

Vol. VIII, Issue I, 2024

# CSR *Mandate*

Enabling Sustainability

## A Legacy of Social Transformation

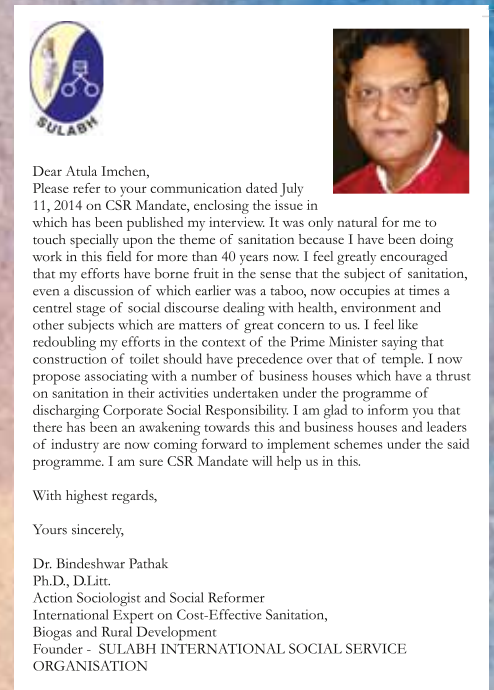




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# F OREWORD



Dear Readers,

Welcome to this reflection on a decade of commitment to social responsibility undertaken by various corporate houses, public sector undertakings, NGOs, individuals and civil society. Over the years, efforts have focused on addressing critical challenges facing communities in India. Through collaborations and innovative solutions, significant strides have been made in areas such as education, healthcare, and sustainable development.

This issue of the magazine showcases a selection of initiatives that underscore the commitment of various organisations to driving meaningful and impactful change. From enhancing literacy for visually impaired children to facilitating access to nutritious meals, these initiatives highlight their dedication to making a positive difference. They serve as a testament to the incredible power of partnerships and technology in fostering positive outcomes.

This reflection not only celebrates achievements but also honours the resilience of communities. It aims to inspire ongoing efforts towards a more equitable society where every individual has the opportunity to thrive.

At its core, this journey is rooted in the empowerment of communities and the promotion of sustainable development. Initiatives spanning health, education, employability, and environmental stewardship illustrate the transformative potential of inclusive and holistic approaches.

Looking forward, the commitment remains resolute to advancing a vision of a more equitable society where every individual has access to opportunities for growth and prosperity.

This issue commemorates the remarkable achievements attained, highlighting the unwavering resilience and indomitable determination of the communities it serves. It serves as a profound inspiration, fostering ongoing innovation and collaborative efforts aimed at forging a brighter and more promising future for everyone involved.

We hope you will enjoy every story and thought-provoking article we have lined up for you in this issue.

Best Wishes,

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

**Kamaljit Swaroop**  
Vice Chairperson





Dear Readers,

In the current global landscape, the pressing issues of food security and child nutrition require our immediate and undivided attention. These challenges are not confined by borders or economic differences; they affect communities on a global scale. In India, these issues are particularly intricate and demand our collective focus and dedication. It is crucial to prioritise ensuring sufficient nutrition for children. By implementing targeted and strategic initiatives, we can effectively bridge nutritional gaps, with a strong emphasis on affordability, accessibility, and the quality of available food. This involves specific interventions aimed at providing subsidised meals to underprivileged populations, highlighting the importance of ensuring equal access to nutritious food as a basic human right.

Our individual and collective social responsibility initiatives play a pivotal role in addressing these challenges. By integrating efforts across various sectors such as healthcare, education, water management, and rural development, we can showcase the potential for collaborative partnerships to drive enduring change.

Educational disparities aggravate these issues, particularly in rural areas where there is lack of infrastructure and well-trained educators. It is important to focus on efforts to address these disparities through innovative reforms and active community involvement in order to achieve long-term progress. Our collective endeavours play a pivotal role in guaranteeing equitable access to nutrition and education for every child across India.

By nurturing partnerships between government, civil society, and the private sector, we can work together to build a more resilient and inclusive society where every child has the opportunity to thrive. Together, we can truly make a difference in the lives of children across India and pave the way for a brighter, healthier future for all.

Your feedback on the content of this issue is highly valued. Your thoughts and opinions are essential to us as we continually aim to improve and enrich your reading experience.

Warm Regards,

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

**Atula Imchen**

Editor



# Strategies for Long-Term Empowerment of Marginalised Communities: Case and Context of India

**Pooran Chandra Pandey** is the Adviser for the UNESCO Inclusive Policy Lab in Paris, France.

## Situational Context

India is the largest functioning democracy with diversity and pluralism like no other anywhere in the world. Multiple communities, languages, traditions, and weather conditions at the federal and sub-national levels further shape and underpin its geographical expanse more uniquely on an unprecedented scale. The country also stands out on its population, currently at over 1.4 billion people spreading across the length and breadth of rural, semi-urban and urban centres. This side of the issue presents multiple and simultaneous opportunities and challenges for the nation – demographic dividends as well as potential challenges such as poverty, vulnerability, and subsistence issues across a substantive expanse of the country. These issues are dynamic and tend to abate and aggravate with changing situations across the economy, health and employment statuses. They need policy responses from both federal and sub-regional governments and positive collaboration between the government, private sector, and civil society to address issues and provide solutions that serve the poor and the vulnerable in a time-specific manner.





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There are multiple pathways to satisfactorily work the solutions, not through a charity or corporate social responsibility mode alone, but by introducing smarter solutions aimed at solving the issues of poverty and vulnerability before the twin issues take an adverse toll both on the social and economic dimensions of the human well-being and their welfare, including economic development to stay healthy.

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### Poverty Eradication through Welfare

Out of the country's more than 1.4 billion people, about 15 per cent in 2019-21 (down from about 25 per cent in 2015-16) are multidimensional poor, according to NITI Aayog National Multidimensional Poverty Report, 2023. This exceedingly high percentage of poor people is putting pressure on public finances and instruments of the governments – both federal and sub-regional – in being able to take care of welfare measures and schemes effectively.



It is worth mentioning that there are about 1000 welfare programmes and schemes respectively administered by the federal (300 welfare schemes) and sub-regional (650 welfare schemes) governments, incurring about INR 14 Lakh Crores, over USD 200 billion in dollar equivalent, making India one of the largest welfare-oriented nations in its class and category in the world.

The fact that the Indian Government feeds over 80 crores of poor and vulnerable through its targeted schemes and welfare measures is a feat in itself. This welfare scheme that started during the pandemic will continue till 2028. The Union Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment has played a critical role in improving the plight of the poor and the vulnerable. It has achieved this by supporting welfare schemes spanning education, social, and economic

parameters. It has successfully addressed challenges such as ghost beneficiaries and duplication of schemes and their recipients by leveraging technologies and implementing targeted benefits and cash transfers. This is no mean task by any stretch of the imagination.

### Public Finances and Private Sector

A task of this magnitude cannot be achieved by the government alone, given the scale and size of the challenges, the state of public finances and population growth going forward. It is an accepted fact that public finances are in short supply around the world. These finances are to be raised, better leveraged, and put to better usage by targeting and removing duplication in welfare schemes, targeted cash and welfare measures. This involves taking out those moving upwardly across socio-economic indicators in a time-bound manner and bringing in those at the cusp of multidimensional poverty remit in time.

Governments in India and globally are confronted with this intricate challenge. Welfare schemes and programmes need repurposing to function more effectively and extend greater coverage to the poor and vulnerable within the constraints of available public finances. In addition, the situation is also likely to warrant more and better collaboration between the federal and the sub-regional governments with the private sector



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Over time, despite multiple amendments and expansions, the initially well-intentioned CSR provisions have gradually been diluted beyond recognition in both scope and vested interests. The concept has also evolved into a different form, with competing claims on private sector finances under CSR provisions and their overall utility.

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through a win-win route. There are multiple pathways to satisfactorily work the solutions, not through a charity or corporate social responsibility mode alone, but by introducing smarter solutions aimed at solving the issues of poverty and vulnerability before the twin issues take an adverse toll both on the social and economic dimensions of the human well-being and their welfare, including economic development to stay healthy.

### Corporate Social Responsibility and Section 135

In this context, it is worth noting that the Indian Government introduced the mandatory provisions of Corporate Social Responsibility under Section 135 by modifying the Companies Act of 1956 in 2013. Operational since April 01, 2014, provisions mandated the private sector to spend up to 2 per cent of their profit on areas and issues related to community and human welfare. These provisions are linked to their net worth, turnover, and net profit in a given fiscal year under the oversight of the regulatory bodies and agencies.

Over time, despite multiple amendments and expansions, the initially well-intentioned CSR provisions have



gradually been diluted beyond recognition in both scope and vested interests. The concept has also evolved into a different form, with competing claims on private sector finances under CSR provisions and their overall utility.

The CSR provisions may need a thorough revisit to bring them under a different set of rules and conditions to repurpose existing welfare schemes and programmes to maintain the operational mechanism to secure the broad ambit for which financial resources are given and spent. This includes aspects less likely to be diluted by elements such as multiple reporting architecture and duplication of

implementing agencies. It is crucial for maintaining transparency and trust purposefully. Considering the impact of technology and targeted welfare programmes and schemes, it should be workable to implement real-time monitoring and straightforward reporting. This applies to recipients and private sector donors for better understanding and transparency.

### Need to Repurpose Welfare Schemes and Social Policies

Given the complex and multidimensional nature of poverty and vulnerability, it is necessary to develop new tools and mechanisms to alleviate poverty and







strengthen safeguards against relapse into deprivation. This is particularly important for the majority of people in India who fall below the poverty line and require multiple simultaneous solutions to their problems. It is necessary to adopt a new approach to policy-making that considers implementing universal basic income tools in the current context. Repurposing welfare schemes and programmes and implementing new social policies to eradicate poverty in the digital age is crucial. This is not only



The UN-led 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are clear. The first goal is Zero Poverty, with Goal 1.2 stressing the reduction of poverty by half in all its forms by 2030.

Additionally, through the sub-set of Goal 16.9, providing a legal entity to citizens prepares India well. It can harness its strength in public digital infrastructure (PDI) and various welfare programmes and schemes. By uniting these efforts, India can leapfrog in a direction that offers a differentiated yet unique solution to inequality, poverty, and marginalisation.



necessary to address the marginalisation of communities but also to empower them long-term, and sustainably.

### Global Goals

The UN-led 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are clear. The first goal is Zero Poverty, with Goal 1.2 stressing the reduction of poverty by half in all its forms by 2030. Additionally, through the sub-set of Goal 16.9, providing a legal entity to citizens prepares India well. It can harness its strength in public digital infrastructure (PDI) and various welfare programmes and schemes. By uniting these efforts, India can leapfrog in a direction that offers a differentiated yet unique solution to inequality, poverty, and marginalisation. This can be achieved through a public-private partnership built on the foundational principles of intergenerational socio-economic equality and opportunities.



### India's Opportunity

India's growing role and stature, both regionally and in the comity of nations, call for new paradigm shifts in how it matches its economic growth with the improved well-being of its people by repurposing its ongoing welfare schemes and programmes. These efforts can yield positive outcomes on the ground. To truly make a substantial impact on people's lives, it is crucial to explore public-private partnerships. Moreover, maximising the effectiveness of federal sub-regional collaboration and leveraging innovative policy instruments is essential.

India is currently in a better position to unlock potential economic opportunities for its poor and low-income groups through welfare programmes and schemes while conjoining its national goals with global sustainable development goals.





# Beyond Financial Giving: The Power of Volunteerism

**Alex Counts** is the Executive Director of the India Philanthropy Alliance.

One of the most impressive aspects of American philanthropy is its sheer size. In 2022, U.S. citizens, residents, foundations, and companies donated an astonishing \$499 billion to better society through charities and nonprofits. It is worth mentioning that this is just a tiny fraction of the overall revenue generated, which is more than \$2.4 trillion. This amount comes from a variety of sources such as government contracts and grants, earned revenue, investment income, etc.

## A Gigantic Volunteer Workforce, with Indian-Americans Leading the Way

But alongside these top-line numbers is another startling aspect: each year, around 64 million Americans volunteer their time for nonprofits. They average 137 donated





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Volunteerism in the nonprofit sector has existed in many forms throughout history, and the American approach to this strategy for societal problem-solving is gaining ground globally. Among foreign-born populations living in the U.S.A., Indian-Americans volunteer almost double (220 hours per year) than typical Americans do. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that volunteers are a lynchpin of the American nonprofit sector, which itself constitutes 5.6 per cent of the national economy and 10 per cent of the American workforce.

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hours each, meaning that they contributed nine trillion hours to nonprofits annually, the equivalent of 5.2 million people working full-time. The value of this donated time is approximately \$195 billion.

