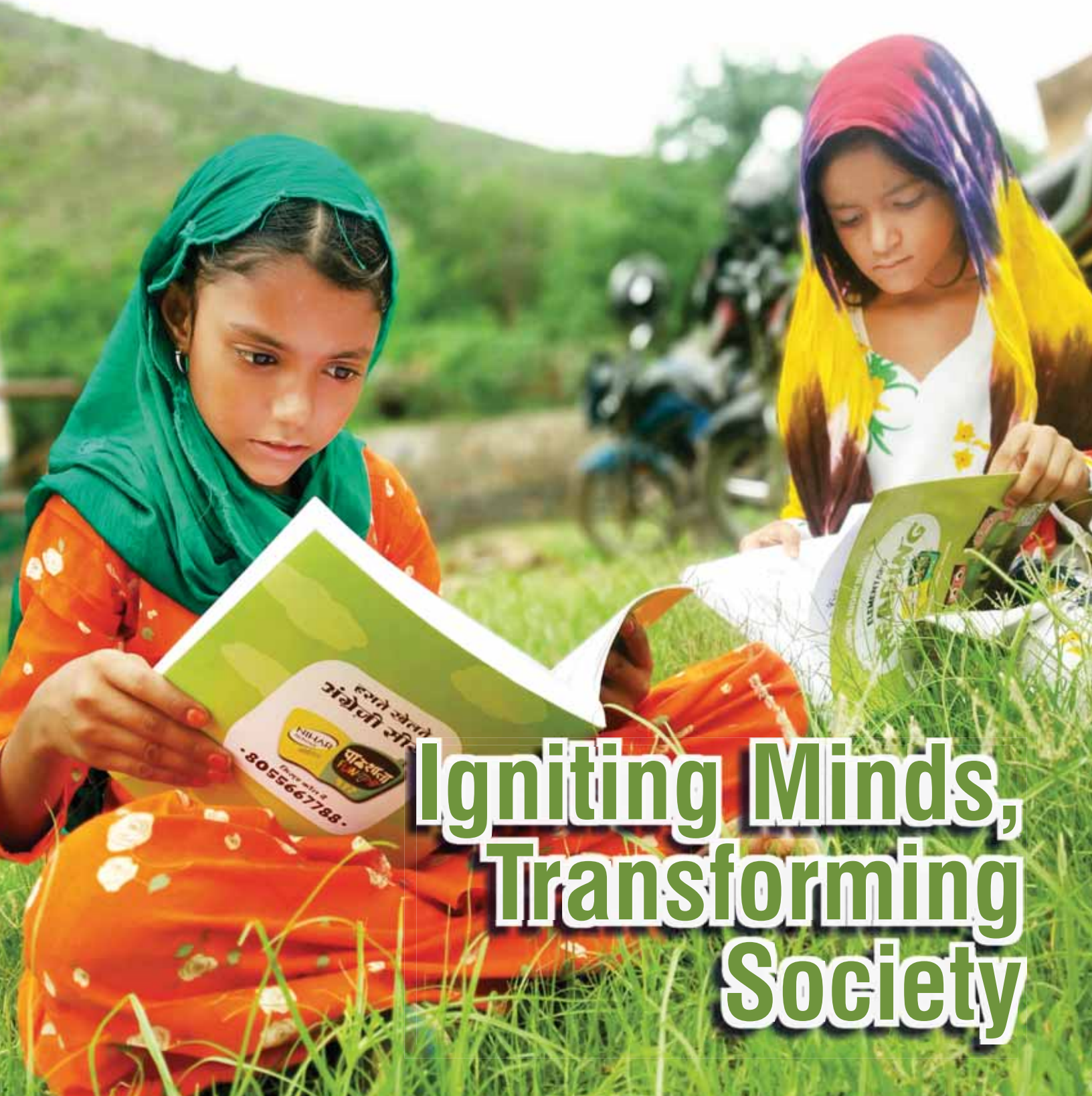


Vol. VII, Issue III, 2023



# CSR *Mandate*

Enabling Sustainability



**Igniting Minds,  
Transforming  
Society**



# Recognition

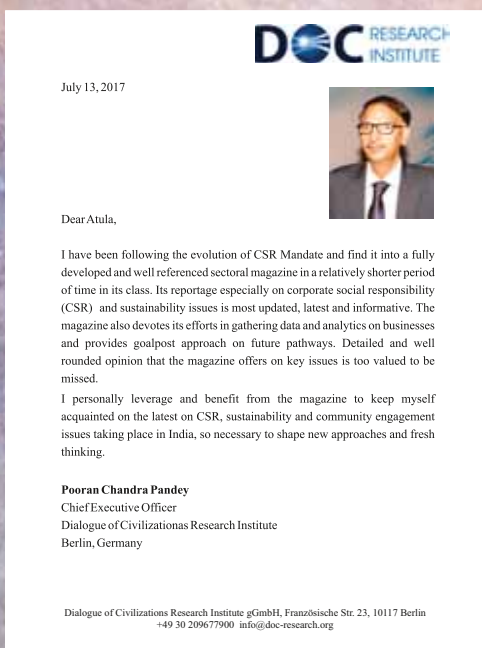
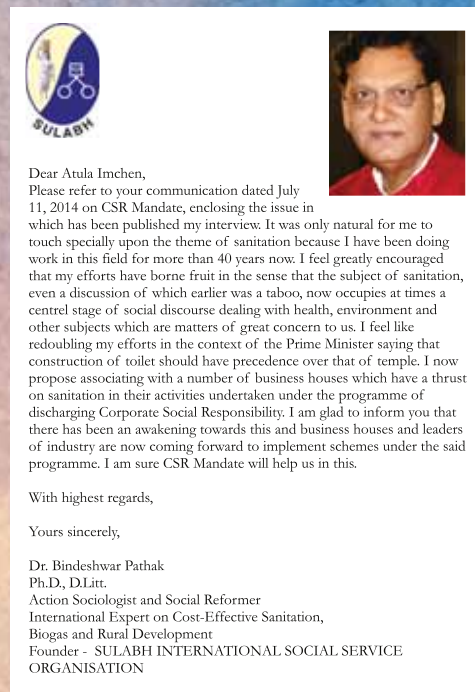
The role and contributions of CSR Mandate in bringing to the fore the initiatives of Corporate India and NGOs has resulted in the magazine being awarded the

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





# Accolades



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### Distributed by:

New Media Communication Pvt. Ltd

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### 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,

Education aims to make future generations poised and ready for the future. It is a transformative force that empowers individuals to shape their lives and positively impact society. We must provide the best education so young men and women are girded with the most vital tools in making a difference in their lives and that of others.

Throughout history, India has been a hub of great learning. Today, numerous Indians hold leadership positions in prominent global companies. Considering these, we could say that ours is a success story. Yet, on closer observation, we find that the most success comes from urban areas as they host a significant number of prominent centres of learning. It is imperative to prioritise the development of learning centres in Tier II and III cities, towns and rural areas so students have access to the same opportunities as their urban counterparts. This inclusive approach will help bridge the educational gap and empower students from all backgrounds to thrive academically and contribute to the nation's progress.

Talking points on education are endless, with new ideas constantly emerging through in-depth study, research, and adaptation of past learnings and methodologies to suit the changing times. It is vital that children are provided with a positive learning environment that inspires, encourages and propels them to hunger for more knowledge. Infrastructure development, implementation of Smart classroom systems, comprehensive training programmes for teachers, and providing scholarships to deserving students are crucial aspects that demand attention. These factors contribute significantly to enhancing the quality of education and ensuring equitable opportunities for all learners.

The entire burden of education should not rest only on schools and teachers. Parents, communities, and policymakers play a vital role in creating an environment that fosters quality education so children have the requisite knowledge, skills, and values necessary to navigate an ever-changing world.

Happy Reading.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K Swaroop', with a long horizontal line extending from the end.

**Kamaljit Swaroop**  
Vice Chairperson





Dear Readers,

Many reports have mentioned that India has made considerable strides in primary and secondary education. There have been changes and additions to how children are taught, especially in big cities and towns, like blended learning, online classrooms, and experiential learning, impacting children whereby they grasp concepts better, reduce learning stress, and help them solve problems creatively.

While urban areas have greatly benefited from the latest addition to learning, the same does not hold for our rural areas. They are the ones losing the most before, during and post-pandemic. Lack of quality education, regular teachers, proper infrastructure, scanty internet connectivity, unavailability of smartphones, parents with low literacy levels, and lack of training for teachers are just some of the reasons holding our rural children from advancing and catching up with their urban counterparts.

However, a shared desire among parents in both demographics is to ensure their children receive a high-quality education. This often leads them to pursue after-school tuition classes, even at significant expense. This raises important questions about our school education system. What aspects are lacking that drive students to seek supplementary education after six hours of schooling? It prompts us to reflect on whether the quality of education has genuinely improved if students increasingly rely on additional classes offered throughout the country.

By examining the quality of education within regular classroom hours, we can assess whether students are receiving the necessary knowledge, skills, and support to thrive academically and develop essential skills. This includes evaluating factors such as curriculum effectiveness, teaching methodologies, teacher-student ratios, classroom resources, student engagement, critical thinking skills, and the ability to apply knowledge in practical situations.

Best Wishes,

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

**Atula Imchen**

Editor





# Idobro: Fostering Collaboration for Social Impact

Idobro Impact Solutions is a social enterprise that aims to develop innovative solutions to social challenges in India. Founded in 2017, it focuses on leveraging technology to create a sustainable impact on education, health, and livelihoods. The organisation and its team of experienced professionals work closely with communities to understand their needs and co-create solutions that address their unique challenges. It has implemented multiple projects, including developing mobile applications for health and education, creating digital content for skill-based training, and providing access to finance for small businesses. As part of its strong commitment to social impact and focus on innovation, it collaborated with Glenmark Foundation for the Glenmark Nutrition Awards. **CSR Mandate** spoke with **Karon Shaiva, Founder of Idobro Impact Solutions**, to know more about the work and the awards.





Over the past 13 years, driven by the RISE shared values - Responsible, Inclusive, Sustainable and Eco-System friendly, we have created a footprint in seven countries and 24 States of India. Our local and global experience in urban and rural settings, with online and offline tools for corporate and non-profit, government, and academic initiatives have co-created a 360-degree action platform.



### Tell us about Idobro. What is the vision driving its existence?

Idobro Impact Solutions is a social enterprise based in India that is a catalyst for innovations and collaborations that benefit people and the planet. It was formed as an active and deeper model of engagement to facilitate and implement market-based solutions that:

- (i) Reduce the information divide which exists between the private and development sector to connect, communicate, and collaborate.
- (ii) Promote products, services, events, and media with social and environmental impact into the consideration set of consumers, corporate, and community.

### What is its mission and focus areas?

Our mission is to measure and multiply the socio-environmental impact of women, social and green (WSG) initiatives through markets, capacity, linkages and solutions. We have designed and developed programmes in the following focus areas:

- (a) Entrepreneurship Development
- (b) Community Development Projects and Alliances
- (c) Value-based Citizenship for Individuals and Institutions

We take an ecosystem-based approach that emphasises advocacy and engagement. We aim to overcome systemic barriers, offer market-based solutions, and build partnerships driven by shared values. With this approach, we strive to foster a sustainable and inclusive society that empowers individuals and communities alike.

### Enlighten us about RISE Infinity Foundation (RIF).

A hybrid organisation, the RISE Infinity Foundation (RIF), was established in 2014 to strengthen individuals and institutions to take positive action for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and so restore and recreate a better world and greener planet for all.

Together, Idobro and RISE have an end-to-end approach that seeks to overcome systemic barriers and forge alliances driven by the RISE's shared values –

Responsible, Inclusive, Sustainable and Ecosystem-friendly.

### How long have you been aligning with like-minded organisations?

Over the past 13 years, driven by the RISE shared values – Responsible, Inclusive, Sustainable and Eco-System friendly, we have created a footprint in seven countries and 24 States of India. Our local and global experience in urban and rural settings, with online and offline tools for corporate and non-profit, government, and academic initiatives have co-created a 360-degree action platform. This has advanced advocacy, engagement, and collaboration with long-term outcomes and value to our communities, enterprise members, partners, and associates, reaching out to over two million lives, as documented in our Decade of Impact Report.

### How do you collaborate with non-profit organisations?

Partnerships are core to our approach “Think Different, Act Together”. All our programmes and projects are based on the PECO (Partnership, Entrepreneurship, Citizenship and







Ownership) Model. We designed the PECO Model for Poverty Alleviation and Ecosystem Restoration. These two issues must be everyone's problem and needs tackling at three levels in society – Citizenship at the individual level, Entrepreneurship at the organisation level, and Partnership at the ecosystem level. O is the joint Ownership of all stakeholders that binds them to “Multiply Our Impact”.

One of our largest initiatives is the Maha PECOnet coalition convened by UNICEF Maharashtra at the onset of the pandemic with 65+ development partners.

Beyond COVID, the partners have collectively fought and faced floods, cyclones, landslides, heatwaves, and measles outbreaks.

RISE Infinity Foundation is the Secretariat of the platform. Our network has now grown to over 150 partners representing every district of

Maharashtra. We are now working to strengthen capacities to go beyond relief and response to focus on peacetime planning and preparedness.

### How has Idobro evolved since its inception and what is its impact thus far?

We started as a social enterprise in 2009. In 2014, we founded RISE Infinity Foundation. We have also established the PECOWorld Community. It convenes annually at the RISE World Summit, a platform for thought leadership and collaboration. RWS23 was a milestone 10th edition with over 10K participants from 71 countries participating in 100+ sessions, facilitated by 118 visionary partners and 200+ experts.

We have made a significant impact by executing projects in seven countries and 24 States of India, positively impacting over 2.3 million individuals, 220,000 students, 5,000+ entrepreneurs, and 500+

institutions and organisations. Over the past 13 years, we have emerged as a valuable resource centre for research, implementation, stakeholder relations, and evaluation. Using a critical lens of Gender, Innovation, Finance, and Technology (GIFT), we provide deeper insights into diversity, inclusion, and sustainability issues.

### How do collaborative approaches tackle challenges, engaging private sector, citizens, gender, and youth?

Billions of dollars have been spent on aid across decades, if not centuries, and we are still grappling with poverty, violence, and disasters. There is a pressing need to find new solutions to the challenges the world faces and take them to every corner and cluster that requires them. As is often quoted, no institution, community, or country can do this alone. Collaboration is the answer. However, successful models for collaborations are few. Moreover, we have traditionally relied on philanthropy and cross-subsidisation to support humanitarian and development interventions. While technology and finance are key enablers, traction is a result of human acceptance and influence. Hence, the call for new development paradigms that is human-centric, where we have every individual and institution as part of the equation, even if it is only the realisation that we are part of the problem and would like to be a part of the solution as well.

The private sector has a key role to play,



“

Instituted around the theme of 'Healthier Children, Healthier World', Glenmark Foundation, the CSR arm of Glenmark Pharmaceuticals, is actively working towards improving child health and reducing infant/child mortality. The Foundation has a 360-degree approach to achieving this mandate. Idobro has been associated with the Foundation for ten years, creating impact together on the ground and across stakeholder groups.

”

but so do citizens. While the SDGs form a comprehensive canvas, it is the cross-cutting issues of gender and youth that take priority. These are our two primary groups of focus along with social entrepreneurs for holistic community and institutional development. It has also been captured in the World Economic Forum – “Davos Agenda Closes with Calls for New Models of Public-Private Cooperation”.

### **Do elaborate Idobro's association with Glenmark Foundation. What has this association achieved so far?**

Instituted around the theme of 'Healthier Children, Healthier World', Glenmark Foundation, the CSR arm of Glenmark Pharmaceuticals, is actively working towards improving child health and reducing infant/child mortality. The Foundation has a 360-degree approach to achieving this mandate. Idobro has been associated with the Foundation for ten years, creating impact together on the ground and across stakeholder groups.

Our approach to addressing the critical issue of malnutrition involves a



comprehensive mix of innovative interventions. We strongly believe that every effort counts in making a difference in people's lives.

One key intervention with Glenmark has been the Communication Catalyst, which engaged college students to design innovative communication strategies for NGOs. We understand the power of communication in spreading awareness and inspiring action toward a healthier and more nourished community.

Another intervention, the Meri Poushtik Rasoi, aims to identify and curate a collection of nutritious recipes from across the country. We believe that access to diverse and healthy food options is essential in combatting malnutrition.

Furthermore, the Glenmark Nutrition Awards identifies and celebrates impactful health and nutrition projects from all corners of the country. We believe in recognising and honouring the hard work and dedication of those making a difference in their communities.

We have several other interventions in



place, all geared toward addressing the core issue of malnutrition. We remain committed to this cause. We are constantly exploring new and innovative ways to make a positive impact.

### **Can you provide more information on the criteria used to select the NGOs and institutions recognised at the Glenmark Nutrition Awards 2023?**

The primary criteria for the selection of the NGOs were based on the below parameters:

**Innovation:** How unique were the strategies used to improve nutrition amongst the groups the organisations were working with? It was either a method of cultivation or distinctive awareness campaigns about nutrition.

**Impact:** What was the impact of their work/innovation on improving the nutrition among the groups they are working with? This was mainly the numbers reached or lives impacted throughout the year along with the behavioural change the innovation might have brought among the individuals/groups.

**Inspiration:** What level of inspiration could other organisations/groups derive from their work or innovation; Possibility of Replicability of their innovation/model.

### **How were they evaluated for their impact on tackling malnutrition in mothers and children?**

As part of the selection process, the NGOs' impact on tackling malnutrition in mothers and children was evaluated. One of the criteria used to evaluate their impact was to assess the effectiveness of their work or innovation in improving nutrition among the groups they are working with. This evaluation focused on the numbers reached or lives impacted throughout the year and the behavioural change the innovation might have brought among individuals or groups. The Selection Committee looked for evidence of the measurable impact and sustainability of the interventions





implemented by the NGOs to address malnutrition in mothers and children. NGOs that demonstrated a significant positive impact on the nutrition and well-being of the target groups were given higher scores on this criterion.

### **What are the initiatives and strategies they implemented to address malnutrition?**

Various initiatives and strategies have been and are implemented to address malnutrition, ranging from direct interventions of distributing fortified meals to interventions using technology in the form of apps.

For instance, one of the NGOs was working with government and charity cancer hospitals, enabling them with trained paediatric oncology nutritionists and food aid so that more children may win the battle against cancer. With the FoodHeals App, a first-of-its-kind tech platform that automates clinical nutritional functions, they can create an ecosystem that enables medical and nutrition teams to collaborate more effectively and make specialised nutritional care more accessible to children. They also freely share their breakthroughs and experience with healthcare practitioners so that they may use this knowledge to save thousands of more children.

Another innovative initiative trains women, known as Community Health Entrepreneurs (CHE), in health, hygiene, nutrition, and common illnesses. They are taught how to grow kitchen gardens, provide access to nutritious foods, and use a 360-degree approach to tackle

malnutrition. Each CHE is reaching out to 1500 women. The kitchen garden approach is increasingly used to reduce malnutrition, create nutritional awareness, and introduce microgreens.

Another innovative approach uses the concept of an egg bank – making eggs available to children and lactating mothers in the community, orphanages, and old-age homes – as they are high in protein and vitamins. We also saw a more collaborative approach between



municipal corporations, hospitals, the Ministry of Education, and women and child health departments.

