

Vol. VI, Issue IV, 2022



CSR *Mandate*

Enabling Sustainability

Empowered Women, Empowered Communities

MORE INSIDE:

- Connect, Inspire, Care, Deliver and Pursue Purpose in 2022
- Ensuring Indian Citizens Have Access to Justice
- Equipping Young Girls With Skills to Develop Them Into Confident, Empowered Leaders of Tomorrow
- The Antarprerna Women Collectives: Helping Rural Women to Help Themselves



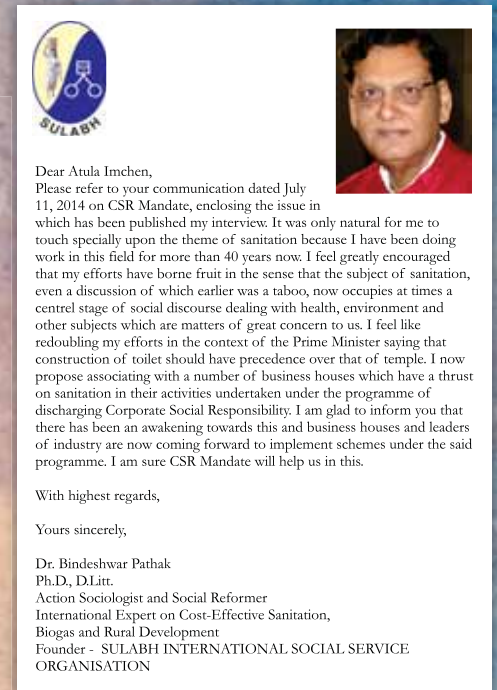
Recognition

The role and contributions of CSR Mandate in bringing to the fore the initiatives of Corporate India and NGOs has resulted in the magazine being awarded the

**ICE Awards 2016 and
CSR Community Initiative Awards 2016**



Accolades



ISO 9001:2008 (QMS)



An Initiative of



CONTENTS

12



POINT OF VIEW

Looking Through Different Lenses:
How Women's Empowerment is
Understood and Interpreted

16

PERSPECTIVE

Women's Empowerment:
Where Are We Now?



20



ANALYSIS

Form CSR-2: A Thorn in the
Flesh or a Blessing in Disguise?

23

STANDPOINT

Impact of CSR Initiatives on a
Company's Bottom Line



25



TÊTE-À-TÊTE

AROH Foundation:
Empowering and Engaging
Women in Nation-Building

31

EMANCIPATION

Girl Power Groups of
West Bengal are Opposing and
Averting Child Marriages





ENDEAVOUR

Sodexo: Empowering Women Through Food Sovereignty

36

HUMANE ENDEAVOUR

BNY Mellon: Creating Ripples of Change in Society by Investing in Women



44



DEDICATION

Pernod Ricard India Foundation: Fostering Inclusion for Women to Accelerate Local Development

48

COMMITMENT

Swades Foundation: Empowering Rural Women for Holistic Rural Development



57



ASPIRATION

Safe Water Network: Turning Women Into Changemakers and Entrepreneurs

69

ENDEAVOUR

Tata Power: Empowering Women Community Members and Micro-Entrepreneurs



76

Chairman Emeritus

Late Shri R.K. Prasad

Distributed by:

New Media Communication Pvt. Ltd

Vice Chairpersons:

Kamaljit S, B.K. Sinha

Secretary General: Satya Swaroop

Editor: Atula Imchen

Liaison Officer: Vrunda Gurav

Support Executive: Arvinder Sethi

Circulation: Santosh G, Vijay, Jawaharlal

Art Director: Santosh Nawar

Sr. Graphic Designer: Hemant Kolambe

BRANCHES

Kolkata:

Anurag Sinha

Mob: +91 9830043339

Email: anurag@newmediacomm.biz

Bangalore:

C.V. Shankarnarayanan

Mob: +91 9902216970

Pune:

Jagdish Khaladkar

Mob: +91 9823038315

Email: pune@newmediacomm.biz

Patna:

Rajesh Naraen, Vimmi

Mob: +91 9334390988

Email: rajeshnaraen@newmediacomm.com

Australia:

Bandhana Kumari Prasad, 129 Camboon Road,
Noranda, Perth, W.A. 6062

Tel: +61 892757447

Email: bandhana@newmediacomm.biz

New Media Foundation

An Initiative of:

New Media House, 1 Akbar Villa,

Marol Maroshi Road,

Andheri (E), Mumbai - 400059

Tel: +91-22-29250690.

Telefax: +91-22-29255279

Email: satya@newmediacomm.biz

www.newmediacomm.com

Published by:

New Media Communication Pvt. Ltd, New Media House, 1 Akbar Villa, Marol Maroshi Road, Andheri (E), Mumbai - 400059

The news items and information published herein have been collected from various sources, which are considered to be reliable. Readers are however requested to verify the facts before making decisions using the same.

F OREWORD



Dear Readers,

There is a place in society for each one of us. There is a plan and a purpose we have to accomplish as we journey through life. We may sometimes feel that our contributions are insignificant and invaluable compared to others, but listen to that stirring in your heart.

As a woman writing this, I feel hesitant when embarking on a task. Can I do it? Will I be looked upon differently because I am a woman? What about my responsibilities to my family? How do I balance work and family so that no one suffers? These questions might sound archaic to many an empowered woman who is reading this right now, but we cannot override the reality most women face. Let us be honest about it.

Yes, a fair share of women worldwide has achieved liberation in many aspects. But countless women are still stifled, have no access to education nor their rights, face uncertainties, and do not feel safe even within the confines of their homes or immediate surroundings. I was deeply struck by what two well-balanced friends now living abroad shared. They said they did not experience this sense of safety and security in their birth country. I try to imagine that feeling, but sadly, I cannot. What does this tell us? How do we give our girls and women that confidence to venture out alone, even within their neighbourhood, or to those living alone in a city far away from their familiar surroundings? Much has been spoken about and debated regarding this. For women to be safe, we need stronger and more effective legislation firmly established and strictly enforced.

It only takes a spark to get the fire going. We can do our part in bringing about a change – letting go of the deeply-entrenched biases, creating safe spaces, being conscious of the value each life can contribute, helping the weaker ones to bloom in confidence, opening up avenues for the neediest, and so on.

CSR Mandate's objective is to highlight what humans can do for other humans when they reach out and help the most vulnerable sections of society. Many testaments affirm the admirable initiatives undertaken over the years. We hope and believe that these and much more will emerge and come to fruition in the days ahead.

We have amazing stories of change and courage in this latest issue of the magazine. May they motivate us to strive ahead and create change.

Best Wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kamaljit Swaroop'.

Kamaljit Swaroop
Vice Chairperson



Dear Readers,

Welcome to another issue of CSR Mandate.

Over the years, we have highlighted the varying burning issues impacting our society. There has been a tremendous response from corporates, NGOs, civil society and individuals regarding the various initiatives close to their hearts. We have been very much encouraged, inspired and challenged as we read and get to know what CSR mean to each of them. The results and transformations seen in different communities and regions where these activities have been undertaken are a testament to the resolute each group have manifested and are continuing to do so. While there has been an impact made by these activities, there is also the flip side where about 36 per cent of companies did not report any data on CSR (FY 2014-15 to 2017-18). The report then stated that 53 per cent of the total CSR fund in FY 17-18 was contributed by just 1.35 per cent of top companies. That is a huge burden on this particular group. This massive disparity needs to be addressed and rectified. Just think of the paradigm shift in the country if every company had spent its fair share of CSR funds as they were supposed to.

As many times as we have discussed women's empowerment, we know that we have miles and miles to go to create a safe space for them and pivot them in the right direction where they know that they are strong, empowered, abled, equalled and are the vital link in every cog to make it function perfectly.

Let us, therefore, unite to do our part in being the helping hand that springs forward to hold and build each other up, and in turn, build stronger and safer communities across the country where each person knows their worth, can express freely, take up any role and responsibility with confidence and contribute in bringing about the change we wish to see in this world. We need to go ahead and do it for the greater good of humanity.

We trust that you will be inspired and encouraged as you go through the contents of this issue of the magazine.

Warm Regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to read 'Atula Imchen', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Atula Imchen

Editor

Connect, Inspire, Care, Deliver and Pursue Purpose in 2022



The years 2020 and 2021 will always be remembered, of course, for all the wrong reasons. Since March 11, 2020, when WHO declared COVID-19 a notified disaster, 4.78 lakh deaths and 3.47 crore cases have been reported in India. The dramatic spread of COVID-19 has disrupted lives, livelihoods, communities and businesses worldwide. It has been a tough fight since then in India. Organisations, individuals, civil societies, environmentalists, activists, and the Government came together and toiled hard to minimise COVID's impact on people and the planet. While the health machinery, Corona warriors, disaster management, etc., have taken the fight on their shoulders, there was latent but rock-hard support that fuelled up the fight for India - the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) battalion.

Speedy and agile efforts of all CSR stakeholders played a major role to address the COVID-19 pandemic with the Union and State Governments and NGOs. This has proven to have had a greater impact on the relief work taking place during this challenging period. From facilitating government relief work to distributing safety kits, ration,

vaccination or awareness, various stakeholders from CSR are still acting as an auxiliary military force against COVID-19 in India.

The CSR Battalion

Although CSR was initiated and mandated for social good, it played a phenomenal role in India's fight against



Rusen Kumar

the pandemic. In fiscals 2020 and 2019, CSR expenditure was Rs 24,689 Crores and Rs 20,150 Crores. As the second and more virulent wave of COVID-19 infections gripped the country, the 350

“

Although CSR was initiated and mandated for social good, it played a phenomenal role in India's fight against the pandemic. In fiscals 2020 and 2019, CSR expenditure was Rs 24,689 Crores and Rs 20,150 Crores. As the second and more virulent wave of COVID-19 infections gripped the country, the 350 public-listed companies spent more than Rs 1,600 Crores on CSR initiatives between March and May 2020 to check the deadly pandemic

”

public-listed companies spent more than Rs 1,600 Crores on CSR initiatives between March and May 2020 to check the deadly pandemic. Corporates were large-hearted, the NGOs showed their expertise, knowledge and deep grip at the ground; the volunteers became the ground soldiers, and corporates initiated more than 750 initiatives during the second wave.

The Joint Response

While all the CSR stakeholders were standing fast against the pandemic, the Government of India also ensured the seamless implementation of CSR activities on the ground. In recent budgets, the Government has made amendments for easy FDI in CSR, transparency in FCRA and brought amendments to the Companies Act in an attempt to divert CSR expenditure on COVID relief. In March 2020, the Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA) clarified that CSR funds may be spent by the companies for various activities related to COVID-19.

The Government has also set up the 'Prime Minister's Citizen Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situations Fund'



(PM CARES) to respond to the COVID-19 crisis and provide relief to those affected. Further, Schedule VII was amended to include contributions to PM CARES as CSR along with the existing Prime Minister's National Relief Fund. On March 23, 2020, all expenditures incurred on activities related to COVID-

19 were announced to be added as the permissible avenues for CSR expenditure. It was further informed that the funds may be spent on activities relating to the promotion of healthcare, including preventive health care, sanitation and disaster management.

The CSR community quickly took up the mantle to drive up its response initiatives with internal approval processes. Even before this announcement was made, we saw some examples of benevolent individual corporate leaders offering resources to combat COVID-19. A huge amount of funding has also been directed from corporates to the PM CARES Fund. As per Times of India, the private sector donated Rs 5,565 Crores and the public sector Rs 3,249 Crores.

The pandemic has affected both personal and professional lives across industries of all scales and types, thereby multiplying relief efforts through the cooperation of all kinds of entities.

Cascading the Good Change - The New CSR

As per a recent report by the Indian Institute of Corporate Affairs (IICA), the COVID-19 pandemic has brought about a flux wherein responsible and responsive business has become more important. The current times pushed global and corporate leadership to take the forefront, especially in being responsive to the safety of employees, effectively running core operations and responding to change. It is evident how the efforts of companies are not only to serve targeted beneficiaries but solve national problems. This has been translated into CSR efforts as well. CSR must also invest in advocating for and enabling access to health insurance schemes and other equity measures in response. Climate change, WASH, socio-economic concerns including livelihood, hunger, poverty, rural development are some areas that will need significant impetus.

Apart from corporate houses, employees,

too, need to pledge to be a part of the social responsibilities, and here is where the new trend, Individual Social Responsibility (ISR) comes to play. Employee and volunteer engagement are becoming a crucial aspect of the new CSR. The need to understand and assess the CSR response from preparedness, response, recovery and risk mitigation and resilience perspective to better assess, understand and measure the impact of short-term and long-term initiatives.

In every crisis, there are risks and opportunities. Companies across all sectors have taken the opportunity to further embed themselves into the social fabric of the communities where they operate. In this context, CSR presents a pathway to protect consumer trust, investor confidence and workforce loyalty. If there is a simple lesson that we can relearn - it is that CSR practices can act as powerful intermediaries when responding to a crisis of our nation.

Closing the Loop through SDGs in 2022

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, whilst imposing social distancing, has also galvanised all of humanity to come together to meet this challenge and be motivated by a single purpose – to save lives. Nearly five years ago, another challenge, development that balances social, economic and environmental sustainability, brought all of humankind on the same page to be guided by a single framework – the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). SDGs are a collection of 17 global goals designed to be a blueprint in achieving a better sustainable future for all. These 17 Goals consist of 169 Targets earmarked to be achieved by 2030.

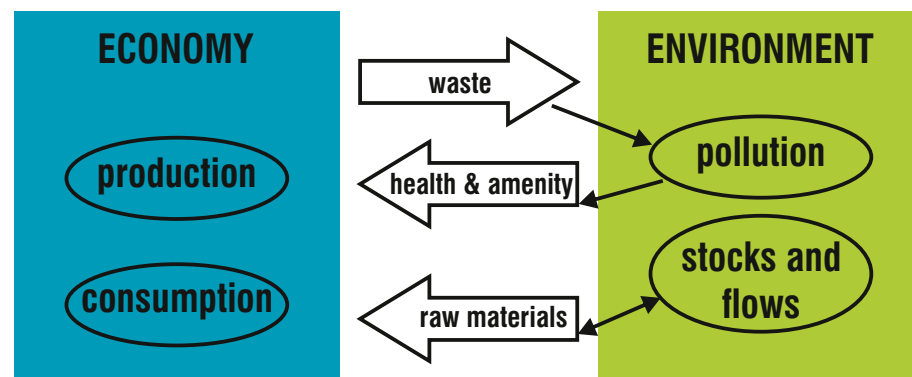
“

Indubitably, businesses responded to these unprecedented times in the most responsible way, witnessed extraordinary measures taken by corporates in a very innovative way. It has changed our outlook on CSR. In the years to come, we shall Connect, Inspire, Care, Deliver and Pursue Purpose through CSR in a different way

”

Although India played a prominent role in formulating the United Nations Sustainable Development Agenda 2030, it still ranks 120 out of 162 on the SDG Index. This slow progress called for immediate action through collaboration between the corporate sector, civil society organisations and the Government. CSR is seen as the key driver of SDGs as they can apply their creativity and innovation to achieve sustainable development and facilitate the implementation of these goals. For years to come, re-orienting CSR with SDGs shall add purpose to the process.

The current economic environment is marked by the globalisation phenomenon of the interdependence between environment and development. It increasingly shares the view that corporate social responsibility and sustainable development approaches should become an integral part of the



“

The utilisation of CSR funds is likely to see an upward trend as corporates will be under a moral obligation to support communities and people in out-of-the-box ways. Despite less revenue or loss, corporates will spend more on CSR.

Collaboration and collective efforts are the mantras. Let us collaborate and partner for Sustainable Social Development together; let us build a sustainable and socially responsible future

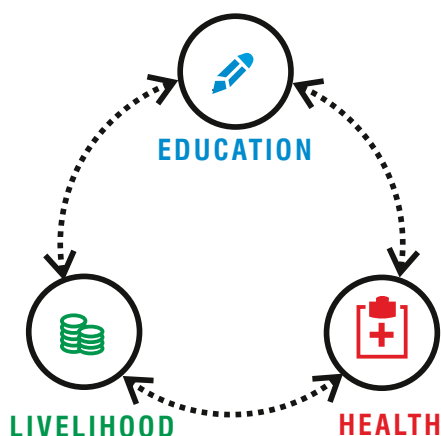
”



economic concepts used by businesses to ensure a balance between social progress, natural resource reserves and economic growth. The 17 Goals include the three dimensions of sustainable development: economic growth, social inclusion and protection of the environment. Undoubtedly, CSR and SDGs are intertwined, just like two strands of DNA. So the ultimate aim of business in future shall be to serve society without eroding our environmental and community life-support systems by providing safe, high-quality products and services that improve our well-being.

New Spirit of CSR

With just one stroke of the coronavirus,



nature bounced back and penalised us for our crimes against nature. Delhi skies were blue and clear, mountains were visible from Chandigarh, and Ganga recorded its all-time high numbers in Water Quality Index. Indubitably, businesses responded to these unprecedented times in the most responsible way, witnessed extraordinary measures taken by corporates in a very innovative way. It has changed our outlook on CSR. In the years to come, we shall Connect, Inspire, Care, Deliver and Pursue Purpose through CSR in a different way where:

- CSR decisions shall be taken at the board and broad level now as the pandemic taught us if you do not plan sustainably, you will repent the same in future.
- The delivery of purpose shall take over, and CSR will have innocuous credits to its face in the near future.
- We shall also see a paradigm shift in the programme priorities of the CSR: Health, Education and Livelihood will be the norm but in a digitised way using technology.
- Also, new skills will be an indication. One has to unlearn to learn new skills. For example, as per the MART

survey, from the four crore people who migrated to villages from cities, 25 per cent will not return. We need to provide them with skills to earn a dignified livelihood. Free ration and the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA/MGNREGA) are not sustainable answers in the long run.

- Stakeholder engagement: The ternion of Government, corporate and community must work in rhythm to have a better world for all of us. The Government must act to address the emerging needs of communities; corporates should work closely with the Government and communities to address it through their CSR.

The utilisation of CSR funds is likely to see an upward trend as corporates will be under a moral obligation to support communities and people in out-of-the-box ways. Despite less revenue or loss, corporates will spend more on CSR. Collaboration and collective efforts are the mantras. Let us collaborate and partner for Sustainable Social Development together; let us build a sustainable and socially responsible future. ■

Rusen Kumar is the Founder and Managing Editor of IndiaCSR Network (indiacr.in).



Looking Through Different Lenses: How Women's Empowerment is Understood and Interpreted

Women's empowerment can be defined as promoting women's sense of self-worth, their ability to determine their own choices, and their right to influence social change for themselves and others. It is closely aligned with a fundamental human right that is also key to achieving a more peaceful, prosperous world. Women's empowerment and promoting women's rights have emerged as a major global movement that's breaking new ground in recent years. But despite much progress, women and girls continue to face discrimination and violence in every part of the world.



Geeta Castelino

wellbeing and safety of all workers, whether male or female

Created in a collaboration between the UN Global Compact and UN Women, the Women Empowerment Principles are used to empower women in the marketplace, workplace and community.

The Seven Principles are:

- Principle 1: Create high-level
- Principle 2: Treat all people fairly at work, respecting and supporting non-discrimination and human rights
- Principle 3: Ensure the health,

corporate leadership for gender equality

“

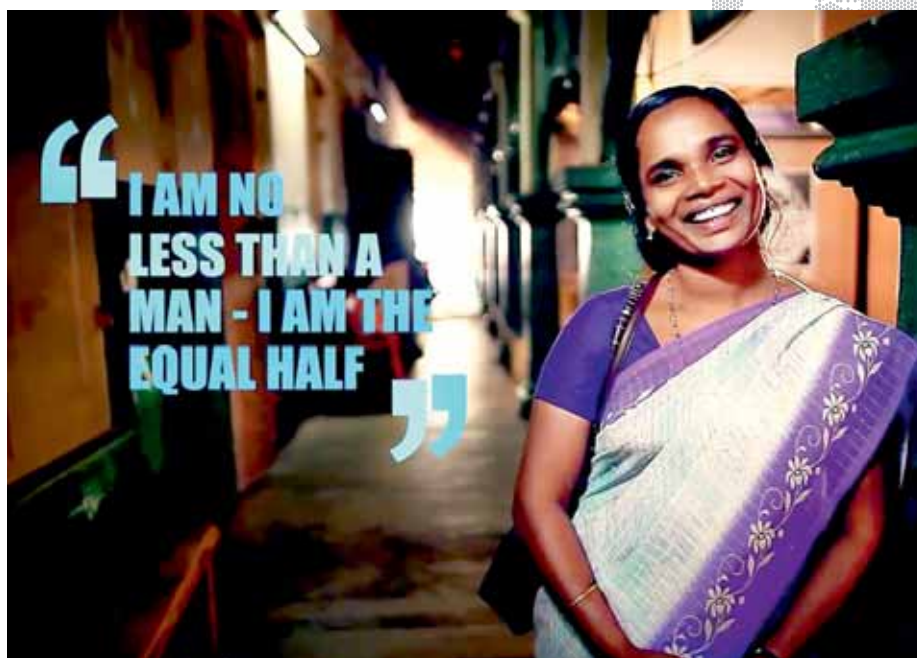
In the developing world, girls and women are regarded as less valuable than boys/men. Instead of being sent to school, they are often made to do domestic work at home or are married off for a dowry before they are adults. As many as 12 million underage girls are married every year. While some progress is underway in various parts of the world, there is still a great deal left to be done to right the problems of gender inequality

”

- Principle 4: Promote education, training and professional development for women
- Principle 5: Implement supply chain, marketing practices and enterprise development that empower women
- Principle 6: Champion equality through community initiatives and advocacy
- Principle 7: Measure and report publicly on progress to create gender equality

Gender equality is a basic human right, and it is also fundamental to have a peaceful, prosperous world. But girls and women continue to face significant challenges all around the world. Women are under represented in power and decision-making roles. They receive unequal pay for equal work and often face legal and other barriers that affect their opportunities at work.

