

THECSRUNIVERSE

Conscious | Social | Responsible



THECSRUNIVERSE

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CONTENTS

FOUNDER'S NOTE	3
EDITOR'S NOTE	4
CONSULTING EDITOR'S NOTE	5
INTERVIEW	
TRANSFORMING RURAL WASTE MANAGEMENT	6
INTERVIEW	
TURNING THE TIDE ON INDUSTRIAL WASTE	10
COVER STORY	
PLANET VERSUS PLASTIC	12
CASE STUDY	
SEEDS OF CHANGE	18
INTERVIEW	
FOSTERING WORKFORCE EXCELLENCE	20
INTERVIEW	
BUILDING A BETTER FUTURE	22
COVER STORY	
RECLAIMING EARTH	26
SUCCESS STORY	
FROM VICTIM TO VICTOR	32
EXPERT TAKE	
THE URGENCY TO IMPLEMENT EPR COMPLIANCE	34
HOW CSR IS LEADING THE WAY TO A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE	35
CASE STUDY	
BREAKING BARRIERS	36
SUCCESS STORY	
SEWING DREAMS	40
EXPERT TAKE	
INDIA'S ORGAN DONATION CRISIS	42
HARNESSING EARTH'S HEAT FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE	43
NEWS STORIES	44

FOUNDER'S NOTE

BUILDING A VIBRANT COMMUNITY FOR SOCIAL IMPACT



Dear Readers,

As we launch this new chapter with **TheCSRUniverse**, I am filled with immense pride and gratitude for the incredible journey we have been on. Since its inception, **TheCSRUniverse (The Conscious, Social and Responsible Universe as we call it)** has grown into a vibrant platform, uniting voices across the social sector and creating meaningful dialogue between corporate leaders, non-profits, government agencies, and changemakers. Our editorial work has played a pivotal role in fostering this dynamic community, allowing us to highlight the groundbreaking work happening across India and beyond.

When we started **TheCSRUniverse.com**, our vision was clear—to be the leading source of information, analysis, and insights on **Sustainability, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG)** criteria, and the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**. Over time, we have achieved just that, becoming a trusted knowledge and advisory platform for stakeholders committed to creating a more equitable and sustainable world.

Through our editorial work, we have not only reported on the latest developments in these areas but also created a

space where stories of real impact can thrive. From on-ground success stories to expert analyses of policy trends, our publication has allowed us to amplify the voices of those making a difference. Our growing network of contributors, experts, and partners is a testament to the role we play in bridging the gap between those who are working towards the greater good.

But the journey doesn't stop here. As we look ahead, our focus will expand even further. **Environmental issues**, particularly those relating to climate change, will be at the forefront of our coverage. With the pressing need for action, we are committed to providing deeper insights into sustainable practices, innovative solutions, and policies that drive positive environmental change.

Additionally, **ESG reporting** is gaining momentum globally, and we see a tremendous opportunity to highlight how businesses are aligning their operations with social and environmental responsibility. We aim to provide thought leadership on how ESG can shape the future of businesses, ensuring that sustainability is not just an afterthought, but a core component of corporate strategy.

Our work in **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)** will continue to evolve as well. With increasing emphasis on corporate accountability and community engagement, our platform will offer a more comprehensive view of how CSR initiatives are driving long-term social impact.

As **TheCSRUniverse** continues to grow, we remain committed to supporting and nurturing this vibrant community of social sector leaders. Together, through knowledge-sharing, collaboration, and impactful actions, we will continue to contribute to the creation of a more sustainable, just, and inclusive world.

I am deeply grateful for your trust, your readership, and your belief in the work we are doing. TheCSRUniverse would not be where it is today without your support. I look forward to what we will achieve together in the years to come.

With warm regards,
Ashish Jha
Founder
TheCSRUniverse

EDITOR’S NOTE

A NEW MILESTONE IN OUR JOURNEY OF SOCIAL IMPACT



Dear Readers,

It is with great excitement and pride that we present to you the inaugural edition of TheCSRUniverse Magazine, launched during the 4th Social Impact Conference & Awards (SICA) 2024. This magazine marks an important milestone in our ongoing commitment to bringing together stakeholders across the social sector on one vibrant platform, fostering a collaborative and transparent environment for positive change.

At TheCSRUniverse, we believe that true social impact is achieved when the collective power of corporate organizations, NGOs, foundations, and government entities is harnessed effectively. Our mission has always been to act as a bridge—facilitating communication, amplifying voices, and ensuring that the important stories, challenges, and successes from the social sector are heard far and wide.

Discover a world of inspiration and insights within TheCSRUniverse Magazine. Each issue brings you a curated collection of thought-provoking case studies, in-depth interviews with industry leaders, timely news stories, inspiring success stories, and expert opinions shaping the social sector landscape. Delve into video

interviews for a more immersive experience, and gain valuable insights from real-world examples of positive change.

Through this quarterly magazine, we aim to create a space where ideas flow freely, solutions are shared, and collaborations are formed. The diversity of topics, from grassroots-level success stories to expert opinions on policy changes, will reflect the depth of work being done across India's social landscape. Our focus will remain on showcasing real-world impact while highlighting the innovative practices driving positive change.

This publication is not just a magazine but a catalyst for change in the fabric of our social ecosystem. It is a call to action for all stakeholders to work in unison, align their efforts, and drive sustainable and scalable solutions to the challenges we face.

As we continue on this journey, we invite you—our readers, contributors, and partners—to engage with us. Let this platform be a catalyst for new ideas, meaningful conversations, and impactful partnerships. Together, we can break down silos, enhance performance, and move closer to our shared goal of creating a better, more equitable world for all.

Thank you for your continued support and dedication to social impact. We look forward to working with you in making a lasting difference.

Warm regards,
Ruchika Kumar
Editor
TheCSRUniverse

CONSULTING EDITOR’S NOTE

CHARTING THE PATH: FROM CSR VISION TO A PLATFORM FOR SUSTAINABLE CHANGE



Dear Readers,

It gives me such joy to be holding the inaugural edition of TheCSRUniverse Magazine in my hands. As I flip through these pages, I am reminded of the incredible journey that has brought us here. TheCSRUniverse started as a small initiative by a few passionate individuals dedicated to amplifying CSR news. Over the past five years, this platform has evolved into India's leading voice for social impact and sustainable development. Our transformation from a niche website to a comprehensive source of thought leadership reflects our commitment to promoting responsible business practices and fostering positive change. It has been a remarkable journey, marked by relentless dedication, innovative thinking, and a strong belief in the power of collective action.

India stands at a pivotal moment in its development trajectory. As we witness unprecedented economic growth and business expansion, the responsibilities of both government and corporate sectors are immense. It is imperative that this growth is inclusive, ensuring that its benefits reach the most marginalized sections of our society. Equally crucial is the need for this growth to be sustainable, balancing economic progress with

environmental stewardship and social equity. At TheCSRUniverse, we envision ourselves as catalysts in this transformation. By shedding light on best practices, celebrating impactful initiatives, and fostering dialogue, we aim to drive a movement that transcends traditional CSR approaches. Our mission is to ensure that the discourse around CSR evolves from a compliance-driven exercise to a powerful tool for driving systemic change and creating shared value.

Our work is driven by a team of passionate individuals who are deeply committed to our vision. We are lifelong learners, constantly seeking to expand our knowledge and understanding of the complex issues we address. Our team is a diverse mix of seasoned millennial professionals, energetic, tech-savvy Gen Z'ers, and even globe-trotting solo travelers. This diversity is our strength, infusing our work with fresh perspectives and innovative ideas. We operate as a 100% remote organization, with team members spread across the country, bringing unique strengths and insights from their respective regions. We strive to create a workplace that is positive, inspiring, and inclusive, fostering a culture of collaboration and continuous learning. It is this culture that enables us to push boundaries, challenge the status quo, and drive meaningful impact.

As we launch TheCSRUniverse Magazine, we invite all stakeholders to join us in this transformative journey. The challenges we face are complex, but they are not insurmountable. By working together, we can drive forward the agenda of responsible and inclusive growth. We call upon businesses, policymakers, civil society organizations, and individuals to engage with us, share their insights, and contribute to the dialogue. Together, we can ensure that India's growth story is one of shared prosperity and sustainable development. Let's collaborate to build a future where economic progress and social well-being go hand in hand, leaving no one behind.

Thank you for being a part of our journey. We look forward to your continued support and engagement as we advance into the next decade of growth.

Warm regards,
Dr. Shweta Singh
Consulting Editor
TheCSRUniverse

INTERVIEW

TRANSFORMING RURAL WASTE MANAGEMENT

HOW AMBUJA CEMENTS IS USHERING A SUSTAINABLE REVOLUTION IN RURAL WASTE MANAGEMENT



EXCLUSIVE INSIGHTS
MS. PEARL TIWARI, CEO,
AMBUJA CEMENT FOUNDATION,
HEAD CSR - AMBUJA CEMENTS

Effective waste management is a critical challenge in many developing countries, including India. It requires not only infrastructure and technology, but also a change in mindsets and behaviour. A recent initiative in Vadnagar, Gujarat, India, has shown promise in addressing this challenge through a collaborative effort between a private company, the government, and the local community.

This initiative, implemented by Ambuja Cements in partnership with the Lighthouse Initiative- a collaboration between the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation and the private sector- focused on house-to-house waste collection, segregation, and plastic waste management. Notably, the project involved the creation of a Self-Help Group that played a key role in plastic waste collection. Vadnagar serves as the flagship village for this transformative endeavour, pioneering a model that can be replicated across other rural communities in India.

Additionally, Ambuja Cements is also in charge of Jagtiya, one of the five Gram Panchayats in Gujarat.

Leading the Ambuja Cement Foundation's efforts on this project is **Ms. Pearl Tiwari, CEO, Ambuja Cement Foundation, Head CSR - Ambuja Cements**. In her exclusive interview with TheCSRUniverse, she sheds light on the project's execution, highlighting the importance of community engagement and capacity building in achieving success. She also discusses the challenges faced during implementation and offers valuable insights for scaling up similar initiatives across rural India- Additionally, she highlights collaboration with other organisations and government bodies to amplify the project's impact. Furthermore, Ms. Tiwari highlights the importance of incentivizing waste collection and securing government subsidies, reflecting a holistic community engagement strategy.



Read the interview below to learn how collaborative efforts are shaping a cleaner, greener future for rural India.

What motivated Ambuja Cements to initiate the waste management project in Vadnagar village? How does this project tie into the broader objectives of the Lighthouse Initiative, and also align with your vision for sustainability?

The Government of India has been diligently working under the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) since 2014 aiming to create Open Defecation Free villages. In Phase II the focus shifted towards sustaining the ODF status of these villages. Ambuja Cements through its CSR arm Ambuja Foundation has been instrumental in supporting the government's Swachh Bharat Mission and has in turn created 199 ODF villages within its own core communities this year.

When the Lighthouse Initiative (LHI) was inaugurated 2 years back by the Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation, Ministry of Jal Shakti and in collaboration with the India Sanitation Coalition (ISC) at FICCI, its objective was to develop 75 model ODF Plus blocks through a public private partnership. Under the ODF Plus initiative, blocks needed to ensure solid and liquid waste management initiatives were also introduced. FICCI ISC initiated the promotion of the LHI project among various corporate and government, eventually leading to Ambuja's involvement.

Since Ambuja was already working in community health and sanitation, it was ideal to be approached as one of the private partners for this project. Phase 1 of the Light house initiative aimed to effectively implement solid and liquid waste management structures in these ODF plus blocks with corporates taking a participatory and consultative approach to mobilize communities. For the past 30 years we have been in the field mobilizing communities, forming groups and collaboratively working with various stakeholders ensuring sustainability of the projects. We were well-equipped for the task. Out of the five Gram Panchayats assigned for Gujarat, we were assigned two-gram panchayats: Vadnagar and Jagtiy.

These communities were known for their uncleanliness and poor sanitation which posed a significant health burden and Ambuja had begun to invest in health and sanitation under its CSR. As part of our environment and social vision, Ambuja ensures clean and disease-free environment not only within the communities but also from a business perspective. Our environmental agenda is to do as much as we can for the environment to reduce carbon footprint. Thus, we mobilized i n forming the ragpickers Self-Help Group (SHG) to collect unrecyclable plastic waste and provide it to us at an incentive, using it as alternative fuel while simultaneously contributing to a less polluted environment.

Can you elaborate on Ambuja Cements' role and responsibilities within the collaborative framework of the Lighthouse Initiative, highlighting your contributions to its overarching goals?

As a corporate we were tasked with acting as a catalyst providing technical and managerial support to the implementing agencies in the implementation of the SBM phase 2.0 and improve the Solid and Liquid Waste Management arrangements in the select blocks.

Ambuja Foundation acted as a mediator, assuming the following responsibilities:

- Facilitating in the linkage between SHG and panchayat by formalizing an MOU for plastic waste collection to avail the government incentive of Rs. 10 per Kg of plastic waste provided.
- Organizing initial meetings with the SBM district team, taluka and sarpanch on the plan of action to ensure success in creating ODF plus villages.
- Conducting discussions on the light house initiatives to address the necessity, importance, challenges and allocation of roles and responsibilities.
- Assigning teams to meet different stakeholders like community leader, panchayat and government officials to identify gaps, propose solutions and facilitate project rollout.
- Initiating behaviour change communication, organizing school level activities on health and hygiene awareness including competitions focused on essays and poetry.
- Arranging meetings with SHGs and community groups to foster collaboration and participation.
- Hosting night meetings to raise awareness about the LightHouse Initiative.
- Organizing campaigns in a plastic free environment amongst students and other stakeholders.
- Conducting monthly meetings with Gram Panchayat and Self-Help Groups to review progress and address any new challenges.

What key challenges did you encounter in replicating and scaling this model? How do you ensure cultural and logistical adaptations for diverse contexts?

This initiative is a public private partnership model in which as a corporate our primary task was to organize a behaviour change communication campaign to strengthen community outreach. This was easy to replicate in our village due to our existing presence and experience through Ambuja Foundation. However, the challenge that we faced was ensuring community ownership of the initiative.

Through consistent mobilization including night meetings, programs in schools and community spaces and engaging with key stakeholders of the communities we succeeded in shifting mindsets within the community. Additionally, involving the local gram panchayat proved to be highly effective, as they are the most trusted institution within the community. With their deep understanding of local cultures and backgrounds, they played a crucial role in helping us persuade communities to embrace behaviour change.

Also, certain mechanisms like providing infrastructure for waste collections, transportation and access to incinerators must be provided either by the government or at the local gram panchayat level to ensure seamless success of the initiative.

■ **How does Ambuja Cements plan to foster long-term community ownership and self-sustainability beyond Phase II's focus on plastic waste? Can you elaborate on specific plans for knowledge transfer and empowerment of local stakeholders?**

Empowering the community and fostering ownership of the programs has been a core approach in our CSR programs. Our extensive experience has shown that projects tend to sustain if they are entrusted to the community to take ownership.

In this project, we have already formed a Self-Help Group who assumed responsibility for segregating plastic waste at the waste yard. Ambuja Foundation has also facilitated a supply chain linkage with the company incentivizing the group for every kilogram of waste they provide. On the other hand, we've secured linkage with the government subsidies to ensure efficient receipt of regular incentives through the Gujarat Livelihood Promotion Company.

Additionally, a core group has also been formed in the community to oversee the project maintenance and ensure its sustainability. This group will hold regular meetings within the community to drive improvements in sanitation, with follow-up from the Gram Panchayat.

For Ambuja, the communities around its core areas are our most important stakeholders. Our founders believed that as the company progresses, so should our surrounding communities. Thus, Ambuja Foundation was setup in 1993, not due to obligatory responsibility but because the company believed it to be an integral component for a sustainable business. Vadnagar falls within our core village areas, in which ongoing initiatives such as safe collection and segregation, knowledge dissemination, training, capacity building will continue to empower our stakeholders. Also, our experiences and learnings will be shared with similar organizations working on the same project in other locations for seamless replication and operation of the project.

■ **Can you delve into the specific strategies employed to facilitate house-to-house waste collection and segregation in Vadnagar? What unique approaches contributed to the project's success?**

Once the segregation infrastructure was built at a local site, the next step was to encourage households to practice waste segregation. Wet and dry waste bins were provided to every household to this purpose. Door to door mobilization campaigns were also conducted to ensure households actively practiced segregation efforts.

To facilitate the waste collection process, a waste collector was hired and equipped with an e-rickshaw to travel door to door to collect segregated waste and dump it into the designated infrastructure. All these systems were implemented under the auspices of the gram panchayat and closely monitored by them.

Regarding plastic waste segregation and collection, ragpickers were engaged to segregate plastic waste while the company provided transportation services to collect and deliver the discarded plastic waste to the company's facilities.

■ **Beyond collection and disposal, does Ambuja Cements plan to explore incorporating innovative technologies like waste-to-energy solutions or composting to maximize resource recovery and circularity within the waste management process?**

We have already established a linkage between the company's waste management arm and the ragpicker SHG to supply the plastic waste to our plant for incineration and use as an alternative fuel. For every kilogram of plastic waste provided to the company, an incentive is given to the self-help group along with transportation arrangements for waste pick-up. This supply chain linkage has already been implemented in our other location with biomass and has proven to be a successful model, not only benefiting the company but also providing additional livelihood income for the community.

In addition, for the wet waste management, we have initiated the design of a vermicomposting plan and have proposed to the gram panchayat to create composting pits for the wet waste. Once vermicompost is produced, the groups will sell it to the local farmers to improve soil quality and crop production.