While the number of people volunteering is slowly falling, the average number of hours committed by those donating their time is growing — so the total amount contributed has remained consistent over many years. Generally, volunteers also tend to be generous and regular donors to the nonprofits they contribute their time. Donating time is not typically a substitute for giving money but rather an on-ramp to doing so.

Volunteerism in the nonprofit sector has existed in many forms throughout history, and the American approach to this strategy for societal problem-solving is gaining ground globally. Among foreign-born populations living in the



U.S.A., Indian-Americans volunteer almost double (220 hours per year) than typical Americans do.

It is hardly an exaggeration to say that volunteers are a lynchpin of the American nonprofit sector, which itself constitutes 5.6 per cent of the national economy and 10 per cent of the American workforce. It is important to remember that volunteers also power many of the estimated 3.3 million nonprofits active in India today.

### Volunteering Can Benefit Many Stakeholders

But the beneficiaries of volunteerism extend far beyond the nonprofits themselves. Studies have shown that the levels of trust within communities directly correlate to the percentage of people involved in local nonprofits. Furthermore, as described by the Mayo Clinic, volunteers tend to be healthier, mentally and physically, than those who do not donate any of their time. Other studies have found that youth who volunteer are 25 per cent less likely to experience anxiety and that teenagers who volunteer at least one hour per week are 50 per cent less likely to adopt unhealthy behaviours such as smoking and abusing alcohol.

Like most people starting underfunded

nonprofits, I relied on volunteers heavily when I established the Grameen Foundation in 1997, an ambitious but inexperienced 30-year-old (a story I told in detail in my book *Changing the World Without Losing Your Mind*). I engaged all those eager to contribute by involving them in getting the organisation off the ground. It was chaotic at times, but also a wonderful experience of creating an intense community of purpose. However, unlike most leaders of start-ups that have matured into organisations with budgets exceeding \$5 million—which constitutes less than 5 per cent of the 1.6 million nonprofits in the country—I doubled down on engaging volunteers as we grew.

In reality, most charities sideline volunteers when they raise enough money to replace them with professional staff. (This might partly explain why the total number of volunteers is gradually decreasing.) Instead, I had the employees work aside volunteers in creative ways that initially startled staff I hired from other, more traditional organisations. But most employees learned to love these ‘force multipliers’, as we sometimes call them. These skills-based volunteers brought their expertise and passion in ways that complemented, motivated, and educated our staff. We coined the term ‘skillanthropy’ to describe their valuable contributions (and to distinguish their



value-add from those given make-work projects that do not utilise volunteers' full capabilities or anything close).

In recognising the potential of volunteers, I suppose I was channelling the lessons I learned in the earliest part of my career as a volunteer and staff member for RESULTS, a leading international humanitarian group working on poverty that relies largely on its volunteer advocates to advance policies that empower the most vulnerable in the United States and around the world. (For more on how this extraordinary organisation works, check out the book *Reclaiming Our Democracy: Every Citizen's Guide to Transformational Advocacy* by the group's founder, Sam Daley-Harris.) In India, many successful partnerships between State governments and nonprofits are initially facilitated by nonprofit volunteers.

### **Bankers Without Borders: An Important Model with Enduring Lessons**

In fact, due to our successes in this area, the Grameen Foundation created one of the world's largest volunteer reserve corps of volunteers and a vibrant

programme to manage them called Bankers Without Borders (BWB), which continues to this day under the leadership of a Bangladeshi-American dynamo named Sabrina Quaraishi. It has more than 19,700 volunteers vetted and ready to serve mission-driven organisations.

One of the insights that BWB channelled was that nonprofits tend to expect too little of volunteers, rather than too much. This was one of several lessons that had been catalogued by Shannon Maynard, the founder of BWB and now the leader of the Congressional Hunger Center, and three other authors including my former University of Maryland colleague, Professor Robert Grimm in an influential article in the *Stanford Social Innovation Review*. Even now, far too few nonprofits have taken these lessons fully on board.

### **The Experience of the India Philanthropy Alliance**

When I became the President and CEO of the American India Foundation in 2016, I was amazed by its volunteer culture that revolved around its chapters in major American cities. When I launched the India Philanthropy Alliance in 2018, I knew that celebrating and promoting

## **OUR IMPACT**

**Bankers Without Borders (BWB)**

**21,154**

**REGISTERED VOLUNTEERS**

**Volunteers come from more than 170 countries**

**92%**

**WOULD VOLUNTEER AGAIN**

volunteerism in the broader India-U.S. philanthropy corridor would be an essential part of the IPA network. And it truly has been.

At its core, IPA is driven by its 22 board members, none of whom is compensated by IPA and all but one of whom work for the U.S. arm of a leading Indian charity. There are task forces, steering



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Foundation for Excellence does have a small but mighty staff in India, but their U.S. operation is entirely volunteer-run. Yet, despite that, or perhaps because of that, it keeps growing every year.

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committees, youth leadership groups, ambassador councils, and more that take the work of IPA forward every day. Our national youth essay competition, now in its fifth year, is led by past winners, the passionate staff of organisations like the Iowa-based Sega Foundation, volunteer judges, and generous donors such as Sarva Mangal Family Trust, based in Orange County, California.

Some of the leading members of the IPA network are all-volunteer organisations in the U.S. While I was initially sceptical of their ability to get things done without even a single employee, organisations like Vibha and Foundation for Excellence have proven that it is possible.

Consider Vibha, which is led by Ashwini Kumar, as energetic and positive a person as any I have ever met. Vibha is entirely volunteer-run in the U.S. and nearly so in India. For the second year in a row, it led all organisations participating in India Giving Day in terms of the number of unique donors they attracted: 414. (Read this article about their achievements and those of other participating groups.) It is a volunteer-driven social catalyst that seeds grows and scales solutions to systemic problems affecting children. Its main goal is to transform the quality of public education by scaling proven models of motivation, learning, training and using technology.

Foundation for Excellence does have a small but mighty staff in India, but their U.S. operation is entirely volunteer-run.



Yet, despite that, or perhaps because of that, it keeps growing every year. Who are these volunteers? One example is Venk Shukla, a current FFE board member who has served on that body for an incredible 28 years. (He was Board President for 18). Minoo Gupta is the current Volunteer Board President, a role she has held for ten years while serving as Volunteer Vice-Chair and Treasurer of IPA.

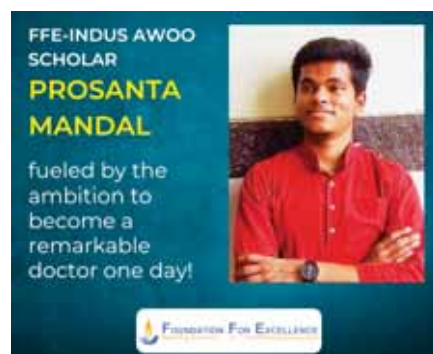
FFE provides scholarships to low-income students in India to pursue degrees in engineering, medicine, pharmacy, and law. Since its inception 29 years ago, FFE has awarded \$53.4 million in 97,813 scholarships to 33,633

deserving students, helping them become skilled citizens in India and to transform their generation entirely. During the 2022-23 academic year alone, FFE provided \$7.4 million in 13,579 scholarships, with 4,018 of these awarded to female scholars.

One of the most impressive things about FFE is how it engages beneficiaries as volunteers and donors. After completing their studies, most of its scholars contribute enough back to the organisation to fund two additional scholarships. One of those who has gone way beyond that benchmark is FFE alumni Ranjith Kagathi, who also serves as a board member, mentor and advocate for FFE at Google.

### Success Models in Involving Youth in Volunteerism

Perhaps the most inspirational examples of volunteerism, especially of youth volunteerism, came from the recently completed India Giving Day campaign. We had been trying to encourage young people to engage in peer-to-peer fundraising in our inaugural campaign



but without much success. This year, we had a major breakthrough.

**Heart to Heart Foundation -** An impressive non-profit organisation working towards improving healthcare accessibility, reducing healthcare disparities, and providing comprehensive care for a better future. It attracted 74 peer-to-peer fundraisers in its first India Giving Day Campaign.

Among them, one of the most successful was Srithan Devrashetty. At just 13 years old, Srithan's passion for aiding children with congenital heart disease (CHD)



ignited a remarkable fundraising journey. His dedication has attracted significant support from friends and family, resulting in an impressive fundraising total of 74 donors and \$2,512 raised.

To understand how this middle school student achieved such success, it is important to understand his motivation. He found himself deeply moved by the stories of how the H2H Foundation saves the lives of children afflicted with heart disease. The plight of parents anxiously awaiting life-saving surgeries for their children struck a chord deep within him. His visit to an H2H partner hospital turned his life around and struck a chord. Witnessing firsthand the resilience of young hearts and the profound relief on the faces of families post-surgery solidified his resolve to make a difference. During the India Giving Day campaign, he rallied support from his family and friends, driven by the desire to

ensure that no child should suffer needlessly due to ill health or congenital heart disease (CHD).

Another example is Preetham Reddy, a 26-year-old young adult who is a poignant and successful campaigner for the H2H Foundation. Preetham's life changed dramatically when he was diagnosed with CHD and experienced physical weakness. Surgery became his only hope, and fortunately, he had a successful operation by some of the best doctors in the country. Thankful for his second chance, Preetham made it his mission to give back by providing free



heart surgeries to others in need. The transformative impact of their own story, coupled with his compassion to pay it forward and save more lives, deeply resonated with supporters of the cause. He brought in 85 donors who contributed \$5,166.

And let us not forget Nitin Charles, a 19-year-old Rutgers University student who

raised \$1,135 from 61 unique donors for his favourite charity, the VicenteFerrar Foundation USA. VFF-USA is the American arm of a leading Spanish Foundation that works in areas such as the inclusion of the disabled, education, women's empowerment, and community health in India. His work single-handedly made VFF-USA's campaign a smashing success in attracting new donors.



In short, volunteers are critical players in the work of many nonprofits, and their donations of their time, expertise, influence, and networks are essential to creating a better future for humanity and the planet. ■





## The Social Stock Exchange (SSE): Enhancing Transparency and Accountability in India's Social Sector



**Poonam Choksi** is the Head of Capacity Building at A.T.E. Chandra Foundation.

In alignment with the Indian Government's Atmanirbhar Bharat philosophy, the Social Stock Exchange (SSE) serves as an innovative platform to unlock new domestic funding sources to bolster long-term development. The concept of a Social Stock Exchange (SSE) was initially introduced in the July 2019 financial budget by the then Hon'ble Finance Minister of India, Smt. Nirmala Sitharaman. SSEs enable NGOs and social businesses to raise funds by attracting ethical donors/investors keen on supporting organisations primarily dedicated to social missions. Its purpose is to bridge our dynamic capital markets with citizens to fulfil the Government's social welfare objectives concerning inclusive growth and financial inclusion.



Enhancing transparency and increasing accountability establishes a structured environment conducive to systematic funding and investment in the social sector by Indian donors.

The social development sector in India primarily receives domestic funding from government-related sources, corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives, high-net-worth individuals

(HNIs) and their foundations, and retail donors.

A key issue confronting stakeholders across these segments and NGOs/social businesses is the absence of a uniform framework for funding, utilisation, impact creation, measurement, disclosures, and reporting.

This lack of uniformity creates a sense of

distrust between donors/investors and recipients, inflates transaction costs, and hampers the free flow of funds. Numerous other countries have encountered similar challenges and endeavoured to address them through SSE frameworks, but with limited or no success.

India's SSE represents a distinct and bold initiative aiming to buck this trend and

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The SSE has introduced a unified framework for social impact assessment in collaboration with self-regulatory organisations such as The Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI), The Institute of Company Secretaries of India (ICSI), and The Institute of Cost Accountants of India (ICMAI). This standardised reporting for NPOs listed on the stock exchanges allows retail investors to assess and compare performance across organisations.

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also serve as a global model by tackling many of the issues that have hindered earlier attempts worldwide.

### Importance and Benefits for Donors

#### Transparency, Trust, and Accountability:

Retail donors, those contributing less than Rs 1 Lakh annually, often encounter significant trust and credibility issues when donating to Non-Profit Organisations (NPOs). Finding trustworthy organisations aligned with their interests and maintaining robust compliance systems is a common challenge.

The primary goal of the SSE platform is to address this mistrust. The National Stock Exchange (NSE) and Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE) conduct thorough



due diligence on NPOs, scrutinising their financial, compliance, and governance systems to eliminate fraudulent organisations. The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) mandates that every NPO on the social stock exchange undergo a social impact assessment. The National Institute of Securities Markets (NISM) has devised a certificate programme to certify Social Assessors. This is to ensure that these professionals are trained and qualified to lead impact assessments, thereby ensuring accountability. To date, 4,764 individuals have enrolled, 3,747 have participated, and 1,372 have passed. Additionally, NPOs must submit quarterly fund utilisation certificates, to further safeguard donor interests and foster trust and credibility in the social sector.

