green skill training programs help youth such as Gudiya to acquire skilled trades.

Water Security Program

Shramik Bharti promotes equitable and efficient water management through capacitating communities and the local governments (Panchayat) in the development of Water Security Plans. They help in bringing to the fore, water security issues in the Gram Panchayat Development Plans. They help build rain water harvesting structures, recharge wells, rejuvenate and clean ponds.

Natural Farming

Since 2015 Shramik Bharti has promoted Zero Budget Natural Farming. Natural farming has been able to improve natural resource use-efficiency as well as rekindle the interest of small and marginal farmers in pursuing farming and food production activities. A bouquet of activities lend themselves to this purpose such as kitchen gardens, community seed banks, model farms, processing and storage facilities.

Allied Agriculture Activities

Backyard Poultry and goat rearing has emerged as simple yet effective means of nutrition and additional income to marginalized households. Mainly managed by landless women SHG members, each household is provided 20 local breeds of chicks or 2 pregnant female goats respectively. Some beneficiaries get entrepreneurial with their poultry or livestock, making some additional income to support their households. Mushroom farming is also promoted, with seeds, materials and training provided by Shramik Bharti.

Other Holistic Programs

Since 2008 Shramik Bharti is working towards building a supportive environment to achieve change in behaviour related to sanitation and hygiene such as handwashing behaviour.

They are also working towards strengthening infrastructure and improving teaching skills of teachers of government primary schools in Uttar Pradesh & Punjab. Through capacity building of volunteer educators, innovative teaching learning materials are introduced in 21 Government schools in 4 districts of Uttar Pradesh & in 12 villages of Punjab. Aanganwadi centres in Uttar Pradesh & Punjab are also improved to create a fun learning atmosphere for pre-school goers. Shramik Bharti is engaged in mobilization & capacity building of Gram Panchayats in Uttar Pradesh. Additionally, Community Grain Bank, a community-owned initiative is playing a crucial role in ensuring food security.

CEO Rakesh Kumar Pandey says, “The communities in which we work are marginalized, exploited by markets, political parties, religious leaders, the system at large. Gaining the trust of the community is itself a huge

challenge. Further their risk-taking ability has become negligible or zero, so when it comes to persuading them shift to sustainable practices (for example to natural farming or use of renewable energy etc.), it becomes even more challenging.”

As for the current global pandemic, Mr. Pandey says, “There have been sweeping changes in funding for such interventions. A large part of our donor fund was moved to the PM Cares Fund. Added to this is the recent change in FCRA to receive grants from Foreign / International Organisations. It has drastically reduced inflow of international funds for NGOs.”

“At Shramik Bharti we are and will always be committed to ecologically sustainable human development. We will continue to build capacities of deprived communities to improve their quality of life”, says Mr. Pandey as he signs off.

Archanaa Ramesh

10. Soulfree

Being the Change



My mother wanted me to be the change. I wanted to save lives. I wanted to show that the idea of ability is never limited to one's body.

Life is full of surprises and shocks. How one responds to these defines an individual's personality. And the changes that come up eventually could not only be life changing for the concerned person, but also for many others who may not have thought from that perspective. Ms. Preethi Srinivasan, Co-Founder of Soulfree, a Public Charitable Trust in Thiruvannamalai, Tamil Nadu has shown the way forward for quadriplegics like her and is determined to show how positively-abled any individual could be, irrespective of the challenges in their body.

Spinal cord injury is an incurable condition that completely changes lives in a split second. From being a national level swimmer and the youngest member of Tamil Nadu senior women's cricket team, under whose leadership the under-19 cricket team won its only national championship, Preethi became physically confined due an accident on the shores of Pondicherry. "Suddenly it was like I was invisible. Nobody looked at me in the eye and that broke me. People could not think of me beyond my wheel chair. Fortunately, I had people around me, especially my mother, who reassured that I was what I think and I was what I do. I slowly came to terms with my condition, learnt about being a quadriplegic and the adjustments to live with my new body," admits Preethi.

"My father's demise and mother's bypass surgery forced me to introspect about my future. What will I be without my mom? Those seven hours when my mother was being operated, I could not help but delve into the plight of women like me who could end up without any source of support in any form. I wondered if we were even cared for," she shares. She was shocked to learn that there were no long term facilities to support women in her condition. Post-surgery, her mother's recovery and the struggles she faced kept Preethi thinking. Her mother too felt the chills and recounted that she too was scared about her daughter's future. "There are many mothers like mine who need an external source of assurance that their children will be safe and sound after their lifetime. I wondered if I could do anything at all. The news of two paraplegic girls' suicide shook us. My mother wanted me to be the change. I wanted to save lives. I wanted to show that the idea of ability is never limited to one's body," says Preethi.

Soulfree was officially registered as a Public Charitable Trust in 2013 to improve the quality of lives of persons

with severe disabilities, primarily those facing a lifetime of paralysis due to spinal cord injury. Right from building awareness for self, family and community, to medical rehabilitation, Soulfree intends to demonstrate that right to life is a fundamental right with no tags attached. “It is usually accepted that we have no role in society – not as a spouse, not as a student, not as an employee. All doors are shut and there is no attention to help us adapt with our new bodies. There is no specific data about us; we are not even counted and there are no rehabilitation centres. In many places, our condition is read with locomotor disabilities, hence no focus is placed upon our actual needs and issues. Soulfree aims to show how an integrated approach can change this scenario and build an ecosystem of services that can lead to independence and self-reliance,” explains Preethi, quickly adding that independence also means the freedom to use a restroom whenever they wished to.

One of Soulfree’s primary focus is on education, to build awareness on spinal cord injury which has been termed the world’s most debilitating condition by the WHO as it results in permanent and severe physical impairments. The team reaches out to every school or college wherever possible to get the message out and sensitise the families and society. “When we say sensitise, it is a bigger connotation than often understood. Medical services must be prompt in attending to care and emergency needs of those in my condition. Accessibility and Inclusion are two sides of the same coin and the first, undeniably the most crucial aspect is the gesture from people around. There is difference between telling a paraplegic or quadriplegic that you believe in them and your gesture in letting them be themselves. That is the level of sensitivity we must get used to and respect their choices and aspirations. A sensitive society aims to create space for those who feel left out. We are definitely taking

steps in the right direction but it is a very long way up till there,” asserts Preethi.

Provision of mobility aides, airbeds, retrofitted scooters, monthly stipends, medical support, counselling and education, employment consultation (like voice based jobs) have all been brought under one roof to shape Soulfree as a one stop resource and research centre in a span of eight years. Having touched the lives of more than 1,000 families, Soulfree has left no stone unturned in saving the lives of many. “We know people dying of as simple and treatable cause as bed sores. I would say society, as a whole has failed in building itself for us. We can be taught to be as productive as anybody. I want my community to recognise themselves for what they are,” says an emotional Preethi, who never misses an opportunity to communicate how small changes and gestures could be life changing for persons facing a lifetime of paralysis.

A fully equipped rehabilitation centre has been Soulfree’s dream from day one and today they are ready to launch their 20,000 square feet facility with a capacity of 60 residents. Built against all odds, including the pandemic, the entire building is wheel chair accessible. Offering a variety of therapies including Hydrotherapy, the very functioning of this rehabilitation centre will set a precedent and help develop a new framework for the management of persons with permanent paralysis. With international organisations already inclined to collaborate and associate, Soulfree is all set to revive, rather rewrite lives. “As word spreads, I sure hope we don’t get to hear news of paralysed individuals committing suicide for being in a condition that is no fault of theirs. We must learn to invest in helping them live a dignified life,” insists Preethi.

Shanmuga Priya.T

11. South Asian Forum for Environment (SAFE)

Facing the Undeniable Truth



How perceptive are we towards environment? Are our kids aware about environmental issues? These questions are not only relevant and relatable but raise a genuine concern about the crisis humanity has to face. Are we doing enough to protect the next generation? Rather, are we preparing them at all? Questions are many, but answers are not straight forward.

“There needs to be a continuum between science and society, an interface that can allow interaction, which can attempt at answering these questions in a microcosm. As efforts begin, resilience becomes the focus. This is our experience, in short,” smiles Ms. Amrita Chatterjee, Director – Communications at South Asian Forum for Environment (SAFE) in Kolkata, West Bengal.

SAFE was founded in 2004 by Dr. Dipayan Dey and his team of environment conscious scientists who were trying to understand issues in the eco-region of South Asia.

Completely aware of the challenges and vulnerabilities the communities in this region faced, SAFE wanted to demonstrate how poverty alleviation, livelihood protection and environment protection can be achieved in climate prone eco systems. “The very idea of environment needs to be understood from a broader perspective and the pertinent issues cannot be contained by political boundaries. Any crisis, man-made or human, affects all adjacent countries and operating from a regional base helps understand habitats better,” adds Amrita.

One of the significant contributions of SAFE is the new age bio-rights paradigm that financially acknowledges the contribution of local communities in conserving natural ecosystems. This paradigm shift has also influenced the pressing need to look into alternate, sustainable livelihoods as an essential component of climate and environment related projects. “It is high time we all accepted that every livelihood needs to adapt. Fishing for example is a very sensitive profession. When a highly nutritious fish from wetlands (Nadosh, for example), also with high demand in the market becomes endemic, it is a crisis situation for the fishing families whose economy thrived on that fish. How do they adapt?” she asks.

Based on rigorous research till 2008, SAFE began to implement small and large scale projects from 2009. Strategically securing habits like waste recycling, plastic free zones, energy conservation along with eco-tourism, SAFE has successfully inspired communities to think from science-society interface. “We not only built this idea, but made it into a thought process in our project areas. Communities have started thinking about their livelihoods within the frame of environment and climate change. In the beginning, this was not easy at all. But, we have made a

steady progress now by taking one step at a time,” says proud Amrita.

Food security is totally disturbed during a disastrous situation like floods. Nevertheless, communities continue to survive in flood prone areas. SAFE came up with the innovative float farming method where plants are cultivated on floating rafts in flood waters. Majuli in Assam (the largest river island in the world), for instance, is flooded for five months in a year. Float farming on bamboo rafts proved to be a phenomenal means of livelihood to sustain the communities. Indigenous communities that survived on the traditional red rice, now get to consume healthy vegetables also. This was then replicated in Sunderbans where high salinity of soil restricts its productivity of food and medicinal plants. As part of flood resilient agriculture, SAFE has also introduced carbon neutral practices like aqua farming (in Sunderbans of West Bengal and Bhittarkanika of Odisha), algae culture, crab flattening, and mangrove cultivation in eastern coastal regions.

SAFE continues to re-envision sustainable development goals by promoting climate adaptive interventions. Communities being key participants and stake holders in the process, SAFE has set a benchmark in achieving common good in its real sense. Its efforts and the strength of its strategies are evident from its position at the UN Environment Assembly and consultative status with many regional and international bodies like the ECOSOC, UNDP, UNEP, UNFCCC, World Bank and Asian Bank.

Extensive research into local habitats, eco systems has helped in innovation, which is the backbone of SAFE’s success. “Climate resilience is an ocean. We are still learning. We strongly vouch for practices that suit local climate factors and therefore, resilience becomes a natural

outcome. Economic returns may profess prawn cultivation in mangroves, but now that we know it makes the soil saline, communities have adapted. Such changes take some time and SAFE believes that building community leaders must be an integral part of any such initiative. Because, after adapting, communities must evolve,” says Amrita hopefully, explaining the relevance of Living Labs.

CRACK – Centre for Community Resilience Adaptation and Climate Knowledge is a sincere effort to build a community resource centre powered by green energy to facilitate eco learning, resolving challenges or constraints in local farming practices, preserving local crops and a multitude of concerns. Climate vulnerable communities are encouraged to use this facility to map existing knowledge, resources and track new practices to resolve issues like provision of clean drinking water throughout the year. “In short, communities are prepared to evolve with changing climate. One has to see the relevance to adapt. Living Labs make sure to demonstrate this relevance with changing time, climate and needs,” she closes, reiterating the importance of working with communities.

Shanmuga Priya.T

12. Ugam Educational Foundation

When The Girl Child Reads



The Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV) Scheme was introduced by the Government of India in the year 2004, for setting up residential schools at the upper primary level for girls belonging to under-served communities. The scheme is being implemented in Educationally Backward Blocks (EBB) of the country, to bring the female literacy rate in these areas up to par with the national average.

With a greater share of the seats in these schools reserved for girls from historically marginalized communities, these KGBV schools are one of the most inclusive institutions in the country today.

As is the case with any system, the KGBV's suffer from a variety of issues, mostly arising out of a deficiency of resources, both in terms of infrastructure and in terms of training. On a mission to make model schools out of these KGBV's, is Ugam Educational Foundation, a not-for-profit organization focused on transforming education systems and empowering girls in needy districts.

Ugam was founded by Lopa Gandhi in 2015. A lifelong resident of Mumbai, Lopa Gandhi has been working in the field of education, curriculum development, training, coaching, and organizational leadership for over 20 years, having been closely associated with leading organizations such as Akanksha, Kaivalya and Mukhtangan, among others. Yearning to create change in rural regions where access to education is even lower than in the urban landscape that she was already familiar with, she set out on assignments in rural regions all the way across the country, in Jharkhand, trying to understand how things work there. It was on one such assignment that she felt a compelling need to start Ugam.

Says Lopa, “We have been witness to several incidences of violence and crimes against the girl child. It is one thing to go on a candle march to protest against these things. But it continued to bother me and my team as we wondered what we could do to address the systemic factors that are enabling repeated incidences of crime and violence. It was then that one of the district collectors we were working with, suggested that we take a look at the Kasturba Gandhi schools in the state. We studied this space for four to five months, understanding how these schools are run. We recognized the challenges faced by adolescent girls in these socio-economically underprivileged societies.”

The challenges faced by adolescent girls struck Lopa as unique. Having to navigate puberty, poverty, the prospect of being married away early and subsequently burdened with early motherhood, these young girls had challenges stacked up against them at an early age. Lopa and her team also noted that in 2015, there weren't many NGOs servicing these regions in Jharkhand yet. A small change in a Hindi-speaking rural heartland would have a ripple effect on the larger economically backward rural belt.

Currently Ugam works with 61 KGBV schools spread across five districts in Jharkhand. Ugam works with students, teachers, and wardens who run the schools, creating different levels of training and meaningful engagement with each of them. The Ugam team conducts sessions on Menstrual Hygiene, Self-Awareness, Critical Thinking and Career Guidance for the girls enrolled in the KGBV's.

Urja, a bi-monthly newsletter, created for the girls, by the girls, helps expand their world view by featuring stories and creative expressions of people of their own age group, who are living in geographic regions. Special attention is paid to fluency and comprehension in English. Urja is the girls' window to a larger world, outside of the confines of their residential campus. Designed in-house, the girls eagerly look forward to every upcoming edition of Urja.

Teacher-training workshops are conducted to help build a culture of continuous learning among teachers. The training involves becoming familiar with current technology. "The teachers come from the same environment that the girls come from. They also carry some of the implicit biases that the society has laid on them." Says, Lopa. Therefore, aside from pedagogical training, the teachers are also trained in socio-emotional support and reflective practice.

Ugam stands out for the support and training they provide wardens. Wardens essentially run the school, says Lopa. They have the most responsibility both in terms of direct care of the girls, as well as administrative/managerial responsibilities of the institution. Wardens are provided with individualized coaching to harness their leadership skills, and are given documents, workbooks and additional resources to improve their institutional processes. "We conducted a 'visioning' exercise where wardens described their ideal KGBV graduate" says Lopa. These kinds of

exercises help bring out the pride and sense of ownership among wardens.

Lopa is sympathetic to the difficult situations that the teachers and wardens face, as they fight their own personal battles while trying to do their best at work. Sometimes a teacher might juggle two to three jobs.

Since the onset of the pandemic, many of the girls had to go back home, where they were once again reduced to doing chores. Some were married off before the lockdowns ended. However, even those few who have been married off, have requested their school's support to complete their 12th Std. from home. In response to the pandemic, Ugam collaborated with wardens to identify dynamic alumni of their schools and enlisted these alumni to become teachers in the communities.

Ugam established the “Sashakti Fellowship” a name given by the girls themselves, to provide a new purpose to girls who have graduated from the KGBV schools. Sefali Soren is a Sashakti Fellow. An undergraduate student, Sefali has been delivering Ugam's educational tools and conducting sessions for her juniors in her community. Even if the gates of the school closed for the season, the books, education and training now find their way to the doorsteps of girls.

Ugam is currently in talks with the district collector of newer districts in Jharkhand to expand their programs and services. When asked about her vision for a post-pandemic Ugam, Lopa says, “The vision stays the same, pandemic or no pandemic-that every person in KGBV is empowered and educated. We wish to create model KGBV schools in the whole of Jharkhand, if not the entire country”.

Archanaa Ramesh

OPINION

1. Achieving Impact Through Fintech



We all know that global development organizations and financial regulators have accepted that financial inclusion plays an important role in achieving socio-economic outcomes in a country. After various bank-community linkage and individual micro-lending models, market is now flooded with modern technology enabled financial solutions, called fintech. These fintech companies are not only changing the urban financial landscape, but also show promising solutions for rural development.

Fintech is coined by combining two words Finance & Technology, these institutions provide financial services to its users, through innovative use of technology. World observe fintech companies as game changer in achieving Inclusive Finance and Sustainable Development Goals. Increasing growth of this sector can also be observed through increasing trust of investors and rising investments in recent years. Recent CGAP reports show that global investments in fintech grew more than 2.5 times during 2014-19, from US\$51 bn to US\$135.7 billion. Although this trend got a shock during pandemic and low rates of investments are seen during 2020 and till date.

Fintech organizations are able to attract various type of finance, including donations, investments and even debts; all this is possible mainly due to the business versatility and give insight about how development, finance and economic world look at it. Development agencies see fintech as a potential solution to achieve inclusive and sustainable financial ecosystem. This ecosystem will also enhance transparency, reduce turnaround time and lower the cost of finance for users in long term. The overwhelming response of investors also possesses some underlying risks associated with financial sector and company specific strategies. These risks prevail mainly due to integrated service delivery approach of fintech companies, where financial institution, technology company, regulators and beneficiaries remain inter-connected within broad guideline issued by regulators. Here we talk about financial, telecom, internet and other regulators; working in this business environment is always challenging.

Fintechs face some interrelated challenges like inefficient market conditions, availability of capital for growth and reaching the underserved. Any fintech requires good technology infrastructure and supportive regulations to foster growth, India is such an example. Another important thing required for growth of fintech requires capital for research, development and roll out. Fintech organizations look for relevant capital solutions, depending upon their stage of growth. New fintech companies look for donations or investment to prove the concept in specific demography. Growth stage fintech requires money for expansion and replication, this may come in the form of debt or equity and in some cases as donations (excepting high social returns). It takes time for fintech companies to reach low income segment and provide solutions as per their need. This mainly happens due to the fact that technology inclusion with financial services is still seen as a risky affair; many

organizations are not able to build trust among rural and semi-urban customers.

Few investors see fintech as a driver for social change as it possesses an ability to create large level impact within short period of time. These investors are termed as ‘Impact Investors’; they form a subset of ‘Development Funders’, denoting organizations which seek to achieve development goals. Impact investors look at opportunities to amplify their impact results. Fintechs have successfully created an ecosystem where users are free to access, compare and use financial products and services on the basis of their requirement. To this, market reacted responsively by innovating new products/services for users. Fintech companies in some countries have offered micro-insurance products for small holder farmers, micro-pension products for poor households, micro savings/credit products for individuals and groups, quick overdraft facilities for producer organizations and so on.

Impact investors look at fintech companies/solutions as a driver for social development and leverage technology for amplifying outcomes and impact of their projects. Impact investors use different strategy to enter the market and achieve their overall outcomes by broad category based on age of the fintech company, i.e. Early, Growth and Mature Stage

The investment strategy depends largely upon their present solutions and future potentials, with overall objective to remain sustainable in operations and financial terms. The impact goal for a fintech at Early Stage is to provide usable solutions for excluded group available in market. This becomes a niche segment and hence gives potential to pilot and expand. Same way, fintech at Growth Stage keep their focus on expansion in same and new areas, with proper management of consumer

related privacy and other risks associated with finance, operations and innovative technology. Mature Stage fintech look out for better positive outcome from the excluded group and move further on its mission and vision.

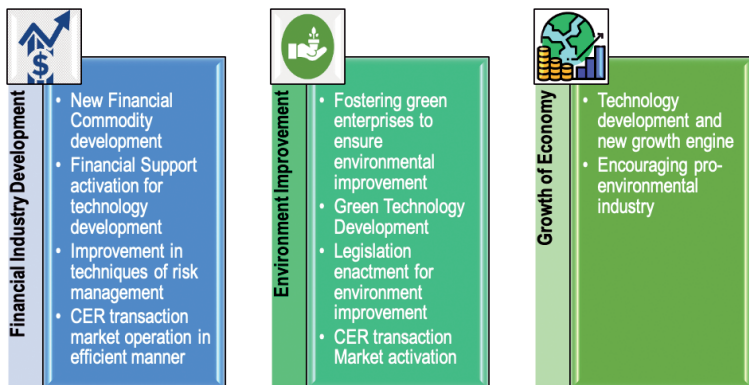
Early stage or Seed or Series A funding is made for fintech to refine business model nurture innovative businesses with impact potential. These funding opportunities are made available through local incubation and accelerator hubs working locally with knowledge institutes and industry think tanks. Another way of supporting is to provide technical assistance and grant assistance to these companies for refinement of their business model and contribution in overall capital for research and development.

Growth stage or Series B & C funding is made available for fintech companies to scale their business and develop channels for open channels of commercial funding. This funding involves player who are risk takers and show faith in future growth prospects of the overall business model. Capital is available to these organizations in the form of pure debt or other blended finance including crowd or equity funding options.

Maturity stage or Series D & Higher funding is another funding option, only available to fintech companies to increase their depth of business model and record how services are impacting the life of beneficiaries. The funding is available in the form of grants or equity investment from organizations or individuals who want to leverage deepening impact at the bottom of the pyramid. The evidences of impact are collected, inferred and final results help from policy advocacy till ultimate benefits actually received by various stakeholders in fintech ecosystem.

Dr. Agyeya Trippathi

2. Environmental Finance



In year 2015, United Nations approved Sustainable Development Goals as universal call to take actions against environment protection, poverty, hunger, justice and peace. SDGs combine major social and environmental goals to achieve sustainable growth. The concept of Environmental Finance is not new but it got much needed attention after introduction of SDGs. In broad way, various pricing and trading policies that are applied to reduce the negative impact of climate change are considered under the purview of Environmental Finance. Basic idea behind the concept is to reallocate all business resources for improving investment sustainability along with ensuring profit. Funding for Projects that harm/damage environment is prohibited under the practice of environmental financing. Corporates, businesses, NPOs, Government organizations and even individual households are practicing environmental financing today.

Undoubtedly, achievement of SDGs requires funding, UNACTAD (2015) highlighted that the investment gap for environmental finance in developing nations is US\$ 2.5 trillion, which is more than India's GDP alone. It is estimated that annual global requirement to achieve

SDGs will reach USD\$5 to USD\$7 trillion by 2030. Financial institutions play a significant role in providing timely, customized and affordable financial solutions to beneficiaries and stakeholders. Environment Finance can broadly be categorized in three parts to achieve sustainability in long term.

Industrial development activities have utilized available natural resources for its development and growth. A section of global community over utilized these resources while others are still deprived of basic living needs, liking availability of water and food. Studies have shown that developed economies have played a significant role in polluting the globe and bringing in the overall environmental imbalance. The residuals of chemicals which are dumped in oceans, poisonous gases coming out from factories, non-biodegradable waste burrowed into the ground has disturbed the basic ecology of our planet. From global warming to increased number of natural calamities to unconventional temperature and rainfall levels, all connect to one primary cause, i.e. environment.