■ **Can you share your learnings from overcoming these obstacles to provide valuable insights for future projects?**

Behaviour Change: Though we had our foothold in the communities, it is always a challenge for any grassroots organisation to introduce a new initiative to the community due to entrenched traditional practices and lack of knowledge in waste management and segregation among the residents. Through our team's continuous mobilization efforts and awareness creation in communities including night meetings and programs in schools and public places, we observed a gradual shift in people's behavior towards waste management.

Sustaining Change: Though separate dustbins for wet and dry waste were provided to each household, many still mixed their garbage, leading to disputes between households and waste collectors and sometimes even refusal to provide garbage. Our teams and volunteers addressed this issue by engaging in door-to-door visits, providing solutions for easy garbage disposal, and listening to the challenges faced by residents.

Building Local Institutions: One of the major challenges was identifying beneficiaries willing to commit to forming a group. With persistent persuasion and involvement from the Gram Panchayat, a few members agreed to participate, and we managed to create a local institution in a time bound manner. However, as groups were created in these villages, members lacked awareness and knowledge regarding the maintenance and sustainability of the infrastructure. To address this, various capacity building programs to empower them to take ownership of the project were organized.

Subsidy and Linkages: While government subsidies were available for the ragpicker Self-Help Group, they were unaware of the process to avail these subsidies. Our teams provided them with hands-on support, facilitating their linkage with government subsidies, assisting with form filling, and

For Ambuja, the communities around its core areas are our most important stakeholders. Our founders believed that as the company progresses, so should our surrounding communities

establishing an efficient system to ensure prompt payment for the waste provided by the SHG.

■ **How does Ambuja Cements plan to balance its corporate social responsibility goals with the financial sustainability of the initiative, taking into account potential long-term costs of infrastructure maintenance and community engagement?**

As previously mentioned, all financial costs for this initiative were covered by the government, and our role as a corporate entity was primarily focused on promoting community engagement which we always design as a sustainable approach. However, by continuing in a public private partnership model, Ambuja agrees to continue its support along with civil organizations, government, and other corporates to make the project replicable and scalable.

Drawing from our experience, our team has played a pivotal role in driving this initiative by mobilizing communities into groups who have now taken charge and ownership of the infrastructures that are built and continuous maintenance of the structure. We focused on behaviour change communication and in mobilizing communities by building their capacity on the issue. This model mirrors our approach in most of our other programs contributing to the sustainability of the initiative by ensuring community ownership and involvement through the project cycle.

Furthermore, we have also created this supply chain linkage between the company and the group to ensure regular consistent provision of plastic waste to the plant, with corresponding payments to support these communities with additional livelihood opportunities. This comprehensive approach in these two villages reflects our commitment to a holistic, people-centric approach to community development.

■ **How will Ambuja Cements measure the project's broader societal and environmental impact beyond waste collection? Will metrics include reduced water contamination, improved public health, or economic benefits?**

At Ambuja, we take monitoring very seriously. Under our CSR arm, Ambuja Foundation, we already have a dedicated monitoring and evaluation cell tasked with continually capturing qualitative and

quantitative data and assessing the impact of our program across various locations. This helps us improve our program models based on the results and impacts gained from the data. This cell drives a number of key studies to ensure we continue to question our work, improve our models and remain open to learning and change. This helps us identify key areas for research which adds another dimension to the work we do and our continual critical analysis of it to optimize outcomes.

Definitely all indicators that are part and beyond the waste management efforts are being tracked as part of our general monitoring data. This will not only improve societal and environmental impacts but also capture any other criteria's that fall under its purview. With the rapport that we have built with the community for the last 30 years, we are in constant touch with them for feedback and also have assigned personnel who acts as a bridge between us and them and oversees to the program's overall need.

■ **Drawing from Vadnagar's experiences, what policy changes or government support mechanisms would Ambuja Cements recommend to improve and scale rural waste management initiatives in India?**

While the government and collaborated partners should be commended for initiating this program, it represents just a fraction of the broader issue of rural waste management.

Addressing the challenge of non-recyclable and non-reusable waste, particularly lacking nearby industries for proper disposal is crucial. In locations like Vadnagar which is close to the cement plant, we have found a mechanism to supply to our cement plant who use it in incineration. However, in areas without such industries communities often resort to burning waste leading to pollution and health hazards.

In such circumstances, the government should consider investing in low-cost research and development initiatives collaborating with relevant industries to create efficient mechanisms. This could involve development of incinerators or other machinery for efficient waste disposal in every village. Such an approach would not only mitigate pollution but also improve public health while ensuring the complete segregation and disposal of waste.

On the other hand, as an organization we have always focused on taking a collaborative approach in creating successful models of transformation. Encouraging like-minded organizations who work in similar field of health and sanitation to join forces with Gram Panchayats has proven to be great strategy in creating ODF Plus villages. By fostering partnerships, pooling in resources, we can enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of rural waste management initiatives across communities

INTERVIEW

TURNING THE TIDE ON INDUSTRIAL WASTE

FORMICA INDIA'S COMMITMENT TO A GREENER FUTURE



EXCLUSIVE INSIGHTS
MR. AJAY KHURANA,
MANAGING DIRECTOR, FORMICA INDIA

Tackling industrial waste is one of the biggest challenges toward a sustainable future. Industrial waste management is a significant problem in India, especially given the country's rapid industrialization and growing urban population. India produces over 63 million tonnes of waste every year. A significant amount of this comes from industrial activity.

As a key player in the surface solutions industry, Formica India has taken significant steps to address the challenges of industrial waste management and carbon emissions. In a recent interview with TheCSRUniverse, **Mr. Ajay Khurana**,

Managing Director of Formica India, delves into the company's comprehensive approach to sustainability and its commitment to reducing environmental impact. He also discusses how Formica has standardized processes in place to minimise waste right from the source. Beyond waste management, Mr. Khurana also outlines Formica India's ambitious roadmap to achieve carbon neutrality by 2030.

This includes replacing traditional thermal fuels with biomass briquettes to cut down on Scope 1 emissions and collaborating with third-party energy auditors to improve energy efficiency.



Read the interview below to learn how collaborative are minimizing industrial waste through innovative recycling strategies.

Industrial wastage is high in your industry. What kinds of initiatives is Formica taking to counter the waste? Could you elaborate on your recycling efforts?

In the industrial sector, waste management is a critical issue, and at Formica, we take this challenge very seriously. To counteract waste, we have implemented a series of initiatives focused on minimizing waste through standardized processes, effective change management, and innovative recycling strategies. We standardise our processes and raw materials to reduce variability and enhance efficiency. This approach helps us minimize wastage at the source. Moreover, we have established effective change management procedures to eliminate acute failures that could lead to unnecessary waste. Our recycling efforts are comprehensive and integrated into our operations. Finished goods that incur physical damage or are rejected due to quality issues are repurposed for sample preparation. This not only reduces waste but also provides valuable samples for our customers and partners.

Additionally, we recycle Work-In-Progress (WIP) waste, such as kraft paper and decorative laminates, by converting them into particle boards. These boards are then used as the base material for exporting wooden crates. Through this, we significantly reduce the amount of waste sent to landfills and contribute to a more sustainable production cycle.

What kinds of strategies and technologies does Formica use to reduce your scope 1 and 2 emissions?

We are focused upon reducing our environmental footprint, and this includes a strong focus on reducing our Scope 1 and 2 emissions. One of our primary strategies has been replacing thermal fuel with biomass briquettes. Biomass briquettes are a more sustainable and eco-friendly fuel source, which helps us significantly lower our direct emissions (Scope 1).

For our Scope 2 emissions, which involve the indirect emissions from the consumption of purchased electricity, we regularly look out for opportunities for energy savings. We are connecting with third-party energy auditors who conduct periodic reviews of our facilities. These audits help us identify outdated electronic components and recommend replacements with more energy-efficient and safer technologies.

Scope 3 emissions constitute a large part of GHG emissions. Tracking it also tends to be more complicated as it requires you to analyze your supply chain activities. How are you addressing this issue at Formica?

Addressing Scope 3 emissions is indeed complex, but we are committed to tackling this challenge through strategic planning and careful monitoring of our supply chain activities. One key

approach is ensuring that our resin batch preparation is meticulously synchronised with our production plans. This sync helps us avoid excess resin stock, which in turn reduces waste and potential emissions. As stated earlier, we also manage our WIP materials, such as treated kraft paper and decorative laminates, with great care. We keep the quantity of these materials at a minimum level and protect them with PVC covers to avoid direct exposure to environmental factors that could degrade them. This not only preserves the quality of our materials but also reduces the potential for waste and associated emissions.

You have promised yourself a tall target of achieving Carbon Neutrality by 2030. Can you run us through the roadmap of your efforts in this direction?

Achieving carbon neutrality by 2030 is an ambitious goal, but it is one that we are deeply committed to at Formica. Our roadmap to carbon neutrality involves a multi-faceted approach that encompasses reducing emissions, increasing energy efficiency, and investing in renewable energy. Firstly, we are focused upon continuously improving our manufacturing processes to reduce our carbon footprint. This includes the adoption of more energy-efficient technologies, the use of sustainable raw materials, and optimizing our supply chain to minimize emissions.

Secondly, we are increasing our functioning on renewable energy sources. We have started transitioning from traditional thermal fuels to biomass briquettes, which significantly reduce our Scope 1 emissions. We are implementing a robust waste management and recycling program. Through repurposing industrial waste into useful products, we not only reduce waste but also lower the emissions associated with waste disposal. Lastly, we are exploring carbon offset initiatives. This includes investing in reforestation projects and other environmental initiatives that can help us offset any remaining emissions. Thus, we are confident in our ability to reach carbon neutrality by 2030.

What are the biggest challenges you are facing in your journey towards Carbon Neutrality? Do you hope to benefit in this regard from any policy changes/introduction on the part of the government?

Well, it surely comes with its own set of challenges. One of the biggest hurdles we face is the integration of new, sustainable technologies into our existing infrastructure. This often requires significant investment and a period of adaptation, both of which can be challenging to manage alongside ongoing production demands. Another challenge is the sourcing of renewable energy. While we are committed to transitioning to renewable energy sources, the availability and reliability of these sources can vary. Ensuring a consistent supply of renewable energy to meet our operational needs is an ongoing challenge.



To read the complete story, scan the QR code

COVER STORY

PLANET VS PLASTIC

EARTH SUFFOCATES:
LOOMING HEALTH
HAZARDS DEMAND
IMMEDIATE RESPONSE



As per a study estimate, humans are consuming 39,000 to 52,000 microplastics per year depending on age and sex. Microplastics have also been found in human blood for the first time. After Shanghai in China, Patna in Bihar reported microplastics in rainwater. “Plasticenta” - a buzz word has been making rounds across the globe with scientists identifying microplastic particles in placenta of unborn babies. These reports serve as stark warnings, signaling that we are teetering on the edge of a catastrophic event with the potential to imperil humanity in myriad ways. However, the irony is, plastic has become an integral part of our lifestyle today. From the milk we consume to the water we drink, from ice-creams to toys, from food grains to eatables, plastic has taken over our lives in every form. And we have adopted a lifestyle that can't sustain without plastic products. But, as they say, everything comes at a cost, and this time it's life – human, animals, birds, mammals, every form of life on this planet.

We have been consuming and discarding plastics with no consideration to our ecosystem, however, as they say - what goes around, comes around. And now it's our turn. Sitting at this crucial juncture, the question is - Can we afford to turn a blind eye to an inevitable threat anymore that's going to cost millions of lives in no time? The answer is a big No. We have allowed it to go unchecked for years and now it's choking the ecosystem, seeping into the very fabric of our existence.

In accord with the mounting issue that has gone unnoticed and unchecked for years, this year's theme for the Earth Day was “Planet vs Plastics”. It's high time that we take it not as a mere theme but a clarion call to action that demands a concerted effort from the global community.

DATA SPEAKS – POLLUTING LAND, OCEANS AND AIR

Globally, around 400 million tons of plastic is produced annually which eventually ends up in either landfills or oceans. Going by the current growth pattern, global primary plastic production is projected to be 1,100 million tons by 2050, with about 36% of plastics being utilized in packaging, including single-use items for food and beverage containers, the majority of which

(approximately 85%) ends up in landfills or unregulated waste streams. Furthermore, nearly 98% of single-use plastic products derive from fossil fuels, or “virgin” feedstock. According to some estimates, greenhouse gas emissions linked to the production, usage, and disposal of traditional fossil fuel-based plastics are set to rise to 19% of the global carbon budget by 2040. With this, global plastic consumption is estimated to nearly triple by 2060.

Plastic pollution has reached alarming levels, with 79% accumulating in landfills or natural environments, 8 million tons entering oceans annually. Approximately 10 billion plastic bags are used worldwide weekly. As per an estimate, the oceans may contain more plastic than fish by 2050, leading to over 270 marine species facing ingestion, entanglement, and chemical contamination, with an estimated 99% of seabirds expected to ingest plastic within the next 30 years.

While some countries have a little streamlined plastic waste management system, many are dealing with the challenge in an uncontrolled manner. For instance, in the sub-Sahara Africa region, plastic waste equal to a football pitch is openly dumped or incinerated every minute. This shows the lack of capacity to handle and manage the soaring demand for plastic.

WHAT CORPORATES CAN DO?

Many countries don't have a robust infrastructure, however, if we cut it at the production level, the problem can be solved in a long run. If corporates shift from plastic production to more sustainable materials and plan to re-purchase the sold plastics and come up with innovative solutions to put it back into the consumption cycle, we will be able to avoid the intensity of the crisis.

Firms can also invest in providing drinking water solutions at the public places which will reduce the consumption of bottled water. Corporates need to lead by example by aggressively training their workforce about environmental sustainability and executing sustainability practices at the organizational level.

Sabre team, for instance, takes a small yet significant step in this regard. As told by Tess Longfield, Principal, Corporate Responsibility & ESG, Sabre Corporation, the team members engage in “plogging” (combining jogging with litter picking) and collected 3,199 pieces of rubbish, weighing a total 200kg as part of its Give Together initiative last year.

The importance of reducing plastic use in the wider travel industry with initiatives like “ is also praiseworthy as it aims to tackle the single-use plastic problem in the hospitality industry.

SOLUTIONS FOR PLASTIC INDUSTRY

So, what could be the solutions? As per experts, below are the few ways to reduce plastic from our lives:

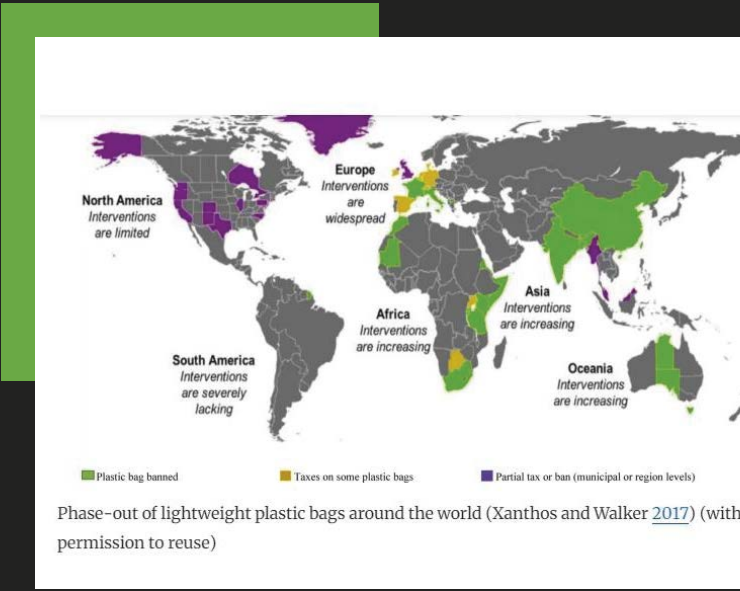
- A tax system that reflects the environmental impact of plastics and plastic products.
- Encouraging the use of eco-friendly materials and production processes through financial incentives.
- Penalizing high-impact plastics to promote sustainable alternatives.

- Providing financial support to research institutions and businesses focusing on developing sustainable alternatives to plastics.
- Encouraging innovation in recycling technologies, biodegradable materials, and waste management solutions.
- Stimulating the growth of a green economy by investing in sustainable practices and technologies.
- Encouraging extended producer responsibility (EPR) programs that promote recycling, reuse, and proper disposal of plastic waste.
- Creating a circular economy model where producers take responsibility for the environmental impact of their products throughout their lifecycle.

Further, we need more examples like Sabre and Jindal Stainless Steel. Hundreds of employees of India's largest stainless steel producer, Jindal Stainless, participate in a plastic waste collection drive conducted across the corporate office and manufacturing plants in Hisar and Jajpur, and collect over 2 tons of plastic waste every year. This initiative shows the company's continued focus responsible waste management practices and the reduction of plastic waste.

Plastics for Change is another such organization that's working to address the plastic waste. It was founded in 2015 and aims to establish the first fair trade verified recycled plastic platform. By linking waste pickers with scrap merchants, it transforms discarded plastic into high-quality recycled packaging. This initiative not only safeguards the environment but also provides a steady income and dignity to some of the 2 million waste pickers in India. Since 2019, Plastics for Change has provided 1,794 tons of recycled plastic to the Body Shop and are suppliers to other prominent cosmetics brands like L'Oréal, Mac, Estée Lauder, Colgate, and Ocean Bottle.

No one can deny the facts that as a community we aren't doing anything to handle the inevitable aftermaths of plastic pollution, however, the action is limited to certain regions only. For instance, across the Europe, Asia, Africa and Oceania, plastic bags have been banned and the intervention to further expand the ban is





underway, while in South and North America there is a serious lack of any intervention. Many states in India too have banned plastic bags, however, the practice is not followed widely across the nation due to its economic implications, political will and consumer behavior.