**Standardisation:** The SSE has introduced a unified framework for social impact assessment in collaboration with self-regulatory organisations such as The Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI), The Institute of Company

Secretaries of India (ICSI), and The Institute of Cost Accountants of India (ICMAI). This standardised reporting for NPOs listed on the stock exchanges allows retail investors to assess and compare performance across organisations. Standardised reporting ensures that NPOs commit to clear outputs in their fundraising documents and report their progress annually, enabling investors to make well-informed decisions. This level of standardisation will also streamline processes for NPOs, as they can share the same impact assessment report with all their donors, unlike in the case of CSR where they must create separate reports for each institution.

**Incentives for Participation:** The introduction of innovative financial instruments such as Zero Coupon Zero Principal (ZCZP) bonds is now approved for tax deduction under Section 80G of the Income Tax Act 1961, providing donors with a level playing field compared to other retail giving platforms. This measure is expected to significantly boost donor participation and increase overall funding to the social sector. The first eight NPOs listed on the NSE-SSE have already raised approximately Rs 11.3 Crores through ZCZP bonds, with four to five more in the pipeline for listing in the coming months.





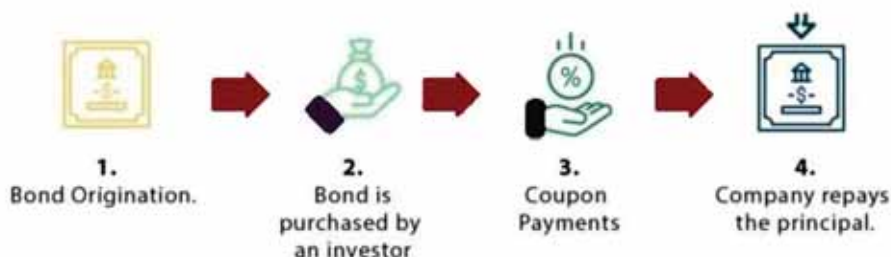
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Historically, NPOs have struggled to secure funds from retail donors. However, in recent times, young professionals and next-gen philanthropists have displayed a keen interest in addressing India's social issues and contributing to nation-building. They actively seek organisations capable of demonstrating effective solutions. The SSE facilitates connections between these stakeholders, amplifying support and advocacy for various causes.

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### Benefits for NGOs

**Trust and Credibility:** The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the critical role of



the social sector in saving lives, reaching the last mile, and supporting the most vulnerable and marginalised communities. Despite their significant contributions, NGOs have long grappled with trust issues from donors and governments. The SSE platform, endorsed by SEBI, brings much-needed credibility and attention to a sector that has been addressing social issues for over 75 years. With millions of beneficiaries served, livelihoods provided to 2.7 million people, and a contribution of 2 percent to the nation's GDP, as reported by this study, this initiative showcases the collaborative effort of society, government, and markets (samaaj, sarkaar, and bazaar) in addressing persistent social challenges at scale.

**Awareness and Brand Building:** The SSE

serves as a potent platform for NGOs to enhance visibility and attract new donors for their social impact projects. Historically, NPOs have struggled to secure funds from retail donors. However, of late, young professionals and next-gen philanthropists have displayed a keen interest in addressing India's social issues and contributing to nation-building. They actively seek organisations capable of demonstrating effective solutions. The SSE facilitates connections between these stakeholders, amplifying support and advocacy for various causes. With over six million active users, Zerodha, India's largest stockbroker, wields significant influence, presenting an opportunity to encourage citizens to contribute positively to social and economic development.



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Opening the SSE to CSR contributions could be a significant step in encouraging its growth and development. While companies stand to benefit from the robust due diligence and reporting framework of the SSE, their familiarity with capital markets and stock exchanges could facilitate their embrace of SSE as a mechanism. This alignment could result in a substantial win for both CSR and SSE. It is noteworthy that all reporting requirements mandated for NGOs receiving CSR funds have already been included in the SSE framework, thereby creating a seamless reporting process for NPOs as well.

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**Promoting Inclusion:** A substantial portion of funding from Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and institutional

philanthropy foundations is typically directed towards addressing social issues in health, education, environment, and sustainability. However, this focus often marginalises community-based NGOs working on inclusion and equity for the most underprivileged communities, constraining their ability to raise funds and address local social issues effectively. The SSE platform tackles this gap by facilitating the registration and listing of a diverse range of social enterprises and NGOs. Under the current mandate, NPOs with a track record of spending over Rs 50 Lakhs in the past three years can register and raise funds through the platform. This inclusion empowers smaller and lesser-known organisations to access funding and support, promoting a more equitable distribution of resources.

**Building an Ecosystem Around SSE:** To fully harness the potential of the SSE, it is crucial to establish a supportive and conducive ecosystem. According to the India Philanthropy Report 2024 by philanthropy organisation Dasra, and global management consulting firm, Bain & Co., India's social sector spending in FY23 stood at around Rs 23 Lakh Crores, accounting for 8.3 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP). This figure falls below the NITI Aayog recommendation of 13 per cent of GDP.

In FY23, member countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the BRICS nations reported significantly higher spending rates of 24 per cent and 11 per cent, respectively (based on FY22 data). However, India has not kept pace with its OECD and BRICS counterparts due to moderate growth in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and donations from high-net-worth individuals (HNIs) or affluents, despite a growing donor pool. We believe that SSE has the potential to significantly contribute to bridging this gap and implementing changes in the enabling ecosystem can expedite the adoption of SSE at scale.

Opening the SSE to CSR contributions could be a significant step in encouraging its growth and development. While companies stand to benefit from the robust due diligence and reporting framework of the SSE, their familiarity with capital markets and stock exchanges could facilitate their embrace of SSE as a mechanism. This alignment could result in a substantial win for both CSR and SSE. It is noteworthy that all reporting requirements mandated for NGOs receiving CSR funds have already been included in the SSE framework, thereby creating a seamless reporting process for NPOs as well.

## Conclusion

The Social Stock Exchange represents a transformative approach to funding social initiatives, offering significant benefits to donors and Non-Profit Organisations (NPOs). By fostering transparency, accountability, and credibility, the SSE helps build trust and attract more resources to the social sector. However, to realise its full potential, it is crucial to develop a comprehensive ecosystem that supports the SSE's operations and growth. Through a collaborative effort involving regulatory bodies, NGOs, and donors, the SSE can become a cornerstone of sustainable social impact, driving positive change and addressing pressing societal challenges. ■







## Beyond Key: Revolutionising Non-Profit Impact with Right Cause Custom-Built Solutions

**Piyush Goel** is the Founder and CEO of Beyond Key.

In an era where technological advancements shape the panorama of every industry, the non-profit sector stands at the precipice of a transformative journey. Our company, Beyond Key, a global IT consulting and software consulting company, is at the forefront of this revolution. We are heralding a paradigm shift with our groundbreaking non-profit solution built on the MS Dynamics 365 platform, 'Right Cause'. This progressive suite is meticulously designed to be the catalyst for change within non-profit businesses, offering customer-tailored solutions that enhance their impact and efficiency.



Right Cause, a non-profit Customer Relationship Management (CRM) suite anchored at Microsoft Cloud, emerges as the harbinger of development, introducing end-to-end solutions that go

beyond the traditional boundaries encountered by nonprofits. From donor and volunteer management to fundraising, contact, and event management, Right Cause encapsulates

a complete suite of comprehensive customisable tools tailored to the specific needs of each nonprofit.

Right Cause is poised to revolutionise nonprofit impact through workflow



automation, project efficiency, and a data-driven approach. As we embark on this exploration, we unravel the threads of how technology, when harnessed with precision, can propel nonprofits to a future of operational excellence, heightened engagement, and unprecedented societal contributions.

### Understanding Nonprofit Challenges

- **Purposeful Expansion:** Our entry into the non-profit sector is intentional and driven by a genuine desire to address specific challenges they face.
- **IT Expertise:** We leverage our substantial experience in the IT industry to understand and cater to the unique technology demands of non-profit organisations.
- **Awareness of Challenges:** We demonstrate a deep awareness of the challenges non-profits encounter, like resource constraints and diverse operational requirements.
- **Adapted Strategy:** We have adjusted our business strategy to provide tailored solutions that effectively address the distinctive problems nonprofits face.
- **Social Impact Focus:** Our foray into the non-profit sector goes beyond profit motives, showcasing a commitment to utilising technology to better communities and advance social causes.
- **Bespoke Solutions:** We aim to equip non-profit organisations with customised solutions by integrating

our IT expertise with an understanding of the unique environments in which these organisations operate.

- **Community Improvement:** Our engagement with nonprofits reflects a dedication to contributing to social improvement, emphasising the positive impact of technology on communities.
- **Efficient Digital Navigation:** We support non-profit organisations in efficiently navigating the digital landscape, acknowledging the importance of digital tools and strategies for their success.
- **Alignment with Objectives:** We align our efforts with the goals of non-profit organisations, assisting them in achieving their objectives and making a meaningful social impact.
- **Dedication to Social Good:** Our involvement in the non-profit sector underscores our dedication to utilising technology as a force for good, emphasising the importance of corporate social responsibility.

### Right Cause: A Game-Changing Non-Profit CRM Suite

The Right Cause non-profit CRM suite is central to our transformative initiative, an influential platform strategically constructed on the secure Microsoft Cloud. This sophisticated suite stands out as the cornerstone of technological empowerment for non-profit organisations. Delving into its intricacies

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The Right Cause non-profit CRM suite is central to our transformative initiative, an influential platform strategically constructed on the secure Microsoft Cloud. This sophisticated suite stands out as the cornerstone of technological empowerment for non-profit organisations. Delving into its intricacies reveals a comprehensive and purpose-driven design, aligning with the unique needs and aspirations of the non-profit sector.

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reveals a comprehensive and purpose-driven design, aligning with the unique needs and aspirations of the non-profit sector. The Right Cause suite is more than a collection of tools; it is a holistic solution meticulously fashioned with an end-to-end focus on non-profit desires. By residing on the secure Microsoft Cloud, it not only ensures robust security but also provides a reliable and scalable infrastructure that can adapt to the evolving needs of nonprofits.







A standout feature of the Right Cause suite lies in its nonprofit-specific features, strategically incorporated to elevate interactions with existing and prospective donors. This intentional customisation fosters meaningful connections, streamlining the process of engagement and reinforcing the vital relationships that underpin the financial sustainability and mission success of non-profit organisations. In essence, our Right Cause non-profit CRM suite emerges as a technological cornerstone that not only meets, but anticipates the distinctive requirements of the non-profit sector. It is a testament to our commitment to leveraging technology as a force for positive change, empowering nonprofits to thrive in an ever-evolving digital landscape.

**A Complete Array of Software Programme Answers**

**Donor Management:** It effortlessly manages and engages with current and new donors through tailor-made functions designed to foster meaningful connections.

**Volunteer Management:** It streamlines volunteer coordination and maximises its effect with intuitive gear that simplifies scheduling, communication, and daily task allocation.

**Licensing:** It ensures compliance and legal adherence with licensing functions that preserve nonprofits on the right side of guidelines.

**Fundraising:** Its specialised tools for campaign optimisation, donor targeting, and contribution monitoring enable nonprofits to maximise the potential of their fundraising efforts.

**Contact Management:** It effectively organises and manages contacts, resulting in a centralised centre for all communication and collaboration.

**Membership Management:** It facilitates membership development and engagement with customisable features geared to each organisation's specific needs.

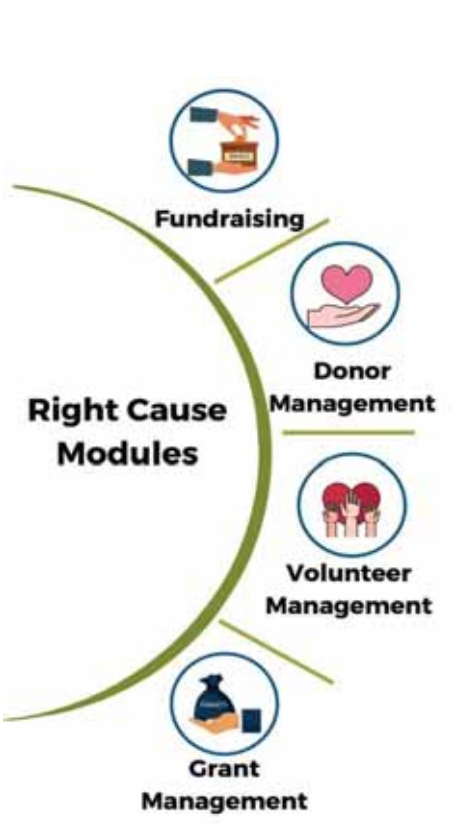
**Event Management:** It uses a range of technologies to simplify event planning and execution, from logistics to

participant involvement.