It is well established facts that countries and communities do not want to compromise in industrial and economic growth, but certainly we need to find alternative ways of doing business which causes less pollution and are environment friendly. Adoption of new processes, methods and systems require new technology, research and efficient machines/tools. Industry and economies see this transformation as a cost centric activity and hence try to escape from modern environmental friendly ways and means. Global development institutions are now working close with government, policy makers, financial institutions, environmentalists and civil society organizations to develop financial solutions for environment stakeholders to tackle this issue. At this juncture the concept of environmental

finance got attention from policy makers, governments and development institutions.

Instruments for Environmental Finance

Different stakeholders have different outcome orientation, each is on a lookout of specific indicators and result oriented parameters, because of this number of financial instruments have been designed for environment sustainability.

Governments and corporations are adopting for Green Bonds to meet the requirement of finance for sustainable environment. These bonds are basically a debt instrument through which funds are raised for projects to prevent pollution prevention, support sustainable agriculture, fisheries, water recycling, develop clean transportation for smart cities etc. Tax incentive feature of Green Bond makes it more acceptable in market. The World Bank is major issuer of such bonds. Since year 2008, world bank has issued \$14.4 billion to support 111 projects globally related with renewable energy, agriculture, clean transportation etc.

Apart from Green bonds, other popular instruments are Sustainability Bonds, Social Bonds, Green Loans, and Sustainability-linked loans (or sustainability-improvement loans, or ESG-linked loans). These bonds are issued specifically to finance the combination of green and social projects. Sustainable bonds were issued for the very first time in 2014 by Unilever.

Bonds which are targeted to finance social projects are known as Social Bonds. For small or medium sized enterprises not possessing sufficient credit ratings to get loans in capital market, sustainability linked loans are provided. These loans are given in accordance with company's ESG ratings (determined by independent party).

Environmental Finance in India

India started working on this concept as early as 2007. RBI published a notification “Corporate Social Responsibility, sustainable development and non-Financial reporting – Role of Banks” in December 2007 to highlight the issue of global warming and climate change. Broad policy framework was formulated in “National Action plan on Climate Change” in 2008 to reduce and manage the risk and impact of climate change. Based on market capitalization, top 100 companies listed in BSE and NSE are now asked to produce their annual business responsibility reports as per the guidelines issued by SEBI. To achieve India’s commitments in Paris Agreement -2015, many fiscal and financial incentives have been approved, including 30% subsidy for rooftop solar panel, Fame scheme (Faster adoption and manufacturing of electric vehicles), green car loan scheme by SBI with longer repayment window and 20 basis point lower interest rate, Production linked Incentive scheme for high efficiency modules manufacturing in area of renewable energy are some initiatives under environmental finance.

Consideration of small renewable energy sector under priority sector lending by RBI is another example of environmental finance in country. Credit enhancement scheme launched by IIFCL to fund viable infrastructure projects with bond tenors above 5 years, IREDA’s announcement to become India’s first green bank to promote clean energy investments shows government’s commitment and seriousness for this issue.

It is evident that all countries including India are keeping environment sustainability at the core of overall sustainability goals of the country. Countries like India, where economy is growing and per capita income is less, population and communities remain less participative in

environmental issues. Plurality of green loan definition, high borrowing costs, mismatch between long term and short-term interest on green investment are few of the major challenges for environmental finance. Green bond issuing cost has been higher than other bonds in India. Existing literature suggests that green projects often have a high up-front cost with some cost-saving features only applicable in the long-term. Maturity-mismatches in green projects and their financing increase the cost of borrowing. Apart from all the constructive efforts at national level, there is urgent need of awareness and knowledge sharing activities on risks related to environment, development of local green bond markets, facilitating cross border investments in green bonds, improving overall green finance activities and spreading awareness about the financial benefits to common man for his contribution towards environmental protection.

Financial institutions need be vigilant against practices of “Green Washing” where companies take financial advantages under false claim of environment protection-oriented projects.

Dr. Agyeya Trippathi

3. POVERTY – Seeing Vs Resolving



Poverty is multidimensional issue, which cannot be defined or seen under specially selected parameters. The World Bank's poverty definition says, "A person is considered poor if his or her income level fall below some minimum level necessary to meet basic needs." It sets this minimum level, or international poverty line, as living on less than \$1.90 a day. This standardization is termed as Extreme Poverty by World Bank, but extreme poverty is more than just a number. USAID defines extreme poverty as "the inability to meet basic consumption needs on a sustainable basis. People who live in extreme poverty lack both income and assets and typically suffer from interrelated, chronic deprivations, including hunger and malnutrition, poor health, limited education, and marginalization or exclusion."

In last two decades global development agencies have classified poor as active poor, ultra-poor, extreme poor and so on. Changing definition of poor is not changing the

definition of poverty but is creating a separate segment, who is poor? Defining is one aspect and designing policies to bring equality or to curb down poverty is another side of the story.

It is known fact that policies can be made on the basis of some evidence, and evidence need verifiable facts and data. The larger problem than defining poverty is resolving poverty, data is being collected from the set of effected population and is used by researchers to bring out statistical references. Data is collected by various agencies including government and civil society organizations to help analyse issue and then design solution to handle poverty. The data help researchers and development organizations to prove or disprove their hypothesis.

The above backdrop is set to make readers understand the fact that too much data is collected for any large poverty eradication project, or any other issue of social sector development. Now, let me bring another aspect of this.

Why this data collected is not solving primary issues?

In democratic political establishments, development policies are designed to deliver benefits to large section of society. Successful development projects and learnings therein can then be translated into policies or programs.

The complexity of poverty is for policy makers and not for the people who are living in it. People living in deprived situation know effective solutions for their problems, as they know the cause of it. Policy-makers try to solve it from a distance, hence try to design general solutions for poverty, making it 'FIT FOR ALL'. From the Governance and implementation point of view, the solution for poverty elimination need generalization with some commonality.

But this is because we often see poverty as a project and try to define it in convergence to fund allocated by government or other international organizations. It gets a good fit, due to the fact that anything and everything can be intelligently hooked up with poor and deprived communities.

Another important phenomenon related to data collection in social sector domain, especially with regard to poverty eliminating projects, is not keeping poor at the core of policies while designing them. Data is collected keeping the problem at core, as we see, observe and define it. While making policies, we often leave out poor community as implementers of projects, we see them as beneficiaries with no role to play in devising solutions. Data collected is used for proving any hypothesis or doing analytics, while the need is much more.

The solution to poverty starts with understanding it, defining it, creating effective solutions, designing program/project around effective solutions, implementation of activities and then realizing the full potential of the project. Governments and implementing organizations are doing this for quite long time, and the data proves it all. From 1.9 billion people (36% of world population) living in extreme poverty condition in 1990, we were 730 million (9.9% of world population) in 2015.

Theoretically it is like this - convert idle land to agricultural land, farmers are encouraged to grow crop, get their produce aggregated, add value to their produce, sort, pack and sell it in the market; as a result, all in the value chain will earn an income and government will gain taxes out of this business thereby adding value to our national income. This increased income can support farmers and their families through better financial services or products, improve agri-infrastructure,

strengthen value chain enablers and create more conducive ecosystem for the sector.

Seems easy, right? Well, it is not as easy as it sounds though. Previously, MDGs and now SDGs are designed to solve this daunting global issue. Countries where natural resources are idle and non-convertible to other income generating resources, need seed funding even to make these already available resources work for their economy. There is high probability of imposing already set definition of ‘poor’ and ‘poverty’ to deprived economies and also dump the solutions to solve it. Who will look into the customization of these solutions for the host economies?

In the process, all stakeholders including development practitioners, policy advocates, political parties, administrators etc. have to be careful about the allocation of free resources from developed nations to these vulnerable economies. There is a chance of allocating free funds towards large unhidden agenda of mobilizing natural resources for some specific reasons. Therefore, countries need to be vigilant and have to do cost-benefit analysis of all long term as well as short term ideas imposed by donors and multilateral development organizations.

Dr. Agyeya Trippathi, PhD.

4. Small Finance Banks in India



Small finance banks came into existence in India in 2015, after special permission given by RBI. These financial institutions were intended to support various financial needs of underprivileged population, especially through lending and deposits products. The idea behind setting up small finance banks is to reach out unbanked population in the remote and unprivileged areas; especially small business units in rural areas, small and marginalized farmers, unorganized entities, and micro and small industries.

Some of the features of small finance banks include minimum capital requirement if Rs. 100 crore, at least 25% branches to be opened in unbanked remote and rural areas, needs to follow regulations set by the RBI, maintain minimum set standard for cash reserve ratio and statutory liquidity ratio, other financial services like mutual funds, insurance and pension products can only be provided after approval from RBI.

The expectation of central bank at the time of conceptualizing and establishing small finance banks includes the following:

- Improved saving and credit products
- Easy access to lending products for vulnerable segment
- Low interest rate on credit products
- Serve underserved areas and population
- Lowering cost of funds for small finance bank as compared to microfinance institutions
- Stability of financial sector within the country, especially rural finance
- Risk mitigation for microfinance institutions

Small finance banks (SFBs) faced tough time during Covid related pandemic, as customers of these institutions were severely affected during lockdowns. Most of the livelihood activities suffered during lockdowns, which directly or indirectly affected the incomes, saving, loan repayment and proper loan utilization. In last few months, SFBs are working hard in field to bring back their business on track. Some of these SFBs have already applied to SEBI to launch their IPOs in coming months, after RBIs directive regarding launch of IPO within three years of net worth reaching Rs. 500 crore. So far, only three out of eleven SFBs are listed, including AU, Ujjivan and Equitas. Others like Suryoday SFB, Jana SFB and ESAF SFB are working on their IPO plans. Suryoday SFB recently received SEBI approval to float an IPO.

According to recent paper published by RBI, there are some great insights about SBFs, here are some:

SFBs are making their presence felt in certain under-banked states, including Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan.

The concentration of SFBs branches is more in Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra and Karnataka, which were already high on branch concentration.

SFBs branches also display more concentration at semi-urban and urban centers.

SFBs have been reasonably successful in reaching out to MSMEs and agriculture, where MSMEs accounted for about 41 per cent of the total SFB credit as of March 2020.

The return on assets has been high for SFBs.

Cost of funds is currently high due to lower than expected percentage of current and savings accounts in their deposit base.

High spread has enabled SFBs to earn a higher return on funds.

The NPA ratio remained moderate for SFBs since their inception, showing better risk management.

Certain observations do throw some light on challenges faced by SFBs, which includes the following operational and compliance related issues:

Customers still have more trust on commercial banks, when it comes to deposit their hard earned savings. This factor is not helping SBFs to further lower down their cost of funds.

The newly licensed SFBs were only experienced in handling loan appraisal, disbursement and repayment collection; some organizations have faced operational risk in this regard.

The capital adequacy ratio for SFBs is 15%, as compared to only 9% for commercial banks, indicating higher risk institutions within financial system of the country

SFBs being more concentrated in unbanked area (by design) have to face systematic risk related to weather, market and local business environment.

Many SFBs have foreign shareholding more than 90%, which needs to be brought down below 50% as per the RBI guideline. This is not going to be easy, as the model is still unproven and need more proof of concept to bring less risky and less costly funds in system.

Institutional transformation is another challenge, where SFBs need to depend largely upon other commercial banks to offer various financial and non-financial services to its customer.

Above mentioned opportunities and challenges give at least one clear understanding that SFBs are going to play an important role in financial sector sustainability of our country. These entities may work as business correspondent of large commercial banks and may give tough competition to all kind of microfinance businesses in their respective location. Time will talk about the degree of success of these SFBs.

Dr. Agyeya Trippathi

5. Utilizing Blockchain Technology In Achieving SDGs



Blockchain is a shared, impregnable and unchangeable ledger to record transactions, track assets and build trust. The fundamental logic underneath application of blockchain is decentralisation of stored data in order to safeguard it from control and manipulation by any central actor at any point in time after its first record.

Stuart Haber and W. Scott Stornetta introduced Blockchain technology in 1991. Their aim was to implement such a system wherein document timestamps could not be altered with. After almost two decades, in year 2008 Satoshi Nakamoto conceptualised first blockchain and in January 2009, blockchain had its first real-world application with launch of bitcoin.

In blockchain, Information is collected together in form of blocks. Each block has limited capacity to store information. So, when one block gets filled, another block is created in link with the previous one creating a chain. New information gets stored in newly formed block until it also reaches to its maximum capacity. In order to synchronise the data, the trusted nodes process each block (group of transactions), determining its validity. A final conclusion is determined using a consensus mechanism.

As blockchain contains data, sometimes it can be misunderstood as simple database but one has to know that a simple database structure its data into table but a blockchain structures its data into interlinked blocks. Each block in the chain is given an exact timestamp according to the time when it gets added to the chain, maintaining transparency of information. All data which gets stored in blockchain can be accessed by either having a personal node or by using blockchain explorers.

Apart from transparency, blockchain also maintains safety of information as it is almost impossible to alter the content once stored in blockchain. It is possible primarily because new blocks are always added in chain chronologically and linearly. Each block is always linked to the “end” of the blockchain.

Integration of blockchain solution may help in maintaining strong data quality and integrity. This application may be useful in location identification, delivery confirmation, condition of goods, and data accuracy for supply chain organisations.

Blockchain’s key benefits i.e. immutability of data and access to public make it an efficient option to tally votes by attributing separate ID to each ballot. Voting process can be

made easily accessible while improving security with the usage of blockchain technology.

Utilizing Blockchain Technology in SDG

Blockchain technology is used in various areas, where transparency and timeliness of data is of prime importance. In social development these two parameters are always important for reporting, documentation and decision making. Recent reports and work from social scientists suggest that this technology is highly reliable in assessment of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). For the purpose SDGs are subdivided 3 categories

- a) Empowerment
- b) Economic Development
- c) Improving Infrastructure and Services

Empowerment

Empowerment inherits with fundamental rights to every human being. Access of Human right begins with official identity of individual. Without recognized identity, people have to struggle for finance and formal societal participatory activities. Generating official identity of each individual will help developing countries to progress towards fulfilling their 2030 Agenda initiate to “ensure no one is left behind.” It may also be proven as a very efficient application in achieving gender equality by providing individual identity to every woman. Without official identification of citizens countries find it difficult to impose proper taxation system. Such identity may help people to use as certifying proof of land/property ownership and existence.

Principle of good governance can be promoted by blockchain. It impacts democratic voting models by letting trace of votes to valid and registered identities stored on a blockchain. Digital casting of votes can be given to only those citizens who are registered and cannot be double-counted by a third party, such as a public electoral authority.

Economic Development

The technology found its brilliant use in the area of promoting financial inclusion, an explicit target of seven of the 17 SDGs namely Good Health and Well-Being, No Poverty, Decent Work and Economic Growth, Zero Hunger, Gender Equality, Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure and Reduced Inequalities. Blockchain technology is being used in mobile money services, financial start-ups and fintech companies with an idea to serve financially excluded people. As supply of cryptocurrencies is fixed, they can't be manipulated through money printing hence put a curb on inflation. Another benefit of cryptocurrency is remittance which is considered to be a stable source of foreign exchange in low and middle income countries. Due to the low cost associated with cryptocurrencies, in 2018, remittance grew three times higher with it in comparison with Official Development Assistance (ODA).

Improving Infrastructure and Services

Blockchain technology is going to become part of new normal in almost all sectors making all information available at one click. All we need to develop is the relevant infrastructure and awareness about this revolutionary expertise in the world of information technology.

Blockchain can assist in assessment and development of quality education. For example, its ability to protect

certificates from any potential damage to a country's national infrastructure comes out of the tamper-resistant nature of blockchain. The ability to verify educational credentials on the blockchain is significant for particular group of people, such as refugees, who may be victim of war or any natural calamity and have lost certifications during the course of their unexpected migration.

Another area is its use in healthcare data management, where blockchain solutions can be used in recording, management and sharing of health related information effortlessly and securely between various stakeholders. Healthcare data operations running on blockchain allow greater scope to empower people to manage their own files, including sharing with new providers as they choose.

Hacking Blockchain – Is it possible?

Blockchain support storage of different types of information with most common use as a ledger for transactions with specific time stamp every time, leaving a trail for traceability and no option to change the block information. As new transaction gets entered, it is conveyed to a peer-to-peer computers scattered network across the globe. Then, this computers network solves equations to confirm transaction validity. Once transactions are found to be valid and legitimate, they are grouped together into blocks. These blocks are then chained forming a long history of all transactions that are permanent. After that transaction is considered complete.

Every block has its specific hash, along with the hash of the previous block, as well as the previously mentioned time stamp. So, once a block is added to the blockchain, it gets very challenging to go back and change the data of the previous block. Change in data leads to change in

hash of block which is mentioned in the subsequent block also. Hence, alteration in one block will lead to information mismatch in rest of the blocks of chain. Even if some hacker wants to alter the blockchain and make changes in his own copy, it would not match with copy of everyone else. So, when other people cross-reference their copies against each other, they would find this one copy stand out and that hacker's version of the chain would be cast away as illegitimate.

To make changes in information stored in block, one has to simultaneously control and alter 51% of the copies of the blockchain so that their new copy becomes the majority copy and thus, the agreed-upon chain. Controlling and changing 51% copies of blockchain would also need an enormous number of resources and money as they would need to change hash codes and timestamps in all blocks and their copies. Blockchain permits maintaining and distributing digital information but do not allow to make any alteration or editing in it. Due to this multilayer safety provision and transparency of information, today applications of blockchain have expanded beyond cryptocurrencies to a broad suite of sectors, including foreign aid and development cooperation. Many organizations are creating their own blockchains for business and industrial purposes the most profound proven benefits of blockchain support furthering its integration into development solutions. These include ability to disrupt established societal models (and linked ability to alter the balance of power between actors), as well as greatly reduce inefficient bureaucracy and costs.

Dr. Agyeya Trippathi

6. Women During COVID-19



The international women's day was observed on 8th March, 2021 with an underlying theme - "Women in leadership: Achieving an equal future in a COVID-19 world". This theme was selected to celebrate and reiterate the very important role played by women in handling household, community, enterprises and economies during pandemic and bringing these back to normal life. Women were found at forefronts working as caregivers, housekeepers, community mobilizers, leaders, doctors and influencers to contain the ill effect of corona virus. Women also played an important role in bringing about the behavioural change on issues related to cleanliness, hygiene and sanitation, not only at household level but also at large in communities. During all these times a learning ecosystem has been created where individuals, communities, civil society organizations and government share their ideas and learning about social distancing, use of mask and sanitizer and curing asymptomatic cases at home.

This crisis has certainly brought forward the multi-faceted role played by women in our society, from nutrition till leadership for policy making and implementation. During past one year we have seen various women leaders around the world, who have successfully contained the pandemic in their respective countries/communities. These leaders have demonstrated their skills and knowledge in leading COVID-19 response and its recovery effort; proving that women bring varied competency, perspective and experience when it comes to decision making during crisis situations. According to reports, countries like Denmark, Ethiopia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, New Zealand and Slovakia have been more successful in stemming the tide of the COVID-19 pandemic and responding to its health and broader socio-economic impacts, all these being headed by women. These countries have been widely recognized for the promptness and level of determination in handling national response to COVID-19. Having said so, there are only 22 countries worldwide where women are head of state and government.

The story is not positive on all fronts; during lockdown countries have seen increase in number of cases registered/ reported for domestic violence, unpaid or underpaid care duties, poor work-life balance, unemployment and poverty. This discrimination might look new, but was present in different form within our society. These parametric indicators came on surface during lockdown, mainly due to their change in normal workday routine either at home or at office. It is evident that health emergencies do not impact men and women equally, simple acceptance to this can help us designing policies and processes to make world ready for future crisis.

The data below speak more about the inequality faced by women, no matter what position they are in:

Only 24.9% of national parliamentarians are women, the trend indicate 130 more years to bring gender equality

Being at the forefront in dealing with pandemic, women are paid 11% less than their male counterparts

In specific researches expressions of aggression, competitiveness, dominance and decisiveness are perceived positively for men but negatively for women

Young women contribute lot as volunteer, health worker and community enumerator, yet women under 30 are less than 1 per cent of parliamentarians worldwide, making it difficult for young women to put their views forward among policy makers

According to World Bank, of 189 economies assessed in 2018, 104 economies still have laws preventing women from working in specific jobs, 59 economies have no laws on sexual harassment in the workplace, and in 18 economies, husbands can legally prevent their wives from working

Reports suggest that nearly 40 per cent of women in wage employment do not have access to any form of social protection

Most of the 3.9 billion people who are offline are in rural areas, poorer, less educated and tend to be women and girls

According to McKinsey report, only 5% of Fortune 500 CEOs are Women

McKinsey report suggests that the economic cost, a reflection of the human and social costs is estimated to be approximately USD 12 trillion annually

The facts and figures above suggest that women, especially those living in rural and semi-urban space need extra support in achieving inclusivity. Covid-19 has brought matter to surface and has given administration an opportunity to rewrite the role and associated benefits of women and young girls in post Covid world. It is important for us to understand the critical role played by women and appreciate the variety brought by them in solving critical issues. Some of the steps to bring women at fore-front are:

Promote new governance models with women at the realm of all affairs

Protect and design policies to safe guard women and girls from gender based violence

Improvise working conditions and workplace safety for women and girls

Improve equitable accessibility of financial, health and other basic services to women and girls

Create more efficient technology inclusion programs to include more and more women and girls

Advocate gender-segregated data in all development projects to help understand the issues in more data efficient way

Promote women leadership from household to local economy and country

Agyeya Trippathi

TRENDSETTERS

1. Aadarana

Homeless To Limitless



Jadi Madhava Rao was born in Khammam district, in Telangana. Raised in a remote village that is still lacking in basic infrastructure, he had to walk great distances to school every day. He realized early on the importance of higher education. While his older siblings went on to become teachers, he decided to forego his engineering ambitions and pursued Sciences, doing a postgraduate degree in Mathematics. He strongly felt that it was due to his father's sheer determination that he was able to get as far as he did, with his education.

As a student in Osmania University, Hyderabad, Mr. Rao was often struck by the plight of children begging on the streets, working at mechanic sheds and washing plates in tea shops. He started spending time at several homes and orphanages, trying to understand the legal procedures

involved in caring for orphaned and destitute children. While working as a tutor at the Bahujana Hitai Destitute Children's Home, the management would often entrust him with the charge of the children. The home would only provide shelter for children under 12 years of age. Mr. Rao wanted to start an institution that would take care of each child until they finished their studies. That is how Aadarana- Home for the Orphaned and Needy Children came into being. Founded in 2003, with five children in a rented house in Warasiguda, the organization grew in a few short years, to house 60 kids in two separate homes for boys and girls respectively.

In the initial days Mr. Rao juggled the needs of running the home along with his profession as a tutor. He would conduct an annual summer drive to identify kids to support. He earmarked five districts each season and would look for orphans, or single parent kids who were not likely to have any access to education. Sometimes he would pick up kids at railway stations and from the streets. Soon he realized that he was going to have to give up one or the other, as it was too large an undertaking to do both. He chose to nurture the Home fulltime and spearheaded a movement - "Save the Children". He took to the streets, raising money from philanthropists, families and his own relatives. Being on rented premises was often challenging, as houseowners disliked their houses being used as an orphanage. So, through his fundraising initiatives he was able to buy a vacant plot at Saroor Nagar, to build an accommodation for 100 children.