Another innovative approach was establishing Nand Ghars – modern, upgraded Anganwadis where you find clean toilets, play areas, awareness workshops, kitchen gardens and more. Some NGOs are conducting awareness programmes on nutrition, including demonstrations of cooking, and talking about important inclusions in the diet, e.g., moringa and millet.

Another NGO has an in-house production unit to prepare Medical Nutrition Therapy (MNT), a WHO-recommended Energy Dense Nutritious Food to manage Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM). They have developed a cost-effective new therapeutic soya-based food product to tackle malnutrition and also introduced a telemedicine service to tackle the problem.

### **How have these efforts improved the health and well-being of mothers and children?**

Through various interventions launched along with their NGO partners, Glenmark Foundation aims to encourage positive health-seeking behaviour among pregnant women and mothers with infants and caregivers towards the right nutrition, including good hygiene practices and ensuring complete immunisation for children. Glenmark Foundation has positively impacted over 1.9 million lives through its various child health initiatives over the years.

### **What are Idobro and Glenmark Foundation's plans to alleviate the**



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Our approach towards strengthening the ecosystem for malnutrition involves a multi-pronged strategy that includes knowledge exchange, implementing projects on the ground, and building communities of practice around MCH. Glenmark Foundation and Idobro remain committed to this cause, and we believe that by working together, we can create a brighter and healthier future for all.

”

### challenges in child and maternal health in India?

To effectively combat malnutrition, it is crucial to implement projects on the ground and strengthen the overall ecosystem around it. This involves sharing knowledge and best practices, fostering collaborations, and building communities of practice.

One of our key strategies to achieve this



is through knowledge exchange. We believe that by facilitating the exchange of ideas and experiences, we can foster innovation and accelerate progress toward our goal of eradicating malnutrition. This can involve sharing research findings, best practices, and lessons learned from ongoing projects which we or others in the sector have implemented. We are committed to leveraging various platforms for knowledge exchange, including conferences, workshops, and webinars that will build the capacity of our grassroots workers in communities.

Our approach towards strengthening the ecosystem for malnutrition involves a multi-pronged strategy that includes knowledge exchange, implementing projects on the ground, and building communities of practice around MCH. Glenmark Foundation and Idobro remain committed to this cause, and we believe that by working together, we can create a brighter and healthier future for all.

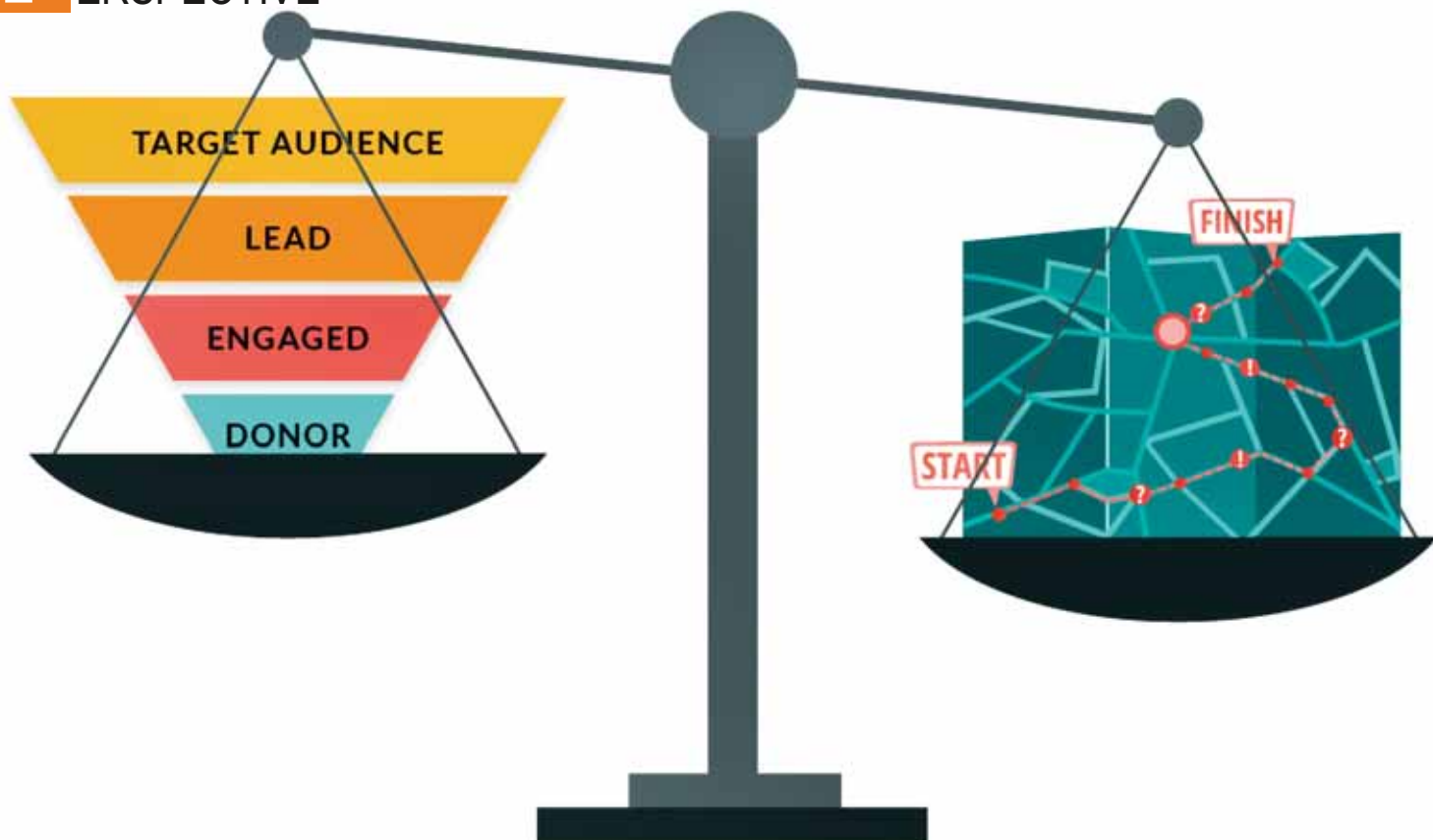
In addition to knowledge exchange, we recognise the importance of implementing projects on the ground, including working with communities to identify and address the root causes of

malnutrition. We believe that a participatory approach involving communities in the design, implementation and evaluation of projects is essential in ensuring their sustainability and effectiveness.

Building communities of practice around Maternal and Child Health (MCH) is another important aspect of our approach. We recognise that MCH is a critical area that requires focused attention and collaboration. By building communities of practice around MCH, we can leverage the collective expertise of stakeholders and create a shared vision for a healthier future. It involves engaging with healthcare providers, policymakers, researchers, and community leaders to share knowledge and best practices.

Our approach towards strengthening the ecosystem for malnutrition involves a multi-pronged strategy that includes knowledge exchange, implementing projects on the ground, and building communities of practice around MCH. Glenmark Foundation and Idobro remain committed to this cause, and we believe that by working together, we can create a brighter and healthier future for all. ■





## CSR: A Strategic Imperative for Businesses and Nations to Achieve Societal Goals

The desire to feel included is a basic human need. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) allows us to work with our employees, local communities and the people at large to build an inclusive and sustainable society. In a world where organisations face constraints brought on by depleting resources, business policies that include the critical area of CSR pave a path of transparency, diversity and inclusiveness.

A significant initiative by the Government of India was the introduction of Section 135 of the Companies Act, 2013, which mandates companies with a specified turnover, net worth or profits to spend at least 2 per cent of their average net profits in the preceding three years on CSR activities. Since then, CSR initiatives in India have seen significant growth. Today, CSR has become an essential aspect of the

corporate world. These activities in India focus on various social and environmental issues such as education, skill development, healthcare, rural development and environmental conservation. Public sector companies have also been leading several of these large-scale initiatives. The Government's focus on CSR has encouraged companies to contribute to society and the



**Sheena Kapoor**

“

Collaborating with NGOs and social organisations help Corporates identify areas for maximum impact and address complex social problems at the grassroots level. Education is one key area where companies are making a great impact - from providing scholarships and building schools and colleges - to supporting educational programmes for children. Companies are increasingly engaging in social impact initiatives such as supporting community development and addressing poverty and inequality.

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environment, thus looking beyond their immediate business interests.

### Rising CSR Demand

Companies are increasingly realising the importance of giving back to society. As a result, they have taken up the CSR mandate across social causes, leading to environmental sustainability, community development and a positive impact on

society. Initiatives such as Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, Beti Bachao-Beti Padhao, Make in India, and Namami Gange, spearheaded by the Government of India have garnered much support from various corporate houses.

Today, companies are mindful of the well-being of the communities in which they operate, and they wish to build a sustainable future for all their stakeholders. As a nation, we have come a long way.

- **Collaborations** – Collaborating with NGOs and social organisations help Corporates identify areas for maximum impact and address complex social problems at the grassroots level.
- **Skill Development** – Providing training and skill development uplifts people, improves their living standards and enhances their employment opportunities.
- **Environment Sustainability** – Companies are eagerly adopting green technology, renewable energy, better waste management practices, and afforestation to reduce their carbon footprint.
- **Health & Hygiene** – We have several corporate houses from various sectors that contribute towards promoting the importance of hygiene and improving the overall health of people across urban and rural areas of India.
- **Education** – Education is one key area

where companies are making a great impact - from providing scholarships and building schools and colleges - to supporting educational programmes for children.

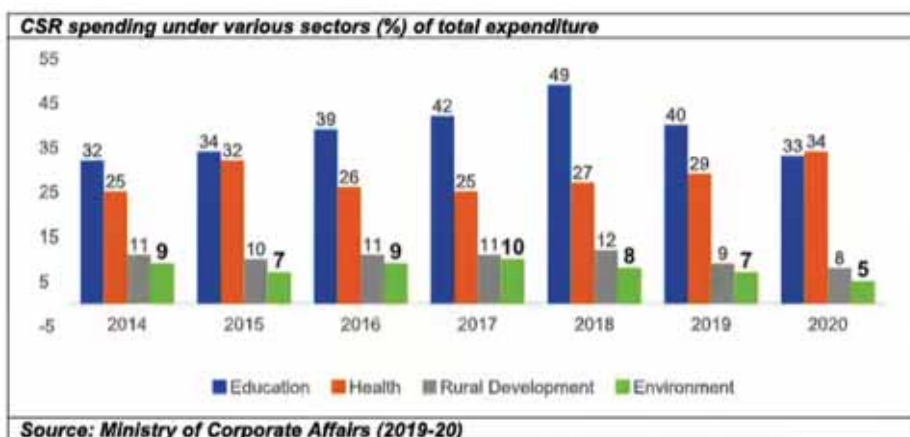
- **Social Impact** – Companies are increasingly engaging in social impact initiatives such as supporting community development and addressing poverty and inequality.
- **Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI)** – Several companies are promoting DEI within their organisation, such as increasing diversity in their workforce, providing equal pay for equal work and addressing and sensitising employees to create a bias-free work environment.
- **Reporting and Transparency** – With CSR awareness and the government's support, we have seen a surge in companies reporting on their CSR activities, including the CSR progress and impact, thereby providing transparency and accountability to stakeholders.

### CSR - A Foundational Step in Building a Modern and Sustained Society

- The pandemic highlighted the need to ensure support for vulnerable communities. To effectively distribute resources and reach a wider population, we saw companies in India collaborate with NGOs and government agencies.







- Companies all over India encouraged their employees to participate in CSR activities, including volunteering for relief efforts. This also helped in boosting employee morale and engagement.
- 2020 highlighted the need for sustainable practices and led to companies increasing their focus on sustainability-related CSR activities such as waste reduction and energy conservation.
- Thanks to the adoption of technology in CSR, companies are using digital platforms to implement CSR initiatives and engage with their stakeholders.
- There has been increased collaboration with government agencies.
- Employee volunteering has emerged as an important component of CSR activities in India.
- To help understand the return on investment, impact assessment has become critical for all CSR activities.

### Key Developments in CSR

Over the years, CSR has evolved from a task-oriented mandate to a more strategic and meaningful partnership aimed at developing communities.

- Health and education continue to receive the highest share of CSR spending in India.



### Creating a Cohesive Environment for All Stakeholders Through CSR

As a responsible corporate, we at ICICI Lombard are committed to making the world a safer and healthier place. One of our flagship community initiatives -



“

We are constantly trying to create a cohesive environment wherein all our stakeholders can excel and achieve societal goals. Time and again, it has been proven that CSR plays an imperative role for companies in building credibility amongst their stakeholders. The best organisations have recognised this and have integrated CSR into their operational endeavour. This realisation bodes well for the corporate world and society, making the world a better and more equitable place.

”

Caring Hands - focuses on employee volunteering to support visually-impaired children and empower them to lead better lives. Employees volunteer to scout for schools, take permission from authorities, arrange for doctors, etc. We conduct eye check-up camps in municipal/government schools. The ophthalmologist tests each child with



utmost detail. Once the tests are performed, we provide corrective lenses to children requiring the same. We carry out this initiative annually across various locations in the country on a special day designated as Caring Hands Day. The initiative started in 2011 and has reached more than 4,00,000 beneficiaries.

Similarly, under our Ride to Safety initiative, we hold educational sessions for school children and their parents. The sessions majorly focus on road safety rules, regulations and the importance of wearing helmets for parents and children alike. After the sessions, we freely distribute ISI-marked helmets to parents and children. We implement this initiative in 12 cities across the country - Mumbai, Pune, Delhi, Bangalore, Chennai, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Ahmedabad, Patna, Agartala, Ludhiana and Nagpur.

In FY2021, through our preventive healthcare initiative, Niranjali, we embarked on a pilot exercise to uplift the Primary Health Centres (PHC) in rural locations by providing medical equipment to PHCs in UP, MP, West Bengal, and Uttarakhand. The intent

was to reduce the transfer of medical cases to district hospitals. We provided equipment to these PHCs in FY2021-2022 and FY2022-23, benefiting more than 15,000 people.

Further, we launched a pilot environmental sustainability programme involving the installation of solar panels in the schools in line with India's net-zero ambitions. So far, we have installed solar panels in 95 schools in Mumbai, Patna and Agartala.

Our CSR initiatives have touched over one million lives till FY2022-23.

As a brand with customer-centricity at its core, we are driven by Nibhaye Vaade - our brand philosophy. Our marketing campaigns are also aligned with this philosophy and holistic approach that takes into account the Environmental, Social and Governance aspects.

At ICICI Lombard, sustainability is at the core of our growth strategy. We are constantly trying to create a cohesive environment wherein all our stakeholders can excel and achieve societal goals.

Time and again, it has been proven that CSR plays an imperative role for companies in building credibility amongst their stakeholders. The best organisations have recognised this and have integrated CSR into their operational endeavour. This realisation bodes well for the corporate world and society, making the world a better and more equitable place.

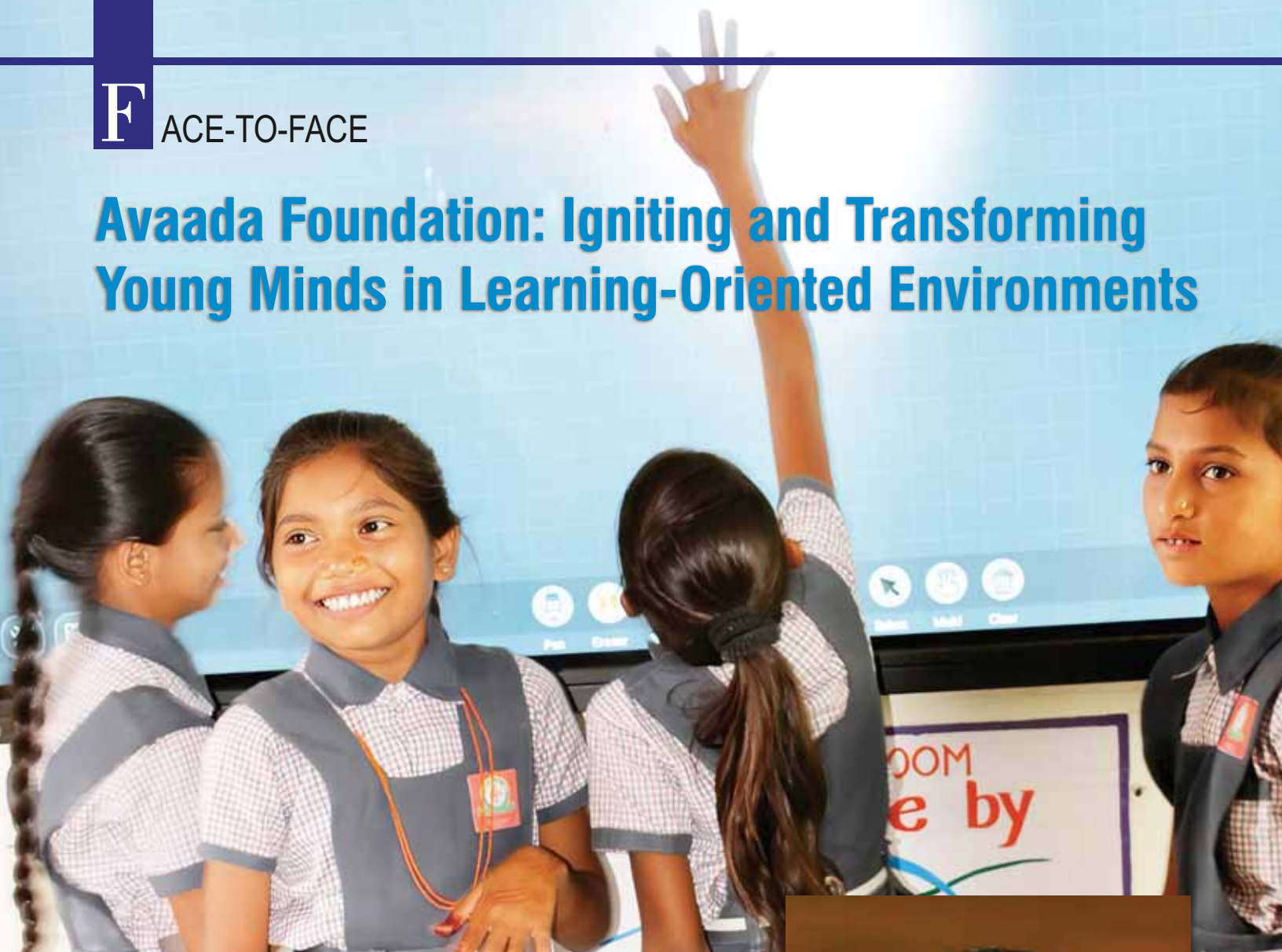
I believe that when we become a better version of ourselves, our environment, society, and nation also become better. After all, whether it is our family or company, our responsibility is to ensure that nobody is left behind or forgotten. ■

*Sheena Kapoor is Head of Marketing, Corp Comm & CSR at ICICI Lombard.*





## Avaada Foundation: Igniting and Transforming Young Minds in Learning-Oriented Environments



Education continues to be a critical concern across India. Apart from access to learning, several parts of the country lack awareness and understanding of its need. No other factor truly impacts a nation's growth than education. It uplifts economically underprivileged masses and helps them overcome various developmental issues. Avaada Foundation has initiated meaningful education programmes that enable the individual's overall development. With a focus on child education, it implements interactive and engaging education methods for poor children. The main initiative - Mission Education - is committed to providing basic education to needy children. **CSR Mandate** spoke to **Vineet Mittal, Chairperson, Avaada Energy**, about how the Foundation's education initiatives have transformed the lives of its beneficiaries.