In the developing world, girls and women are regarded as less valuable than boys/men. Instead of being sent to school, they are often made to do

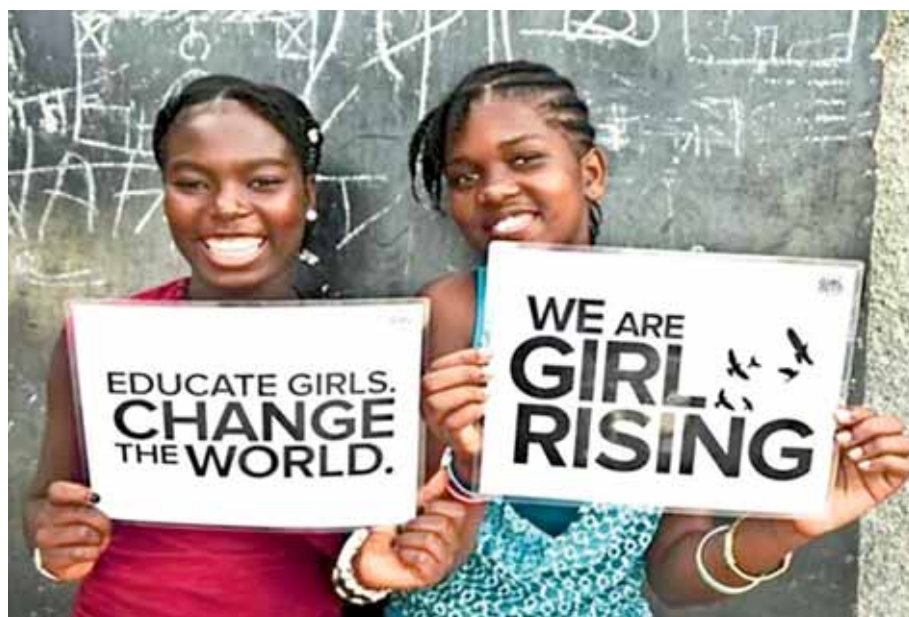


domestic work at home or are married off for a dowry before they are adults. As many as 12 million underage girls are married every year.

While some progress is underway in various parts of the world, there is still a great deal left to be done to right the problems of gender inequality.

Empowering women is essential to the health and social development of families, communities and countries.

Women can reach their full potential when they are living safe, fulfilled and productive lives. They can help fuel sustainable economies and benefit societies and humanity at large. A key part of this empowerment is through education. There is so much an educated girl can achieve - a good job, higher income, healthier children, and improved wellbeing for her family and community. Girls with education can pursue meaningful work and contribute to their



“

Crafting and executing a concrete policy framework, dispersing civic awareness and education can usher in the desired missions in eradicating the plight of women in India.

The realm of women empowerment in India is limited to granting balanced rights to women. It should not stop there. It should also assure that they are ingrained and rightful partners in the workforce

”

country's economy later in life. They are also four times less likely to get married young when they have eight years of education, meaning that they and their families are healthier.

Empowering girls is the key to economic growth, political stability and social transformation. Standing with and investing in women is an important start - from homes and schools, workplaces and communities. When women and girls are supported, they gain opportunities to



WOMEN = NATION
EMPOWERMENT = EMPOWERMENT

speak up for their rights and advocate for their communities, rise in social standing and positively contribute to future generations. This means women's organisations, women empowerment policies and women's charities can gain momentum and contribute to a stronger world. Healthy, educated and empowered women and girls represent change.

Women Should Have Power Over Themselves, Not Power Over Men

Women's empowerment in India is the most effective tool for development, as these days, women across the world are actively working as leaders and surpassing others in all spheres of life.

Women's empowerment in India is dependent, up to a great extent, on numerous different variables encompassing geographical setting (urban/rural), social status (caste and class), educational status, and age factor. Actions on women empowerment exist at the State, local (Panchayat), and national levels. However, women encounter gender differentiation in most sectors like education, economic opportunities, health and medical assistance, political participation. This demonstrates the substantial gaps between strategy advancements and actual exercises at the community level.



Crafting and executing a concrete policy framework, dispersing civic awareness and education can usher in the desired missions in eradicating the plight of women in India. The realm of women's empowerment in India is limited to granting balanced rights to women. It should not stop there. It should also assure that they are ingrained and rightful partners in the workforce.

The term women's empowerment is all about authority, or the power embarked on women sharing indistinguishable rights. It refers to the liberation of women from socio-economic restraints of reliance. Women comprise around 50 per cent of the country's population, and a bulk of them stays economically dependent on each other without employment.

Women are known for delivering multiple roles effortlessly per day, and thus, they are considered the backbone of every society. Living in male-dominated societies, women play a wide range of roles - caring mothers, loving daughters, and capable colleagues. The best part is that they fit the bill perfectly in every role. Nonetheless, they are also a neglected group in different parts of the world. It has resulted in them surviving the brunt of unevenness, financial trustworthiness, oppression, and distinct social evils. Women have been residing under the shackles of enslavement for centuries now, impeding them from attaining professional and personal highs. Therefore, training and empowering impoverished young girls will uplift the nation if it is taken up seriously by policymakers.

I have been pondering over the way sometimes women's empowerment is misconstrued. Women empowerment is the need of the hour though there are times when we push the envelope too far that we shove the feminist agenda to dangerous grounds. There are times when men are mistreated, and their voices are not heard. Justice should be done logically without any gender bias. Many a time, this 'empowerment' is being

“

We must also have open discussions with women from rural and underserved regions and understand and know how they feel about women's empowerment. Are their views taken into consideration? We should be able to guide them to a safe and healthy place. Are we trying to do that? Women from rural and urban areas need to communicate with each other - to exchange views and balance their approaches. What is it that women want when they think of empowerment?

”

weirdly portrayed. I believe we should not take undue advantage of our gender either. Each of us has to play our roles equally.

We must also have open discussions with women from rural and underserved regions and understand and know how they feel about women's empowerment. Are their views taken into consideration? We should be able to guide them to a safe and healthy place. Are we trying to do that? Women from rural and urban areas need to communicate with each other - to exchange views and balance their approaches. What is it that women want when they think of empowerment?

There needs to be a logical system put into place so women can stand on their feet and respect themselves first as humans. In the age of feminism, a small portion of women in India are freed and can employ their free will and are permitted to carve out their lives the way they want. But there is a considerable division of women in our nation who



require optimistic support. In most Indian villages and semi-urban cities, women are still denied fundamental education and are authorised to cease continuing higher education despite amassing the understanding required.

We as a nation should get together to make a positive change through empowerment. ■

Geeta Castelino is an Educationist, Consulting Psychologist and the Director of ECO CSR International Foundation.

Women's Empowerment: Where Are We Now?



Women's empowerment – a topic that, when raised, is almost guaranteed to get a reaction. Most people you know, whether in your workplace or social circles either champion it, support it or do not oppose it. Countless articles, reports and surveys have already covered the need for greater inclusion, diversity and representation. Its awareness seems to be higher today than at any other time in history. But this uplifting narrative falters when confronted by on-ground realities. Women's representation and participation as stakeholders and decision-makers in areas such as the workforce and politics remain disappointingly low.



Dipali Goenka

The Gender Gap Report 2021 by the World Economic Forum estimates that, in the last decade and a half, gender parity across the globe has grown by just 0.24 percentage points per year on average. Female managers account for just 27 per cent of the total managerial opportunities across the world. Women account for only 26 per cent and 23 per cent, respectively, of more than 34,000 parliament seats and 3,400 ministerial jobs worldwide. At this pace, closing the global gender gap will take another 135.6 years.

The situation in India is hardly any better. Data from The World Bank estimates the

Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) for women in the country at 18 per cent in 2020, less than half the global average (45.92 per cent). Even more alarming, perhaps, is the fact that India ranks below conservative economies such as Somalia, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Afghanistan when it comes to the economic participation of women. The Egon Zender Global Diversity Report 2020 estimates that women held just 17 per cent of board positions and 11 per cent leadership roles in the country's corporate ecosystem.

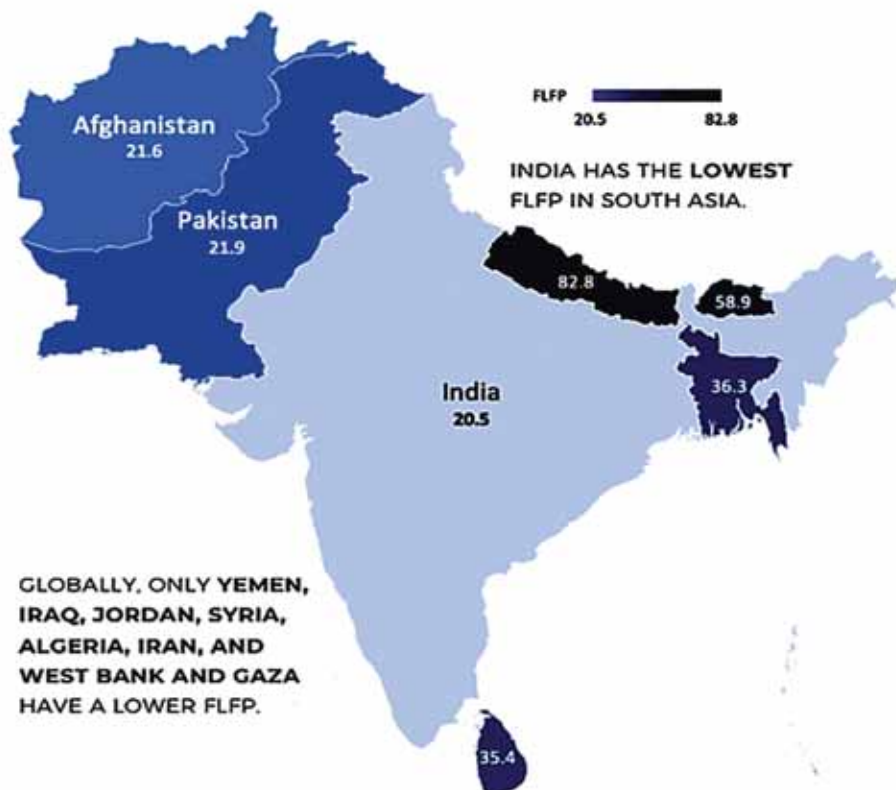
This begs the question: despite the progressive talk occupying airwaves and

column inches, why does women's empowerment in India still feel like a pipe dream waiting to be revitalised? Not surprisingly, the answer to that lies in our very neighbourhoods, workplaces and educational institutions – if we only know where and how to look.

FOUR OUT OF FIVE WOMEN IN INDIA ARE NOT WORKING



*In less than 15 years, India has fallen **39 places** on the Economic Gender Gap by World Economic Forum*



Source: International Labour Organization, ILOSTAT Database

The Conundrum of Women in India

Before we begin to aim for women's empowerment, we must evaluate the various issues, systems and processes that hinder the country's female population.

The most obvious challenge is that of representation. The LFPR for women in India in 2020 marked a more than 13 per cent drop from barely a decade and a half ago when it stood at 31.95 per cent. Their representation in the formal workforce is even lower, with only 6 per cent holding formal jobs. The remaining 94 per cent

are either engaged in low-skill, low-pay jobs with little to no security, such as domestic helpers, wage labourers, street vendors and home-based workers.

But why are there so many women in the unorganised sector? The reasons include lack of access to education and learning resources across levels, poor healthcare coverage for women, lack of basic living amenities such as nutrition, restrictive socio-cultural mores, and the urban-rural divide. These factors influence each other, creating a complex, multi-layered hurdle to women's empowerment.

For instance, the lack of access to quality

Before we begin to aim for women's empowerment, we must evaluate the various issues, systems and processes that hinder the country's female population.

The most obvious challenge is that of representation. The LFPR for women in India in 2020 marked a more than 13 per cent drop from barely a decade and a half ago when it stood at 31.95 per cent. Their representation in the formal workforce is even lower, with only 6 per cent holding formal jobs. The remaining 94 per cent are either engaged in low-skill, low-pay jobs with little to no security, such as domestic helpers, wage labourers, street vendors and home-based workers

education is one of the biggest reasons women – particularly from Tier-2/3, semi-urban and rural areas – do not have significant representation in the formal workforce. It is easy to point to issues with educational infrastructure, coverage and teaching quality to explain the disparity. Yet, the gap between male and female professionals exists even in the relatively developed and progressive Tier-1 and metropolitan areas. With no one hailing from a similar background serving as an example of success, it is perceived that educating a girl child is not worth the same as a male child. As a result, they drop out of school, stop pursuing higher education, get married and become homemakers to raise families, undermining their financial self-dependence and the power to make a



decision. A 2021 study by Zinnov estimated that just 25 per cent of Indian women pursued graduation courses.

It does not help that, across all geographies, a significant percentage of women in India face poverty and lack of resources, whether as children or adults. Struggling for proper nutrition and proper healthcare, objectives such as pursuing education or making a career are often the last thing on the minds of women and their families.

Then there are the regressive social perceptions that women must contend with to be part of the workforce. The deep-rooted taboo around menstruation and reproductive health causes more than 20 million girls to drop out of schools every year as they do not receive adequate facilities to lead comfortable and confident lives.

However, even in this discussion, it is essential to adopt an intersectional approach – for, without it - the conversation will fail to drive inclusive and empowering changes. While these issues have been around for several years, the viral outbreak of 2020 magnified them, affecting more lives than ever before. When the markets shut down and businesses moved to online platforms, more than 15 million women lost their jobs, of which, 12 million belonged to rural backgrounds. Today, over 10 million girls are expected to drop

out of secondary schools, half of the unemployed women never return to the workforce, and a quarter will continue to struggle to meet basic nutritional needs. This is a lot of unrealised human potential, especially for a nation aiming to become a \$5 trillion economy by 2025.



We need our women, especially the ones currently deprived of basic resources, to feel empowered and able to fulfil their potential if they are to become the driving force in the making of a better nation.

The Female Opportunity: How to Empower Indian Women and the Benefits

The India Skill Report 2021 observed that women are slightly more employable than men in India. However, lack of new-age skills prevents the majority from applying for better paying, secured and fulfilling jobs. This is further compounded by the fact that only 35 per cent of them have access to the internet, leaving a large pool of talent deprived of updated learning and upskilling resources.

“

The India Skill Report 2021 observed that women are slightly more employable than men in India. However, lack of new-age skills prevents the majority from applying for better paying, secured and fulfilling jobs. This is further compounded by the fact that only 35 per cent of them have access to the internet, leaving a large pool of talent deprived of updated learning and upskilling resources

”

Taking these disparities into consideration, we must build educational environments that ensure consistent,



quality and affordable learning experiences for young girls and women, especially in the hitherto underserved rural regions. To begin with, we can look at including more weekly skilling sessions and prioritising practical learning in government schools – something that will benefit both male and female learners. Regular upskilling initiatives for Anganwadi and government school teachers will also help improve the quality of education available, as will personalised sessions for women learners to help them overcome social conditioning and biases. A robust learning system will ensure the long-term development of talent in distant villages and households in India and boost India's GDP by a whopping 27 per cent.

We also need to look at how we address the issues of the lack of proper nutrition and health guidance for women. Taboos around menstrual health and sanitation need to be broken, and awareness about mental health needs to be improved. To an extent, we can address this by developing personalised diet plans for different age groups, apart from ensuring easy access and availability of adequate nutrition and affordable sanitary products.



Some private organisations are already working towards that aim. Welspun's Project Wel-Netrutva has improved health conditions for over one lakh people. Apart from regularly organising medical camps, menstrual and health awareness drives, and providing diet solutions to young girls and pregnant women, the project has also trained rural women to build their nutrition gardens. With its multipronged approach and initiatives including menstrual awareness drives, the project has been successful in helping 2,500 children and 588 women across 90 villages and aiding the creation of 50 group enterprises. In a country of more than 170 million young girls and women, such measures can prevent lifelong health challenges, both for these women and their families.

Representation and Entrepreneurship: Ingredients of Building Leaders of Tomorrow

Coming to the crux of the issue of women's empowerment: India does not have enough female leaders, role models and entrepreneurs to drive the change it needs. To close its gender gap, India requires its women to share the same power and influence as their male counterparts. Whether it is representing the country in sports, spearheading innovations in corporate boards, or transforming lives through designing

political policies, a fair and equal representation in all fields is the need of the hour. But how do we make that possible? The answer lies in providing platforms, forums and strategies to help them discover and capitalise on their unique potential.

At Welspun, we have been actively making efforts to allow our female staff to unleash their leadership talent and create a robust growth environment for women professionals, regardless of the sector or vocation, across the country. For instance, our Welspun Super Sports Women Programme has aided 27 athletes across 14 sports to achieve their dreams. To encourage the entrepreneurial spirit in rural women, our project SPUN (a women-led ecosystem) has allowed over 2200 women across eight centres to leverage their handicraft skills to develop industry-level skills and pursue a sustainable means of livelihood.

Michelle Obama very rightly said: "No country can ever truly flourish if it stifles the potential of its women and deprives itself of the contribution of half of its citizens."

As a country with half a billion women, it is time for us to redefine what women's empowerment means to us. ■

Dipali Goenka is the CEO & Jt MD of Welspun India Limited.

NEW AMENDMENTS FOR CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY POLICY



Form CSR-2: A Thorn in the Flesh or a Blessing in Disguise?

India became the first country to make it mandatory for certain companies to undertake philanthropic efforts towards social, environmental and human development concerns on April 1, 2014. The resultant Section 135 of the Companies Act stated that every company with a net worth of over ₹500 Crores, or a net profit of over ₹5 Crores in the previous financial year, or a turnover of over ₹1,000 Crores, will have to spend 2 per cent of their average net profit of the last three years on CSR activities.

Reciprocating the contribution of local communities in their success, key players of the Indian industry have been contributing to development in certain regions for a long time, often beyond the 2 per cent mandate issued by the CSR Policy. However, most companies failed to understand the CSR requirements and take responsibility for the communities within their periphery. As a result, when the CSR Policy was introduced, many organisations found the legislation to be too harsh and thought that it would be repealed soon after.

In the initial years of the Policy, many organisations were partially or entirely non-compliant. However, companies that complied with the Policy used their funds and innovative approaches to achieve ground-breaking developmental goals. Some CSR programmes even became model projects that were scaled further by the Government. Such programmes by compliant organisations motivated the Government to make the CSR Policy stringent to the point where companies could delay their social responsibility but never escape it.



Lehar Tawde

The pandemic required the Government to collaborate with India Inc. to bring its core systems back to their original form. So, in 2021, the Government amended the CSR Policy to prohibit companies from using unspent CSR funds for

“

The pandemic required the Government to collaborate with India Inc. to bring its core systems back to their original form. So, in 2021, the Government amended the CSR Policy to prohibit companies from using unspent CSR funds for business purposes or setting off past CSR expenses against future obligations. The amendment capped administrative overheads and involvement of international organisations to ensure programmes were beneficiary-focused. It also mandated the registration of executing agencies and impact assessment of CSR programmes

”

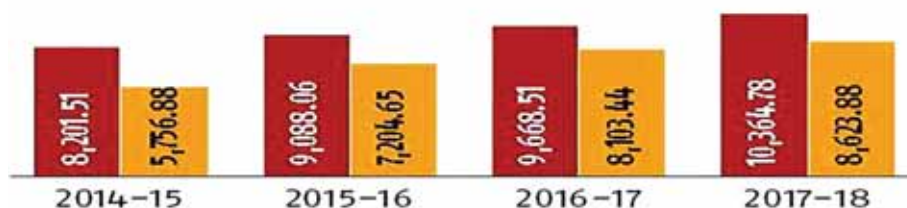
business purposes or setting off past CSR expenses against future obligations. The amendment capped administrative overheads and involvement of international organisations to ensure programmes were beneficiary-focused. It also mandated the registration of executing agencies and impact assessment of CSR programmes.

Provisions in the 2021 amendment in the CSR Policy were more detailed and structured than the original. Besides clarifying basic concepts like the definition of CSR, CSR Policy and CSR Implementation, the amendment brought clarity to complex concepts in the Policy, reducing ambiguities that could be exploited by corporates, and introduced uniformity as it stated procedures to be followed. Naturally,

HOW THEY FARED

Figures in (₹cr)

■ Required CSR spend
■ Actual CSR spend



Note: Based on companies listed on NSE as of each financial year's end. Considers those required to spend on CSR and for whom data was available. Some companies spent more than the required amount. Source: nseinfobase.com

companies that were partially or entirely non-compliant had to comply with the CSR Policy.

The COVID-19 pandemic severely impacted India Inc. during FY 2020-21. Therefore, amendments introduced in 2021 did not show an immediate effect on CSR compliance and efficiency. However, now that the Government has clogged the basic loopholes in the Policy pertaining to CSR compliance and efficient deployment of CSR funds, it is focusing on maximising the effectiveness of CSR programmes or 'impact' as commonly addressed in the Development Sector.

A recent notification issued by the Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA) on February 11, 2022, made it compulsory for India Inc. to present a detailed report on CSR activities through an 11-page form. The notification, according to the MCA reads: The MCA vide its notification dated 11th February, 2022 has notified Companies (Accounts) Amendment Rules, 2022 which shall

come into force from 11th February 2022. In the Companies (Accounts) Rules, 2014, after Rule 12 (1A) the following shall be inserted: “(1B) Every company covered under the provisions of sub-section (1) to section 135 shall furnish a report on Corporate Social Responsibility in Form CSR-2 to the Registrar for the preceding year (2020-2021) and onwards as an addendum to form AOC-4 or AOC-4 XBRL or AOC-4 NBFC (Ind AS), as the case may be: Provided that for the preceding year (2020-2021), Form CSR-2 shall be filed separately on or before 31st March, 2022, after filing form AOC-4 or AOC-4 XBRL or AOC-4 NBFC (Ind AS), as the case may be.” The newly introduced Form CSR-2 (Report on Corporate Social Responsibility) is required to be filed by those entities that fall under the provisions of Section 135 of the Companies Act, 2013, i.e., the companies that are required to comply with the provisions of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).