In 2017-2018, the Amitabha Aadarana Vidyalaya was established. It is a day cum residential school for orphaned and destitute children. Currently, 100 children from the Aadarana home as well as 80 children from other homes in the local community get free education, books, uniforms,

and mid-day meals at this school. The State-Board affiliated school is adequately staffed with trained teachers and non-teaching staff. Equipped with well-furnished classrooms, a library with over 3000 books, a computer lab and digital learning centre, fire-safety equipment and so on, the school also has a van and a bus to transport its day-scholars. Timely health check-ups are conducted for all children, and the school premises is kept clean and sanitary. Anil Kumar Salluri, a representative of Aadarana says, “The school management has taken utmost care in protecting the rights of children. A Child Rights Committee has been constituted which meets every fortnight to discuss any issues or misconduct and is swift to take up remedial or preventative action.” Cultural and sports activities are conducted with great gusto each year.

From the beginnings, Mr. Madhava Rao has made sure that every child gets to leave the Home only after they have been adequately supported, cared for, and more importantly, equipped with enough life-skills to thrive on their own. In keeping with his vision, most of the now grown up Aadarana kids have moved on to achieve great success with their higher education and settled into diverse careers. Recounting the many success stories, Mr. Salluri says, “Srinivas Durgam came into our home as a ten-year old. He eventually made it to IIT Dhanbad and is currently working at a multinational corporation (MNC). Sowjanya Suguru, who similarly entered our home in her 5th standard is currently pursuing her bachelor’s degree in Australia. Jaipal and Pavan Desani, two brothers who had lost their parents at a young age. Jaipal went on to start a borewell manufacturing business in Madhya Pradesh and his brother is now serving in the Army. Anil who hails from a rural area, is currently pursuing his MBA in Australia.” This is everything that Aadarana stands for- giving deprived children a safe and loving environment that supports their

every ambition. True to their nurturing spirit, since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, Aadarana has been diversifying their services. They have provided essential provisions to the distressed and displaced families. Moved by the plight of the masses of migrant labourers who lost their jobs and were forced to return home due to the lockdowns, the Aadrana team, adhering to all safety and hygiene protocols, gave away cooked meals and grocery kits to daily wage labourers, construction site workers and people at old age homes and night shelters.

It has not been an easy ride for Aadarana, over the years. “We still are in need of adequate funds to carry out our programs. We need to be able to pay our teaching staff their salaries, and we could also use more volunteers to help children with their extra-curricular activities,” insists Mr. Salluri.

When discussing plans for the future, he says, “We wish to evolve into a higher education platform. Aadarana cannot stop with the Amitabha School alone. We are looking to expand it into a Junior College first and someday soon, a full-fledged degree-college. We plan to set up Technical Training Centres to train skilled tradespeople, such as electricians, welders, lathe operators, etc. Yet another dream project of ours is to set up small business establishments that will be run by destitute women.”

Archanaa Ramesh

2. Adhwana NGO

Working towards a better future



The overall aim of Adhwana is to capacitate the youth and communities to become sustainable models of development.

India is a large diverse country, both demographically as well as geographically, it is almost impossible for the government alone to work in the upliftment of the poor and to support the impoverished sections of the society. This is when NGO's have stepped in to contribute in making the country grow and sustain a healthy community.

NGOs operates independently from the government, but they participate in social, economic, philanthropical and international missions. NGOs advocate for diverse social causes—it could be from caring about orphans and old aged; providing employment; addressing poverty, human rights and environment issues, etc.

Adhwana, an NGO based out of Trivandrum, Kerala started in 2000 (officially registered in 2002) with the aim of bringing about change in the society. The initial objectives of Adhwana was to fill the gap in pre-training and post training linkages in functional, vocational training of school dropout boys and girls in Kerala. As training for skill training alone was not enough to lead them to employment or self-employment, Adhwana came up with the idea to help the youth further.

Dr. J Mary John, Chairperson of Adhwana, says that, “the overall aim of Adhwana is to capacitate the youth and communities to become sustainable models of development. It functions as a non-profit development organisation with a general body and an elected Governing Board. The major focus of the organisation remains skill development for employment and self-employment for the youth, irrespective of caste, creed and religion. However, the perspective has broadened over the past 19 years widening itself to women empowerment and environmental conservation .”

Initially, Adhwana started as a network of NGOs in Kerala. Due to resource challenges, the organisation started working as an NGO with linkages to other local stakeholders. Presently, with the availability of resources for field implementation projects, Adhwana is now moving forward with supporting NGOs and others through consulting, research and training in social development. They have initiated their own projects for environment conservation (POOMARAM); child development (Viswas counselling) where they provide services in the area of children, youth, education, career, marriage, family, and lifestyle counselling; and education of children (Vidyadarshan) of poor widows/disabled and bedridden parents in and around Trivandrum

Adhwana works passionately to ensure social order by promoting justice, equality and freedom. The focus on sustainable development and economic empowerment through skill development and knowledge building. They organise and conduct capacity building exercises for the development practitioners associated with NGOs in Kerala and manage interventions in areas of training, community development, research, monitoring and evaluation. Over the years Adhwana has extended their purview to other deserving target groups and communities like Dalits, farmers, fishermen and their families, students, Children, migrants and other vulnerable people.

“We help our beneficiaries achieve their personal, institutional and community goals through our programmes which focus on:

- Sustainable livelihood which helps in building skills and entrepreneurship qualities
- Environment conservation (with special reference to coastal literacy), waste management, promotion of medicinal plants, organic farming, energy conservation
- Gender mainstreaming, legal aid and rights,
- Community health and sanitation through several awareness programmes
- Education in terms of career guidance, distribution of books, uniforms and rights from government schemes
- Land and housing
- Safe migration
- Disaster management.” says Dr. J Mary John

Sharing the success story of an individual, Dr. J Mary John, says “There are many young boys and girls who have

been placed in jobs with our training in technical skills and entrepreneurial motivation. Many of them were poor Dalits. One girl, named Resma from Trivandrum was provided training in health assistance and was placed in the same hospital she underwent training. She is now earning well to support herself and her family.

Adhwana has been consistently organising training programmes for women and children in areas of organic gardening, tailoring, garment making, and dealing with social issues like alcoholism, dowry, drug abuse, etc.

Signing off, Dr. J Mary John says, “We are widening our perspectives to reach out to many people, hands to help the poor for sustainable development and betterment of the society. Our vision and strategy for Adhwana is to include community mobilisation, awareness generation and training, promotion of small enterprises for income generation, leadership skill development, linkage building, etc.”

Aatika Kouser

3. Annamrita Foundation

Replacing hunger with hope



Did you know that India holds the 94th place out of 107 countries in the Global Hunger Index severity scale? This undeniably worrisome position is thanks to an underwhelming score of 27.7, which indicates acute hunger – a standing embarrassment for a country that claims to have made huge strides in development since achieving independence over 70 years ago.

“Recent reports state that over five million children are at risk of falling in the wasting category of malnourishment, while an additional two million children are at risk of being pushed into the severe wasting category,” says Anurag Bhatnagar of Annamrita, an NGO dedicated to the cause of ensuring that children do not go hungry, “In total, a staggering 14% of India’s population is undernourished.”

The reports that Anurag refers to also indicate that India recorded a 37.4 percent stunting rate (low height for their age) among children under five, and a wasting rate (low weight for their height) of 17.3 percent. “The under-five mortality rate stands at 3.7 percent,” he adds, “At this rate, the number of severely under-weight and wasted children is expected to increase by 268,767 and 166,342 respectively in just a few more years.”

Dedicated to eliminating these worrying statistics, Annamrita began its journey in 2004, by feeding mid-day meals to just about 900 students in Mumbai. Today, the organization operates 21 kitchens across seven states, and serves up to 12 lakh meals per day. “Since our inception, we have already served more than 3 billion meals across 6500+ schools of Andhra Pradesh, Haryana, Maharashtra, Delhi, Rajasthan, West Bengal, and Jharkhand,” Anurag says.

In partnership with other NGOs, Annamrita has carried out multiple surveys on the impact of mid-day meals on attendance and the cognitive abilities of children.

And they’ve found some interesting results.

“We’ve seen a huge improvement in children regarding attendance, sports participation, better STEM results, and fewer cases of children fainting in schools due to hunger,” says Anurag.

Although the NGO doesn’t track the progress trajectory of individual students, schools that Annamrita partners with have reported many success stories, on a regular basis. Part of this reportage also includes sharing attendance records on a monthly basis — records that have revealed an encouraging improvement in school attendance thanks to mid-day meals.

“The undernourishment stats are in the public domain for comparison of status from 2004 till date, but as our presence is currently limited to 21 cities, in only 7 states, we have to go a long way to make a substantial impact on the national figures,” says Anurag, “Our mid-day meal programme, which aims at improving the nutritional status of school-age children nationwide, has been one of our most effective initiatives. Before the pandemic-induced lockdown, the recipients of our mid-day meals primarily consisted of children from urban slums, rural and tribal areas. And most of the time, the food we served was the only meal these children received during the entire day.”

One of the factors that made the midday meal scheme effective and an astounding success is the inherent simplicity for donors to reach out and contribute. “Individuals could make a donation on our website with just a few clicks,” says Anurag, “We set a very low threshold for donation at just Rs 750 —the cost of meals for an entire year for a child. Another factor in our success is our excellent network of volunteers, staff, and donors across India – all of whom continue to be deeply invested in our anti-hunger programs.”

All these strides notwithstanding, Annamrita’s biggest success story was scripted in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. “On March 25, when the nation came to a standstill to contain the spread of the pandemic, hundreds of thousands of people lost access to income, resources, and daily meals,” said Anurag, “At this point, the Annamrita Foundation decided to leverage its kitchens across the nation to deliver healthy and hygienic meals to those stranded by the lockdown.”

That initiative was the start of something new — Project Annamrita Karuna — a COVID-19 relief initiative that has,

till date, delivered more than 2 crore cooked meals and 6 crore dry ration kits to migrant and poor families impacted by the lockdown.

“As an NGO in India with a robust network of donors, partners, and volunteers, we are delivering hygienic and nutritious meals to emergency medical teams, patients and their relatives, quarantined families, underprivileged children, and daily wage laborers in multiple states. We follow strict adherence to WHO guidelines on maintaining social distance and personal hygiene while sourcing, preparing, and delivering food,” says Anurag, “With the support of State Government bodies, Corporate, Institutions and well informed individuals, our food donation campaign has been able to replace hunger with hope across India.”

Although NGOs like Annamrita have been ceaselessly performing yeomen service via their anti-hunger programs, estimates suggest that at the current rate, it could well take between 23 and 50 years to completely eradicate hunger in India. “The only way to reduce the consequences of this monumental challenge is by safeguarding and promoting access to nutritious, safe, and affordable diets to the vulnerable populations of our country,” Anurag says.

“Considering the long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic looming over us, we intend to collaborate with various State Governments to fight pandemic-induced disruption and hunger by efficiently supplying nutritious food,” says Anurag. The plan of course, he says, is to improve nutritional status and coverage of the organization’s recent Kit of Joy initiative over the next few months. In a post-pandemic scenario, Annamrita will fall back on its main objective — increasing enrollment in schools, reducing malnutrition, and ensuring education for all by increasing

their mid-day meal reach from 1 million daily meals to 3 million daily meals by 2025.

“We are in the process of expanding our reach to more Indian states and improving the impact in the states we are currently operating,” he adds, “We hope to extend absolute food security to underprivileged communities and rural school children in the next 10 years. “ With a presence in seven states and an expansion plan in the works, Annamrita is plotting further expansion into the North East and Eastern geographies, aside from branching out into other states as well as expanding to more cities and towns in states that Annamrita is currently serving.

***To know more about how you can help fight India’s
growing battle with hunger, please visit
<https://annamrita.org/get-involved.php>***

4. President of APJ Abdul Kalam People's Welfare Association

SELF-RELIANCE IN SLUMS



We all know how poverty gave birth to slums. We also know how slum populations struggle to manage their basic needs. We have seen the impact of slum rehabilitation projects too. But, Mr. E.Marisamy, Founder-President of APJ Abdul Kalam People's Welfare Association in Chennai, wishes to see self-reliant slum communities. "I have always felt an ineffable sense of insecurity prevailing in slum communities. They don't feel settled at all. Yet, they are a potent human force determined to live better lives. I came to Kannagi Nagar when I was 28 years old. From an outsider, I am now a good friend and guide to many students here. I have seen them transform from being directionless to having big aspirations. Participation and capacity building are powerful tools in building the confidence of any community. I witnessed their potential here," says Marisamy.

As one of the largest resettlement colonies in the city, population here has had to face displacement from job, education, health care and almost everything that they had organised in their previous addresses. As sociologists point out, displacement made them poorer than they were before. Women's labour participation fell drastically. Education was the only hope but aspirations were amiss. Marisamy started by teaching neighbourhood kids. Interacting with them, he learnt issues in the area and why they remained unaddressed. His interactions widened, some more friends joined him and together they addressed one issue after another. "Not that we found solutions. We attempted to show the people that problems can be solved if appropriate steps were taken. This helped build trust and in roads. We wanted to do more," he adds.

Marisamy and team were amused to see how residents enjoyed, valued every program they organised. They felt the need for an organisation to plan strategically and introduce new futuristic programs. Dr APJ Abdul Kalam People's Welfare Association was registered in 2016 and education became the team's focus. "Engaging in education allowed us to analyse everybody's perspective and also communicate effectively about changes the residents must aspire for," recalls Marisamy. There was hardly any little place dedicated for studying in those small tenements. So, the first effort was to organise a place for studying without any disturbance.

Where alcoholism and drug abuse is visible, a place for studying is extremely important to keep the younger ones focused. "We thought this was important to check dropout rates," he says. Marisamy approached a nearby school and organised evening tuition classes. Good results in the first batch itself demonstrated the need and effect of education support activities. Soon more classes and students were

covered. Local police offered security for the evening tuitions. The positivity encouraged team to dream bigger. “As the first generation of graduates were ready, the association also geared up to train them for Public Service Commission examinations. We wanted to ensure that they got employed. Only then it was possible for the next generation to follow suit,” he reiterates.

Vocational skills like plumbing, electric repairs were also imparted with no age barriers. In doing so, they ensured that children who had dropped out also got a new opportunity to excel. Informal education for grandmothers 60 years and older was a surprising success as there were more takers than anticipated. “These grandmothers were once enterprising workers. Their valuable labour had fed their families. As displacement forced them to adapt, they lost their former contacts and enthusiasm. And today, when there is a chance to learn something new and upgrade themselves, they readily accepted it,” smiles Marisamy. He remains overwhelmed by their take on issues in the resettlement process. “I wish they were allowed to participate and express themselves. All their ideas and suggestions once again prove that participation, rather partnerships with beneficiary communities is a very powerful tool,” he added.

Yoga, sports, self-defence, cultural programs are organised regularly to keep the children motivated. Students’ enthusiasm has helped them and the association reached new heights. Every opportunity, be it the Guinness book of records or World book of records, children have learnt that a genuine, dedicated attempt is the first step. 31 school and college students from Kannagi Nagar were a part of the team that got trained and made hundred satellites that weighed fifty grams. This satellite launch was a big event for entire Kannagi Nagar and people now see education as a path to their future. Marisamy and team are now in

collaboration with three schools in Kannagi Nagar to expand their programs. “Step by step, we were able to figure our trajectory. Consistent guidance from Irai Anbu sir (an experienced IAS officer) has been a big supporting force,” he adds.

Various art forms like parai are used to spread awareness on key issues like health, environment and people’s participation in organising and attending these programs has had a better impact on the outcomes too. “It makes it easier to get them to think about what they can do at a household level.” The pandemic brought in new challenges and the association managed to do its part. Every day, food for 300 destitute people is being provided. They have reached 46,000 people so far. Also over 25 lakh rupees worth provisions have been distributed to nearly 6,000 people, who lost livelihood due to lockdown and its aftermath.

For an assistant director in the film industry, Marisamy finds his journey with the association rewarding and educative. He feels that his perspective on social change is evolving with experience and that the confidence he sees in Kannagi Nagar’s children has helped him and the community dream bigger, together.

Shanmuga Priya.T

5. Barefoot College

THE GANDHIAN WAY



Social Work and Research Centre (SWRC), popularly known as ‘The Barefoot College’ is a community-based grassroots organisation working since 1972 based on the Gandhian concept of reaching the last person. It was founded by Sanjit ‘Bunker’ Roy, to harness the skills and intelligence of rural people and ‘specialists’ people with degrees and formal professional competence, to work together to empower local communities.

The SWRC/ Barefoot College aimed to specifically address the issues concerning marginalised communities and individuals, including women, the exploited and the impoverished rural poor. The work took shape in practical domains like water, education, solar, health, advocacy and rural livelihoods including handicrafts.

Barefoot has also sought to enable marginalised rural communities to participate in planning, executing, and

maintaining their own frameworks for development. These processes have provided the opportunity to the rural poor to lift themselves out of relative poverty with dignity and self-respect. The Barefoot College discussed, defined and consolidated the non-negotiables within its body politic (equality, collective decision-making, decentralisation, self-reliance, austerity and openness to learning skills).

Barefoot College will be celebrating 50 years of impactful journey at Triveni Kala Sangam, Delhi from February 5 - 11, 2022.

Ever since the Barefoot College was established in 1972, a Gandhian approach to its work has been at the centre of its functioning. The key reason for this: the need to reach last-mile communities while tackling issues like water, health, livelihood and education through rural wisdom and knowledge. “Mahatma Gandhi’s central belief was that the knowledge, skills and wisdom found in villages should be used for development before getting skills from outside,” explains Jaswanth Dadi, organizing secretary at Barefoot.

“Gandhiji also believed that sophisticated technology should be used in rural India, but it should be in the hands and in control of the poor communities so that they are not dependent or exploited as it leads to replacement,” Jaswanth adds, “Barefoot College has internalized and implemented this message of Mahatma Gandhi since our early beginnings.”

The college has, since inception, worked with the marginalized, exploited, and impoverished rural poor — typically those living on less than \$1 a day — to deliver them from poverty. The college’s adoption of Gandhian ideals has found relevance even in 21st Century India. For instance, Barefoot has successfully applied traditional

know-how to build homes for the homeless, collect rain water for communities where potable water sources are scarce, and helped spread socio-economic messages at the grass-root level.

In keeping with its approach of adopting only technology that can be understood and controlled by rural communities, Barefoot College has demystified technologies and decentralised their uses by transferring their access, control, management and ownership to rural communities. “The College believes that even the uneducated poor have the right to use technologies to improve their life and skills,” says Jaswanth.

Through it all, the focus has clearly been on working with the poor. “Even though the core projects have been temporarily halted, thanks to the pandemic, the organization stepped up to provide much needed support to the rural communities of Rajasthan,” says Jaswanth, “We distributed survival kits throughout the first and second COVID wave.” Barefoot’s survival kits include rations (wheat, salt, turmeric, chilli powder and lentils) in addition to sanitizers, sanitary pads, soap and masks. “Disseminating relevant information in the form of IVR and videos in multiple languages has helped communities build resilience towards curbing the spread of COVID,” he adds.

When COVID restrictions lifted, Barefoot College began bridge schools in last-mile villages to help students have access to education. “The plan was to ensure that children don’t suffer due to the digital divide induced by the pandemic, and we arranged for equipment like iPads, tablets and solar projectors, to help overcome this,” says Jaswanth.

Recently, Barefoot College assisted the Rajasthan Government's 'Prashasan Gaon Ke Sangh Abhiyan' initiative across 50 camps, to help reach government benefits to the poor. "All our projects aiming to empower rural communities are important to the organization's mission till we reach the last person," says Jaswanth, "This work will continue as the organization believes in the optimal utilisation of the local traditional knowledge not only preserving it, but also making sure that it helps in providing a decent and dignified way of living to marginalised communities."

Barefoot measure success only when it is able to reach the last person, and help empower every human. The organization turns 50 next year, and is set to meet new challenges head-on. "We have made an impact by creating a sustainable model to scale across the world," says Jaswanth, "Our initiatives have reached 96 countries and more than 20 Indian states."

Today, Barefoot College is the first fully solar electrified campus in rural India with a capacity of 250kW. The organization has trained over 3,300 solar 'mamas' from 96 countries. "Over a million people today have light through clean, decentralised solar electricity, which has effectively replaced kerosene lamps and thus offset carbon emissions from thousands of households across the world," says Jaswanth.

Barefoot has also pioneered provision of sustainable drinking water and sanitation solutions to rural communities for 50 years. "Over 70 billion litres of water have been harvested through the creation of rainwater harvesting tanks, ponds and small dams which have revived multiple traditional water sources," he adds.

Barefoot has helped educate over 90,000 students from last-mile villages and has supported the livelihoods of over 300 artisans in Rajasthan. Today, these artisans earn and sustain revenues from their native craft.

Over 300,000 individuals from rural Rajasthan have been able to access health facilities like dental, birth control and TB camps at grass-root levels thanks to Barefoot's health initiatives. On the environmental front, Barefoot College has promoted plantations in wastelands, government schools and nurseries throughout Rajasthan.

“Through the interventions from the nursery team, Barefoot currently manages more than 20,000 trees and plants on campus and nearby villages,” says Jaswanth,

“In addition to the forestation drives, we have developed Rajasthan's first zero-waste and plastic-free village.” Today, the programme has been scaled to four villages and a panchayat.

During the COVID second wave, Barefoot distributed over 10,000 survival kits to rural communities in 12 districts of Rajasthan. It conducted a survey covering over 100 villages to understand the impact of the pandemic at the grass-root level, which helped build programmes and projects addressing some of the pressing issues. In fact, against all odds, Barefoot College was at the forefront of COVID relief efforts in 2020 and 2021. “Having known very little about Coronavirus in 2020 never came in the way of the organization's determination to travel and distribute survival kits, which helped create hunger-free villages in Rajasthan,” says Jaswanth.

After 49 years of supporting rural communities, Barefoot believes much of its work is yet to be done. “Our mission

and vision remains the same, and that is to use traditional knowledge and skills to empower rural communities,” says Jaswanth, “We are bound to our Gandhian approach and guiding principles — non-negotiable elements like equality, collective decision-making, decentralization, self-reliance, austerity and transparency.” Barefoot’s goal is clear: to ensure that everybody has access to the basic amenities that help one live a decent and dignified life.

6. Caritas India

HOPE IN THE FACE OF DISASTER



In a disaster-prone country like India, Caritas has come to the forefront of relief during calamities of epic proportions. Since its inception, Caritas India has been involved in reconstruction and rehabilitation during such disasters. Its role includes responding to affected communities and extension of relief services, a role that the organization has played dating back to 1970, up until recent cyclones in 2021.

Deploying a mixture of skill, technique and risk-reduction approaches, Caritas India has overtime contributed to reducing losses whenever disaster strikes. From the Uttarakhand and Latur earthquakes in the early 1990s to the COVID pandemic and Cyclone Yaas in recent times, Caritas' interventions have been ever-present.

In fact, the last five decades has seen the organization work towards nation-building as it addresses the cause of poverty. "We have been able to support 22,945 projects to tune of Rs.1,373 crore," says Fr. Paul Moonjely, Executive

Director, Caritas India, “About 25,000 houses have been built for the disaster affected victims. As part of Tsunami rehabilitation program alone, Rs. 500 crores have been spent, building 13,420 houses and supporting 50,000 households with food and short term recovery aid.”

“During Gujarat Earthquake, we set up 3,215 permanent houses and supported 20,000 households with livelihood generation and short-term recovery needs,” Fr Paul adds.

Caritas adopts a four-pronged strategy to humanitarian aid: Immediate relief aid, Short term recovery, Long term rehabilitation and Risk resilience and management. “Our endeavour is to assist and facilitate the disaster affected communities to build back better and establish normalcy in their lives,” says Fr Paul, “Our approach under Immediate relief aid is to provide lifesaving essentials to the affected population such as food packets, drinking water, health care, medical support, non-food essentials such as temporary shelter makeshifts, mats and blankets.”

Under the short-term recovery, Caritas India engages temporary to semi-permanent shelters and extends livelihood support to the affected population. Long-term rehabilitation sees the organization intervene through livelihood generation, counselling, permanent shelters, development of task force group’s role allocation, village disaster and management committee.