## Why do you think it is important to focus on education in India?

Education is a fundamental human right and has the power to transform individuals and communities. Given that a significant part of the population (136+ crores) consists of young individuals, a developing nation like ours must prioritise increased investment in education as an urgent requirement. By providing quality education, universally, the youth can be empowered with the knowledge and skills they need to achieve their full potential, regardless of their socioeconomic background. Education is also the key to reducing poverty, bettering lifestyles and promoting economic growth.

India is a developing nation with an abundant talent pool, and investing in education can help create a skilled workforce essential for driving innovation, boosting productivity and promoting economic development. It also provides opportunities for entrepreneurship, innovation and helps to create job opportunities.



Education can foster social and cultural development, and by promoting cultural understanding, barriers are broken, diversity is promoted, and social cohesion is built. It can also help to

promote gender equality, social justice and empower individuals and communities to challenge discrimination and inequality.

Finally, education is essential for promoting environmental sustainability and building a greener future. By teaching sustainable practices and environmental stewardship, education can help to create a more sustainable future and mitigate the impacts of climate change. Therefore, focusing on education in India is a moral imperative and an economic, social and environmental necessity.

## There is a visible gap in the quality of education in the country. Do you feel India Inc. should shift its focus to bridging this gap through its CSR initiatives?

I believe India Inc. can play a huge role in bridging the gap in quality education in the country. By supporting initiatives that focus on improving the quality of education, we can create a skilled and competent workforce essential for the growth and prosperity of our nation. As responsible corporate citizens, we must invest in education and contribute to building a better future for all.

Given the vast pool of young talent, India can become the skill capital of the world. However, this talent must be turned into ways to generate revenue. This is where targeted efforts need to be put in not just by India Inc., but also by all stakeholders. Giving back should become a universal motto, and every individual, institution, and organisation needs to do whatever it can to ensure the right education reaches the right person.

Specialised and vocational training should be given more focus going forward so that our population can be turned into human capital. Thanks to NEP 2020, a key step has been taken in this regard. All we require now are stronger policies and better implementation to ensure we provide quality education universally.

Education is one of the key focus areas of our Group's CSR policy, and we support

initiatives that aim to improve the quality of education in the country. Moreover, we leverage technology to improve the reach and quality of education. For example, we support eLearning initiatives and provide access to digital resources to enhance the learning experience.

## What are some of the key areas of focus for Avaada Foundation?

We are engaged in social welfare activities, with a significant focus on education, medical facilities in rural areas, women empowerment through skill development, environment, and rural electrification, among others. We have implemented these initiatives directly and collaborated and liaison with the Government, local authorities and rural administrative bodies. We are presently working across 11 States, covering more than 40 districts and serving more than 100 villages across India.





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The curriculum taught in schools today might not be relevant for the jobs of the future. The challenge before us is – How do we prepare students for jobs that do not exist yet? The answer lies in transforming classrooms from content-delivery places to learning-oriented environments. In the schools of the future, teachers will be responsible to ignite young minds to think innovatively and accept challenges as growth opportunities.

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### What made the Foundation decide to work in these particular social sectors?

Our purpose and values matter a lot to the people and communities we serve, and we must consider ourselves fortunate to be able to serve them selflessly.

Our larger vision is to meet the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and we have put down objectives to meet these goals and foster overall development and upliftment of the society as listed in Schedule VIII of Section 135 of the Companies Act through a detailed and focused action plan.

### What was the vision behind Utkrisht Shiksha Abhiyan?

We launched a unique initiative, Utkrisht Shiksha Abhiyan, to promote value-based education among the youth and share innovative methodologies with the teachers to transform lives. The objective is to bring about long-term societal development by introducing value-based education programmes for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

In the fast-changing world of digital transformation, academia, like other professions, is also going through an important transition. The curriculum taught in schools today might not be relevant for the jobs of the future. The challenge before us is – How do we prepare students for jobs that do not exist yet?

The answer lies in transforming classrooms from content-delivery places to learning-oriented environments. In the schools of the future, teachers will be responsible to ignite young minds to think innovatively and accept challenges as growth opportunities.

### Share the educational initiatives undertaken through this programme.

Utkrisht Shiksha Abhiyan is a research and evidence-based programme curated to maximise learning. It is a blend of ancient wisdom, neurosciences, and modern research and is delivered using experiential activities to empower the youth to live happy and successful lives.

Under this initiative, we have 'Be a Champion' and 'Teaching to Transform Lives'.

'Be the Champion' provides a value-based approach to education and uses positive values to create a strong learning environment. The students learn to lead a life with a positive vision, handle peer

pressure, realise self-esteem and gain self-confidence.

Overall, it teaches you how to be good, successful and happy humans. Students feel empowered and safe to learn and participate in a culturally-responsive environment. They feel included in their school community as that is where they develop a sense of pride and self-esteem.

The 'Teaching to Transform Life' programme is a combination of principles from neurosciences, modern research, ancient wisdom and experiential learning. It provides insights to students to become academic leaders and life transformers.

We held the programme in 11 government and private schools in Rishikesh, Uttarakhand, and in GLA University (the largest private university in Uttar Pradesh) in Mathura and Rae Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh.

We organised a slew of activities for the students to help them become more confident and talk about their issues openly without fear. We hope many more students and teachers will participate in this transformative programme to enhance their learning and teaching experiences.

### Lives Touched

Rishikesh - Over 4,000 students and 150 teachers

GLA University - Over 500 students and 100 teachers

Rae Bareilly - Over 1000 students and 150 teachers

### What have you accomplished through these programmes and what do you hope to accomplish in the future?

Our initiatives have aided 35,000 people in education, where we have instilled a true sense of their identity and confidence through a careful blend of knowledge, skills and social responsibility. We hope to educate, empower, enhance the quality of life, and energise and enlighten the community, socially and economically, to fulfil their dreams. We hope to achieve this through quality and innovative



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Infrastructure support for schools, such as renovation and construction of classroom seating arrangements, providing toilets, libraries, drinking water facilities, sports equipment, science labs, smart classes, etc., has come a long way in providing a healthy environment for the children to study. We provided quality and innovative education with smart classes on laptops, computers, and smart TVs in classrooms and science labs in the schools. In addition to providing core academic support and bolstering government schemes such as Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and the Mid-Day Meal programme, appointing Shiksha Karmis (Education Volunteers), we place special emphasis on promoting girls' education.

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education and provide a healthy environment and community support that will positively impact the lives of the children, boost confidence and help them build stronger futures for themselves.

**How did you zero in on the schools? What was the need you observed that required your immediate intervention?**

In the regions where we initiated our project activities, we conducted need-based surveys to assess the basic requirements of the schools, including social and physical infrastructure facilities and level of quality education, including drinking water and toilets

facilities, library, sports equipment and facilities, science lab, eLearning classes, computer, smart classes, etc. We held meetings with the school administration, principals, teachers and students in focused group discussions, and informal discussions with the village heads.

Based on assessments and stakeholders' consultations, we found that schools in rural India often face a range of challenges, such as inadequate infrastructure - dilapidated classrooms and playgrounds, toilets, poor drinking water facilities, lack of qualified teachers, insufficient teaching materials, low attendance rates, and high dropout rates. These challenges can significantly impact the quality of education and the opportunities available to students. Such deficiencies can create unsafe and uncomfortable learning environments that discourage students from attending school regularly.

**Providing core academic help is just one of the many aspects of education to improve student outcomes. What are the other interventions and infrastructural aid you extended to the schools in need?**

Infrastructure support for schools, such as renovation and construction of classroom seating arrangements,

providing toilets, libraries, drinking water facilities, sports equipment, science labs, smart classes, etc., has come a long way in providing a healthy environment for the children to study. We provided quality and innovative education with smart classes on laptops, computers, and smart TVs in classrooms and science labs in the schools.

In addition to providing core academic support and bolstering government schemes such as Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and the Mid-Day Meal programme, appointing Shiksha Karmis (Education Volunteers), we place special emphasis on promoting girls' education.

**Would you like to share some inspiring stories with us?**

Please provide some success stories from the students, teachers, principals, and community beneficiaries who have benefited from these initiatives.

Our journey has been full of triumphs. We count our success stories as testimonies, full of hope and courage rather than accomplishments. We are mere intermediary who aid the recipients.

I want to share one success story from Amravati, Maharashtra. Zilla Parishad Upper Primary Marathi School and Shirajgaon Korde School in the region hardly had any facilities. The principal







was personally funding essential facilities out of his own pocket.

Our CSR team visited the school and formulated a plan to build infrastructure and provide educational support for the school. In a year, the dropout rate decreased, and it won the Rainbow School Award, one of only three schools in the entire Amravati district to do so.

One of the positive impacts of our intervention is our digital learning initiative. We strongly believe in the power of visualisation through digital learning, which helps students tremendously in their daily academic

lives. The impact was evident; we saw better attention span and attendance in the classroom, leading to improved results.

Through Utkrishta Shiksha Abhiyaan, we have gained some interesting insights. The principal of Bharat Mandir School and Saraswati Shishu Vidya Mandir, Rishikesh, has an innovative and unique method of imparting teaching methodology, and the teachers and students were motivated by this programme as it enhanced their skills.

Vice Chancellor Anoop Gupta of GLA University also expressed his views on the Utkrishta Shiksha Abhiyaan, emphasising its significance as the beginning of a remarkable journey. He highlighted the programme's objective to provide quality education by prioritising innovation and creativity and fostering a new teaching methodology among educators.

### **What are the other community initiatives the Foundation is involved in?**

Our 360° inclusivity model provides clean energy and improved opportunities



for rural India through education and livelihood skills and community involvement. During the pandemic, we carried out several relief efforts, including food distribution and medical supplies across our communities.

We encourage the community to enhance their vocational skills and empower themselves in accessing information, thereby building their capacity. Empowerment is one of our major focus areas. To empower and uplift the community's skill level, we have set up the Nav Kiran Stitching and Nav Kiran Digital Literacy Centre, where women and youth are empowered and digitalised under the Skill India programme.

We initiated a 'Vocal for Local' campaign, where decorative and other handmade items are crafted in skill centres to empower and enhance livelihoods through employment generation for local women. These items are showcased at various organised exhibitions. We distribute the funds generated from these stalls back to these rural women.

### **How long has Avaada Foundation been involved in all these initiatives? What is the impact thus far?**

Avaada Foundation was registered under Section 8 of the Companies Act 2013 on May 18, 2018. After its incorporation, we have been working tirelessly for the development of the community on many levels. In the field of education, we have taken several initiatives like Utkrishta Shiksha Abhiyan, promoting girls' education, education for all, youth education, bolstering government schemes, aiding appointment of Shiksha Mitra/Karmi under the 'Train the Teacher' programme, innovative teaching and learning methods such as digital





literacy/smart classes/eLearning programmes, science labs in schools, exposure visits, etc. Our initiatives have directly and indirectly impacted lakhs of students across India.

### **The pandemic has demonstrated the advantages and disadvantages of digital learning. What are your thoughts on the matter?**

Digital learning, like any other approach, comes with its own set of advantages and disadvantages, making it a widely debated topic. On the positive side, students now have instant access to a vast amount of information, and the world is becoming more interconnected than ever before. With a wide range of digital learning solutions available 24/7, students enjoy the freedom to study at their convenience and engage with a global learning community, sharing knowledge with individuals from diverse countries and cultures. However, it is becoming increasingly challenging to

distinguish between what is genuine and what is not. Issues such as network connectivity problems, excessive screen time, and limited access to devices or internet connections are among the challenges faced. Despite these challenges, the educational landscape is evolving, and it is encouraging to witness our adaptation to new learning methods.

### **Should the Indian Government increase the mandatory percentage of CSR investment?**

It is important to note that the effectiveness of CSR activities depends on the amount of funds and the quality and impact of the initiatives undertaken. Therefore, it is essential to ensure that funds are utilised responsibly and effectively, regardless of the percentage of mandatory investment.

Ultimately, the decision to increase the mandatory percentage of CSR investment lies with the Government, and it should be based on a

comprehensive assessment of the potential benefits and drawbacks of such a move.

### **Do you think corporate-government collaboration is required for CSR activities to be successful?**

I fully agree that corporate-government collaboration is essential for the success of CSR activities. Corporations have a significant role in addressing social and environmental challenges through their initiatives. However, it is equally important for government policies and regulations to create an enabling environment that supports and encourages such efforts.

### **What are your plans for CSR beyond 2023?**

CSR is not an obligation but an opportunity to create shared value for the business and society. Our approach focuses on relevant and impactful initiatives, taking long-term perspectives rather than short-term gains, measuring and reporting impact using relevant metrics and standards like Social Returns on Investment (SROI) that can help in evaluating the effectiveness of the initiatives and identifying areas for improvement, and collaborating with stakeholders including the Government, NGOs, and other businesses to achieve common goals and maximise impact. As corporate citizens, we can positively impact society while creating value for the business. ■

Impact of Initiatives	Beneficiaries
Empowerment:	20,000+
Health:	70,000+
Sanitation:	35,000+
Environment:	65,000+ Lives Touched
Rural Infra Development Work:	6,000+
Rural Electrification:	8,000+
Agriculture Support and Farmers Awareness:	450 households, and about 1,200 animals
Other CSR Activities:	10,000+
COVID Care Support:	65,000+





## Literacy India: Education as a Tool for an Equitable and Sustainable Future

Access to quality education in India is a complex and multifaceted issue, with challenges such as illiteracy and limited resources. Despite government and non-profit efforts, many communities still lack opportunities for quality education. According to the 2011 census, the overall literacy rate in India stands at 74.04 per cent, which indicates a significant improvement over the years. However, this progress is uneven, with significant disparities between rural and urban regions. Gender inequality also persists, with a considerable gap in literacy rates between males and females.

Despite significant barriers plaguing education, the government's efforts and the tireless work of non-profit organisations like Literacy India are promoting education and literacy in India.

Through innovative programmes, the organisation is empowering communities and promoting a brighter future for all individuals in India.



**Indrani Singh**

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We work to address the root causes of illiteracy, such as poverty and gender inequality, and to promote community engagement and participation in education. To achieve an equitable society, we have developed a range of innovative and effective programmes that aim to provide access to quality education, vocational training, and life skills development.

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### Our Mission and Vision

At Literacy India, we envision to empower marginalised communities in India by providing educational and vocational training for a more equitable and sustainable future. We promote literacy and education among underprivileged children, youth, and women, especially in rural and urban slum areas. We strive to create a just and equitable society in India by providing creative educational initiatives and activities that enable individuals to realise their full potential. We also offer

women access to technical education and job opportunities to help them achieve financial independence and become active community members.

### Targeted Regions and Age Groups

We have worked in 17 States, and we currently operate in Delhi, Haryana, UP, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Gujarat, Rajasthan, and Ladakh. We target individuals and communities who lack access to quality education, including those living in slums, rural areas, and other marginalised communities within these regions.

We work with a range of individuals, including children, youth, and adults. We have developed specific programmes tailored to the needs of each age group, with a focus on providing access to education, vocational training, and life skills development.

### Uniqueness of Literacy India's Approach

We work to address the root causes of illiteracy, such as poverty and gender inequality, and to promote community engagement and participation in education. To achieve an equitable society, we have developed a range of innovative and effective programmes that aim to provide access to quality education, vocational training, and life skills development.

Some of our notable innovative contributions are:

**Gyantantra Digital Dost:** This programme uses a gamified digital platform called the Gyantantra Learning Lab to develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills through interactive learning experiences. The platform engages students with real-world scenarios and challenges.

UNICEF selected the Gyantantra





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Many students in government schools face obstacles to learning. Due to this, they struggle to keep up with their peers and risk falling behind academically. Pathshala is a remedial education programme that provides extra tutoring and support to students struggling with core subjects like Math, Science, and Language. We partner with government schools. We operate in multiple locations across India, including Delhi, Haryana, UP, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Rajasthan, and Ladakh.

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software as it has a relatable approach to engage the students using interactive games for concepts. Gyantantra.org has a unique software download to track the progress of a child with a pre-test and post three-months test. This data helped regions like Rajasthan and Ladakh with minimal network connectivity to get the systems loaded with the software for once and use it later. Later, the data on the app is used to track an individual child's progress. As of now, there are more than 45 centres that include the labs.

The programme is currently bridging the



## The Power of Determination Mayank

Mayank is from Shahpur, Noida, Uttar Pradesh. He was born with a disability in his right leg. His father is a labourer and his mother is a homemaker. Mayank is in Grade IV while his two older siblings are in Grade V. He is a very friendly boy who gets along with everyone.

Literacy India met Mayank while conducting a community survey. They were intrigued by his enthusiasm for everything, despite his disability. They counselled his parents about the Gyantantra Programme, and Mayank was very excited to join once he learnt that it provides access to computers and tablets. He was enrolled in Grade IV.

Initially, his father would transport him to and from classes, but Mayank was determined to become independent and started going by himself. He would complete most of the tasks himself. A Pre-test showed that his performance could use some guidance. Through diligence and dedication, his grades improved significantly after joining the programme. He consistently scored well in all subjects, with a remarkable improvement from 80 per cent in the Mid Term to 93 per cent in the Final Term.

Despite his disability, Mayank excels at every task by working hard and putting in a lot of effort. He also enjoys playing Kho-Kho. He hopes to become an engineer when he grows up, and Literacy India is helping him prepare for that.

Mayank's story inspires us all, showing that with hard work and determination, anything is possible.



digital divide with UNICEF and several NGOs and government schools for 5000 children in Purnia district, Bihar, to provide individuals with the skills and knowledge needed to participate in the digital economy.

The Gyantantra Learning Lab provides interactive lessons, activities, and assessments across various subjects like science, math, social studies, and language arts. The platform includes a teacher dashboard for progress tracking and customising the learning experience to meet students' needs.

## Vidyapeeth - Non-Formal Education

**Centres:** We are currently operating several Non-Formal Education Centres (Vidyapeeth) in Gurugram, Haryana. This is to provide basic education and life skills training to children who are unable to attend school. The Four Es – Education, Empowerment, Employment, and Environment – are the pillars of Project Vidyapeeth, which is driven by the idea of providing quality education to children regardless of their family's financial situation.

**Pathshala** - Many students in government





## Second Chances Neetu

Twenty-six-year-old Neetu is a resident of Koriya Patan village in Manohar Thana, Rajasthan. She was forced to drop out of school (Grade IX) as her parents got her married. She had a difficult marriage and faced domestic violence, so she returned to her parents' house.

During Literacy India's area survey and mobilisation drive, Neetu expressed her wish to study and wanted to explore the possibility of completing her education. A courageous girl, she joined the special academic programme for girls, "Second Chance". She was enrolled under the RSOS (Rajasthan State Open School) to complete her Grade X. Life rewarded her with a second chance to complete her academics. A devoted student who attended her classes regularly, Neetu is very keen to learn new concepts and wants to excel in her pursuits to complete her education and become independent. She is also pursuing her cutting and tailoring course along with her academics.

Neetu is thankful to Literacy India for helping her complete her studies and for the skill training, she received. Seeing her dedication and devotion towards learning, Literacy India provided her with a bicycle for an easier commute to the learning centre.

Her story has also made her a local icon, motivating other girls and women in her area who may have faced similar obstacles due to various reasons.



skills development. This initiative aims to provide learners with the information and abilities they need to improve their lives and become self-sufficient by granting them access to education and vocational training.