This process is designed to provide the Government with an idea of a company's CSR expenditure, programme execution and impact of CSR programmes by eligible companies across India. The regulation comes into immediate effect, and information related to FY 2020-21 has to be submitted by the end of March 2022.

Just like the introduction of the CSR Policy in 2014, this notification has brought mixed reactions from corporates all across India. Some CSR leaders find the increased reporting an additional burden to their organisations as some of the information the Government seeks is

already part of the annual reports. On the other hand, some leaders feel that collecting CSR data through a uniform approach would allow the Government to analyse the information and leverage insights in a way that it would be able to enhance its developmental strategy.

As the Co-founder of a leading EdTech social enterprise, ConnectEd Technologies, we have been working with some of the largest socially responsible corporates in the country to make quality education accessible to Government school students. Our focus has always been on the impact of our efforts on learning outcomes and the academic performance of the students. We have been collecting data points from a large number of beneficiary students, and their analysis has provided invaluable insights to us, our clients, and even the Government.

While some people might see Form

“
This process is designed to provide the Government with an idea of a company's CSR expenditure, programme execution and impact of CSR programmes by eligible companies across India
”

CSR-2 as a replication of efforts, I am elated to see this added layer of compliance. It will make organisations accountable for the CSR programmes they plan and execute. It will also ensure that corporates seek more information regarding the impact of their activities. Reporting crucial insights from all over the country emphasising programmes that have produced exceptional outcomes will enhance knowledge and promote healthy competition between corporates and other implementing agencies.

Most importantly, the Government's analysis of CSR information will enable robust policy formation at senior levels of the Government, which in turn will translate to swift and practical decision-making at the grassroots. Naturally, an eco-system like this will produce a swift and long-lasting impact on audiences that have remained in the dark for a long time. It will facilitate them and future generations to contribute to India's growth story and benefit from it. ■

Lehar Tawde is the Co-Founder of ConnectEd Technologies, an edtech social enterprise specialising in creating tailor-made technologies and deploying large-scale developmental programmes that make quality education accessible to government schools and the children studying therein.

He leads Strategic Relations and Operations, which requires him to utilise his experience to build, manage and leverage relations across governments, socially-responsible corporations, grassroots-level educators and the company's Operations team that execute projects on-ground.

Under Watch

MCA puts out new disclosure form CSR 2

CSR 2 seeks detailed info **on CSR activities**

To disclose CSR matters of FY19-21 by Mar 2022

Data analytics, AI to identify loopholes

In case of discrepancies, **companies could be penalised**



Impact of CSR Initiatives on a Company's Bottom Line

The term CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) is very much a product of the 20th century. However, its origins can be traced back to the mid-to-late 1800s when there was a growing concern among factory owners about workers' conditions. This eventually precipitated industrialists such as Rockefeller and Andrew Carnegie donating large amounts of their wealth to charity, giving birth to the concept of businesses giving back to society. Two hundred years later, CSR has become an important practice for companies across the world, and in many countries like India, it is legally mandated.



Sarah-Jane Littleford

Reputation

There is a saying in the business world that reputation is everything, and when it

In essence, CSR entails those businesses that have a moral and philanthropic responsibility to contribute to the causes of society and give back to the communities they live in. It speaks to the connections between businesses and charitable causes and the generosity of

business leaders when it comes to bettering the world. There is also a growing body of evidence to suggest that CSR is not just a cosmetic tool, but a way to add real value to a company's bottom line, and organisations are beginning to take notice. Here's what we know so far:

“

Companies that associate themselves with good causes are considered socially responsible, and investors automatically gravitate towards such brands. Ultimately, being associated with a worthy cause is beneficial for a company and, by extension, for the people who invest in them

”

comes to CSR, reputation can be one of the most important things it influences. As more of Gen Z becomes part of the workforce and consumer base, organisations are becoming cognizant of the value that this new generation attaches to standing up for a cause. Any quick poll can tell us that consumers increasingly want to buy from brands that stand for something. In fact, in the US, 91 per cent of millennials and 85 per cent of the average public said they would switch to a brand if they were associated with a cause. Hence, CSR initiatives are deeply important for companies to garner more customer loyalty and appeal from the growing cohort of consumers. Valuable CSR initiatives also have the potential to attract price-elastic customers who might not be driven away by increased prices if they see the values a company represents through their philanthropy. This can directly increase profit margins and drive opportunities for business growth and revenue, positively impacting the bottom line of businesses.

Employee Perception and Engagement

A company's CSR initiatives often lead to employees attaching a sense of worth and meaning to their job, as they can be proud of the companies they work for. An



experiment conducted by the Harvard Business Review magazine showed that employees care about both the intentions driving a company's CSR activities and the positive impact it has on society. This experiment alluded to potential benefits, such as increased employee engagement and satisfaction can eventually lead to lower rates of attrition, directly impacting a company's reputation as a favourable employer.

Investors

Stock prices of a company are not always influenced by measurable factors. There is an element of intangible value that contributes to a company, and CSR is often a contributor to this. Companies that associate themselves with good causes are considered socially responsible, and investors automatically gravitate towards such brands. Ultimately, being associated with a worthy cause is beneficial for a company and, by extension, for the people who invest in them. Also, having robust CSR initiatives means that companies are less likely to face public backlash and PR

disasters, and they boast of strong corporate citizenship. Ultimately, these are all the factors that add value to a company's profit and loss statements, whether directly or indirectly.

Today, the pressure to make CSR an integral part of an organisation comes from a wide range of stakeholders, including institutional investors, customers (B2B and B2C), regulators and governments, other parts of the supply chain, and, of course, society at large. Therefore, C-Suite executives are increasingly required to contribute to overall CSR strategy, as well as to understand how it applies to their specific area of expertise and responsibility. The clear momentum in this regard is reflected in the numbers that state that between 2005 and 2015, there was a 64 per cent increase in the number of companies who produced CSR reports, i.e., out of the largest 250 companies in the world, 92 per cent did have CSR initiatives in place. Thus, for business organisations, the debate about 'should we or shouldn't we', concerning corporate social responsibility, has been put to rest. The question that all businesses today are asking is - how can we better CSR outcomes? Because the evidence of positive outcomes is clear and ignoring it would be a mistake. ■

Sarah-Jane Littleford is the Head of Global Responsible Business, Fujitsu.





AROH Foundation:

Empowering and Engaging Women in Nation-Building

Data provided by the National Commission of Women (NCW) suggested there was almost a 100 per cent increase in violence against women, especially during the shadow pandemic. The statistics are alarming. There is a strong need to provide a safety net to women who are silent sufferers of domestic abuse. AROH Foundation aims to improve the socio-economic status of marginalised and vulnerable women through its pioneering initiatives with sustainable solutions. **CSR Mandate** spoke to **Dr Neelam Gupta**, Founder President & CEO, AROH Foundation, to know more about project SHAKTI, and how the Foundation is gearing up awareness generation among women in day-to-day issues leading to their overall empowerment.

How did the AROH Foundation come into being?

AROH, an acronym for A Ray of Hope, is my heart child. The seeds for AROH were sown in my heart right from my childhood. When I was just about 13-14 years old, enroute to my school one December chilly morning, I spotted a girl, almost my age, shivering profusely as she had no warm clothes. I gave her my pullover to comfort her. I spotted her

again at the same place the next day, sans the pullover. I asked her about it. She sadly responded that her father took it away and sold it. I realised that it is not sufficient to merely give food, or in this case, provide a sweater, but to help that person learn how to be independent and earn so that they will not go hungry or suffer during the wintry season. The saying - if you give a hungry man a fish, you feed him for a day but if you teach



Dr Neelam Gupta

him how to fish, you feed him for a lifetime, is what we should keep in mind all the time if we want to raise independent, self-sufficient, confident and responsible human beings. This is the sustainable route we need to take to empower an individual or community.

“

Amongst the other social ills and crimes prevalent in the slums, domestic violence is one of the issues faced by women all the time. While both men and women are aware that domestic violence is morally and legally offensive, they choose to ignore this common knowledge. This is because our societal norms have normalised tolerance of domestic violence

”

Now coming back to how this Foundation came into being: I registered AROH Foundation in 2001 as a Society under Societies Registration Act XXI, 1860. I set up this NGO because I wanted to serve and give back to society and create an equitable society with equal opportunities for everyone to grow and prosper.

How did the SHAKTI project get started? What were the struggles you faced when it was initiated?

AROH has had a strong presence in various urban slum establishments for



more than ten years now. Amongst the other social ills and crimes prevalent in the slums, domestic violence is one of the issues faced by women all the time. While both men and women are aware that domestic violence is morally and legally offensive, they choose to ignore this common knowledge. This is because our societal norms have normalised tolerance of domestic violence. During the COVID lockdown, where victims and culprits were forcibly locked for an indefinite period, the rate and reporting of violence were recorded at an all-time high by the National Commission of Women in India.

Usually, due to social pressure, ignorance and helplessness, women tend to tolerate this violence, which is even appreciated as a high level of endurance. Poverty and stressful life conditions add fuel to this violence, age-long patriarchal setups, and inaccessibility to the right authorities or individuals to seek support also keep the victims at the receiving end.

There was a strong need to provide a safety net to women who are silent sufferers of domestic abuse and violence. Due to this menace, they are unable to live happy and healthy lives and cannot realise their full potential. There was a need to create acceptance and awareness so that they start reporting or at least sharing their problems. There is a need to prevent and reduce instances of Violence Against Women (VAWs).

This was the main reason why we launched Project SHAKTI (Power) in early 2021 in the South Delhi slums of Sangam Vihar. This project aims to address the problem of domestic violence, especially intimate partner violence, physical, verbal and emotional, suffered by poor and vulnerable women.

While AROH was well prepared and focused strategically and morally to implement SHAKTI, there were many hurdles just at the start of the project. They included political reluctance in providing support, or even social hurdles where fostering local acceptance and instilling a sense of ownership among community members was a task. The community also presented its friction in breaking age-old set patriarchy. We also had implementation risks where operating in remote contexts with weak formal service was a challenge in sustaining partnerships and change beyond a single-programming cycle. With concerted dedication and efforts, we were able to mitigate them eventually.

What are the affected areas in Delhi where the project is being implemented? Apart from Delhi, are you working in other States?

There was a dire need for intervention for 500 underprivileged women during the lockdown in the South Delhi slums of Sangam Vihar. The aim was to address the problem of domestic violence, especially intimate partner violence, physical, verbal and emotional, suffered by the poor and vulnerable women. Since we already have our presence in the area, and based on our experience, a need





remedial services and counselling sessions.

Project SHAKTI runs on only one emotion, and that is TRUST. Women victims trust our team members enough to open up and disclose their most private chapters of tyranny. Our staff pledge to maintain the privacy and dignity of the victims and to provide them with the most empathetic environment and solutions. The project also creates a conducive environment of prosperity for women while including her peer group in phases of awareness and counselling.

The hypothesis of the project itself suggests that once a motion of awareness and confidence is created among women, their peer group and the community at large, women will be more likely to disclose VAWs, that communities will become less tolerant of it, and that the prevalence of intimate partner and

analysis emphasised the necessity to take up a project like SHAKTI to support women in need.

Due to its instant and humongous impact, SHAKTI was also replicated in the clusters of Mundka slums in North West Delhi. With its crucial component of creating awareness, advocacy and extended activities of socio-economically empowering women through income-generating skill training and enterprise setups, we scaled up this model in the villages of Uttar Pradesh, Meghalaya, Chhattisgarh, and Rajasthan, under our various projects.

How many women have benefited from the SHAKTI project? How do you encourage women through this project?

SHAKTI has by far benefited more than 5000 women directly and more than 10,000 women indirectly through extensive awareness, personalised

“

Usually, due to social pressure, ignorance and helplessness, women tend to tolerate this violence, which is even appreciated as a high level of endurance. Poverty and stressful life conditions add fuel to this violence, age-long patriarchal setups, and inaccessibility to the right authorities or individuals to seek support also keep the victims at the receiving end

”





domestic violence will reduce and eventually diminish.

The project adopts a three-tier approach - Preventive (Identification of beneficiaries, awareness campaigns and personalised services), Curative (Institutional approach and training of changemakers) and Sustainability (Placing changemakers in the clusters and establishing liaisons within stakeholders) aspects to ensure impact

“

SHAKTI has by far benefited more than 5000 women directly and more than 10,000 women indirectly through extensive awareness, personalised remedial services and counselling sessions

”

and its sustainability even after the project team exits from the sites. The success and impact of the project itself is the deep-seated trust between the women and team SHAKTI.

Can developing an alternative structure bring about change in society? How would you address the fight for women's empowerment?

We at AROH do not believe in creating a parallel structure or processes. We design projects that have a large scope in creating convergence and liaison with existing schemes, resources and repositories. This also ensures the sustainability of the initiative as manpower and resources are from the local vicinity who are empowered and skilled to take over the baton after we exit from the area.

As India's population grows, its social, political and economic rights continue to be fair toward men, but not women. Women empowerment in India is put aside while the country's society focuses on the empowerment of men. Approximately 43.4 per cent of women suffer from crimes committed by their husbands or family members. As of 2015, the Government's lack of action has positioned India as 125th out of 188 countries on the Human Development Report's Gender Inequality Index.

India's journey on women's empowerment and gender equality dates back to that point in history when Raja Ram Mohan Roy fought to end Sati Pratha. For the past hundreds of years,

especially after India's independence, visible gains have been made through legal reforms, human development and grassroots initiatives but, we still have a long way to go in many areas of women empowerment. A more integrated and concerted effort is needed to close the urban-rural divide and ensure that women in rural areas enjoy the same access to education, employment, healthcare and decision-making as their urban counterparts. The hardest challenge will be to change attitudes, given that many barriers to women empowerment are attributed to patriarchal and patrilineal traditions that are deeply entrenched in our society. Simply put, we need to go for the Gaon to Global approach stepwise systemically to curb this deep-rooted problem.

What is the road ahead like for the SHAKTI project?

SHAKTI has a rippling effect. In a short span of 1.5 years, we have seen heartwarming responses from our beneficiaries. SHAKTI also spread its safety wings to more than five States now, including Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Meghalaya, Chhattisgarh, and Rajasthan. It has been a roller coaster yet gratifying journey so far.

In future, we would want to increase our outreach to the remotest locations and the neediest women in all corners possible. We also want to be associated with the National Commission of Women, Ministry of Women and Child, legal groups, etc., under the project to ensure seamless and quick resolutions to the





“

Even though women are vaulting to leadership spaces, our communities remain obstinately resistant to women in leadership roles. They (the patriarchy) too often perceive women as too delicate to lead. This trend, among many other deeply-seated and unconscious gender biases, forces potential women leaders to withdraw into their shells. Yet women possess inherently strong attributes that can help lead more effectively

”

should celebrate women in leadership. The pandemic has fallen heavily on the shoulders of women. Many have lost their source of livelihood. Most have a triple duty - caring for families, managing households, and handling economic activities. Some have faced the brunt of the pandemic as caregivers and



programme. We aim to enlarge our SHAKTI umbrella to the maximum number of women possible in securing their dignity, rights and health while creating a favourable ambience for them to prosper.

Being a leader, what do you think is the most significant barrier to female leadership?

Oh, there have been many, and there are still many. It is indeed a man's world. Sexism, veiled or overt, holds professional women back. And there are gender biases and stereotyping that work against professional women's leadership aspirations.

Historical sexism and gender bias have resulted in structural barriers that serve as obstacles to women trying to climb the rungs of the corporate ladder. The historical dominance of men in the workplace has resulted in less developed networks of female leaders. Some female leadership networks might offer formal presentations about strategies for following up in business while others

might feature casual get-togethers over wine during which professionals have a chance to build relationships and learn about each other's businesses and how to help one another.

Professional women often face significant challenges balancing work and family. Their family responsibilities can limit their ability to pursue leadership positions. This is because they have full-time jobs while also handling the lion's share of household responsibilities, such as caring for the young, the sick, or elderly family members.

Even though women are vaulting to leadership spaces, our communities remain obstinately resistant to women in leadership roles. They (the patriarchy) too often perceive women as too delicate to lead. This trend, among many other deeply-seated and unconscious gender biases, forces potential women leaders to withdraw into their shells. Yet women possess inherently strong attributes that can help lead more effectively.

Being in the social sector, my work demands me to be more soft and polite, but handling a team of more than 200 people and taking responsibility for more than two to three lakh beneficiaries have made me aggressive at the same time. Personally, it is a tough balance between being polite and aggressive.

How do you see upcoming changes in the employment landscape due to COVID-19, impacting women leadership?

This year, more than any other year, we





essential service providers. Yet others have stepped up to also solve challenges in their communities. We should engage our young women to realise that they already have superpowers they can invoke to solve problems and lead—locally, nationally, and internationally. They should trust in these superpowers - observing, listening, learning, empathising with others, experimenting and persevering when doing what is hard, and crystallising lessons into actions that bring systemic change. But, most importantly, we should encourage them to be courageous, to dream big, or to start small as seeking solutions to the day-to-day problems facing us and our communities can lead to a broader change in the world.

What methodology do you use to spread your message and work to those who may not believe in gender equality?



Awareness is the key. We empower women about their due rights and dignity. We inform them about various laws supporting their welfare. Simultaneously, we make them aware of their peer group, the community at large, and nation eventually, through all means possible. We take small steps, create awareness door-to-door and through large gatherings. We create a group of like-minded people and create a rippling effect of the phenomenon. I allow women to speak about various pressing challenges at every national and international platform.



I strongly feel that along with women empowerment initiatives, there is an equal need to run extensive campaigns of sensitising men towards declassifying women. Men need to undergo systematic training to treat women as normal fellow beings and normalise their existence in the ecosystem. In India, small interventions bring big changes for gender equality. Interventions should start at the school level. We should promote the education of women, facilitate them with important and valid information, and once she is aware of her rights, she will not require constant support.



What leadership advice would you give to the next generation of female leaders? What keeps you motivated?

Indian girls and women stand to gain the most from shaping their country into a place that releases their enormous potential. It is to them that I look for leadership. Many are living on the fringes of society, in the grey economies, in community associations, in peer lending groups. They are not integrated into the economy or institutions of governance. It is high time they do. Indeed, we will go on talking about India's potential until this army-in-waiting of changemakers take charge. They can and must connect their businesses to the economy and anchor the State to their vibrant communities. They can give birth to an India that becomes the finest expression of how to develop a country. India was the cradle of civilisation. Tomorrow, it can be a leader in a globalised world. It is this HOPE that I want to give to my future women leaders and this is what keeps me motivated too - A Ray of Hope, AROH for you! ■





Girl Power Groups of West Bengal are Opposing and Averting Child Marriages

One hundred years ago, child marriage was widely acceptable across India. The Reformer, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, who strongly campaigned against child marriage, was married in 1781 at the age of nine. Considered as the Father of the Indian Renaissance, this multifaceted social, religious and educational reformer is renowned for his pioneering role in opposing practices like Sati, Child Marriage, social divisions and advocating education. When the Child Marriage Restraint Act or the Sharda Act was passed in 1929, the minimum age of marriage for girls was fixed at 14 years and boys at 18 years. In 1949, post-Independence, the minimum age was amended to 15 for girls. In 1978, it became 18 for girls and 21 for boys. The 2006 Act kept the same minimum ages but provided clarity on the status of children forced into marriages and avenues for redressal. Yet, child marriages continue across the country.



Joseph Wesley

In India, the expense of a girl child's marriage is calculated from the day she is born. Girls are considered a burden to the family, and traditionally, the attitude of many societies is to marry them off as early as possible as dowry is lesser when the girl is still young. In this practice, a girl child is reduced to mere calculations, and her life is often beholden to a much senior stranger. These young brides are

subjected to sexual violence by their spouses, often resulting in painful and forced sexual intercourse, multiple sexual health issues and pregnancies during puberty. This practice is followed despite the law prohibiting dowry.

The growing incidents of child marriage in West Bengal has been alarming ever since the breakout of the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to acute poverty, it is

difficult for students in rural areas to have access to smartphones or laptops. Since these children have no access to education, they are barely aware of their rights. Thus, school closures such as those triggered by COVID-19 pushed parents to decide between marrying their



girls at a very young age since school is no longer an option. Further, abject poverty has forced many people to marry off their children before the legal age -

“

School closures such as those triggered by COVID-19 pushed parents to decide between marrying their girls at a very young age since school is no longer an option. Further, abject poverty has forced many people to marry off their children before the legal age - either owing to societal pressure or in exchange for money. Other factors are also at work. For instance, taking advantage of the restrictions in place because of the pandemic, parents were spared from spending more on big weddings. Since law enforcement agency personnel were deployed in enforcing lockdown measures, their ability to reach out to communities to protect girls from imminent marriage was also hampered. Parents took advantage of these conditions as well

”

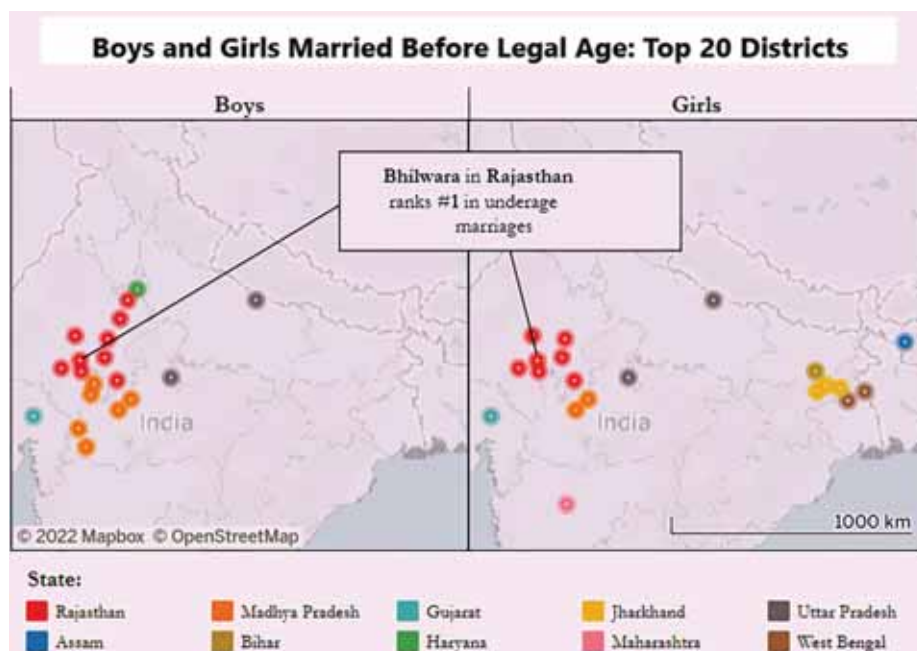
either owing to societal pressure or in exchange for money. Other factors are also at work. For instance, taking advantage of the restrictions in place because of the pandemic, parents were spared from spending more on big weddings. Since law enforcement agency personnel were deployed in enforcing lockdown measures, their ability to reach out to communities to protect girls from imminent marriage was also hampered. Parents took advantage of these conditions as well.