“Our risk resilience and management cover the aspect of ecosystem management and restoration,” Fr Paul explains, “This is an intervention during peace times to study the ecosystem and based on that create preparedness measures within the community to address recurring calamities.”

In humanitarian aid, timeliness and accuracy are two key parameters. “During a crisis, the most important mandate is to ensure that the affected households are reached out on time providing support to address the needs,” says Fr Paul, “However, in the wake of timeliness, accuracy can sometimes be compromised.” Over time, Caritas has faced a bevy of challenges including: difficulty in accessing remote locations, lack of data to address needs, inadequate emergency preparedness, frequency of disasters and response fatigue.

Caritas has worked in close collaboration with the NDMA, NIDM nationally and BSDMA, ASDMA and OSDMA locally, and was recently awarded the Healthgiri Awards announced by the Ministry of Health as the Best NGO, during COVID pandemic.

“With the engagement of the local panchayat members, community institution leaders and local district authorities, Caritas India engages and facilitates the relief operations spearheaded by the community,” says Fr Paul, “Our intervention has a secular approach, and we engage through the local partners and district administration on board.”

One of Caritas’ visions for the future is that stakeholders in humanitarian response should share a common agenda through joint assistance strategies, partnership declarations, harmonisation, and alignment action plans. “This can be achieved through a series of trainings, workshops, and consultations across the country to create a common commitment and cohesive standing on humanitarian aid,” says Fr. Paul. “In our humanitarian realm, one of the prominent and accelerating force of effective response has been the local stakeholders,” he adds, “Caritas endeavours to engage with the local stakeholders (community leaders, grass-root institutions, local NGOs, duty bearers and the

local village representatives) to create a holistic approach to any crisis.”

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, billions of people were in isolation, which prompted many others to volunteer in many innovative ways. “Despite COVID, the spirit of volunteering has not extinguished within,” says Fr Paul, “Volunteers during crisis can be seen as development boosters that influence and create a larger scope of effective response and preparedness interventions. Caritas India envisages mobilizing a pool of volunteers across the country to respond to a crisis and accentuate humanitarian aid.”

One of the lessons COVID-19 taught society at large was the creation of community-based response mechanisms that would help in accessing support and care during the time of crisis. “Disaster clinics were meant to serve one such purpose,” says Fr. Paul, “These disaster clinics are terminologically community-based arrangements that would identify and address the local needs of the community or a village through various mechanisms of development plans, community services, community resources etc. This is only to create local and sustainable mechanisms of ownership.”

Caritas says it will continue to build on the scope of humanitarian aid. It hopes to do this through capacity enhancement, learning and increasing responsiveness, networking and partnerships and technology adoption.

“Research studies and assessments would help Caritas to strategise our future interventions and responses in different states,” says Fr. Paul, “The study’s recommendations could be effectively used by various stakeholders to engage in advocacy works and lobby with respective states and

philanthropists to develop proactive and innovative strategic responses.”

Another pillar of functioning for Caritas is partnerships and networks, continue to be its biggest strength. “This is especially true for far-flung areas of the country,” Fr. Paul says, “Continuous knowledge sharing through training, seamless flow of two-way feedback, and multiple communication channels have helped Caritas to understand situations in depth and respond accurately and effectively.”

7. CLT India

TECHNOLOGY AND TEACHING FOR TOMORROW



The access to quality education has been one of the great dividers among Indian society — more so, the access to education technology. While students of privileged private schools have had access to this technology, lesser privileged schools were contending with more basic problems like teacher shortage, which translated to learning opportunities that went amiss.

However, that problem turned around on its head when Bengaluru-based CLT India introduced e-Patshale, conceptualized to transform rural classrooms.

“The strategy was to build a scalable and replicable model where master-teachers would design innovative pedagogy

for digital STEM, for local practitioners and technology would be leveraged to deliver them to local areas,” the organization’s website says. “The entire program architecture was built around what ‘access’ translated to in the context of underserved communities, which further meant that the resources had to be in many regional languages,” it adds.

In a nutshell, CLT e-Patashale is about bringing best teaching practices to every classroom leveraging technology.

Today, the organization has a collection of over 15,000 videos in four languages, 2,000 digital workbooks for teachers, and 80,000 teachers with enhanced skills. The organization has impacted the lives of 2.6 million students across 12,600 classrooms that learn from e-Patashale STEM.

Needless to say, collaborations with State and District governments, corporate entities, NGOs and local communities have made these initiatives sustainable. However, unique problems call for unique strategies and approaches to solving them. And the COVID-19 outbreak has been one such problem.

“COVID threw many challenges and children were impacted the worst around the world. Everyone in this sector realized that we needed multi-pronged approaches to build resilience at a systemic level,” says Bhagya Rangachar, Founder & CEO, CLT India, “Digital interventions came to the surface, but the children in under-served communities would end up being left behind for many reasons, like not having connectivity, affordable technology, digital resources and training.”

However, with e-learning getting a lot of attention post-COVID for many reasons, one can’t help but wonder what

caused CLT India to start e-learning a decade-and-a-half earlier. “CLT has been working with government schools for 22 years in different capacities. But one problem or challenge that we have faced day to day was the severe shortage of teachers,” says Bhagya.

“Rural schools have the additional challenge of recruiting teachers with subject-matter expertise in Science, Mathematics and English,” she adds, “Headmasters were repeatedly asking us to give them additional teachers.” And that was how CLT’s e-Patashale began implementing the best teaching practices into everyday classroom learning by leveraging technology.

Over a hundred teachers, subject-matter experts and textbook committee members worked together for four years to create innovative content for remote teachers. “They created a framework for pedagogy and built best practices of teaching into every module,” says Bhagya, “The technology was designed to keep it simple and light for rural schools.”

In recognition of CLT’s efforts, the organization was awarded with the second Millennium Alliance Award in 2020, which stands as a testimonial to its impact at scale. CLT’s bigger claim to fame, no doubt, is the fact that the technology was delivered in-house and delivered to remote rural schools, online and offline.

“Technology interventions in India have an additional challenge, other than no connectivity in rural schools, with many States adopting their own regional language to teach,” says Bhagya, “CLT has countered this challenge by making available all the teaching and learning resources in regional languages and mobile technology.”

CLT's work has gained momentum and recognition as a scalable model that can be easily replicated. The group has received the Social Innovation Award, which recognizes 50 impactful social innovators globally, the Digital India Award conferred by The Times Group and has been featured on CNBC-TV18's flagship show, Changemakers.

"While the internet and computers have changed how information is shared across the globe, only 16% of rural residents in India have access to the internet. The bulk of existing online material available is not translated into regional languages. Many do not even have electricity for several hours per day," says Bhagya, "CLT e-Patashale was conceptualized to address the massive challenges children face in underserved communities to complete school education with good learning outcomes, with no access to quality schools, good teachers and learning resources."

One of the ways CLT has tried solving problems at scale is to create a hub-and-spoke model, where Master Teachers designed in-house innovative STEM pedagogy for Classes 5 to 10 in regional languages. The company also designed low-cost technology delivery models for remote areas with no connectivity.

"CLT's focus has been to address the lack of access to basic needs in the context of education. Our body of work examines 'access' in the context of under-served communities," says Bhagya, "For example, having content or resources on internet does not necessarily become usable for someone when they cannot afford the technology, training and not available in a regional language. Our strategy has been to build an entire ecosystem to develop relevant resources for the practitioners in their regional languages and develop low-cost mobile technology delivery models with data analytics."

CLT has implemented its e-Patshale program in 4,200 village schools across multiple states including Jammu and Kashmir, Rajasthan and Bihar. On the last-mile front, the technology is light and user-friendly, while the back-end has a series of complex systems and processes. “While E-learning ecosystems could comprise an android television, it can also be a plug & play android device for TV, which hosts all the content and gives access without the need for internet,” says Bhagya, “The device is also sim-enabled that fetches data on usage from every remote area, and reflects on partner dashboard whenever there is connection.”

CLT has launched two additional apps on the Google Play Store — Jigi and Jigi Jigi — which enable access to learning outside classrooms. “About 2.5 million learners are direct beneficiaries, which has impacted the way they learn science and mathematics,” says Bhagya, “We have learnt that we can influence the local practitioners to be motivated, and adopt effective methodologies while using innovative resources.”

CLT India’s collaboration with the government, corporate enterprises and foundations are key drivers for scale and reach. The organization aims to build a community of learners that it hopes will eventually grow to 10 million students over the next five years. “We’re hoping they can access the best pedagogy in their own regional languages with affordable technology,” says Bhagya, “Research shows that the most cost-effective way to scale and gain social return on our investment is through digital learning.

8. Diya Foundation

A LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS



Striving for a “just and civil society”, the Diya Foundation has come a long way with interventions in Assam and Meghalaya. The non-profit organization has, over the course of the last few years, improved the wellbeing of underprivileged and marginalized communities through holistic development activities. Through these programmes, Diya Foundation has successfully helped such communities overcome the lack of access to resources, services and information.

Diya Foundation has identified some key thrust areas such as livelihood creation, education promotion, biodiversity conservation and the need to response to emergencies as some of the focus points of its programmes. With a keen eye on marginalized, depressed communities, the organization has strived hard to work hand-in-hand with members of such communities for their greater good and betterment. The aim has been to rise beyond limiting factors like social

deprivation; negligence and marginalization to help such communities do better for themselves.

By and large the work of the social organization has focused on two states — Assam and Meghalaya. Kamrup district in Assam and Ri-Bhoi in Meghalaya have been witness to Diya Foundation's interventions and programmes. The organization says the key to doing good work in such communities has remained social mobilization and the creation of a self-sustaining community and self-sustaining practices.

Serving under-served regions, building capacities and skills to make use of optimum resources, in a nutshell, exist as the mission statement of Diya Foundation. However the end-point to these facets has been integrated development.

To devote itself towards the social and economic upliftment of rural and decentralized sectors, physically and socio-economically handicapped persons or in family welfare programs, and to increase the speed of development in the field of livelihood and well-being of the people living in rural and semi-urban areas are part and parcel of the organization's list of objectives.

However, one objective that the Diya Foundation wants to focus on with greater emphasis is to act as a facilitator or a service provider to emergent issues for preservation and conservation, and the development of natural resources and a rich cultural heritage vis-à-vis the society or community it is involved in.

The organization hopes to do this through building partnerships, strengthening networks and working on advocacy programmes so as to achieve common goals and raise people's voices towards a common goal or interest.

Providing the necessary tools to develop the right kind of atmosphere for students of marginalized families has also been a priority of the Diya Foundation. Helping these students increase their tech know-how and develop skills in non-formal education has also been a key interest area for the organization.

However, the social and economic uplifting of rural and de-centralized sector populations, which also includes physically and socio-economically handicapped people through family welfare programmes assumes greater importance today, as does its conscious role in acting as a facilitator to emergent issues like the preservation and conservation of natural resources and the “rich cultural heritage” of society.

Ever since the COVID-19 pandemic, Diya Foundation has enhanced its relief measures, including the doorstep delivery and distribution of medicines, provision of rations to tea garden workers, nutritional supplements to pregnant and lactating women, and provision of food to highway destitute people.

“The spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) is the most serious global health security threat to all human being. As the entire country is in various forms of lockdown and timelines are unpredictable, normal life of every human being is at stake at this point,” says an entry on the organization’s website.

“In addition, community people especially the small and marginal farmers, Agri entrepreneurs, livelihoods of women vendors, transportation of pregnant women and children who are due for routine check-ups at health facilities have been severely affected the entire circle, which in turn has pushed them back into misery and poverty,” it adds.

In all, nearly 1,200 households were covered through the medicine distribution programme, while nearly 80 patients were covered by way of the organization's COVID-19 measures.

As for livelihood restoration and support to ultra-poor and families of labourers, households having pregnant and lactating mothers, Diya has secured financial assistance of the Centre of for Catalyzing Change, as it proposes to develop a nutrition garden for these communities. The main focus of the programme is to enhance health through cultivating vegetables with high-value nutritional content primarily for consumption. The programme also focuses on supporting cash-for-work, in order to benefit families who have signed up for it.

At present the Diya Foundation is looking to serve young, migrant returnees who have made it home in the midst of the first COVID-19 lockdown. On priority is the restoration of livelihoods through support that the organization hopes to lend in agriculture and allied areas of intervention. Through the support of the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, the Diya Foundation intends to cover at least 100 young, migrant workers within a year across three development blocks: Chhaygaon, Chayani Barduar and Rani Development Block, in Assam.

Through the combined, synchronized execution of projects that lie within its thrust areas, and by continuing the good work that is doing in post-COVID relief, the organization hopes to go from strength to strength and make a difference to the lives of people in Assam and Meghayala through various interventions and activities, with the sole purpose of uplifting marginalized communities and giving them a better and brighter future.

9. Diya Ghar

MONTESSORI MAGIC



The Montessori method is extremely beneficial since children are taught individually, they can learn at their own pace and there are a lot of activities aimed at the child's development

When Diya Ghar opened its first centre in Green Garden Layout at Ramamurthy Nagar, Bangalore, it had only about 5 children under its wings. This was July 2016. By September that year, the number quickly swelled up to 30. Just three years later, Diya Ghar opened its second centre, and even organized to pick up and drop its students. Ever since, the organization's admission rate has only reached upwards.

At its basic level, Diya Ghar describes itself as an NGO for the children of migrant labourers. The organization believes that all children deserve to partake in the joy of learning, and that none be left out of the process. It is precisely from this belief that its network of centres and Montessori education has originated.

“We have worked with many batches of children since 2016. However, over 500 children have graduated from the Montessori preschool course and continued further education in private or government schools,” says Saraswathi Padmanabhan, Founder and Director, Diya Ghar, “Currently, we have over 400 students in eight communities in our preschool programme.”

Why Montessori, though? For a start it’s simply on account of the learning methodology. In the words of Saraswathi, Montessori education helps students “learn concepts”, thereby improving foundation. “Montessori method uses a lot of learning material that students work with to learn concepts,” she says, “As children learn by doing, their foundation is stronger.”

At Diya Ghar, children work in a mixed age group of between two-and-a-half to six years of age, a process which lets younger students learn from older ones. “There is also scope for older children to teach youngsters,” Saraswathi adds. As per the Montessori methodology at Diya Ghar’s centres, there is a clear emphasis on the development of fine motor skills even as children are taught individually and get to learn at their own pace.

“Children from lesser-fortunate backgrounds come with developmental delays,” says Saraswathi, “The Montessori method is extremely beneficial since children are taught individually, they can learn at their own pace and there are a lot of activities aimed at the child’s development.” Needless to say, learning by doing is an approach that has resulted in children actually enjoying the process of learning, as a result of which students enjoy and look forward to attending school.

The syllabus at Diya Ghar focuses on two pillars: cognitive development and learning development. Striking a balance between both is the key. Saraswathi explains. “Cognitive development refers to reasoning, thinking and understanding,” she says, “In preschool, children continue to keep learning the art of questioning, spatial relationships, problem-solving, imitation, memory, number sense, classification and grading to name a few.” She continues: “Language development, on the other hand, includes understanding and communicating. We introduce them to English and help them understand and speak. We also teach them to write English and Kannada.”

However, Diya Ghar’s curriculum is one that goes beyond these two pillars, choosing to focus on all-round development. “We cover all aspects of a child’s development – physical, emotional, social, cognitive, including language development,” says Saraswathi.

One of the major challenges that Diya Ghar had to face in its five-year-long journey came during the COVID-19 lockdown last year. Not only did the NGO take the onus upon itself to ensure continuity of learning, but also looked into the health and wellbeing of its students and the community at large. “During the lockdown, we collaborated with other NGOs and formed COVID Relief Bangalore which resulted in 11,00,000 people receiving dry rations to help them through what was most certainly a very difficult time,” says Sarswathi.

To ensure children continue to learn we switched to a community-based model. Our teachers went where the children were. In addition to our online curriculum, we started building classrooms within the blue tents settlements so that children could attend daily classes.

However, a specific approach to education always comes with its share of challenges. “Finding a suitable place to build the classroom with land-owners cooperation was and is one of the biggest challenges we continue to face,” says Saraswathi, who also lists finding blue-tent communities to work with as another key challenge that she faced in the journey of Diya Ghar. Then, there’s the challenge of finding the right kind of human resources to impart Montessori education. “Finding new community champions and community teachers from within the communities to work part-time with us is also proving to be a challenge,” says Saraswathi.

In keeping with the attempts to ensure overall health and wellbeing, Diya Ghar has gone about distributing milk, eggs and fruits after class on an everyday basis. “They (children) also get monthly packs of high-protein mix and protein bars once a week,” says Saraswathi, “These supplies are for preschoolers and all the other children in the community as well. As on date, nearly a thousand children receive nutrition kits on a daily basis.”

Diya Ghar has gone the extra mile to ensure that high standards of hygiene have been maintained within the communities that the NGO has worked with, especially in the post-pandemic time period. “We have raised the standard of hygiene for the communities that we work with by providing hygiene kits, masks, conducting workshops and making sure there is physical distancing within the community classrooms,” says Saraswathi, “All children within these communities are taught to wash their hands before each meal on a daily basis. This is literally practiced each day before children receive their daily nutrition kits.”

Diya Ghar has gone about conducting regular medical camps for children and adults, while its blanket-and-

sweater-distribution drive during the winters has been quite successful too. The NGO isn't done yet with its services and hopes to keep giving back to society. In keeping with these plans, an expansion blueprint has been worked on and will be executed in due course.

“By the end of March, we will be running 12 community centres for 500 preschool students, and by the end of 2021, we will be working towards doubling that number to 1,000 preschool children and their older siblings,” says Saraswathi, “Our next milestone is to serve 5,000 preschool students and spread our presence across Bangalore.”

10. Dream a Dream

It Takes A Village



In 2011 “Conversations Today” featured a rapidly growing organization, cofounded by 12 like-minded individuals using the idea of “Power of One” to build life-skills among underserved children and youth in and around Bengaluru. Today it has grown into a massive innovation and life skills-building organization that has already reached over a million children in Delhi, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Telangana and Uttarakhand. Since its inception in 1999, Dream a Dream has provided unique opportunities for children to tap into their fullest potential in all aspects of their lives. Through their After School Life Skill Programme and Career Connect Programme they develop life skills such as problem solving, managing conflict, communication, self-reliance, enterprise and leadership among others, thereby nudging children to dream big, learn to thrive and grow into confident, well rounded individuals. Over 9000 teachers and educators have been trained in innovative learning methodologies that will help them address every child’s unique and diverse learning needs.

What are Innovation Labs? These are physical indoor/outdoor spaces in Bengaluru where children have the opportunity to engage in sports and arts. The Life Skills Programme documents the journey of each student and demonstrates the changes that the student undergoes, in order to build larger programmes that can achieve the desired impact at scale. The Career Development Programme provides youth with spoken English classes, career awareness sessions, money management and other workshops. Information about internships, scholarships, vocational training and jobs are also disseminated to keep each young person engaged and prepared to make a healthy transition into adulthood.

Besides these, Dream a Dream also routinely engages other social organizations, government agencies, educators and parents through its ‘system demonstrations’ and as a way to influence entire ecosystems to be more conducive for a child’s wellbeing. The organization develops policies and frameworks through rigorous research of children’s ecosystems at both micro and macro levels.

Says Vishal Talreja, Co-founder of Dream a Dream, “At Dream a Dream, we keep the child at the core of all our work. Dignity, Equity and Inclusion are the three pillars that help us achieve a thriving future for these children. We recognize the need to engage with the social identities of our young people.” Suchetha Bhat, CEO, Dream a Dream, explains how the lens of cultural intersectionality is applied to build their activities. She lists out four cultural needs that are recognized and built into Dream a Dream’s programmes: a. The need to address adversity; b. The need to address stigma, stereotyping, prejudice, and violence; c. The need to facilitate voice and participation and; d. The need to accommodate difference and change structures of discrimination.

Over the years, Dream a Dream has evolved from direct implementation of programmes to creating systemic change. Says Vishal, “Our direct programmes for children and teachers in Bengaluru act as innovation labs for curricula design and teacher-training modules. This helps us incorporate insight into large-scale programmes delivered via governments and partners. After the launch and implementation of the ‘Happiness Curriculum’, now we are in various stages of developing life-skills based interventions in five states and are also in the process of partnering with two more states. We are now at a potential to train 200,000 teachers and impact 4 million youth. Today, we are recognised as thought leaders in the life skills space with expertise in addressing adversity and taking on the ecosystem builder role.”

The efficacy of Dream a Dream’s programmes is visible in the clear and succinct way that their alumni speak on their online platforms. Dream a Dream won the “Football for Good” award by Common Goal, at the World Football Summit 2020. The organization is a certified “Great Place to Work” in 2021. For the third time in a row, this year Dream a Dream is featured in the HundrED’s annual Global Collection as one of the leading innovations in K12 education. The organization has earned many other accolades during its years of rising as a force of good.

The COVID-19 pandemic has given rise to newer challenges. Suchetha points out that for the young people that the organization serves, stark and growing inequalities have emerged. Some of the glaring problems are: loss of income and livelihood, migration, high levels of anxiety, children forced to become adults, confusion and misinformation, heightened violence and abuse, gendered impact, loss of learning, loss of dignity, confidence and self-esteem, impact of trauma- all of these factors leading to an inability to thrive.

The organization put together a COVID-19 task force which since April of last year has provided ration support, reintegration modules to encourage kids to get back into learning and has set up a youth-run online mentoring programme. The Life Skills Programme and Skill Development Programme have been made available online. A new movement “#WhatIf” was floated, where young changemakers can reimagine themselves to become resourceful changemakers within their settings and continue to make useful contributions to their immediate surroundings. Vishal explains that the Dream a Dream community has now identified a whole host of areas where support needs to be built, ranging from medical care to information, to social and emotional support systems. Aside from the pandemic related changes, Suchetha adds that continuous effort is being made towards strengthening monitoring and evaluation of Dream a Dream’s projects.

“We realise that this is not enough, and that we can do more. Pervasive systemic barriers-- like an education system anchored on outdated and narrow notions of what success means- does not allow life skills to take centre-stage in education and prevents children from thriving, says Vishal, adding that, “We want to evolve further, from equipping children with life skills, to promoting ‘thriving’ as the purpose of education. Sharing what this means for Dream a Dream, Suchetha says that, “Thriving includes life skills and stretches beyond that, enabling children to be resilient, responsible and happy. A move towards thriving allows us to tackle systemic barriers currently holding children back and create a more enabling environment. This is a long journey that will require large-scale change, but one that we are well-positioned to embark on given our track record and one that allows us to take advantage of the movement towards holistic education, well-being and equity within India and around the world.”

11. Faborg

Fashionably Sustainable



Fashion industry is one of the top pollutants in the world. From synthetic materials that create toxic waste, to artificial dyes causing water pollution, to fast-fashion piling up on the landfills year after year, the industry is in dire need of change. While the ethical fashion market is steadily on the rise, it still accounts only for a measly 5% (approx.) of the global market.

Cotton, silk, linen, are all commonly known varieties of natural fabric. They are comfortable, luxurious and trendy. However, sustainable they are not. There is excessive usage of chemical fertilizers, artificial dyes and wastage in the production of these fabrics that renders them in a bad light. There is an ongoing quest to identify naturally occurring fibres from plant sources that can also be harvested and processed in a more environment friendly manner. This is where people like Shankar make a difference.

Shankar is the founder of Faborg, an eco-business that manufactures fabric from the wild plants *Calotropis Gigantea* and *Calotropis Procera*. Known in Tamil Nadu as ‘Erukam poo’, the flowers of the *Calotropis* plant are usually made into a garland, as an offering to Lord Ganesha. Shankar, however, noticed the fine strands sticking out of the pods of the plant and those from within the stem of the plant, and decided to experiment with them.