**Customisation of Tailored Solutions**

Right Cause's standout feature lies in its unparalleled customisation capabilities, setting it apart as a pioneering solution in the non-profit technology landscape. Recognising the diverse and nuanced needs of non-profit organisations, it offers a level of customisation that goes beyond a one-size-fits-all approach. Non-profits operate in a myriad of ways, each with its distinct workflows and operational intricacies. Right Cause acknowledges this diversity by providing organisations with the flexibility to tailor the suite according to their specific requirements. This granular customisation ensures that the technology seamlessly aligns with and enhances existing workflows, fostering a sense of integration rather than imposition. The suite's adaptability extends further to accommodate the unique demands of specific non-profit groups.

By offering customised versions tailored to the idiosyncrasies of certain



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Right Cause transcends the conventional notion of a toolset, evolving into a dynamic solution that redefines how non-profit organisations approach workflow automation and task efficiency. Serving as a catalyst for operational transformation, this suite systematically initiates processes, seamlessly automates time-consuming tasks, and meticulously tracks outcomes at every stage of a project. Its strength lies not only in the comprehensive set of tools it provides but in its ability to orchestrate these tools into a cohesive, automated workflow.

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organisations, Right Cause becomes a versatile tool that caters to the varied needs of the non-profit sector. This

commitment to customisation is not merely a feature; it is a testament to Right Cause's understanding of the dynamic nature of the non-profit landscape. It recognises that a one-size-fits-all solution falls short of addressing the multifaceted challenges faced by these organisations. Instead, Right Cause empowers non-profits by putting the reins of technology adaptation in their hands, allowing them to shape the suite according to their distinct visions and operational strategies.

In embracing Right Cause's tailored solutions, non-profit organisations embark on a transformative journey where technology becomes an enabler, enhancing their capacity to achieve their mission-driven goals. This commitment to customisation marks a paradigm shift, heralding an era where technology adapts to the unique needs of non-profits, catalysing a positive impact that resonates throughout the sector.

### Workflow Automation and Task Efficiency

Right Cause transcends the conventional notion of a toolset, evolving into a dynamic solution that redefines how non-profit organisations approach workflow automation and task efficiency. Serving as a catalyst for operational transformation, this suite systematically

initiates processes, seamlessly automates time-consuming tasks, and meticulously tracks outcomes at every stage of a project. Its strength lies not only in the comprehensive set of tools it provides but in its ability to orchestrate these tools into a cohesive, automated workflow.

What sets Right Cause apart is the integration of robust dashboards that furnish organisations with real-time insights. These dashboards empower decision-makers with a bird's-eye view of ongoing processes, enabling them to make informed and timely decisions. The synergy of workflow automation and data-driven insights positions Right Cause as a pivotal asset for non-profits, fostering agility, enhancing productivity, and ultimately amplifying the impact of their initiatives on the communities they serve. In embracing Right Cause, non-profits embark on a journey towards streamlined operations, greater efficiency, and heightened effectiveness in realising their altruistic missions.

Our purpose is to help non-profit organisations serve humanity by providing the right technology solutions. This approach indicates an acute knowledge of the resource and financial limits that non-profits confront, and Right Cause exemplifies our commitment to addressing these issues.

In an era marked by the swift evolution of technology, the imperative for non-profit organisations to stay abreast of advancements has never been more crucial. Right Cause emerges as a beacon of hope, illuminating a path toward a new era of technological empowerment for non-profits. In the relentless pursuit of positive social impact, Right Cause is not merely a solution but a transformative force poised to revolutionise the non-profit industry. This initiative encapsulates more than a suite of tools; it is a visionary approach that aligns technology with the specific demands of non-profit organisations. This innovation is poised to reshape their operational landscape, propelling them towards unprecedented levels of efficiency, automation, and data-driven decision-making. ■







# Dr. Regi George and Dr. Lalitha Regi: Serving Communities in Need with Compassion and Commitment

Dr. Regi George and Dr. Lalitha Regi are originally from Kerala. Dr. Regi specialised as an anaesthesiologist, while Dr. Lalitha focused on gynaecology. After completing their studies, they started their professional journeys at Gandhigram Kasturba Hospital. It was during this time that they encountered Gandhiji's principles of self-sustained communities and Gram Swaraj.

Inspired by these ideals, the couple was drawn to the notion of implementing such concepts in the field of healthcare. For this, they chose Sittilingi Valley, a region where 95 per cent of the people are tribals. Nestled between the Kalrayan and Sitheri Hills, this area is almost completely cut off from the rest of the world. Dr. Regi George and Dr. Lalitha Regi resolved to bring this transformative

approach to the underserved tribal population of Sittilingi Valley.

### **Tribal Health Initiative (THI)**

The doctor couple formed the Tribal Health Initiative in September 1993. They launched an outpatient facility in a remote forested valley, courtesy of a modest hut built for them by the local tribals in Sittilingi village, Dharmapuri

District in Tamil Nadu. The infant mortality rate in the area was a distressing 147/1000, with a significant number of mothers succumbing during childbirth.

In the ensuing ten years, the Regis successfully reduced the infant mortality rate to an impressive 20 per 1000 by empowering the local population with self-care knowledge. They achieved a milestone of zero maternal mortality for



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The Regis understood that to attain self-reliance in health, it was necessary to train and empower local girls and women. Under THI, they introduced the Health Worker Training. It is a two-year residential programme for tribal girls with a minimum educational qualification of Std XII. THI has now shifted to a basic Staff Nurse Course which is recognised by the Indian Nursing Council. Graduates from this programme, serving as health workers, are incorporated into the hospital and visit remote villages to render their service, treat minor illnesses and share their health knowledge.

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more than 15 years. Gradually, the work expanded to deal with the determinants of health which included organic farming and community development.

Initially, the people of the area faced



*Our First OPD - Built by the Tribals*

multiple challenges as the nearest hospital nearby was 50 km away. Emergency surgical cases required a journey of 100 km to Salem. To overcome these challenges, the Regis established the Tribal Hospital in 1997. Today, it is a full-fledged 35-bed hospital with a labour room, a neonatal care room, an emergency room, an operation theatre, and an intensive care unit (ICU) that operates year-round. The hospital is a lifeline for the community. It serves more than 35,000 patients annually – admitting and treating about 1800 in-patients, and conducting about 800 surgeries and 800 deliveries a year.



### Health Workers and Auxiliaries

The Regis understood that to attain self-reliance in health, it was necessary to train and empower local girls and women. Under THI, they introduced the Health Worker Training. It is a two-year residential programme for tribal girls with a minimum educational qualification of Std XII. THI has now shifted to a basic Staff Nurse Course which is recognised by the Indian Nursing Council. Graduates from this programme, serving as health workers, are incorporated into the hospital and visit remote villages to render their



*First Team of Four*





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They sensitised the people in this remote tribal valley about local governance, the Panchayati Raj system, and Gram Swaraj. In the last Panchayat elections, the Farmers Collective selected one of the senior nurses in the hospital to be their candidate. She won by a comfortable margin and is now the President of the Panchayati Raj. This successful example showcases how local communities can effectively govern and address their needs independently, transcending political affiliations.

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service, treat minor illnesses and share their health knowledge. They also plan and implement community health programmes.

Dr. Regi and Dr. Lalitha also introduced another cadre of Health Auxiliaries, consisting of 25 tribal women from 25 villages, who were selected by their communities for training. Despite being minimally literate, these Health Auxiliaries possess essential skills such as weighing babies, registering births and deaths, educating villages on nutrition and sanitation, and treating common ailments like diarrhoea and respiratory illnesses. They are the cornerstone of the THI health programmes, and they cater to about 15,000 tribals in remote villages. With new initiatives like hypertension care, they now play a key role as community development facilitators.

A team from the hospital visits each of the 25 villages every month conducting antenatal checkups and Under-5 clinics and health education sessions. These visits have a profound impact on the villages with antenatal check-ups showing a remarkable improvement of up to 95 per cent and malnutrition witnessing a reduction of 80 per cent.

Through these consistent efforts, THI is not only addressing immediate healthcare needs but also fostering positive transformations in the overall well-being of the tribal communities.

### Sustainability and Self-Reliance

In 2004, the Regis completed ten years of work and they were contemplating their next step. The year was also the 75th anniversary of the Dandi March.





To rediscover the community, the team did a padayatra to all the villages and discussed with the villagers what they and THI could do together to make their lives better. The first offshoot of the padayatra was initiating organic farming.

THI had formed farmers' groups in the villages and helped them in sustainable organic agriculture and marketing the produce. To add value to the local produce for a better profit, the women groups collectively sold their produce under the brand name SVAD. The farmers also formed a producer company called SOFA (Sittilingi Valley Organic Farmers Association), boasting a membership of 700. A Women Entrepreneur Society with about 500 women was also formed, benefiting about 1200 families. SVAD, SOFA and the Women Entrepreneur Society had a turnover of close to Rs 2.5 Crores in 2022.

The doctor couple started working on reviving the dying craft of the Lambadis (resettled gypsies). They took up this work in two Lambadi villages. About 70 women have revived their almost extinct embroidery skills that generations before

them were doing. They are reaping profits from this dying art and can now support themselves financially. They now make products for the Indian and foreign markets – taking pride in their art and generating money in the process. Another ten women are engaged in tailoring and other activities. A recent venture has trained 50 tribal women in high-end fashion tailoring, with plans to form a society to seek and fulfil orders.

For the last ten years, with a new road connecting the Kalrayan Hills nearby, the Regis noticed that many tribals coming from remote villages in the hills have the same diseases and problems initially seen in the Sittilingi Valley. To tackle this, THI held a weekly OPD and a community health programme on the same lines as Sittilingi. THI hopes to have a full-fledged modern OPD and staff to cater to the health needs of the Kalrayan Hills tribals throughout the week.

To boost income-generating capacities in the Sittilingi Valley, THI aims to develop local cottage industries utilising indigenous materials and expertise.

With better healthcare and modern culture coming in, THI introduced an annual Rs. 200/- insurance scheme, catering especially to neglected elderly citizens. THI has also instituted health insurance schemes for farmers and artisans.

### Governance

For four years, the region experienced

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The doctor couple is an ideal role model for young medical professionals. Through their enduring intervention, numerous tribes in the area are now on the path to self-sufficiency. They have not only served the communities in the area but are deeply committed to following core Gandhian values and promoting them in the communities. They have successfully empowered the village people to learn, and govern themselves better by organising and taking group decisions.

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extreme drought which severely impacted the farmers. THI felt they needed to do something about it. They expanded their initiative to include watershed and water management in the Sittilingi Valley.



They sensitised the people in this remote tribal valley about local governance, the Panchayati Raj system, and Gram Swaraj. In the last Panchayat elections, the Farmers Collective selected one of the senior nurses in the hospital to be their candidate. She won by a comfortable





margin and is now the President of the Panchayati Raj. This successful example showcases how local communities can effectively govern and address their needs independently, transcending political affiliations.

THI's commitment to holistic community development is evident in its multifaceted approach, acknowledging the interconnectedness of health, agriculture, and governance in fostering resilient and self-sufficient communities.

### Impact

To date, THI is operative in five districts – Dharmapuri, Salem, Kallakurichi, Tiruvannamalai and Krishnagiri.

Dr Regi George and Dr Lalitha Regi believe that Gram Swaraj is achievable even if one works in health, education, or livelihoods. Their approach centres on



Project	Impact
Outpatients	6,28,400
In Patients	28,574
Surgeries	10,132
Deliveries	8112
Health Sector	26+ tribal hamlets/15,000 population
Farming Sector	48 tribal hamlets/20,000 population
Sittilingi Organic Farmers' Association (SOFA)	700 farmers
Porgai Artisans' Association	60 artisans

carrying the community along with their work, empowering individuals and enhancing their capacities. This, they believe, is the key to fostering true self-reliance.

The doctor couple is an ideal role model for young medical professionals. Through their enduring intervention, numerous tribes in the area are now on the path to self-sufficiency. They have not only served the communities in the area but are deeply committed to following core Gandhian values and promoting them in the communities. They have successfully empowered the village people to learn, and govern themselves better by organising and taking group decisions.

What began as a health-centred initiative in this remote tribal settlement some decades ago has led to a positive transformation impacting every aspect of life. Dr. Regi George and Dr. Lalitha Regi's exemplary and unwavering dedication has resulted in a thriving, vibrant, rural community exemplifying Gandhian principles for sustainable development.

Dr. Regi George and Dr. Lalitha Regi were honoured with the Jamnalal Bajaj Award for Constructive Work 2023.



## Dr Ramalakshmi Datta: Silently and Competently Transforming Rural India with Science



### Luminaries

Dr Ramalakshmi Datta was born in Pudukkottai, Tamil Nadu, on September 12, 1964. Her parents' destiny took them to Delhi and that was where she grew up.