UNICEF predicted that COVID-19 could lead to an additional 13 million child marriages over the next decade globally. It is evident with the recent incidents that India is already hewing to the trend. The country already hosts the world's largest number of child brides – 23 million. That is one-third of the global total. Over 27

per cent of girls in India were married before their 18th birthday and 7 per cent were married before the age of 15. Each year, at least 1.5 million girls under 18 get married in India and nearly 16 per cent of adolescent girls aged 15-19 are currently married.

One way of keeping a check on child marriages during the pandemic is to ensure there is a strong cohort of child protection monitoring systems among the villages. Organising and empowering adolescent girls within the communities is the best possible way to protect girls from forced/early marriages.

Eighteen-year-old Koyal and seventeen-year-old Tanushree, along with their Girl Power Group members, have stopped eighteen child marriages during the pandemic-related lockdowns in West



“



Koyal (left), with her mother and sister



Tanushree (middle) with the GPG

Bengal. Young Koyal is brave and strongly believes that child marriage deters a girl's holistic development. She believes in education and empowerment, but, in her small village near Siliguri, Koyal is ridiculed and verbally abused for doing the right thing as child marriages are still part of their social custom. Meanwhile, Tanushree had to fight against her marriage which her parents arranged.

Koyal's small frame and shy demeanour belie her resolute and unwavering resolve. She has been on the receiving end of so many abuses and threats, but she pressed on. But for what? For her belief in child rights. "Every child has the

right to live their childhood. It is a time for them to play and learn. Once they are married, they are burdened with providing food for the family and raising children. I want them to live in freedom," says Koyal thoughtfully. On the other hand, Tanushree is encouraging her friends to pursue higher studies. "I tell all my friends to study, to learn some skills, to be independent, and then get married. If you get married now, you will have children, and life will be difficult."

Child marriage cases have increased during the lockdown in rural West Bengal. Since these areas are bordering Nepal and Bihar, cross-border/inter-country trafficking is a common

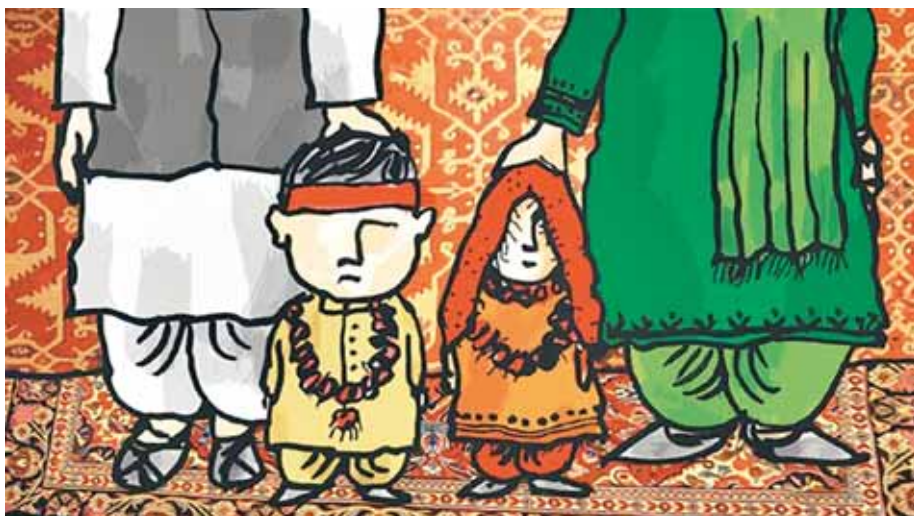
In trafficking-prone West Bengal alone, the movement to protect girls is gaining momentum with 291 Girl Power Groups (GPG). More than 9300 girls are part of the Girl Power Groups in 65 villages. These girls are sensitised on issues related to child rights, trafficking and child marriage. GPG members also attend self-defence classes. In Siliguri, World Vision India is working among 4069 children from the most vulnerable communities; 27 of whom are trafficked survivors. World Vision India was instrumental in setting up Anti-Trafficking Network's (ATN) at Siliguri in 2011

”

occurrence. The pressure to get married is growing even more intense because of yet another twist of the pandemic: It made weddings cheap. Normally, families feel obligated to invite legions of guests, but with the lockdown and lost livelihood scenarios, the social pressure and the cost of the wedding play a vital role in sending off their daughters on the pretext of marriages.

Recently, Koyal came across a girl who was sold as a child bride. "The girl was just 14 years old, and the family sold her to be a bride of a visually impaired person. The family is the problem in such cases. It is very hard to convince or make the parents understand. In such scenarios, only pressure from the police or local politicians can make them change their minds," said Koyal.

When these girl groups receive news of a child marriage taking place, they immediately inspect the family and make



sure the bride and groom are of legal age. They ask the family to produce their birth certificate to verify their age. Girl Power Groups work closely with the Village level Child Protection Units, Police, Integrated Child Development Scheme workers, Accredited Social Health Activist workers, Panchayat members, Sarpanch and local politicians. The Groups monitor the village for child rights violations, including child marriages, and immediately alert the concerned officials.

The impact of the Girl Groups speaks for itself: Since the start of the pandemic, these girls and their all-female crew have helped stop eighteen early forced marriages. In one case, the Group reached the venue just minutes before the marriage was made official. The 14-year-old girl was quietly being dressed and primped up for her wedding. She would have been offered to her husband-to-be, a man she had never met.

In trafficking-prone West Bengal alone, the movement to protect girls is gaining momentum with 291 Girl Power Groups (GPG). More than 9300 girls are part of the Girl Power Groups in 65 villages. These girls are sensitised on issues related to child rights, trafficking and child marriage. GPG members also attend self-defence classes. In Siliguri, World Vision India is working among 4069 children from the most vulnerable communities; 27 of whom are trafficked survivors. World Vision India was instrumental in setting up the

Anti-Trafficking Network (ATN) at Siliguri in 2011. At present, 17 NGOs are part of ATN in Siliguri, North Bengal. ATN does advocacy on anti-human trafficking and works with the local police, Child Welfare Committee, and the West Bengal Task Force at the State level. Up till now, 17 children have been rescued from trafficking. The effectiveness of the ATN in stopping trafficking has inspired the other NGOs to set up Anti-Trafficking Networks in

“

Now that States have made marriage registration compulsory, marriage officers and registrars are mandated to intimate the Child Marriage Prohibition Officer about child marriages. Working closely with faith leaders will also help in abolishing child marriages.

Better coordination and communication between agencies concerned with the protection of Child Rights and the statutory authorities under the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act is, therefore, the need of the hour

”

South Bengal. ATN members are also part of the district-level advisory board on anti-trafficking.



Despite stringent legal provisions, child marriages still happen due to sheer negligence and lack of awareness. Community alertness, along with strict legal interventions, still remind us that we have a long way to go. Now that States have made marriage registration compulsory, marriage officers and registrars are mandated to intimate the Child Marriage Prohibition Officer about child marriages. Working closely with faith leaders will also help in abolishing child marriages. Better coordination and communication between agencies concerned with the protection of Child Rights and the statutory authorities under the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act is, therefore, the need of the hour. Child marriages can also happen because girls choose to marry early without being forced by their parents. Lack of awareness on how child marriages and teenage pregnancy can adversely impact the health of the mother and child, lack of life skills among adolescent girls, the inability to understand the full magnitude of early marriage and childbirth are some of the factors resulting in many girls running away from home and getting married.

Girls like Koyal and Tanushree inspire



other girls from their villages to take up education and be empowered. Koyal has completed her 10+2 and is enrolled in the Auxiliary Nursing Midwifery course from a university in Bangalore. She believes that she would have never reached this far without constant mentoring and encouragement from NGO volunteers. Koyal aspires to continue her studies and be financially independent before getting married. For Tanushree, her work with the Hena Girl Power Group is just the beginning. Though COVID-19 has kept her out of school this year, the experience in the recent months has only galvanised Tanushree's dreams of becoming a psychologist.

Ending child marriage by 2030 is a target in the Sustainable Development Goals. The strategy to address this is prevention. Reopening schools, ensuring that all girls return to school, support for most vulnerable girls to resume education and

incentivising girls' education are some of the ways to address this burning issue. Building a vibrant community-based reporting and referral system consisting of adolescent girls, faith actors, civil society organisations, village-level child protection committees, schools, PRI institutions, and Child Helpline, can help identify vulnerable girls and prevent early marriages.

Despite advances, the progress is slow. The pandemic has taken a toll on communities due to school closures and loss of livelihood. But some girls and women have taken the lead and campaigned for a change in people's mindsets. Even in this 21st century, we need girls like Tanushree and Koyal to continue the fight, which Raja Ram Mohan Roy initiated back in the 1700s. ■

Joseph Wesley is Head - Anti Child Trafficking Programs & Case Manager – Child & Adult Beneficiary Safeguarding at World Vision India.

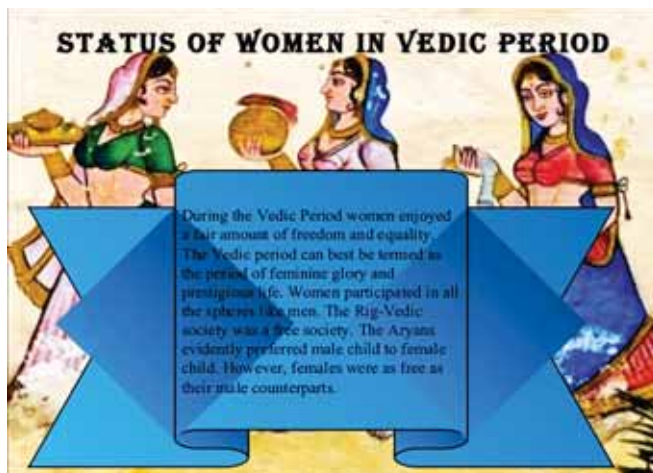


Sodexo: Empowering Women Through Food Sovereignty

According to a recent UN report, 60 per cent of women in India do not have any valuable assets. Considering agriculture in particular, women own barely 2 per cent of cultivable land even though 75 per cent of the rural women are farmers producing approximately 60 - 80 per cent of the food and 90 per cent of dairy products in India. Thus, a whopping 50 per cent of the total Indian population has a long way to go. But history suggests that women did not always suffer from disparities. Women enjoyed many privileges and were accorded the same status as men in the Early Vedic period. They were educated, could select their partners, pursue agricultural interests and offer their opinion on financial matters. In short, they were treated as equals. However, there was a gradual decline in the status of women over time.



Ashwin Bhosale



Patriarchy gained importance, and women occupied a secondary position in society.

After India gained independence, our leaders strove to set things right again. They introduced reforms. Under the Constitution, women received equal rights as men. In recent times, there has been a massive drive to educate women, ensure that all of them have a bank account, and most importantly, make them financially independent. Emphasis was given to economic empowerment, predominantly through women entrepreneurship.

Steps Taken by the Government

NITI Aayog has launched a Women Entrepreneurship Programme (WEP) to provide free credit ratings, mentorship, funding support for women entrepreneurs, apprenticeships, and corporate partnerships. The Department of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare (DA & FW), Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare, is encouraging States and other implementing agencies to ensure at least 30 per cent expenditure on women farmers, along with imparting training to them to understand the latest techniques in agriculture and allied sectors.

Additionally, women farmers are provided inputs to increase the productivity of crops. They are educated about the nutritious value of crops and how to cultivate them for household consumption and for selling. These initiatives are fostering food security in the entire community.



“

In another ongoing project, we teamed up with Sulabh International Centre for Action Sociology, to implement food sovereignty for women. Within three months of its initiation, the project has already helped a team of 300+ women entrepreneurs better their economic condition by an impressive degree

”

How Corporates are Stepping In

Along with the government, corporates are also doing their bit to uplift women. Some companies like ours – Sodexo - have Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) at the core of their values. As a part of our Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives, we are constantly striving to encourage gender equality in our workforce and promote women entrepreneurship. We have formulated a 'Better Tomorrow 2025' plan under which we are taking up several community development initiatives to

promote sustainable livelihoods for women, thus improving their quality of life.

Initiatives Taken by Sodexo

One of our success stories includes Subhada Mestry, a woman entrepreneur who now supplies Indian bread (chappatis) at multiple Sodexo sites. We helped Subhada to set up her own chapati business in Mumbai. Within a short period, the business enterprise turned out to be a sustained, profit-making venture for Subhada while offering employment to other like-minded and strong-willed women.

Another important initiative we undertook was to help women in a few villages of Maharashtra set up their kitchen gardens and establish bee



farming, in association with NGO - Under the Mango Tree. Within a few months, these women grew vegetables for their family consumption and could also sell the surplus and earn money. They could all become financially independent.





Launching the Food Sovereignty Project

In another ongoing project, we teamed up with Sulabh International Centre for Action Sociology, to implement food sovereignty for women. Within three months of its initiation, the project has already helped a team of 300+ women

entrepreneurs better their economic condition by an impressive degree.

The project began by Sulabh International Centre for Action Sociology identifying 16 villages in Sangamner and Akole Blocks in the Ahmednagar district of Maharashtra. The objective was to create a seed bank managed by women volunteers who took



“

There were many interesting and welcome changes once the project was implemented. The women became aware of gender discrimination in farming and endeavoured to break the shackles. They took an active interest in the cultivation of crops and promoted an indigenous variety of seeds. The adoption of organic farming practices led to reduced production costs of farming goods compared to farming with chemical inputs. Women were encouraged to start their kitchen gardens. This helped them produce vegetables for their daily meals. The surplus was sold in the local market, and the extra earnings supplemented the family income

”

the role of storekeepers for high-quality indigenous seeds. Farmers could purchase these organic seeds for a nominal price; these seeds would give rise to a healthy crop, which is chemical-free, and it would also help conserve agrobiodiversity. Additionally, the project would establish a food chain from farm to end customer and lead to economic and social empowerment of women.

“Seeds from traditional agricultural varieties help to solve food shortages and malnutrition. These varieties also intensify the food system resilience to climate and cultural challenges. Seed banks promote resiliently and diversified food production of sorghum, millets and



employed. They held meetings in the village to build rapport with the women, discussed with Gram Panchayat members to gain the support of key persons, visited nearby kitchen gardens to gather more knowledge, and created a focus group of already engaged women farmers who had been conserving and cultivating indigenous crop varieties. These activities helped the project staff and the local women gear up for project implementation.

Interesting Facts Noticed After Implementation



many more indigenous varieties that protects the biodiversity of the area. In our initiative, women farmers are encouraged to use the conservation of the native seeds as the basis of their development. This initiative also aims to preserve and promote indigenous seeds to achieve food sufficiency that eventually eradicates hunger and restores the dignity of farmers. I am sure this joint partnership between Sulabh International with Sodexo India will contribute immensely towards food security and will emerge as a successful model of food sovereignty,” said Nirja Bhatnagar, National Director - Programme and Advocacy, Sulabh International Social Service Organisation.

Overcoming Several Challenges

Several constraints challenged the success of this project. At the outset, the problem of patriarchy had to be resolved. Traditionally, the men of the house had always handled farming while the women looked after the house. Further, these men were led to believe that hybrid seeds and chemical fertilisers would help increase yield. Quantity took precedence over quality. They also followed inappropriate farming practices. For example, they practised mono-cropping as it was easy, overlooking the fact that this practice would eventually rid the soil of fertility.

A Smoother Journey

Once the villages were identified for the project, community seed workers or animators, known as Beej Sakhis, having interest and experience in working with women farmers, were

There were many interesting and welcome changes once the project was implemented. The women became aware of gender discrimination in farming and endeavoured to break the shackles. They took an active interest in the cultivation of crops and promoted an indigenous variety of seeds. The adoption of organic farming practices led to reduced production costs of farming goods compared to farming with chemical inputs. Women were encouraged to start their kitchen gardens. This helped them produce vegetables for their daily meals. The surplus was sold in the local market, and the extra earnings



supplemented the family income.

Gradually, the advantages of organic seeds became apparent, and women farmers started exchanging seeds among themselves instead of purchasing from the market at a higher price. This also fostered team spirit among the women. It led to increased collaboration, and the

women started discussing the best methods for seed conservation and increased farm produce.

Woman farmer Savita Dattaray Lende also shares her experience. "I reside at Khandarmalwadi village in the Sangamner Block of Ahmednagar district. We live in a nuclear family setup. I can proudly say that I have developed holistically from this project. I learnt teamwork by working with other women in the self-help group. My self-confidence has also increased greatly. It also gives me immense pride to mention that our work through this project has given us much respect among the village community, which was missing before.

“

As climate change continues to exacerbate women's vulnerability and increase the gender gap, the feminist movement must look towards environmental efforts to save the planet and humanity.

The promise of equality gets further and further away with each rainfall, drought, or storm that comes due to climate change

”

My husband proudly tells everyone who sees our kitchen garden that this is only due to his wife's hard work. We (the self-help group) are also consulted by other male farmers in the village on the types of crops that are required to grow on their farm.”



Lata Sawant
Pimpalgaon, Matha Village

Securing a Healthy and Prosperous Future Through Seed Banks

I am a Beej Sakhi in my village, Pimpalgaon Matha. We have a land holding of around 5 acres where we cultivate vegetables, fruits and grains.

Sulabh International and Sodexo have started a seed bank in our village. Through this project, we have formed a self-help group in our village. We have 25 members as of now. Due to the seed bank, I can barter seeds with other women farmers in the village. I give them the seeds they need and vice versa. This process has allowed me to start a kitchen garden in my home garden. I grow various fruits and vegetables. This has improved my family's nutritional intake, especially my two schoolgoing children. Apart from my family's improved health, the kitchen garden has allowed me to save money, as earlier, we were spending ₹ 1000 per month on vegetables.

Initially, there was resistance from my family about my involvement in the seed bank project, but I convinced them by telling them about the benefits of having a seed bank. On seeing the results of the seed bank, they finally agreed that my decision was correct. They are also happy to see my personal growth and the leadership skills I have developed through this project. I am now much more confident while speaking with others about the project.

I thank Sodexo and Sulabh International for giving me this opportunity.



Project Details

Climate change is causing serious repercussions on agriculture and food security. It primarily affects populations from developing countries, particularly women, who depend more on agriculture for sustenance/livelihoods.

As climate change continues to exacerbate women's vulnerability and increase the gender gap, the feminist movement must look towards environmental efforts to save the planet and humanity. The promise of equality gets further and further away with each rainfall, drought, or storm that comes due to climate change.

Gender and environmental knowledge and practices interact. Gender and environmental relations are experienced and are an important part of knowledge production around gendered ecological processes.



A seed bank conserves indigenous and interspecies variation suited to the ecological niche.

It integrates on-farm conservation by engaging with women farmers of the farming community.

Benefits of a Seed Bank

- Conserves indigenous and interspecies variation suited to the ecological niche.
- Integrates on-farm conservation by engaging with women farmers of the farming community.



“

The project was an extremely enriching experience for us. It brought immense satisfaction to us as we always strived to eradicate hunger and malnutrition, overcome gender disparity and promote local entrepreneurship for community development. It was also a huge learning experience as discussions with the local women and farmers helped us gain a new perspective. Further, the project helped create a storehouse of organic produce that the onsite kitchens nearby could depend on

”

- A collection, selection and production of indigenous crop diversity.
- Ensures quality seed and planting material production.
- Minimises dependency on the public



Savita Pande

Sarpanch (Village Head), Pimpalgaon Matha Village.

I am the Sarpanch (Village Head) of the Pimpalgaon Matha village. Sulabh International and Sodexo have been implementing the seed bank project in eight villages in the

Sangamner block; my village is one of the eight. I am extremely happy with the results of the project in the first six months. The women trade seeds amongst themselves through which they have started kitchen gardens in their respective plots. It has allowed these families to consume nutritious food while also helping them save an average of ₹ 500-600 each, every month.

This project has also saved many endangered seeds from extinction and brought awareness about the importance of organic farming practices in my village as many farmers have decided to quit using chemicals in their fields.

One of the most important aspects of the project is empowering women through the formation of self-help groups. The Beej Sakhis have also developed leadership skills and now have the potential to lead the villages in the sustainable agriculture revolution.

I am very grateful that my village was chosen to be a part of this wonderful project. I hope we can develop this project even further in the coming months and years.



Dattaray Vitthal Lende, Khandarmalwadi Village, Sangamner Block, Ahmednagar District

Benefits of Indigenous Seeds and Organic Farming

I am a farmer in the Khandarmalwadi village of the Sangamner Block. I live with my wife Lata and our three children. We have agricultural land of about 1 acre and 68 gunthas, where one half is reserved for rain-fed crops while the other half is kept for irrigated agriculture. We also run a small dairy business to supplement our limited farming income. My wife helps me in my work, and together, we look after the farming and the dairy business. She also sells vegetables on the side to help bring in that much-needed income.