Shankar hails from a centuries-old traditional weaving community in Tamil Nadu. Mainly weaving silk and occasionally other kinds of fabric, his community has for generations remained committed to their artisanal traditions. So connected is his community’s ties to the woven fabric, that Shankar’s childhood was filled with mythology, with stories of sages who wove clothes for Lord Shiva Himself. “As a child I grew up listening to these fantastic stories. It turned into a quest of mine, to unravel the mysteries behind some of these mythological stories, which in turn have become part of my very identity.”

It was not just the glorious past that Shankar explored. He was also tuned in to the various opportunities and problems in his community. For instance, he noticed there was a simmering discord between the weaving community and the farming community in his region. The farmers, who provided cotton among other things to the weaving community, did not like that the weavers were part of the larger water pollution that was affecting their villages. The toxic dyes that the weavers let out into local canals directly flowed into the irrigation system. This set Shankar on a course of discovering the most holistic sustainable process to produce clothing.

Since starting Faborg in 2015, Shankar has been looking at end-to-end solutions. Identifying the least invasive methods

to extract fibre, weave cloth, recycle the residue that gets created in the weaving process, and also identifying ways to create fashionable clothing using natural, non-toxic dyes, attempting overall, to conduct his business in the most environment-friendly way possible. At this point, he has developed ‘Weganoool’- vegan wool made from the Calotropis plant, and ‘Arka’, a natural insect repellent that is made from the residues of Weganoool. Arka has been tested and proven to keep agricultural crops, house-plants, and neighborhoods free of insects and pests. It is Shankar’s offering of truce to the farming community, to say that he is eager to be a part of the solution.

Newer and more diverse uses for the Calotropis plant are showing themselves up, day after day and Faborg is determined to put this plant on the national map. Shankar suggests that if he gets the support he needs, he would utilize wastelands to cultivate the perennial Calotropis plant, generate employment for people by the thousands and also help reduce water pollution all over the country. He has even worked out regions that are known for their drought-like conditions where Calotropis can thrive.

At the heart of Faborg is Shankar, whose maverick ideas keep him busily working, testing his own inventions and understanding governmental regulations (which are many) surrounding his business. Having previously worked in the high-fashion industry, he now runs a pilot unit just outside Auroville in Villupuram District, Tamil Nadu. His wife Elen works right alongside him, helping him out in every way in this journey. An Estonian by birth, Elen and Shankar met at a party at a mutual friend’s place. They soon fell in love and married. Elen left her high-flying sales career back home in Estonia to come live with Shankar in India. “We are constantly working together, day and night. We have this amazing energy between the two of us,” says Shankar,

“There is no decision I would make without first running it by Elen”.

Faborg has earned clientele both from India and outside. Their clients include on the one hand, fashion boutiques that are happy to use Faborg’s Weganool- vegan wool, and on the other, local farmers who rave over the efficacy of Arka- the pest-repellant made from the Weganool residue. Shankar is excited for the times to come. He is gradually looking to expand his small but mighty team. He feels especially protective of the farming community around him who have supported his Arka- pest-repellant even through the challenges of the ongoing pandemic.

“I want Faborg and the principle behind my eco-business to live on long after I am gone. I wish to keep all my knowledge open and available for the taking. At the same time, I’m wary of people who may want to tamper with the processes I’ve painstakingly developed. Weganool and Arka are mutually complementary products. In order to be sustainable, they both must be part of one larger process. Just this past year the government has announced a list of 10 natural dyes that can be derived from local plant sources. This opens up a whole host of opportunities for us” says Shankar, who has already begun working with natural dyes for Faborg.

He adds, “Innovation should not be restricted to just the crème de la crème of society. With just a little cooperation between stakeholders, even a plant growing in the wild can serve as a consummate solution to several problems.”

Archanaa Ramesh

12. Gram Nehru Yuva Trust

CHANGE THROUGH DEVELOPMENT



Up to 24% of the world's poor live in India, the fifth largest country by gross domestic product in 2017, according to the World Bank. India's richest 1% held 58% of the country's total wealth, which was higher than the global figure of about 50%, indicating extreme inequalities. India is expected to add nearly 273 million people by 2050 and will surpass China as the world's most populous country by 2027, according to the recent UN World Population Prospects 2019 report. Given the findings of the IHDS survey, this could have serious implications for the lives of India's poor. Female literacy has an overall impact on the lives of family members and rising levels of education result in progressively better access to shelter, water, sanitation, education, health, and information, irrespective of their economic status, the IHDS study found. A household is 1.6 times more likely to be deprived of access to necessities such as shelter, sanitation, education, and water if there is an illiterate woman in the family.

Since its inception in 1994, Gram Nehru Yuva Trust a non-profit organization has been working with enterprising men and women in the developing world to build competitive farms, businesses, and become self-dependent. By linking people to information, capital, and markets, Gram Nehru Yuva Trust has helped millions to create lasting prosperity for their families and communities.

GNYT offers loans, grants, and loan guarantees to help create jobs and support economic development and essential services such as housing, health care, first responder services, and equipment and water, electric, and communications infrastructure. GNYT also provides technical support to help communities to undertake community empowerment programs and help youth & women to become self-dependent. A dedicated voluntary organization based on Gandhi and Nehru Bichar, GNYT operates in 4 districts of Bihar and Jharkhand.

GNYT arranges workshops, seminars, training programs for the young and old. Their society is a Jan Bikash institution motivated, formed, and operated by local villagers. Gram Nehru Yuva Trust is working towards a great mission every day, to promote a better quality of life for communities, notably vulnerable populations, and empower them by enriching their lives through education, health, and sustainable livelihood skills and fundamental rights in all perspectives.

Estimates suggest that each year, at least 1.5 million girls under 18 get married in India, which makes it home to the largest number of child brides in the world - accounting for a third of the global total. Nearly 16 percent of adolescent girls aged 15-19 are currently married. GNYT conducts workshops on Child Rights and Child Marriage to bring awareness to rural youth. In partnership with the

Government of Bihar, the Trust conducted a program in Jandaha, Basmatta, Kolhasar Panchayat in 40 villages. Street plays, rural meetings, campaigns are conducted from time to time to stop child labour and abuse. GNYT has impacted about 1500 villages through this program.

According to the National Crime Records Bureau, a total of 5264 cases of human trafficking were reported in India in 2018, where 64% were women and 48% were below 18 years old. The most affected areas are Bihar, Maharashtra, Telangana, Jharkhand, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Orissa, and West Bengal. People from economically disadvantaged classes, and belonging to the categories of SC, ST, OBC are more susceptible to fall victim to such malpractices. GNYT often organizes workshops involving Anganwadi workers; ASHA workers and youth club members to prepare taskforces to prevent this gruesome act.

Empowering women and youth is one of the main objectives of the Trust. This is implemented through skill upgrading training. An income generation program was conducted in Kolhasar Village for unemployed youth. Through this program, GNYT aims to provide a three-month training on tailoring and making incense sticks wherein around 60 young girls took the training. These young girls are then provided with a little loan with the help of a local bank so that they can start small enterprises.

Farmers in rural areas of Bihar & Jharkhand are in a very poor situation; the Trust arranges training for their upgradation. National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), Field Office, Ranchi (Jharkhand) with the cooperation of the Government, FPO has been formed in 5 villages under the Jarmundi block of Dumka district and registered in the Companies Act. The main purpose of the study was to increase the income

of small and marginal farmers; every FPO has 100-300 shareholders.

GNYT has an active wing that helps small and marginal farmers who are into agriculture and milk production. “We arranged a Farmer Producer Organisation Program in villages like Raja Simria, Badrampur, Thari, Sahara, Bhavandiha, Jhakhiya, Palsia, Machla, etc. with the collaboration of National agriculture and village development bank, Field Office, Ranchi (Jharkhand) of Jarmundi area in Dumka district. Around 100 farmers attended this program and we made the FPO committee for them” says Shri Sunil Kumar, one of the Managing Trustees of GNYT.

Another important training conducted by the Trust is training for the FPO Board of Directors. Under the FPO of NABARD, field office, Ranchi (Jharkhand) for the capacity-building of the members of the Registered Farmers Producer Organization, a training of the athletes was organized and 25 members from Akhand Jyoti Sanstha and 25 members from Gram Nehru Yuva Trust got the training from the FPO under Bihar District. Along with this, there also has been training for CEOs for FPOs to upgrade the skills of members. A 5-day training program was conducted for the same.

With the help of the Bihar Skill Development Mission, Patna, the Trust was able to arrange computer training for youth and students. For this, network connections were provided by the institution for operating computer tracking in Banka District. In the institute, youth are being trained on the subject of DCA, tally, and data entry operations. So far, the institute was able to impact the lives of over 120 youth.

The Trust believes that women's empowerment is an asset to our society and empowers them through workshops. To make Muslim women self-reliant in the Madrasa complex located in Minor Gao-Parman of Jandra Panchayat of Katoria block, the Trust started a tailoring training. The training lasted for three months.

GNYT organizes Micro Entrepreneurship development to encourage locals to be self-dependent. Training camps on poultry and goat farming were conducted for 30 women. After the program, every successful trainee was given a small loan for self-income from the Central Bank of India. The organization also arranges seminars and workshops on climate change and air pollution. The youth is made aware of ways to protect the environment.

Over the years Gram Nehru Yuva Trust has grown by leaps and bounds. The impact the organization has on people's lives has exponentially increased with the help of teams and volunteers and rural youth. The organization strives hard every day to make a difference and bring development and empowerment to young and old alike.

Angela Anish

13. HOPE

Bridging the Digital Divide



Puducherry Riviera

Previously known as Pondicherry, Puducherry was once a French settlement. A love child of the French and Indian cultures, Puducherry is a beach-side Union Territory located near Tamil Nadu. French-style houses, churches and even the newly built French-style shops, bright coloured cafes and restaurants give Puducherry city, the capital of the Union Territory, an exotic character to it. No doubt, Puducherry is nicknamed as French Riviera of the East.

But, behind this facade of opulence, is a dark side of Puducherry. Almost 36 per cent of the total population of Puducherry are slum dwellers. The city of Puducherry in the Union Territory of Puducherry is characterised by high levels of urban poor population living in 140 slums or more.

Genesis

The 73rd amendment of 1993 gives the constitutional status to Panchayati Raj, self (local) governance for rural areas. Three years after the Amendment was passed, HOPE - an acronym for Holistic approach for People's Empowerment - started its activities with a core agenda of people's empowerment in 1996.

Leading this initiative was Mr. P. Joseph Victor Raj, a postgraduate in Social Work. His unique approach was the use of digital knowledge for the delivery of services to the have-nots using the vast potential of the digital space. His reasoning was, "I worked in the field of social work for years and felt that many NGOs lacked the knowledge of computers for Database Management and Social Work Research".

Advocacy and Campaign

From its inception, HOPE was functioning as a support service organisation; and in due course it evolved as an advocacy and campaign organisation.

The tsunamis that lashed the eastern and southern coastal areas of the country have left more than 7,000 dead in the coastal areas of Tamil Nadu and Puducherry.

Though HOPE started as a campaign organisation for protection of child rights, it had to work with the children who were affected by the tsunami disaster. Since the children underwent the trauma due to loss of family members and witnessing the giant waves, HOPE had to focus on psycho-social welfare of the surviving children with the technical support from NIMHANS and financial support from TdH (G) IP. The HOPE team was in the coastal villages within

hours after the tsunami, mainly for fact-finding purposes through which campaigns were held for environment protection and pro-people development.

However, through continuous visits to the villages, it was found that the relief efforts by various individuals and organisations lacked gender sensitivity and the special needs of the children.

From campaign mode, HOPE got into grassroots-level activities by providing psycho-social support to the tsunami survivors; creating livelihood opportunities for the women.

Justifying his core group strategy, Victor Raj says, “The disaster was huge and the means at our disposal were very meagre. By focusing only on the special needs of the women and children, we were able to carry out the tasks effectively.”

Interventions

Some of HOPE’s interventions were Formation of Women Self Help Groups, making them empowered women by educating about Right to Information Act, Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, Rights of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act and Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act with the financial support of Oxfam Australia.

“Some of our empowered women have also addressed the International Conference on Microfinance organised by Pondicherry University”, says a proud Victor Raj. And he further adds, “Tsunami gave us an opportunity to

practice whatever we have been preaching as a consultancy organisation”.

Media Campaign

HOPE reaches out its advocacy and campaign programmes through publication of posters on all social legislations. Furthermore, women and children were trained in street theatre and they gave performances in different parts of Puducherry.

HOPE hosted the national secretariat for Campaign Against Child Labour (CACL) between 2014 and 2019 and involved in advocacy with around 60 Parliamentarians to strengthen Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Amendment Bill.

Victor Raj adds, “We have organised a series of Press Meets across the country; and discussed the Bill in Rajya Sabha TV also”.

Pandemic & Online Campaign

HOPE’S knowledge on the digital space is coming handy for the present covid pandemic.

Initially, HOPE was lock downed like the rest of the world for quite a few months. And then decided to start working again. Since social distancing was the norm, HOPE took the digital way to reach out to its constituency. Before the beginning of the second wave; HOPE organised online training on Child Rights and the participants were the school teachers and the NGO staff.

The present project is ‘Ensuring Survival, Development, Protection and Participation Rights of Girls Children’ with

the support of India Literacy Project (ILP); and the main tasks were giving career guidance, life skill education, personal hygiene and menstrual hygiene education and awareness against child marriage in the Government Schools. Earlier, these were carried out by visiting the Schools and conducting the training in the Classrooms.

Since visiting Schools was not possible during the lockdown, HOPE created four WhatsApp Groups for students of high school in career guidance and other subjects. The organisation's techno-savvy staff created video content on the project's tasks. While the short video films were directly shared with students, a few films were uploaded to YouTube and links shared through WhatsApp. Apart from project's tasks, corona awareness messages were also communicated. There's constant interaction with staff and students and other stakeholders to gain feedback and improve the video contents.

“The Government has made it mandatory for the Associations to receive the FCRA donations only through the Main Branch of SBI, New Delhi with a lot of other riders. We are complying with all these new regulations; however, these processes consume a lot of human resource, which can be otherwise utilised for better purposes”, P. Joseph Victor Raj concludes.

Harry Jayanth

14. HOTHs

Uplifting the Dalit community



The plight of Dalit children coupled with Nirmala's passion made KNH extend support towards the upliftment of human dignity of Dalit communities

The story of HOTHs begins with a young girl and her tale. This little girl hails from a Dalit community who is clever and cheerful. She often bunked schools for silly reasons and this made her father anxious about her future. Hence, he decided to send her to Lutheran Girls High School, a residential school located in Andhra Pradesh. She was quite upset with the sudden uprooting and found it difficult to adjust to the unfamiliar Christian setting there with over 5,000 girl students. Something changed over the course of her time there. She got selected as one of the foster children among 500 children for the Kinder Not Hilfe (KNH), a German-based charity organisation that the school was associated with. KNH was founded in 1959 by a group of Christians in Duisburg, Germany in order to help poor children in India.

Over time, KNH became one of the largest Christian organisations in Europe supporting poor children in developing countries. Receiving support from her foster parents Prof. Robert Hoth and Prof. Gerda Hoth was life-changing for the little girl as she aspired to do something for the needy in rural areas especially.

This is the story of Mrs. Nirmala Bai, who started a voluntary organization to support children who are in need of care and protection and worked for women empowerment. A post-graduate in Sociology from Nagarjuna University, Andhra Pradesh, Nirmala established HOTHs, an organization for the Human Services in 1993, in the name of her foster parents Prof. Robert Hoth & Prof. Gerda Hoth.

Singaripalli is a hilltop village where schools was not accessible. Children either dropped out of school or never enrolled in one in order to rear goats and cows in the village. In 1995, with support from Kinder Not Hilfe (KNH), Nirmala started an integrated primary school exclusively for the Dalit children in the village and introduced formal education. KNH started to realise her efforts and came forward to aid her educational initiatives through the Churches' Council for Child and Youth Care, an organization based out of Bangalore.

During this time, Nirmala realised that the families living in remote hill areas not only lack quality education but also awareness of their rights against violations and discrimination. They lacked the skills that were necessary to combat the evils of the society they lived in. She understood that merely imparting education wasn't enough. There were deeper issues connected to the Dalit communities who lived away from urbanisation - social, economic and health-related. To tackle this, she approached Sathish Reginald Samuel, coordinator of KNH in India with a proposal to

execute Child Focused Community Development (CFCD) Programmes in 25 villages of Bestavaripeta Mandal, Prakasam district in Andhra Pradesh.

The plight of Dalit children coupled with Nirmala's passion made KNH extend support towards the upliftment of human dignity of Dalit communities through its programme - Child Focused Community Development (CFCD). Along with school programmes, after school study centres were formed to help children hailing from low-income families. Also, education committees, children's clubs and community committees were established to improve their sense of ownership so that they can take forward various activities for its sustenance.

KNH supported HOTHs in building capacities of the programme staff on project management, facilitation, documentation and communication skills. HOTHs developed an outstanding rapport among the Dalit communities, thus extending its activities to women and Dalit empowerment. Nirmala has earned good recognition among the communities for her dedication and commitment to the fight for educational and human equity. She dedicated her life to address the issues of women and children from poor backgrounds who lived close to forests and remote locations in the Prakasam, district of Andhra Pradesh. Unfortunately, Nirmala had an untimely death in 2020.

HOTHs has established Self Help Groups (SHGs), Cluster Level Association (CLA), Children Groups and Children Rights Resource Centre (CRRC), Youth Groups and Education Committees in the district of Prakasam. Through their intervention, the Dalit women improved their capacities through training, savings and linkages with banks & SHGs.

HOTHS conducts awareness programmes on child rights, women rights, human rights, health, cleanliness, environmental change, disability, and HIV/AIDS in the target villages. The organisation has been primarily involved in women welfare, especially widows and destitute women. They conducted various programmes and activities for the families belonging to these women in order to ensure that the children do not drop out of school or end up becoming child labour.

HOTHS has programmes planned for the benefit of children whose families have migrated and for children who belong to destitute and vulnerable families. These initiatives ensure schooling, food security, shelter through seasonal hostels and short-stay homes. They also took care of their additional needs like uniforms and school supplies.

The organisation conducted an awareness programme with the support of Mercury Pronex Trust, U.K on the prevention of HIV/AIDS. They also held a Wheelchair Distribution Programme in 2020 with the support of Indian Christian Mission Hyderabad.

HOTHS joined hands in helping victims of COVID 19 and the underprivileged in

Bastavarapeta Mandal, Prakasham District and approached many organizations like BOSCO and SHAMDASANI for support. With the kind support and cooperation of these organizations, HOTHS distributed five types of green leaves, vegetables and groceries to the migrants, daily labourers, pregnant women, physically challenged and destitute women during the COVID phase. They covered 7 villages and 3,212 poor and needy beneficiaries. Health awareness campaigns were also conducted.

Another project is the eradication of Leprosy through awareness and participation. The project was initiated in 2019 in 20 villages in Bestavarapeta Mandal in Prakasham. This is in collaboration with Government District Medical and Health Department and PHCs in Prakasham. Medical checkups were also conducted to diagnose and treat any such cases.

HOTHS also conducts awareness programmes on the eradication of child marriages, domestic violence and human rights, child protection, food security, community issues, livelihood and its promotion.

Although Nirmala is no more, the staffs at HOTHS try to fulfil her dreams to this very day.

Angela Anish

15. Indian Grameen Services (IGS)

ALL ABOUT LIVELIHOODS



The success or failure of any sustainable social initiative depends on whether or not it is ably supported by a market. In many ways, Indian Grameen Services' contingency approach to rural livelihoods has provided a readily available market for the communities it involves.

“While working with communities for the betterment of livelihoods, we have always faced pressing challenges,” says Sanjib Sarangi, programme director at IGS, “This required contingency approach which typically includes collaboration and partnership in terms of technical support services involving livelihoods within agriculture or forest-dependent communities.”

However, in Sarangi's own words, there were “missing links”, including the quest to find financial wherewithal, technology or government structures. But the contingency approach, he believes, tackles these issues too. The reason: market dynamics.

“This is important because it gets a market player in place,” Sarangi explains, “This also helps communities get price realization by selling their produce. The contingency approach works with the weakest link of the chain. We identify the weakest link and that decides where intervention is required.”

Established 35 years ago, in 1987, IGS succeeded its predecessor, Pradhan, established by Deep Joshi and Vijay Mahajan in 1983, which was at its basic level, a national-level NGO. “While working with producers in rural communities, both men discovered that tackling the market was the big challenge,” explains Sarangi, “Pradhan wasn’t enough to accommodate the cascading effect of market dynamics. After much thought, IGS was established to ensure that community producers cooperative had technical support services and a market.”

A market meant that producers in various communities could get good prices for their produce, which in turn meant that their livelihoods were positively impacted. That very tenet is today, at the core of what IGS does by way of its contingency approach focused on livelihoods.

The reasons for the livelihood-based contingency approach were many. “The founders believed that livelihood was the core that contributed to various factors surrounding standard of living. If livelihoods are below par, then other factors like healthcare and education also suffer,” says Sarangi, “Many NGOs are working in India and are implementing many livelihood projects. But there are challenges that require tackling in depth in terms of solutions.”

The problem with solutions though was startlingly simple: one size just doesn’t fit all. “Strategies feasible in Tamil Nadu, for instance, may not be feasible in the North or

North East of India,” explains Sarangi, “These solutions not only have to be feasible but also sub-sector-oriented — with context to crops, geographical context or the type of farmers that they are aimed at benefiting.”

Another major factor while dealing with the livelihood-based contingency approach was the ready availability of capital. “Our founders realized that capital was the big challenge while dealing with the sustainability of livelihoods involving marginalized communities,” says Sarangi, “While banking services existed, rural communities were not able to access these facilities. Banks, for instance, needed guarantors, which the rural marginalized communities could not furnish.”

Another issue was the simple fact that while these communities lived in rural hamlets, most banks back in the day were established in urban localities. IGS developed a solution to this problem nearly a decade since it began operations.

“In 1996, through Basix India, IGS helped provide micro-finance to the doorstep of these communities,” says Sarangi, “IGS contributed to provide support and design micro-finance products and services for these rural communities. Once these products were tested in IGS operational areas, they were shifted to the communities themselves.”

What IGS did and did well, was to extend Basix India’s technical support services in terms of how to manage portfolios, build capacities to manage livelihood, and cultivate better practices in order to sustain these livelihoods. What added to this repertoire was IGS’ strong focus on innovation. “When IGS started its journey, every programme had an opportunity to think from an innovation point of view,” says Sarangi, “We started gauging livelihood

solutions for specific regions, communities and areas of livelihood.”

The key was to gauge innovations and figure out ways to innovate further in the pursuit of better impact and effectiveness. In fact, this approach was put to the test and came out successful in Mangalajodi, a village located on the Chilika Lagoon in Odisha.

“About 11 years ago, we promoted a model called Community-based Eco Tourism in Mangalajodi,” says Sarangi, “The situation was rather simple: over two decades ago, the village had a fantastic wetland and was a destination for migratory birds. During the migratory season in winter, migratory birds from Mongolia and Siberia congregated in Chilika and Mangalajodi.”

Trouble, however, began when villagers began poaching these birds and selling them off as pets, with their eggs making their way to the local dhaba. “These poachers were ably supported by urban dwellers who patronized them by buying these birds,” says Sarangi.

A census conducted at Mangalajodi revealed that the local and migratory bird population had reduced drastically. “Authorities then figured out a way to regulate the situation. They involved local NGOs who tried convincing the villagers to stop what they were doing since it was affecting the region’s biodiversity,” recounts Sarangi, “Although it took time for poachers to give up, the NGOs were able to convince them to stop doing what they were doing.”