MORE AGGRESSIVE CAMPAIGNS NEEDED

More campaigns like Plastic Free July, New Plastics Economy Global Commitment, Global Partnership on Marine Litter, and Global Tourism Plastics Initiative are needed where scientists, environmentalists, civil society, citizens and governments must come together and play their part in ensuring their effectiveness of these schemes and programmes.

Furthermore, to ensure the effectiveness of these initiatives, it has to reach at deeper levels in the society also. It has to begin from schools and institutions. A greater interest has to be invoked in the students from an early age which can prompt them to take up subjects like sustainability, carbon-neutrality, net-zero emissions, healthy ecosystem, plastic and pollution-free environment so that more environmentalists and scientists can be produced. A better and robust infrastructure with job creations will also attract new talent pool towards sustainability.

In this regard, Aditya Birla World Academy (ABWA) has set a good example with its Expeditions programme that encourages students to travel to successfully pursue their passions and establish a bond with the nature. Radhika Sinha, Principal, Aditya Birla World Academy says, “We have designed this program so that students can successfully explore outdoor activities and develop close and intimate connections with nature. The primary aim is to empower students to develop life skills and holistically appreciate mother-nature. ABWA gives unrivalled importance to expeditions for students.”

India’s premiere institutions, IITs have also started executing plans in this direction with the launch of some courses on sustainability. IIT Hyderabad has announced a masters and PHD in sustainability. IIT Madras Kanpur have also started Schools of sustainability. These examples must be followed by all academic institutions rapidly so as to bring that fundamental change at the deepest levels in the society. Moving further, to speed up the process, subjects pertaining to sustainability can be made mandatory by the schools.

WHAT GOVERNMENTS CAN DO - INVESTMENT AND INCENTIVES

More investments have to pour in for corporates, NGOs and organizations that are working for the damage control against plastic pollution. Education and global healthcare are of course priority areas, however, plastic waste management has to be prioritized as well before we run out of time.

At the policy levels, governments have to come up with stringent processes and mechanisms to ensure heavy penalties to the defaulters – corporates and individuals both. Enforce the policies if needed. While on the other hand, incentivize the contributors.

A highlight here is what the European Union is doing. EU has launched a commendable policy related to plastic packaging. It has embraced Circular Economy packaging, encompassing

initiatives such as formulating a strategy for plastics within the circular economy, aiming to elevate plastic packaging recycling to 55%, setting a binding target to limit landfill to 10% of total waste by 2030, and implementing a comprehensive prohibition on landfilling separately collected waste.

Except for Iceland, all Nordic countries have container deposit schemes in operation. Similar schemes are implemented in the United States, where the national recycling rate stands at 34%, whereas states with container deposit laws boast an average rate of 70%. Michigan holds the highest deposit amount nationwide at USD 0.10, coinciding with its impressive recycling rate of 95% as of 2013.

In addition, examples of glitter ban coming into force in EU and the plan to further crackdown on other microplastics in EU are noteworthy. The aim is to cut plastic pallet (Used in plastic products) pollution by 74% by the end of the decade.

SOLUTIONS FOR DISPOSAL OF PLASTICS

■ **Educational campaigns:** Implementing educational campaigns to raise awareness about plastic pollution and promote sustainable practices among communities.

■ **Door-to-door information provisions:** Providing information and guidance on plastic waste management directly to households through door-to-door initiatives to encourage proper disposal and recycling.

■ **Small cluster development to recycle plastic waste:** Establishing small recycling clusters to efficiently collect and recycle plastic waste within local communities, promoting a circular economy approach.

■ Introducing charges or fees for the use of single-use plastics to discourage their consumption and incentivize the adoption of eco-friendly alternatives.

■ **Weight-based pricing for waste:** Implementing a pricing system based on the weight of waste generated to encourage waste reduction and proper disposal practices.

■ **Subsidies for appropriate behavior:** Offering financial incentives or subsidies to individuals and businesses that adopt environmentally friendly practices and reduce plastic waste.

■ **Pay-as-you-throw systems:** Implementing pay-as-you-throw systems where individuals pay for the amount of waste they produce, encouraging waste reduction and recycling.

■ **Landfill bans:** Enforcing bans on certain types of plastics or materials from being disposed of in landfills to promote recycling and sustainable waste management practices.

■ **Mandatory recycling laws:** Enacting laws that mandate recycling practices for households, businesses, and industries to ensure proper disposal and recycling of plastic waste.

WHAT CONSUMERS CAN DO AGAINST THIS FIGHT?

■ Spend more money for buying sustainable products; Say no to water bottles

■ Buy in bulk and carry your own bags to the markets.

■ Reuse products to the fullest of their lifecycle rather than throwing them.

■ Support a plastic bag tax; replace plastics at the society level.

■ Buy used products and items

■ Though recycling and reusing the plastics will solve the problem to an extent, it still won't be able to address the global challenge at large.

Though recycling and reusing the plastics will solve the problem to an extent, it still won't be able to address the global challenge at large.

MULTI-FACETED SOLUTIONS FOR A MULTI-FACETED PROBLEM – CIE MODEL

Given the magnitude of crisis we are dealing with, the solutions have to be multi-faceted. We have to collectively work on CIE (Circulate, Innovate and Eliminate) model to tackle the plastic menace. The Circulate approach drives through the idea of keeping the plastic waste in the economy and prevents it from going into the environment.

Project MainStream, a global, multi-industry initiative aims to accelerate business-driven innovations to help scale the circular economy, advocates the same solution. Natch Snacks is also working in line with the Circulate approach with its sponsorship of Recircles’ monthly plastic-neutral drive. Through this initiative, they collect plastic waste directly from households, effectively diverting it from landfills and waterways. The company is also dedicated to empowering waste picker communities by guaranteeing fair wages, enhancing working conditions, and providing access to valuable skill development programs.

“By diverting low-value plastic away from landfills and water bodies, this program will have a significant and far-reaching positive impact on the environment, society, and governance (ESG) landscape and promote responsible waste management practices throughout India,” says Matthew Taff, founder of Natch Snacks.

Secondly, the “I” in CIE approach stands for Innovation. Individuals and businesses have to take steps to ensure that plastic waste is reusable, recyclable and compostable. It has to be a constant effort to integrate new technologies to solve this crucial challenge. Monika Walia, Head - Corporate Social Responsibility, GlobalLogic is of the same opinion. She says, “Technological advancements in clean energy, storage, and materials offer promise for sustainable development. Adopting practices like 3R’s (Reduce, reuse, recycle)

would go a long way to support the conservation efforts. Every step taken is a ray of hope and a promise to future generations for a better world for them to thrive.”

And ultimately, we have to eliminate plastic from the entire value chain. The elimination of plastics, of course, has to be done in a phased manner. We can’t be in a denial mode anymore and continue to passing on the buck - whether the consumer is responsible for this or the producer. As the plastic pollution affects everyone adversely, it’s a shared responsibility to act upon.

SOLUTIONS FOR HOUSEHOLDS & COMPANIES

■ Introducing waste charges based on the amount of plastic waste generated to incentivize reduction and proper disposal.

■ Implementing waste-based billing systems where households and businesses pay according to the volume of plastic waste they produce, encouraging waste reduction and recycling.

■ Implementing deposit schemes for plastic bottles to promote recycling and incentivize the return of containers for reuse.

■ Increasing prices of plastic products to reflect their environmental cost and encourage consumers to opt for more sustainable alternatives.

■ Implementing bans on single-use plastics such as straws, bags, and utensils to reduce plastic pollution.

■ Introducing restrictions on the use of non-recyclable or non-biodegradable plastics to promote eco-friendly alternatives.

■ Implementing mandatory recycling programs for households, businesses, and industries to ensure proper disposal and recycling of plastic waste.

■ Enforcing regulations that require manufacturers to use recycled materials in their products to promote a circular economy and reduce the demand for new plastics.



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CASE STUDY

SEEDS OF CHANGE

HOW THE HANS FOUNDATION REVITALIZED GOOM VILLAGE



*In the heart of India, where the challenges of poverty, deforestation, and rural exodus intersect, a remarkable transformation is taking place. **The Hans Foundation**, a pillar of support for marginalized communities, embarked on an ambitious mission to revitalize the impoverished village of Goom. Faced with a dwindling workforce, environmental degradation, and economic despair, the village posed a formidable challenge that would test the resilience and ingenuity of all involved. Through the creation of the Hans Mahila Kisan Nursery, the foundation not only aimed to restore the region's ecological balance but also to empower the village's women and youth.*

The following case study explores the intricate journey of building a community-driven initiative from the ground up—overcoming obstacles and ultimately establishing a sustainable model for rural development and environmental conservation.

Discover how a barren landscape was transformed into a flourishing nursery, offering livelihoods, protecting the environment, and reigniting hope in a community that was yearning for change.

FOUNDATION OVERVIEW: THE HANS FOUNDATION'S LEGACY OF COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

The story of the Hans Mahila Kisan Nursery in Goom is just one example of how The Hans Foundation has been making a lasting impact across India- Established in 2009, the foundation is dedicated to improving the quality of life for marginalized and underserved communities throughout the country. Over the past 15 years, the foundation has implemented a wide range of programs across various sectors, including education, healthcare, disability livelihood, and environmental conservation.

The foundation's mission centres on the holistic development of remote and underserved communities, with particular attention to initiatives for children, women, and persons with disabilities. Committed to creating a more equitable society, The Hans Foundation ensures that no one is left behind in the pursuit of social justice and development. Aligning its efforts with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the foundation contributes significantly to the global agenda for a better world.

In terms of community development and environmental conservation, The Hans Foundation has made remarkable strides, reaching over 12,000 villages, 24 cities, and 25 states, and impacting 40 million beneficiaries. Notable among its initiatives is the Forest Fire Prevention and Mitigation Program, which seeks to reduce forest fire incidents, protect biodiversity, and support local livelihoods. Through a strong emphasis on community engagement and co-creation of solutions, The Hans Foundation ensures that its interventions are both culturally relevant and sustainable.

BACKGROUND OF THE INITIATIVE: SELECTING GOOM VILLAGE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The Hans Foundation's decision to support the nursery initiative in Goom Village was driven by a combination of factors reflecting their commitment to community-led environmental and economic solutions. Ms. Seema Singh, Group Senior Manager - North Region at The Hans Foundation, explains, "The Hans Foundation was motivated to support the Goom village nursery initiative because it was a community-led initiative, reflecting the residents' commitment to tackling local environmental and economic issues. We were particularly interested in how the initiative addressed deforestation and forest fire risks while creating sustainable livelihoods, especially for women. Additionally, the opportunity to build local capacity through training and resources aligned with our mission to empower grassroots initiatives."

This alignment with The Hans Foundation's goals made Goom Village a clear choice. The selection for the Hans Mahila Kisan Nursery project was driven by several critical factors:

- Agricultural Dependence:** With 60 families relying on agriculture and livestock, there was a need for sustainable practices to enhance economic stability.
- High Migration Rates:** Significant migration due to lack of facilities and opportunities highlighted the need for local employment and improved living conditions.
- Ageing Population:** The elderly demographic created challenges in maintaining a productive workforce, making it crucial to engage younger residents and women in meaningful work.
- Environmental Concerns:** The village's need for environmental conservation, especially in forest fire mitigation, aligned with the initiative's dual focus on ecological and economic benefits.

These conditions made Goom Village an ideal choice for fostering community resilience and sustainability.

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INTERVIEW

FOSTERING WORKFORCE EXCELLENCE

NEW PATH FOR INDIA'S EMPLOYMENT LANDSCAPE



EXCLUSIVE INSIGHTS
MR. SUMIT KUMAR, CHIEF STRATEGY OFFICER AT TEAMLEASE DEGREE APPRENTICESHIP

Skilling is a cornerstone of India's growth story, playing a crucial role in transforming the nation's workforce and driving sustainable economic development. As India strives to become a global leader, equipping its vast youth population with the right skills is imperative to bridge the gap between education and employment and foster inclusive growth.

In this interview, **Mr. Sumit Kumar, Chief Strategy Officer at TeamLease Degree Apprenticeship**, shares insights into how they are optimising Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) funds to address existing skill gaps. Through strategic collaborations with government bodies, educational institutions, and a wide array of corporate partners, they are creating an ecosystem that enhances employability and promotes inclusive growth. The discussion also touches on the challenges companies face in implementing effective training programs and the need for alignment between CSR initiatives and government skill development projects for broader reach and impact.

With a focus on integrating apprenticeship programs into CSR strategies, Mr. Kumar sheds light on how these efforts contribute to reducing unemployment, promoting diversity and inclusion, and ultimately driving innovation and economic growth through a skilled and adaptable workforce.



Read the interview below to learn how CSR initiatives and government skill development projects can work together for broader reach.

Please give us an idea of how TeamLease helps in optimising CSR funds channelled towards vocational training.

Our commitment to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is exemplified by the TeamLease Foundation, which executes vocational training and education project initiatives. The Foundation leads efforts at the intersection of the 3Es - Education, Employability, and Employment, aiming to skill the underserved and optimise the use of CSR funds in these areas. By aligning our efforts with national skill development and job creation goals, we significantly contribute to India's sustainable development objectives. Our initiatives foster public-private partnerships, creating a collaborative ecosystem that transforms vocational training and enhances workforce skills.

The TeamLease Degree Apprenticeships program is crucial by facilitating apprenticeships and channelling 2.5% of CSR funds from companies into these vital programs. This ensures that our programs are comprehensive, inclusive, and aligned with industry needs. By partnering with government bodies, educational institutions, and the private sector, we prepare individuals for the competitive job market. Our focus on practical, on-the-job training bridges the gap between education and employment, enhancing employability and skill development.

What are the major organisations that TeamLease has partnered with?

We have partnerships with a broad spectrum of organisations, including prominent business conglomerates, multinational and international companies, global enterprises, Fortune 500 firms, and micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs). These collaborations demonstrate our commitment to embedding social, environmental, and human development concerns into the corporate value chain, supporting a diverse range of business types and contributing to national development objectives.

Is there any particular successful project that you would like to share with us- what factors do you think contributed to its success?

The TeamLease Foundation has made significant strides through various CSR programs. Our extensive programs, including Whirlpool CSR Retail, the Women's Diversity and Training Program, Skill Development & Semberp, and the Modular Vocational Training Program, have been instrumental in enhancing vocational skills, promoting gender inclusivity and professional development, and creating rural skilling initiatives.

In addition, our dedication to promoting inclusive growth and addressing skill gaps is evident through our comprehensive apprenticeship programs and impactful CSR initiatives. Since our inception in 2014, TeamLease Degree Apprenticeship has

empowered 1,000,000 young individuals across 24 industries in all 29 states of India. By blending learning with practical learning, our innovative approach has achieved a remarkable 98% transition rate into formal employment, with nearly 40% of apprentices being retained by their original organisations.

What are the major challenges that organisations face in designing and implementing effective training programs?

Companies today find themselves between a rock and a hard place when crafting effective training programs that marry apprenticeship models with CSR goals. It's not merely about upskilling the workforce; companies are grappling with a multifaceted challenge rooted in skill deficits and the gap between education and employment. They're striving to stay ahead of the curve, identifying skill gaps and keeping pace with rapid technological advancements to ensure their training remains cutting-edge and relevant. This is just the beginning of their uphill battle. Organisations are also tasked with raising awareness about the importance of continuous learning and apprenticeships, which remains low among many youth. Maximising their return on investment without compromising quality and ensuring targeted delivery of training initiatives adds to the complexity.

Additionally, companies must demonstrate tangible outcomes, both in terms of individual career progression and overall organisational performance, while adhering to regulatory requirements and industry benchmarks. The challenge extends to creating inclusive learning environments that cater to diverse needs, balancing standardisation with personalisation, and cultivating a culture where ongoing skill development becomes second nature across all organisational tiers. Localisation of training content is crucial to address regional disparities and ensure relevance, while diversity and dexterity in program design help cater to varied learner profiles. Moreover, companies must effectively channel resources to underserved areas, contributing to rural skilling and bridging regional skill gaps as part of their CSR efforts.

A significant aspect of this challenge is developing robust talent pipelines and strengthening the overall skill ecosystem. This involves creating sustainable frameworks for continuous skill development and aligning training programs with industry demands to ensure a steady supply of qualified talent. Companies must integrate strategic planning, innovative approaches, and collaborative efforts to utilise CSR and degree apprenticeships as a way forward, ultimately cultivating a skill ecosystem that enhances employability, drives inclusive growth, and supports sustainable development.



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INTERVIEW

BUILDING A BETTER FUTURE

DS GROUP'S MULTIFACETED CSR INITIATIVES IN WATER, EDUCATION, AND LIVELIHOOD



EXCLUSIVE INSIGHTS
MR. PRABHAKANT JAIN,
HEAD, CSR, DS GROUP

As a leading FMCG conglomerate with a strong Indian and International presence, DS Group (Dharampal Satyapal Group) is guided by a clear set of values that are built on a strong foundation of collective good. This commitment to giving back to society and protecting the planet is evident in their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives.

In this insightful interview with **Mr. Prabhakant Jain, Head, CSR at DS Group**, we delve into the strategic vision and philosophy that underpin the company's CSR agenda. The discussion explores the pivotal role of water conservation within their CSR initiatives, the innovative "Water Economic Zones" project in Udaipur, and its successful replication in other regions.