A few months ago, Sulabh International and Sodexo organised a women farmers' meeting for the first time in our village. My wife attended the same and came back to inform me about the agenda of the meeting. She told me about indigenous seeds and organic farming and their benefits on our health, our environment and also on our finances. She also told me that she is very keen on attending more such meetings in the future. While I appreciated her enthusiasm, I was apprehensive and told her that from my own farming experience, using chemical fertilisers and hybrid crops are the only way to make agriculture a profitable business in today's time. She still insisted on attending these meetings and

and private seed supply system and strengthens the farmer-to-farmer exchange system.

To take this further, we need support to provide infrastructure for storage facilities and develop a resource and training centre for the community.

Expected Impact: The ultimate aim is to sustain and maintain the seed banks while encouraging women farmers to grow indigenous and local crop varieties, which are the staple food of the area and resilient to climate change. We also want to help women achieve food security and empower themselves with food sovereignty.

Current Positive Impact: With our STOP Hunger funds this year, Sulabh has appointed 13 such Beej Sakhis that have trained and empowered 3293 women farmers in 16 nearby villages in two blocks (eight villages per block) in the interiors of Maharashtra. By adopting these agricultural best practices, the women





also wished to make practical use of the learnings. I respected her wishes and asked her to continue attending such meetings and see if we can make something out of it.

After a while, she joined a self-help group formed by Sulabh to start an indigenous seed bank in our village and a kitchen garden at home. They also conducted sessions by inviting expert speakers from different fields to discuss various topics relating to organic farming and the conservation of indigenous seeds with the women of the self-help group. Seeing such commitment made me rethink my views on organic farming and using indigenous seeds instead of hybrid ones available in the market.

I told my wife that I am also now interested in giving organic farming a try. We also successfully made the kitchen garden at our home. I was blown away with the results as it was very beneficial for our family's health and immunity, especially during the testing times of COVID-19 as it gave us the necessary vitamins needed to strengthen our immunity. It was also very cost-efficient as we were saving a big chunk of money that was previously used for purchasing fruits, vegetables, grains and lentils from the market that are now available in our house itself. We also saved money on seeds as getting indigenous seeds from the bank is way cheaper than buying

expensive hybrid seeds from the market. All this saved money can now be used in educating our three children, especially our two daughters, as we believe that educating our girls is the first step towards making them independent as they grow older.

I now fully understand the benefits of indigenous seeds and organic farming. I will make my farm completely chemical-free. I thank my wife for bringing me to this stage with her constant efforts. I am also happy that she has grown as a person through this project. Her self-confidence has shot up. She now not only speaks confidently in front of big crowds but also takes many new initiatives for her self-help group. She has made the saying, 'Nothing is Impossible' true in our lives. I will continue to support her. This is not only the case with my wife but also with the other members of the self-help group. All the women have grown tremendously through this project. This will help in developing our village as empowered and self-dependent women are a very critical part of any developed society or community.

I would also like to wholeheartedly thank Sulabh International and Sodexo for this project as it has not only helped the women but our entire village. I would like to request them to continue to support the development of our village through such projects.



have witnessed up to a 15 per cent increase in the yield. The project has led to households' average incomes inching to around ₹ 24-25K per annum.

A Sublime Experience for Sodexo

The project was an extremely enriching experience for us. It brought immense satisfaction to us as we always strived to eradicate hunger and malnutrition, overcome gender disparity and promote local entrepreneurship for community development. It was also a huge learning experience as discussions with the local



women and farmers helped us gain a new perspective. Further, the project helped create a storehouse of organic produce that the onsite kitchens nearby could depend on.

We are now striving to replicate and upscale this model in the next phase of the project in different areas of Maharashtra

and across the country. By encouraging sustainable livelihoods every day, we intend to carry on its legacy of creating a better tomorrow for the communities we operate. ■

Ashwin Bhosale is the Director of HSE & CSR, Sodexo Onsite Services, India.



BNY Mellon: Creating Ripples of Change in Society by Investing in Women

“Investing in women means investing in the people who invest in everyone else.” - Melinda Gates

Women's contribution to the economic development of any country is enormous. As India economically surges on the global stage, the extent of the contribution by Indian women, unfortunately, does not get the attention it deserves. We only need to look at local self-help groups and women's co-operatives to understand the positive impact they have on the rural economy. Empowerment is the key to sustainability in rural development. The role of women in rural development is significant as they not only comprise half of the rural population but are also the primary stakeholders in poverty alleviation and in establishing nutritional security at the household level.

Gender parity becomes essential for the holistic growth of rural society and the economy. Similarly, large numbers of women in the industrial and corporate workforce today have been active drivers of economic growth. However, there remain concerns that the percentage of female labour participation in the

workforce - a direct indicator of women empowerment - has gradually declined over the past three decades. The situation has only worsened during the pandemic.

As per a report published in 2021 by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), in 82



Dr Vidya Durai

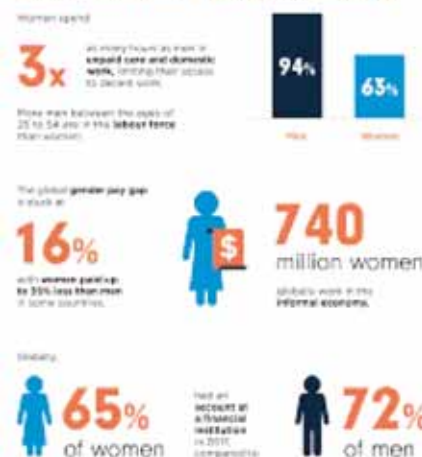
per cent of countries surveyed, women were disproportionately impacted by the social and economic burdens that

“

The entrepreneurial spirit of rural women has long been critical to their community's survival and sustainable socio-economic development. An entrepreneur maximises opportunities, comes up with innovative ideas and starts an enterprise in the market. Women are scientifically proven to be better than men at multi-tasking, stress management, calculated risk-taking, emotional intelligence, and profitable decision-making. Thus, the result of the entrepreneurial skill training of rural women can create an impact beyond measure

”

There will be aggravated impacts of COVID-19 for women already living on the economic margins



Source: UN

resulted from the pandemic, including loss of income and increased responsibilities for caring. The pandemic



Photo Credit: IFRC

kept 1.3 billion Indians inside their houses in an unprecedented lockdown. When millions of migrant workers had to walk back to their villages and were left with no source of income, women had to take up the responsibility of caring for children and sick relatives while earning to feed their families.

The entrepreneurial spirit of rural women has long been critical to their community's survival and sustainable socio-economic development. An entrepreneur maximises opportunities, comes up with innovative ideas and starts an enterprise in the market. Women are scientifically proven to be better than men at multi-tasking, stress management, calculated risk-taking, emotional intelligence, and profitable decision-making. Thus, the result of the entrepreneurial skill training of rural women can create an impact beyond measure.

Our CSR Strategy

At BNY Mellon, philanthropy is more than a legacy or philosophy. Our carefully targeted CSR programmes ensure that each act of kindness produces a significant difference in the life of a deserving individual. We have hosted diverse programmes and interventions pan India to develop rural women entrepreneurs. The programmes are designed to overcome the key challenges faced by rural women entrepreneurs such as lack of capital, short of adequate skills,

lack of resources, poor marketing and branding knowledge, lack of awareness on financial tools and lack of buoyancy or self-belief.

Keeping with this focus, in association with the National Agro Foundation, we have supported the 'Skill Development Training for Rural Women Entrepreneurs' programme since 2019. The initiative successfully trained and



empowered 1392 women in rural India across Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Kerala, and Puducherry. Women that have benefitted from this initiative come from various economically underprivileged areas and hail from remote villages where they worked as agricultural labourers or as employees under the MNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act). Through this skill-based training - Skill Development Training for Rural Women Entrepreneurs - we provided training to women on professional skills that enable them to join the skilled workforce and become proud owners of their very small-to-medium-size businesses. This allows the women financial independence and the ability to provide for their families, autonomy and a feeling of empowerment. These women are now connected with the world beyond their villages.

Along with National Agro Foundation, we identified and conducted over 600 training programmes across different skillsets like Lean Farming Technologies, Jute Bag Manufacturing, Bio-input Preparation, Nursery Management, Mushroom Cultivation, Poultry Farming, Tailoring, Food Safety Certification, etc., and trained women to master their respective fields.

Key Projects and Impact

Fifty economically underprivileged women from a remote village in Tamil Nadu who were further made vulnerable as they are destitute, physically challenged, and spinster women, were trained by National Agro Foundation between December 2019 and January

Extensive Benefits from Azolla Cultivation



Kasturi
Trainee from Lean Farming Technology Training Programme

“With BNY Mellon's support, I was trained at National Agro Foundation. They gave me training on Lean Farming Technologies. As part of the training programme, I learnt about Azolla cultivation. I am now cultivating it at my home. I use it as feed for poultry and goats and as an input to the paddy crops. Usually, while planting paddy, we need to employ 5 to 6 people to weed out. But Azolla controlled the growth of weeds. We used to get about 1.5 litres of milk from our cows. After using Azolla along with the feed, we now get about 3 to 4 litres of milk. I also use it as feed to the chickens. I thank BNY Mellon for conducting this training programme.”

2020 on tailoring and jute bag making, etc. On completing the training programme, they started earning through orders on school bags, lunch bags, etc. In the wake of the virus, the women found a more sustainable model. Using their newly acquired tailoring skills, they began to produce safety masks, 20,000 per week and secured orders for masks from the Government of Tamil Nadu and a corporate agency. This helped them relieve lockdown-induced economic stress on their families.

The training programme on tailoring at Kerala, as a part of BNYM-NAF monsoon floods relief, helped flood victims to recover from the trauma of heavy floods and gain vocational skills that helped them in creating additional income for the family, thus improving their overall socio-economic status.

A few of our trainees established various

agricultural units such as household poultry units, mushroom cultivation, organic inputs, bio-inputs, etc., and are supporting their family income through additional income from domestic sales.

We set up a Chilli Processing Unit at Ghorepatal Village in Pune District to benefit the farming community. We then trained five out of the twenty women volunteers to operate the unit.

Three out of 13 participants have bought their farm machinery through



“

When women succeed, the entire society benefits. It is time we tap into this talent pool with new aspirations and a commitment to empowering women. With equal rights, empowerment, and training, India's women will become the agents of change as they possess the ability to lead our nation towards a more sustained socio-economic ecosystem

”



Sivasankari

Trainee from Jute Bag Manufacturing Training Programme

Tailored for Success

“BNY Mellon and National Agro Foundation taught us to make jute bags. They taught us 11 models of jute bags. With our newly acquired skill, we have received a school order, a wedding order and other such orders that are keeping us busy as well as benefiting us. They also gave us sewing machines which are a great help to us in diversifying our work such as blouse stitching. We feel we are as good as the professional tailors. We are earning about INR 8000 per month through the support of BNY Mellon's training programme.”

government support after learning the applications and financial means available through the training programme on farm machinery.

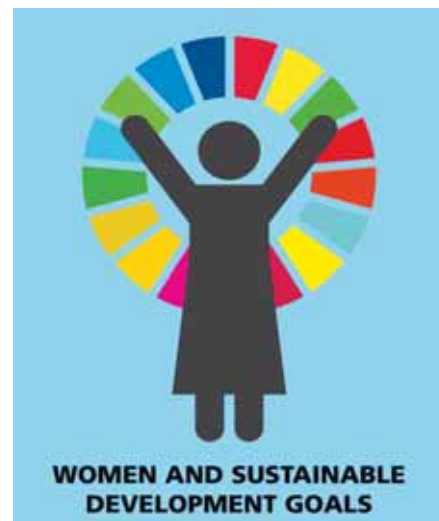
The women who underwent FoSTaC – a food safety training - were given a 2-year certificate upon successful completion to pursue their carrier in this field.

It is a humbling experience to witness the enthusiasm of these women as they take control and responsibility and refused to be defeated by the prevailing situation in the country. While the pandemic may have affected the whole world, the bitter reality is that it always affects certain sections of society disproportionately.

Vision for the Future

As rural women entrepreneurship is directly linked to Sustainable Development Goals (1) No Poverty, (4) Quality Education, (5) Gender Equality, (8) Decent Work and Economic Growth, and (10) Reduced Inequalities, it is essential to create more women entrepreneurs throughout the globe. And it is strategically more important for India to address the increasing unemployment rate, widening gender gap, and increasing digital divide, as all these are at the forefront of the solutions to the wicked social problems.

When women succeed, the entire society



benefits. It is time we tap into this talent pool with new aspirations and a commitment to empowering women. With equal rights, empowerment, and training, India's women will become the agents of change as they possess the ability to lead our nation towards a more sustained socio-economic ecosystem. We work with non-profit organisations and invest in initiatives to help others in need by concentrating on areas that fulfil the basic needs while also developing the workforce, thus making the community a better place to live. ■

Dr Vidya Durai is the Head of Philanthropy and Corporate Social Responsibility at BNY Mellon.



Dhatayani

Trainee from Vermicompost Preparation Training Programme

A Natural and Eco-friendly Approach to Farming

“I am very interested in natural agriculture. National Agro Foundation invited us for a training programme. They taught us how to prepare vermicompost. I can now make it myself at home. I use it for our farm and sell it at Rs 10 per kg. I have reduced using chemical inputs after using vermicompost. I wish to do nature-oriented farming and that is what I am doing now. This training was of great benefit to my home and our farm. I am glad to be a part of this programme. On behalf of my family, I thank National Agro Foundation and BNY Mellon for their timely help.”



Pernod Ricard India Foundation: Fostering Inclusion for Women to Accelerate Local Development

Gender equity is one of the most important prerequisites for a more economically prosperous, equitable and sustainable world. The UN SDG 5 for Gender Equality outlines some ambitious targets for gender equality, especially in the developing world; however, much remains to be done. According to Niti Aayog, women account for almost 50 per cent of India's population, yet they barely represent 30 per cent of the workforce. The divide is even more blatant when one looks at rural women in agriculture who represent 85 per cent of the workforce, but only 13 per cent of them are agricultural landholders, as highlighted by Oxfam. In the past few years, this subject has been under greater scrutiny and various government initiatives and engagements such as “Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao” have contributed significantly to building the momentum for action.



Sashidhar Vempala

That being said, corporate India needs to step up to the cause with a strategic vision and purpose to centralise women

and gender empowerment across the social impact space. At Pernod Ricard India, we envision transforming our



“

As per Oxfam, 60-80 per cent of food is grown by women. And yet, their work remains largely unpaid. In our Water, Agriculture and Livelihood (WAL) programme, we take a gender-contextual approach to create resilient communities; actioned into two main objectives. The first one focuses on enabling increased participation and ownership for women in agriculture and allied activities

”

The programme is also augmenting their disposable incomes to aid a better quality of life. We have supported over 400 women to create nano-horticulture and vegetable plots. Throughout those activities, increased participation and active decision-making ownership from women beneficiaries have been observed while also generating additional income for them and their families.

Key Numbers

3,124 women engaged in SHGs

Rs 29,23,635 sales revenue generated by women in MP

70 per cent increase in participation and decision-making ownership from women beneficiaries

+400 women supported with nano-horticulture and vegetable plots

Rs 20,000 to Rs 50,000 income increase through vegetable plots in women-hands

communities and accelerating local development near our plants and in areas of national priorities. Within our larger community transformation purpose, we believe that supporting women and all genders across all sectors is essential to unleashing the next wave of growth and development for the country. With various programmes across 19 States, our projects take a holistic approach and work with more than 1,25,000 rural women, girl children and women social entrepreneurs to encourage access to better education, social entrepreneurship, and ownership in agri-livelihood activities.

Empowering Rural Women to Step Beyond the Four Walls

As per Oxfam, 60-80 per cent of food is grown by women. And yet, their work remains largely unpaid. In our Water, Agriculture and Livelihood (WAL) programme, we take a gender-contextual approach to create resilient communities; actioned into two main objectives. The first one focuses on enabling increased participation and ownership for women in agriculture and allied activities.

This involves collectivising women as Women Producer Groups (WPGs) or



Self-Help Groups (SHGs) to transform local value chains or start micro-enterprises. For example, in Shivpuri, Madhya Pradesh, we are engaging with more than 2,300 women farmers under 100+ WPGs, where women have revolutionised the local groundnut and palash value chain with end-to-end control. With this activity, those women have been able to generate revenue of over Rs 29 Lakhs and almost Rs 80,000 profit per WPG.



Championing Change Bati Adivasi

As a small landholding farmer, Bati struggled with growing crops, weak market linkages and an unstable disposable income. Having lost her husband, she had – apart from caring for her land – to take care of her two sons and daughter by herself. Through traditional agriculture, Bati was financially struggling, as with uneven land and limited irrigation, she found it difficult to make ends meet to feed her family.

As part of the WAL programme in Shivpuri, Bati has built up strong competencies in horticulture management. She initially started with 60 Guava plants, followed by 35 Papaya trees. She has made profits out of this new agro-practice with fewer inputs. She is now confident that she can make more profits and lead a comfortable life. This fruiting season, she earned Rs 15,000 from Papayas, and she aims to earn Rs 1,000 from each plant.



women SHGs from the communities as machine operators.

Key Numbers

50 Water ATMs

+ 70,000 women impacted

“People had always been fetching water from tube wells. However, since the installation of the Water ATM, people have happily embraced it. Safe drinking water was a persistent problem earlier. But now, the Water ATM right near our homes has resolved our problems. I have been getting water from here and have asked other people to adopt this practice. We get one litre of water in just 30 paise and can take about 7-8 litres of water, every day, easily. The neighbourhood Water ATM is not only beneficial for us but also extremely affordable and sustainable.” ~ A programme beneficiary at Khurda, Odisha.

Safeguarding Menstrual Hygiene at Schools: Enabling the Girl Child to Continue her Education

There exists a wide variety of hardships preventing girl children from pursuing their education - ranging from dire financial family situations to lack of appropriate infrastructures related to menstrual hygiene. We have strived to ensure that students, especially girls, do not face infrastructural obstacles to continuing their education. We have built and renovated 13 schools to date. We have responded to calls for action from the State Governments in Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh to upgrade the menstrual hygiene facilities with free dispensers and incinerators provided at key government schools to ensure that no girl student stops coming to school.

Key Numbers

10 Government Schools: Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh

3,500 girl children impacted

Building World Class Infrastructure and Services for Inclusion

Neighbourhood Water ATMs for Rural Women

Our Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WaSH) programme encompasses various facets to minimise drudgery and costs, which disproportionately affect rural women. Our innovative Water

ATMs, with their unique “Hub and Spoke” model, serves clean drinking water right in the neighbourhoods of deprived communities, address the gap between the demand and accessibility to potable water, where it is most often women that are expected to bear the cost of transport. On top of that, the model also generates local employment opportunities by employing youth and





Providing Quality Primary Healthcare Services at the Doorstep of Rural Women



With Project Sanjeevani, we also address the lack of access to healthcare, emphasising preventive measures towards women, children, and the elderly most often left behind due to lack of mobility and affordability. The Mobile Medical Vans provides free doorstep preventive healthcare services. It has also led to awareness campaigns on different issues generally considered taboo – from reproductive, sexual and maternal health to preventing UTIs/STDs.

Key Numbers

15 mobile medical vans

200 villages | 9 States

1,11,576 women impacted

Removing Gender Barriers to Education and Employment

Pinki: Educating the Girl Child in Rural India



Pinki, our flagship programme to reduce gender disparities in education, aims at providing access to quality education to girl children across India, especially those coming from more vulnerable backgrounds. It offers scholarships to meritorious students and supports them throughout their journey. To date, the programme has enabled 4,012 girl children across India to continue their education.

Key Numbers

4,012 Pinkis educated since 2018-19

Fostering Employability for Women with Disabilities

In partnership with Sarthak Educational Trust, we aim at working with women with disabilities to create a diverse and inclusive workforce. We have already trained 400+ differently-abled women across 16 States, providing them with a safe and inclusive environment and placing them in suitable positions across various sectors.

Prathibha's Story of Change

Continuing education has been an uphill battle for Prathibha since she lost her hearing ability in the 7th Grade. With medical expenses related to hearing surgeries taking a toll on her family's financial condition, her academic career looked bleak. However, Prathibha has been resolute about not letting this become her story, and the PRIF scholarship programme has since then supported her journey. Apart from the financial support, the field team also provides career support and mentorship to keep her dream alive and kicking. Today, all her professors are convinced that she would comfortably pass the Maharashtra Public Service Commission (MPSC) exam.



Key Numbers

600 differently-abled women mobilised

201 differently-abled women trained

141 candidates placed

Beyond Gender: Creating a Trans-inclusive Workforce

The paradigm of gender equality has seen a sweeping shift in recent years to accommodate the discourse of seeing beyond gender binaries. All our programmes seek to include women as key stakeholders and decision-makers. However, it is our firm resolution to promote women and girls at the forefront and provide an empowering platform for all genders. In 2020, in partnership with Connecting Dreams Foundation, we launched a specialised programme to mainstream and open livelihood opportunities for 100 young and inspiring trans-persons in Delhi NCR.

Key Numbers

480 transgender persons mobilised
125 transgender persons trained
93 certified
6 trans-entrepreneurs groomed
15 individuals placed

Valentina: Motivated to Open Her Own Dance Studio



Valentina believes the professional edge course of the Career Progression Fellowship programme has increased her confidence in her abilities and talents. She is determined to take her dance talent forward and aims to do that by opening her dance studio.

Enabling Women Social Entrepreneurs To Do Good

With the vision of bridging the gaps between what keeps social enterprises



from reaching their true potential and generating tangible social development, we launched the Social Impact Incubator in 2018. The programme works exclusively for women through mentorship, networking, business advisory, incubation and, fellowship support. The first incubation centre at the IIM Calcutta focuses on community-centered social impact ideas and solutions exclusively from women entrepreneurs and women-led start-ups. The second one, in partnership with the CIE@IIIT Hyderabad, fosters deep-tech solutions and concepts situated around serving women as the core impact group.