However, that was only a job half done since the fact still remained that poaching birds and selling their eggs proved to be a lucrative livelihood for villagers. And that was where IGS entered the fray. “Our plan was to utilize the

skills of these poachers who could identify these birds and their habitats,” explains Sarangi, “We applied this talent to provide guided bird-watching services to tourists, and even went about establishing an eco-tourism-based community.”

Soon enough, home-stays, nature trails and food walks became a well-known feature of Mangalajodi. These services were well marketed across various forums, with the initiative bagging awards like the India Responsible Tourism Award instituted by Outlook Traveller, and the India Biodiversity Award.

While the bird poaching stopped, the bigger takeaway from the Mangalajodi model was the fact that the establishment of an eco-tourism industry through IGS’ contingency approach ensured that revenue was generated by the villages, which in turn led to income enhancement support. A nice bonus was the fact that conservation of the wetland was all but assured.

16. Karna-Subarna Welfare Society

Global Samaritan



To date, 37 such people have already been brought back from Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and Malaysia by Rahaman. Seven more people are about to be repatriated, including one from a Malaysian detention camp and six from Saudi Arabia, two of whom are in jail

Matiur Rahaman is the eldest among three siblings of an agricultural family. In Spite of the family's frugal financial situation, he managed to finish his schooling and thereafter graduated in commerce. He moved to Kolkata to pursue Chartered Accountancy but had to discontinue because of financial constraints.

On returning to Murshidabad, he worked in a couple of NGOs as an accountant. Soon he conceptualized his own

NGO – Karna-Subarna Welfare Society. Like any other NGO, he started with issues on education, empowerment and health. Helping Indian people in foreign countries - either dead or incarcerated - happened by chance.

Asatulla Sheikh, Rahaman's maternal uncle's son-in-law, was working as a gardener in Malaysia. A lightning struck him and killed him instantly. Rahaman's uncle approached him for help to bring the body from Malaysia. "I didn't know the process to bring back a dead body from other countries," admits Rahaman.

He contacted the local police and district magistrate for help. He even spoke to the local journalists for information. In desperation he wrote to the chief minister of the state. All to no avail.

He tweeted to Ms.(late) Sushma Swaraj, then Minister of External Affairs. He instantly received a call from MEA seeking information. Immediately he got another call from the High Commission in Malaysia. They gave him the link to "Madad" (helpline) the Consular Services Management System of the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. They asked him to stay connected with MEA.

The body was located at Batu Anam in Johor area about 140-km away from Kuala Lumpur. Within a week, the dead body was sent to Kolkata. It was brought to Berhampore from Kolkata Airport for burial on the next day. The people of Murshidabad district were soon talking about the Malaysian incident.

Murshidabad is a town in West Bengal and is located on the eastern bank of the Hooghly River. It was originally called Makhsudabad, it was reputedly founded by the Mughal emperor Akbar in the 16th century. In 1704 the

nawab (ruler) Murshid Qulī Khan (following Aurangzeb's orders) transferred the capital from Dacca (now Dhaka, Bangladesh) to Makhsudabad and renamed the town to Murshidabad. During the 18th-century, Murshidabad once was a prosperous city. The city's decline began with the defeat of the last independent Nawab of Bengal Siraj-ud-Daulah at the Battle of Plassey by the British in 1757.

Khairul Sheikh is a daily wage labourer of Sahajadpur village in Murshidabad district. Khairul's 28-year-old son Jurail Sheikh went to Saudi as a sweeper on a monthly salary of Riyal 700. He died due to prolonged illness at Al Munawwarah in Medina. The father ran from pillar to post of the district civil administration departments for a week but all his efforts turned futile. It was then that someone from the neighbouring village informed him about Rahaman - the only person in Murshidabad district who knows the procedure to bring back corpses from any country.

When approached, Rahaman requested Khairul Sheikh photocopies of Jurail's passport, Aadhar Card and an authorisation letter to proceed on behalf of Khairul. And the details were registered on the "Madad" helpline. Managing these documents is time-consuming. It may take a week or may extend to six months because of several reasons. But Matiur Rahaman patiently followed the issue, fulfilling all the bureaucratic norms.

Finally, Jurail's mortal remains arrived at IGI Airport, New Delhi instead of NSCBI Airport Kolkata. Rahaman contacted the officials at Delhi Airport to confirm that the coffin would be shortly picked. The dead body of Abdul Gaffar was brought from Al Quassim, Saudi Arabia to India after six month of his demise. The poor family borrowed Rs 1.5 lakh to bring the coffin by flight.

But Rahaman's job wasn't over. Transporting the coffin from Kolkata Airport to Berhampore, a distance of about 181-km one way, was another challenge. At his request, the Chief Medical Officer of Health, Murshidabad sanctioned a free ambulance service. Eventually, the coffin reached and Jurail was laid to rest in Sahajadpur village.

In yet another case, an Indian boy who went missing abroad. Najemul Sheikh (28), a resident of village Mahalandi in Kandi, Murshidabad district, went to Malaysia with the help of an agent. He was told that the company hired him for a packaging job at the salary of 60 Malaysian Ringgit per month. But he landed up cutting green coconut. However, he was in touch with his family regularly and suddenly the communication was truncated. He escaped from his workplace but was then caught by the Malaysian police.

His father, Khudabaux Sheikh, along with his wife, visited Rahaman stating that they didn't have any idea whether their son was dead or alive. Based on their information, Rahaman docketed the grievance on "Madad". Soon the Pravasi Bharatiya Sahayata Kendra (PBSK), Kuala Lumpur Branch, sent him a message on WhatsApp stating that Najemul was alive and in a detention camp. The letter from the High Commission in Malaysia stated: "We have checked our record. Mr. Najemul Sk is in Tekan Detention Camp. He is ready for repatriation. Kindly provide us with a Malaysian contact number, so that we will inform them to make payment for his Air ticket.'

The same letter was forwarded to the District Magistrate and Superintendent of Police of Murshidabad. The letter from MEA shook them and they picked the agent for questioning. The agent made a video call to his Malaysian counterpart. Subsequently, the name and number of the agent in Malaysia were passed to

the High Commission. Najemul was vaccinated for COVID-19 before he was repatriated to India. He was sent to a quarantine centre in New Delhi for six days and reached his village on 29 March 2021.

To date, 37 such people have already been brought back from Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and Malaysia by Rahaman. Seven more people are about to be repatriated, including one from a Malaysian detention camp and six from Saudi Arabia, two of whom are in jail. He also rescued 14 Indian sailors, who were taken into custody by Yemeni Coast Guard in February 2020. Heron Sheikh Siddiki from Murshidabad was one of them. They were sailing from Oman to Saudi Arabia and due to inclement weather they had to anchor their ship at Yemen port. These sailors were confined to a hotel in Sanaa, Yemen. They all have been repatriated to India via Dubai.

Matiur Rahaman (45) is a resident of Berhampore, is a social activist who has been bringing back dead bodies from abroad. He has also liberated many labourers, who got stuck either in overseas jails or detention camps since 2017. And he does it all for free of cost. A chartered accountant by profession, Karna-Subarna Welfare Society is his umbrella organisation. Before the Moguls, Shashanka Deva was the emperor of Bengal from 600 AD. His capital was Karnasubarna, the present-day Murshidabad and hence the organisation's name. He is supported by Mr. Sunil Baskey, Mr. Hupna Mardi and Ms. Panigareti Tudu, the field stakeholders in the project area.

“He is the Samaritan of poor labourers. We are illiterate and know nothing about the paperwork. He does it on behalf of us for free,” says Khudabaux Sheikh.

— Harry Jayanth

17. Ladli Foundation Trust

Reforming the Streets Through Meaningful Engagement



Devendra Kumar Gupta, founder of Ladli Foundation Trust, often quotes, “When you take a step towards society, the latter doubles its efforts to steer you towards success.” His life, riddled with challenges as it has been, has proven this to be true. Devendra’s childhood was sparse. Abandoned by his parents at the tender age of two, he not only had to fend for himself, but also for his infant sister, as soon as he was able.

Forced to work as a child labourer, he grew up in one of the high-crime slums of Delhi. At age 8, he was beaten up by some few drug-using youth. This incident made Devendra question what caused the young boys to beat him up. Instead of resorting to anger, he decided to do befriend these older kids.

He would get together with these boys and play local sports such as kabaddi, all evening. Soon, several more youth

started playing with and befriending young Devendra. This organized playtime gradually helped youth get over their drug addiction. Seeing this change, their families started supporting Devendra, encouraging their kids to befriend him.

Soon Devendra was busy straddling two major undertakings - his own livelihood, which he earned through clerical jobs here and there, and his social service in his immediate surroundings, the slums of Delhi. He also set up his own business in due course. Years later, when he started looking for marriage alliances for his sister, he became acutely aware of the deep-rooted social problems of dowry and gender-based violence. It was the challenges he faced at this time, in the year 2012, that led him to build Ladli Foundation Trust- an organization that empowers women and girls in impoverished communities to become educated, skilled and independent.

In Devendra's neighborhood, it was plain to see that women's rights was non-existent. Domestic violence was highly prevalent, along with a low literacy rate of women. Human trafficking and marriage rackets were all too common and in general, women did not have a right to expression over the smallest of things, such as asking for menstrual pads.

Ladli runs several programs to eradicate gender-based violence. In 2012, he undertook the responsibility to verify grooms for local women of marriageable ages. Appreciating his efforts, the parents of the brides then proceeded to help him organize a mass wedding event by pitching in whatever they could- cooking the wedding feast, setting up the wedding decorations, etc. Till date, Ladli Foundation has arranged the marriages of 1,753 verified couples through these community-led, annual mass wedding events.

Emboldened by the community's support, in 2015, Ladli Foundation proceeded to start education and vocational training for women through its volunteer run training centres in Delhi. Devendra converted one of his old residences into a training centre. Mothers who previously took extreme measures to protect their daughters from street criminals, felt safe enough to send their daughters to be trained here. Over 16,000 young women have learnt basic English and Computer skills through this training program so far. Many have since moved on to acquire clerical jobs and are financially independent.

In 2017, Run for Ladli was begun. A half marathon for men who wish to support women's rights, the event was attended by 25000 men, with the then Union Minister being its chief guest. Since then, major PSU's such as ONGC and BPCL have partnered with Ladli in several different CSR projects. One such project "Saheli", has helped screen over 300,000 women in Delhi and surrounding rural areas for infectious diseases such as TB or HIV and other medical conditions such as anemia. The screening has helped those in need of immediate medical care to seek it, as well as to help women become more comfortable talking about their own health needs. "Life can be challenging for anyone, but for a woman, her challenges begin even before she is born" says Devendra. Right from talking about female foeticide to menstrual health, sexual health and communicable diseases, Ladli Foundation, along with its partner organizations, helps shed some light on women's health in communities where their health is often the very last priority of households.

Also in 2017, in 48 districts in India, a massive Kanya-Puja drive was conducted by Ladli Foundation. Families across these districts who observed this tradition, were encouraged to pledge their continued support for 2 girl children each, for a period of 9 years. The objective of this initiative is

to create a bond between the girls and the local families. Over 3,000 girls have been “socially adopted” through this program, according to Devendra.

Ladli Foundation attained “special consultative status” with the UN in 2020. Devendra was invited to the March 2021 UN Commission on Status of Women and even delivered an address emphasizing on the importance of women’s health in determining women’s overall development. With 2300 interns working under him and over 5000 volunteers ready to spring into action in a moment’s notice, Devendra has helped establish Ladli Foundation as a veritable grassroots movement, a notable one at that. Now the Foundation’s programs run in over 50 districts spread across North India. Aside from big name corporate partners, Ladli Foundation also has the support of the Delhi Police.

Speaking of challenges, Devendra says, “We need a larger platform to raise our voice. We feel we are still too small. Getting government agencies to listen to us continues to be a challenge. Our research has resulted in us creating a huge data bank with case studies about the plight of women and other groups in poor communities. All this information needs to be put to better use. We wish to be involved in policy making”.

Devendra remains cheerful and resolute in his journey with Ladli Foundation. He signs off on a note of conviction, “I started my life as a child labourer. People still invested in me, believed me enough to become who I am today. The universe offers you several opportunities. It is up to you to rise up to those opportunities and create your own success”

Archanaa Ramesh

18. LC Disability and Development Programme

People with Disabilities



Disability is a contested concept. It has been referred to as an ‘embodied difference’, ‘specially challenged’ or simply ‘differently abled’. People with disabilities are considered burdensome or a liability and are most often ridiculed and neglected by society

According to the World Report on Disability, about 15% of the world’s population or one billion people are affected by disability; of whom 2% to 4% experience significant difficulties in functioning. A disability may be readily visible, or invisible in nature. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities defines disability as long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder a person’s full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.

LCDDP, short for LC Disability and Development Programme, was established in 2006 at Ongole, Andhra Pradesh, India. The project addresses the need for skill development and employment of people with disabilities by directly facilitating greater equitable access to livelihoods and employment opportunities for them.

“People with disabilities are also people with destiny. They need extra facilitation and mentoring to stay well, active, and be a productive part of the community. The identified candidates have to undergo a self-motivational programme titled ‘Ready2Succeed’ at our Livelihood Resource Centre. After finishing the training in the trade of their choice, they are given a kit in case they opt for self-employment instead of job placement,” says Mr. A. Raj Kumar, Livelihoods Manager of LCDDP.

Narendra Kotinarayana Murthy is affected by severe speech and hearing Impairment since birth. Despite his disability, he somehow managed to finish his primary education in a government school but had no means for livelihood. After marriage, his wife, who was into tailoring, tried to teach him sewing but was not successful at that. Things had gone from bad to worse after the birth of their children. It was at this point in time the couple heard about the LCDDP. Murthy and his wife were trained in making artificial jewelry and the duo learnt to make several varieties of this jewelry. With the self-employment kit provided by LCDDP, the couple set up a unit and sold the artificial jewelry they produced through retail shops in towns thereby gaining sustainable income.

Raj Kumar explains, “A self-employment kit consists of tools and materials and related equipment required for the business. For instance, artificial jewelry kit consists of beads, needles, threads, etc. We encourage non-monetary

support rather than just giving seed money to start a business. The organisation also facilitates bank loans to the trained participants , if required.”

LCDDP, through its ‘Ready2Succeed’ programme and Livelihood Resource Centre, provides people with disabilities with various technical and non-technical skill training. Technical skills in computer related services – from computer basics to hardware and networking, DTP, Photoshop, Multimedia, Tally ERP 9 and Cell Phone Technology – are taught in the centre.

Other skills that are taught at the resource centre include tailoring, beautician course, artificial jewelry making, food processing and fast Food preparation, pickles, spices, candles, phenol, greetings cards making, etc.

“I was stricken with poliomyelitis at an early age. I was doing my polytechnical course with government sponsorship when I fell in love. Both of our parents did not agree to our marriage as my boyfriend was a Hindu while I was a Muslim. So, we eloped. My husband worked as a chauffeur and the money he earned was barely enough for house rent and grocery items,” says Shaik Valiya Bi adding, “Things were getting very dismal and when I learnt about LCDDP’s Ready2Succeed programme, I immediately enrolled. I was trained in Data Entry and accounting with Tally ERP 9. Thereafter, I got a job in a granite company and later on as an outsourcing employee in a government office where the salary is good. Now, I can provide good education for my children and buy a house too!”

LCDDP’s interventions for people with disabilities covers almost all categories of Locomotor Disability – Orthopedic disability, Visual Impairment, Low Vision, Intellectual

Disability, Leprosy Affected Persons, Hearing Impairment, Cerebral Palsy, Muscular Dystrophy, Dwarfism, etc.

“We have also covered young people with spastic disabilities by providing computer skills, physiotherapy, and supporting them with assistive Devices. In, fact, our website has been designed by a Spastic Disabled person,” Says Raj Kumar.

“LCDDP’s project intervention takes into account the inter-linkages between social, economic, and cultural rights and calls for a holistic view of the rights of people with disabilities and their access to employment and livelihoods,” concludes A. Raj Kumar.

Harry Jayanth

19. Manavlok

An ode to social welfare & development



Manavlok...Marathwada Navnirman Lokayat; where 'Navnirman' means Innovation and 'Lokayat' stands for Community of People.

Established in 1982 as a Non-profit organization for social welfare & development of Rural communities, Manavlok has always been clear about its mission and its goals. The aspect that sets Manavlok apart from others of its kind, is their unshakeable belief that one needs to provide means of development as opposed to putting money in the hands of the people.

Aniket Dwarkadas Lohiya, The Secretary at Manavlok states, "The key to doing good work is proper "Strategic Planning" & the key to successful strategic planning is "Participation"; We at Manavlok, strongly believe in equal participation & ensure we involve everyone, including the board, management & key stakeholders, in our meetings. In order to achieve equality in the lives of women and

bring about positive change in the lives of landless laborers & marginal farmers, Manavlok has and will always be prepared to take a lead role in campaigns, agitations & protests wherever necessary.”

Over the years, at Manavlok, wholesome participation & collective local leaderships have played an important role in mobilization & optimum utilization of resources. “Employing local Human Resources must always take priority over Hiring of outside assistance.” says Lohiya. Saying this, it is no wonder that one of the core beliefs of Manavlok is “Its people are its Wealth” and their Health & welfare is of great importance since if the people are taken care of, they will, in turn take care of their environment.

Mr. Lohiya adds, “Since ignorance and poverty are enemies of the community and our environment; awareness programmes & welfare schemes are staunchly promoted by Manavlok. We believe in sustainable development in association with natural development & ecological restoration.”

Manavlok is also committed to the cause of women empowerment & has a dedicated women-oriented wing; Manaswini Mahila Prakalp (MMP), that works towards fighting violence and discrimination against women. Since its inception, MMP has undertaken several programmes promoting gender equality & women empowerment. It also provides free legal aid & counselling for women facing the aforesaid social evils. The centre also educates women & their families about the Laws prevalent in our country, for domestic violence, women safety, and women empowerment, which instils confidence among these women & improves their mental well-being. Its associate arm, Manaswini Mahila Nagarik Patpedhi (MMNP), is a women’s co-operative credit society, which has been set up to provide quick and low-interest credit (microfinance)

to women and motivate them to start small-scale income-generating activities. The ideology behind MMNP is to empower women & inculcate the value of entrepreneurship & self-reliance among them.

Another of its associate arm viz: Savitri Mahila Udyog (SMU) is an enterprise set up with an aim to improve the status of underprivileged, destitute & deprived women in society. The SMU works relentlessly towards creating income-generating jobs & small-scale business opportunities for women, addressing domestic grievances and acting as a support system for oppressed women. The SMU also helps these women by providing necessary assistance in improving their children's health & education.

Lohiya adds “We have also formed a Community support Group at the Village level. Currently, this activity is being implemented in over 50 villages of the Ambajogai and Dharur blocks of the Beed district. To date, more than 7,000 cases have been registered at this centre, out of which 70% of the cases have been settled.”

Through Manavlok's ‘Shelter Home’ initiative, over 400 needy women are given shelter and provided medical and legal aid on a regular basis. “They are assisted with psychological support and are provided knowledge about laws and provisions related to women to enable them to take their own decisions” says Lohiya.

Manavlok operates with a clear Mission & sets Targets for itself to achieve. Some of its most important Targets being; To end Distress migration, Empower poor and marginal farmers, Empower women for inclusive development, Restore ecological balance, mobilize people, Improve water safety and security, and Bring value and respect to the lives of farmers.

The organization carries out campaigns for gender equality and women's protection from domestic violence at Villages of Beed district in Maharashtra. "Community support groups are formed in each village having 8 women and men members to prevent domestic violence at the village level. Workshops are conducted regularly at each village level to assist & educate the families," informs Lohiya.

It is very important to note that Manavlok not only works within Maharashtra but beyond it as well. "We have conducted monitoring & surveys on campaigns like 'Total Sanitation Campaign' and 'Nirmala Gram Puraskar' in states of UP, MP & Gujarat. We remain open to working across India." says Lohia

It is worthwhile to note that many projects initiated by Manavlok are adopted by Government agencies as Policy Programmes. However, the organization's Baliraja Cooperative Society which provided 1,367 families with small and marginal landholdings with financial holdings, will always stay close to its heart.

"Fertilizers and seeds worth about Rs. 1.73 crore were provided to 114 farmer groups in 57 villages at the time of distribution. These farmers agreed to repay the amount to the organization from the sale proceeds of their produce. Out of all the farmers who received this support, 654 beneficiary families were women-run households." states Lohiya.

One of the main reasons why the project is close to the hearts of those who run Manavlok is that it has lasted all three decades. "In the absence of a recovery officer, our beneficiaries have paid back the total amount upon a simple follow-up, which proves that, if you help the farmers in times of crisis, it is they who faithfully return the favour," says Lohiya, "Even after the Government implemented two

major Debt waivers in the past, not a single beneficiary in the past 30 years, has asked us for a “payment waiver”. The most rewarding feeling for all who work at Manavlok is feeling of satisfaction that comes from helping people during such exceptional times.” says a beaming Lohiya.

Manavlok has always been recognized for its work & efforts towards community welfare. Mr. Aniket Lohiya, secretary at Manavlok has been recently awarded the National Water Warrior Award 2020 (West Zone) -IInd prize and The Late Shankar Rao Chavan Jalbhushan Award 2020- IInd prize for his leadership in Manavlok’s work & efforts towards Drought solutions.

Manavlok has worked against Drought volumes of 12076425 Cu.m. increasing storage capacity for 12076425000 litres of water. The silt excavated is spread over 7200 acres. Minor and sub minor canals are cleaned up to 597 km. thus helping irrigate land even in the tail region of the canal.

To date, Manavlok has been able to reach out to over 4,468 Villages with their welfare schemes & development programmes and aims to reach another 4,000 or more villages in the next 10 years.

“Manavlok was set up with a dream of achieving equality in the lives of women, to empower the women, landless laborers & farmers and improve the lives of their children. Though being a humungous task, We at Team Manavlok are glad, that gradually but consistently, step by step, we have been able to work towards our dream by assisting the rural communities for all these years. We strongly believe that with the undying support of Manavlok’s associates, sponsors, followers and Institutions like yourselves that recognize & appreciate our efforts; we will tirelessly continue to do so in the future years to come.” maintains Lohiya.

20. Men Against Violence and Abuse (MAVA)

Men, for Women



MAVA is the fruit of all his introspection and innovation to communicate gender concerns to a small and large audience cutting across all social barriers.

Inspiration is everywhere. It is ubiquitous but calls for the right combination of situation, perspective and personal drive, to be identified. “In the early 90s, domestic violence was a big social issue. As a trained social worker, incidents that I came across not only disturbed me, but forced me to look into the factors that made it persistent. Yes, there was an act in place but the issue relentlessly resurfaced everywhere. My questions never found answers. That is when a newspaper advertisement appealing to men who believed that women are not for battering gave me hope,” shares Mr. Harish Sadani, Co-Founder of Men Against Violence and Abuse (MAVA), in Mumbai, Maharashtra.

There were 205 men, all from different socio-economic, cultural backgrounds who responded to that appeal and

after a year, it became a focused group of 30 members who consistently deliberated to identify ways to support existing efforts in the field. MAVA, the first and pioneering men's organization was established in 1993 to demonstrate the need and effectiveness of engaging men to address violence and abuse against women. "When it was widely known that men were the most crucial part of the problem, there was hardly any effort to make them a part of the solution. We wanted to change this. We strongly believed that unless men saw through what they were doing to the present and next generation families they may not realize the gravity of their actions," he says.

Harish was that kind of man who did not feel inferior when friends teased him 'girlish'. He rather wondered why people teased him using that word. "Femininity is not inferior, then why?" he still speculates. He was also disappointed that entertainment industry did not portray strong men who stood up for themselves and women in their families. He sensed a huge void here and the resultant attitude in the society that was taken for granted. The absence of men in women's movements baffled him.