Mr. Jain also sheds light on the importance of community engagement in ensuring the sustainability of their projects and the Group's commitment to quality education, livelihood enhancement, and skill development for underprivileged communities.

Additionally, the interview touches upon DS Group's collaborative approach with NGOs and local bodies to drive impactful, sustainable development and the future plans that underline their dedication to fostering a better society through innovative projects like Project Saamya.



Read the interview below to learn how CSR projects of the DS Group are making inroads in the area of sustainable development.

■ **Could you share DS Group's overarching philosophy and strategic vision driving your Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives, and outline the key pillars and thematic areas underpinning these endeavours?**

Guided by a clear set of values and built on a strong foundation of collective good, Corporate Social Responsibility is an integral part of the DS Group's business objectives. The DS Group is future-focused, and has been steadily expanding its 'green' initiatives, including Energy and Water Conservation— reflecting its response to what the world needs and its role as a committed corporate citizen.

The CSR projects of the DS Group are designed on the principles that indigenous knowledge and skills of local communities are important for sustainable development. To move closer to our objectives, we work on projects focussed on critical focus areas across the country, such as Water Conservation, Livelihood Enhancement, Education, Community Development and Gender equality to help the communities and have a long term impact. From creating awareness to implementation and ensuring sustainability, the projects encourage proactive participation from stakeholders, local bodies and recognized NGOs.

■ **What factors led DS Group to prioritize water conservation as a cornerstone of its CSR agenda, and could you elaborate on the specific methodologies used in these projects and their impact on sustainable agriculture in various regions?**

At DS Group, we believe that farmers are our important stakeholders and are motivated to pursue our water conservation efforts to ensure a sustainable water supply that enhances their livelihoods. In this, we have partnered with likeminded organizations and supported multiple projects in the states of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Gujarat, benefitting people from the marginalized communities.

With the support of different partner organisations, we started with small projects and focussed on construction of water harvesting structures. Subsequently, a comprehensive approach was prepared, leading to the launch of the project – Water Economic Zones in Udaipur district of Rajasthan in 2018 in partnership with Mahan Seva Sansthan and Arpan Seva Sansthan.

The 'Water Economic Zone', is based on integrated watershed development approach considering water as a critical and important tool for the economy of a particular area rather considering as a mere natural resource. In this approach, our focus is beyond conservation- effective management and judicial use are also equally important.

Through this, DS Group has seen some significant impact on sustainable agriculture across the regions.

The project has led to a groundwater recharge potential of 30 Lakh cum (30 MCM), with an installation of about 58.625 kW solar pumps (individual as well as community based) leading to a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions against conventional diesel/electricity-based pumps. About 235 kg co2e has been reduced annually by the project.

The introduction of a micro irrigation system has resulted in significant water savings. The project has promoted 77.1 hectares of micro irrigation systems (62 hectares with sprinklers/rain guns and 15.1 hectares with drip systems). Utilizing the drip system for vegetable and floriculture cultivation for at least one season has saved a total of 45 lakh litres of water per year. Increased irrigation water availability, increased cultivated land in Rabi and summer and improved crop productivity have compounded the overall rise in net production value. In comparison to a pre-project scenario in project villages, there has been a rise in the net production value of about 74.3% of farmers, where the average change in NPV for small marginal farmers has grown to INR 31,037 from INR 13,686.

More than 100 farmers have diversified agricultural crops and practices, significantly enhancing their income. Earlier, annual income from 800 sq.mt land was around INR 5000-6700 by growing conventional crops like maize and wheat, etc. With crop diversification, double cropping, and improved practices, farmers now earn between INR 40,000 and INR 50,000 per annum from the same area.

Improved irrigation availability and changes in the package of practices (PoP) have led to improvement in crop productivity of major crops, such as maize, wheat, mustard, and black gram in project villages in comparison to the pre-project scenario. The impact on productivity in maize and wheat is higher with more than 70% of farmers in project villages reporting to have risen in crop productivity.

The project has also promoted floriculture and vegetable cultivation, leading to a significant increase in these activities compared to the pre-project scenario. In the second year, floriculture was introduced for some farmers, supported by high-quality seeds and training. The average net income from floriculture is between INR 40,000 and INR 60,000 per bigha. More than 100 farmers have adopted WADI model for their WADI land and taking vegetable cultivation for higher income.

■ **How integral is community engagement to the success of DS Group's CSR projects, and what methods do you employ to foster collaboration with local communities in identifying and addressing their unique needs?**

Acknowledging the vitality of community cooperation and participation for the long-term sustainability of any project, the company, and its partner organization ensures their active participation in each stage of project implementation, right from the conception till the phase-out stage.

Our projects combine the traditional knowledge of each community with the technological expertise of professionals and researchers from academic and scientific fields, in almost all phases.

Project Conceptualization: As we know, a very close relationship exists between resources (such as land, water, and forest) and the community, particularly the local community. Their inputs in the planning stage is crucial to bring out the rigor in the project planning. At this stage, we ensure their participation through the various techniques of Rapid & Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA).

Implementation: People's participation in the planning and site selection for all major structures in the watershed region has been actively ensured. Decision-making involved diverse socio-economic groups. The community has contributed labour, accounting for approximately 20% to 30% of the conservation work for water conservation projects. Additionally, the community has made a 50% monetary contribution towards individual interventions such as solar and irrigation equipment. The Water User Group (WUG) oversaw the construction of these structures.

Operation & Maintenance: Various kind of community institutions have been formed for project as per the requirements. In case of water conservation, we formed 345 Water User Groups (WUG) for the augmentation of stored water and maintenance of the structures. An apex body has been formed by the representative of the WUGs for overall monitoring and future sustainability of the program. In education interventions, parent bodies play a crucial role in sustaining the progress made with children. For sanitation projects, village and mohalla-level committees are essential for driving the work forward.

■ **What motivated DS Group to focus significantly on education within its CSR framework, and what specific challenges does the Group aim to tackle through its educational initiatives to achieve maximum impact?**

At DS Group, we believe that education is an essential tool to empower the communities for a better future, and hence it stands as one of our key focus areas. The access to education has been significantly better in recent times, but quality education is still not accessible to many communities.

Therefore, under our education interventions, DS Group is supporting similar not-for-profit organizations to ensure the access the quality education to children in different settings. In Madhya Pradesh, we have partnered with Adharshila Shiksha Samiti to provide the formal education to Sahariya tribal communities in remote part of Sheopur district. In other regions as well, we are closely working with organizations like Arya Shree Shiksha Samiti, Niveda Foundation and The Creative Thinkers Forum to provide the various kind of educational support to children living in slums or similar settings. DS Group is also committed to skill-centric education as a pathway to better livelihoods. In partnership with Shikshantar, we launched the Creativity Adda project in Delhi to offer alternative, self-directed learning opportunities to government school students and dropouts.

■ **The Group supports a range of livelihood enhancement projects. Could you share more about the innovative approaches DS Group has adopted to create sustainable income opportunities for underprivileged communities?**

We measure success using two metrics: first, the learning levels of students, assessed through formal evaluations; and second, and the improvement in life skills such as communication, collaboration, teamwork, and critical thinking.

DS Group believes in inclusive growth through building the capacity of people from underprivileged section of the society. The DS Group supports a range of projects related to livelihood for creating opportunities, enhancing skills and facilitating enabling environment that empowers associated communities to explore added possibilities for their better income generation.

Apart from Water Economic Zones, the DS Group is implementing projects in the field of improved agriculture, Livestock Management, Skill Development, Financial literacy and Entrepreneurship Development. These projects are designed with participation of the local communities, using their knowledge to make the initiative sustainable. Some of them are below:

DS Group directly works with more than 50,000 Farmers on improved agricultural practices, diversified crop pattern, organic farming, post harvesting practices, market linkages and livestock management. Around 3700 individuals are supported through various skill development programs for better livelihoods.

Through Project Manthan, DS Group created an ecosystem for improved Dairy Practices for farmers in Sikar district in Rajasthan. On the one side, DS Group focussed on improving the veterinary services including breed improvement, on the other side capacity building program were facilitated in the field of cattle rearing including clean milking practices.

In Tripura, DS Group built the capacity of rubber tappers in scientific tapping practices to optimize the latex production and better income opportunities for them.

In Jharkhand, in partnership with PRADAN, DS Group supported more than 20,000 tribal women to sustain and improve livelihood in post Covid scenario through Farm and off farm activities.

The projects on Livelihood Enhancement are being implemented in the states of Rajasthan, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Nagaland and Tripura.

■ **Education is a key focus area for DS Group. How does the Group address the challenges of providing quality education to children in tribal and urban slum areas, and can you**

provide examples of measurable impacts from these educational projects?

We believe that every child should have the opportunity to explore their potential. Therefore, DS Group's interventions are designed and implemented according to the local context. In tribal areas and urban slums, our focus is on delivering the school curriculum through a participatory and engaging approach, utilizing play-based methods.

We measure success using two metrics: first, the learning levels of students, assessed through formal evaluations; and second, and the improvement in life skills such as communication, collaboration, teamwork, and critical thinking.

■ **DS Group's CSR projects are designed on the principles of leveraging indigenous knowledge and skills. How do you integrate these principles into your projects to ensure long-term sustainability and relevance to the local context?**

Communities that have lived in a particular area for decades or even centuries have accumulated valuable traditional knowledge passed down through generations. This knowledge is crucial and is integrated into our projects.

For example, in Project Manthan, we documented various traditional cattle treatment practices and reintroduced them in a scientifically validated manner after consulting with relevant experts. This approach led to better acceptance of the solutions within the community.

Similarly, in water conservation efforts, communities have insights into the most effective structures for specific sites. By involving technical experts, we aim to develop the best possible work plan for each site. This process marks the formal establishment of Water User Groups.

■ **The Water Economic Zone project in Udaipur has been quite successful. How do you plan to replicate this model in other regions, and what adaptations are necessary to address the unique challenges of new areas like Khandwa and Betul districts?**

The concept of Water Economic Zone is quite flexible and replicable. Based on the learning, DS Group replicated the Water Economic Zones in other parts particularly in four districts of Madhya Pradesh namely as Khandwa, Betul, Seoni and Katni. In all four locations, farmers remain as the primary stakeholders and water is an essential requirement for their sustenance. Thus, initial acceptance by the community has been quite over whelming.

Rather than viewing it as a challenge, we see it as a learning opportunity to tailor interventions to local needs. We recognize that each community has unique contexts, expectations, natural resources, and opportunities. Starting our interventions in two different communities in Udaipur has provided us with invaluable insights that helped us successfully replicate the project in Madhya Pradesh.

■ **What are some of the biggest challenges DS Group faces in its CSR initiatives, particularly in water conservation and livelihood enhancement, and how do you overcome these challenges to achieve your goals?**

In our experience at DS Group, the market linkages and climate change are most critical challenge for farmers and as development project, WEZ tried to address it.

For climate change, we at DS Group tried to build diversified livelihood opportunities for farmers to reduce the impact of adverse weather.

We also promoted entrepreneurs through as separate intervention to encourage youth to explore the opportunities form local area and ensure reach out to suitable market place. Building local economy is also important part of our strategy.

■ **DS Group collaborates with various NGOs and local bodies for its CSR projects. Could you name some of these partners and share insights into the mutual benefits and contributions derived from such collaborations, and how you monitor and evaluate their effectiveness?**

Corporate and NGOs are different in nature but working for a common goal - benefit of the society particularly disadvantages sections through the Corporate Social Responsibility. Before having partnership, mutual alignment is critical for log-term and sustainable partnerships.

We are working with organizations such as PRADAN, Sesta, Manjari Foundation, Arpan Seva Sansthan, Mahan Seva Sansthan, Adharshila Shiksha Samiti, Aryashree Shiksha Samiti, Vigyan Foundation Shikshantar Sansthan etc. We carefully selected these partners based on their strength and alignment with DS Group vision.

In addition to the guidelines provided by the MCA, we have developed our own process for evaluating NGOs and assessing their efficacy. Our methodology includes field visits to NGOs and interactions with their founders or chief executives as essential components.



To read the complete story, scan the QR code

COVER STORY

RECLAIMING EARTH

NURTURING RESILIENCE AGAINST DESERTIFICATION AND DROUGHT



For decades, the human race has been living with a false belief that they can exploit natural resources to any extent to fulfil their greed and not need. This unchecked exploitation has led to widespread deforestation, which has triggered a series of harmful effects. These include desertification, increased greenhouse gases, soil erosion, nutrient depletion, decreased soil fertility, disruption of the water cycle, altered rainfall patterns, reduced groundwater recharge, and an increased risk of droughts. Additionally, deforestation has contributed to the emergence of diseases, such as pandemics, due to animal viruses entering human populations.

The disruption of the water cycle and altered rainfall patterns have intensified droughts, which, in turn, cause significant health impacts—both acute and chronic—on affected populations. Every year, large areas of land are lost due to deforestation and floods, leading to reduced agricultural productivity. This decline exacerbates malnutrition and contributes to food scarcity, further heightening health vulnerabilities.

The combination of floods, prolonged droughts, and deforestation also leads to a shortage of safe drinking water. Cities such as Bangalore, Pune, Indore, Thane, Delhi, Vadodara, Rajkot, and Kota are already experiencing severe water stress. This scarcity often results in overcrowding or displacement of communities, and water mismanagement is linked to increased psychosocial stress and mental health disorders.

In today's profit-driven world, while development is crucial, it must not come at the expense of irreversible ecological damage. The theme of this year's World Environment Day highlights the critical impact of our actions on land, forests, and water, leading to desertification, water stress, floods, and droughts.

HEALTH IMPACTS OF DESERTIFICATION

Desertification affects not only land productivity but also has significant health consequences. Worsening arid conditions facilitate the spread of diseases such as malaria and dengue fever. Additionally, dust and particulate matter generated by desertification can aggravate respiratory issues and lead to

chronic health conditions. The link between environmental degradation and health is clear, showing how damaged ecosystems contribute to disease spread and negatively affect human well-being.

ECONOMIC COSTS OF DESERTIFICATION AND LAND DEGRADATION

The economic impact of desertification is substantial. The World Bank estimates that desertification costs the global economy billions of dollars each year, primarily due to lost agricultural productivity and ecosystem services. This economic burden is equivalent to the loss of multiple national economies combined. The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) warns that if current trends continue, land degradation could reduce global GDP by up to 23% by 2050. These figures highlight the urgent need for coordinated global efforts to tackle this escalating crisis.

At the heart of this issue lies the staggering loss of land. Each year, 418 million hectares of healthy land are lost due to degradation. According to some estimates, 75% of all currently available land exists in a degraded state, meaning it has lost its natural capacity to sustain human life and provide a liveable habitat for wildlife. This degradation is driven by factors such as soil erosion, monoculture industrial agriculture, agricultural chemicals, deforestation, mining, and climate change.

The impact of these statistics extends beyond the environment, revealing a profound human tragedy. In the arid landscapes of Ethiopia, for instance, women and children bear the brunt of desertification. They walk miles to fetch water, often sacrificing their education and health in the process. As their livelihoods deteriorate, poverty, malnutrition, and social unrest rise, offering a stark reminder of the human dimension of this environmental crisis.

Addressing desertification requires more than just awareness—it demands a concerted effort to restore degraded lands and build resilience against drought. This complex battle has far-reaching consequences, affecting not only the environment but also the livelihoods of millions of people around the world.

The regions most vulnerable to desertification are Africa and Asia, where nearly 67% of degradation in dryland areas occurs. By 2040, approximately 43% of major cities in these regions with populations exceeding 300,000 are projected to face desertification. Simultaneously, more than 70% of cities in non-dryland areas are expected to experience increasing aridity during the same period. These projections make it clear that action is needed on a global scale.

One path forward involves adopting comprehensive strategies that drive positive social, environmental, and economic change. Prioritizing environmental sustainability through holistic land use and water management practices is essential for mitigating the effects of desertification.

Countries like Saudi Arabia are leading the way in this regard. The nation has announced ambitious environmental sustainability goals to combat drought, desertification, and land degradation. Through

initiatives such as the Saudi Green Initiative and the Middle East Green Initiative, Saudi Arabia has pledged to plant 50 billion trees across the region. The Gulf state recently celebrated its land restoration efforts and has committed to increasing support and funding for private and philanthropic organizations working on environmental issues. As a result, Saudi Arabia is well on track to meet the global land degradation neutrality target by 2030.

Similarly, companies like Happiest Minds Technologies are recognizing their role in addressing ecological imbalances. "Our approach includes responsible land development that minimizes ecological disruption and promotes biodiversity. We implement sustainable practices to maintain soil health. By integrating these practices into our operations, we aim to protect and enhance the natural ecosystems that our business depends on," says Prithviraj Franklin, Director, Sustainability & CSR, Happiest Minds Technologies.

This shared commitment between nations and businesses illustrates the collaborative effort needed to combat desertification and secure a sustainable future for all. As these collective efforts gain momentum, it's crucial to examine how countries like India are addressing the specific challenges of drought and desertification through targeted resilience-building initiatives.

COMMENDABLE ENVIRONMENT INITIATIVES ACROSS THE GLOBE

As the world confronts the escalating challenges of desertification and drought, numerous commendable initiatives are making a significant impact. These efforts span across continents and sectors, demonstrating a diverse range of strategies and successes.