Key Numbers

510 applications
Rs 6.1 Crore incubation funds
17 incubatees
6 Fellows
38 SDG targets impacted

Kat Katha's Journey of Turning the Red Light Area into "Street of Love"

Kat Katha began with the vision of ending forced sex work. Supporting women and children living in red-light districts, they aimed at enabling those people to live a life of their own choice and pursue their dreams with dignity,



ownership, and compassion. In almost ten years, they have worked with approximately 1,500 women and more than 300 children living across 85 brothels of GB Road in Delhi.

Their flagship initiative - Maitri Meals, is being incubated by us. The goal is to provide a platform to offer life choices to trafficked women in the form of life skills and sustainable livelihoods. Through cooking and literacy classes – amongst others – their goal is to disrupt the web of generational sex work. Providing a safe rehabilitation space, the women will be residing and running the Maitri Meals project.

Way Forward

Communities will remain at the core of our programmes. We will strongly endeavour to empower all genders, rural women and specially-abled persons by promoting rural women entrepreneurship and access to primary healthcare. We are enhancing our efforts towards the intersectional axes around Poverty Eradication (SDG 1), Food Security Enablement (SDG 2), Good Health and Well-Being for All (SDG3), Quality Education (SDG 4), Water, Sanitation & Hygiene (SDG 6), Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG 8). We will also bridge the skill gap to enhance employability for persons with disabilities and LGBT communities.

The decade to 2030 is extremely crucial in meeting the SDGs, and we, at Pernod Ricard India, are committed to playing a decisive role by inculcating a gendered lens across all our actions. ■

Sashidhar Vempala heads Sustainability and CSR at Pernod Ricard India. He comes with an overall experience of over 25 years working at reputed organisations like Ogilvy, Tata Teleservices, and Nokia. He is deeply passionate about shaping organisational sustainability cultures and systems, community-centred development and social impact business storytelling.



Nyaaya: Empowering Indian Citizens to Access Justice

According to the 2021 data released by the National Family Health Survey of India, for the first time in India's recorded history, the population of women has surpassed men. However, women empowerment remains a distant goal. Much needs to be done to understand and address the problems faced by millions of women in our country, especially those in rural areas. The National Commission for Women recorded a 46 per cent rise in complaints relating to violence against women in the first eight months of 2021. Education, health, domestic violence, gender divide, ignorance of their rights and entitlements, unequal pay, sexual abuse, early marriages, unequal property rights, abandonment. The list is endless and has a direct impact on every aspect of their lives.



Team Nyaaya

“

We work on initiatives with grassroots level organisations to make justice attainable to those needing it the most. Some of the recent campaigns on empowerment of women and the youth that we collaboratively built this year are #MyKanoon, #MeriBhiAwazSuno, #MeriZindagiMeraAdhikar and #NyaayaNaari

”

One of the biggest hurdles in creating more awareness is the lack of access to simple, reliable and actionable information about our legal rights. It is this void that we, at Nyaaya, have stepped in to fill with an innovative approach.

What is Nyaaya?

We are a free, open-access, digital resource that provides simple, actionable, reliable and accessible legal information to Indian citizens, helping them solve day-to-day legal problems. Our vision is to make Indian citizens aware of their rights to protect themselves, assert their rights and seek justice.

We provide legal information that is easily understandable and decipherable to the citizens and in a manner that is relevant to their specific needs and reality. We work towards creating a society where the rule of law is a real lived experience for everyone, and a lack of legal awareness does not lead to exclusion from access to justice.

We work on initiatives with grassroots level organisations to make justice attainable to those needing it the most. Some of the recent campaigns on empowerment of women and the youth



that we collaboratively built this year are #MyKanoon, #MeriBhiAwazSuno, #MeriZindagiMeraAdhikar and #NyaayaNaari.

These are just four of many initiatives created to empower women across cities, towns and villages of India, making them aware of their rights and explaining government schemes to them.

In the last year, our website has recorded over 4 lakh page views, 2.5 lakh visits, 2 lakh users, and an active online community of 90 thousand members. This emphasises how an initiative such as this is urgently needed in our country. We have collaborated with youth-centric platforms and grassroots organisations to create legal champions across all sections of Indian society.

#MeriBhiAwaazSuno - Empowering Underprivileged Communities

#Meri Bhi Awaaz Suno is an initiative

that touched the lives of many rural communities, encouraging them to speak up about all the problems they faced and creating avenues for problem-solving. Along with Gram Vaani, a social tech company that uses simple technologies and social context to design tools to impact communities, we provide simple, actionable and reliable legal content on rights and entitlements, health laws and employment laws. Through this campaign, we launched a series of eight audio episodes of three minutes each on Mobile Vaani (Gram Vaani's federated network of community media platforms). These episodes were a huge success. They had 13,929 unique users, 1,09,756 minutes cumulative listening duration and received 991 comments and additional 473 questions.

This initiative helped people in villages with no access to smartphones and the internet understand that everyone is a



“

We joined hands with Gram Vaani yet again in the #MeriZindagiMeraAdhikar campaign to focus on issues plaguing women at the grassroots, and to create awareness particularly about the laws that protect women from violence and abuse

”

rights bearer with the ability to demand enforcement of their rights. They can have their voice heard and ask questions without fear of reprisal. To be able to express their thoughts and articulate their grievances and challenges was immensely empowering for the community members, and in itself was a step towards bringing about effective change in society. The campaign was not only limited to generating awareness but also extended on ground hand-holding support. This fostered a unique model of encouraging agents of change from within the community. From facilitating access to pension dues to guidance on registering under the e-Shram scheme, stories from #MeriBhiAwazSuno speak volumes about the effectiveness of these initiatives and campaigns.

The initiative has impacted many women. We share stories of two women who were helped through the campaign:



Usha Kumari had not received her dues under the disability pension for over four months. Along with Mobile Vaani, we helped her identify the bottlenecks and connected her with the local Vikas Mitra who then assisted her in completing the necessary paperwork and expediting the disbursement of her pensions.

#MeriZindagiMeraAdhikar – Addressing Violence and Abuse Against Women

We joined hands with Gram Vaani yet again in the #MeriZindagiMeraAdhikar campaign to focus on issues plaguing women at the grassroots, and to create awareness particularly about the laws that protect women from violence and abuse.

Launched during the #16DaysOfActivism 2021, this is an ongoing awareness campaign on gender-based violence reaching those with minimal access to the internet or information in regional languages.

Meri Zindagi Mera Adhikar addresses all issues, rights and policies for action against offenders. It comprises audio episodes hosted by local legal champions who have been empowered with legal knowledge by Nyaaya.

#MyKanoon - Empowering the Youth in the Online Space

#MyKanoon campaign is created for generating awareness about issues such

as online violence, bullying and harassment of women while also addressing children's safety in online spaces, among many others. We run it in partnership with Instagram, where India's youth are spending time. It is designed with the insight that lack of awareness and information hinders young women when they need legal assistance. Awareness about cyber safety and the rights of internet users can help create a safer online space for everyone.

“We are committed to equipping the youth with adequate legal knowledge so that they can make informed legal action and interact with justice systems in India with confidence. We believe that informed youngsters can become legal champions to empower others who do not have access to legal information,” says Anisha Gopi, the Team Lead at Nyaaya.

In this campaign, young content creators prepared over fifty pieces of short and long-form content on topics such as online violence, bullying and harassment, child sexual abuse and children in conflict with the law. Aimed at simplifying legal information around the concept of being safe online, the



campaign is engaging and filled with actionable insights. It informs young women about the legal rights and protections available to them.

Since the launch of the campaign in November 2021, the content has recorded a cumulative reach of 6.6 lakh accounts and over 3 lakh views on Instagram.

A few comments from the engaged audience over the campaign highlight how Indian youth and women influencers are finding such efforts useful:

"You guys are doing God's work."

"Keep raising awareness."

A recent article by a popular digital media portal, Miss Malini, highlights: "With the help of this campaign, young users will be informed about Instagram's safety controls as well as help them to make informed legal steps and interact with the justice system accordingly."

#Nyaaya Naari - Empowering Women in Rural Sectors

Aggregating the experiences from campaigns like #MeriBhiAwazSuno and #MeriZindagiMeraAdhikar, we launched a campaign to empower women, particularly in rural areas, by making available actionable information on legal rights and explanations on how to enforce them.

Information on women's rights is available but often scattered, not accessible, nor easily understood. We



devised a strategy to overcome those hurdles and disseminate this information and awareness through four easy and user-friendly steps. The legal content has been categorised into:

- **Explainers** breaking down complicated legal rights documents and governmental schemes into short, accessible snippets
- **Interactive tools** providing information on both Central and State Government schemes, all in one place
- **Guides** providing step-by-step guidance on how they can access their rights, including eligibility and preconditions, and comprehend how the justice delivery mechanisms work
- **Audio and video content** along with infographics and posters to make it more accessible and easily understandable

We plan to cover a wide array of topics that will have a tremendous impact on all aspects of life. The focus will be to create

awareness that is essential to empower women and ensure that exploitation and abuses are eradicated. These topics range from education, finance, domestic violence and matrimonial rights, reproductive and sexual rights to property and employment rights.

To ensure that this vital information reaches a multitude of women, we will begin by making them available in Hindi, Kannada, and English and then expand to other regional languages. The content will be shared widely with the beneficiaries and made available to our audience through regional print and social media.

All these will considerably contribute to ensuring that women, particularly in rural areas, are brought into the mainstream, made active, empowered and equal citizens of India by being aware of their rights and opportunities. ■

Nyaaya was incubated at the Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy & is housed at the Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy, India's leading law and policy think-tank. Vidhi is a not-for-profit company registered under Section 8 of the Companies Act, 2013 (formerly Section 25 of the Companies Act, 1956). *Nyaaya* is one of the first organisations in India to focus on making the law accessible for non-lawyers, not only in English but also in Hindi and Kannada. The team consists of highly qualified lawyers from reputed institutions with a diverse work background in litigation, grassroots legal awareness work, training, content creation and legal research.





Swades Foundation: Empowering Rural Women for Holistic Rural Development

Indian rural women have silently woven the social and economic fabric of the rural economy. They have emerged as the greatest strength in managing daily household chores and working on the farms. However, their contributions are often unrecognised. The battles that rural women fight every day are difficult to comprehend for those living in the comfortable city lifestyle.

Challenges for Rural Women

With more than 189 million rural households in India, only 51 million have access to drinking water through taps installed in their house (Jal Jeevan Mission, 2020). They walk daily, for miles, to fetch drinking water and often compromise on the education of their elder daughter as she has to assist in carrying water for the daily requirements of the family. Despite the successful Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, many rural households still do not have toilets and

defecate in the open. For this, they either wake up before dawn or wait till dusk to relieve themselves in the dark to save themselves from the embarrassment, risking their health as they expose themselves to animal attacks and various infections. Along with these, the rigid culturally present norms force rural women to reap their maximum potential. Indian rural women have been the biggest casualty of the pandemic. While 25 per cent of rural women were in the workforce before the pandemic, the second wave caused job



Mangesh Wange

loss for 5.7 million rural women (<https://economicoutlook.cmie.com/>). These factors call for urgent upscaling of women empowerment efforts across the country to ensure that rural women stay

“

Playing the roles of farmers, labourers and entrepreneurs, rural women have a major role to play in the growth of the rural economy. Lack of resources, opportunities, social norms and attitude often holds back the potential of rural women. We implement all the programmes through the VDCs that create a positive atmosphere in rural communities and ensure women are equal partners in the development process for their families and village

”

strong and have the promising future they and the nation deserves. We also witness that many girls drop out of school or have high absenteeism because of poor infrastructure of drinking water and toilets.

Our Approach

We, at Swades Foundation, are a grassroots implementation organisation that visions for an empowered and poverty-free rural India where



communities are capable of transforming their lives. Our mission is to uplift one million rural lives out of poverty every five years through a holistic model of development across health, education, water, sanitation and economic development by creating a scalable,

replicable and community-centric model of sustainable development. We are currently working in the Raigad and Nashik districts of Maharashtra. The community is at the core of the process of this rural transformation. The implementation of our programmes is participatory as the community leads and plans their village development. This model ensures that the community receives end-to-end support to become sustainable with the programmes we implement.

Empowering Rural Women - Key to a Poverty-free Rural India

We are determined to sustainably exit the villages leaving behind a cadre of empowered rural community members who take charge of their village development. Although our dedicated programmes focus on women





holistic model of rural development, there were several stories of women in the villages of Raigad where the unavailability of water and toilets made life harder for them and the young girls. When the basic necessities like water and safe sanitation are unresolved, communities do not have the will or zeal to vision a better future for themselves.

We support the construction of drinking water schemes and ensure that clean potable drinking water reaches every

empowerment, women representation is an integral part of all interventions we undertake. One of the best examples to cite this is the 50 per cent representation of women in Village Development Committees (VDCs). VDCs are a group of empowered community members representing all members of the community who are the key stakeholders for their community development. With or without us, VDCs are determined to function for the welfare of their community. VDCs must have a 50 per cent representation of women. VDCs have emerged as a platform for women to participate and raise concerns in the decision-making process at the community level. Today, there are 1,200+ VDCs created by us involving 6,000+ rural women actively in the progress of their villages.

Role of Water and Sanitation in Women Empowerment

When we started implementing the





house in the village through taps installed in their home. We have supported 39,500+ households with drinking water taps impacting more than two lakh rural lives. To end the daily drudgery of relieving in open fields and ensure rural communities are free of open defecation, we supported the construction of 25,300+ toilets and made 1,337 villages free of open defecation.

Having clean drinking water and access to toilets has improved the health of the community members. We have supported infrastructure upgrades for drinking water stations and toilets in 219 schools. These interventions have improved the attendance of adolescent girls.

Sustainable Livelihoods to Empower Rural Women Self-Sufficient

Playing the roles of farmers, labourers and entrepreneurs, rural women have a major role to play in the growth of the rural economy. Lack of resources, opportunities, social norms and attitude often holds back the potential of rural women. We implement all the programmes through the VDCs that create a positive atmosphere in rural



communities and ensure women are equal partners in the development process for their families and village. With a positive and reinforcing environment in the village, rural women came forward and express their interests in livelihood programmes. Under our Livelihoods initiative, we aim to empower every household in rural families to achieve an annual income of a

minimum of Rs 2 Lakhs per annum through multiple livelihoods. Women are taking up more off-farm income opportunities like engaging in animal husbandry, cashew processing, and drumstick cultivation. Our support is not merely to hand over the projects but also to train rural women in technical information for the trade, helping them establish strong market linkages and

“

After our Drinking Water Scheme and the construction of individual household toilets, their lives took a turning point. The women now have ample free time as they have access to clean drinking water through taps installed in their homes. This has led to the formation of three Self Help Groups (SHGs). The women came together, developed kitchen gardens and started earning money by selling the vegetables. Our team also supported them in technical training to manage the crops and establish market linkages. In two years, they picked up, acquired loans for purchasing buffaloes and started dairy farming

”

continuous support through animal health check-ups.

There are many situations where our team successfully converted challenges into opportunities for the villagers. For example, when we faced the challenge of lack of veterinary services for our goat and poultry programme, our team worked to develop local women as Pashu Sakhis or Livestock Nurses to ensure success and sustainability. Under this initiative, we trained women within the community to become caretakers for animals and become entrepreneurs. We provided the women of rural Raigad, who had no source of earning livelihood other than toiling the whole day as farm labourers, an opportunity to become Pashu Sakhis. The programme is doing well and is ensuring timely care of the animals in the remote locations of the district.

Rajya Pawar belongs to the Adivasi community. She took up this programme and underwent training and the capacity to learn about various measures required to take care of goats. Today, she serves as a doctor for goats in her village and the adjoining ones. Before becoming a Pashu Sakhi, she also took the goat rearing programme wherein we supported her with two goats. She now has 18 goats, each having a market value of ₹10,000 to ₹12,000.

Rajya is now serving her community with timely treatment to the goats as well as working as an entrepreneur. Swades has trained her to business in alignment with the goat treatment. She prepares goat manure - pashukhadya – a nutritional fodder for goats and other such allied activities. Recently, she sold goat manure



worth ₹15,000. She earns ₹2000-₹3000 monthly by providing treatments, along with the asset value of goats worth ₹2 Lakhs. There are 33 women Pashusakhis working successfully in Raigad. Pashu Sakhi as a programme has also provided tribal women dignity and respect in the community.

Empowering Self Help Groups (SHG) and Women-led Enterprises

Recently, I had one of the most inspiring experiences of how women are providing a positive, sustainable change in the lives of the entire village. For years, this group of women in the Angrekond village of Raigad district spent most of their time carrying water from stream to home. They complained of physical and mental stress and found no time to invest in any income-generating opportunity. After our Drinking Water Scheme and the construction of individual household toilets, their lives took a turning point. The women now have ample free time as they have access to clean drinking water through taps installed in their homes. This has led to the formation of three Self Help Groups (SHGs). The women came together, developed kitchen gardens and started earning money by selling the vegetables. Our team also supported them in technical training to manage the crops and establish market linkages. In two years, they picked up, acquired loans for purchasing buffaloes and started dairy



farming. They are currently planning of starting a papad business. They have been practising this for the last two years, and today, they earn around ₹2,40,000 annually.

We ensure that women have reliable support in their journey towards independence and making a mark for themselves. The women of Angrekond are now skilled in leadership, financial management and thinking beyond the boundaries of their village.

The women call the SHGs 'bachat ghat' which translates to 'savings group'. This serves only half the purpose of creating SHGs. We firmly believe that the role of SHGs is more than savings. There has to be a focus on running an enterprise and generating income. With this intent, we support SHGs in their formalisation, technical training, financial literacy and market linkages. Under formalisation, we have helped in obtaining Udyog Aadhaar and food licenses. Under capacity building, we conduct dashasutri (financial literacy and the objectives of SHGs) training, and lastly, for market linkages, we have linked the SHGs to farm2business organisations, conducted exhibitions at prominent places and trained on best practices of the value chain.

We are currently involved with 178 SHGs. Few SHGs are linked to Bharatrath – a farm2business marketplace dedicated for the SHGs. 40+ SHGs have availed food licenses, and 50+ have availed Udyog Aadhaar. It is also worth noting that livelihood programmes such as drumstick cultivation, poultry and goat rearing, generally provided at an individual level, are now customised and offered as an entrepreneurial opportunity for the SHG groups.

Digital Empowerment for Women

I truly believe that digital empowerment for women is a lesser tapped opportunity and was a great learning for us during the pandemic. We observed that many rural women adapt and embrace digital platforms faster. With more approximately 49 per cent of rural women having access to a mobile phone, which is only increasing, it can benefit rural



women through strategic digital interventions. During the lockdown, when we could not reach our community members, we initiated Digital Swades - to bridge the information gap among communities on various subjects using the power of video conferencing platforms. Today, Digital Swades conducts online sessions, with a special focus on children, youth and women. We see very high participation among women for sessions related to entrance exam preparation, SHG marketing, and health-related concerns. Witnessing the active participation of women, we are planning to expand Digital Swades across Maharashtra, taking up pressing issues of concern for most of the rural communities.

Swades Mitra - Empowered Community Health Volunteers

Although ASHA workers and ANMs are

available, the remoteness and dispersed geography of Raigad with small hamlets makes it difficult for government services to reach during critical moments. To address this, we created Swades Mitras - a strong cadre of empowered community health workers who serve as a vital link between the community and various public and private health facilities. They provide paramedical aid to the villagers ensuring the last mile reach of essential health services. To provide paramedic aid to the community, we provide Swades Mitras with a medical kit comprising essentials like a thermometer, blood pressure equipment, medicines for viral fever, a first-aid kit for wounds, an oximeter, and others. Swades Mitras took an exemplary lead during the pandemic and helped contain the spread of COVID-19 in their villages. They mobilised community members to inoculate and led to successful COVID-19 vaccination of



“

We at Swades Foundation are very proud and happy to see a clear scalable, and successful way forward for the holistic development of rural India. This model is sustainable and fruitful because rural women are empowered. Our 360-degree community-centred approach helps women become part of the solution and enable them to lead this positive change. Its success depends largely on creating a can-do attitude in rural women

”

more than 32,000 rural community members in Raigad.

Ordinary women have now become Swades Mitras. They are equipped with the proper knowledge, wear a uniform and carry a medical kit. They are now looked upon with respect and are a significant part of the community. These leadership roles have ensured a woman's rightful place in society. To date, we have



1,831 Swades Mitras serving nearly a population of above 3.5 lakhs.

Shalini Vilas Chafe from Chiklap village in Shrivardhan joined the Swades Mitra Programme in 2014 and has dedicated her time to ensuring the village members lead healthy and happy lives. She is now a master trainer in Shrivardhan Block and has trained 26 Swades Mitras. Her role as a Swades Mitra has ensured the residents of her village are cataract-free.

Creating a Force of Women Leaders with a Can-Do Attitude

Besides these programmes, we are continuously working on building a mindset that enables community members, especially women, to believe

in a promising future and work towards it. Communities often struggle with hopelessness and accept whatever fate has in store for them. They feel that things cannot be changed. Changing this mindset is a continuous process, which we feel is essential to be adopted by all non-profits.

We at Swades Foundation are very proud and happy to see a clear scalable, and successful way forward for the holistic development of rural India. This model is sustainable and fruitful because rural women are empowered. Our 360-degree community-centred approach helps women become part of the solution and enable them to lead this positive change. Its success depends largely on creating a can-do attitude in rural women.

This can-do attitude is essential for the success of all development programmes and results in truly empowered women. It changes the perspective of rural women and builds hope, something which we at Swades call "Giving up of Mental Poverty". Through experience, we observe that when women are determined to transform their life, they demonstrate leadership by collaborating rather than competing and building harmonious relations that benefit the entire community. Empowering rural women is an inspiring journey worth taking. ■

Mangesh Wange is the CEO of Swades Foundation.





Equipping Young Girls With Skills to Develop Them Into Confident, Empowered Leaders of Tomorrow

The term 'empowerment' comes with a certain amount of historical weightage when put in the context of women. The United Nations' Third World Conference on Women in Nairobi in 1985 defined Women Empowerment as a redistribution of social and economic powers, and control of resources in favour of women. Coming together to promote gender equality and strengthen women's rights is essential for sustainable development and aligns with the UN Sustainable Development Goal #5 - Gender Equality. According to the Gender Vulnerability Index (GVI), just two years ago, two-thirds of all illiterate people were women, and more than 65 per cent of people living in the most extreme poverty globally, were women and girls.