She was deeply impacted by the captivating stories that her father, Late Shri S. Y. Raman, used to relate about her grandfather, Late Shri Y. Srinivasa Iyer, a strict disciplinarian. He was a devoted teacher who had taught and nurtured

countless students in the rural areas. Hearing about her grandfather and his role in shaping and moulding many young lives inspired young Ramalakshmi to dream of working in the hinterlands of India and making a difference. Her mother, Alamelu Raman, encouraged her in this aspect.

As a high schooler, Ramalakshmi was deeply influenced by her class teacher who played a crucial role in shaping her life. She used to say, "Try to bring out the

best in you as well as in others. The future depends on what you do at present." These words did not just motivate her as a student but stuck with her lifelong.

### Professional Journey

Dr Ramalakshmi Datta joined the Vivekananda Institute of Biotechnology (VIB) in 1997 as a Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) Pool Officer. She embarked on journeys to the creeks, canals, and islands in the Sundarbans of West Bengal to collect mangrove alga, *Catenella*, for her work. As she was doing so, she was confronted with a stark contrast. On one hand, she was amazed and awed by the region's rich natural resources, while on the other hand, she could not ignore the prevalent poverty, particularly the dire conditions faced by rural women.

During that time, a unit on Plant Tissue Culture was initiated at VIB with the support of the Department of Science & Technology (DST) under its Young Scientist Scheme. Young girls from Nimpith village were trained to work in this unit.



Grandfather



Mother



Father



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To reach the grassroots in Sundarbans as well as other parts of West Bengal and the Eastern States, Dr Datta got in touch and networked with community-based organisations (CBOs). This network provided a range of technologies to enhance livelihoods, improve sanitation, and empower the youth economically through skill development programmes.

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team involves technology generation, modulation, adoption, and diffusion; primarily benefiting the women of the Sundarbans. The concept of plants being grown inside closed bottles was quite a new thing for the people in this region. They conducted awareness programmes in selected remote areas through the 'Reaching the Unreached' programme to demonstrate that these banana plants were like the other banana plants they grow in their backyard. They kick-started a group called 'Nursery Group of Women' who underwent training. These women then nurtured the tissue-cultured



Following the establishment of the Plant Tissue Culture Unit at VIB and the involvement of rural girls in laboratory work, Dr Datta began to realise that her desire to work in the rural area to empower the local community was no longer just a dream; it was becoming a reality.

The statements made by her high school teacher became a guiding light even as she was leading and training her team of girls in the unit, instilling the same drive in them to meticulously keep the necessary records and data.

### Mission

The primary focus of Dr Datta and her





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Dr Ramalakshmi Datta's contribution has impacted over 17,000 people across 273 villages in 19 Districts of West Bengal, Bihar, Odisha and Jharkhand. Her work is a perfect example and initiative of the lab-to-land research programme.

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plantlets produced in the culture bottles by the 'Culture Group of Lab Technician Girls' and prepared them for supply to the farmers for plantation.

### The People

The work on Banana Tissue Culture has evolved as Banana Technology. The tissue-cultured banana plantlets have reached the farmers; the hardening of the micro-propagated plantlets is established as an income-generating activity for the rural women (of the Nursery Group). The Group could standardise a simple method for the extraction of banana fibre as a rural household technology for



women. The Culture Group has standardised the protocol for the ornamentals and other horticultural crops. The Rural youth, trained at VIB as para workers, are empowered with knowledge and skills. They are currently analysing 1.39 lakh soil samples in the lab, and issuing Soil Health Cards to the farmers.

### Impact on the Community

Dr Ramalakshmi Datta's work has played a major role in establishing a modern lab as a resource centre to provide support for different Science & Technology-based programmes to the people who need it the most while also developing the community. She emphasised the

delivery mechanism – Training Pedagogy - which included development of competency-based curricula, manuals, organising hands-on training and follow-up programmes for the rural youth. The multi-skilling training module on bio-fertiliser technology gave scope to the rural youth. It helped to identify the area they want to take up work, whether as a knowledge worker or establish their microenterprise.

To reach the grassroots in the Sundarbans as well as other parts of West Bengal and the Eastern States, Dr Datta got in touch and networked with community-based organisations (CBOs). This network provided a range of technologies to enhance livelihoods, improve sanitation, and empower the youth economically through skill development programmes. The big impact anticipated is that S&T interventions could reduce the gap in the social barrier. In the present scenario, since many of the CBOs are facing problems continuing their work. They







must be empowered with knowledge, skill and support to face challenges. That is where VIB comes in – building a rock-solid network of competent CBOs, and creating a platform for sustainable community betterment.



With a vision to build up a platform of sincere, dedicated team members and demystify technology for the benefit of the community, Dr Datta and her husband, Dr B. K. Datta, are working with the mission to further reach the people in the remote regions with relevant S&T interventions.

Dr Datta's contribution has impacted over 17,000 people across 273 villages in 19 Districts of West Bengal, Bihar, Odisha and Jharkhand.

It is rare to find scientists who innovate within laboratory settings and then apply their findings directly in the field by mobilising social groups.

Dr Ramalakshmi Datta's work is a perfect example and initiative of the lab-to-land research programme. Her

work is truly remarkable in making scientific research accessible and beneficial to small farmers. She is not just making science accessible; she is making it work for small farmers, training them up, and handing them the keys to the research kingdom. She has trained and employed rural scientists to good effect. Dr Datta and the team have also given research tools to the farmers. Her work truly contributes to the advancement of rural India. She firmly believes in demonstrating competence while working diligently and silently with unwavering dedication.

Dr Ramalakshmi Datta is a recipient of the Jamnalal Bajaj Award for Application of Science and Technology for Rural Development 2023. ■







## Annie: Bridging the Braille Literacy Gap for the Visually Impaired - Thinkerbell Labs' Innovative Solution



**Sanskriti Dawle**



**Aman Srivastava**



**Dilip Ramesh**



**Saif Shaikh**

Co-Founders of The Thinkerbell Labs, a tech-driven startup that solves pressing social problems using cutting edge technologies.

In the vast expanse of India's educational landscape, a challenge often overlooked is the journey of individuals with visual impairments. There are over ten crore people with moderate to severe visual impairment or blindness, of which 1.6 crores are children in India, yet the availability of special educators remains inadequate.





To better understand Braille and improve our product development, we visited Hyderabad and learned Braille ourselves. Starting with an initial prototype that played the alphabet song, we worked towards bridging this gap in Braille literacy and making education accessible and inclusive for all. Over two years of dedicated effort, we refined the concept and did extensive field research and lab prototyping, ultimately making Annie the world's first remote-enabled and self-learning Braille literacy device.



innovative education to those who could benefit from it the most.

The Ranchi Annie Smart Class, also known as ASC, was a tremendous success. The students and teachers were immediately impressed with the Annies. This technological innovation has a significant impact on Braille learning. Since then, we have set up several more such classrooms, and many of our product, logistical, and operational processes have been influenced by the lessons we learned there.



Traditional methods of teaching Braille necessitate continuous handholding from a specialised educator for individuals with special needs. However, there is currently a shortage of qualified teachers for the visually impaired (QTVIs) in India, leading to an insufficient supply to meet the demand for Braille literacy. The literacy rate in Braille stands at a mere one per cent and the global average of just ten per cent. Furthermore, the lack of modern technology in Braille education exacerbates the problem. Despite advancements in the wider education system, Braille's teaching methods remain outdated and non-scalable. This technological gap hinders the effectiveness and reach of Braille literacy programmes, leaving many students with visual impairments without the necessary skills for independence and academic success.

Let us tell you how Thinkerbell Labs came about. We are four engineers from BITS Pilani Goa Campus who came together to work on a project. During this project, we identified the pressing need for modern Braille literacy solutions and began working on an innovation in Braille literacy to address this problem. Sighted students have access to modern technology, while children with visual impairments are still struggling to write the alphabet using ancient methods of Braille learning.

To better understand Braille and improve our product development, we visited Hyderabad and learned Braille ourselves. Starting with an initial prototype that



played the alphabet song, we worked towards bridging this gap in Braille literacy and making education accessible and inclusive for all. Over two years of dedicated effort, we refined the concept and did extensive field research and lab prototyping, ultimately making Annie the world's first remote-enabled and self-learning Braille literacy device.

After this, we established India's first Annie Smart Class (Braille Smart Class) in July 2018 at Rajyakrit Netrahin Madhya Vidyalaya, a blind school in Ranchi, Jharkhand. The Prime Minister of India praised this initiative. This was our first major deployment of the Annie learning ecosystem, which served as a test for our technology and the partnerships we believe would bring



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Shark Tank India gave us a platform where we could make people aware of the pressing need for a product like Annie, which led to Namita Thapar, Peyush Bansal and Anupam Mittal, granting us one of the biggest investments of Season 1 of the show. This visibility, coupled with recognitions from esteemed institutions such as the UNDP, TIME's Best Inventions of 2022, and MIT Solve, attracted partnerships from prominent figures like Micron and the SBI Foundation, propelling Thinkerbell Labs to the forefront of the assistive technology landscape.

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At an event, we had the opportunity to demonstrate Annie to the then Duke and Duchess of Cambridge (now the Prince and Princess of Wales). They were highly intrigued by the revolutionary idea. Anand Mahindra, who was present at the same event, was so impressed by the technology that he decided to invest in our invention.

Annie is a comprehensive education solution that empowers learners of all abilities by offering Braille support with a display, keyboard, and the world's first digital slate, facilitating reading, writing, and typing in Braille. With audio-guided lessons, engaging games, and culturally relevant content, Annie's patented technology revolutionises Braille education by making it enjoyable and accessible to children. It is the first-ever Braille literacy device that teaches via gamification and interaction. Since this device addressed the critical challenge of



low Braille literacy, our company began to gain significant traction, leading to partnerships with numerous government districts to deploy Annie for visually impaired students.

Leveraging a combination of innovative marketing strategies, including targeted

outreach and participation in high-profile competitions, we gained widespread recognition. We further amplified this with an appearance on Shark Tank and a demonstration for the Prime Minister during Digital India Week 2022.

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Thinkerbell Labs has been experiencing exponential growth, especially in the last two years. It took us six years to establish 50 Annie Learning Centres in India, and now, given our rapid and exponential growth, we establish one new centre every six days. We are currently in 23 States with over 150 Annie Learning Centres nationwide, intending to reach all students with visual impairments across the globe. We contextualise our learning content according to the regions where Annie is deployed. Annie's content, available in 15+ regional languages with ongoing development for more, emphasises teaching students in their mother tongue during foundational years, which yields better learning outcomes.

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enable us to extend our reach and make a meaningful difference in the lives of children brimming with potential.

Annie's impact on students is profound because we introduced a product that facilitates independent Braille learning among students. In a recent impact survey conducted across blind schools in Tamil Nadu, an overwhelming 86.7 per cent of teachers acknowledged Annie's potential to bolster enrollment rates significantly.

Thinkerbell Labs has been experiencing exponential growth, especially in the last two years.



Annie's endorsement by the 166-year-old American Printing House for the Blind (APH), the world's largest organisation for the visually impaired, underscores its credibility and effectiveness. Thinkerbell Labs' first international contract was signed with APH, which included a nationwide launch in the U.S.A. This partnership resulted in the remarkable success of Polly's first batch, which sold out in less than ten days, reflecting the overwhelming demand for the product with anticipation of a threefold surge. Along with this, partnering with another leader in assistive technology, Humanware, facilitated Annie's expansion into the UK, Ireland, Australia, and New Zealand. Our partnerships extend far and wide, encompassing collaborations with State and District governments across India and various CSR and governmental entities. In addition to APH and Humanware, notable partners include the Abu Dhabi Early Childhood Authority, the Abu Dhabi Investment Office, Rotary International, Mitsubishi, Sensory Services, the SBI Foundation, GSR, Micron, Tech Mahindra, PowerGrid, General Motors, and Amazon, among others.

High-profile testimonials further validate Annie's transformative impact. Prime Minister Modi said, “In the district of Ranchi, the lives of visually impaired children are being improved with the Braille Smart Class.”

Rai Mahimapat Ray, Deputy Secretary at the IMF, Ministry of Finance, quoted,

“Thanks to Thinkerbell Labs and the district innovation fund, it is a meaningful change in the lives of those that need it most,” lauding the collaboration and recognising it as a meaningful catalyst for change in the lives of those most in need.

Behind the scenes, Thinkerbell Labs is supported by visionary patrons and mentors. The founder of Tech Mahindra, Anand Mahindra, has been a great mentor throughout our journey, and his guidance has been instrumental in navigating the complexities of the startup landscape and scaling Thinkerbell Labs' impact. Our patrons, including Micron and the SBI Foundation, supported us steadfastly throughout our journey. Additionally, Thinkerbell Labs received a multi-year grant from the GSR Foundation. This generous grant will





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Prathamesh, our star student's journey, is a testament to assistive technology's transformative power. Once a learner of Annie, he now stands proudly as our 13-year-old brand ambassador. His

journey with Annie led him to remarkable heights as he confidently demonstrated the device in front of Prime Minister Modi, earning commendation from the highest levels of leadership. Prathamesh has emerged as a beacon of inspiration, serving as a motivational speaker at events across India and captivating audiences with his resilience and determination.