- Maldives launches a 5 million Tree Project
- Canada reaffirms its commitment to conserve 30% of land and ocean by 2030
- Brazil announces new environmental protection measures, including decrees signed
- Oman plants over 16 million seeds; To plant 10 million indigenous trees
- Bangladesh to increase its green cover to 25 per cent of land area by 2030
- Sweden announces its intention to ban bottom trawling in marine protected areas (MPAs) and all Swedish territorial waters (up to 12 nautical miles)
- Rainforest Trust notifies its accomplishment of protecting 50 million acres of habitat
- Kazakhstan marks a new chapter in biodiversity conservation
- New observatory to track progress of Africa's Great Green Wall unveiled



DROUGHTS AND EFFORTS TO BUILD RESILIENCE

In addition to these global efforts, local initiatives are also playing a crucial role. India, with its vast and diverse geography, faces significant challenges from desertification, a threat that looms large over its agricultural and rural landscapes. The Thar Desert in Rajasthan is a stark testament to this pressing issue. However, India is not standing idly by; the nation has embarked on a determined journey to combat this environmental scourge through a range of strategic initiatives.

One of the most notable efforts is the Integrated Watershed Management Program, which seeks to restore ecological balance by harnessing, conserving, and developing degraded natural resources. This program also aims to create rural employment, offering a dual benefit. While the program has shown promising results in several regions, it has not been without challenges. Issues such as inadequate funding, limited community participation, and the slow pace of implementation in certain areas have hindered its full potential.

Despite these obstacles, India’s unwavering commitment to combating desertification is reflected in its various other programs and policies. The government has invested heavily in afforestation, soil conservation, and the promotion of sustainable agricultural practices. Yet, the sheer scale of the affected areas and the intricate web of factors contributing to desertification make this a formidable challenge.

RAJASTHAN’S AGRICULTURAL RENAISSANCE

Amidst these challenges, Rajasthan—a state synonymous with aridity—is quietly undergoing an agricultural revolution. What was once seen as a landscape of limitations, marked by relentless sun and dry lands, is now being transformed into a sustainable and profitable agricultural ecosystem.

A prime example of this transformation is the cultivation of high-value crops like saffron, which thrives in the region’s dry climate. This shift has not only increased farmers’ incomes but has also created new job opportunities in processing, packaging, and marketing. Similarly, the cultivation of medicinal plants and herbs has gained momentum, tapping into the lucrative market for organic products.

Moreover, the integration of livestock with crop cultivation is reshaping rural livelihoods. Dairy farming, apiculture, and poultry rearing are being promoted to diversify income sources and reduce dependency on rain-fed agriculture. These practices not only boost income but also contribute to soil health and nutrient recycling, further enhancing the sustainability of the region.

The state has also made significant strides in water conservation through innovative techniques like drip irrigation, rainwater harvesting, and the revival of traditional water bodies. These efforts have not only bolstered agricultural productivity but have also helped recharge groundwater levels, providing a more sustainable water supply for future generations. However, challenges remain. Many farmers still struggle with access to technology, market linkages, and financial resources. To fully realize the potential of these initiatives, robust extension services are needed to bridge the knowledge gap and empower farmers with the necessary skills.

THE BROADER CONTEXT OF DROUGHTS

While Rajasthan’s agricultural transformation showcases a hopeful path forward, the broader context of droughts across India highlights the urgency of scaling such efforts to combat a nationwide threat. Currently, about one-third of the country’s land is experiencing varying degrees of drought, a situation that is worsening with time. Globally, droughts affect 55 million people each year, threatening livelihoods, livestock, and agriculture, and leading to mass migration in extreme cases.

The escalating challenges posed by desertification and drought necessitate proactive measures to safeguard the environment and protect vulnerable populations worldwide. In agriculture-based economies like India, preventing forced displacement hinges on the ability to produce sufficient food for human sustenance. However, the overuse of fertilizers and other chemicals has raised concerns about the long-term fertility of agricultural soils. Ensuring continued food security requires concerted efforts to restore degraded lands and adopt sustainable farming practices.

BECOMING DROUGHT-RESILIENT

To build resilience against drought, increasing green cover through widespread afforestation is crucial. Comprehensive participation from all societal stakeholders in afforestation drives can yield significant environmental benefits. Leveraging technology to track and measure the impact of these initiatives will enable mutual learning and guide future actions.

“As part of our afforestation initiative, we have planted over 200,000 trees in the last two years, and we will continue to plant more in the years to come. This effort is expected to lead to an approximate carbon reduction of 3,000 MTCO2e through sequestration,”says Prithviraj Franklin, Director of Sustainability & CSR at Happiest Minds Technologies.

CORPORATE INITIATIVES IN SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

In the quest to address these environmental challenges, companies like PepsiCo are stepping up with innovative solutions. Recognizing the interconnectedness of water management and agricultural sustainability, PepsiCo is implementing a range of initiatives under their pep+ framework. This framework emphasizes three pillars: positive agriculture, positive value chain, and positive choices.

Under the Positive Agriculture pillar, PepsiCo prioritizes regenerative agricultural practices that not only aim to boost yields and improve crop quality but also reduce environmental impacts. Their efforts include advancing climate-resilient crop practices, integrating indigenous knowledge to refine farming techniques, and minimizing the use of chemical fertilizers and water through their regenerative playbook approach.

Additionally, PepsiCo India’s Lay’s Biochar Project offers a sustainable alternative to stubble burning. This initiative enhances soil health, water retention, and air quality while reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Complementing this is their Smart Farm initiative, an AI-driven crop intelligence model that utilizes satellite imagery and historical data to provide farmers with critical insights through a smartphone app. This tool offers crop

health information, weather and yield forecasts, and early warnings for diseases, helping farmers optimize resources and mitigate risks associated with drought and desertification.

Together, these corporate efforts demonstrate how businesses are contributing to sustainable solutions, bridging the gap between immediate challenges and long-term resilience.

WATER CRISIS AND SUSTAINABLE WATER MANAGEMENT

However, the challenges of sustainable agriculture are deeply intertwined with the broader global water crisis. Today, the world is grappling with an unprecedented water shortage. Approximately 4 billion people, or at least 50% of the earth's population, experience water stress for at least one month each year. Projections suggest that by 2025, 1.8 billion people may face absolute water scarcity. Data from the World Health Organization (WHO) indicates that by 2030, water scarcity could impact 40% of the global population, putting over 700 million people at risk of displacement.

Without significant interventions, such as increased investment in water infrastructure and improved water governance, the situation is likely to worsen. Regions with rapidly growing populations and economies will be particularly hard hit. Some reports predict that global water demand will rise by 25% by 2050, and the number of watersheds experiencing high year-to-year variability—resulting in less predictable water supplies—is expected to increase by 19%. This means that by 2050, the entire populations of North Africa and the Middle East could be living under extremely high-water stress.

The implications are dire. On one hand, forced community displacement due to water scarcity will lead to uneven population distribution and compromise food security. On the other hand, the economic impact will be profound. According to a report by Aqueduct, by 2050, nearly \$70 trillion will be needed to address high water stress. This figure would represent over 31% of the global GDP in 2050, compared to 24% (\$15 trillion) of the global GDP in 2010.

To mitigate these challenges, nations must improve their water governance, incentivize water efficiency in agriculture, adopt integrated water resource management, and enhance water infrastructure through nature-based solutions and green infrastructure. Protecting and restoring wetlands, mangroves, and forests not only improves water quality and builds resilience against droughts and floods but also reduces water treatment costs, contributing to long-term sustainability. Every level of government, along with communities and businesses, must step up to build a secure future for all. The world will ultimately require a comprehensive approach that includes both global strategies and region-specific solutions.

As the globe today grapples with environmental challenges exacerbated by rapid urbanization and climate change, proactive measures are essential. Such efforts will not only mitigate environmental impacts but also help build resilience against future ecological threats. In India, several companies have demonstrated their commitment to environmental sustainability through innovative practices aimed at addressing critical



challenges like water scarcity. Strategies emphasizing a holistic approach to resource management and sustainability are crucial. Investments in energy efficiency and sustainability solutions, notably rainwater harvesting, will play a key role. By employing cutting-edge technology such as smart water management systems and data analytics, companies can optimize water usage efficiently, enhancing operational sustainability while contributing significantly to water conservation efforts in regions facing scarcity.

Furthermore, advanced irrigation techniques that minimize water wastage while maximizing agricultural productivity are proving fruitful. By integrating water recycling and rainwater harvesting systems, companies can ensure a resilient water supply crucial for both their operations and the local communities they serve.

“Our water management practices emphasize both efficiency and regeneration through methods like rainwater harvesting and HVAC condensate water collection, treatment, and reuse. We not only ensure efficiency but also actively measure our water consumption data. Condensate water is collected from air conditioning systems and reused. In 2023, approximately 0.23 million liters of condensate water from the air conditioning system was collected and reused. All water fixtures are low-flow, with some featuring foot operators, further encouraging conscious use. The toilets at our Gurgaon location are waterless. Additionally, we harvest 100% of the rainwater on our premises and replenish the groundwater table in our buildings,” says Ashish Agarwal, Managing Director, New Ventures and Custodian of Sustainability, Nagarro.

The deployment of N-Drip irrigation technology, along with other

efficient techniques, can drastically improve water efficiency in water-stressed regions. Farmers can be encouraged to transition from traditional agricultural practices like paddy transplantation to direct seeding of rice (DSR), which is said to reduce water consumption by nearly 30%.

PepsiCo attests to the importance of tech-driven solutions. “Under the Positive Value Chain pillar, our Sustainable Water Resource Development and Management (SWRDM) program focuses on groundwater recharge through geo-hydrological watershed-level approaches, building drought resilience in Punjab, Maharashtra, and Uttar Pradesh. These initiatives underscore our dedication to fostering sustainable practices and inspiring positive change for the planet and people,” says a PepsiCo spokesperson.

Additionally, the construction of wetland models for wastewater treatment represents an innovative approach. This method utilizes natural processes involving vegetation, soil, and organisms to effectively treat wastewater, making it safe for reuse in urban communities. Research focused on the feasibility and benefits of implementing constructed wetlands in urban areas, where water scarcity and wastewater management are significant challenges, contributes to ecosystem health and safeguards human health by minimizing potential risks associated with contaminated water sources.

FOSTERING COLLABORATION FOR ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

Effective collaboration with local communities is key to successful environmental restoration and sustainability. Beyond technological investments, fostering a culture of environmental stewardship requires robust employee and community engagement through awareness activities. Engaging with local stakeholders early in the planning process ensures that their needs and perspectives are considered, which is crucial for successful restoration and regeneration projects.

Building strategic partnerships with local governments, NGOs, and community groups provides valuable insights and resources. These collaborations are essential for creating sustainable projects that benefit both the environment and local communities. Recognizing cultural nuances and tailoring initiatives to specific local contexts enhance the effectiveness of these efforts. Educating and training local communities on sustainable practices empowers them to actively participate in restoration efforts. Additionally, investing in community development projects that offer economic benefits fosters a shared sense of ownership and long-term commitment.

Dr. Sunita Varjani, Senior Associate Professor at UPES, Dehradun, emphasizes the importance of such collaboration: “By engaging with stakeholders, companies can co-create tailored solutions that address the unique needs and challenges of each region. Fostering knowledge sharing, capacity building, and equitable benefit sharing mechanisms will be crucial in ensuring the sustainability and social acceptance of these initiatives.”

Incorporating innovative solutions into environmental projects can address multiple interconnected issues. Traditional street designs often lead to the loss of trees, impacting biodiversity and

water absorption. A notable example of a holistic approach is Nagarro’s project at Sanath Road in Gurugram. Instead of simply widening roads for motorized vehicles, Nagarro redesigned the street to accommodate pedestrians, cyclists, and street vendors while preserving existing trees and planting over 500 saplings of native species. This design not only improves street usability but also enhances stormwater retention and biodiversity.

Ashish Agarwal from Nagarro reflects on this approach: “We are addressing societal needs by creating streets designed for women’s safety and accessibility, with well-lit footpaths, broad pavements, and safe transit options, contributing to gender equality and inclusivity. Ultimately, our aim is to set a precedent for collaborative efforts that yield tangible benefits for communities, businesses, and the environment alike.”

Organizations like Habitat for Humanity are also playing a vital role in this endeavour by improving living conditions and indirectly supporting environmental sustainability. Their focus on affordable housing and community development strengthens resilience against environmental challenges.

In India, numerous organizations are advancing environmental conservation. The Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE) has contributed to policy and practice through its research on development impacts. CHINTAN’s initiatives on rainwater harvesting and waste management have significantly benefited local communities. Other notable organizations include:

- The Centre for Science and Environment (CSE): CSE raises awareness about environmental issues and advocates for sustainable policies on air pollution, water conservation, and agriculture.
- The Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History (SACON): SACON focuses on biodiversity conservation and research on wildlife habitats and human-wildlife conflict.
- The Tata Energy Research Institute (TERI): TERI addresses climate change, energy, and sustainable development, contributing to India’s low-carbon economy transition.

These organizations, along with growing public awareness and policymaker focus, are building a strong foundation for a sustainable future. Despite the challenges, the collective will to protect our planet and address desertification and climate change offers hope and a powerful force for overcoming obstacles.



To read the complete story, scan the QR code

SUCCESS STORY

FROM VICTIM TO VICTOR

HOW NILESH TRANSFORMED HER LIFE THROUGH RESILIENCE AND EDUCATION



This is the inspiring story of Nilesh, who overcame the trauma of child marriage and domestic violence to become a beacon of hope in her community. Growing up in Sakurpurbasti, Delhi, Nilesh was married off at 12 and faced years of abuse before being abandoned by her husband during her fourth pregnancy. Determined to build a better future for her children, she found support in Bal Raksha Bharat (BRB). Through their guidance, Nilesh gained financial independence, embraced education for her children, and became a vocal advocate against child marriage. Her journey exemplifies that resilience and timely support can not only break the cycle of poverty but create brighter futures for individuals and families.

Read the full story below:

In the bustling neighborhood of Sakurpurbasti, Delhi, Nilesh's life was defined by hardships from an early age. Her dreams of education were abruptly halted when she was married off at just 12 years old, thrust into a life she was not prepared for. The subsequent years were marred by domestic violence, a harsh reality that she endured silently. Her situation worsened when her husband abandoned her during her fourth pregnancy, leaving Nilesh alone to fend for her children.

In the midst of this turmoil, hope emerged in the form of Bal Raksha Bharat (BRB). Members of the BRB saw a woman yearning for a different future, not just for herself, but for her four children. Initially reserved, Nilesh gradually opened up to their guidance and assistance. With their encouragement, she began working as a housemaid, a first step towards self-sufficiency. She later joined BRB's Multi Activity Centre (MAC), a decision that marked a turning point in her life. The stability and confidence she found there enabled her to secure work and gain financial independence. The transformation was palpable; her voice, once timid, grew stronger, her confidence blossomed.

Denied the opportunity for education herself, Nilesh was determined to ensure her children did not face the same fate. With BRB's assistance, she obtained Aadhaar cards for her children, a crucial step for their school enrolment. Her eldest son joined the Multi Activity Centre, where BRB provided educational support through bridge courses and learning materials. This foundation enabled him to transition seamlessly into mainstream schooling. Meanwhile, Nilesh's younger children benefited from the Mobile Learning Centre (MLC) and the Anganwadi center, ensuring their holistic development.

Nilesh's journey is a testament to the transformative power of support and education. Her story exemplifies how breaking the cycle of poverty is possible, empowering individuals to create a brighter future for themselves and their families.



Through BRB's interventions, her outlook on life transformed. Empowered by newfound independence and knowledge, she became an advocate for education, particularly for girls, in her community. Nilesh's journey wasn't just personal; she became a champion for change. Witnessing the negative effects of child marriage first-hand, she spoke out against the practice, her voice resonating within the community.

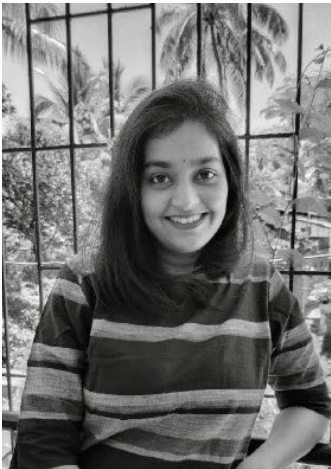
Nilesh's journey is a testament to the transformative power of support and education. Her story exemplifies how breaking the cycle of poverty is possible, empowering individuals to create a brighter future for themselves and their families. Her life is not just a story of personal triumph but a beacon of hope and inspiration for many.

Since 2004, Bal Raksha Bharat (Save The Children – India) has been working tirelessly across various states in India to ensure that every child experiences a happy childhood and a promising future. Over the years, their efforts have directly impacted over 10 million children, more than half of whom are girls.

Nilesh's story is one of many that have been created through multiple social initiatives supported by Acuity Knowledge Partners. They have partnered with Bal Raksha Bharat for their Project Anganwadi on Wheels impacting 548 children. Acuity Knowledge Partners is also coming with a Coffee Table Book featuring many such beautiful stories from their social endeavours.

EXPERT TAKE

THE URGENCY TO IMPLEMENT EPR COMPLIANCE



In the intricate landscape of India's waste management, the informal sector has long played a pivotal role in the collection and recycling of plastic waste. However, with the country producing approximately 9.46 million tonnes of plastic waste annually, the need for structured and enforceable solutions has become urgent. This is where Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) steps in as a game-changer. In this article, Nikhila Vishnuvajhala, Assistant General Manager of Business

Development & Sales at Banyan Nation, highlights that EPR policies hold manufacturers accountable for the entire lifecycle of their products, fostering innovation, reducing plastic pollution, and contributing to economic growth. The urgency to implement EPR compliance is paramount, not only to capitalize on an \$8 billion economic opportunity but also to ensure a sustainable future for India.