**Shiksharth** - This programme goes beyond traditional teaching methods to create a dynamic and holistic approach to education. By providing students with opportunities to express themselves through the arts, they develop a sense of confidence and creativity. The programme also emphasises the importance of social responsibility by involving students in community work, which not only benefits society but also instils values of empathy and compassion in the students. It is an innovative and effective way to enhance the educational experience and prepare students for a well-rounded and fulfilling life.

## STEM Learning

At Literacy India, we aim to enhance STEM learning for students by expanding the ToKo Tinkering Lab



schools face obstacles to learning. Due to this, they struggle to keep up with their peers and risk falling behind academically. Pathshala is a remedial education programme that provides extra tutoring and support to students struggling with core subjects like Math, Science, and Language. We partner with government schools. We operate in multiple locations across India, including Delhi, Haryana, UP, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Rajasthan, and Ladakh.

**Gurukul** - Gurukul is a financial assistance



programme to provide quality education to children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. These schools provide a safe and supportive environment where students receive education, vocational training, and life





programme which involves establishing a club for young tech innovators who can collaborate within the lab to develop their ideas and concepts further. We have partnered with Code.Org and Microsoft to broaden its reach and have a more significant impact on learners.

Toko Tinkering Lab has already positively impacted over 5,728 students and has been a valuable addition to other learning modes. We have enabled over 3,000 coders, facilitated the creation of 30,000+ programme applications and

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Our teacher training programme is customised to meet the specific needs of each programme. It includes workshops, seminars, and on-the-job training delivered by experienced trainers and subject matter experts. It focuses on enhancing teachers' skills and knowledge in pedagogy, subject matter, and technology, including teaching methods, classroom management, student engagement, assessment, and subject-specific training. It also covers the integration of digital tools and resources into the classroom.

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6,000+ games, and imparted skills to 3,150 girls, which accounts for 55 per cent of the total students trained under this project. It has also enabled students to create various games, programmes, mobile applications, bots, and learning management systems.

Students have developed games like Dogger, Puzzles, Simon, and board games like Snakes and Ladders. They have created mobile apps such as ToKo and learning management systems as part

of their projects. They have developed bots like Spinning Chakra, Simple Humanoid, and Automated Restaurant, and created a cloth-folding machine and a human-following robot, showcasing their creativity and innovation.

### Partnerships with Schools: A Joint Initiative

We work with a range of educational institutions, including non-formal education centres and government schools. We have reached over 5,66,729 children and youth since our inception in 1996.

While selecting schools or institutes for the above initiatives, we partner with government schools, community-based organisations, and other educational institutions to provide education, vocational training, and life skills development to children and youth from marginalised communities.

### Enhancing Teachers' Skills

Our teacher training programme is customised to meet the specific needs of each programme. It includes workshops, seminars, and on-the-job training delivered by experienced trainers and subject matter experts. It focuses on enhancing teachers' skills and knowledge in pedagogy, subject matter, and technology, including teaching methods, classroom management, student engagement, assessment, and subject-specific training. It also covers the integration of digital tools and resources into the classroom.





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The future involves the integration of technology with pedagogy in elementary education to ensure educated, trained, confident and job-ready youngsters. A strong educational foundation is the only tool that will ensure employability and secure the future of children, impacting their immediate families, and ultimately having a positive impact on the community at large.

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### Community Engagement

We recognise the importance of community engagement in our education initiatives. We actively engage a diverse range of stakeholders, including parents, Panchayat leaders, and the wider community, in the design,

implementation, and evaluation of our programmes.

To involve parents, we encourage them to participate in parent-teacher meetings, where they can discuss their children's progress and receive feedback from teachers. We also provide parents with resources and support to help them reinforce their children's learning at home.

We engage with Panchayat leaders as important stakeholders, collaborating with them to align the programmes with local development plans and priorities. Leaders are involved in selecting communities and monitoring programmes. This creates a supportive environment for learning and promotes a culture of education. Collaboration with Panchayat leaders also ensures a sustainable impact on the broader community by aligning programmes with local development priorities.

### Pre and Post Scenario Success Measures

We made it a point to assess students' academic and emotional levels before

starting our initiatives. We do so by using periodic assessments, observations, and feedback from teachers, parents, and students to evaluate their progress. We track attendance and retention rates to ensure students stay motivated. We conduct a final assessment at the programme's end to measure its effectiveness. We employ both quantitative and qualitative methods such as standardised tests, surveys and focus groups to evaluate them.

At Literacy India, we deploy innovative and alternative teaching methods and use technology to facilitate learning. Over the years, we have refined our approach and embraced modern teaching tools to make learning holistic. The future involves the integration of technology with pedagogy in elementary education to ensure educated, trained, confident and job-ready youngsters. A strong educational foundation is the only tool that will ensure employability and secure the future of children, impacting their immediate families, and ultimately having a positive impact on the community at large. ■

*Indrani Singh is the Managing Trustee at Literacy India.*







## Marico Limited: Shaping the Leaders of Tomorrow with Nihar Shanti Pathshala Funwala

Emerging economies like India have made major strides in improving access to education over the last several years, but, the overall landscape of literacy remains a work in progress, especially in rural areas. Rural regions house nearly 65 percent, or around 880 million of India's total population. They face deep-seated issues such as low household incomes, limited educational infrastructure, limited digital and physical connectivity, and a lack of skilled, qualified teachers. Access to technology in rural areas has been a huge obstacle to education. They still lack the infrastructure to support digital learning. Schools often lack the funds to purchase the necessary technology, and even if they do, there is often no internet connection or access to digital resources. As a result, many rural schools are stuck in the past, relying on outdated teaching methods and materials.



**Amit Bhasin**



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The efforts undertaken by our flagship CSR programme, Nihar Shanti Pathshala Funwala (NSPF), are a case in point of how corporate initiatives can change the educational landscape in India. We launched Nihar Shanti Pathshala Funwala (NSPF) about four years ago to focus on upskilling and empowering government school teachers to resolve the pressing issue of lack of consistency and fluency in the Indian education system.

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Without access to the same technology as their urban counterparts, rural students often miss out on the opportunities digital learning can provide. They are unable to participate in interactive lessons, use educational apps, or take advantage of virtual resources, which directly impacts their academic performance as they struggle to keep up with their urban peers. Furthermore, the dearth of digitalisation also affects the quality of teaching in rural areas as teachers lack the means to utilise new and innovative modes of teaching.

Over the years, the Government of India has taken several steps to address these

issues. Initiatives such as the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Mid-Day Meal Scheme, and the Right to Education Act were introduced to enhance rural students' access to education, improve the quality of teaching, and incentivise teachers working in these areas. These measures are complemented by the efforts of responsible private organisations, which have committed to solving challenges in the sector through various interventions. In doing so, these players are transforming the education landscape in rural India by helping students improve their language competency and become better equipped to achieve future success.

### Championing Education

The efforts undertaken by our flagship CSR programme, Nihar Shanti Pathshala Funwala (NSPF), are a case in point of how corporate initiatives can change the educational landscape in India. We launched Nihar Shanti Pathshala Funwala (NSPF) about four years ago to focus on upskilling and empowering government school teachers to resolve the pressing issue of lack of consistency and fluency in the Indian education system. It intends to increase the proficiency level of reading and speaking capabilities among the students from underserved areas. Over the years, contextualised content and comprehensive training processes have improved the teachers' subject-matter knowledge, and enabled them to engage better with the students. The accessibility of digital learning resources has



enhanced learning environment for students.

In collaboration with various State governments, we provide government teachers with quality teaching material. A scalable and fun-based learning model was designed for students, which was supported by online as well as offline tools that not just impart education, but also bring about a transformation in the overall literacy quotient of our country. Staying at par with technological advancements, WhatsApp Enterprise model-based learning programs were developed, to upgrade teachers' capabilities in learning and imparting English literacy. In FY22, WhatsApp







(online) as well as workbook (offline)-led education was imparted in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Jharkhand, Bihar, and Chhattisgarh. Till FY22, the programme has impacted 4.17 lakhs. The programme has touched the lives of over three lakh teachers and four lakh students through a unique amalgamation of digitally-powered WhatsApp Enterprise Model and workbook-led courses. As a signature brand that prioritises making a difference and a purposeful existence, NSPF has consistently centred its focus on education and skill empowerment to align with its overall value proposition.

Our goal through this programme is to increase the proficiency level of reading,



speaking and comprehension capabilities among students from underserved areas. Over the years, contextualised content and comprehensive training processes have improved the teachers' subject-matter knowledge and enabled them to engage better with the students. The accessibility of digital learning resources has enhanced the learning environment for students.

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We designed and developed a scalable and engaging learning model for students, utilising both online and offline tools to provide education and enhance the overall literacy quotient of our country.

### Impact of NSPF

In our yearly survey, we saw that 85 per cent of the teachers agreed to benefit from teacher training techniques, and 95 per cent of teachers rated the quality of training material as 'Good'. Furthermore, 100 per cent of teachers expressed interest in honing their training techniques. Overall, we recognised that the technology-enabled medium proved extremely beneficial in a virtual learning session.

Calling out a few testimonials, Sarika Thakur, who has been associated with the NSPF programme since 2019, shared how she learned the concept of 'Power Words' through NSPF which has proven beneficial in improving her and her students' language skills. Another teacher, Md. Samsuddin Ansari shared with us how the simplicity of the study



Sarika Thakur



Md. Samsuddin Ansari



Umend Kumar Nirmalkar

materials and interactive practice quizzes help the students learn faster. Another teacher, Umend Kumar Nirmalkar, opines modern teaching techniques by NSPF were the key to gaining the interest of his students.

By incorporating practical techniques, relevant materials and interactive quizzes, we have made learning a fun and engaging experience for students. One of the students, Dilshana Jamshed, who aspires to be a lawyer, shared that she has developed an immense interest in

obtaining further education after participating in the programme and receiving the Elementary and Advance reading workbooks.

Another inspiring story is that of a fourth-grade student who, with access to new-age teaching techniques and interactive quizzes, has significantly improved her language proficiency. As a result, she can now comprehend texts from the fifth grade.

Furthermore, parents have also expressed their excitement regarding the dynamic initiatives undertaken by NSPF. They have witnessed a significant improvement in the language proficiency of their children.

To minimise the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak on the learning proficiency of rural students, we have, through NSPF, complemented holistic educational programmes such as DIKSHA (Digital Infrastructure for Knowledge Sharing) and SWAYAM (Study Webs of Active Learning for Young Aspiring Minds). These are our digital-first initiatives.

We have developed and launched a scalable, fun-loving hybrid learning model for students that use WhatsApp Enterprise model-based learning programmes to upgrade teachers'

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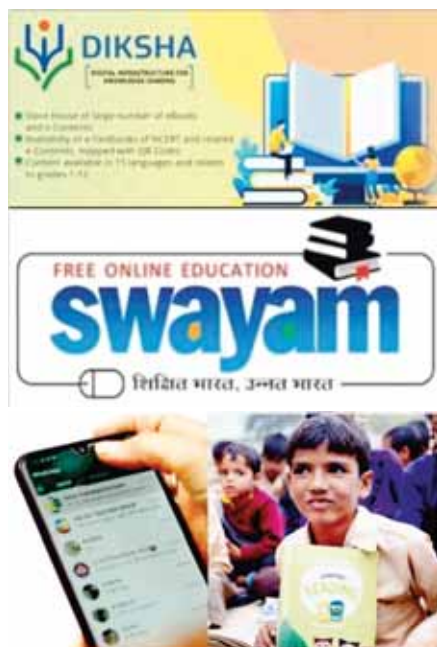
In tandem with good education, leveraging government partnerships has paved the way to expand the reach and access to far-flung rural areas. One of the consciously crafted features of our NSPF initiatives is the clear idea of not duplicating the existing government programmes; rather the focus is on creating a system for the beneficiaries that are an extension and is in tandem with the State's current efforts in education. Since the beginning, we have ensured that our efforts are aligned with the State Governments, complementing and contributing jointly towards their vision for their respective States.

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capabilities and impart literacy. In 2022, we delivered literacy programmes through WhatsApp and workbook (offline) channels in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Jharkhand, Bihar, and Chhattisgarh. To date, through NSPF, we have impacted 4.17 lakh students and reached 2.89 lakh teachers. Our target is to make 10 lakh children literate by 2025.

## Widening the Impact

In tandem with good education, leveraging government partnerships has paved the way to expand the reach and access to far-flung rural areas. One of the consciously crafted features of our NSPF initiatives is the clear idea of not duplicating the existing government programmes; rather the focus is on creating a system for the beneficiaries that are an extension and is in tandem with the State's current efforts in education. Since the beginning, we have ensured that our efforts are aligned with the State Governments, complementing and contributing jointly towards their vision for their respective States. Our collaboration with the Governments of Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, and Rajasthan has been very fruitful. Leveraging our relationships with the government at the





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Education is an essential aspect of development and evolution, playing a crucial role in shaping our societies and cultures. It continues to be a powerful tool that connects people worldwide, breaks down barriers, and creates opportunities for growth and development. By equipping and empowering rural students with the right learning and coaching tools, we can continue to shape generations of leaders who will drive our country's growth and shape the future of our world.

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cluster, block, and district levels, our programme is readily adopted by both teachers and students.

### Motivating Students Through Word Power Championship

In partnership with Leap for Word, we host an annual Word Power Championship (WPC) to enhance students' confidence in the English language. The first-of-its-kind competition is influenced by the widely-known American 'Spelling Bee', adopted for regional schools across predominately Hindi-speaking States which has widened the exposure for teachers and students. We also train teachers with effective techniques and lesson plans to teach using Hindi or the regional language as the medium of instruction.

This year, the recently initiated 10th edition of the Word Power Championship saw enthusiastic participation from key States like Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra,



Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu. Over 8.9 lakh students and two lakh teachers participated. Moreover, the support from all the State governments was overwhelming and boasted the scale of the championship. After qualifying in a tough competition in the State round, we shortlist 20 winners from Classes Two to Five for the finale in Mumbai.

Over the last few years, Nihar Shanti Pathshala Funwala has created a positive change in the lives of students by providing them with access to quality education, innovative learning solutions and an opportunity to showcase their language proficiency.

We strongly believe that language proficiency is a critical skill that can help students succeed academically and

professionally. We feel immense pride to see the impact of our effort in hosting the Word Power Championship.

### Conclusion

Education is an essential aspect of development and evolution, playing a crucial role in shaping our societies and cultures. It continues to be a powerful tool that connects people worldwide, breaks down barriers, and creates opportunities for growth and development. By equipping and empowering rural students with the right learning and coaching tools, we can continue to shape generations of leaders who will drive our country's growth and shape the future of our world. ■

*Amit Bhasin is the Chief Legal Officer & Group General Counsel and Secretary of the CSR Committee at Marico Limited.*

# Five NGOs Committed to Transforming Government Schools

Education is a constitutional right of every Indian citizen. However, the country's overwhelming financial and cultural disparity has resulted in increased inequity in accessing education. According to a UNICEF report released in June 2020, school closures impacted 247 million children in elementary and secondary education and 28 million children in pre-schools and Anganwadi centres in India. This is in addition to more than six million children who were already out of school before the COVID-19 crisis. As the study signifies the immediate need for assistance, the pandemic has only worsened the situation for underprivileged children across India. Government schemes and interventions from different NGOs have become the only cradle of hope for these budding minds. Government schools become the catalyst to extend quality education, due to which NGOs focus on transforming these schools into attractive learning centres. The following five NGOs are committed to ensuring quality education for children studying in government schools.

## Bal Utsav

Bal Utsav, an education-based NGO, has been transforming government schools across India to make quality education and basic infrastructure accessible to all. Their celebratory approach to redefining government school education led them to conceive flagship programmes like iShaalaa which focuses on digital innovation in classrooms, and the Sampurna Shaala which focuses on revitalising government schools. They developed a 360-degree school revitalisation programme focusing on four critical areas of intervention i.e., school infrastructure, WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene), teacher development, and scholarships for students. This has significantly contributed to an increase in enrolment rates and reverse migration to government schools. Since its conception, Bal Utsav has revamped over 200+ government schools in Karnataka, and nearly 8,00,000 students have benefited from its flagship programmes.





## Makkala Jagriti

Makkala Jagriti is an NGO conceived to provide a safe and friendly space where children from marginalised communities can gather after school hours and engage in meaningful and enriching learning activities. They have three flagship programmes:

- (i) ECCE (Early Childhood Care and Education) is designed to promote the holistic development of children from ages three to six.
- (ii) HDLC (Holistic Development Learning Centres) sets up thoughtfully designed learning centres within government schools for children from ages 6-14.
- (iii) Yuva Jagriti programme imparts essential life skills and facilitates access to opportunities to fulfil the aspirations of the youth. They have impacted the lives of over 50,000+ students and integrated with 200+ Anangawadis to create a holistic learning environment.



## OSAAT (One School At A Time)

OSAAT is a volunteer-run non-profit organisation rebuilding the infrastructure of rural schools in India. Its mission is to enable children in rural India to thrive, supporting both their physical and emotional health to foster intellectual growth and break the cycle of illiteracy and poverty. Through their programmes, they aim to close the urban-rural divide by rebuilding and expanding schools and providing cutting-edge learning tools in rural India. With their programmes such as the ODiSI (OSAAT Digital School Infrastructure) which provides a digital platform for learning, they are making contemporary education accessible for rural children. Through targeted investments and strategic partnerships, OSAAT has successfully transformed 60+ schools across India. More than 10,000 students have benefited from a classroom, proper workspaces, sanitation facilities, kitchens, drinking water, libraries, and playgrounds.





## eVidyaloka

eVidyaloka is an educational social enterprise with a vision to enable quality education for the children of rural India. The organisation creates digital classrooms for children in remote villages with the support of local communities and volunteer teachers from across the globe. Focused on children in the age group of 10-14, eVidyaloka aims to leverage technology to provide basic education through government elementary schools in remote and rural villages of India. The programme provides live interactive classes in the local medium through a powerful partner ecosystem. Children from various government schools in rural India receive quality education with standardised lesson plans and teaching aids. eVidyaloka caters to over 61+ schools and has impacted over five million students across India as part of their digital innovation programme.



## Colours of Life

Colours of Life is a non-profit organisation striving to uplift underprivileged children by helping government schools to transform themselves into institutes of excellence. They aim to provide additional support to the schools through different programmes to boost children's life skills, sports, and arts. They provide teachers and volunteers in collaboration with corporates and experts to enhance the quality of education. In addition to assisting the students through their schooling till Class X, the NGO also helps with securing positions in colleges, providing tuition fees and scholarships to outstanding students. ■





## Greenlam Industries: Improving Learning Outcomes in Pre-Primary and Primary Education



India has made significant progress in enhancing access to quality education, expanding elementary school enrolment, and decreasing the number of out-of-school children. These achievements have been bolstered by key laws, policies, and programmes such as the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act (2009), National Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Policy (2013). However, challenges do remain. There is a drastic decrease in out-of-school children in 2014 (6.1 million) compared to 13.46 million in 2006. Out of 100 students, 29 per cent of girls and boys drop out of school before completing the full cycle of elementary education, and often, they are the most marginalised children. Around 50 per cent of adolescents do not complete secondary education, while approximately 20 million children are not attending preschool. Half of the Primary school-going children – which constitute nearly 50 million children – have not achieved grade-appropriate learning levels. **CSR Mandate** spoke with **Parul Mittal, Director, Greenlam Industries**, to understand the various initiatives the company is undertaking to ensure that children who are part of their focused interventions gain access to quality education.



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The programme - Improving Learning Outcomes - caters to children of different age groups, such as Pre-Primary and Grade I-VIII government schools. It has a two-fold approach - to address the issue of the learning gap - working closely with the children in the school setting, and generating awareness in the community regarding the importance of education as a means to a better quality of life.