"Women were there in the freedom struggle. They support families in all crucial times. They always stood for their men, whether husband or children or siblings. Then, why did men fail them? Why did we leave it to the women to fight violence and abuse against them? Is there something wrong in the way we are brought up as men?" Harish continues to raise such questions in every platform that can prompt a change.

MAVA is the fruit of all his introspection and innovation to communicate gender concerns to a small as well as large audience cutting across all social barriers. MAVA was

ahead of its time 28 years ago and even today it surprises observers with its impact on individuals.

There is a serious dearth of places for men to reflect upon their actions and to help them see beyond traditional judgements about gender roles and stereotypes; MAVA provided this space. “Men needed to see how else they could handle disagreements or other situations in their families. They needed to see why violence could not resolve the fundamental issue. Making them talk, open up and speak their hearts out was a huge task, but it was important to what MAVA was trying to do. Our patience paid off well enough,” smiles Harish.

MAVA utilised every opportunity to educate masses about domestic violence being a societal issue and not a private one. Awareness programmes and workshops were tailor-made to suit every type of audience and Harish began to see the relevance of street plays. MAVA hired professionals to conduct street plays in different places because it was significant for men to see how neighbourhood intervention could turn the table. As men began to see the roles they can play, it became easier for them to relate to what they could actually do at a community level. But, did this ensure that they acted so in reality? Harish and team thought of strategies to help men act in such situations. “It is like un-schooling them about what they were used to and getting them to behave in a completely new pattern. It took time, but efforts paid off,” he proudly says.

Extensively working with youth in colleges, universities and collaborating with other organisations helped MAVA rise as a resource organisation in mentoring audience on gender and sexuality concerns. A combination of interactive workshops, street-theatre, film-screenings, folk media, wall newspapers and social media soon drove men to support

peers who took an active stand for women. MAVA was able to engage and sensitize the youth on a wide range of contemporary gender and sexuality matters, apart from domestic violence. Against a family member or community, men began to show their solidarity with disadvantaged women in their lives. This peer influence further honed MAVA's interactions with new entrants. MAVA's annual Marathi magazine 'Purushspandana' (meaning Men's Expressions) was initiated in 1995 to educate the society about men who have taken active stands for the cause of women and gender equality, apart from providing non-threatening space to ventilate their innermost thoughts, ideas and experiences through first-person accounts, stories, poems and all other forms of contributions. It's huge success also led to the publishing of an English book called 'Breaking Moulds' in 2007 which articulates men's views on sexism, patriarchy, masculinity, sexuality. Therefore, gender became a larger discussion involving everybody and not just women.

With a lot of patience and perseverance, MAVA managed its first 10 years without an office and full-time staff. Soon, new projects and new donors came on board, recognising MAVA's work. The project Yuva Maitri created a new identity for MAVA as the objective was to demonstrate methods that can mentor peer influence on gender equality. "We wanted the results to spiral out. The two-year fellowship programme sponsored by Population Council of India was successful and from a small group of 33 young men in Pune it spread to nine other districts of Maharashtra through strategic collaborations with local social organizations. Today, we count on over 90 gender champions in three other states too – Assam, Gujarat and Karnataka. Our gender sensitisation programmes have been so impactful that women professionals from different parts of the globe visit us. Having built a cadre of over 900

youth mentors, MAVA also attempts to create platforms for all genders to reflect,” adds Harish.

SamaBhav (meaning equanimity) is the first of its kind film festival on gender diversity, masculinity, relationships that has been travelling to cities and districts across India. Over 6000 youth from Universities, Colleges and Civil Society Organisations in 23 cities and 12 districts across India have been reached out in the last 3 editions of SamaBhav through engaging conversations post screening of a wide range of national and international films. “More than the number, we are proud to have created a space where all gendered people express themselves without judging anybody. Safe spaces for such open dialogues is a must to be able to understand each other. Respect, Empathy and care comes only after we understand. Such dialogues inspire us and many youngsters who want to live in a gender-just society,” he says, adding that the fourth edition is work under progress and will be launched soon.

Shanmuga Priya. T

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21. Mission for Vision

THE GIFT OF SIGHT



Ensuring equitable, accessible and quality eye care for everyone irrespective of nationality, religion or socio-economic status, best describes Mission for Vision (MFV). Over two decades, the organization has provided eye-health interventions for over 16 million and eye surgeries for more than 2.38 million patients at no cost.

Founded on the philosophy of Caring Capitalism, rooted in the belief that an individual should give a portion of their wealth to the communities from which they have benefitted, MFV has recognized Recognising the potential of collective philanthropic action. “Our founders came together to strengthen efforts towards eradicating needless blindness and progressing people out of poverty through improved sight,” says Elizabeth Kurian, CEO at Mission for Vision. Alongside eye-health interventions to disadvantaged communities, MFV conducts an impact assessment of its

activities. “Utilising innovations, MFV has developed a Patient-Related Impact Studying Mechanism or PRISM, which gathers evidence on quality of life and other indications of eye-health systems,” Elizabeth adds.

In this manner, MFV has engineered an impact on the quality of life and vision, indicating alignment with World Health Organisation’s recommendations. “For example, in the year 2019-2020, we assessed the impact of cataract surgeries on the quality of life of patients, we found that 77% of patients reported improvement in mobility, and 80% of them experienced improvement in psychological and social aspects, which meant there were improvements in productivity and mental health,” she says.

Today, according to the WHO world report on vision, over 2.2 billion people have vision impairment out of which over a billion cases could have been prevented or are yet to be addressed. In India, of 1.3 billion people, 8.8 million are visually challenged in 2015, while 47.7 million have moderate to severe vision impairment. “This totals to 56.5 million,” Elizabeth points out, “Cataract and Uncorrected Refractive Error are the leading causes of blindness and visual impairment respectively.”

It is here that MFV has been a catalyst for strengthening and enabling eye care, especially in the rural heartland. “Through our different thematic areas, we provide eye-testing, treatment and also generate awareness among the masses to ensure that they proactively seek eye care and this in turn helps us holistically tackle avoidable blindness,” says Elizabeth, “We strongly believe in collaborative action and partner with 39 leading eye institutes across India to enable delivery of high-quality eye-health systems.”

The organization's Mission Saksham programme is presently engaged in training Allied Ophthalmic Personnel (AOP), which in turn aims to address the dearth of AOP capacity in the country. This means rural youth from socio-economically challenging backgrounds undergo training at no extra cost.

“The programme eventually leads to livelihood opportunities for them, thereby paving the path for such people towards equality and empowerment,” Elizabeth says, “Mission for Vision is also actively involved in research that focuses on workable solutions for appropriate eye healthcare, and this provides us with valuable evidence that helps in decisions related to policy and advocacy.”

Challenges are ever-present. In its years of existence, MFV has experienced difficulties in accessing members of tribal communities and populations in remote locations. “The main issue is accessibility, difficult terrain to transport such populations to a base hospital and navigating through the pre-existing practices and traditional medicine used by these groups, particularly among tribes,” says Elizabeth.

But that isn't all. Low awareness and inadequate human resources add a layer of difficulties in reaching out to marginalised groups. To address this issue and focus on inclusion in every step, MFV ensures these vulnerable groups are prioritized.

The organization's partnership with the Naraindas Morbai Budhrani Trust, Wen Giving Foundation and L V Prasad Eye Institute (LVPEI) to strengthen eye-care delivery for the Dongria community, a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG) of Odisha has come up for praise. This Last-Mile Eye Care initiative has impacted 10 PVTG communities across 10 districts in Odisha. “With the onset

of the COVID-19 pandemic, our Mission Jyot's 'Vision Centre (VC)' approach has been found to be effective and relevant. Local lockdown protocols, compounded by fractured transport facilities and the fear of infection have prevented communities from accessing eye care in hospitals that are usually based in cities or larger towns at considerable distances," says Elizabeth, "Communities served by VCs on the other hand had a continuous source of eye health care and were not bereft of services."

In a nutshell, vision centres or VCs double up as primary eye-care centres with trained optometrists conducting services at affordable rates. "The model is in complete sync with the integrated people-centred eye care (IPEC) approach, as recommended by WHO in its World Report on Vision," says Elizabeth, "VCs are often located in rural and tribal areas, particularly in underserved regions and focus on serving the socio-economically challenged communities."

In keeping with the World Health Organization's (WHO) commitment towards integrated people-centred eye care (IPEC), MFV plans to establish 250 Vision Centres under the Mission Jyot umbrella. The Vision Centre approach has significant potential in reaching out to communities in remote locations to reinforce the global strategy on vision. Another key programme that MFV will scale up is Mission Saksham, where it intends to train 2,000 AOPs over the next few years.

"Along with the plans to expand our reach with the Mission Jyot and Mission Saksham programmes, we have also joined hands with several partners to establish eye health centres that will provide quality affordable eye care and help us in eradicating avoidable blindness among these vulnerable groups," says Elizabeth.

Although COVID-19 may have led to uncertainty; MFV wants to strengthen quality eye-care systems for communities in need. “With a collaborative approach, our goal is to reduce the prevalence of blindness in the country to 0.25% and reduce the prevalence of visual impairment by 50% by 2025,” she adds.

Given the importance of on-ground presence, one of MFV’s aims is to ensure presence in every state that requires eye-care the most. “We are strengthening our efforts in Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar, Jharkhand and other North Eastern States of India,” says Elizabeth, “We plan to scale up our programmes INCH closer towards eliminating needless blindness.”

22. Mitti Café

The inclusive Cafe



About 2.2% of India's population lives with some kind of physical or mental disability, as per the National Statistics Office report on disability released last year. After the passing of 'The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Bill – 2016', perceptions regarding disability underwent a radical change. It became one of the salient points on the corporate agenda with many organisations initiating special drives to recruit people with disabilities (PwD).

Mitti Café is completely run and managed by people with various kinds of disabilities ranging from Down's Syndrome, Autism, Asperger's to visual and hearing impairments, etc. The very first branch was set up in August 2017 at Deshpande foundation in BVB College of Engineering and Technology campus, at Hubballi, Karnataka. 90% of the equipment for the first unit of Mitti Café was donated by the community.

Alina Alam was 23 and a student at Azim Premji University when she started Mitti Café. She was doing her final year studies when she came up with the idea. An internship

at Bengaluru's Samarthanam Trust for the Disabled got Alina involved for the first time in this space. This made her contemplate on the untapped potential of people with disabilities "I always wanted to build a social enterprise that engages these people in an empowered setup, outside the scope of charity. And that's how I envisaged the concept of Mitti café," shares Alina.

Alina realised the struggles that people with disabilities faced and understood how they were not offered equal opportunities in the job market. She wanted to bring about a change to this situation thereby assuring them of a dignified livelihood. She believes that food connects people and this could be a great medium to spread her message.

"People bond over food. It's one of the most common activities to break the ice," says Alina. "I always wondered if this action can be channelled to break the ice between the customers and this community", she explains.

The Café made its presence felt across Karnataka in various colleges, hospitals, business parks, and corporate campuses. Today, 800 trained adults with disabilities are gainfully employed across 15 cafes across 2 cities in Bengaluru. The Cafés have a disabled-friendly infrastructure where the wheelchair employees can move around with ease and the walls have sign language guides that can help customers to order food in sign language. Menu cards have incorporated Braille to aid the visually impaired staff, self-explanatory placards and flicker lights that signal the staff when there is a customer call, and more such unique ideas to facilitate the disabled staff. These adaptations make every employee at Mitti Café feel valued and provides them with a better environment to work, thus making it inclusive.

Many persons with disabilities often see a dead end ahead of them due to the huge stigma that still revolve around people with disabilities. Mitti café has opened doors to a new life for each one of them who are working here. In fact, the Café has been able to normalise disability, create awareness amongst people, and empower them by providing opportunities to nurture and evolve. It is a great medium for everyone to understand that the differently-abled people are employable and are asset to an organisation.

Despite facing many hurdles due to COVID-19 and the lockdown, Mitti Cafe has not glitched in following its dreams. Over last year, several of their teams of adults with disabilities served over 5 million meals and beverages to frontline workers, doctors, etc. They have even set up food stalls in hospitals which led to providing rehabilitation to countless people with disabilities. Aside from meal distribution, the employees also started making gift packs as a vertical. Two branches have opened in Koramangala and Jayanagar through crowdfunding.

COVID brought forth tremendous hurdles. But the Mitti Café team found different ways to help others. “Along with the Café, we have crafted other initiatives like Experiential training for persons with disabilities where each Mitti Café and their retail production and packaging units facilitate experiential training for persons with physical, intellectual and psychiatric disabilities. Having access to an opportunity to skill development and understanding facets of roles gives them an opportunity to use productive abilities and skills that develops their skills and employability,” she says.

MITTI Karuna (Compassion) Meals is an initiative started during COVID-19 first phase focusing on nutritious meals prepared and served by Mitti Café team to benefit economically vulnerable communities. This includes homeless people, COVID patients, caretakers of poor patients at government and charitable hospitals and children coming from low-income backgrounds. With a cost of 25 rupees per meal, Mitti Café raised funds to distribute 2 lakh meals in the last 17 months to the economically vulnerable. A part of this income goes towards the labour cost to pay members from their PWD team who are rendering their services.

The idea of helping people with disabilities came to Alina when she saw a documentary about Roman emperor Nero and how he burned people who he thought were unfit in a party. “This realisation was a turning point for me. I knew that I could no longer face myself if I remained to be one of Nero’s guests. I decided not to sit for placements, much to the dismay of my parents, who wanted me to ‘settle down’ either with a job or a husband. Instead, I started volunteering with organisations who worked in the disability inclusion space. The statistics were staggering – 7 crore persons with physical, intellectual and psychiatric disability in India, and 1.2 billion across the world – struggling for equal opportunities, economic independence and dignity despite their ability and willingness to engage in productive work that would enable them to contribute to the sustainable development of the country, she says. “I realised that the problem was not their ability, but the disability in our own perception and the limitation which we placed in the way we view them was the problem, and I knew this needed to change,” she adds.

Alina, who is now named by Forbes, in the 30 people under 30 list, shares that she always wanted to build a social enterprise that engages these people in an empowered setup, outside the scope of charity. These were the thoughts that enabled her to build the Café.

Mitti Café currently has plans of expanding to Chennai, Mumbai and Hyderabad. They also provide hands-on training within the Café, following which the persons with disabilities can work at the Café or be placed in organisations that Mitti Café works with.

Angela Anish

23. Mother Teresa foundation

Bringing about change



The most terrible Poverty in the world is loneliness and the feeling of being unloved. For many of us it is heart-wrenching to see the situation of sufferings due to hunger, lack of education and being homeless. Irrespective of which aspect the poor are suffering, it is painful to witness the difference in society and those who have privilege of living a luxurious life where some are struggling to even meet the ends of life.

The Mother Teresa foundation started in the year 2002 in Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu, embarks on the noble mission to spread love among the poor and bring them to mainstream of life to embrace universal brotherhood. The foundation is dedicated to achieving extraordinary improvements in human life. It strives to “promote the well-being of humanity” in all aspects. The main idea behind the foundation was to spread love and make one to understand the depth of love and motivate to perpetuate the love among all.

The founder chairman, Rtn. Dr. A.R Savarimuthu, from his school days was inspired by the teachings of Saint Mother

Teresa which ignited his desire to support the cause of the underprivileged irrespective of caste, creed, religion and language. From his early adulthood, he nurtured a passion for the upliftment of the poor and oppressed which culminated later in the formation of Mother Teresa foundation in 2002 dedicated towards the same. The activities of the foundation are guided by the board of trustees headed by the chairman. It has an advisory panel consisting of eminent personalities in various fields.

Rooted in love, justice and trust, respect for the dignity of life and spirit of hope, Mother Teresa foundation partners with people especially the unwashed, and cares and loves to help them to achieve their full potential in life. “The character of our lives is determined not by the genes but by our responses to the aggrieved society to propel better life “, says Dr AR Savarimuthu. He added, “By educating the undeserving youth it has significantly brought about transformation in the life and helped in reducing urban rural divide. It has paved way for the present generation to guide the future generations in different possible ways. On the health side, quality medical care has been made available for the have-nots who have been denied of such medical attention due to their poverty “.

The Mother Teresa foundation with its friendly approach could bring about desired transformation in the lifestyle of poor people from rural areas and urban slums. The foundation over the years with the help of Mother Teresa education programme so far has enabled over 1500 people who are economically poor but academically efficient across the country to pursue their academic aspirations and get well placed in their professional career. Presently, 900 students are getting scholarship under this programme which covers 14 states in India. Education being a tool for

prosperity, the transformation in the life of poor and needy could be achieved through this programme.

Mother Teresa Mother Teresa foundation initially started as an orphanage called Mother Teresa Anbu Illam, now has many more projects to benefit multi number of people covering the different states in India.

With the experienced gain in running an orphanage and feeling the necessity to provide higher education for the children foundation launched Mother Teresa education programme to provide full scholarship at school and college level by end rolling over thousand students every year depending upon the aptitude, proficiency and economic status. The stakeholders include orphans, semi-orphans, destitute, differently abled children, children of parents affected by terminal diseases, children of parents for visually and physically disabled and poor children who are academically proficient and economically backward classes.

The beneficiaries who completed the courses are now well placed in their life to live with honour and dignity and remain equipped to support the successive generations. Most of the beneficiaries happened to be first graduates and hailing from remote rural areas and urban slums. The transformation does not stop with this, the foundation has been able to concentrate on health issues and Also started Mother Teresa health Centre to provide quality medical care to the non-affordable matching the haves.

This programme was launched to benefit the abandoned seniors by opening the Mother Teresa joy home which is the home for the aged with an international standard in which those who are totally abandoned are given care and compassion without taxing them.

Dr AR Savarimuthu, Says , “Given the present situation, the pandemic having thrown the livelihood of many daily wage earners and street dwellers out of any earning, we launched Mother Teresa Amudha Surabhi Program which is a free meal programme to provide free lunch to over 500 poor people every day around the year. The sequence of the projects will amplify that from the child to the oldest our foundation engage itself to help them through various charitable activities which happened to be the basic need of the hour”. He also said, “Our programmes have considerably reduced urban rural divide in the areas of health and education”

Citing the example of the many people who have benefited in Mother Teresa foundation, Dr AR Savarimuthu says, “ K. Vasanthakumar, An orphan who lost his parents in his early childhood hails from Kumarapalayam, Namakkal district, Tamil Nadu. He has been under the care of his grandmother who was also struggling to earn her livelihood. In spite of all such odds he has excelled himself at school level and got admission through government counselling in BE computer science course In KSR Institute of science and technology, Tiruchengode and completed the course with distinction with the help of Mother Teresa foundation. He then got placed in Infosys Private Limited, Bangalore as senior associated consultant . He is also very active member of the Mother Teresa alumni association”.

The Mother Teresa foundation has rendered services to children, women, youth, elderly in India and has so far touched the lives of more than seven lakh individuals irrespective of caste, colour, religion and language. Dr AR Savarimuthu says, “We address multiple needs of the socially and economically vulnerable people by our programmes, through which they have access to basic services for holistic growth “.

The prime aim of mother Teresa foundation programs seek to rejuvenate the poor into vibrant individuals/families. The foundation seeks to empower, enable and transform communities across India, while improving the quality of life of the underprivileged, Undeserved and backward and laying special emphasis of women and children through a distinctive focus on education and health.

The foundation regularly organises new life programme, rejuvenation programme and counselling programme with the help of social activist, reformers and HR specialist at school and college levels covering on an average 50,000 students in 50 schools and colleges every year. The main purpose of these programmes is to create awareness among the student community is about the abuses caused to the girls by unscrupulous elements, health issues, evils of smoking and drinking to prepare them for clean and ethical lifestyle.

The chairman, Dr AR Savarimuthu has also empanelled in educational institutions as an advisor on eradication of social evils which provide additional scope to directly deal with the affected people.

The Mother Teresa foundation carries out all these charitable activities and events to transform lives with the help of dedicated board members, advisers and trusted executives. The services are provided with idea and belief of the foundation only in “religion of love “ propagating the fact that “to love your neighbour is to love God “.

Aatika Kouser

24. Naisargik

Safety Behind the Wheels



Road and transportation have become part and parcel of every human being today. Everyone is a road user in one form or the other. While transport has helped in minimising distances, it has considerably increased the risk on one's life. It is alarming that every year road accidents result in the loss of lakhs of people's lives and causes serious injuries to crores of people in India. This leads to very difficult financial hardships and emotional trauma to the families of the victims. Mr. Nitin Gakdari, Minister of Road Transport and Highways has stated in one of his interviews that that India's road accident is more dangerous than Covid-19 pandemic.

With only 1 percent of the world's vehicles, India accounts for 11 percent of the global death in road accidents, witnessing 53 road crashes every hour; killing 1 person every 4 minutes – the highest in the world, according to a report by the World Bank. In the last decade, 13 lakh people died, and another 50-lakh got injured on Indian roads, a daily newspaper in India quotes.

The man behind the wheel plays an important role in most of the crashes. In most cases, crashes occur either due to carelessness or due to a lack of road safety awareness of the road user. Hence, road safety education is as essential as any other basic skills for survival.

Naisargik is an Indian Charitable Trust in Gujarat founded by Mr. Prakash Chandra Chauhan in 1997. It's activities were promoted by a group of young social entrepreneurs who had significant experience in mobilising communities at the village level, particularly women and disadvantaged communities, for meeting the development needs of northern Gujarat. While the Trust has been steadfastly working in the areas of women empowerment, school awareness, environmental awareness, health awareness, water & sanitation, its core engagement is in road safety awareness.

Naisargik has been playing a pivotal role in educating truck drivers, and other drivers and pedestrians on road safety rules as part of their mission in Gujarat. They aim to provide road safety information for road users to safer road user behaviour among current and prospective road users and reduce the number of people killed and injured on our roads every year.

Road Safety is emerging as a major social concern not only in Gujarat, but also in other states of India. Deaths on road have gone up and the total economic loss to society on account of road accidents is high. On 31st July 2019, Gujarat State Road and Transport Department felicitated individuals, NGOs, and schools for their Innovative efforts for road safety at Sachivalay Gandhinagar, Gujarat. Naisargik received Gujarat State Road Safety Award for their efforts in Road Safety training and awareness on this occasion.

Recently, Naisargik has collaborated with SUZUKI and conducted PATH Road Safety Awareness Programme, a CSR Initiative by Suzuki Motor Gujarat Pvt. Ltd for rickshaw drivers, children and women of Sitapur Village. As part of this programme, reflectors were posted on various vehicles and drivers were taught how to wear a seatbelt properly.

‘Various engaging activities and games are conducted in this programme. With SUZUKI, a Traffic Rules Awareness Meeting for truck Drivers, Road Safety Awareness, COVID-19 Awareness, and License Awareness Camps are also organised. Naisargik team members are also trained in conducting COVID-19 Awareness programmes by Dr. Bhavesh Solanki, Swami ICU & Hospitals, Palanpur.

Sadak Suraksha – Jeevan Raksha’ was the theme of this year’s National Road Safety Month. Naisargik created ads and pasted them on cycles and rickshaws to increase the awareness.

The Trust also focuses on quality implementation of government programs with community participation. So far, Naisargik has completed 168 projects with the support of 7,596 volunteers and 8 partners.

Naisargik has been in the limelight for quite some time now. Udgam honours the achievements and accomplishments of outstanding women committed to serving and enriching their workplaces, their communities, and the world. Winners are chosen for their vision, courage, and compassion, proven success, and generosity as demonstrated by how they help other women succeed. Ms. Pinki Gandhi, Program Co-ordinator of Naisargik received Udgam Women Achiever Award-2017 for her valuable contribution to Rural Development Sector and the Women Empowerment area

for the past 23 years. Gujarat Ecology Commission has also recognized Naisargik's work on environmental awareness.