Read the opinion piece below:

THE URGENCY TO IMPLEMENT EPR COMPLIANCE

In India, the collection of post-consumer plastic waste is a complex process deeply intertwined with the informal sector, which plays a crucial role in the country's circular economy.

Annually, India produces around 9.46 million tonnes of plastic waste, of which about 60%-70% is recycled, largely due to the efforts of the informal sector. This sector consists of ragpickers, waste pickers, and small-scale recyclers who collect, sort, and sell plastic waste to recycling units. Informal waste collectors traverse neighborhoods, collecting plastic waste from various sources, often with minimal support and recognition from formal systems. Municipalities either use their own collection services or contract private waste management companies.

Informal collectors sell materials to the nearest aggregators, who determine market prices based on local demand and supply. Aggregators then sell the material, including plastics, to larger aggregators, intermediate dealers, or other agents.

India is estimated to have more than 7,500 registered and unregistered recyclers. The informal sector's contribution is vital, not only in terms of the volume of plastic waste managed but also in providing livelihoods to millions of waste pickers and small-scale recyclers across the country.

The Plastic Waste Management Rules 2016 and the recently strengthened Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) guidelines position India as a leader in addressing plastic pollution. As environmental concerns intensify and regulatory landscapes evolve, the urgency to implement EPR compliance has never been more critical.

WHAT IS EPR?

EPR is an environmental policy approach that holds manufacturers, producers, and importers accountable for the entire lifecycle of their products, particularly their end-of-life management. This includes the collection, recycling, and disposal of products in an environmentally responsible manner. While other countries faced conflicting economic and political priorities, resulting in inaction, India implemented a comprehensive EPR policy.

Due to the enforcement of EPR, in the last three years, established entrepreneurs and startups in the industry have developed advanced capabilities to deliver safely recycled materials, developed traceable supply chains, and worked with various players in the plastics ecosystem to establish a playbook for use of recycled plastics. Without a policy led push for recycling – India would lose an \$8 billion economic opportunity.

EFFECTS OF EPR REGULATIONS IN INDIA ON BRAND OWNERS:

- 1. Increased Accountability and Compliance Costs** - According to a report by FICCI, the cost of compliance for brand owners can range from 0.5% to 2% of their total revenue, depending on the scale of their operations and the amount of plastic packaging used.
- 2. Design and Material Innovation** - A survey conducted by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) found that 60% of brand owners have invested in developing sustainable packaging solutions since the introduction of EPR regulations.
- 3. Enhanced Corporate Image and Consumer Trust** - A study by the Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Ahmedabad revealed that 70% of consumers prefer products with sustainable packaging, and 55% are willing to pay a premium for such products.



To read the complete story, scan the QR code

EXPERT TAKE

HOW CSR IS LEADING THE WAY TO A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE



In today's complex and interconnected world, the symbiosis between economic prosperity and environmental sustainability has never been more crucial. Ms. Pihu Jain, Head of the Girnar Foundation, the CSR arm of the CarDekho Group, offers a profound exploration of this relationship in her thought-provoking article, "How Corporate Social Responsibility is Leading the Way to a Sustainable Future." Jain delves into the transformative power of CSR, illustrating how

it is not merely a business obligation but a strategic imperative for ensuring the longevity of both our ecosystems and the global economy. For those seeking a deeper understanding of how corporate strategies can align with the urgent need for sustainability, this article provides invaluable insights.

Read the opinion piece below:

The vitality of the global economy is intricately tied to the health of our natural environment. With over 50% of the world's GDP dependent on nature and biodiversity, the health of our ecosystems directly impacts the success of businesses worldwide. This interconnection underscores the critical importance of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in shaping a sustainable future for both commerce and the environment. Recognizing this vital link, businesses are increasingly called upon to play a pivotal role in conservation efforts. The World Economic Forum's estimate that US\$ 44 trillion of economic value generation relies on nature and its services serves as a stark reminder of what's at stake.

THE EVOLUTION AND IMPORTANCE OF CSR

Today, as India stands among the fastest-growing trillion-dollar economies globally, CSR has evolved into a powerful mechanism for driving positive change. The concept has expanded beyond philanthropy to encompass a comprehensive approach to business that considers environmental, social, and economic impacts.

At the COP26 summit, India committed to an ambitious target of achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2070. This monumental goal demands concerted efforts from all sectors, and the corporates are increasingly stepping up to address the challenges of climate change.

In 2013, India took a major step by mandating CSR, creating opportunities for businesses to contribute to biodiversity conservation and community development. This move has set the stage for a new era of corporate engagement in addressing pressing environmental and social challenges. The mandate recognizes that businesses have both the resources and the responsibility to contribute to societal well-being and environmental conservation.

THE NEED FOR CORPORATE INVOLVEMENT

The scale of our global environmental challenges is increasing. With an annual finance gap of US\$ 599-824 billion for achieving global biodiversity conservation goals, the private sector's involvement is not just beneficial – it's essential. Corporations, with their vast resources, technological prowess, and global reach, are uniquely positioned to drive meaningful progress toward sustainability.

Moreover, sustainable business models could unlock economic opportunities worth \$12 trillion and create 380 million jobs by 2030. This potential for growth, coupled with the increasing awareness of environmental risks, is compelling companies to integrate sustainability into their core business strategies. By doing so, businesses not only contribute to global conservation efforts but also secure their own long-term viability in a world where environmental factors increasingly influence market dynamics.

ALIGNING CORPORATE GOALS WITH GLOBAL SUSTAINABILITY OBJECTIVES

The United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted in 2015, provide a comprehensive framework for addressing global challenges by 2030. These goals encompass a wide range of issues, from poverty eradication and gender equality to climate action and responsible consumption. For corporations, aligning with these SDGs is not just about fulfilling a moral obligation – it's about ensuring long-term business viability.

By integrating these goals into their operations, companies can mitigate risks, identify new market opportunities, and build resilience in an increasingly unpredictable world. The SDGs offer a roadmap for businesses to contribute meaningfully to global sustainability while also enhancing their own competitiveness and reputation.



To read the complete story, scan the QR code

CASE STUDY

BREAKING BARRIERS

SARTHAK EDUCATIONAL TRUST'S PATH TO DISABILITY EMPOWERMENT AND EMPLOYMENT



Sarthak Educational Trust, a distinguished Civil Society Organization, has been championing the inclusion and empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) since 2008. Over the years, Sarthak has profoundly impacted over 2 million PwDs and trained over 80,000 individuals through its Job Entrepreneurship & Empowerment Training Program (JEET). In recognition of its relentless efforts, the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment (MSJE) honoured them with the National Award 2023 for being the Best NGO in the Disability Sector, presented by the Hon'ble President of India.

This case study takes us into the details of Sarthak's initiatives that focus on skill development, job placement, workplace inclusivity, and sustainable livelihoods. Read the full story to understand how they are fostering a more inclusive society by enabling thousands of PwDs to achieve financial independence:

SARTHAK EDUCATIONAL TRUST'S INSPIRING WORK AND TRIUMPH IN DISABILITY EMPOWERMENT

The training and employment initiatives of Sarthak Educational Trust aim to empower persons with disabilities, enabling them to lead independent and fulfilling lives while contributing to a more inclusive society. Their program is centred on the following objectives:

- **Skill Development:** Provide vocational training to enhance the employability of persons with disabilities.
- **Job Placement:** Facilitate employment opportunities through partnerships with corporates.
- **Inclusivity:** Promote workplace inclusivity and diversity through sensitization of potential corporate employers.
- **Sustainable Livelihoods:** Ensure beneficiaries can secure sustainable livelihoods in the Corporate sector.

The beneficiaries of their work include:

- 1. Persons with Disabilities:** Primary beneficiaries who receive training and employment support include youth with disabilities in the age group 18-35 years.
- 2. Corporates:** Benefit from a trained, diverse workforce and fulfil CSR objectives.
- 3. NGOs:** Collaborate to extend their reach and impact in the rural and peri-urban PwD community.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

In India, persons with disabilities (PwDs) face significant barriers to education, skill development, and employment. Despite various government initiatives and legal frameworks aimed at promoting inclusivity, societal attitudes, infrastructural inadequacies, and a lack of awareness continue to marginalize PwDs. This marginalization leads to high unemployment rates among PwDs, resulting in economic dependence and social exclusion.

UNDERLYING ISSUES:

- 1. Limited Access to Education and Training:**
 - Many PwDs do not have access to quality education and vocational training due to physical barriers, lack of specialized programs, and insufficient support systems.
 - Educational institutions often lack the necessary infrastructure and trained staff to cater to the specific needs of PwDs.
- 2. Employment Discrimination:**
 - Employers often harbor misconceptions about the capabilities of PwDs, leading to bias in hiring practices.
 - Workplaces may not be equipped with the necessary

accommodations or support systems to integrate PwDs effectively.

3. Economic Dependence:

- The lack of employment opportunities leads to economic dependence on families or state support, restricting the financial independence and social mobility of PwDs.
- This dependence perpetuates a cycle of poverty and limited opportunities.

SOCIAL EXCLUSION:

- PwDs often face social stigma and isolation, which further hinders their ability to participate fully in society.
- The lack of awareness and understanding among the general public exacerbates this exclusion.

SOLUTION FRAMEWORK

Sarthak's training and employment program aims to tackle these issues by focusing on:

1. Skill Development and Education:

- Providing tailored training programs that equip PwDs with market-relevant skills.
- Partnering developed inclusive curricula and training methodologies.

2. Employment Opportunities:

- Collaborating with corporates to create job opportunities and facilitate the placement of trained PwDs.
- Advocating for inclusive hiring practices and workplace accommodations.

3. Economic Empowerment:

- Enabling PwDs to achieve financial independence through gainful employment.
- Providing continuous support to ensure job retention and career growth.

4. Social Integration:

- Raising awareness about the abilities and rights of PwDs through campaigns and advocacy efforts.
- Fostering an inclusive community where PwDs are valued and supported.

CHALLENGES

During the implementation of its training and placement initiative for persons with disabilities (PwDs), Sarthak Educational Trust faced several challenges:

- **Funding Constraints:** Limited financial resources hampered the ability to expand programs and outreach of this program to different cities across India and reach more beneficiaries.
- **Skilled Trainer Shortage:** Finding and retaining trainers experienced in working with PwDs is still a big challenge.
- **Employer Bias:** Many employers still have misconceptions about the capabilities of PwDs, leading to reluctance in hiring.
- **Accessibility Issues:** Inadequate transportation, mobility barriers, workplace inaccessibility and financial constraints often lead to PwDs not joining the trainings and jobs offered.
- **Technological Gaps:** Ensuring access to technology and digital tools for training posed significant hurdles.

COLLABORATIVE STRATEGIES TO OVERCOME CHALLENGES

- **Forming Strategic Partnerships:** Sensitizing and collaborations with corporates, provided essential funding, resources and employment opportunities.
- **Awareness Campaigns:** Joint initiatives with partners helped

educate employers about the benefits of hiring PwDs, addressing biases and promoting inclusivity.

- **Capacity Building:** Periodic re-skilling program for trainers are implemented, to enhance their skills and knowledge.
- **Technology Integration:** Launched digital solutions like Rozgarsarathi – job portal to access real-time job openings for PwDs and Gyansarathi – self learning and easy to use e-Learning platform facilitated remote learning and skill development.

RESILIENCE AND ADAPTABILITY

Sarthak demonstrated resilience by continuously adapting its strategies to address emerging challenges. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, Sarthak swiftly transitioned to online training modules, ensuring uninterrupted support for PwDs. The organizations ability to innovate and maintain strong partnerships underscored its commitment to creating sustainable and inclusive employment opportunities, right from work from model to work from office model, with 2000+ hiring partners associated with organization. Through these collaborative efforts, Sarthak not only overcame immediate obstacles but also built a robust framework for long-term impact.

PARTNERSHIPS

Collaborative partnerships are crucial for Sarthak in achieving its mission of empowering PwDs through skill development and employment, by partnering with government agencies, corporates, educational institutions and other NGOs. These collaborations enhance the trust's capacity to deliver comprehensive programs and reach a wider audience. Joint initiatives lead to the development of innovative solutions tailored to the unique needs of the disabled community, for example, development of GyanSarathi -e_Learaning portal has been developed with support from Stratbeans Solutions, a leading IT Development company. Partnerships with corporations facilitate job placements, ensuring sustainable livelihoods for beneficiaries. Engaging with educational institutions helps in curriculum development and specialized training, our training curricula is in-line with the courses approved by NSDC. Furthermore, collaboration fosters knowledge exchange, driving continuous improvement and advocacy for policy changes. In essence, these synergistic partnerships are instrumental in amplifying Sarthak's impact, ensuring holistic development, and achieving shared goals of inclusivity and empowerment.

STRATEGIES FOR SCALING UP AND REPLICATION

Sarthak Educational Trust's skilling and employment program for (PwDs) has significant potential for scaling up due to its robust framework, successful outcomes and strong partnerships. Scaling up can amplify the program's impact, reach a broader audience and foster greater inclusivity across various regions and sectors.

- 1. Strengthening Partnerships and Expanding Corporate Collaboration:** Engage more corporates across different industries and sectors to increase job placement opportunities and diversify training programs.
- 2. Standardizing New Training Modules** for newer job roles
- 3. Leveraging Technology:** Utilize Online Training digital platforms to provide remote training, making programs accessible to PwDs in remote or underserved areas.
- 4. Capacity Building of Trainers:** through Implementingmore robust train-the-trainer programs to build local capacity and ensure a steady supply of qualified trainers.

5. Public Awareness Campaigns: Conducting large-scale awareness campaigns through Sarthak Social Media platforms to spread awareness about the program.

6. Policy Advocacy: Work with policymakers to advocate for inclusive employment policies and incentives for companies hiring PwDs.

REPLICATION STRATEGIES

- **Expanding Sarthak Centres Networks:** Establish more Training and Employment Centres in new regions to ensure benefits to maximum beneficiaries across India.
- **Knowledge Sharing** - Share best practices, resources and training materials with NGOs, partner organizations associated with Sarthak, to facilitate replication and wider outreach.

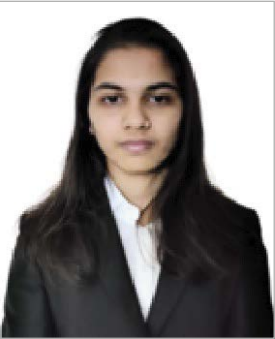
LESSONS LEARNED AND BEST PRACTICES

- **Inclusive Design:** Ensuring that training programs are designed and re-designed inputs from PwDs to address their specific needs and challenges.
- **Collaborative Approach:** Engaging more employers to align training outcomes with job market needs.
- **Flexibility and Adaptability:** Adopting flexible training schedules and training periods to accommodate diverse needs.
- **Sustainable Funding:** Diversifying more funding sources to include grants, corporate sponsorships and government funding to ensure programs long term sustainability.

RECOGNITION AND AWARDS

- First-ever Rotary DEI Award 2024, for promoting and enabling participation of people with disabilities.
- National Award, as the best NGO in the field of Disability by Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPWD), Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment (MSJE) for the year 2023.
- Dr. Jitender Aggarwal felicitated by Hon'ble President of India Smt. Droupadi Murmu for his contribution to Abilympics Movement and International achievements during France Abilympics, 2023
- Dr. Jitender Aggarwal elected in International Executive Committee of International Abilympics Federation, Japan in March 2023 amongst the 8 International Members
- Dr. Jitender Aggarwal nominated to Diversability International's 4th annual 2023 D-30 Disability Impact List as Honoree
- 11th AIWEFA Nina Sibal Memorial Award 2023, to Sarthak for managing and educating disabled and disadvantaged children through innovative methods
- Felicitated by Nobel Foundation, Ludhiana for serving the disability community in India – 2023
- Dr. Batra's Positive Health Hero's Award 2022 to Dr. Jitender Aggarwal, for empowering Persons with Disabilities
- BWDisrupt Social Impact Award of Excellence by BW Businessworld – 2021 to Dr. Jitender Aggarwal, Founder CEO, Sarthak
- Mary Glowery Liliane Kelmans Disability Award – 2021 to Sarthak Education Trust for
- Outstanding contribution in the field of disability by CHAI+ & Liliane Foundation
- Felicitated with Mahatma Award
- Best D & I Practices of Asia Governing Council Commendation Award -2020, to Sarthak Educational Trust, by Women Leadership Forum of Asia

FEW SUCCESSFULLY PLACED CANDIDATES BY SARTHAK



Name: Vrushali Summersingh More
Disability Type: Low Vision (75%)
Education: M. Com
Placed in Company: Edu Angels Pvt Ltd
Role: Recruitment Executive
Salary: 70,000
Training Center: Sarthak Thane



Name: S Mallikarjuna Raju
Disability Type: Locomotor Disability (71%)
Education: BSc
Placed in Company: Cognizant Technology
Role: Associate Projects
Salary: 75,000
Training Center: Sarthak Visakhapatnam



Name: Ashwanth S
Disability Type: Hearing Impaired (80%)
Education: MBA
Placed in Company: EY Global
Role: Lead Associate
Salary: 40,000
Training Center: Sarthak Chennai



Name: Yogesh Pratap Singh
Disability Type: Hard of Hearing (40%)
Education: M.Com
Placed in Company: HDB Financial Services
Role: Branch Credit Manager
Salary: 29,585
Training Center: Sarthak Lucknow



Name: Kaushlendra Kaushlendra
Disability Type: Locomotor Disability (40%)
Education: 12th
Placed in Company: Blinkit
Role: Delivery Executive
Salary: 24,000
Training Center: Sarthak Delhi



Name: Ragini Sawhney
Disability Type: Thalassemia (70%)
Education: 12th
Placed in Company: Concentrix
Role: Data Entry Operator
Salary: 19,000
Training Center: Sarthak Delhi

To read the complete story, scan the QR code



SUCCESS STORY

SEWING DREAMS

AVISHEK PATEL'S JOURNEY OF TRIUMPH
VIA PROJECT UNNATI



In this heartwarming story, we get to know about Avishek Patel, a resilient young man from a small village in Uttar Pradesh, who overcame the challenges of hearing loss and is well set on the path to financial independence today. Born into a farmer family with limited financial resources, Avishek struggled to find fulfilling work. However, Project Unnati's inclusive training program empowered him to pursue a promising career as a Sewing Machine Operator. This initiative by the Roots Foundation highlights the transformative impact of skill development, offering hope and sustainable livelihoods to young individuals like Avishek.