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### What is Greenlam's approach to improving the present education scenario in the country?

As a part of our CSR initiative, we have forged a partnership with Pratham Education Foundation to undertake the “Improving Learning Outcomes” programme to bridge the learning gaps in the communities by focusing on creating a sustainable learning space through intensive community-driven activities and building and improving the foundational skills of children to help them gain access to quality education.

This programme caters to children of different age groups, such as Pre-Primary and Grade I-VIII government schools. It has a two-fold approach - to address the issue of the learning gap - working closely with the children in the school setting, and generating awareness in the community regarding the importance of education as a means to a better quality of life.

The interventions can be summarised as:

- Building Math and Language skills in the students through customised content and teaching learning



material in English and local languages.

- Capability building and awareness generation of the parents to enroll their children into schools and contribute to their learning levels.
- Augmenting existing education infrastructure by creating playscapes (playgrounds in schools).
- Using art-based learning in schools by painting walls to encourage students to attend schools.
- Interactions with important stakeholders like the district and



block-level Panchayat.

- Supporting school principals and teachers.

### What are the reasons Greenlam is approaching Education through this programme?

The need assessment in Behror (Rajasthan) and Nalagarh (Himachal Pradesh) for learning outcomes indicated a strong focus on supporting early childhood education by strengthening their foundational skills. The assessment indeed indicated the need to support children from Grade I to VIII. We found out that in terms of reading and number recognition, most of the children in Pre-Primary and Grade I and II were at the Beginners level. In socio-emotional skills and language development, the percentage of children giving correct answers was below 50 per cent in all activities. And in Grade VI to VIII, we found out that only 50 per cent of children could answer two of the five questions correctly in Vocabulary.

### For an impactful and successful programme, an NGO well-versed or fully dedicated to education is required as an implementing partner. Do share in detail about the partner.

We partner with Pratham Education Foundation, an innovative learning





organisation created to improve the quality of education in India. Established in 1995 to provide education to children in the slums of Mumbai, it has grown in scope and scale, with programmes reaching children and youth across the country.

As one of the largest non-governmental organisations in the country, Pratham focuses on high-quality, low-cost, and replicable interventions to address gaps in the education system. Working directly with children and youth as well as through large-scale collaborations with government systems, its programmes reach millions every year. Its Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) approach has demonstrated proven impact on children's learning outcomes, and is now being adapted to contexts outside India.

Pratham addresses gaps in education

systems with innovative, low-cost, replicable interventions that span the age spectrum. Working directly and through government systems, these programmes collectively reach millions of children and thousands of school dropouts each year. In direct work, a Pratham instructor works with children either in the school or in the community, whereas the partnership model involves its teams working closely with government teams at the State, district or city level to design and implement programmes. Its approach to improving learning outcomes continues to serve as a model, both within India and beyond.

**Where is this programme implemented? How many schools are part of it, and why were they chosen?**

We have 15 villages in Behror Block of Alwar District in Rajasthan and ten

villages in Nalagarh Block of Solan District in Himachal Pradesh.

We have almost 25 schools as part of this programme. In Behror, we are working in 15 schools, out of which, we have Grades VI to VIII Science programme in ten schools. We are also working in ten schools in Nalagarh. We chose these schools as they are around the vicinity of our plants.

**Is the content an addition to the regular curriculum the government schools are following?**

Yes, they are. In fact, we create in-house content. We follow a level-wise curriculum rather than grade-wise, i.e. beginner, alphabet, paragraph, story level, etc. We would like to stress here that we aim to provide excellence on two focused subjects - Hindi and Mathematics - as they are the main pillars in building employability skills and managing day-to-day efficient communication for students.

**Do you provide training to the teachers before they teach the students this customised content?**

Yes, of course. We organise in-house trainings on a monthly/quarterly basis and walk them through the teaching modules.

**How do you gauge the impact of the programme on the students?**

We conduct a baseline assessment/sample-based assessment to gain an



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The programme has managed to change the overall perception of the community with respect to children being an economic asset and supporting the parents to earn a living through involvement in their farms and small businesses back in the villages.

Most parents were initially unwilling to participate in the process and become volunteers for community-based activities.

However, post the initial few months, through multiple interactions with the community, the responses began to turn positive. Today, more than 80 per cent of children are enrolled in schools.

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overall perspective on the children's learning gains. At the end of the programme, we conduct an endline assessment to measure the impact.

We conduct baseline assessment to know where the child is. At the end of the programme, we conduct an endline assessment to measure the impact. Pratham conduct sample-based assessments to gain an overall perspective on learning gains. For a comparative study, the assessment is also conducted in Anganwadi Centres where Pratham does not have any interventions. It is an observation and interaction-based method, designed by Pratham, to assess the progress of children and help generate insights that can enable the teachers and Pratham teams to improve their functioning and achieve their developmental goals.

**What are the different initiatives undertaken to help children improve**



### **their learning outcomes and encourage them to attend school?**

We do have different initiatives to help our children.

**Remote Outreach Learning** for children in Pre-Primary and Grade I to III. We share daily fun, easy-to-do activities with mothers over SMS or WhatsApp where they could carry out with their children with easily available items at home. This helps parents engage their child and create a conducive learning environment within the home.

**In-School Intervention** for children between Grade I and II and VI to VIII. The team conduct development activities

with children in Grade I and II to make them school-ready. We encourage children from Grade VI to VIII to create science models for the Science Mela.

**Community Bases Interventions** for children in Pre-Primary, Grade IV to VIII.

**Mothers' Groups** have been created in ten communities to orientate mothers on simple activities they could conduct with their children at home.

**Children's Clubs** are formed in 15 different communities where volunteers facilitate learning activities.

**Education for Education** initiative for volunteer mothers. We provide them







educational courses to enhance their skill sets.

We also deliver a virtual course on First Aid messages through WhatsApp to mothers who are involved in the project.

### How is Greenlam involving parents, Panchayat leaders and the community where these schools are situated?

The community has been incredibly supportive, with volunteers extending their help even during the pandemic. We received assistance from community volunteers, and community members participated in school readiness melas, community engagement events, and



other initiatives. These collective endeavours aim to ensure children's enrolment in school and foster regular attendance. As a result, we have developed a stronger relationship with the community following the pandemic.

### Are you satisfied with how this programme is running and impacting lives in its current state or do you see various areas of improvement you would like to adopt based on the impact and feedback from everyone involved?

We have catered to approximately 3000 children, and 750 mothers have been trained and involved as part of the community engagement model in the last three years. We initially started the programme in 2018 in nine villages in Behror. It was then scaled to 15 villages in Behror, and in 2019, we replicated it in ten villages in Nalagarh. It has increased children's enrolment in schools and also encouraged a significant number of them

to pursue higher studies.

The programme has managed to change the overall perception of the community with respect to children being an economic asset and supporting the parents to earn a living through involvement in their farms and small businesses back in the villages. Most parents were initially unwilling to participate in the process and become volunteers for community-based activities. However, post the initial few months, through multiple interactions with the community, the responses began to turn positive. Today, more than 80 per cent of children are enrolled in schools. Over the past two years, there has been a rise in enrolments and significant engagement from both parents and village leaders in this endeavour.

### Are there plans to expand this programme to other States as well?

Yes, we will continue to be in the space of Education, however, the mode and scope of intervention keeps changing based on the need at the ground.

### Any closing thoughts before we conclude this interview?

As an organisation, we are content and pleased with the efforts we have made in the education sector. The community has shown appreciation for our initiatives, and we are excited about continuing to do more for them. ■





## Teach For India: Providing Education That Empowers and Liberates India's Children

It is a Monday afternoon, and the corridors of a dilapidated school building on the outskirts of Delhi are buzzing with the cries and laughter of Grade II students. When a young man in a dark green jacket, black trousers, and a laptop bag enters the premises, the students run toward him to hug him. “This is how I am greeted daily,” says Sunit Srichandan, a former entrepreneur and now a Teach For India Fellow in the school. “I am an educator in this school, and it is my responsibility to ensure that I create a safe and healthy environment for my students.”

Our Teach For India Fellows, just like Sunit, are not merely teachers in the conventional sense. They are bhaiyas and didis for their students, and their sole aim is to ensure that each of their students realises their true potential to be the best they can be. To that end, they go above

and beyond to make classroom learning a fun, engaging, and enriching experience for their students. Sunit, for instance, often walks into his classroom and plays Linkin Park's songs to start the day on high energy levels. As he waits for everyone to come on the same page, he



**Tanya Jha**





nudges students into opening their Maths textbooks. As soon as they get to solving the sums, the music gradually fades out in the background.

“That’s the best part about being a Fellow. The classroom is your playground, and you can use creative means to teach and learn with your students,” he adds.

Like Sunit, our 1000+ Fellows are working as full-time educators in low-income schools across eight cities in the country. Our 4500+ alumni are working in several leadership positions in reputed places such as the World Bank, the Government of India, Teach For All, Dalberg, Columbia University, Central Square Foundation, and so on. And each of them, in their capacity, is working towards a common goal: one day all children will attain an excellent education.

However, the path to achieving excellence is fraught with challenges, especially in a country like India, where there are limited essential resources for most of the population. In such a scenario, education for children is not always a priority. As a result, numerous



children from marginalised communities had no choice but to discontinue their education during the pandemic. Reportedly, the pandemic severely affected over 24.7 crore children. Many children, particularly those from marginalised communities, had to work at brick kilns, plantations and enter other occupations to support their families financially. Two years later, the repercussions have not entirely died down. While the dropout rate has not considerably increased, as per the ASER 2022 report, there has been a noticeable drop in the learning levels of children. Therefore, global education experts and scholars have been mulling an overhaul of the education system post-pandemic.

Our two-year Fellowship programme has carved out a niche in modern pedagogical practices by emphasising innovative

teaching and learning methods. We recruit aspiring changemakers to serve as full-time educators in under-resourced schools in eight cities across India. Collectively, our Fellows and alumni impact the lives of over 32 million children. To date, we have operations in eight cities across India, which include Mumbai, Pune, Ahmedabad, Delhi, Chennai, Hyderabad, Bengaluru, and Kolkata.

Our journey, however, dates back to 2009.

### Building a Movement

After returning from the US, Shaheen Mistri launched Teach For India in 2009. It is a part of the Teach For All Network, a growing group of independent organisations working on expanding





As an organisation, we continue to challenge convention with every passing day. Many of our students are now becoming Fellows to bridge the gaps of educational inequity and give back to others what they received.



leadership, many Fellows in Mumbai are planning lessons and executing projects in their respective schools and communities. Recently, she was part of the Teach For All Student Panel [our umbrella organisation], sharing her journey with early-stage entrepreneurs worldwide.

“To some people, education is just something girls do before they get married. For most students like me, our primary objective is to earn money for our parents. We have been taught to step back from something if we cannot afford it. But why can't we aspire big?” she asks.

And our students, across all nooks and corners of the country, are slowly inching closer to their dreams. They are dreaming big and how! One of them is Sahil Varma, who, last year, made it to the Indian Institute of Technology, Roorkee. Once a curious school student who walked the campus with his Fellows (didis), Sahil will now pursue his BTech in Mechanical Engineering at one of the top engineering universities in the country.

As an organisation, we continue to challenge convention with every passing day. Many of our students are now becoming Fellows to bridge the gaps of educational inequity and give back to others what they received.

Our students not only shine in academics, but they also earn awards and applause in sports. Prince Sharma, for instance, was selected to represent India in the



educational opportunities in their nations. The 60 countries in the network today share a common vision of an excellent education for all children. Fellows from across the globe routinely connect and collaborate to make classroom learning a fun and engaging experience for children.

Initially, we were only able to place our Teach For India Fellows in Mumbai and Pune. As the impact grew, we launched sites in Delhi, Chennai, Hyderabad, Ahmedabad, and eventually, Kolkata. In the meantime, we also launched, 'The Greatest Show on Earth', a Broadway-style musical, setting the bar higher, and innovations around teacher training, student leadership, and social entrepreneurship.

As an organisation, we continue to challenge convention with every passing day. Many of our students are now becoming Fellows to bridge the gaps of educational inequity and give back to others what they received.

One such student is Kunal Dhangar, a 2022 Fellow in Pune. Thirteen years ago, he was a student in a classroom taught by Madhukar Banuri, a Teach For India alumnus, who currently is the co-founder



of Leadership of Equity. “In this monumental quest of building leadership across all levels, such moments give our work meaning,” says Madhukar. As a Fellow, Kunal is now impacting the lives of other Kunals in his classroom, all waiting to shine in their respective fields.

Kunal's sister Divya Dhangar has risen through the ranks to become one of our programme managers. Under her







International Taekwondo Championship in Vietnam in August 2022. When he was younger, he often got into physical fights and had anger issues. “I would get myself in trouble for hitting someone in my class. I never understood the importance of being a well-behaved student until I interacted with Upasana didi. She was the first one to talk to me calmly and have a conversation about values. Things did not change magically, but after many such conversations, I realised how my actions were wrong,” says Prince.

And today, one wall in Prince's house is adorned with several gold medals that he won in every State and national championship. Sports also helped him improve his academics, and he became one of the top-performing students in his class.

Many Fellows use sports to help their students manage their anger and channelise their energy. They tie up with many sports organisations to ensure that students get exposure to various sports they can do alongside their studies.

Art is another medium to nurture the seeds of creativity within students. Slam Out Loud, for example, is a project that Jigyasa Labroo, a Fellow from the 2014 Cohort, started. It has now grown to become a full-fledged organisation in itself. In 2022, Jigyasa made it to Forbes 30 Under 30 list.

### Beyond Classrooms

There are many Teach For India alumni like Jigyasa who, after taking lessons



from their Fellowship experiences, are creating impact at a much larger scale in their career pathways.

Anurag Kundu is the Chairperson of the Delhi Commission of Protection of Child Rights, Government of Delhi. He monitors the implementation of the rights of nearly 5.5 million children in Delhi. However, his journey began in an under-resourced classroom in Seelampur, Delhi, where he taught primary-grade children from communities where basic amenities such as water and food were scarce. As a Fellow, he not only worked to improve the literacy levels of his students, but he also worked with the principals of various schools.

Another alumnus, who is working in policy implementation, is Aniket Doegar, the founder of Haqdarshak, a non-profit which makes citizens aware of all the welfare schemes they are eligible for. Recently, his organisation received a joint offer of Rs 1 Crore for 2 per cent equity from the Shark Tank judges Namita Thapar, Aman Gupta, and Peyush Bansal. So far, he has impacted over 27 lakh citizens nationwide. He was among the five Indians who won the World Economic Forum-backed Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship.

Talking about more direct impact in the field of education, we have Raman Bahl, another social entrepreneur, who is



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This is the overarching sentiment of all the alumni - keeping students at the centre of everything they do. It all goes back to the love they received in their classrooms when they were Fellows – the bright smiles that greeted them every morning and the tight warm hugs they received as soon as they entered the school premises.

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currently working with out-of-school children at his organisation - Learning Initiatives For India (LIFI). While talking about what led him to start the organisation, he recalls 11-year-old Neelam, a child he met in a small village



in Haryana, during the pandemic. She was washing clothes. “She should have been in a school,” he said.

And that is the overarching sentiment of all the alumni — keeping students at the centre of everything they do. It all goes back to the love they received in their classrooms when they were Fellows – the bright smiles that greeted them every morning and the tight warm hugs they received as soon as they entered their school premises.

As an organisation, we are moving forward to continue impacting the lives of the children we work with—all with love, positivity, and hope. All of this, and more, will come alive in the upcoming musical, “Conference of the Birds”, which will have 24 students from Pune exploring the true meaning of India. During the making of the musical, the student participants have come out of their shells and have found their calling. That is precisely the long and short of a reimagined education – an education that empowers and liberates. ■

*Tanya Jha is the Manager, Communications at Teach For India.*







## Renewed Focus on STEM to Usher a New Era in Education

As we observe the Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav to commemorate 75 years of independence (2022-23), it is time to review the state of public education, celebrate numerous milestones attained, iron out the challenges and make rapid strides to lay the foundation of a developed India.

The Right to Education Act of 2009 gave fresh impetus to the public education system, intended to make it more inclusive, equitable, and accessible to all. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which is in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4, seeks to develop the cognitive as well as the social, ethical, and emotional capacities of students. However, the lack of equity and quality in education could lead to missed opportunities. The lack of motivation and professional development of educators and deficient learning materials and learning conditions need to be addressed. There must be a paradigm shift in focus from merely achieving literacy to transforming India into a tech-driven, knowledge-based and inclusive economy.



**Dr Anupama Shetty**

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Our unflinching focus on delivering innovative scientific solutions to the most pressing global healthcare problems has a positive influence on promoting STEM education and research through our CSR programmes. Through our CSR arm - Biocon Foundation - we have made many concerted efforts to strengthen science education by collaborating with the country's premier research institutes.

Creating a pool of critical thinkers, innovators and problem solvers remains the cornerstone of our initiatives.

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To secure a firm footing and win the global race for scientific and technological innovation and research, it is critical to increase investments to impart knowledge and skills in the fields of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics).

While there is a growing demand for highly qualified STEM professionals, the underrepresentation of women in STEM-related roles, metaphorically referred to as a leaky pipeline, is a cause of concern. According to a World Bank report, about 43 per cent of STEM graduates in India are women, the highest in the world. However, their representation in STEM jobs stands at a significantly low percentage of 14.

With a focus on innovation, we at the Biocon Group are committed to building a large talent pool for the industry as well as providing opportunities for talented candidates. We have over 6,500 scientists as part of our organisation, and over 40 percent of our researchers are women.



Our unflinching focus on delivering innovative scientific solutions to the most pressing global healthcare problems has a positive influence on promoting STEM education and research through our CSR programmes. Through our CSR arm - Biocon Foundation - we have made many concerted efforts to strengthen science education by collaborating with the country's premier research institutes. Creating a pool of critical thinkers, innovators and problem solvers remains the cornerstone of our initiatives.

### Women in STEM

We have also partnered with the Research and Innovation Circle of Hyderabad, the nodal agency for the Hyderabad Science & Technology Cluster, an initiative of the Office of the Principal Scientific Advisor to the Government of India. The collaboration supports women from low-income groups in Tier 2 and 3 locations to pursue higher education in STEM through scholarships and mentorship. The programme aims to increase



Our association with Biocon Foundation is invaluable to further such research. IBAB is a not-for-profit organisation, and we require high-quality faculty to drive programmes, training and research. The support of the Biocon Foundation allows us to ensure we have the best minds in the space who could foster innovations and developments in biotechnology, life sciences and healthcare.

**Dr H S Subramanya**  
Director, IBAB & Biocon Chair.

enrolment, decrease drop-out rates, and provide skills and industry orientation to women to make them employable and promote women-led science-based start-ups. In the first year, 25 deserving women candidates were sponsored and mentored.







### Mobile Science Labs

To spark curiosity, nurture creativity and help children develop a scientific temperament, we launched experiential learning models in Government schools in Chikkaballapur and the suburbs of Bengaluru and Hyderabad. Mobile Science Labs are reaching out to about 8,500 students across more than 50 government schools. Instructors are trained on imparting hands-on learning as an effective pedagogy. Furthermore, science fairs are organised to encourage the application of scientific knowledge to solve real-world problems. Science quiz competitions are also conducted to establish a culture of questioning.