At Thinkerbell Labs, we aim to empower every learner worldwide with literacy through Annie, bridging educational gaps and ensuring universal access to quality learning. We believe in a future where advanced assistive technologies like Annie make Braille literacy universally achievable, fostering complete accessibility and inclusivity in education. With unwavering dedication



and a commitment to innovation, we are tirelessly working to make Braille education accessible to all, enabling visually impaired learners to access their full potential and paving the way for a more inclusive society.

#### Citation:

International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB), (2020) Vision Atlas "Magnitude and Projections Country Map & Estimates of Vision Loss", IAPB. <https://www.iapb.org/learn/vision-atlas/magnitude-and-projections/countries/>







## Roundglass Foundation: Forging Global Models for Social Change to Address Development and Climate Challenges

**Vishal Chowla** is the Leader of the Roundglass Foundation.

Climate change, food security, sanitation, hygiene, and equitable opportunities for youth and women are critical global issues identified by the United Nations, requiring urgent attention from world leaders and all stakeholders in shaping humanity's future.

Roundglass Foundation is addressing these challenges by building global models for social change and harnessing the power of collective action. We empower communities to take control of their future while addressing global challenges such as climate change, food security, youth engagement, and women's empowerment. Our dedicated teams innovate and scale solutions backed by strong evidence to drive meaningful change. We are steering the world's largest experiment, using technology, innovation, and collaboration to promote holistic well-being for humanity and the planet.





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Our collective experience has taught us that community engagement is crucial to manifesting positive change at the grassroots level. We may think of rural communities as beneficiaries, but the fact remains that they have just as much to offer us in the form of traditional knowledge and wisdom as we do. Therefore, while designing grassroots programmes to enable behaviour change and progress, we need to engage with them as partners and leaders besides seeking support and engagement with the academia, the government, police, NGOs, and subject matter experts.

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### The Beginning

Roundglass Foundation was started in 2018 by Seattle-based entrepreneur and philanthropist Sunny Gurpreet Singh with the intent to re-introduce holistic well-being to Punjab. Soon enough, we realised that our models of change could be applied to any geography of the world to enable the well-being of people and the planet by focusing on three key impact areas - environment and sustainability, youth development and women's empowerment. We run several on-the-ground programmes under these key areas by engaging with the village community, village and local administration, youth, and volunteers.

A defining aspect of these models of change is community partnership and engagement. Our collective experience (including mine as a professional in the social and development sector) has taught us that community engagement is crucial to manifesting positive change at

the grassroots level. We may think of rural communities as beneficiaries, but the fact remains that they have just as much to offer us in the form of traditional knowledge and wisdom as we do. Therefore, while designing grassroots programmes to enable behaviour change and progress, we need to engage with them as partners and leaders besides seeking support and engagement with the academia, the government, police, NGOs, and subject matter experts.

Thanks to this community-led approach, our Foundation has impacted 2.0 million people across 1,900 villages in Punjab since 2018. We have planted more than two million native trees, made 225 villages litter-free, and enabled the well-being of more than 13,000 rural children through sports and tech-powered learning.

### Supporting Environment and Sustainability in Rural Communities

We currently have three programmes under Environment and Sustainability – The Billion Tree Project, Waste Management and Regen Agriculture. The Billion Tree Project aims to regreen Punjab by planting one billion native trees by 2035. Low forest cover leads to serious environmental challenges such as biodiversity loss, climate change events, low water table and soil erosion.

We have planted more than two million native trees in 1,350 villages in Faridkot, Derabassi, Mogal, Mohali, Sangrur, etc., leading to the sequestration of 35,000 tons of carbon and the return of birds, bees and other wild creatures that live on and off these trees. We believe in taking a strictly scientific approach to tree



plantation. For example, we plant native species such as farah, desi kikar, desi beri, reru, and phulai because they can thrive in local conditions and provide a habitat for local wildlife. We cultivate over 60 varieties of native species at our nurseries.







In addition to climate and environmental action, this programme has enabled economic opportunities for more than 10,000 MGNREGA workers engaged in our nurseries and supporting our plantation activities.

### Waste Management

The Waste Management programme promotes a decentralised model for waste segregation and composting for efficient and sustainable waste management in rural settings. We have been successful in making more than 200 villages in Punjab litter-free through this programme. Its primary aim is to change the mindset and behaviour of people towards waste disposal and make them sensitised and aware of segregating waste at source. We also support the village community in the construction and running of compost pits to convert wet waste into compost.

It is important to understand that



agriculture plays a crucial role in tackling environmental and sustainability challenges. The detrimental effects of unsustainable farming practices, including mono-cropping, excessive fertiliser use, and overexploitation of water resources, have had a widespread impact on farming outcomes globally, including in Punjab.

Our Regen Agriculture programme, launched in April this year, aims to

“It is important to realise that agriculture plays a vital role in addressing environmental and sustainability challenges. The detrimental effects of unsustainable farming practices, including mono-cropping, excessive fertiliser use, and overexploitation of water resources, have had a widespread impact on farming outcomes globally, including in Punjab.”

reverse this trend by promoting regenerative farming practices among the farming community in the State. We are engaging with other relevant stakeholders like academia, subject matter experts and youth to overcome challenges such as poor soil health, depleting water tables, and declining farmer incomes.

### Embracing Inner Joy: The Nirmal Singh Way

Most of us chase and look for happiness in materialistic things. Nirmal Singh, however, finds joy in his work as a waste collector with RoundGlass Foundation's Waste Management initiative in Tangrala village, Punjab.

His dedication has made the project a success. Nirmal's happiness is contagious, spreading positivity among villagers who eagerly await his daily visits with tea and snacks.

Previously a sewer cleaner, like his mother, he now earns Rs 8000 per month. “I like this



work because it has helped me take care of my family. If you do not love your work, it will never help you grow,” he says.

Despite societal disdain and pleas from his children to quit, Nirmal finds fulfillment in his work. He remains unfazed by others' opinions, cherishing the happiness he derives from his job.

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We run 275 Learn Labs in community spaces like gurudwaras in the villages and urban slums where more than 5,000 children attend daily to learn and play. Children can access the internet on laptops to supplement school-based learning and develop new skills. For some children from deeply impoverished backgrounds, these Learn Labs provide a safe space to experience the pure joy of childhood. Each Lab is managed by a Changemaker who acts as a mentor and an enabler for these children.

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### Ensuring the Well-being of Women and Children

Women and children are the centre of any community. By supporting them, we are ensuring the health and well-being of the entire community.

We see sports as a medium to nurture children's potential for leadership, teamwork, and discipline, and to encourage them to make positive life choices. Our Sports for Development programme, operates 268 Sports Centres in 232 villages, engaging 8,400-plus children, with 24 per cent participants being girls. Under this programme, we provide trained football coaches and football equipment to the children, encouraging them to come out to the ground to play.

We are experiencing a lot of success with our 'One Girl One Football' initiative, promote changes in behaviour around gender. Every day, over 2,000 girls from various villages are stepping out to play, challenging social norms and gender stereotypes. Parents who previously prohibited their daughters from playing



outside are now enthusiastically cheering for them as they score goals. Girls who had never kicked a football are now participating in regional matches. This initiative demonstrates the tremendous impact of sports as a catalyst for social change.

Like sports, technology has the potential to accelerate growth and progress. Through our Learn Labs programme, we enable curious young minds to learn and expand their worldview through the internet. The programme equips children aged 6-14 with essential life skills including foundational literacy, creativity, problem-solving, and computer skills.

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Changemaker who acts as a mentor and an enabler for these children.

We run two programmes for women's empowerment – Women's Livelihood and Health and Well-being. These programmes empower them with relevant knowledge and skills needed to create sustainable livelihood sources. At the same time, our programmes are designed to break the transgenerational cycle of gender bias and give women a voice and a place on the table.

Our Women's Livelihood programme spurs socio-economic empowerment of women through the formation of Self-Help Groups. Currently, we have 13 SHGs with 100 enrolled members.





Our Health and Well-being programme equips adolescent girls with correct information and knowledge about their health and hygiene by organising awareness workshops. It also focuses on introducing yoga as a well-being practice in village communities and training village youth as yoga trainers.

### The People of Punjab – Our Biggest Supporters

We are continuously striving to build healthier, happier, and more sustainable rural communities in Punjab. This would have been impossible if not for the unwavering support and love of the people of Punjab who have been our biggest champions. We are humbled that they share our vision for the State and have chosen to walk beside us on this transformative journey.

Take the example of Sheshandeep Kaur,



the Sarpanch of Manak Khanna village in Bhatinda. Talking about The Billion Tree Project, Kaur says that the mini forest planted in her village in 2019 is now a thriving oxygen factory for the community: “The Foundation’s vision to improve Punjab is well on its way to realisation as the younger generation has become acutely aware of its responsibility towards the environment. Roundglass Foundation has undertaken a commendable mission to plant one billion trees in Punjab, and I take great pride in being part of this initiative.”

Similarly, Sher Kaur, 60, a waste collector in Jhiurheri village in Mohali says that since our Waste Management programme began, her village is no



longer littered with plastic bags. “Earlier, villagers would dump their waste in rudis landfills or burn them. All of this stopped since I started collecting waste from each house as part of the Waste Management programme.”

We were thrilled by the overwhelming response to our social media campaign where we invited people to support The Billion Tree Project. In return for their support, we pledged to plant 500 trees in their honour. Over 100 celebrities from Punjab, including actor Simi Chahal, singer-actor Ammy Virk, and singer-actor Nimrat Khaira, showed their support for this programme.

We are grateful to all these individuals and more who are our pillars of strength. Additionally, we extend our thanks to our partners such as Indian Oil, UNICEF, the Art of Living, the Government of Punjab, SBI Foundation, The Nature Conservancy, and One Tree Planted, for their support to this mission.

### The Road Ahead

The global models of change that we are creating in Punjab can be replicated anywhere in the world. We chose Punjab as our starting point because our founder, Sunny Gurpreet Singh, hails from the State, and it holds a special place in his heart.

Going forward, we want to scale our work and expand to different parts of the world by leveraging philanthropic partnerships and engaging with communities. We are boldly leading transformative change. We urge all of you to join us on this journey and contribute to building global models for social change. ■



## Tata Motors: A Decade of Purposeful Actions for Social Impact



**Vinod Kulkarni** is the CSR Head at Tata Motors.

Ten years ago, we began our CSR journey guided by a deep-rooted commitment to positive social change. Starting from a simple DIY approach, we have evolved into a harmonised programme, positively impacting over six million lives across India. Through our four-pillar approach of Aarogya (Health), Vidyadhanam (Education), Kaushalya (Employability) and Vasundhara (Environment), we have woven ourselves into the fabric of countless communities, making a lasting difference. Our flagship projects are at the forefront of tackling pressing social challenges in health, education, employability, and the environment. These initiatives extend across diverse landscapes, with a specific emphasis on empowering marginalised communities. They illustrate a deeply felt commitment to seamless integration, aligning with local, national and global priorities. Embracing the philosophy of "Low Touch, High Impact" programmes, we prioritise scalability, longevity and creating enduring positive change.







At the heart of our CSR philosophy is the 'More from Less for More' approach. We emphasise the responsible use of resources and collaborative partnerships. Our CSR journey is a testament to our dedication to building a better tomorrow, where progress aligns with purpose and societal impact is not just an obligation but an integral part of our identity.

### Comprehensive Community Development

In 2014, we embraced a unified four-pillar approach, aligning our CSR initiatives across India to ensure lasting impact. This shift, now integrated into Aarogya, Vidyadhanam, Kaushalya and Vasundhara programmes, has evolved

beyond individual projects into comprehensive development efforts, acknowledged by communities and governments.

### Aarogya - Championing Health for All

Aarogya tackles critical health challenges like child malnutrition, leprosy, and water scarcity in vulnerable communities. With a mix of preventive and curative services, the initiative aims to bridge the healthcare gap and bolster overall well-being.

In 2009, we partnered with UNICEF and the National Rural Health Mission to bring hope into the lives of Purbi Singhbhum's children. Their flagship Malnutrition Treatment Centre (MTC) in Jamshedpur tackled severe malnutrition,

successfully treating over 2,000 children. Similarly, urban Maharashtra saw a remarkable 96 per cent health improvement in malnourished children with the innovative Community-Based Management of Acute Malnutrition (CoMAL) initiative launched in 2014.

Recognising the critical gap in early childhood care, we started an initiative to strengthen Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) in Pune. Facing a nationwide public health concern impacting children under six, we extended this to Mumbai, Lucknow, Pantnagar and Sanand through government partnerships, weaving a robust network of enhanced ICDS services.