Read the full story below:

In the serene village of Padrauna, nestled in Kushi Nagar district of Uttar Pradesh, resides 24 year old Avishek Patel. A member of a farmer family, he has faced the challenge of hearing loss since a young age. Yet, his unwavering spirit and resilience shine brightly, proving that no obstacle is insurmountable.

Avishek lived with his parents, three brothers, and grandparents, who grappled with age-related illnesses. The family relied on the meager income from their farm to make ends meet. Despite completing his education up to the 12th standard, Avishek found himself reluctantly working as an embroiderer for a clothing company. While this job contributed to the family's income, it lacked the passion and fulfillment he longed for in his professional life.

His life took a significant turn when he discovered a promotional pamphlet for Project Unnati. This initiative offered him a glimmer of hope and the possibility of a brighter future. Despite initial apprehension due to his physical condition, the project's ethos of inclusivity embraced him wholeheartedly. Project Unnati offered him the opportunity to train as a certified Sewing Machine Operator, opening doors to a career that aligned with his interests.

Driven by the prospect of enhancing his career prospects, Avishek eagerly enrolled in the program, seizing the chance to broaden his horizons. Despite facing what many would perceive as a physical

Avishek Patel's story is a testament to the transformative power of education and skilling. Through Project Unnati, he has discovered his potential and is poised to build a future that promises hope, dignity, and success.



disadvantage, his dedication and perseverance shone through as he progressed alongside his fellow trainees.

As he nears the culmination of his training, Avishek's excitement is palpable, fuelled by the prospect of learning and growth. With newfound skills and confidence, he envisions a career in the apparel manufacturing industry, eager to contribute to his family's welfare like his siblings. For Avishek, Project Unnati has not only provided him with vocational training but also instilled in him a sense of empowerment and purpose.

Avishek Patel's story is a testament to the transformative power of education and skilling. Through Project Unnati, he has discovered his potential and is poised to build a future that promises hope, dignity, and success.

Over the past year, Project Unnati has trained over 350 young men and women as Sewing Machine Operators, with 164 of them securing direct placements in the apparel sector. This initiative aims to foster a sustainable skill-based ecosystem, equipping youth with market-oriented skills that pave the way for sustainable livelihoods.

Roots Foundation, the implementing agency of Project Unnati, is committed to empowering youth through skill development and fostering a sustainable livelihood ecosystem. Through comprehensive training and placement programs, they aim to uplift communities and create lasting impact.

This is one of the many success stories that have been created through numerous social projects supported by Acuity Knowledge Partners. They have partnered with ROOTS Foundation for this project to skill train over 350 young women and men. Acuity Knowledge Partners will be launching a Coffee Table Book featuring such inspiring stories from their social endeavours.

EXPERT TAKE

INDIA’S ORGAN DONATION CRISIS: A CALL TO ACTION



On this World Organ Donation Day, as we celebrate the gift of life, it's crucial to acknowledge a pressing issue that clouds India's healthcare achievements: a severe organ donation crisis. Despite recent strides in medical advancements, the stark gap between the demand for transplants and the availability of organs leaves countless patients in a painful limbo, with far too many lives lost due to this tragic shortfall. Rajesh Mittal, Country Coordinator for Rotary Action Group on Blood, Tissue, and

Organ Donation, RID 3011 Chair for Organ Donation, and Charter President of RC Delhi Manthan, delves into the heart of this issue. He explores the underlying causes, the devastating impact on patients, and proposes actionable strategies to close the donation gap and enhance patient survival rates. On this significant day, the article stands as a clarion call for collective action, urging us all to work towards a future where every patient awaiting an organ transplant has a chance at life.

Read the opinion piece below:

INDIA'S ORGAN DONATION CRISIS: A CALL TO ACTION

India has made remarkable strides in healthcare in the last few years with life-saving technologies now accessible to more people than ever, however a looming organ donation crisis threatens to overshadow this progress. The demand for organ transplants far outstrips access, leaving countless patients waiting in agony and facing preventable deaths.

The crisis is driven by deep-rooted religious and socio-cultural beliefs, lack of awareness, and infrastructural challenges, all contributing to a widening gap between those in need of transplants and the organs available to save them.

The paradox is that while India accounts for the highest number of road accident deaths in the world, it also remains a country with one of the lowest organ donation rates with less than one per million population. That's staggeringly low — especially when compared with countries like the United States and Spain whose rates of deceased organ donors are among the highest in the world at over 40 donors per million people.

ORGAN DONATION LANDSCAPE IN INDIA

An estimated around 1.8 lakh persons suffer from renal failure every year, however the number of renal transplants done is

around 6000 only. An estimated 2 lakh patients die of liver failure or liver cancer annually in India, about 10-15% of which can be saved with a timely liver transplant. Hence about 25-30 thousand liver transplants are needed annually in India but only about 1500 are being performed. Similarly, about 50000 persons suffer from heart failures annually but only about 10 to 15 heart transplants are performed every year in India. In case of cornea, about 25000 transplants are done every year against a requirement of 1 lakh.

In the realm of living organ donations, a noticeable gender disparity exists. Men are often the recipients, with women, typically family members, stepping forward as donors. Unfortunately, female recipients receive limited attention, a gap that underscores the broader inequities in healthcare access and support. The root cause of this gender disparity lies in social norms, compelling women to assume caregiving roles within the family.

To address this issue, Rotary has launched initiatives like LIFT UP with an aim to support underprivileged women in need of kidney transplants, ensuring they have access to life-saving treatments.

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE CRISIS

Several factors contribute to the organ donation crisis in India. Cultural beliefs and myths around organ donation often act as significant barriers. Many people hold the misconception that organ donation is against religious practices, or they fear that their bodies will be mutilated after death. These myths, coupled with a general lack of awareness, prevent many potential donors from registering.

In response to this crisis, Rotary Districts, Clubs, and the Rotary Action Group on Blood, Tissue, and Organ Donation (RAG BOD) are collaborating on various initiatives aimed at educating the public and busting common myths surrounding organ donation. RAG BOD serves as a knowledge partner, supporting clubs and districts in organizing awareness campaigns, rallies, marathons, and other events.

For instance, the Rotary Club of Delhi Manthan has spearheaded significant awareness campaigns across North India. The campaign brought together 100 Clubs across 20 cities reaching out to more than 10,000 people, making a substantial impact on public awareness. Additionally, the Club also supported a marathoner who ran from Delhi to Mumbai, covering 1,500 kilometres and connecting with another 10,000 individuals.



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EXPERT TAKE

HARNESSING EARTH’S HEAT FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE



Renewable energy sources are at the forefront of the global movement towards a more sustainable future, and geothermal energy is gaining traction as a reliable alternative. Ashish Agarwal, Managing Director and CEO at Seros, explores this promising yet underutilized resource in the context of India's energy landscape. With a background in diverse industries such as energy, shipping, and logistics, Mr. Agarwal has been instrumental in

steering Seros towards sustainable practices. His leadership has facilitated the growth of India's largest green logistics company and a nationwide virtual pipeline network, reflecting his dedication to reducing carbon footprints and promoting energy security.

In this article, Mr. Agarwal delves into the potential of geothermal energy to transform India's energy sector. He discusses its advantages over other renewable sources, its versatile applications, and the challenges it faces. By highlighting the opportunities for innovation and collaboration, Mr. Agarwal envisions a future where geothermal energy contributes significantly to India's journey toward net-zero emissions and sustainable development.

Read the opinion piece below:

INDIA'S GEOTHERMAL FRONTIER: HARNESSING EARTH'S HEAT FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

As India charts its course towards a sustainable energy future, a promising yet often overlooked resource is gaining attention: geothermal energy. With ambitious targets to achieve net-zero emissions by 2070, India is exploring innovative solutions to meet its growing energy demands. Among these, geothermal energy emerges as a potential game-changer, offering a unique blend of sustainability, reliability, and versatility.

MAPPING INDIA'S GEOTHERMAL LANDSCAPE

Beneath India's diverse landscape lies a vast reservoir of heat waiting to be harnessed. The Geological Survey of India has identified approximately 340 geothermal hot springs across the country, spanning seven distinct geothermal provinces. These natural wonders, with surface temperatures ranging from 37°C to 90°C, represent more than just geological curiosities – they are gateways to a clean energy future.

From the snow-capped peaks of the Himalayas to the sun-baked plains of central India, geothermal potential is scattered across the

nation. Notable hotspots include the Puga Valley and Chhumathang in Ladakh, Manikaran in Himachal Pradesh, and Tattapani in Chhattisgarh. Each of these sites tells a story of untapped potential waiting to be written into India's energy narrative.

THE STEADY HAND OF GEOTHERMAL POWER

Unlike its renewable counterparts – solar and wind – geothermal energy offers a consistency that sets it apart. Unaffected by day-night cycles or seasonal variations, geothermal power plants can provide a steady baseload power supply. This reliability makes geothermal energy an attractive option for grid stability, complementing the intermittent nature of other renewable sources.

Moreover, the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy estimates that India could potentially harness up to 10 GW of geothermal power. While this figure might seem modest compared to solar or wind potential, the impact of geothermal energy extends far beyond mere numbers.

LADAKH: A GEOTHERMAL PIONEER

In the high-altitude desert of Ladakh, a pioneering project is taking shape, marking India's bold entry into the geothermal arena. The Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) Energy Centre has embarked on an ambitious venture in the Puga Valley, aiming to tap into the region's rich geothermal resources.

The project's first phase involves drilling a 1,000-meter well to access temperatures exceeding 200°C. Initially set to produce 1 MW of electricity, the long-term vision is to scale up to an impressive 100 MW. This initiative not only demonstrates the scalability of geothermal energy but also aligns perfectly with the vision of a carbon-neutral Ladakh.

BEYOND THE POWER PLANT: GEOTHERMAL'S VERSATILE APPLICATIONS

While electricity generation often takes center stage, the potential of geothermal energy extends far beyond power plants. In regions blessed with low to medium temperature resources, direct heat applications offer a wealth of possibilities.

Imagine greenhouses in Ladakh, warmed by the Earth's heat, producing fresh vegetables in the harsh winter months. Picture spa resorts in Himachal Pradesh, where therapeutic hot springs attract health-conscious tourists. Envision industries in Gujarat utilizing geothermal heat for processes ranging from food dehydration to textile production.



To read the complete story, scan the QR code

TELANGANA GOVT, WADHWANI JOIN HANDS TO PROMOTE WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

HYDERABAD, SEP 6, 2024: Wadhvani Foundation had partnered with WE Hub, a Government of Telangana Initiative, for their programs dedicated to supporting and promoting women entrepreneurs. Together, they are launching all-women entrepreneur cohorts designed to enable women-led businesses through co-designed programs that leverage the unique strengths of both the organizations.

The Wadhvani Liftoff program currently being offered by Wadhvani Foundation aligns perfectly with the bootcamps designed by WE Hub for early-stage and early-traction stage startups. This synergy ensures a comprehensive support system that addresses the unique challenges faced by women entrepreneurs at critical stages of their startup journey.

Together, both the organizations will ensure the successful execution of the WE Engage - Spark (Early Stage) program and WE Engage – Propel (Early-Traction Stage), marking the beginning of a powerful initiative aimed at creating a supportive and thriving ecosystem for women entrepreneurs.

Wadhvani Foundation brings to the collaboration, its deep expertise in developing and scaling successful entrepreneurial ventures globally, providing valuable resources, training and a well-researched curriculum to support entrepreneurs at every stage of their start-up journey. WE Hub complements this by offering its extensive experience in working with women-led startups, a robust support network, and a specialized bootcamp approach that fosters peer learning, a growth mindset, and access to essential ecosystems for startup growth.

Speaking about the partnership, Sanjay Shah, COO of Wadhvani

Foundation, said, “WE Hub is more than an incubator — it’s a powerhouse for women entrepreneurs, extending its impact well beyond Telangana. Leveraging government support, WE Hub has emerged as a powerful platform that connects women to essential resources, empowering them to achieve their entrepreneurial dreams. To date, over 6,000 women have successfully launched and grown their businesses with WE Hub’s support. Together with WE Hub and its visionary CEO, Sita Pallacholla, we are dedicated to propelling women-led startups forward, equipping them with the tools to excel and expand in the competitive global arena.”

WE Hub CEO Sita Pallacholla added, “With a global reach of over 20 countries, the Wadhvani Foundation has significantly impacted emerging economies. By collaborating with governments, educational institutions, and industry leaders, the foundation has driven sustainable socio-economic change, benefiting countless individuals and communities worldwide through their strong resource pool and curriculum. Their vision and outcome-based approach aligns perfectly with what we envision for WE Hub’s Urban Innovation vertical in the next 3 years. We are extremely proud to partner with the Wadhvani Foundation for our WE Engage – Spark (Early Stage) and WE Engage – Propel programs (Early-Traction Stage), which are set to give the necessary support and a huge impetus to women-led start-ups of urban India incubating with us. I am looking forward to working with Sanjay and his team to reach the goal of catalysing women-led businesses across the country and launching them into their high growth trajectory.”

BRY-AIR INAUGURATES CHECK DAM AT ALWAR TO ADDRESS ISSUE OF WATER SCARCITY IN THE REGION

JAIPUR, SEP 5, 2024: Bry-Air, a flagship company under the Pahwa Group, inaugurated a check dam at Bala Dehra village in Alwar as part of its CSR activity to address the issue of water scarcity in the region.

Alwar, being a semi-arid region, is continuously faced by the problem of the water crisis. Owing to this, the people of the place are highly dependent on the monsoon for farming activities. Considering that Bala Dehra village is situated at the foothills of the Aravalli Range in Alwar, the water problem is exacerbated, where people find it difficult to carry on the farming processes due to shortage of water and brief monsoon season ranging from June to August.

The construction of the check dam will benefit more than 2500 people in the region. Facilitating replenishment of nearby groundwater reserves and wells, the check dam will help in the cultivation of crops such as wheat, barley, and mustard over 50 (ha) agricultural land. In the process, it also comes with the capacity to recharge 10 open wells and 80 bore wells in the village.

Coming with the ability to capture and save rainwater, the check dams will contribute to recharging the groundwater level and increasing the availability of water, which will be a big boon for farmers. The entire project has been implemented in collaboration with Sapna NGO which saw the proactive involvement of the gram panchayat, including the villagers who were constantly part of the identification of the site for the construction of the check dam.

Speaking on the occasion, Deepak Pahwa - Chairman, Pahwa Group & Managing Director, Bry-Air, said, “The construction of the check dam

showcases our dedication to drive societal upliftment as a responsible organization. Fostering regional development, the project aims to improve the quality of life in the beneficiary communities. Where we have been previously involved in constructing check dams, and have been receiving positive result, with the inauguration of the new dam we aspire to create similar output.

“The dam being the 5th check dam is part of Bry-Air’s continuous initiative that focusses on enhancing surface and underground water availability to boost agricultural productivity. By providing a more consistent source of water supply, the dam will facilitate the replenishment of groundwater reservoirs and wells. At the same time, by supplying water for agricultural and domestic use, it will offer a sustainable livelihood option where it will play a pivotal role in retaining the younger generation in farming over the years.”

The construction of the check dam can be considered a remarkable step towards addressing the perennial issue of water scarcity in the region. By harnessing the benefits of water conservation, the project will promote effective management of rainwater and ensure reliable water supply for agricultural needs and daily activities at the same time.

The CSR project is part of the 60-year celebration of Bry-Air. Deepak Pahwa, CMD, Bry-Air, and Vinita Pahwa, Director, Bry-Air, inaugurated the check dam as the chief guests of the program. The occasion was also graced by the presence of Anandita Pahwa, Head-CSR Initiative, Pahwa Group; Sudhir Pratap Singh, General Secretary, Sapna NGO; Krishna Sarpanch of Bala Dehra village, and villagers of Bala Dehra village, Alwar.

ONE POINT ONE SOLUTIONS PARTNERS WITH GOVT BODIES FOR SKILL DEVELOPMENT; TRAINS OVER 1.3K YOUTHS

MUMBAI, SEPT 4, 2024: Digital business solutions One Point One Solutions Ltd has intensified its focus on skill development for rural youth, successfully training over 1,300 candidates till FY23-24 and aims to train and place approximately 5,660 candidates. This initiative is in direct response to the recent government budget announcements advocating for enhanced skill development.

The company has been actively engaging with several multiple government organizations and state schemes, including the Himachal Pradesh Kaushal Vikas Nigam, Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana, Recognition of Prior Learning, and Electronics System Design and Manufacturing. Furthermore, One Point One Solutions has been collaborating with programs such as DDUGKY, the Tribal Research and Training Institute, and the Uttar Pradesh Skill Development Mission.