### Institutional Grants

We have partnered with the Indian



“We are always understaffed, and finding ways to make children excited about science is a challenge. However, it is an important discipline for them to be curious about. We need support on infrastructure and the latest methods of teaching scientific thinking. The training we received and the activities for the students are helping us to see a different way of teaching. The experiments conducted by the teachers when the mobile lab comes to the school are very useful for the students and relevant to the topics in the curriculum. We hope to get more support in the future.”

**Nagendra**, Teacher, Government Higher Primary School, Attibele.

Institute of Science (IISC) to jointly fund the construction of a Postgraduate Medical School & Hospital in Bengaluru. The Institute will set up a not-for-profit multi-specialty hospital and offer an integrated dual degree MD-PhD programme in clinical research to develop new treatments and healthcare solutions. The Biocon-Syngene General Medicine wing, expected to be operational by early 2025, will be spread over six floors and have 147 beds. Experts in this wing will have access to the most advanced diagnostic tools.

We have established a scientific chair at the Institute of Bioinformatics and Applied Biotechnology (IBAB) to drive high-quality training in biological sciences and cutting-edge clinical research to discover new drugs.



### CHAMPS

The Child Health Activists Mentoring and Promoting Health in Society (CHAMPS) is a unique health education initiative we instituted to develop high school students as community change agents in driving awareness of the early onset of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) by training them to monitor and report on hypertension. About 200 government school students have been trained as CHAMPS and equipped with blood pressure monitors to screen for high blood pressure (BP), improve health-seeking behaviour and promote healthy lifestyles in their communities in Anekal, Bengaluru.

### Supporting the Learning Ecosystem

Besides helping schools explore effective pedagogies, we invest in physical infrastructure to support the learning ecosystem. We constructed spacious, well-ventilated furnished classrooms, separate washrooms for boys and girls with running water and handwash

“Learning by doing and reflecting on the experiences not only augments the understanding of the subject but also helps students develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills, resulting in better retention of concepts related to science. This approach encourages peer-to-peer learning. Some of the students are also trained to demonstrate the science models and impart science concepts to fellow students. This leaves a lasting impression on the young minds.”

**Aruna Kumari**, Teacher, Government High School, Chikkaballapura.

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Besides helping schools explore effective pedagogies, we invest in physical infrastructure to support the learning ecosystem. We constructed spacious, well-ventilated furnished classrooms, separate washrooms for boys and girls with running water and handwash facilities, and installed drinking water purification systems in schools in Bagalkote, Tumkuru, Dakshina Kannada and in the suburbs of Bengaluru in Karnataka.

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facilities, and installed drinking water purification systems in schools in Bagalkote, Tumkuru, Dakshina Kannada and in the suburbs of Bengaluru in Karnataka.

To unlock the opportunities for digital learning in government schools, we provided computers to schools in

“We study science in school but when I get to see these models and perform experiments, it is very exciting and makes the learning process easy and enjoyable. I hope we can have many more visits so we can do better in our studies.”

**Manoj**, Student, Class VIII, Government Higher Primary School, Halepeeresandra, Chikkaballapur.

Bengaluru, Udipi, Kolar, Dakshina Kannada and Uttar Kannada districts.

In the current financial year, the construction of 12 classrooms is in progress across nine schools in the Chikkaballapur, Dakshina Kannada, and Uttara Kannada districts of Karnataka.

### Transforming the Future Means Actioning Now

#### Making Learning Relevant and Equipping Students with 21st-Century Skills

Education is a powerful enabler of social change and plays a vital role in the future of the nation. The COVID-19 pandemic surfaced as an opportunity for technology to prove its efficacy in scale and reach. While we made significant efforts to bridge the gap between technology and



### Impact



#### 10.9 per cent increase in Awareness

Knowledge of alternate experiential methods of learning and teaching science

#### 10.2 per cent increase in Curiosity

Behaviour characterised by exploration, investigation, observation, and a desire to learn more about new, incongruous or unknown elements

#### 11.5 per cent increase in Confidence

The ability to stand up, speak out and develop consciousness of their own abilities

#### 14 per cent increase in Science Knowledge

Knowledge of science concepts

access to education during this time, we are now continuing our efforts to improve school and Anganwadi infrastructure, and design programmes that can engage learners creatively and make learning fun.

### Impact

More than 3,200 students from 21 government schools in Anekal, Karnataka, received more than 59,000 virtual and face-to-face exposures; each exposure being at least 1-1.5 hours in duration.

In our quest to strengthen STEM education, we will continue to make transformational and long-term investments, paving the way for continuous learning opportunities, innovation, and scientific advancements.

*Dr Anupama Shetty is the Mission Director of Biocon Foundation.*



# Vahani: Transforming Lives to Create Leaders of Change for India

Team Vahani



India has the world's largest youth segment attending school and college. Throughout history and across the globe, younger generations have been at the forefront of driving change in various fields. From political revolutions to social evolutions, technological discoveries to theological philosophies, the younger generation has consistently been the 'changemakers'. Despite their potential, however, young people have often been held back by limited access to resources like limited educational opportunities or lack of financial support for innovative ideas, to name a few.

This lack of resources can take many forms, from limited educational opportunities to a lack of financial support for innovative ideas. Furthermore, systemic biases against youth can lead to a lack of representation and voice in decision-making processes. These challenges can make it difficult for young people to fully realise their potential and bring about the change they envision.

This raises the immense need for educational support, especially post-pandemic, which rendered many households jobless and impacted family incomes.

In an extremely biased education system, accessibility to quality education and life-changing opportunities like Vahani Scholarship Trust seek to bridge the gap to prevent bright, deserving scholars from dropping off the education grid. Despite the various scholarships and grants available, criteria such as gender, caste or choice of subject may deter many deserving scholars from pursuing higher studies.

After completing BA in Experimental Psychology from Oxford University, and during a trip to India on a project in 2014, our





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We take a unique approach to supporting underprivileged meritorious scholars for their graduation into top universities across India. We provide financial support, mentorship and guidance to help develop each scholar holistically. Our two-pronged approach includes a full financial scholarship to cover the expenses associated with higher education and ongoing mentorship and guidance from experienced and successful mentors, tutors, and counsellors.

”



Founder and Chairperson, Reeva Misra, felt the lack of support in higher education. The underlying thought is that good education should not be a monopoly of only those who can afford it. Having noted this social inequality, she conceptualised Vahani Scholarship Trust in 2014 to bring quality education to those who could not afford it.

Reeva strongly believes that leadership is manifested through life experiences, failures and the ability to make decisions. The world around us, the people we interact with and the opportunities we come across play an important role in shaping our reality and creating awareness in us.

We take a unique approach to supporting underprivileged meritorious scholars for their graduation into top universities across India. We provide financial support, mentorship and guidance to help develop each scholar holistically. Our two-pronged approach includes a full financial scholarship to cover the

expenses associated with higher education and ongoing mentorship and guidance from experienced and successful mentors, tutors, and counsellors. This approach ensures that every scholar is well-equipped to thrive throughout their college. Our long-term vision is to create "Leaders of Change" who would make a difference in their local communities and beyond, regardless of their socioeconomic background, religion or gender.







Since our inception in 2014, we have dedicated ourselves to harnessing the talent of exceptionally brilliant underprivileged children. We aim to create a close-knit community of scholars who will become the inspiration and agents of change in their local communities. We believe that quality education should not be a privilege of the few who can afford it, but a right for all. That is why we offer scholarships to scholars across India and enable them to attend top universities.

We have collaborated with leading non-profit schools in India, such as Vidya Gyan, Shanti Bhawan, Him Jyoti School and Happy Days, to identify the first batch of scholars from financially weak families. Since then, we have expanded our outreach to over 500 JNVs throughout the country, thanks to our growing network. By collaborating with NGOs such as Avanti, Salaam Balak, Tara Homes, and CRY, we have successfully raised awareness about our Scholarship Programme in 29 States and Union Territories. Our goal is to expand our reach to every State in India and ensure that every deserving scholar is aware of this life-changing opportunity.

Ishika Lohia, one of our scholars, now an employee of Microsoft, says, “The



guidance and motivation that Vahani has given to me is a great asset for my future.”

Each scholar is mapped and connected with a professional mentor who provides a learning experience outside the classroom. These scholars get a glimpse of the opportunities that the real world has in store for them.

Meenakshi Yadav, a Vahani scholar, says, “Vahani has unshackled my dreams from the darkness of adversities. It is transforming the lives of the underprivileged.”



At Vahani, we firmly believe in recognising and supporting those who have excelled academically despite undergoing hardships and challenges. We have observed that children who endured poverty and prejudice from an early age develop an inner strength and a demand for life that creates a spirit of innovation, unlike any other. This spirit, when recognised, mentored, and channelled, becomes a massive resource for positive change in society.

Pooja, another beneficiary, says, “Vahani

“

We run five mandatory programmes for scholars, with each programme to build their overall personality and well-being. We conduct focused programmes online (Zoom, Google Meet, Skype) and offline (Workshops and Events) for scholars on IT Skills, Creative Thinking, Entrepreneurship, English Communications, Mock GD/PI, Mental Well-Being, etc.

We hope to broaden their horizons and enable each of our scholars to become more articulate, confident and aware.

”



has made my life a colourful painting in which the colours are made of all the things I dreamt of. It has given me strong wings and a fresh new start.”

Our Scholarship Programme began with supporting 20 scholars and has now more than doubled to 50 scholars a year, bringing the total number of scholars at Vahani to 200. We provide a fully-funded comprehensive scholarship covering academic, residential, and other expenses such as travel and laptops to our scholars. We support their dreams of attending the



# Alumni Stories

Alumna Sejal Agnihotri from 2017 batch is got placed with **KPMG LIGHTHOUSE** as a Data Scientist.



**Sejal Agnihotri**

**Data scientist**

# Alumni Stories

Alumnus Sumit Kumar from 2017 batch is got placed with **Ncompass Techstudio Private Limited** in Chennai as a Software Developer.



**Sumit Kumar**

**Software Developer**

best universities across the country where they gain exposure to world-class faculty and discourse.

The online application for the Scholarship opens every year in September, with no fee involved. Scholars in the 12th Standard who meet the eligibility criteria (above 85 per cent in the 10th Standard and a household income of less than Rs. 2 Lakhs per annum) can fill out the application form available on our website. We thoroughly review each application and conduct two rounds of video interviews before shortlisting the scholars. Conditional offers are sent, subject to them clearing their Board examination with 85 per cent or above and getting admission into college.

We are proud to receive scholarship

applications from 29 different States in India, and we have scholars representing 19 States who are currently studying at top universities across the country. Our scholars are pursuing their higher education in prestigious institutions like IIT Delhi, IIT Mumbai, top NITs, SRCC, LSR, NLSIU, and Maulana Azad Medical College, to name a few. Despite growing up in extenuating circumstances, each scholar has shown remarkable resilience and determination to achieve their dreams.

We run five mandatory programmes for scholars, with each programme to build their overall personality and well-being. We conduct focused programmes online (Zoom, Google Meet, Skype) and offline (Workshops and Events) for scholars on IT Skills, Creative Thinking, Entrepreneurship, English

Communications, Mock GD/PI, Mental Well-Being, etc. We hope to broaden their horizons and enable each of our scholars to become more articulate, confident and aware. The annual workshops conducted during the summers and winters are the most enjoyed and anticipated events. Almost every scholar associates their best memories with these workshops. They experience many things for the very first time, like their first flight, meeting eminent personalities, and kart racing, among others.

In 2019, the Lucknow City Edition of a prominent national daily featured a story about a young girl named Nidhi Kanaujia. She was the daughter of a washerman who lived with her family of six in a makeshift hut in Gomti Nagar. The story covered Nidhi's 12th Board





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To achieve our mission of providing quality education to scholars across India, we are working tirelessly to build a network in every State of the country. We understand it is a daunting task but we are committed to making it a reality. We believe that by providing deserving scholars with access to education, we are not only changing their lives but also transforming the communities they come from. We are proud of the impact so far and are eager to continue our efforts until we see our mission accomplished.

”

examination results and included photographs of her many medals hanging from the bamboo sticks of their humble abode. Pursuing higher education at that time seemed like an unattainable dream for Nidhi until a counsellor suggested that she apply for the Vahani Scholarship.

To her surprise, Nidhi received an acceptance email from Vahani, which would transform her life. The Scholarship provided her with the resources and courage she needed to study at Miranda House, University of Delhi, one of India's premier colleges. During her time at Vahani, Nidhi interned at leading media houses and organisations. The college experience, mentorship, training programmes, and workshops helped broaden her horizon, and she grew into an intelligent, confident, and composed young woman.

Nidhi completed her undergraduate degree in Political Science (Honours) with a 1st Division and secured the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung (RLS) scholarship



**PREET PATEL**  
PLACEMENT: ADANI GROUP

for an MA Programme in Modern Indian Studies at the University of Gottingen, Germany. Nidhi is the first and only RLS scholar from India, a remarkable achievement for a young woman who started her journey in a modest hut in Gomti Nagar.

Like Nidhi, 189 other young scholars from economically weak backgrounds find their lives transformed by Vahani Scholarship.

We are proud of a growing network of Vahani Alumni working in top MNCs like Microsoft, Deloitte, EY, KPMG, Bank of America, PharmEasy, etc., as well as exploring the social and

MALIKA GOYAL



Placement: US TAX CONSULTANT AT  
DELOITTE

development sector through well-known fellowships like Teach for India, Gandhi Fellowship and Young India Fellowship.

To achieve our mission of providing quality education to scholars across India, we are working tirelessly to build a network in every State of the country. We understand it is a daunting task but we are committed to making it a reality. We believe that by providing deserving scholars with access to education, we are not only changing their lives but also transforming the communities they come from. We are proud of the impact so far and are eager to continue our efforts until we see our mission accomplished. ■



**Team Vahani (L-to-R):** Rounak Barman, Mariya Ansari, Preeti Bhatia, Rashmani Singh, K. Hinga and Zubin Sethi

# The Remarkable and Resilient Abhinay Sharma



Thirty-two year old Abhinay Sharma hails from Rampur village of Bulandshahr in Uttar Pradesh. He attended a government primary Hindi medium school. He spent most of his childhood in abject poverty. His father had a small construction business, and his mother was a homemaker. They could not even afford a basic stove, necessitating creative solutions, such as burning papers to warm milk for Abhinay and his brother. The family was often ridiculed and insulted due to their poor financial circumstances. Their relatives would ask them not to attend family gatherings because they did not have even the modest of attires, and they even deny them a ride in their cars.



Abhinay had to wear the same uniform for an entire week, washing it only on Sundays to wear it again for the next week. His classmates used to mock him and would refrain from speaking to him. His father's construction business was not very stable, and there were times when the family struggled to have even two square meals a day.

Abhinay had a natural talent for solving math problems and was the top scorer in his school. After completing his schooling, he enrolled in a B.Sc course at a government university

located 150 km away from his hometown. As he was particularly skilled in Mathematics, he started working as a tutor for aptitude tests to support his family financially while pursuing his graduation. His strong aptitude skills helped him secure a job at Tata Consultancy Services with a modest starting salary. However, the joining period was still a considerable time away. During this waiting period, his mother suggested that he explore the option of government exams so he could get a government job, which provides



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Abhinay started his own YouTube channel – Abhinay Maths — in October 2017. The channel became one of the first few education channels on YouTube to reach one million subscribers in just eight months. He also expanded his coaching to a hall with a capacity for 150 students. When he announced the batch in November, around 500 students approached him. The number went up to four thousand in his March 2018 batch. There was no looking back.

”



### Shubham Pandat

Meerut, UP

“His teaching style is different from other teachers. He makes questions and calculations very easy. I am thankful to him for helping me build my Maths and aptitude skills. Aptitude is the most important and a common section across all exams. I learned from Sir and was able to solve almost all the questions in the Aptitude Section, which also increased my overall score. The problem-solving methods taught by Abhinay Sir are unique and takes very less time than other methods I tried before.”

financial security and stability.

Abhinay followed his mother's advice. He moved to Delhi in 2011 after his graduation to prepare for the Staff Selection Committee (SSC) examination. To provide him with emotional support, his family also moved with him to Delhi. They rented a low-cost flat to stay close to Abhinay and support his journey. While preparing for the SSC exams, he began giving tuition to school students to support his family. He would walk long distances

and survived on Maggi noodles to sustain him through the day as it was the only economical food he could afford to buy. His hard work paid off when he cleared the SSC examination on the first attempt. He was placed in Dehradun as an Income Tax Department Officer.

The new job and salary did not put an end to his difficulties. His landlord told the family that he is not renewing the rent agreement for the flat anymore. He asked them to vacate it immediately. Another tragedy struck when his father took out a huge loan to buy a house for the family but failed to repay it on time. Abhinay's job alone could not repay his father's loan. As a result, the family was deeply in debt, causing major health problems for his parents. His mother suffered facial paralysis, and his father was diagnosed with diabetes.

Abhinay realised that his stable government job was not enough to repay loans and meet household expenses. His father had been his pillar of strength and taught him to be optimistic. Despite the challenging situation, his perseverance and resilience motivated him to take control of his life. In 2017, four months into his new job, he quit and returned home to deal with the crisis. He went back to teaching, his passion and talent, to make ends meet. Abhinay sold his phone and, with some savings, moved to a rented flat with his brother. They would stay and sleep in one room and the next morning, would clear the room and prep it for the tuition classes. With limited resources, he started teaching a small batch of 20 students.

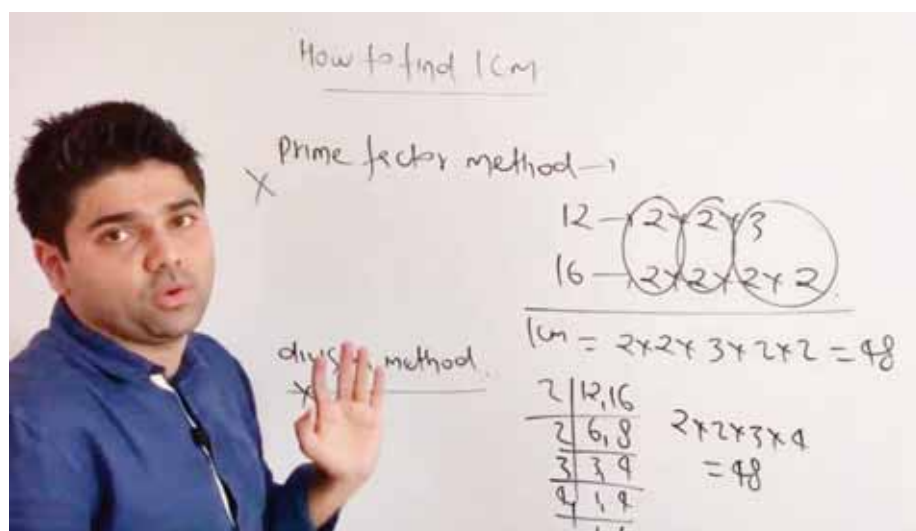


### Guguloth Naresh

Hyderabad, Telangana

“I could not afford expensive course material as my father is a small-time farmer. I was searching on YouTube for a long time to learn Maths, but I could not find a teacher who could teach and make me understand this difficult subject. I listened to many Maths teachers. After a long search, I then chanced upon Abhinay Sir's channel on YouTube. He says Maths is basic, a trick like everyone else. The way he teaches is very good. Oftentimes, I forget he is a teacher because he feels like a brother, a friend, and a family member. I learned from Abhinay Sir's classes

on YouTube for free and cleared SSC CGL Tier I. I also took a combo course on his educational app called Abhinay Maths for the Tier II exam. Because of my financial condition, I could only pay Rs 2,000 for the course on the mobile application, although the course is for Rs 5,000. I talked to Abhinay Sir, and when he asked me how much I can pay, I told him the amount. He said it was okay because he did not want to deprive any student of education. Generally, we are charged Rs 10,000 - 16,000 for the same course by other institutes. Besides affordability, Abhinay Sir teaches concepts simply through various methods. I find his teaching style unique and effective. He simplifies concepts using various methods, making the subject easy to understand. I have been able to clear my preliminary examination after studying on YouTube, and I think I can clear Tier II all thanks to Sir and his different approach towards the subject.”