As per a report on a nationwide study conducted by the National Statistical Office (NSO), India's countrywide female literacy rate is 70.3 per cent, while the male literacy rate is estimated at 84.7 per cent. The female labour participation rate in India fell to 16.1 per cent during the pandemic.

Women Empowerment is crucial to address this great disparity. Education can be the great equaliser as it enables women to respond to day-to-day

challenges more effectively, defy gender roles traditionally ascribed to them, and, therefore, change their lives.

Uplifting through Education

At Embassy, we believe that education plays a powerful role in providing women with the knowledge and skills they require to excel in their lives.

Our vision is to empower students at government schools with skills for self-development and future employability



Shaina Ganapathy

through holistic and innovative learning programmes. This aligns with our belief that empowering women is key to our nation moving forward; no nation can have a strong economy without the active participation of women.

We began supporting government schools in 2012. Our education

“

At Embassy, we believe that education plays a powerful role in providing women with the knowledge and skills they require to excel in their lives.

Our vision is to empower students at government schools with skills for self-development and future employability through holistic and innovative learning programmes. This aligns with our belief that empowering women is key to our nation moving forward; no nation can have a strong economy without the active participation of women

”

interventions include learning support in English and Mathematics through computers, life skills and sports integrated into the existing school schedule. These programmes are boosted by various extracurricular activities targeted at development on a

“When I was in primary school, I would stay in the background as I was too scared to talk and express myself. I did not have the skills required to cope with life. As we grow, so will our confidence. With this course, I have changed considerably. I have come forward because I realise that what I make of my life is in my hands. I used to think that boys come first before girls, but after joining this school, I feel that girls too should come forward. Why should they stay back? There is no difference between boys and girls when they need to express themselves. I am not going to look back. I will keep moving forward. I am going to participate in everything without fear and keep growing.”



Sufiya Banu, a former student of Government High School, Pottery Town and a member of the COLA Programme.

comprehensive level where students are exposed to social and emotional learning experiences.

We mentor the students; provide them career guidance, scholarship opportunities, counselling, and work placements. As they leave school, we aim to fulfil our mission of ensuring inclusive educational opportunities through our Scholarship Programme.

A continuing issue we face in our country is the lack of importance given towards

educating the girl child. It is almost instinctively assumed that young girls do not need to be educated beyond primary school and will follow the dictum of domestic labour or get married. According to the National Domestic Workers' Movement, nearly 90 per cent of domestic workers in India are women or girls, ranging from ages 12 to 75; an estimated 25 per cent among them are below the age of 14. Most tasks such as cooking, washing, and cleaning are traditionally seen as women's work and considered subservient in nature.

Additionally, a lower socioeconomic background comes with several mental restrictions when it comes to aspirations – either the youth are prevented from dreaming big because they do not have the means to achieve their goals, or they have no idea of the variety of career paths that are available to them.

Our alumni programme - Colours of Life Academy (COLA), was founded in 2012 with support from our NGO partner - Colours of Life. This programme is for students, particularly girls, who have graduated or left Embassy-adopted government schools but would like assistance in terms of fees for higher studies, extra tuition, mentorship, and career guidance.



Programmes such as this enable young girls who cannot fulfil their education because of economic or social issues to achieve their aspirations through constant and sustained support. They also offer hands-on experiences, like visits to our Head Office and other partner offices in our business parks to give them an idea of the plethora of job roles they can consider striving.

Recent studies show that over 50 per cent of school-going adolescents have behavioural and emotional problems. As a result, absenteeism is always on the rise. There is a lack of discipline and hygiene and drastic drops in academic performance. To combat these issues and develop confidence amongst the girl students, we - and our partners - LXL Ideas and Colours of Life - created a Life Skills programme for government school students. The course includes components in leadership, public awareness, and talent development, creating opportunities for students to discover and showcase talents, solve educational and personal problems and observe positive changes in their behaviour.

The programme helps students foster a culture of caring, social and emotional learning, motivation, and mental and emotional well-being, which goes a long way in facilitating personal growth – a necessity to climb the metaphorical ladder in any career. Ninety-two per cent of our government school Principals noticed a positive behavioural change in students after the introduction of the Life Skills programme, followed by 69 per cent of Principals feeling that the counselling centres had an influential impact on their students.

Skilling

We partnered with Technique Control Facility Management (TCFM) and Mentric Solutions to curate a Facility Management Skilling Programme for government school students. The programme aims at enhancing employment opportunities and arming our alumni with the skills and knowledge to join the workforce. Upon completing a four-month training course out of a state-of-the-art practical training centre customised by TCFM, the upskilled students were awarded well-paying jobs in the Embassy Group and its partner organisations.

Enabling young girls to find job opportunities and making them monetarily stable gives them certain freedoms they are far less likely to have otherwise.

To date, we have provided jobs for 13 alumni from our government schools within Embassy and TCFM, with an additional 16 students currently being placed. We are now mentoring 22 girls, and 73 of our alumni are working in IT, real estate, facilities management, tailoring, and beauty parlours.

Empowering women also means equipping them with the tools they need to have power and control over their own lives. Women require the possibility to choose what they want to do and give them a sense of ownership and accountability. To facilitate this, we offer funding to young girls who want to join Yuvalok



Foundation's six months Skill Training Tailoring Programme. At the end of the training, the girls are equipped with the skills and certification to join a garment factory or start their small tailoring business. We also give them a new sewing machine once they complete the course. Six of our COLA students have been attending the programme for the last two months.

Health and Infrastructure

The gender ratio in our country is skewed as the polarity is leaning more towards males than females. Our patriarchal society leaves little room for females to have opportunities to study compared to their male counterparts. Most often, the ones enrolled in school do not continue to pursue their education for several reasons. Shortage of safe and sanitary bathrooms and washing facilities is one of the leading factors preventing girls from attending school. To combat this, we provide sustainable infrastructure facilities with the help of our corporate partners that include bathrooms and handwash stations with the provision of clean water and soap. Our engagement goes beyond building

“

A lower socioeconomic background comes with several mental restrictions when it comes to aspirations – either the youth are prevented from dreaming big because they do not have the means to achieve their goals, or they have no idea of the variety of career paths that are available to them

”



“After joining this training programme, I have learned a lot of new things. It helped enhance and improve my skills, my behaviour and my attitude. The trainers are amazing and teach us very well.”

Raziya Banu
Mentric Skilling Development Trainee

these resources and on to the continual maintenance of 19 government schools.

A research documentary filmed in 2019 threw light on school drop-out rates in India. About 23 per cent of girls drop out of school annually after they begin menstruating due to a lack of sanitary napkins and overall hygiene awareness. Lack of reproductive education leaves 71 per cent of girls unaware of what takes place in their bodies during menstruation.

As part of our health initiatives, we regularly provide health kits to government school students. These kits contain health and oral hygiene products. In September 2021, we distributed 23,460 sanitary napkin packets with the health kits in our government schools in Bangalore.

Pandemic Causalities

The COVID-19 pandemic had life-altering effects worldwide, but the hardest hit were people living on the lowest rung of the socio-economic ladder. As schools started to shut following quarantine and lockdown protocols, the reliance on EdTech increased exponentially, and online classes became the new normal. It was a huge problem for government school students, mainly because they lack the resources.

The families of those who attend government schools often only have one multimedia device, which is less likely to be given to their girl children to use for online classes, especially if they have school-going brothers. In the

northern district of Bangalore, headmasters and headmistresses of government schools report that it is





“It is extremely heartening to see corporates such as Embassy providing a model for partnering with the government in providing an equitable education to our underprivileged children. We are very pleased to renew this meaningful partnership to strengthen our existing education system and hope such initiatives encourage other corporates to join us.”

Shri. S.R. Umashankar, IAS
Principal Secretary to Government,
Primary and Secondary Education,
Government of Karnataka.

“

Empowering women also means equipping them with the tools they need to have power and control over their own lives.

Women require the possibility to choose what they want to do and give them a sense of ownership and accountability

”

difficult to carry out online lessons in this regard.

Additionally, many of the families in Bangalore had moved back to their villages where they were hard to reach. The migration became a roadblock between the teachers and the students. In collaboration with our NGO partner, Colours of Life, we assisted our government schools through a digital engagement platform called Sputnik. The project aimed to supplement the Department of Education's online learning channels by delivering engaging academic activities to students utilising simple technology platforms. This initiative ensured there was some degree of syllabus continuity during the pandemic. We were able to reach 3,533 students.

Our NGO partner, Room to Read, collaborates with local governments, schools, communities and families to support girls to reach their full potential. We support them with their Literacy Programme libraries in Karnataka and Maharashtra.

The programme offers strategies to support distance learning that proved successful at the outset, such as creating and sharing hard copy learning materials, providing literacy content through different modes such as radio and TV, sharing our curriculum and Literacy Cloud with teachers, schools, the government, and providing individual remote and in-person mentoring and read-alouds to a myriad of students.

Room to Read also runs a Girls'

Education programme through the Literacy Programme libraries project wherein digital content is created for adolescent girls, parents, teachers and wardens to provide thought-provoking content for learning, including newsletters in Hindi, Telugu and Marathi, worksheets, and podcasts.

These components are curated to help girls develop a broader perspective on diverse topics from science to superwomen and practice and reflect on life skills on their own.

As we work towards building stronger and more equitable communities, it is crucial to realise that the key to achieving women empowerment in India requires education from the ground up and a buy-in from all stakeholders. It is vital that corporates that can initiate powerful conversations and spur concrete solutions prioritise providing opportunities for young girls to pursue their education and a career of their choice, regardless of their social, economic or cultural restrictions.

We believe in the power of collective action. Harnessing the strength of our corporate and NGO partners towards achieving the goals we have in common ensures that we are laying a firm foundation for continual progress. ■

Shaina Ganapathy is the Head of Community Outreach of Embassy Group.





Safe Water Network: Turning Women Into Changemakers and Entrepreneurs

Data-driven, decentralised Small Water Enterprises of Safe Water Network empower women by improving access to household water and enhancing their economic participation in the water sector. The model is ready for broad-scale replication.

India is home to 16 per cent of the global population, but it has only 4 per cent of the world's freshwater resources. Its wells, ponds, and tanks are drying up at an accelerating rate due to overexploitation and unsustainable consumption. Groundwater in over 250 of its 700-odd districts remains at a critical level. Repeated droughts and climate change further exacerbate water stress.

Water contamination is another cause of significant concern. Over 70 per cent of surface water sources in the country are contaminated by human, animal, and industrial waste. About 100 million

people lack access to safe drinking water. Estimates claim that as much as 70 per cent of India's disease burden is related to either water or sanitation.

Water supply, especially in rural areas, is not reliable. Piped water supply is still a distant dream. And owing to factors like lack of maintenance, operational controls, and unsustainable sources, a significant portion of water systems in villages are dysfunctional.

It's a Women's Problem

India's water woes affect more women than men. Like cooking, water collection



Poonam Sewak

is considered a woman's job. Collecting water becomes a time-consuming and arduous task with the nearest water

“

The imbalances in gender roles continue to undermine women's interests and deprive them of their rights. Water equity has a direct bearing on gender equity. Though women do the entire water work, there are rarely informal technical and managerial jobs in the water sector. In India, women account only for 17 per cent of India's labour force in the Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene sector

”

source about 30 minutes away by foot. Carrying heavy water vessels for long distances is both physically demanding and damaging. A UNICEF report calculates that women in water-deprived households in countries like India spend over 250 minutes per day on water tasks. The time spent on water collection should

ideally go to their productive work or education.

The imbalances in gender roles continue to undermine women's interests and deprive them of their rights. Water equity has a direct bearing on gender equity. Though women do the entire water work, there are rarely informal technical and managerial jobs in the water sector. In India, women account only for 17 per cent of India's labour force in the Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene sector.

Women in Water Sector

Women have unique knowledge about water resources. Equal representation of women in leadership roles in the management of water bodies creates better social and economic impact. The involvement of women in water governance paves the way for gender-inclusive water policies, improves sustainability, and addresses women's concerns. A pragmatic approach to meaningfully engaging women in the water sector is inevitable for the country to scale up and ensure resilience in the water supply. Various studies from across Asia and Africa are consistent in their findings that women's engagement boosts the effectiveness of water projects on many fronts.



Low Tech, High Touch

In this context, we at Safe Water Network (SWN), embarked on setting up data-driven and decentralised Small Water Enterprises (SWEs) in rural India. Our first functional water station commenced operation in 2010. Our primary objective



is to train local communities to operate and maintain a convenient and reliable safe water supply at a nominal price.



“

Women have unique knowledge about water resources. Equal representation of women in leadership roles in the management of water bodies creates better social and economic impact. The involvement of women in water governance paves the way for gender-inclusive water policies, improves sustainability, and addresses women's concerns. A pragmatic approach to meaningfully engaging women in the water sector is inevitable for the country to scale up and ensure resilience in the water supply

”

However, in 2016, we introduced a crucial element to the equation: expanding the role of women in the water sector.

Under the brand name - iJal, we initiated locally-owned and operated water treatment and dispensing units. The water they produce is affordable, and the water supply is reliable. These units have different ownership models: they are operated as community-managed entities or social enterprises. iJal stations have a critical mass of customers and generate revenue sufficient to cover operating costs, repairs, and routine maintenance. As locally self-sustainable models, these enterprises have the resources to meet their monthly operating expenses and generate local livelihood for the operator, entrepreneur, etc.

iJal enterprises usually draw water from locally available resources. They can run on solar power and thus serve even off-grid communities. A critical entity that ensures the operational excellence of water stations is the 'Field Service Entity' (FSE). Located in every geographic cluster, FSEs provide technical support in the operations and maintenance of the stations. Besides, the spare parts are locally available. Since they have 24x7 technical support from qualified technicians, the downtime is less than 2 per cent.

The water stations are enabled for remote monitoring using satellite communication. They collect data 24x7. The data is transmitted to operators in real-time to address technical issues and prevent breakdowns. Each water station pays a service fee to Field Service Entities. They also contribute to a 'Sustainable Fund' for long-term asset renewal. The enterprises issue RFID cards for customers and accept e-Payments. The water is dispensed automatically. Members across the team use mobile phones and tablets for operations and communications.

We have evolved water quality protocols

with the support of Underwriters Laboratories, a global and independent safety science organisation. The team is well-trained and equipped to maintain





the established quality standards. Enterprises across clusters strictly adhere to these tested protocols and consistently achieve water quality that meets the national standard.

The benefits to society are tangible. Families that consume iJal water can reduce their medical expenses as the rates of children and elders falling sick have come down. School absenteeism of girls in the local communities is drastically reduced.

Empowering Women the Safe Water Network Way

The entire project is based on multiple and cross-sectoral collaborations with private and government agencies, besides the local community, at various levels - from design to implementation. These partnerships help us achieve scale.

At present, we have about 350 water

stations in four States - Telangana, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh. Every day, around three lakh people buy water from the iJal network. Most of the water stations are owned and operated by women social entrepreneurs. There are nearly 200 women that are now part of the iJal value chain.

As managers, women from the local community own and manage iJal water stations that house automatic water treatment units - Water ATMs. These social entrepreneurs in the iJal value chain employ operators and manage the enterprise with technical and managerial support from us. Women trained in operations and management of iJal Water ATMs work as field executives. Their job involves supporting and monitoring the operators of Water ATMs. Women are employed as Community Mobilisers. Their role is to create awareness among local residents about using safe water and enrolling them as customers. They also champion the cause of safe water usage and promote healthy water behaviour. Women operators take care of the day-to-day operations of the water units and the business of the water enterprises. Our value chain also has women retailers who sell the treated water from their shops and houses for a margin. They help enhance



“

As managers, women from the local community own and manage iJal water stations that house automatic water treatment units – Water ATMs. These social entrepreneurs in the iJal value chain employ operators and manage the enterprise with technical and managerial support from us. Women trained in operations and management of iJal Water ATMs work as field executives. Their job involves supporting and monitoring the operators of Water ATMs. Women are employed as Community Mobilisers. Their role is to create awareness among local residents about using safe water and enrolling them as customers. They also champion the cause of safe water usage and promote healthy water behaviour

”

access to water in a given locality. Some of the women have co-invested in the programme, becoming entrepreneurs.

What Makes SWEs Tick

Some of the critical factors that contribute to the success of iJal are consumer participation in buying their daily water in a 20L can, locally operated and maintained iJal station by the operators and Field Service Entity. Coupled with technology application in training through audio-video e-Modules, automatic dispensing, remote

“

Transforming women from mere water collectors into water managers is a multidimensional challenge. It involves strategies to motivate and mobilise them. We evolved a unique framework of the QUIT technique that stands for Question, Undo, Involve, and Trust. Through campaigns, women are encouraged to question barriers and stereotypes around their roles. We organise meetings and invite local leaders to give motivational talks. We also organise activities to encourage women to free themselves from age-old attitudes, norms, and behaviours. With technical and life skills training, they gain self-confidence

”

monitoring, and digital payment, it increases the scale. The expansion is always based on geographic clusters that enable the project to achieve economies of scale and develop a cost-effective supply chain. There is an unwavering commitment to building capacity in local communities. There is a solid structure for extending operational support.

The solution believes in customisation. The plants are customised for the local conditions and context. For instance, we assess water sources to understand the prevalence of contaminants in raw water specific to the location and designs suitable solutions.

Above all, the project regards people not as beneficiaries but as consumers. The emphasis is on self-sustainability. The idea is to enable the units to generate income for owners while providing the community with access to a safe, affordable, reliable water supply.

Marketing and Training

We run marketing campaigns on health outcomes and invest in the education and training for its team. We hand-hold social entrepreneurs, primarily women, and engage them right from the design stage. Our multi-functional expert team assists the women in site selection, construction, and water sourcing. Experts also provide operators and other staff training and tools



in water treatment, maintenance, performance diagnosis, and auditing.

We have a training e-Toolkit called iSWEET – Digital Safe Water Enterprise Entrepreneur Toolkit. It has ten modules and 63 tools to train in Water ATMs' operation and management. The project seeks a more significant role and involvement of women in understanding, creating, deploying, and operating the water services.



Women are empowered to make decisions in managing the SWEs. They gain financial literacy, operational knowledge, and managerial skills.

Effective Leadership Rani Barukaum



Meet Rani Barukaum, the leader of a local Self-Help Group named Divya, in Ambedkar Nagar, a small settlement in Medak district of Telengana.

As a young mother, Rani watched her two young children frequently fall ill after drinking contaminated water. For many years, there was no water treatment in the village, and boiling and filtering the water failed to solve the problem. She urged her community to invest in an iJal station from Safe Water Network as a way to reduce waterborne illnesses.

Rani now leads consumer engagement programmes and hopes to enrol every member of her community. She passionately conducts water quality tests at her neighbours' homes using field kits that test for total dissolved solids - all while tirelessly explaining the virtues of safe water, personal hygiene, and sanitation.



Leading from the Front VijayaLakshmi



Vijaya led the organisation of community education and engagement programmes in her area. Over time, her unparalleled organisational skills earned her a promotion to a Field Executive position as an iJal Water Station Cluster Coordinator.

"I never doubted that I could lead a team of male executives. All I needed was an opportunity." Now Vijaya manages three field executives and a portfolio of 56 iJal Water Stations.

Traditionally, women in India do not significantly influence the formal labour market - be it in water or any other sector. The prevailing societal mindset does not readily acknowledge women's potential and their role as changemakers. Most rural families accuse working women of neglecting household duties such as raising kids, maintaining the house, and looking after the elderly. Women themselves usually lack confidence and the necessary vocational skills. They fear jobs, especially those involving technical skills. These factors can explain why women account only for 26 per cent of the workforce in India. While the global average of women's contribution to the GDP of their country is 37 per cent, it is still 17 per cent in India.



Hence, transforming women from mere water collectors into water managers is a multidimensional challenge. It involves strategies to motivate and mobilise them. We evolved a unique framework of the QUIT technique that stands for Question, Undo, Involve, and Trust. Through campaigns, women are encouraged to question barriers and stereotypes around their roles. We organise meetings and invite local leaders to give motivational talks. We also organise activities to encourage women to free themselves from age-old attitudes, norms, and behaviours. With technical and life skills training, they gain self-confidence.

calls for innovative perspectives. The team that conceived the market-based water solution comprised of technical, financial, health, and development experts. We have prepared a set of manuals and toolkits to share the knowledge and expertise in the conceptualisation, deployment, and operation of these small water enterprises. They explain the step-by-step process of engaging the communities - especially women, to own and operate SWEs successfully. Under the USAID-supported programme working with Safe Water Enterprise partners, the programme has scaled up to 11 States and 20 cities. With broad-scale replication of this data-driven and market-based solution, the water-stressed Indian communities can acquire a reliable solution for water supply and achieve economic participation and, thus, empowerment of women sustainably and equitably.

Overcoming Barriers

But there are many social, political, and institutional obstacles for women to come out of their homes and take up technical and managerial jobs in the water sector.



Hence, transforming women from mere water collectors into water managers is a multidimensional challenge. It involves strategies to motivate and mobilise them. We evolved a unique framework of the QUIT technique that stands for Question, Undo, Involve, and Trust. Through campaigns, women are encouraged to question barriers and stereotypes around their roles. We organise meetings and invite local leaders to give motivational talks. We also organise activities to encourage women to free themselves from age-old attitudes, norms, and behaviours. With technical and life skills training, they gain self-confidence.

Ready for Replication

Making women central to water management is the need of the hour. It

Poonam Sewak is the Vice President – Program & Partnerships at Safe Water Network.