## Sameena Shaikh Empowering Communities to Fight Malnutrition

most vulnerable in society and help them fight child malnutrition sustainably.

Sameena Shaikh, a remarkable Community Link Worker (CLW) in this initiative, has emerged as a beacon of hope. She recognised the need to empower mothers of malnourished children to help them escape the vicious cycle of poverty and malnutrition. Sameena worked relentlessly to help uplift families from the grip of poverty.

For Sameena, the journey began with identifying a group of five widows, all mothers of malnourished children. Seeing their potential for micro-enterprise, she embarked on a challenging path. Sameena meticulously gathered their documents, navigated bureaucratic hurdles, and painstakingly filled out applications. Her hard work



bore excellent results. Around 30 deserving women received financial support, approximately Rs. 10,000 each, to kickstart their household businesses, paving the way for them to provide better nourishment for their children and provide for their families' needs.

In the heart of Pune's slums, where significant marginalised populations reside, a silent battle against child malnutrition and poverty has been unfolding since 2014. Tata Motors has been a driving force behind this transformative change to empower the



Every life deserves a chance at health and dignity. Driven by this belief, we partnered with Nav Jagrat Manav Samaj (NJMS), an organisation dedicated to leprosy prevention, control, and rehabilitation near Jamshedpur to tackle the stigma and spread of leprosy. Since 2018, our tireless efforts have reached thousands of households, offering treatment to over 4,000 patients. This has reduced incidence rates and brought hope and empowerment within the community, aligning perfectly with our commitment to holistic well-being.

From tackling malnutrition to battling leprosy, Aarogya weaves a tapestry of health and well-being across diverse communities.

Turning the tide on water scarcity, 'Amrutdhara' breathed life into the parched landscapes in Almora and Nainital, benefitting over 17,000 individuals through a network of life-giving infiltration wells and piped water systems. Amrutdhara's reach extends its roots deeper, nurturing 11 government schools and empowering women by liberating them from backbreaking water



journeys. As waterborne diseases recede and communities flourish, a remarkable ripple effect has taken hold – girls, no longer tethered to distant wells, fill classrooms instead, paving the way for a brighter tomorrow.

### Vidyadhanam: Where Classrooms Transcend Walls

Just as Amrutdhara quenches physical thirst, Vidyadhanam nourishes the thirst for knowledge. This comprehensive education initiative empowers students from all walks of life, offering specialised coaching, modern infrastructure and financial aid, guiding students towards their full potential. Beyond academics, it emphasises life skills, sports, and co-curricular activities, ensuring well-rounded growth.

ENABLE (Engineering and NEET Admission Bridge Accelerated Learning Engagement) is a Vidyadhanam initiative launched in 2014 to combat high school dropout rates and equip students for JEE/NEET success. Starting with the Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya (JNV) Puducherry, it has expanded to Mangalore and Palghar, connecting over 20,000 students across 550+ JNV schools through satellite broadcasts.

Our targeted intervention through 100+ qualified teachers across 141 government schools has helped unlock the academic potential of 9,987 students from deprived families. With a blend of digital learning platforms and in-person guidance, ENABLE offers focused support in critical subjects like Math and Science. Pass percentages have soared from below



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60 per cent in 2013 to an impressive 95 per cent in 2023 across 100 schools under the Thane and Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation in Maharashtra.

Recognising the unique challenges faced by girls in pursuing education, we joined forces with Vidya Poshak in Dharwad (Karnataka). This partnership focuses on coaching meritorious students from underprivileged backgrounds and providing scholarships to bridge the financial gap. In 2022-23, the initiative expanded, reaching 2,613 students across 11 schools, reinforcing the commitment to shaping a brighter educational landscape for all.





## Kaushalya: Rekindling Futures Through Skills

Kaushalya's tailor-made vocational training programme, covering diverse fields like retail, beauty, baking, fashion, and ITI strengthening, has been crafted in collaboration with industry experts. They equip participants with in-demand skills and practical knowledge, thus securing their future.

Kaushalya is committed to rural communities as well - empowering nearby farmers to embrace modern farming techniques through technology transfer and farm improvement practices. This approach fosters a ripple effect, transforming individual lives and revitalising entire communities.

Tackling India's rising unemployment head-on, Tata LEAP (Learn to Earn and Progress) equips underprivileged youth with employable skills. Eighty-five per cent of LEAP graduates secured placements, and 10 per cent launched their

workshops. Notably, 13 per cent of them are women. This impactful programme is a beacon of social responsibility, significantly bridging the skills gap and reducing unemployment.

### Top of Form

Beyond skill development, we stay committed to social responsibility through many initiatives. In 2010, a notable CSR project in Ahmedabad addressed the skills gap in animal husbandry in marginalised communities. We empowered the women in these communities by introducing Automated Milk Collection Systems and Bulk Milk Chilling Units in 32 villages. This resulted in a noteworthy 33 per cent increase in cooperative memberships, elevated milk production, and a substantial 58 per cent average income boost by 2012-13.

Continuing our dedication to women's empowerment, our Samaj Vikas Kendra has been encouraging local women through traditional crafts since 2007, leading to the establishment of SHG MAHEE. Expanding into products such as jute bags in 2011, this SHG now generates an annual revenue of Rs 4-5 Lakhs, showcasing success in promoting women's self-reliance and community development.

## Krishnanshu Tanwar From Local Education to Medical Triumph



Krishnanshu Tanwar is a shining example of determination in the medical field. Raised by a single parent, education was not just a priority but a privilege for him. Despite humble beginnings, Krishnanshu's family knew the value of seizing opportunities. Instead of settling for local education and a future of uncertainty, they made a courageous decision to send him to Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya (JNV), which proved to be a life-changing decision.

Krishnanshu reflects, "Without the NEET coaching provided by the ENABLE programme at JNV, my story would have been one of mere survival." However, he did not just survive; he thrived. In 2020, he achieved an exceptional score of 705/720 in NEET and clinched the prestigious All-India Rank (AIR) of 53. These achievements opened doors for him to gain admission at the Maulana Azad Medical College (MAMC), Delhi, where his journey to becoming a medical professional truly began.



## Vasundhara – Weaving a Greener Future

Our dedication to environmental stewardship manifests in diverse initiatives. Fostering renewable energy sources, conducting large-scale afforestation drives, implementing water conservation techniques, and educating communities on ecological responsibility, are a few examples. Our collaborative spirit shines through partnerships with businesses, communities and governments, expanding our tree-planting reach and mitigating greenhouse gas emissions. Within well-crafted micro-habitats, a diverse array of flora and fauna flourish, enhancing environmental sustainability.

In 2014, we launched a pioneering initiative in Pune, weaving a network of urban forests to transform barren landscapes into thriving ecosystems. This has led to an improvement in air quality, soil health, biodiversity explodes and prevention of illegal encroachment. By 2017, six urban forests blossomed across 200 hectares, embracing 1.25 lakh trees. Warje Urban Forest, once devoid of life, is now a vibrant sanctuary with 9,500 mature trees breathing life into the city, producing 5,62,000 kg of oxygen annually. This success has inspired corporations across India to replicate the initiative.



## Laxmi Dalawai Turning Struggles Into Success

John Wooden, American basketball player and head coach at UCLA, said: "Things work out best for those who make the best of how things work out." This quote is exemplified perfectly by Laxmi Dalawai from Dharwad, Karnataka, who had to almost give up on her primary education

due to financial issues at home. However, at the nick of time, she received assistance and guidance from Tata Motors and Vidhya Poshak.

Her hard work resulted in her attaining an impressive 90th percentile in her Class X exams. Scholarship, essential supplies, expert-led tutoring sessions and coaching for IIT-JEE from Tata Motors helped her realise her dream of building a career. In

addition to financial assistance under 'Vidya Poshak', Laxmi was also assisted with training in soft skills and career guidance. With her newfound confidence, Laxmi excelled in the interviews she appeared for and secured a job at one of the leading IT companies in Bangalore. Her relentless perseverance and ambition to build a career drove her to pursue engineering. As she braces herself for higher opportunities in future, her success story continues to inspire many other women in her village.

Laxmi expresses her gratitude, saying, "Tata Motors and Vidya Poshak gave me wings to fly with their continued support. I was able to dream of a career and achieve it too. They brought experts to my doorstep for in-depth learning and offered crucial financial aid, thereby removing all obstacles on my path to a successful career. The comprehensive assistance offered by them has truly transformed my life, boosted my confidence and has also enthused confidence in many more girls from my village to dream and have a career."





## Pinki Singh A Resilient Warrior

Pinki Singh is a determined individual who never shies away from a challenge. She excelled in both boxing and football at the Jharkhand State level. However, her biggest challenge is providing for her family. Married to a restaurant cook, she knew she needed a skill that could sustain them.

With unwavering determination, Pinki, a Standard X graduate, decided to pursue a Service Technician course. Mechanics were held in high regard in her village, and she saw this as an opportunity for stability. Despite having to travel six kilometers daily to the Regional Dealer Training Centre at Mithila Motors,

Pinki never gave up. She completed the course with outstanding results, catching the attention of Pragati Motors (TASS), who promptly offered her on-the-job training.

"Even during those six months, my salary of Rs 5,000/- per month was a godsend for my family," Pinki recalls. Her passion for learning and dedication did not go unnoticed, earning her assurance of a permanent position from one of the partners at Pragati Motors. With a beaming smile on her face, Pinki shares her aspirations: "Eventually, I want to open my own vehicle repair shop in my village."

During the 2023 monsoon season, we planted one million saplings, positively impacting over 5000 tribal farmers in Maharashtra's Palghar district. The primary focus of this initiative is to nurture saplings, engage farmers, and collaborate with the government to combat climate change, preserve biodiversity and improve the prospects of families living below the poverty line.

In April 24, 2022, as part of the Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav, we launched Mission Amrit Sarovar to rejuvenate 75 water bodies in each district. This ambitious project pledges water security for all. We

began with the rejuvenation of the Dongarpada Amrit Sarovar, and by the summer of 2023, we successfully restored 106 water bodies, each with a capacity of one crore litres, guaranteeing water availability throughout the year. Besides water restoration, we also focused on creating jobs and engaging the community thereby ensuring long-term sustainability through active involvement.

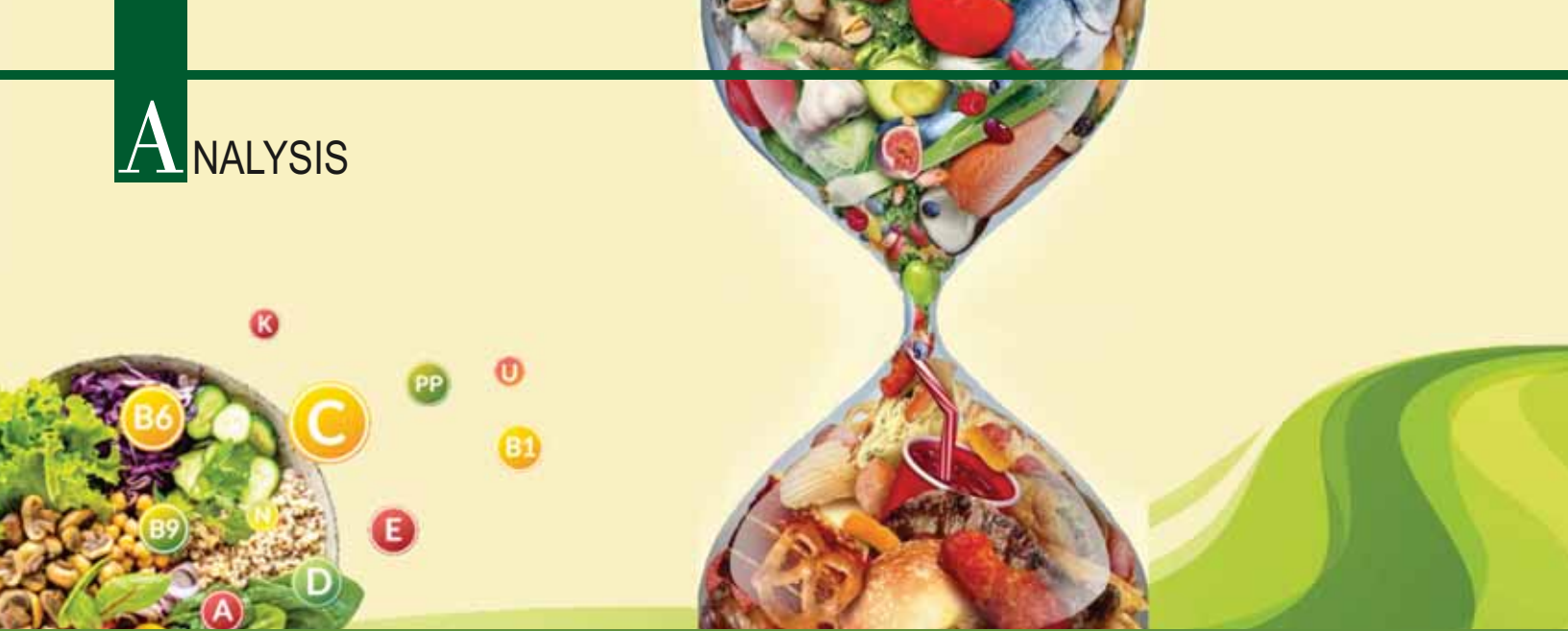
Our success is rooted in harmonising efforts, utilising standardised processes, technology, and strong partnerships. Through external collaboration, we have



achieved cost-effectiveness, reaching over eight lakh beneficiaries in 2022-23 compared to two lakhs in 2014-15. We believe in not just conducting good business but doing good for society. Our unwavering dedication to enhancing the quality of life in communities around our business operations is the cornerstone of our mission.