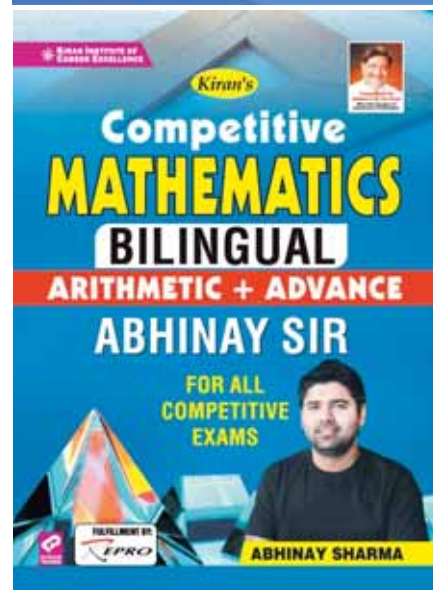
Abhinay's dedication and commitment to his students paid off, and his coaching centre slowly gained popularity. His students appreciated his simplified approach to Mathematics, and his innovative teaching techniques helped them grasp difficult concepts with ease. His ability to connect with his students and make learning enjoyable helped him build a loyal following.

In mid-2017, one of Abhinay's students suggested he upload a video on YouTube because his concepts were fresh and no one else on the platform was teaching such concepts. Within six days, the video received over one million views. In the video description, he had added a link to one of the books he had written. Students liked the video because he simplified the answers to mathematical problems. For instance, how one can make Algebra and Trigonometry easy using zero. Soon the

sale of the book boosted, and the number of students in his coaching increased to 400. He started earning Rs 5-7 Lakhs a month. That was one of the best phases of his life. Just a year earlier, he could not even afford to buy a chappati.

Inspired by this, Abhinay started his own YouTube channel – Abhinay Maths – in October 2017. The channel became one of the first few education channels on YouTube to reach one million subscribers in just eight months. He also expanded his coaching to a hall with a capacity for 150 students. When he announced the batch in November, around 500 students approached him. The number went up to four thousand in his March 2018 batch. There was no looking back.

Abhinay saw YouTube as an effective way to reach out to more students in remote areas. He provides free books and content for students who cannot afford



education. He has more than 2.5 million subscribers on his YouTube Channel. Throughout his journey, he never saw education as a business. He approaches education as a relationship with his students rather than a business, believing that only structured curriculum and teaching can bring about a revolution in education.

He noticed YouTube lacked certain features required for better learning, like monitoring student growth and mock tests. In 2017, Abhinay also launched an app - Abhinay Maths – which focuses on competitive exam preparation for SSC (CGL, CPO, CHSL, etc.), Bank (Clerk, PO), Railways and several other government exams with India's top educators. It has served over two lakh students from more than 500 cities and towns across the country. The platform targets the majority of government job



### Radhe Shyam Bhisnoi

Indore, MP

“Abhinay Sharma Sir is an inspiration to me and every student who have been under his tutelage to start on the right path. I have read an 88-day course on YouTube and Free Classes on Unacademy from Sharma Sir. His teaching method is fantastic and helps solve many questions in less than a minute, which is most helpful in saving time. I had the good fortune of meeting Abhinay Sharma Sir. For this, I am deeply thankful. I am overwhelmed by your hospitality. I hope to meet you again, Sir.”



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Abhinay continues to break geographical, financial and resource barriers by providing revolutionised education to students across the country. His app - Abhinay Maths - has over 250K downloads. He does not cross-question nor deny admission to students from impoverished backgrounds because he sees himself in them. He has provided free education to over 10 million students from small towns and cities across the country, with over 10K students who were taught by him passing government exams with flying colours.

”

seekers who come from Tier II, III, and IV cities, where affordability is a significant concern. Abhinay offers affordable education through his App, which serves as a one-stop solution for all the learning needs of students preparing for government exams, such as mock tests, books, recorded sessions, and problem-solving.

Abhinay managed to repay his loans. He was able to buy a car for himself. He also ensured that each of his family members have their own homes. After all the hardships



the family had been through, Abhinay felt that it is time for them to live a comfortable life, free of all worries about where their next meal would come. He has been able to silently respond to all those who mocked his family. Abhinay is now a family man blessed with two lovely children. He is finally living his dreams, but this money and comfortable life came after much sacrifice and hard work.

During the pandemic, Abhinay worked as a full-time educator for an Edtech unicorn, becoming a Legend Educator with 280 million watch minutes, which is the most on the platform. After that, he left the platform to focus on building a free education community on YouTube where he provided free books and content for students who cannot afford education. He has created a community of more than four lakh students on Facebook, and 21

crore views on his YouTube channel from across the nation.

Abhinay continues to break geographical, financial and resource barriers by providing revolutionised education to students across the country. His app - Abhinay Maths - has over 250K downloads. He does not cross-question nor deny admission to students from impoverished backgrounds because he sees himself in them. His app offers courses and coaching at affordable rates for students from poor financial backgrounds. His dedicated team also responds to students' queries.

Abhinay has provided free education to over 10 million students from small towns and cities across the country, with over 10K students who were taught by him passing government exams with flying colours. He says he will continue teaching for free on YouTube, even after he retires.

Abhinay's journey has been marked by numerous challenges and hardships. Despite these obstacles, he remained committed to his goals and worked tirelessly towards them. His unwavering determination, combined with his family's support and his own hard work, allowed him to overcome every obstacle and achieve success. ■



**Satyam Upadhyay**  
Mirzapur, UP

“Excellent app! Abhinay Sir is a compassionate human being as he always helps those who are unable to afford the course by giving free study materials. He is a great motivator who always pushes us in the right direction. The app is very useful as we get additional information and sample questions for practice. The content on all his platforms makes Maths easy to tackle.”



## Significance of Skill-Based Education, Particularly for Girls Across Communities

Education is our fundamental right. It empowers individuals, drives economic growth, and promotes social development. However, many children in India miss out on quality education due to various reasons such as poverty, discrimination, inadequate infrastructure, and limited access to learning resources. Many families in India cannot afford to send their children to school as they have to prioritise basic needs such as food, shelter, and healthcare. With government policies in place to ensure free education for all, many children miss this opportunity for several reasons. This is especially true for girls who face gender-based discrimination, and lack adequate safety, hygiene, and sanitation facilities. Even when children attend school, the quality of education can be poor, particularly in rural areas. There may be a lack of teachers, inadequate infrastructure, and limited access to learning resources. The pandemic has laid bare the various inadequacies. It is painfully evident that the entire education infrastructure needs transformational intervention.



**Kameswari Gangadharabhatla**



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Our flagship initiative, 'Education as an Equaliser' expands access to higher education, skills training in high-growth fields, and financial literacy for underserved communities. We have several community initiatives implemented under this flagship programme.

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At Synchrony, we are committed to the UN SDG 4, which ensures that all children have access to inclusive and equitable quality education. Poverty and discrimination are two primary reasons many children do not continue their education. This further impact girl education. Impoverished families often favour the male child when investing in education, and in some places, schools do not meet girls' safety, hygiene, or sanitation needs. Thus, prioritising female education now would tackle the discriminatory gender norms and harmful practices that might deny the next generations of girls access to school and quality learning. Another key reason to focus on female education is that it holds immense potential to bring about significant positive impacts on families, communities, and the nation as a whole.



When women receive education, they are more likely to achieve higher incomes, promote healthier families, and actively engage in civic and political spheres. Educated women also serve as influential role models for younger girls, and help break the cycle of poverty and inequality perpetuating across generations.

Further, we understand that while traditional education focuses on academic learning and theoretical knowledge, skilled education prioritises the acquisition of practical skills that can be immediately applied in a workplace. It makes students job-ready, encourages them to think creatively, develops innovative ideas and solutions, and helps them to continuously update themselves to remain competitive in the job market.

Our flagship initiative, 'Education as an Equaliser' expands access to higher education, skills training in high-growth fields, and financial literacy for underserved communities. We have several community initiatives implemented under this flagship programme. We currently support 119 lesser-privileged students, of which, 88 per cent are girls. They are selected based on need and merit from tribal, rural, and urban economically weaker backgrounds. We place them in public State universities of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, private educational institutions and universities, and premier national-level institutions. We collaborate with academic institutions, non-profits, and the government for this.

Under this Flagship Citizenship programme, we offer scholarships that

support two categories of students:

- Help students complete their high school and college
- Upskill graduates for better job opportunities

Implemented with the support of three partner non-profits, ASSIST, Nirmaan Organisation and United Way Hyderabad, 74 students have been selected for scholarships for high school/intermediate and graduation courses such as BA, B.Com, B.SC, Pharma, Nursing, B.Tech and MBBS, and 40 female students for upskilling in IT-Enabled Services (ITeS), and financial literacy.

As we complete the upskilling programme for the current academic year, 28 out of 40 girls have already been placed in various organisations. We are also looking at learning opportunities and career development programmes for students pursuing graduation, such as internships, summer projects and campus placements. We also support the cause of bringing technology to schools and colleges, making it accessible at their doorstep. These initiatives complement the schools' efforts to increase overall school enrolment rates and decrease dropout rates.

**Robotics for Children** – Schools and colleges, especially the public and low-budget institutions, are not exposed to or experiencing the technological revolution as the rest of the world. While one can now develop apps with little or no training, aided by a mobile device, many students are missing this wave due to a lack of accessibility. We are bridging this gap by



providing these youngsters with robotics training. We train our volunteers from tech and non-tech backgrounds in robotics. They then virtually train the children. In 16 months, we trained 9,125 less privileged children (55 per cent of whom were girls) in 75 government and low-budget schools in Telangana.

**Digital Labs** – We believe every student should have access to the Internet, and digital education must be accessible at all government schools. Under Disruptive Digital Intervention (DDI), we set up one new digital lab each year at government high schools with a dedicated computer instructor and interactive English software on all computers. We support it for four years until it is self-sustaining. This project aims to digitally empower students from Standard VI to X, giving them a better chance of employment and higher education in future.

The Lab solves three major problems that a regular government school student might face:

- (i) Lack of fundamentals as per age and grade.

- (ii) Exposure to computer's practical knowledge.

- (iii) Ability to communicate in simple English.

We have set up seven labs since 2017. We are currently supporting 1,111 girl students with digital labs at five girls' high schools in the tribal and rural districts of Telangana.

At Synchrony, we believe that our social initiatives are enriched further with employee participation. Two of our flagship volunteer-led projects are the Robotics for Children and Coding Programme where we train volunteers to teach robotics and coding, such as scratch programme, HTML, etc., to lesser privileged students based on a pre-decided curriculum created by Soham Academy and Nirmaan Organisation, respectively. The employees sign up for these programmes and dedicate their time to being trained by the non-profits. They also commit to training the students virtually or in person based on their availability and work schedule.

We also launched a Scholarship

Volunteer programme, in partnership with Nirmaan Organisation, to provide virtual training sessions for soft skills and job readiness for the students selected for the Upskilling Scholarship programme.

We also plan to launch a mentorship programme wherein employees will guide and work with these students to support them as they navigate their future path. Additionally, we always look for opportunities for these students to visit our workspace and showcase their learnings to the senior and executive leadership. They experience the corporate environment and are motivated to learn and join such workplaces in the future. They also meet the volunteer trainers who had guided them virtually during the project training.

We continue to strive to ensure that the basic right to education does not become elusive due to affordability concerns. By fostering inclusion, we look forward to continuing the positive momentum of our Education as an Equaliser initiative. ■

*Kameswari Gangadharabhatla is the VP of HR and Asia Diversity & Recruitment COE Leader at Synchrony.*





# DIAGNOSTIC ASSESSMENT

## The Power of Diagnostic Assessments in Driving Academic Success

You cannot improve what you do not measure. Diagnostic assessments are a powerful tool for understanding, measuring, and improving student learning outcomes. When conducted and leveraged well, these assessments can improve student learning outcomes. We will discuss the types of diagnostic assessments, their potential impact, and some real-world projects where diagnostic assessments played a role in improving student outcomes.

The COVID-19 pandemic led to extended school closure and remote education, resulting in a huge learning gap in students. India saw one of the most prolonged school closures, stretching to

approximately two academic years, significantly impacting student learning levels and hampering robust data collection on student learning outcomes<sup>1</sup>. There is little data to understand the



**Vivek Gangarapu**

<https://www.unesco.org/en/covid-19/education-response><sup>1</sup>

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Diagnostic assessments can be conducted in several formats throughout the year to understand the competencies and concepts students mastered and where they need additional support. However, the focus of diagnostic assessment should not be to punish or reprimand students or negatively label them as “behind,” “not meeting expectations,” or “dull”. Instead, they should be used to diagnose learning gaps and plan remedial measures to bridge the identified gaps.

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magnitude and extent of learning loss in students. One strategy to measure, understand and bridge this learning gap is through the effective application of diagnostic assessments.

Diagnostic assessments can be conducted in several formats throughout the year to understand the competencies and concepts students mastered and

where they need additional support. However, the focus of diagnostic assessment should not be to punish or reprimand students or negatively label them as “behind,” “not meeting expectations,” or “dull”. Instead, they should be used to diagnose learning gaps and plan remedial measures to bridge the identified gaps. The aim and priority of these assessments should be to improve student learning outcomes and growth.

### Types of Diagnostic Assessments

Let us delve into some common types of diagnostic assessments school teachers encounter in their academic cycle:

**1. Pre-Tests:** These are the 'before' tests conducted before teaching the topic. These tests give the teacher an idea about what the students already know about a topic, helping them structure their lesson plan, the pace they need to teach, and any specific areas of misconceptions they need to pay special attention to.

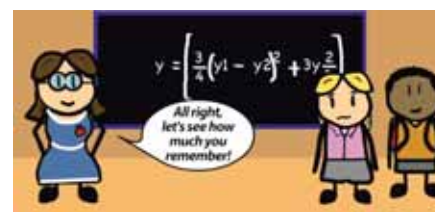
**2. In-Classroom Assessments or Quizzes:** These are daily/weekly assessments or quizzes a teacher can conduct during a topic to understand if the students are learning the concepts well. They can use learnings from this to plan and tweak further instructions and remedies for the next week more effectively.

**3. Monthly Tests/Formative Assessments:** These are like the check-in or unit tests that teachers commonly conduct monthly or at the end of every unit to check how



the students have grasped what was taught. As these tests are conducted regularly, they provide the teacher with information on how students progress over the year and takes remedial action wherever necessary.

**4. Summative Assessments:** These are the 'after' tests that assess what a student has learned at the end of a specific period of instruction. They are conducted either



half-yearly or annually. They may also be conducted in a pre-post design at the beginning of the academic year (BoY) and at the end of the academic year (EoY) to understand how much the students have learned from the summation of topics covered in that period. In summative assessments, a student's performance is generally compared relative to other students or against a



benchmark.

**5. Norm-Referenced Assessments:** These are assessments where a student's performance is compared to a larger group's performance. This larger group, known as the 'norm group,' could be a class, school, district, or even country





level. The goal is not necessarily to gauge whether a student has learned a concept but to rank students relative to their peers. Examples would be National and State Achievement Surveys conducted to rank districts and States to each other, and entrance examinations to rank and select candidates.

#### 6. Criterion-Referenced Assessments:

These assessments evaluate students against a set standard, not against each other. The students must clear the predetermined level of standards to determine if they have attained the level of achievement. For example, students must achieve a minimum score in board exams to pass. They are then classified into “Third Division,” “Second Division,” etc., based on their scores. Any assessment that categorises students as “Pass” or “Fail” can be considered a criterion-referenced assessment.

However, to actualise the above impact, it is essential to conduct diagnostic assessments and leverage insights to identify learning gaps and plan personalised remedial interventions. The focus must be on the outcomes achieved in learning through diagnostic assessments and not on the output, which would be marks or rank scores.

One such example in recent times that focused on the outcomes was The Quality Education India - Development Impact Bond (DIB hereon), which sought to improve the learning outcomes for 2,00,000 primary school children. This was a four-year innovative outcome-based project, i.e., pay-for-success only if targeted learning outcomes are

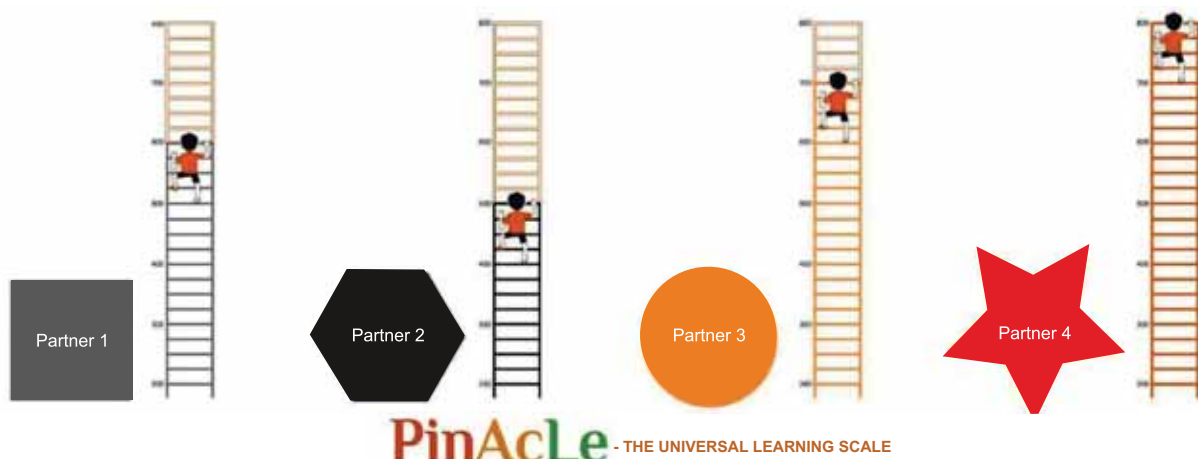


achieved. This project involved four interventions implemented by education partners, including Gyanshala, Educational Initiatives (with Pratham InfoTech Foundation), Society for All Round Development (SARD), and Kaivalya Education Foundation (KEF). The learning outcomes were assessed and evaluated through summative diagnostic assessments using a universal learning scale 'PinAcle' developed by the outcome evaluator, ConveGenius Insights (CGI).

The PinAcle Scale uses highly-precise test design methods, psychometric testing theories, and statistical data

analysis techniques to provide actionable insights for education partners, funders, administrators, schools, and teachers. PinAcle scale allows for measuring learning on a universal scale against universal targets. This scale allows all stakeholders to identify learning gaps and make programmatic innovations based on on-ground needs.

As a result, QEI-DIB students saw a remarkable 2.5 times improvement in literacy and numeracy skills compared to non-participating students. This showcased that diagnostic assessments, when scientifically conducted and leveraged, keeping the child's learning





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However, the implementation of diagnostic assessments comes with its own set of challenges. These challenges often stem from a lack of understanding of diagnostic assessments, inadequate technological support, and teacher training to leverage different assessment tools. At the core of the challenge is the inability to analyse findings from these assessments and then personalise the child's learning journey.