CSR Mandate



SUBSCRIPTION FORM

Yes, I would like to subscribe to CSR Mandate magazine

One Year Subscription (Four Issues) -

Rs. 1500/-

Three Year Subscription (Twelve Issues) -

Rs. 4000/-

I am renewing a current subscription -

I am a new subscriber -

PERSONAL DETAILS

First Name: Last Name:

Address

City State Pin

Telephone Mobile Email

Pay Via Cheque/DD Cheque No./DD No.

of (Payable to New Media Communication Pvt Ltd, payable at Mumbai)

Date:

For online transfers:

Bank Name: State Bank of India

Account Name: New Media Communication Pvt Ltd.

Account No. 67390858512 IFSC Code: SBIN0015781

Branch: S.V. Road Borivali (West) (15781)

For information on advertisements and subscriptions contact:

Satya Swaroop, Mobile: 9820031016, **Atula Imchen**, Mobile: 9833782710

E-mail: satya@newmediacomm.biz, atula.imchen@gmail.com



Tata Power: Empowering Women Community Members and Micro-Entrepreneurs

India has a rich demographic dividend of over 49 per cent women and over six million women's collectives (Self Help Groups) spread across its States. These grassroots institutions have a huge potential and promise to be the harbingers of change for progressive communities and inclusive societies.



Foram Nagori

We, at Tata Power, recognise the challenge of the skill gap in grassroots communities. We design our community empowerment efforts to address this challenge by aiding women with potential platforms for maximum exposure. With a focus on holistic growth, our community empowerment initiatives focus on financial

independence through training and handholding.

Our flagship programme, Anokha Dhaaga, a women empowerment and livelihood initiative, works towards empowering women's collectives, increasing their household income while enhancing their leadership skills and promoting handmade crafts. Under this

initiative, we provide the women with specialised technical training, market linkages, and end-to-end support.

The intervention started in Maval Tehsil of Pune district in Maharashtra in 2015, where we taught 16 women stitching, tailoring, and other micro-enterprises like making baskets and herbal items. So far, this initiative has benefitted over 1,500 women across eight States - Delhi, Maharashtra, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Gujarat.

To widen customer reach across geographies, we launched the in-house eCommerce platform, Saheli World, profiling the makers and their stories where customers get to buy products while contributing to the larger movement for empowerment.

To increase customer base and B2B association, Anokha Dhaaga collaborates with Amazon India under Amazon Saheli, Air Asia, and The Indian Hotels Company, among others. These tie-ups have helped women entrepreneurs by providing them with a platform to showcase and sell their products.

With its core focus on the circular economy, Anokha Dhaaga empowers its women to design unique and upcycled products using eco-friendly raw materials. The initiative focuses on upskilling women members across India through phygital models for design, production support, and market linkages. The objective is inclusive community development through a micro-enterprise collective approach, enabling livelihoods through self-help groups.

With an aspirational vision, the women at Anokha Dhaaga work towards creating a sustainable range of products with a hint of



luxury. Anokha Dhaaga's recent launch, BlessdBox, evolved from a collaboration with celebrity designer, Nida Mahmood, who designed a unique gifting range (curated set with a set of six table mats, serviettes, coasters, and a safety mask stitched in cotton and canvas by Anokha Dhaaga women's SHGs in Jamshedpur and New Delhi) that emphasises on sustainably-sourced materials. Fifty per cent of the earnings from this project directly go to the makers.



The women of Anokha Dhaaga believe in working collectively. This power of sisterhood was impactful during the pandemic, providing livelihood to micro-entrepreneurs while contributing significantly towards COVID relief efforts. They made specialised SHG-95 (trademarked) high-protection masks out of pure cotton with filter quality-tested at accredited laboratories. In partnership with #BillionSocialMasks, Anokha Dhaaga distributed more than one lakh masks across communities.



Apart from protective masks, care packages with wellness products like immunity booster tea masala, herbs, and Ashwagandha powder made by our women were distributed across communities, enabling wages and livelihoods for the women during the tough times of the pandemic.

Focus on Employability for Women

Abha/Abha Sakthi/Abha Sakhi (Vocational Skilling for Women)

Roshini – This integrated vocational training centre focuses on inclusive growth as a core focus and implements an evolved unique model furthering women's livelihoods by combining customer connect and safety and shared value generation by involving and upskilling women's SHGs.

Under this flagship community empowerment initiative, semi-skilled and unskilled women from the communities are given mentoring and quality training on technical domains such as electricity metering, billing, and collections, along with awareness about energy conservation. Today, these community ambassadors are not only financially empowered but also rally a very critical cause on energy conservation while being community role models embedding progressive social behaviours into their communities.

The flagship skilling and employment



model is being successfully furthered in Delhi as Abha, Odisha as Abha Sakthi, and Mumbai as Abha Sakhi, serving a large customer base in slum and rural areas. The initiative also focuses on vocational skill-building of semi-skilled/unskilled women and girls, focusing on financial literacy, life skills, and leadership training.

This shared value programme supports community lives and livelihoods, leverages technology as a tool, and upskills women to serve as community change agents. Over and above technical upskilling and employment opportunities, the programme also emphasises grooming, leadership skills, and creating awareness on efficient energy consumption empowering the



Abha women to become Conservation Champions. The trained women also serve as Adhikaarprenuers to further access the government's social welfare schemes, financial and digital literacy while embedding progressive social behaviours into their communities.

We have engaged more than 8000 Abhas across Delhi, Jharkhand, Mumbai, and Odisha under this flagship initiative over the last four years. The Abha partners today earn an average monthly income of nearly ₹ 10,000.

India's grassroots communities have massive potential and promise. Our CSR and voluntary efforts shall continue to champion and enable these institutions and groups, build their confidence, knowledge and skills to access more and more opportunities for collective growth, access to technology and sustainable livelihoods. With the growing employment demands of the rapidly changing industrial ecosystem, there is a big imperative to interlink skilling and mentoring of underserved communities with inclusivity initiatives as part of large business value chains, and our community empowerment efforts are largely centred around this. ■

Foram Nagori is the Head of Corporate Social Responsibility at Tata Power.





The Antarprerna Women Collectives: Helping Rural Women to Help Themselves

Across the globe, the development sector has produced enough evidence to show that changing a community begins with empowering its women. On that front, there is still work to be done in rural India where the labour force participation rate for women lags behind countries in Asia as well as urban India. Women Collectives and Self-Help Groups (SHGs) that draw on pooled resources and capabilities are proven and effective platforms for economic empowerment. The group-based model serves as a supportive base where the women can test and strengthen newly-acquired skills and collectively forge paths towards financial security and independence.

Starting Up

The Collectives run by us - Head Held High Foundation - operate under Antarprerna, our rural entrepreneurship programme, aim at nurturing place-based economic opportunities. They allow women in a given community to come together for group enterprises, creating sustained income and job security for them – all within the vicinity of their homes.

Our first Collective was formed in Wadi, Karnataka, in August 2019 with

infrastructure support (including space and equipment) from ACC Trust. We had a market partner in Meemansa, which upcycles fabric waste into other textile products. Before long, the Wadi group was filling Meemansa's orders for cloth bags. Mobilising the ten women who were part of the project initially was not easy. Apart from working around logistical roadblocks, the team had to overcome the reservations of the families and the women themselves to get the Centre up and running.





Growing Up

Much has happened between then and now. There are four Collectives operational currently - two in Karnataka (Wadi and Chikballapur), one in Maharashtra (Chandrapur) and a fourth one recently launched in Odisha (Rayagada). Together, they include 90 women with skills ranging from sewing, tailoring and hand embroidery to knitting, crochet and macrame. Working an average of seven hours a day, each woman can efficiently manage her time and consistently meet production targets, all while retaining a keen focus on quality standards. As a group, the women are motivated to learn new skills and take on more work.

Each Centre has a trainer to guide them through the intricacies of creating various products. The trainer is vital to the success of each collective. She helps

keep the group morale and motivation levels up and encourages the women to set goals for themselves, professionally and financially. Given the rural locations of the Collectives, each trainer regularly solves logistical challenges spanning sourcing, packaging and transportation. Although they started with simple cloth bags, their product portfolio now includes masks, jute and canvas bags, aprons, garments, hand embroidered items, knit patterns for carpets and more.

Thanks to our market partners, Meemansa, Stitch in Time (a heritage craft unit started by designer Deepa Chikarmane), and Craftizen Foundation (a craft-based skilling organisation), among others, who have supported the women with their orders. The women have generated sustained income while continually upgrading their skills.

Challenges

The road to empowering the Antarpurna women involved many hurdles. Productivity was an issue initially until we came up with more efficient ways of splitting up the tasks involved - including cutting, ironing and stitching - between the women.

During the first pandemic-induced lockdown in 2020 and subsequent restrictions, we had to figure out alternate ways to keep the work going. Pivoting to produce safety masks that were the need of the hour required



additional training. With centres closed for an indefinite period, we equipped the women to work from their homes and set up a milk-run model to drop off the fabric



Harshlata is from Ghugus, Chandrapur. When her husband passed away five years ago, Harshlata started working on a farm to support herself, her young daughter and her mother-in-law. Given the seasonal nature of the work, the income from this was variable. It was a challenge to make ends meet with this work alone. She was on the lookout for other opportunities when she learnt about the Antarpurna project. A year after joining, she feels that the project has impacted her life in more ways than one. It has given her financial stability, and she can run the household with the income she makes at the Centre and create a support system of peers that she and her mother-in-law can lean on for advice and help. She is happy that she decided to join the Collective.



“

Following this orientation and experience of working in the Collectives, the women have started taking tentative steps towards starting their local ventures. In Wadi, some of them have taken orders for regional favourites such as jowar rotis and peanut chikkis. In Chandrapur and Chikballapur, the women handle local tailoring orders to supplement their income. There is a substantial amount of peer-based learning and sharing within each group

”

and then pick up the finished masks. Raw material shortages were common with courier services and public transport impacted by the shutdowns. There was a steep rise in fabric material as well. We overcame these hurdles with implementable solutions in the prevailing environment. Once lockdown restrictions eased, the centres reopened for work. The women were divided into smaller groups and shifts to follow social distancing and other COVID guidelines at work.

Impact

Since the project first got off the ground in 2019, we have mobilised, trained or supported close to 200 women. The cumulative income generated across them during this period is close to ₹ 20 Lakhs. The team also works with the women to connect them to relevant social security schemes. Until now, this has involved helping them with getting Jan Dhan accounts. These accounts are



linked to multiple benefits, including life and accident insurance and financial inclusion through access to banking services.

In addition to craft-based skilling, the women also go through more than 15 hours of General Entrepreneurship Training delivered by our team. The goal is to help them develop the mindset and knowledge necessary to stay the course in self-employment. These sessions cover topics such as the pros and cons of starting a business, investment and cost



Ganga lives with her mother, brother and sister-in-law in Wadi. She is a divorcee who had walked out of an abusive marriage. She had to deal with this stigma. Her family often reminded her of being a financial burden to them. Ganga was able to join the Antarprena project near her home when a vacancy opened up. She soon became known for being extremely hard-working and was one of the more productive workers at the Centre. As she started earning and contributing to the family, her family began acknowledging her as a valuable member of the household. In a short period, her status changed from being stigmatised to being treated with respect by those around her.

calculations, profitability, and more. By giving them a view of what is involved, we aim to help them develop the stamina and will to pursue their entrepreneurial aspirations.

Following this orientation and experience of working in the Collectives, the women have started taking tentative steps towards starting their local ventures. In Wadi, some of them have taken orders for regional favourites such as jowar rotis and peanut chikkis. In Chandrapur and Chikballapur, the women handle local tailoring orders to supplement their income. There is a substantial amount of peer-based learning and sharing within each group. When there is downtime, they watch videos to learn how to make new



Champa lives in the Khedapada village of Rayagada district, Odisha, with her husband, her three-year-old son, and her in-laws. Her husband works as a vegetable vendor to support the family. Married at a young age and forced to drop out of school at that point, Champa was motivated to learn new skills and become an earning member as well. She had to deal with family resistance to this idea but overcame these with persistence. Following a six-month programme covering various foundational and soft skills (also run by Head Held High Foundation), she joined the newly formed Antarpurna Collective in Rayagada. That has made a huge difference in building her confidence and clarity to go after her goals. She supplements the Antarpurna work with other tailoring orders. She aims to open her very own shop soon.

products such as floor mats, macrame plant holders, decorative door hangings (torans) and more.

These point to a slow mindset and operating shift from dependency to self-sufficiency for the collectives. Over time, we expect that they can leverage their know-how, skills and increased confidence to organise as SHGs focuses on catering to the home and textile value chains.

More than two years after we started in Wadi, the Collectives are well established and the women now possess many core skills along with a greater agency and a sense of optimism about their future. Through the team's efforts



and with the support of committed partners, they have already made significant progress in the journey towards economic empowerment. With further upskilling and access to funds,

resources and mentoring networks through the larger ecosystem, they will soon be able to fly on their own. ■

Authors:




"There were hardly any job opportunities for us in Wadi. I used to feel bad that I was not able to work outside. Though I knew tailoring, I was unable to get customers from the village. I feel good and confident now that I have an income. I am able to support my family and take care of my mother's medical expenses. I hope to see hundreds of women in Wadi employed and economically empowered," says **Renuka**.



***Chandana TR** heads Operations for the Antarpurna Women Collectives intervention by Head Held High Foundation.*



***Sangita Srinivasa** heads Communications for Head Held High Foundation.*



Save the Children WINGS 2022 Report: Majority of Adolescent Girls in Urban Slums Deprived of Basic Health and Education Services Compared to Boys During the Pandemic

Save the Children, India (also known as Bal Raksha Bharat) has highlighted the disproportionate impact of the ravaging COVID-19 on girls, with a focus on populations in urban slums through a research-led study – THE WORLD OF INDIA'S GIRLS - WINGS 2022 – themed Spotlight on Adolescent Girls Amid COVID-19 was launched recently. The report reveals the situation of girls during and after the first pandemic induced nationwide lockdowns in India, which has only worsened with the multiple mutations and successive waves of the COVID-19 virus since then.

The study unfolds the repercussions on girls' access to health, education, and opportunities for play and recreation with a focus on the changes that have taken place in the overall context of their insecurities. It also includes understanding the coping mechanisms adopted by the families to deal with the increased health and nutritional insecurities, the abrupt decline in learning opportunities, the pressure on early marriages, and limited play and recreation facilities.

Speaking on the report, Sudarshan Suchi, CEO,

Save the Children said, “India@100 cannot achieve its full potential unless we secure 100 per cent of its children today. WINGS 2022 Report is our way of bringing to the fore the risks our nation runs into by not investing in and securing all its children. Specifically, the fact that India @75 has almost half its children not able to equitably secure themselves with their basic rights is a tale by itself! With this report, we would like to reaffirm our commitment to being a part of the solution. Along with the various specific steps the report provides a way forward for all of us and more importantly, the obligation to include the voices of children – the primary stakeholders – to shift the approach from a process of planning for them to planning with them. Children cannot wait – not any longer.”

The study has also captured the voices of adolescent girls, to describe the changes that have occurred in their lives. The findings are paramount to framing an appropriate response to build back better by way of formulating recommendations to all stakeholders #allyouppforher. These will enable the policymakers and implementers to make informed long-term strategic measures to safeguard and uphold the rights of girl children.

With the aim of making effective and wide changes, the study was conducted in four States - Delhi, Maharashtra, Bihar, and Telangana, representing the four geographical zones (East, West, North and South).

The following are the cross-cutting recommendations from



the report:

- **Scale-up investments on the girl child:** Considering that the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftereffects will continue to impact the lives of girls soon, there is a need to increase investments in the girl child and ensure that health, nutrition, education, and protection services are well-resourced and inclusive with a specific focus on girls.
- **Build engagement of multi-stakeholders:** Coordinated, and synergised efforts required for State, civil society organisations, private sector, academia, media, community,



citizens, and girls to work together to address the issue of violation of rights of girls.

- **Listen to the voices of girls:** It is important to ensure that dialogue and interaction with girls capture their experience and the impact of COVID-19 to develop response plans to improve girls' access to services.
- **Build an agency of girls:** Building an agency of girls and empowering them to exercise their life choices by (i) advocating with the government for improved services and functioning of protection mechanisms for children, (ii) creating opportunities for child and young people-led advocacy and accountability on child rights issues including child marriage, and (iii) utilise children's groups, youth groups and other forums for children to disseminate information about child rights, and lead activities for children in their communities.
- **Strengthen the delivery system:** There is a need to strengthen the delivery mechanisms to ensure the effective implementation of programmes for girls.
- **Provide additional support to institutions, structures, and frontline workers** in terms of finance, capacity-building, providing incentives to work proactively by motivating, educating and convincing parents and guardians of girls to advance child rights and promote the best interests of children, particularly girls.
- **Improve and develop community-based monitoring systems** to ensure the involvement of different committees established at the ward/village/gram panchayat level such as CPC and (VHSNC), among other efforts.



- **Generating evidence on the girl child:** Invest in building evidence on the impact of COVID-19 on girls. Efforts in generating data on girls in the context of COVID-19 should be directed at all the critical child rights issues including health, nutrition, education, and child protection.

Constructive guidelines prepared by Save the Children, India, for safe return to Anganwadi centres and schools have been shared with the State Education Departments of Karnataka, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Telangana and Andhra Pradesh along with safe return protocols including class-wise timetable, duration of sessions, safety procedures (i.e., sanitising classrooms after each class and provision of personal protective equipment (PPE) kits) to be followed, and re-course steps, if COVID-19 cases emerge.

The first WINGS report in 2014 explored unequal challenges faced by girls and women despite economic growth and social development. WINGS 2018 examined the underlying gender



stereotypes and their implications on girls' safety in public spaces, and its deterrence in realising their potential.

Impact in Delhi

The biggest impact in Delhi has been on Girls Nutritional Index, including Menstrual Hygiene and Continuity of Education:

- The health and nutritional well-being of adolescents has taken a major hit.
- Four in five households (79 per cent) suffered from food insufficiency.
- Two in three mothers (63 per cent) reported that their adolescent daughters faced difficulties in accessing sanitary napkins during the lockdown period.
- Nine out of ten adolescent girls (93 per cent) reported that they did not have access to or receive any health and nutrition services.
- One in two adolescent girls (45 per cent) did not have access to information on sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR) during the pandemic.
- School closures have caused a major setback to learning continuity.
- Closure of learning facilities disrupted the lives of over 320 million children majority of whom were enrolled at the primary and secondary level (86 per cent).
- Seven in ten adolescent girls (71 per cent girls) attended online classes during the lockdown.
- Nine in ten mothers (89 per cent) clearly indicated that the pandemic had adversely impacted their daughter's learning to a large extent.
- Since the closure of schools, one in five girls (20 per cent) were not contacted by school staff as reported by mothers during the pandemic period.

Impact on Bihar

- The health and nutritional well-being of adolescents took a major hit during the pandemic. In households living in





poverty, women and girls were particularly disadvantaged in their access to household resources, including food and nutrition. Adolescent girls faced difficulties in accessing sanitary napkins during the lockdown period and did not have access to information on sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR).

- Three in four mothers (73 per cent) clearly indicated that the pandemic had adversely impacted their daughter's learning. Only 2 per cent of girls attended online classes during the lockdown.
- Job losses and reduced household incomes due to the pandemic have increased the likelihood of child marriages. Nine in ten mothers (88 per cent) shared that they have not come across any awareness-building activity around the issues of child marriage during the pandemic.
- Physical restrictions due to COVID-19 severely dented the opportunities for adolescent girls to meet their friends, engage in sports, play and participate in extracurricular and



other leisure activities. One in two girls (48 per cent) reported increased household chores as compared to pre-pandemic days.

Impact in Maharashtra

- The health and nutritional well-being of adolescents took a major hit during the pandemic. In households living in poverty, women and girls were particularly disadvantaged in their access to household resources, including food and nutrition. Adolescent girls faced difficulties in accessing sanitary napkins during the lockdown period and did not have access to information on sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR).
- Two in three mothers (68 per cent) clearly indicated that the pandemic had adversely impacted their daughter's learning. One in two adolescent girls (54 per cent) attended online classes during the lockdown.
- Job losses and reduced household incomes due to the pandemic have increased the likelihood of child marriages. Almost all mothers (97 per cent) shared that they have not come across any awareness-building activity around the issues of child marriage during the pandemic.
- Physical restrictions due to COVID-19 severely dented the opportunities for adolescent girls to meet their friends, engage in sports, play and participate in extracurricular and other leisure activities. Three in five girls (61 per cent) reported increased household chores as compared to pre-pandemic days. ■

CSR *Mandate*

Impact Survey & Awards 2021

The first ever CSR Impact Survey will be conducted on 16,000 companies who have been undertaking various initiatives at the grassroot level under the Companies Act 2013.

The CSR Mandate Impact Awards will recognise and felicitate achievers in various CSR fields.

Partner with us in this important initiative which will help, touch and transform millions of lives across the country.



Instituted by:

Contact:
Satya Swaroop
New Media Communication Pvt. Ltd, New Media House,
1, Akbar Villa, Opp. Old State Bank Bus Stop,
Marol Maroshi Road, Andheri (E), Mumbai - 400059
E: enquiry@newmediacomm.biz
Tel: +91-22-29255279/29208888



An Initiative of:





National Forensic
Sciences University
Knowledge | Wisdom | Fulfilment
An Institution of National Importance
(Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India)

Education through Investigation

World's first and
only university
dedicated to Forensic and Allied Sciences

**A highly specialized National University with the
status of Institution of National Importance.**

SPECIAL FEATURES

- "Centre of Excellence" for research and analysis of Narcotics Drugs and Psychotropic Substances granted by Ministry of Home Affairs
- Asia's 1st Ballistics Research Centre & Testing Range
- State of the art Cyber Defence Centre
- Centre for Futuristic Defence Studies
- International Centre for Humanitarian Forensics (An Initiative of ICRC and NFSU)
- Centre for International Relations
- International Students Exchange Program
- Residential Accommodation Facilities for Boys and Girls.

Contact

Headquarter: NFSU, Sector - 9, Gandhinagar - 382007, Gujarat
Delhi Campus: LNJN NICFS, Rohini, Delhi - 110085