“ Our aim is to expand our awareness campaigns into more areas of social issues in the future. We want to host Save Water and Save Environment Campaigns, Reproductive Health and Child Care Campaigns, Livelihood Restoration and Skill Enhancement Workshops, Animal Rescue Helplines, Career Guidance and Counselling and more of Road Safety Awareness Campaigns in the coming years,” says Mr. Prakash Chauhan, Founder of Naisargik.

Naisargik believes that progress is impossible without change and those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything. The Trust hopes to spread and create change in the lives of people through these awareness programs in the coming years.

Angela Anish

25. Native Medicare Charitable Trust'

Rewriting the Destiny of the Underprivileged



Here is the story of Dr. A.S.Sankaranarayanan, an ethnobotanist who lived with a tribal community in Coimbatore district during the mid 80s and trained them in agricultural practices so as to overcome poverty.

Sankara Narayanan realised the obstacles that the tribal communities faced. This led to the launch 'Native Medicare Charitable Trust' (NMCT) in 1988, with the vision of Sustainable Holistic Development for the tribal communities through capacity building, promotion and support service.

NMCT works in 19 districts of Tamil Nadu and in a few districts in Kerala as well. The organisation focuses on

providing quality education to tribal children, while also promoting agriculture, agro-forestry, animal husbandry and other livelihood activities.

“During the initial years, I focused on building contacts. The first project was a prestigious Bio-diversity Conservation Project that was launched in association with Dr. M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation in 1992. Through NMCT, I originated the tribal development programs during 1992-1993 on preservation, propagation and cultivation of medicinal plants along with CAPART,” says a proud Sankara Narayanan.

HIV/AIDS was a more concerning epidemic of the 20th century, and Sankara Narayanan was passionate towards this cause as well. Through NMCT, he conducted awareness on the prevention of HIV/Aids in over 100 schools for adolescent boys and girls and supported the affected families too.

During 1998 to 2003, NMCT concentrated on educating the target communities in Environment, Education, Health and Livelihood. Environmental Awareness programs were conducted in Coimbatore and Nilgiris districts. He closely associated with Covai Class (Covai Child Labour Abolition Service Society) and rescued child labourers from brick kilns and mainstreamed them to school education. This programme was later upgraded and supported by Karl Kuebel Stiftung, Germany during the years 2004 to 2007 which led the child labourers to mainstream education. 10 play schools and 10 bridge courses were established within the brick kiln areas through which 1625 children benefitted. Through Abhaya Students Shelter, vulnerable children were provided shelter, educational support, nutrition food and medical treatment services.

“While undertaking the project on Rescue of Child Labour, around 85 SHGs were formed in order to provide supplementary income to the migrated families. In this, 1,000 women were empowered to launch entrepreneurial activities and financial assistance was also offered. In 2008, a Block level Federation namely Vimuktha Federation was formed by merging all the SHGs under 5 clusters,” he says.

NABARD TDF scheme was launched in the tribal areas wherein horticulture in 450 acres of agricultural land was cultivated and 250 tribal families were provided livelihood opportunities through milch animals and sheep rearing. With the support of NABARD, NMCT also established Rural HAAT in 2019 to enable these families market their Agri products and poultry thereby avoiding paying the middlemen. This led to sustained incomes and launch of ADI Federation in the tribal area.

NMCT also promoted and educated WaSH practice among the Government and Panchayat Union School Students. “We constructed new toilets along with handwash platforms and the provided sanitary napkin incinerators in Government Schools in Coimbatore District with the financial support of KKS, KKF, Ford Motors Pvt Ltd and Save the Children. We also promoted kitchen gardens in the schools and strengthened the School Management Committees,” he says.

The recent COVID -19 pandemic and the consequent lockdown have resulted in the shutting down of all the industries, hotels and restaurants. This has left many migrant workers in Coimbatore and neighbouring districts jobless and many not having food to eat. “We approached CSR programmes for support and reached out to more than 20,000 families with groceries, sanitary and hygiene kits in Coimbatore, Tirupur, Erode and Salem areas. Community

Kitchens were also established in the tribal areas of Karamadai Block of Coimbatore District,” he adds.

NMCT in association with Eicher Group Foundation and Give India upgraded 44 Primary Health Centres and 2 Government Hospitals with medical equipment and consumable. It also provided Medical Equipment to Coimbatore Medical College and Hospital and renovated the Paediatric ward in Coimbatore Government Hospital.

“We were successful in creating awareness among parents on the importance of education. Apart from ensuring that education is not disrupted by the pandemic, the programme has also prevented children from falling into the trap of child labour. We roped in volunteers and started teaching the tribal children.”

“Now, there are about 400 children attending classes from 9 am to 1 pm every day in eleven tribal settlements in Karamadai block and nine in Periya Naicken Palayam block. We also provide the children with nutritious snacks and food,” he says.

NMCT in association with a few corporate houses is providing training programs to deserving women in dosa batter making and bakery products and also supports them with bank linkages. The organisation hopes to focus on more Sustainability Development Goals to reach out to more people in need.

Angela Anish

26. Raindropss Charity Foundation

RAINDROPSS OF HOPE



Raindropss has supported 800 children across Tamil Nadu, and helped them continue their education, acting as a bridge through their generous patrons and supporters.

It has been a decade-long journey for Raindropss Charity Foundation. Recently, the organisation re-registered to establish its presence internationally, through their global committee members and also work on CSR projects.

Until November 2020, the organization was involved in multiple signature projects such as Educate A Child, Reach The Beach, Medical Wing, Feed The Needy, Ramp For A Cause and Dream And Fly High.

“Service to humanity was our main motto,” says Aravind Jayabal, Founder, Raindropss, “In November, we restructured and re-registered our organization as Raindropss Charity Foundation and we wanted to mainly focus on the education and uplifting less privileged children and to support the differently abled in creating an accessible

society for them.” However, in Aravind’s own words, Reach the Beach, Educate A Child, Vanamae Ellai, Dream and Fly High remain the organization’s most notable and successful projects. However, Reach The Beach, a project designed to allow people with disabilities to access the seashore, has a special place for the organization.

“Reach The Beach will always remain close to our heart,” he says, “When we see the happy faces of the differently-abled reaching and touching the sea shores through the temporarily laid ramp, we feel that anything and everything is possible and accessible.”

Today, beaches have become more accessible to the differently-abled. “We are glad to know that our state government and the Chennai Corporation have taken steps for creating a permanent ramp setup for the accessibility of differently-abled in Marina Beach, and we hope it will be LIVE very soon,” says Aravind.

Aravind says projects like Educate A Child and Vanamae Ellai go hand-in-hand in their support for education of lesser privileged children: “The objective is to let these children continue their education and build up their confidence levels to achieve and make them feel the sky is the limit,” says Aravind, “This in turn, creates a greater and positive impact on young minds to keep achieving more and more.” As on date, Raindropss has supported 800 children across Tamil Nadu, and helped them continue their education, “acting as a bridge through our generous patrons and supporters.” However, none of this would have been possible without support and inspiration from Aravind’s family.

“My Late father Jayabal who has served more 36 years of service in the Department of Public Health as an Administrative Officer is my biggest inspiration for starting

Raindropss,” Aravind says, “I have always seen him help people in whatever manner possible. Our Trustee, Arun Loganathan, who is an international mentalist and magician, is also an inspiration for many. Both men are differently-abled achievers.”

Also drawing inspiration from personal struggles and hardships that the two men they face in their daily life to access public places or transportations, Aravind knows what it’s like to go to the beach to enjoy the lap of waves on one’s feet. “Yet it is out of reach for lakhs of differently-abled people,” he says, “Driven by the need to make it inclusive for all, the Reach the Beach initiative was ideated, by laying a temporary ramp on Elliot’s Beach in the city, for persons with disabilities to reach the shore. It is a dream of every differently-abled person: visit the beach to leave a trail on the wet sand and let the frothy waves lap at their legs. But for many, it remains unfulfilled as nothing is more difficult than wading through the sand in a wheelchair or walking on crutches.”

Through Reach The Beach, Raindropss wanted to make the dream of every differently-abled person come true, and over time, this initiative has made them happy, and left memories to cherish.

“Covid has thrown us many challenges in all ways possible,” says Aravind, “The major challenge was the fact that we couldn’t reach out to people in need physically, as everyone was concerned for their safety. Though schools and colleges were not open, students have had to pay their fees. We had a lack of donors and supporters due to the pandemic and crisis. We weren’t able to support as many children we support every year. We were not able to execute any of our projects during the pandemic and we have only just started trying to come out of it.”

The working at Raindropss is one where board members — all employed with different companies — divide and share work among themselves. Executing projects is a function that occurs in line with availability, and funding continues to be a persistent challenge.

“We haven’t employed any full-time or part-time resources too. From the date of inception, we board members share our personal money as monthly contributions and use it for the execution of small scale projects like Feed the Needy,” says Aravind, “We get sponsors from our patrons for executing the projects like Reach the Beach and Vanamae Ellai, Dream and Fly High. We are working on a few fundraising plans and hope it will definitely help us to create and build our corpus in the near future.”

Raindropss is presently in the process of working out procedural intricacies in the hope to work on CSR projects with the focus on education of lesser privileged children, support for the differently-abled and women empowerment. “We have restructured our organization, and are working on this actively,” says Aravind.

“I wanted to re-start the functioning of our office space, hire a few deserving people in need to run and execute our projects,” he adds, before signing off, “I also have plans of expanding our team and volunteers strength for the effective functioning of all our projects.”

27. Rural Litigation and Entitlement Kendra (RLEK)

Avdhash Kaushal : The Man Who Regained The Lost Paradise of Doon Valley”



The Doon Valley in Uttarakhand once had numerous limpid water streams emanating from limestone aquifers. Abundant growth of the bushes held the soil together. But unscientific mining and unbridled cutting of trees wrought havoc with local conditions and greatly altered the ecosystem.

Cometh the hour, cometh the man. Once, a young Avdhash Kaushal was browsing a newspaper. A news item caught his attention. Tribal people in the hilly region were violently fighting for their share of water!

“It shocked me that they were stabbing each other for something that is in abundance in the valley - water!” recalls Kaushal. “I knew this had to be stopped at any cost.” He consulted environmentalists, hydrologists and social activists. And found out the cause of the dearth of

water in the area was unbridled mining and indiscriminate felling of forests.

In early 1970s, when Avdhash Kaushal relocated to Dehradun from his native Meerut, he founded Nehru Yuva Kendra to motivate young people in environmental issues facing the local areas. It was kind of a start-up to the activist in him. Later, he initiated an entity called Rural Litigation and Entitlement Kendra, RLEK for short in 1989 and undertakes a host of issues like legal literacy, human health, veterinary health, milk marketing, non-formal adult literacy, and children's education.

For decades, limestone mining operations in the Doon Valley were very widespread. The Valley had not only lost its natural beauty but had become prone to landslides, flash floods, water shortages, rising temperatures and failing crop production.

Kaushal decided to take on the mining cartel. Friends and well-wishers had warned Kaushal against taking on the powerful mining mafia of Dehradun-Mussoorie belt in Uttarakhand. He went on regardless without a care for his life and limb.

“It's not that I was looking for a fight. These poor people of rural Uttarakhand were not aware of their rights and the laws that can protect them. I just took the law to them,” reminiscences Kaushal.

He filed a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) on 14th of July, 1983 in the Supreme Court seeking a complete ban on quarrying. The limestone quarries case fought by Avdhash Kaushal was the first environment case in the country to be heard by the Supreme Court. A fierce legal battle was fought between the affected citizens on one side, and the

rich limestone contractors, powerful industrialists and even the government, on the other, bringing into sharp focus the conflict between development and conservation.

After having won the historic environmental battle in the Supreme Court, Avdhash Kaushal decided to harness the energies of people, particularly the youth, to rejuvenate the abandoned mines and denuded foothills. Kaushal promoted reforestation in the Doon valley. He undertook a massive afforestation programme with 30,000 students in the valley.

The afforestation programme became a feature of many a 'school curriculum' as groups of children dug pits, planted saplings and fenced areas. After some years, the ecological balance of bare hillsides in the Dehradun district was partially restored. Having won the people's rights to their ecological environment, Kaushal continued to promote the traditional lifestyle of Uttarakhandis.

Avdhash Kaushal also addressed a host of other issues through RLEK.

Right to Breathe:

A number of chemical and cement factories located in DehraDun district were causing serious damage to the health of the people. RLEK successfully went through the lower courts to the Supreme Court of the country demanding the closure of the polluting factories.

Bonded Labour:

RLEK led an initiative to help free large groups of such bonded labourers. It was due to RLEK's untiring efforts that the presence of 19,000 bonded laborers was officially accepted by the Government and they were released.

Land Ownership Rights:

RLEK filed a case before the Supreme Court regarding non-allotment of land to freed bonded labourers and the Supreme Court ordered the State government to facilitate the allotment of land to the freed bonded labourers.

Illegal Poppy Cultivation:

The tribal area of Dehradun had the wide-ranging practice of poppy cultivation for smuggling to the national and international market. The real beneficiaries were the rich and influential classes. Drug addiction also created many social problems among the youth of these tribes. RLEK filed a suit against them in 1986, leading to the passing of the “Prevention of Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act” in 1988.

The United Nations granted Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations on RLEK for having competence in empowering indigenous groups. In fact, Kaushal was invited to address the World Summit of the United Nations at Geneva.

Avdhash Kaushal received Padmashree Award 1986 and The Week’s “Man of the Year 2003”. He continues to run RLEK with the help of his children.

Bhatar is located 11 kms from Lakhamandal in the Chakrata Block of Dehradun District in Uttarakhand. Like in other parts of rural Uttarakhand, Bhatar is also home to an abundance of traditional water harvesting structures. Even after hundreds of years after their construction, most of them continue to supply water even today. They are living examples of sustainable technologies. These structures have been sustained by a combination of cultural and customary practices of reverence towards water.

The presence of sacred trees and plants, e.g. peepal and banyan trees or tulsi, symbolized their sanctity. People often built small water structures like dharas, naulas, or baoris as an act of piety. Even now, a new Uttarakhandi bride on first reaching her husband's home offers ritual prayers at the village naula or dhara.

The forests surrounding these water structures are also considered as sacred by the local community. The trees in the sacred forest are deemed to be a manifestation of the Lord Kedarnath and any harm done to them is considered to be not just on the tree but on the deity. Cutting of trees is strictly prohibited. But the villagers are allowed to collect dead wood from the forests. Outsiders are allowed to collect dead wood for a nominal amount.

The water from the nearby spring is bifurcated into two separate channels. One channel leads to a small cemented pool called Devta ka Paani (the deity's pool) where the water collects. The water collected in this pond is not utilized by any person, for any other purpose except by the pujari for usage in the worship of the temple.

The other channel is used to divert the water into separate outlets which have elaborately carved wooden snouts. The water flowing through these outlets is utilized for drinking, washing and other daily chores by the communities.

The villagers are also aware of the favourable ecological impacts of the sacred forest. There is a big water source just below the forest and according to Pramila, a village resident, "the abundance of water in the source is ensured through the preservation of the trees above it." Thus the sacred forest is perpetuated by both religious and ecological motives. And now, some communities have found medicinal properties in plants and herbs.

28. The Centre for Tribal and Rural development trust

Need of the hour: Promoting all-round development



India with a population of 1.2 billion people has almost 2/3 of the people living below the poverty line. It is the second most populous country in the world after China. Over the years, Indian economy has risen by almost 10%, out of which only a small segment of our society has benefited. A large section of people continue to lead an impoverished life. This is where NGO's play a role by putting in efforts to uplift the society and making them financially sustainable.

The Centre for Tribal and Rural development trust (CTRD Trust) established in 1988, in Nilgiri District, Tamil Nadu has been working for the welfare of the indigenous tribal and rural communities over the last three decades in the field of health, education, livelihood, tribal development, disability and environment.

Mr. R.S. Ranganathan, Founder & CEO of CTRD Trust says “The main aim of our Trust is to improve the socio-economic conditions by helping the community in Gudalur, Ooty and Coonoor blocks to overcome the grip of poverty and ignorance. Our focus was equality and basic human rights for all, regardless of age, gender, and education, and providing livelihood opportunities for sustainable economic development.”

Over the years CTRD trust had projects planned and implemented with the guidance of the community as well as experts and has brought about significant changes. The Trust has individually identified several social issues and brought awareness and social change through its programmes.

Woman empowerment and growth:

In 2003, the organisation was registered under the Tamil Nadu Woman Development Corporation. Since then, they have formed 1,180 women self-help groups of which 100 are exclusive tribal woman groups which helps in capacity building and livelihood training programmes for women in Nilgiris.

They have also formed 39 Village level groups which are registered under the Tamil Nadu Societies Act and Tea Board of India. These Village level groups help in providing various tea board subsidy schemes to the tribal farmers working in tea cultivation besides enhancing their skills. This project is spread over 4 municipalities, 11 towns, 35 villages Panchayat of Nilgiris.

Health:

Health being a major concern due to lack of access to healthcare facilities, CTRD initiated the Medical Outreach

Programme – where a team of dedicated staff –doctors, nurses, pharmacist–provide healthcare to 150 remote tribal villages. Free health camps are organised in partnership with multi-specialty hospitals in the nearby cities.

Education:

To reduce the dropout rate and to encourage literacy, Village Level Preparatory Schools are operated to spark interest in education amongst children belonging to the age group of 4 to 6 years. Nearly 4,200 tribal children have benefited so far. Educational materials like uniforms and stationeries are provided along with tuition fees for university students in 150 tribal villages. Evening coaching centres, painting camps, environmental camps and doctor-kid programmes are organised to improve skills and awareness among children.

Community infrastructure projects:

Tribal communities living in traditional huts have faced infrastructure related issues every now and then. To address this, CTRD came up with “rural housing and livelihood programme for the indigenous communities” wherein solid structure houses were designed by architectural experts and provided. This project was supported by DESWOS, a German-based donor agency. By partnering with Raleigh International, a UK based charity which encourages youth to come together to construct houses, toilets, schools and biogas units for the rural poor communities, 150 houses were constructed, besides a model village project.

Environmental projects:

Nilgiris, otherwise known as ‘Blue Mountains’ is home to thousands of species of flora and hundreds of animals. To preserve this, CTRD educates communities about climate

change. The Trust has also implemented projects to promote renewable energy through biogas plants and safeguarding natural bio-diversity and habitat with the support of Air Bus Corporate Foundation to reduce the Co2.

Projects for differently abled:

Since 2005, CTRD has partnered with Sight savers International, which helps visually challenged people and facilitates people to actively seek better eye care services and lead a better quality of life.

Sanitation program:

CTRD Trust has taken initiative to improve the sanitation culture of the communities by conducting school-level, Panchayat-level and block-level awareness programmes. It also helped to reduce the soil and groundwater pollution and most importantly reduced communicable/viral diseases. So far, CTRD has constructed more than 200 standard sanitation units in Nilgiris.

“We have partnered with several multi-lateral, international, national, government and corporate agencies to support and implement result driven project to benefit them on all fronts. To mention a few, Air Bus Corporate Foundation, Global Environmental Facility, United Nations Development Programme, Centre for environmental Education, AWO international, Care India, NABARD, and many more,” says Ranganathan.

Presently CTRD is working with SODI international, Germany to bring organic tea cultivation and started a tea factory to promote tribal tea thereby leading to a sustainable income for the tribal farmers.

29. Thozhamai Trust

Humanity or Rights?



Humanity and Rights are two interesting words that signify two different world views. For Mr. Devaneyan, Founder of Thozhamai Trust in Chennai, the choice was very clear. “When it comes to Rights, it is never about giving but acknowledging the entitlements of every human being. Why should the underprivileged always be at the receiving end? Why should their stories be read through those who have come forward to better their lives? In true sense, rights imply independence,” convinces Devaneyan. Having seen his parents engage in a wide range of social service activities he became passionate about social work and the more he delved into the subject during his college days, the clearer he became about his long term plans.

While working with People’s Watch Tamil Nadu on Human Rights Education (HRE) and later with Centre for Child Rights and Development, he began to see the need for both education and action that must be backed by field scenario based facts. Thozhamai was established in 2006

to demonstrate why educating the masses should go hand in hand with appropriate actions/interventions. “Unless people begin to see that they can act to change the lives of underprivileged communities, they can only give or contribute when they can. The poor cannot survive only on goodwill. Their lives need a push, a force that can put them on par with others. Bringing about the culture of rights is the only way,” he says.

The context of Human Rights is an ocean and in a country like India it is very much relevant to work in every sector. Whether women or children or aged or differently abled or transgender, all of them have their rights by virtue of being a human being but their struggles are not on the same page. This calls for a focused approach as manifested by Thozhamai’s work. While evolving as a resource centre on HRE, Devaneyan and team reached out to a wide range of audience – from students to retired bureaucrats, officials at work, community members, etc. As they established a strong and active network, they began to act by engaging network members. “For example, we have trained over 5,000 persons on Right to Information Act. Having seen how Thozhamai filed over a 1,000 petitions and the responses received has enabled network members to do the same at their level. So now, when we try to highlight a human rights issue from a remote village in the State, the approach and response are both manifold. Every stakeholder turns out to be a rights’ defender,” adds Devaneyan.

Thozhamai’s strength lies in its field action research where evidences from grassroots are used in both addressing issues though the system and also identifying systemic gaps that cause their recurrence. The slum rehabilitation colony in Semmencherry located south of Chennai city, about 18 km from the city centre, houses 6,754 families and has faced a lot of issues. Abuse, livelihood crisis, children

discontinuing education, lack of adequate food and water, etc. made lives difficult for the families. Thozhamai's presence has gradually changed things here and today, the only Middle School in this region has now upgraded to a Higher Secondary School. Transit into and out of Semmencherry has become easier and affordable owing to the new roads and bus stands. The primary health centre that worked only half days is now operating full time and a greater number of ration shops have been established.

“It is not that their absence were not known; just that they were not seen as a right. Rehabilitation is a long term, multi-pronged process that must be executed strategically. All entitlements must be ensured in the new place of settlement. Perspective can completely alter the course of implementation. We demonstrated that in Semmencherry. Our advocacy efforts has finally convinced the Tamil Nadu Urban Habitat Development Board to plan for 400 sq ft homes in rehabilitation colonies (it was 158 sq ft earlier),” explains Devaneyan, whose team is now raising voices for all other rehabilitation colonies.

Child Rights has also been Thozhamai's focus and is an integral part of all their interventions. Having delved into both micro and macro realities, their role in preventing over a hundred child marriages and rescuing trafficked children has put them on authorities' good books. As they support institutional mechanisms in interventions, it becomes an enhancing process for both groups. Their rigorous training workshops on child friendly and protective environment has reached more than 20 schools, over 600 media persons and several city colleges. Thozhamai's Life Skills Education programme has trained more than 2,000 adolescent girls in identifying and acting on abuse. The Trust has been very categorical about one fact – not only schools and families, every individual who must be educated about child rights

and protection mechanisms. “Even a school bus driver must know how to handle a situation that affects the issue of child rights. Remembering a helpline number is not too much to ask for,” smirks Devaneyan.

Thozhamai dreams of an abuse free society where every child goes through a happy childhood. Fully aware of the milestones in this journey, their work attempts to reiterate that child rights is the foundation and we need to establish the culture of rights in our society. “Children are full of hope and trust. By reaching them rights, we are building a protective and responsible society,” says an optimistic Devaneyan.

Shanmuga Priya.T



The review of work given in its articles is very inspiring. The title (“Unsung Beacons”) as well as the subtitle (“Stories of people to whom Humanity Matters”) sum up the essence and the connecting thread of the articles. These are stories of persons and organisations that focus on people who suffer some handicap, because of personal or social deprivation, and provide them a helping hand.

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