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outcome as the goal could have a tremendous impact on learning outcomes.

However, the implementation of diagnostic assessments comes with its own set of challenges. These challenges often stem from a lack of understanding of diagnostic assessments, inadequate technological support, and teacher training to leverage different assessment tools. At the core of the challenge is the

inability to analyse findings from these assessments and then personalise the child's learning journey. In a majority of the cases, this issue persists due to two reasons, one, the inability of an individual teacher to personalise education for each child in a large class without technological support, and second, lack of time to focus on assessment analysis as teachers often lose time in administrative tasks.

Technology has a significant role in resolving various challenges of conducting and leveraging data from diagnostic assessments to improve child learning outcomes.

### Mission Buniyaad Tab Lab

An example of a successful project that used technology for better learning outcomes was the Mission Buniyaad by the Government of Rajasthan. The Rajasthan government piloted the usage of the ConveGenius PAL (Personalised and Adaptive Learning) platform for 35,000 girl students from Grades 8-12 in six districts to recoup the learning loss due to COVID-19.

CG PAL conducts various diagnostic assessments to identify learning gaps in the student and then personalise the learning journey for the child. Based on the diagnostic assessments CG PAL conducts, it provides comprehensive reports and a dashboard for teachers

allowing them to view and track student progress in three categories - Grade Level, Grade Minus 1, and Grade Minus 2 for every chapter taught in the class. This allowed the teacher to understand which areas require additional attention in class and plan their lessons effectively.

Mission Buniyaad pilot using CG PAL was a resounding success, with the average learning outcome improving by 16 per cent between baseline and endline within six months. This has led to the Rajasthan government expanding the PAL programme to two million students across the State. This pilot shows that diagnostic assessments are prerequisites to improve a child's learning outcomes, whether formative or summative.

In conclusion, this gravity cannot be exaggerated – we are talking about the lives and futures of our students. Just as a doctor would not treat a patient without diagnosing their issue, we must also not educate our students without diagnosing and addressing their learning gaps. Diagnostic assessments make classrooms and the teaching-learning process intelligent, without which it is one-way communication to finish the syllabus at best. To do it well at scale, leveraging technology and universal learning scales is the only way forward. ■

*Vivek Gangarapu is a Senior Manager at ConveGenius.*





## Shaurya Kabra: On a Mission to Improve Financial Literacy in Rural India

It is rare to find a high school student who is passionate about bridging the gap between the rich and the poor, the endowed and the dispossessed, the educated and the uninformed. Shaurya Kabra, however, possesses a level of maturity, worldview, and outlook on life that goes well beyond his age of seventeen. He effortlessly carries the weight of this challenge on his shoulders, leaving a trail of transformation in society wherever he goes.

Shaurya comes from a noteworthy business family, but he does not believe in taking the easy path to mentoring. Despite his young age, he displays remarkable clarity when it comes to matters related to society, the environment, and the economy.

Shaurya has launched two great initiatives to empower the less fortunate with the basics of financial literacy and enable them to make the most of their resources by sharing his passion for fintech with his peers.

In addition to his love for basketball and singing, Shaurya has several other passions. Unlike many young people today who are obsessed with video games and electronic devices, Shaurya is drawn to the intricacies of the business and financial world. This is why he is a wizard with numbers—it's not just a coincidence. At an age when most teenagers are immersed in electronic games, Shaurya has charted a course for his own mission and launched two initiatives: Simplify Fintech and Ek Prayaas. Through these initiatives, he aims to share his



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Since childhood, Shaurya was fortunate to have access to resources that allowed him to sharpen his knowledge of finance through his parents, teachers, and other individuals. He was acutely aware of the socio-economic inequalities that exist among various strata of our country's population.

Seeing children from economically weaker families made him realise that not everyone was as fortunate as he was. This ignited a desire within him to take action and do something to help them.

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financial knowledge and tap into the expertise of others in the field to help those in need.

Simplify Fintech is a platform that introduces and educates young individuals about fintech, demystifying this complex subject through sessions delivered by fintech experts. Shaurya's vision for Ek Prayaas, his book, is to improve financial literacy among India's rural masses. Through financial literacy offerings, the book aims to raise fiscal awareness and financially empower underprivileged individuals in rural India. Shaurya's passion and determination provide a glimpse of what is to come in the near future: he has plans to launch his own fintech startup.

Shaurya was born and raised in Mumbai but is currently studying in Class XII at Jayshree Periwal International School in Jaipur. From a very young age, he developed an interest in finance by observing his parents, who are deeply involved in the family business. Dinner conversations often revolved around

business, finance, and more, which fueled his curiosity and passion for the subject.

Since childhood, Shaurya was fortunate to have access to resources that allowed him to sharpen his knowledge of finance through his parents, teachers, and other individuals. He was acutely aware of the socio-economic inequalities that exist among various strata of our country's population. Seeing children from economically weaker families made him realise that not everyone was as fortunate as he was. This ignited a desire within him to take action and do something to help them.



Shaurya recognised the lack of financial knowledge among the masses, particularly in rural areas. He understood that financial inclusion could instil the habit of saving and investing and provide access to the banking system, thereby reducing their dependence on moneylenders, lowering their exposure to economic risks, and even creating job opportunities. Ek Prayaas, his book, primarily covers the basics of finance to address this issue.

Shaurya spent around six to eight months

writing Ek Prayaas. He started working on the initial draft of the book when he was in Class X, amidst the pandemic that kept people confined to their homes. Despite being loaded with schoolwork and extracurricular tasks, Shaurya took the opportunity to delve deeper into his interest in finance and crystallise his ideas. Under the guidance of his school supervisor, he began working on the book. During the summer vacation that year, he devoted more time to fine-tuning the language and other creative elements.

In addition to writing the book, Shaurya conducted extensive research on the subject of finance. He read books on

investment for children, sent Google forms to children to get their opinions on the book's structure and creative diagrams, and worked to develop accurate specifications for these elements. Shaurya also studied the required topics extensively to collect precise information that was easy to understand. To reach a wider audience, he had the book translated into different languages such as Hindi, Marathi, and Tamil.

To print and distribute the book for free in





different States, Shaurya collaborated with Foundations that are working towards spreading financial awareness and literacy among rural masses. Through these collaborations, Shaurya was able to reach a wider audience and make a greater impact.

Following his initiative, Shaurya received an overwhelming response from students and adults. The book was widely appreciated for its ingenious format that used simple language and easy-to-understand concepts. Teachers and students

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alike found it to be a useful resource for improving financial literacy. His efforts were also acknowledged by various organisations and media outlets, which helped spread awareness about his initiatives.

Shaurya intends to pursue a major in finance and establish a fund to support entrepreneurs from rural and tribal areas.

Shaurya finds great joy and satisfaction in knowing that his efforts have helped even a few people to understand the fundamentals of finance and investment. He encourages other young individuals to explore ways to assist those in their communities, as it can strengthen them and provide valuable life lessons. ■



## Striving for Success Through Tata STRIVE

Two-thirds of India's 1.2 billion population is under 35 years, making the country one of the youngest in the world from a demographic perspective. The economic benefit of having such a large working-age population is evident. However, a significant percentage of this population is unskilled or under-skilled. Skill building is therefore a key focus area for national development. The outcome of the Skill India Mission is to mould this vast human potential into productive employees and venturesome entrepreneurs.

With this in mind, Tata STRIVE – the skill development initiative of the Tata Community Initiatives Trust under the aegis of Tata Trusts - addresses the pressing need of skilling India's youth for employment, entrepreneurship, and community enterprise.

It reaches out to communities, develops the skills of people from financially challenged backgrounds, and acclimatises them to the changing work environment. The core philosophy is to create courses that would help in creating and supplying trained manpower across the entire industrial spectrum as well as develop entrepreneurial talent.

Over the years, Tata STRIVE trainees have brought laurels to the programme. Let us meet some of them.

### Anita Nayak

Anita is a mobile phone charger technician at Foxlink, Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh.

"I am content with my life," she says, something she discovered through her struggles that shaped her into the courageous young lady she is today. Through her earnings, she hopes to provide her younger brother and sister a better life by supporting their higher education.

Her maternal grandmother was granted custody of the three children when their parents separated years ago. When Anita was 13 years old and studying in the 8th Standard, her grandmother compelled her to get married. This was a case of child marriage which Anita was dead set against. Determined to not fall prey to





such a practice, she sought assistance. With her friends' help, she contacted the helpline number 1098. As a result, Anita was placed in a child care institution for her safety and well-being. While at the institution, she completed her Class X education. Some personnel from the government-funded ITI, Bhubaneswar, visited the institution Anita was housed in for a counselling programme. They were very impressed with her determination and desire to succeed in life. They offered her an opportunity to pursue a trade at IoT Smart City.

Full of dreams, Anita joined the ITI where she was introduced to the technical environment of the skilling ecosystem. Though it was all new for her, she was impressed with it and put all her efforts into learning IoT technology. As her trainers put it, "She was a curious student. She attended her classes regularly. She would always approach us and asked questions to clarify her doubts or seek more explanation regarding a particular point she did not understand."

In 2021, she was ecstatic when she received her appointment letter from Rising Star, Bangalore, as it was her first-ever job opportunity.

The Tata STRIVE Bagchi Life Skills Development Programme built her confidence. "It is now part of my life forever," she says. Her interpersonal skills developed and so did her public speaking skills, which reflected in her communication and personality. Today, Anita proudly tells her friends, especially those who think that girls cannot step out of her house and chase their dreams: "In a way, the struggles I went through were a form of training. Let this belief move you forward whenever you feel weary. These struggles will ultimately make you stronger."

### Sasmita Mohapatra

Sasmita Mohapatra works as a Zonal Change Leader at the Govt. ITI, Rourkela, in Odisha Special ITI Projects. She facilitates employability skills to the students at the institute.

Being a change leader at the ITI, she delivers quality training, maintains a



professional environment, and coordinates with all stakeholders for the smooth implementation of the programme.

Sasmita is gratified to be one of the change leaders of Tata STRIVE. She had been working as a freelance trainer and content developer for years. She joined the organisation for the work the Trusts does and for the opportunity to work with the team. Sasmita is an action-driven person and is always curious to learn.

Sasmita's journey has been far from easy. At the tender age of 11, she faced the wrath of the 1999 Super Cyclone that ravaged Odisha, leaving a path of destruction in its wake. In the midst of the chaos, she sought refuge in a humble shed alongside 30 others, enduring a harrowing 40 hours in her small village. During that time, none of them knew if they would live to see a new day. When the cyclone eventually subsided, the aftermath revealed the devastation it had inflicted on Odisha's forests and ecosystem. The region suffered immense losses, and the destructive impact was

evident. Tragically, the occurrence of natural calamities, in various forms, claimed numerous lives each year.

Years later, Sasmita volunteered with local NGOs and volunteer groups working on various environmental issues. She travelled to many States in India and was devastated to see many places destroyed. There was rampant felling of trees and people were undergoing various water issues. She also worked in the rural areas of Odisha on various CSR projects and realised the pain of the silent voices caused by water scarcity and heat-related illnesses. Although Sasmita had a burning desire to address these pressing issues, she did not know how to move forward and make a meaningful impact. However, her path became clear when she joined Tata STRIVE.

Today, Sasmita is well on her way to becoming an environment warrior. She has additionally co-founded and founded her volunteering group called "Climate Warriors of Rourkela", along with some local youth. Their efforts have been ongoing with cleaning drives for "Koel River" and a campaign, "Save Koel". Her family, too, maintains an eco-friendly lifestyle, with the use of eco-friendly products. Sasmita says, "I believe charity begins at home. I maintain a completely eco-friendly lifestyle and motivate others to adapt to this sustainable lifestyle for a better future. Mentoring young minds for project-based learning on sustainable development goals (SDGs) makes me proud. I cherish working with Tata STRIVE, an organisation that truly makes us prosper."

### Sangita Prusty

Sangita Prusty, a trainee from the Tata STRIVE's Electronics Mechanic trade made headlines when she received an award from Dharmendra Pradhan, Minister of Education and Skill Development & Entrepreneurship, Government of India, at a felicitation ceremony organised by the Govt of India at New Delhi, for achieving All India Rank 1 in AITT (All India Trade Test) conducted by NCVT.

"Her journey was not an easy one and she



**Sangita Prusty**

never dreamed she would reach the stature she has achieved thus far, but her hard work, dedication, and perseverance guided her to move fearlessly towards her goal,” her trade faculty says. Ever since she visited the ITI during a study trip after completing Class X, she was determined to study there so she could then work as a technician within the vast network of the Indian Railways.

As the eldest child in a family of five, Sangita went through many struggles growing up, and today, her desire is to offer a better life to her younger siblings through her earnings.

Sangita is very proud that she is an alumnus of Govt. ITI Bhubaneswar. The 21st-century skills she gained through the life skills classes and domain skills had a profound impact on both her personal and professional growth. She puts it succinctly, “The two years I spent at the ITI developed my self-confidence, self-discipline, informed decision-making abilities, and effective time management skills.”

Her trainer also notes, “Sangita is a very curious girl by nature, driving her to stay one step ahead of others. Once she gets a little clarity on a subject, she eagerly delves deeper to get a more comprehensive understanding. This should be the characteristic of every student.”

### **Pradeep Ray**

An alumnus of Govt. ITI Bhubaneswar, Pradeep completed his ITI in IoT



**Pradeep Ray**

Technician (Smart City) trade in 2021. He now works as an Operation Trainee at Jindal Steel Power. His success story is a rather unusual one.

In 2012, a young Pradeep was begging for food all alone at Bhubaneswar Railway Station. Fortunately for him, he was rescued by the Railway Police. When they questioned him about his family or any contact person, he was unable to give them any answers. They handed him over to the Child Welfare Committee of Odisha. He was then transferred to Nehru Seva Sadan – a childcare institution in Banpur, Khordha, where he grew up in a nurturing environment alongside other children facing similar circumstances.

Pradeep was always a shy person, but with an unwavering determination who refused to quit until he has reached his goals.

He had always dreamed of returning to his family but since he was separated from them at a very tender age, he could not remember anything about them. He yearned to create his own identity in society so he could rise above the tag of a destitute orphan.

With this mindset and dedication, Pradeep completed his Matriculation in 2020 and joined the Govt. ITI Bhubaneswar to equip himself with skills that will provide a profession that will sustain him.

Today, as a skilled professional, he is grateful for the training he received at Govt. ITI Bhubaneswar. He encourages



**Abhijeet Hota**

the youth to take up vocational training at ITIs and build their career, or as he puts it, “I understand the struggles young people go through, who, due to a lack of knowledge, remain directionless. By arming them with knowledge, we can make a positive impact and help change their path to a better future.”

“I joined Tata STRIVE because they have many good programmes. I learned time management, leadership, communication, and basic computer knowledge. It has played a pivotal role in uplifting my life and opened doors for me to achieve a respectable position in society.”

### **Abhijeet Hota**

Initially, Abhijeet thought that Tata STRIVE programmes were regular ones, but when he joined, he discovered that the sessions were unique and distinctive. It was not just theoretical learning. He was able to learn various things. His confidence improved and he overcame his fear of public speaking.

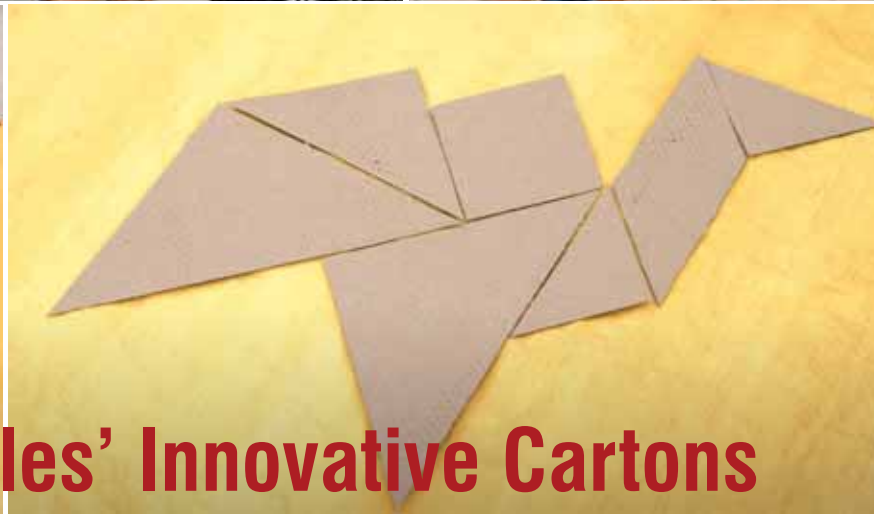
Abhijeet learned valuable life skills during the programme which helped him develop skills like critical thinking, grit, decision making, and maintaining good interpersonal relationships.

The programme has also helped Abhijeet become Abhijeet 2.0! “I have overcome many of my weaknesses and I am now more confident in the informed decisions that I have taken in my life.”

*Contributed by:*

**TATA STRIVE**





## Orientbell Tiles' Innovative Cartons Educate Poor Kids

India's increasing urbanisation attracts more than five crore construction workers, and along with them, their nearly ~5.5 crore children. This is a migrant population from small towns who travel across States to work at construction sites. As they keep moving, they also face challenges in getting a stable education from regular schools.

During visits to construction sites for mason training, Orientbell's team noticed young children, aged five - seven years, playing at the construction sites. They faced challenges in accessing education and most of them ended up joining their parents in their work.

Though a sizeable population of these children has access to creches or schools provided by the builders, they lack tools that can enhance their engagement, skills, and creativity. They often end up loitering on construction sites or looking after their younger siblings. Left to their own devices, they would end up as unskilled labourers themselves. Orientbell felt the need to do something to prevent this large population from the same future as their parents.

To provide these children with at least some educational resources, Orientbell

came up with a creative solution called the Tangram Carton for GVT 600X600 tiles. The decision was made to incorporate Tangram puzzles on all these cartons.

The Tangram puzzle consists of seven geometric shapes cut out of a single square. The goal is to use these seven pieces to create different shapes or figures. Tangram is often used as a game or educational tool to promote spatial reasoning, creativity, and problem-solving skills. It encourages children to use their creativity to make shapes and designs with the tile boxes. It is a popular educational tool for children aged 2 to 12 years, both in India and globally, and is often a part of school curriculum.

The carton serves a dual purpose as a tile packing box and an educational tool. It offers a scalable way to reach these children.

The Tangram Project is just one of Orientbell Tiles' many initiatives to support workers' families and promote social responsibility and sustainability. The company believes that supporting education of the under-served children is a key part of its commitment to society. By offering innovative solutions like the

Tangram, the Company is committed to creating a better future for its stakeholders, their families, and the environment.

"We understand the challenges that builders and contractors face to enable learning amongst children of their construction workers. Printing Tangrams on cartons of 600x600 GVT is a unique way to reach underserved children with educational aids that are relevant. These shapes are perforated and a child could easily remove them from an empty carton. We really hope that adds to any other effort existing on the site. We ideated on this along with Aditya, CEO of Craftgami. And we had looked at numerous options before we finalised on this Tangram as the best option," shared Alok Agarwal, Chief Marketing Officer, Orientbell Tiles.

By integrating the Tangram Carton concept into their tile packaging, Orientbell not only contributed to the children's education but also found inspiration in addressing their needs and creating a positive impact in their lives.

This initiative is activated across North, Central and East India in their GVT 600X600mm Tile box. ■

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