Elaborating on the skill development initiative, Akshay Chhabra, Founder-CEO of One Point One Solutions Limited, said, “The skill development programs at One Point One Solutions are designed to improve employability among rural youth, providing them with essential skills and job placements with average salaries reaching up to Rs. 15,000. Placement locations include Navi Mumbai, Gurgaon, Bangalore, Indore, and Chennai, showcasing the effectiveness and relevance of the training provided.”

“Under the skill development, our ultimate objective is to cater to the career aspirations of rural youth. The recent Union Budget 2024 has introduced centrally sponsored schemes for skilling, which aligns with our initiatives,” he said.

The training courses will be tailored based on a skill gap analysis and employer demand, utilizing the Rozgar portal for job opportunities.

To ensure the quality of training, One Point One Solutions is implementing mandatory training for its trainers in collaboration with the Sector Skills Council, part of the Skill India Mission. Concurrent monitoring of training quality will be conducted through online reviews by dedicated teams.

One Point One Solutions also plans to launch digital marketing campaigns, collaborate with employment agencies and NGOs, and conduct awareness programs in educational institutions to attract potential participants. Regular district mobilization camps will be held in conjunction with Community Resource Persons (CRPs), and trainees will be mapped using Kaushal Panjee, an end-to-end tool for mobilizing rural youth for skill development and employment by the Government of India.

GRAMEEN FOUNDATION, PROTEAN EGOV TECHNOLOGIES FORGE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP TO DRIVE FINANCIAL INCLUSION

NEW DELHI, AUG 31, 2024: Grameen Foundation for Social Impact (GFSI) and Protean eGov Technologies Limited have signed a strategic Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to enhance financial inclusion across India, with a focus on covering the underserved communities.

The MoU was signed recently at the Protean Pavilion, Jio World Convention Centre, during the Global Fintech Fest 2024.

This collaboration aims to leverage technology to transform agent-based networks, enabling Business Correspondents (BCs) to deliver a diversified range of financial and non-financial services. By equipping BCs with contemporary skills and innovations, the partnership seeks to improve access to essential financial services, particularly for women and marginalized groups.

Bharati Joshi, CEO, Grameen Foundation India and Grameen Foundation for Social Impact, emphasized the partnership's potential to drive systemic change, stating, “This MoU represents a significant step towards realizing our shared vision of financial enablement for all. By combining our expertise and networks with Protean's technological capabilities, we are poised to create lasting impact in the communities we serve, especially benefitting women as agents as well as clients.”

Bertram D'Souza, Chief Product & Innovation Officer, Protean eGov Technologies, added, “Our partnership with Grameen Foundation for Social Impact marks a significant milestone in our journey of unlocking economic and social impact with the power of Digital Public Infrastructure across multiple-sectors like financial services, sustainability, education & skilling, ecommerce, agriculture and healthcare. Grameen Foundation's focus on creating impact at the last-mile especially in rural India allows us to make a positive impact to the lives of millions of individuals and small entrepreneurs.”

Arindam Dasgupta, Interim CPO and Director of Innovations in Digital Finance, Grameen Foundation for Social Impact, remarked, “This partnership is not just about expanding financial services; it’s about reshaping the ecosystem to be more inclusive and responsive to the needs of those at the bottom of the pyramid. Through this collaboration, we are committed to creating sustainable pathways to financial independence for millions.”

Rahul Dube, Project Director of Innovations in Digital Finance, Grameen Foundation for Social Impact stated, “Our focus is on leveraging technology to bridge the gap in financial access and create solutions that are both scalable and impactful. This partnership with Protean is a critical step in achieving those goals, and we look forward to the transformative outcomes it will bring.”

The collaboration between Grameen Foundation and Protean eGov Technologies marks a significant milestone in the journey towards financial inclusion, paving the way for innovative solutions that will allow communities and transform lives across India.

GFSI is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to breaking the barriers that stand in the way of women and underserved communities leading quality lives. Through initiatives in Agriculture, Digital Finance, Women's Entrepreneurship, and Health, GFSI uses technology and innovation to drive systemic change.

Protean is a provider of technology solutions aimed at enhancing governance and financial services accessibility in India. With a focus on leveraging technology to empower communities, Protean plays a crucial role in developing platforms that enable efficient service delivery across sectors.

PHYSICS WALLAH AND EARTH CARE FOUNDATION JOIN HANDS TO EMPOWER 40K UNDERPRIVILEGED STUDENTS

NEW DELHI, SEP 2, 2024: EdTech platform Physics Wallah (PW) has joined hands with NGO Earth Care Foundation (ECF) under their flagship program, Project Udaan 2.0, to provide quality education to the poor and underprivileged students.

This partnership is in-line with PW's aim to make education widely accessible for students across the country and Earth Care Foundation's aim of bringing knowledge to the doorsteps of the disadvantaged youth at almost zero cost.

The partnership will empower students approved by ECF residing in villages and small towns who lack access to quality online education. Eligible students competing in recruitment and entrance examinations like NEET, JEE, Banking, Defence and SSC will be given access to the high-quality content and courses offered by Physics Wallah (PW). Along with the PW courses, the program also offers courses in English proficiency, PDP & Soft skills course & career counselling course through Know Thy Choice and Fastinfo. A meagre registration fee is charged from the students to ensure their willingness to learn and also to make them feel more invested in completing these courses.

Majority of these students are the primary bread earners of their families and hence prefer self-paced learning. Hence, Flexi-Time and Flexi-Location mode of online teaching and learning, which allows these students to complete the online course at their convenience from the comfort of their homes. The success of this way of teaching is further substantiated through the pilot run that witnessed a high completion rate of around 85-90%. For every 10 students, a mentor is assigned who connects with them each week to track progress and handhold them through their academic journey.

Conveying his thoughts on this partnership, Alakh Pandey, Founder & CEO of Physics Wallah (PW), said, "Helping students from across the country regardless of their social or economical status, is the sole reason why we began this company. We are delighted to have partnered with ECF as our visions are aligned. In future, we aspire to partner with multiple NGOs to empower 10 lakh underprivileged students in the next 5 years, so that we can give them equal opportunities and access to top quality education."

Sharing his thoughts, Dr Ajit Kumar, Founder Chairman of ECF, said, "We are excited to expand Udaan 2.0 this financial year after the success of Udaan 1.0; which empowered students belonging to families of migrant labourers, dwelling in the slums of Delhi. Having Physics Wallah (PW) as our knowledge and technology partner will enable us to use their robust digital distribution network to reach students whose education is constrained due to socio-economic reasons. We aim to level the playing field when it comes to compete in recruitment and competitive exams by giving them access to quality online education."

ECF has partnered with CSC (Common Service Centre) Academy, an undertaking of the Ministry of IT & Electronics, where students can register themselves for Udaan 2.0 by visiting their nearest CSC in the village (more than 5.5 lakh centres are there in the country). They are also required to submit their mark sheet and income certificate as part of the registration process. Know Thy Choice (KTC) is the technology and delivery partner for the project.

REVITALISING INDIA’S HERITAGE: EXHIBITION SHOWCASES 100+ MASTERPIECES BY OVER 70 AWARD-WINNING ARTISTS

NEW DELHI, AUG 30, 2024: In a bid to preserve, sustain, and revitalize India's heritage art forms, an exhibition featuring over 100 masterpieces created by more than 70 award-winning artisans from 17 states was held in the national capital.

Titled NAAYAAB, the exhibition was a joint initiative of Craft Maestro & M3M Foundation. Dr Payal Kanodia, Chairperson & Trustee M3M Foundation, supported the initiative as its Art Promotion Partner.

The two-day event, which concluded on Aug 26, showcased over 100 masterpieces by more than 70 artisans across 17 states who have received the highest national honours, including Padma Vibhushan, Padma Shri, Shilp Guru, and National Awards. Representing over 40 crafts from 17 states, NAAYAAB brought together the finest works of these celebrated artisans in a collective effort to celebrate and safeguard the nation's rich cultural legacy.

Among the masterpieces on exhibit was a priceless 7 kg ruby stone, meticulously chiselled to perfection over the last two-and-a-half years.

Sharing her insights after the event, Kanodia said, "Naayaab is not just a celebration of art, it is a call to action for the passionate patrons of the new age to become custodians of India's rich cultural heritage. In a world that is constantly moving forward, it is crucial to pause and honour the traditions that have shaped our cultural identity. Naayaab is not just an

event, it is much more than that. Naayaab is a national movement conceptualised & curated by Craft Maestro to bring our master craftsmen the recognition and support they deserve. By connecting them with patrons who value their art, we have aimed to ensure that these crafts not only survive but thrive in the modern world. This initiative is our commitment to preserving the legacy of Indian handicrafts for our future generations."

Naayaab was conceptualized to showcase solidarity in line with the ruling central government's vision towards reviving Indian artisanal treasures and to create sustainable economic opportunities for artisans.

The event held at Hotel Taj Man Singh attracted a discerning audience of high-net-worth individuals, art aficionados, and cultural enthusiasts. The event curated a special session for the Delhi Chapter of the Young FICCI Ladies Organisation (YFLO) on August 26, which featured a private guided walkthrough the various priceless exhibits along with key dignitaries and ambassadors from Algeria, Russia and Israel.

Dr Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, Minister of Culture and Tourism, was the Chief Guest.

NAAYAAB is happening next in Hyderabad on September 4 and 5 September, and in Mumbai on September 13 and 14.

DRI INSTALLS SOLAR STREET LIGHTS TO ILLUMINATE OUTSKIRTS OF DADHIKAR VILLAGE IN ALWAR

NEW DELHI, AUG 30, 2024: Desiccant Rotors International Pvt Ltd, a flagship company under the Pahwa Group, has installed Solar Street Lights in the outskirts of Dadhikar village, Alwar as part of its CSR activity. The project aims to enhance the electrical infrastructure of the village by improving the lighting condition of the region.

As part of the initiative, 25 solar street lights will be installed in the initial phase to illuminate the stretch of street remaining dark during the night. Serving the purpose of improving, safeguarding, facilitating, and encouraging vehicular and pedestrian traffic during the night, the installation is estimated to benefit more than 7,500 people residing in the village.

The village is situated in the neighbourhood of Sariska Tiger Reserve and animals from the buffer zone of reserve tend to enter the village after sunset. This makes it difficult to carry on the activities after dusk in the buffer zone of the village. Recognizing the challenge faced by the locals, DRI worked closely with Sapna NGO to install solar-powered street lights for enhancing the safety of the people. In the process, it will also protect the villagers and domestic animals from wild animal attacks such as snakes and jackals, which are very common in the area after sunset.

Focussing on sustainable rural development, the initiative will have a transformative impact on the lives of residents. It will facilitate continuity

of activities and enable ease of commutability even during night due to better illumination. Additionally, it will also ease movements during the evening hours on rainy days. The initiative will be instrumental in creating a sense of security among the residents at evening and night. They will be able to continue with their tasks without any hindrance or fear of accident or animal attack.

The inauguration was done by Deepak Pahwa, Director, Desiccant Rotors, and Vinita Pahwa, Director Desiccant Rotors. The event was also attended by Anandita Pahwa, Head-CSR Initiative, Pahwa Group; Sudhir Pratap Singh, General Secretary, Sapna NGO; Prof Ranveer Singh, Treasurer, Sapna NGO; Bhumi, Sarpanch of Dadhikar village; and villagers.

Speaking on the occasion, Vinita Pahwa said, "The solar street light project is a testament to our commitment to upgrading the lives of underprivileged people with the help of CSR activities. The Solar Street Lights will be the source of quality illumination in the villages during power cuts in the evening hours. Thus, in cases of power cuts, many times the inhabitants depend on the light received from the Solar Street Lights. The light from the Solar Street Lights will also illuminate the premises of the adjacent households. Thus, during power cuts, the families will be able to gather outside their houses sometimes to sit under the light."

LG ELECTRONICS ANNOUNCES LIFE’S GOOD SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

NEW DELHI, AUG 29, 2024: Consumer durable brand LG Electronics has announced its flagship CSR initiative, the Life's Good Scholarship Program, which aims to support students across India in their academic journey by providing financial assistance to pursue higher education, including focus on promoting girl child education.

LG Electronics India on Wednesday hosted the first edition of its flagship scholarship program at its Corporate Office Noida. At the event, MD – LG Electronics India felicitated scholars from three institutes -- Galgotias University, Jaipuria Institute of Management & Lloyd Law College.

The Life's Good Scholarship Program is open to students from any academic year of higher education, provided they meet the minimum eligibility criteria of securing at least 60% in their previous class. The scholarships will be awarded based on two key criteria: need-based and merit-based selection.

Under the need-based category, 25% of the scholarships will be reserved for students coming from a humble background. The merit-based scholarships, on the other hand, will be awarded to students who have achieved a minimum of 75% marks in their 12th-grade exams or a 7 GPA in subsequent academic years. Importantly, 25% of the scholarship will be allocated to meritorious female students, in line with the program's objective of promoting girl child education.

The financial assistance will be 50% of tuition fees or up to INR 1 lakh for undergraduate students and up to INR 2 lakh for postgraduate students, whichever is lesser.

Hong Ju Jeon, MD, LG Electronics India, said, "At LG Electronics India, our commitment extends beyond delivering innovative products and services; we strive to make a tangible difference in people's lives through meaningful initiatives. Health & Nutrition, Education & Skilling are core areas where we focus our CSR efforts. With the Life's Good Scholarship Program, we aim to inspire and support young minds in pursuing higher education and achieving their dreams. We believe that education is fundamental to societal progress and economic empowerment."

The Life's Good Scholarship is a collaborative effort with the NGO Buddy4Study Foundation, which will help identify and support talented youth, ensuring equal access to education for both meritorious and underprivileged students. Through this initiative, LG Electronics aims to make a meaningful impact by reducing financial barriers to education and fostering the growth of future leaders.

Ashutosh Burnwal, Founder & CEO, Buddy4Study, said, "We greatly appreciate LG Electronics India for their commitment to supporting education through the Life's Good Scholarship Program. At Buddy4Study, we are proud to collaborate on this initiative, which empowers deserving students, especially from underprivileged backgrounds, to pursue their academic dreams. This program is a crucial step in ensuring that financial barriers do not stand in the way of talented youth across India."

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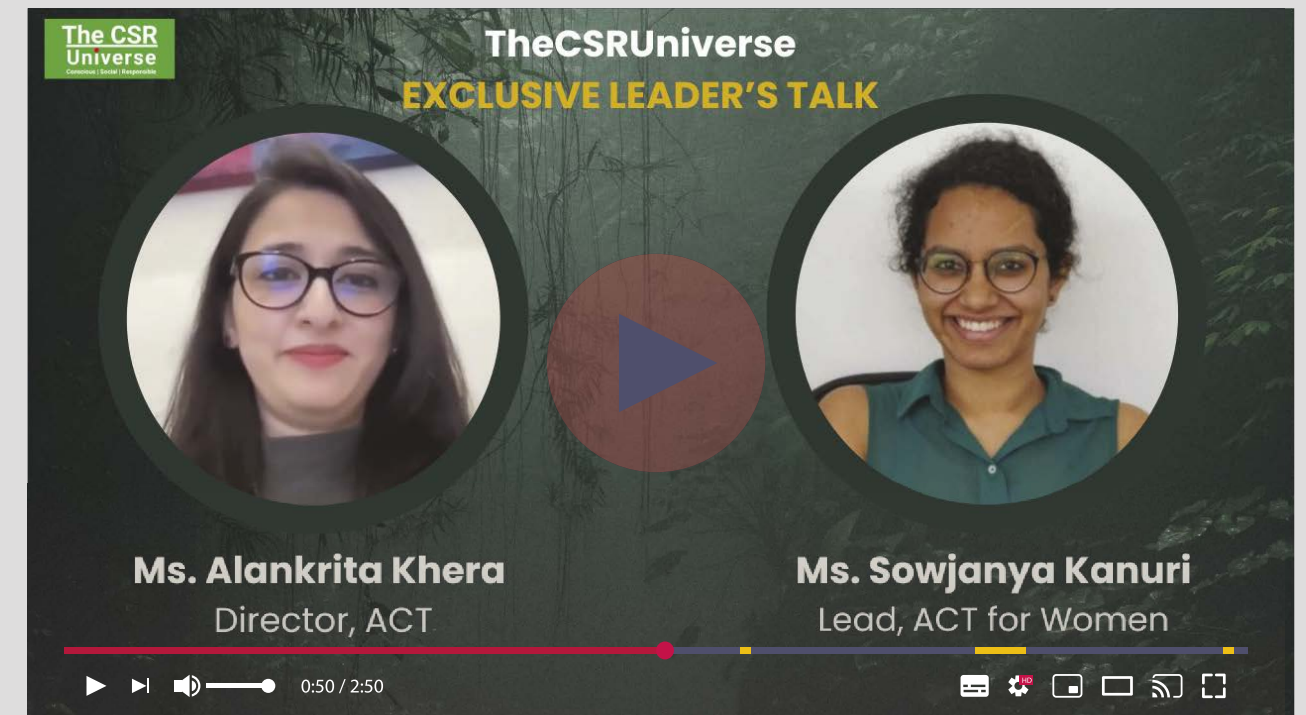
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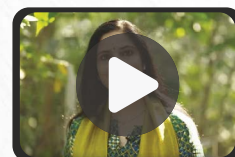
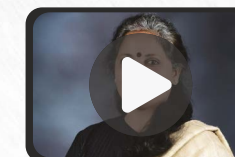
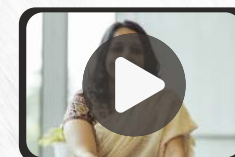
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