Our commitment to communities takes diverse forms. Whether empowering youth through skill development programmes in rural India, revitalising water bodies like the Dongarpada Amrit Sarovar, or nurturing traditional crafts through initiatives like MAHEE SHG, our impact resonates across landscapes and lives. This is not just about CSR; it is about a deep-rooted belief that business success flourishes when communities flourish.





# Navigating Food Security and Child Nutrition Challenges in India

**In a world marked by constant change and unprecedented challenges, food security and child nutrition have emerged as a fundamental concern that transcends borders and socioeconomic divides. The nexus between food security and child nutrition in India presents a complex and multifaceted challenge. This interconnection is not merely an issue of ensuring an adequate food supply but involves a comprehensive understanding of accessibility, affordability, and nutritional quality.**

**Dr Geetanjali Chopra** is the Founder of Wishes & Blessings NGO.

Despite its agricultural richness, India grapples with persistent challenges in achieving food security for its vast population. The country has a third of all malnourished children globally. While the nation has made commendable progress in increasing food production, unequal distribution, storage losses, and inadequate infrastructure prevent its citizens from accessing a nutritious and balanced diet. The impact of these challenges is acutely felt among vulnerable populations, particularly children, whose nutritional needs are crucial for physical and cognitive development.

Child nutrition, a cornerstone of human development, is intricately linked to food security. Malnutrition among children jeopardises their immediate health and

has long-term implications for the nation's productivity and socioeconomic growth. The various manifestations of malnutrition like stunting, wasting, and underweight, reflects the complex interplay of factors such as inadequate dietary diversity, poor sanitation, and limited access to healthcare.

## Government Initiatives Against Child Malnutrition

Since 1975, the Government of India has made substantial strides in combating child malnutrition through the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) programme, enhancing public health initiatives. ICDS focuses on the holistic development of children below six years of age, aiming to improve their nutritional status. Through this programme, the



Government provides supplementary nutrition, immunisation, and regular health check-ups to young children to effectively combat malnutrition and ensure their overall well-being.



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Child malnutrition remains a formidable challenge in India despite the implementation of various government initiatives. Their effectiveness is hindered by several persistent challenges, with one of the most pressing issues being the stark and uneven distribution of resources and healthcare infrastructure across different regions of the country. This geographical disparity disproportionately affects rural areas, where a significant portion of the population resides, leading to inadequate access to essential services such as healthcare facilities, nutritious food, and educational resources.

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In 2018, the Government launched the National Nutrition Mission or Poshan Abhiyan. This mission represents a multi-ministerial convergence initiative with the specific goal of addressing malnutrition in a targeted and time-bound manner. It strongly emphasises community involvement and leverages technology for real-time monitoring of



nutrition-related interventions. By engaging communities and employing technology, the programme seeks to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of the interventions, ensuring that they reach those who need them most.

Another pivotal government intervention is the Midday Meal Scheme, which began in 1995. This programme is designed to improve the nutritional status of school-going children by providing free meals to students in primary and upper-primary classes. Beyond the immediate goal of enhancing nutrition, the Midday Meal Scheme also serves as an incentive for regular school attendance, contributing to the broader objectives of education and overall child development.

The Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) is a crucial initiative that addresses the nutritional needs of

pregnant and lactating women. Launched to provide financial assistance and support during the critical stages of motherhood, it indirectly contributes to improving child nutrition by ensuring that mothers receive the necessary nutrition and healthcare support.

All these programmes collectively aim to create a robust framework that addresses immediate nutritional concerns and promotes the development and well-being of children and mothers.

### Shortcomings in Tackling Child Malnutrition

Child malnutrition remains a formidable challenge in India despite the implementation of various government initiatives. Their effectiveness is hindered by several persistent challenges, with one of the most pressing issues being the stark and uneven distribution of resources and healthcare infrastructure across different regions of the country. This geographical disparity disproportionately affects rural areas, where a significant portion of the population resides, leading to inadequate access to essential services such as healthcare facilities, nutritious food, and educational resources. The consequences of this imbalance exacerbate the prevalence of child malnutrition, particularly in marginalised communities struggling to benefit from government interventions.



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It is crucial to have direct engagement with local communities. By comprehending their specific challenges, interventions can be customised to be effective and culturally relevant. Collaborating with community leaders and influencers helps bridge the gap between external interventions and local realities. This approach cultivates a sense of ownership within the community, increasing the likelihood of sustainable changes in attitudes and practices related to child nutrition.

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A multifaceted approach is crucial to address the complex issue of child malnutrition. Drawing upon my background in journalism and international studies, I envision spearheading targeted awareness campaigns utilising various media channels, including my experience in television and radio. This initiative would disseminate vital information on proper nutrition and healthcare practices, addressing the critical need for knowledge in rural and economically disadvantaged areas.

The significance of media-driven awareness campaigns lies in their potential to transcend geographical barriers and reach diverse audiences. Crafting engaging and culturally relevant content is essential to convey the importance of proper nutrition. By utilising various media platforms, these campaigns not only educate but also inspire positive behavioural changes within communities, empowering them



to make informed choices regarding the health and well-being of their children.

Addressing child malnutrition is not just about spreading information; it requires a comprehensive understanding of the social and cultural factors that contribute to its persistence. Long-standing traditions, beliefs, and gender norms significantly impact diet habits and access to resources. A culturally sensitive approach is necessary to overcome these deeply ingrained practices which involve community leaders and influencers in promoting positive changes.

It is crucial to have direct engagement with local communities. By comprehending their specific challenges, interventions can be customised to be effective and culturally relevant. Collaborating with community leaders

and influencers helps bridge the gap between external interventions and local realities. This approach cultivates a sense of ownership within the community, increasing the likelihood of sustainable changes in attitudes and practices related to child nutrition.

It is important to recognise and address the interconnected nature of these challenges if we want to combat child malnutrition. While media-driven awareness campaigns can provide valuable information, they must be complemented by on-the-ground efforts that empathise and respect the diverse social and cultural contexts within which they operate. By combining these approaches, there is a greater likelihood of achieving meaningful and sustainable improvements in child nutrition, particularly in underserved





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Partnerships play a pivotal role in the battle against child malnutrition. Collaboration among government agencies, NGOs, the private sector, and local communities is instrumental. This multi-stakeholder approach acknowledges that each entity brings unique strengths and leverages collective expertise for a more impactful outcome.

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rural and economically disadvantaged areas of the country.

### Steps to Overcome these Challenges

In the relentless fight against child malnutrition, visionary leadership, diverse skills, and an unwavering commitment to social impact are indispensable pillars. A comprehensive strategy is crucial to surmount the

multifaceted challenges that hinder child nutrition efforts. This demands meticulous planning, transparent monitoring, and efficient resource allocation to bolster execution.

Critical to this strategy is the development of robust infrastructure which extends beyond physical facilities to encompass a holistic approach addressing cultural barriers and fostering active community engagement. Recognising that diverse regions and communities have unique challenges, tailoring interventions to local contexts becomes paramount for enhanced penetration and effectiveness.

Partnerships play a pivotal role in the battle against child malnutrition. Collaboration among government agencies, NGOs, the private sector, and local communities is instrumental. This multi-stakeholder approach acknowledges that each entity brings unique strengths and leverages collective expertise for a more impactful outcome. Governments set policies, NGOs provide grassroots insights, the private sector offers innovation, and communities bring context-specific knowledge.

Regular evaluations are imperative in this dynamic landscape. Strategic adjustments based on real-time feedback ensure the adaptability of interventions to the evolving needs of the communities. This commitment to flexibility is complemented by an unwavering



dedication to long-term sustainability, recognising that the journey toward improved child nutrition is a marathon rather than a sprint.

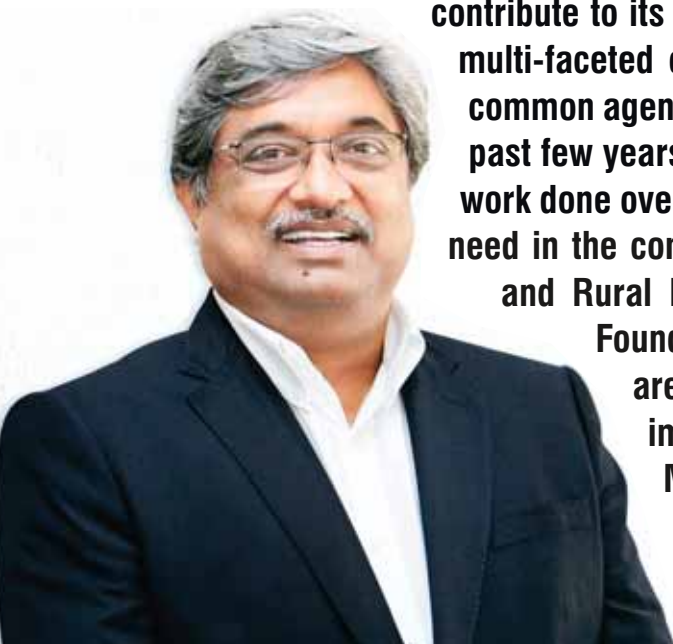
Ultimately, the vision for a healthier and more prosperous future for the children of India hinges on the synergy of these efforts. Through visionary leadership, diverse skills, and a steadfast commitment to social impact, we can pave the way for tangible progress in the battle against child malnutrition. By fostering collaboration, transparent monitoring, and strategic adjustments, we lay the foundation for a brighter future where every child in our nation can thrive and fulfil their potential. ■





## Diversifying Philanthropic Endeavours: Hinduja Foundation's Journey Beyond Business

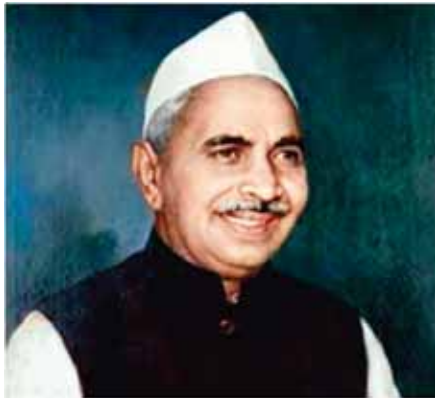
PD Hinduja, philanthropist and founder of the Hinduja Group of Companies, established Hinduja Foundation over 50 years ago on a simple yet profound principle. He firmly believed that the Group has a moral obligation to give back to the communities that support its various businesses and contribute to its profits. Manifesting this belief, the Foundation is today a multi-faceted charitable entity led by the Hinduja family to support a common agenda for CSR across the Hinduja Group companies. Over the past few years, Hinduja Foundation has pivoted to build upon historical work done over the decades to direct attention to the four areas of acute need in the community, viz., Healthcare, Education, Water Stewardship and Rural Development. By building upon its historical work, the Foundation has established synergies across the Group in these areas to ensure its programmes have a greater impact on improving lives and livelihoods. In an interview with CSR Mandate, **Paul Abraham, President of Hinduja Foundation**, shared deeper insights into the various CSR initiatives that have impacted and bettered the lives of countless lives across the country.





## What is the mission statement guiding the Foundation in reaching out to the underprivileged in India?

We are inspired by our founder PD Hinduja's motto, "My dharma (duty) is to work so I can give." The Hinduja Foundation manages various social impact initiatives and acts as a guiding force for corporate responsibility interventions across our Group companies. These include water stewardship, health, education, rural development and socio-cultural initiatives in art, culture, and heritage. The primary aim of several of our social impact initiatives is to ultimately enhance livelihoods.



## What are your flagship CSR initiatives and why did you choose to focus on these areas?

More than half the population of our country does not have adequate access to clean water. In response to this pressing demand, we have embraced water stewardship as a central theme, a commitment that resonates across all our Group companies. These activities come under the umbrella brand name, Jal Jeevan.

On the health front, in addition to running

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**In 2015, we embarked on an ambitious journey spanning multiple villages, which has unfolded and evolved over the years. One of the main goals of this project is to enhance income generation by creating livelihood opportunities and improving the standard of living of the local communities.**

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one of India's finest tertiary care hospitals, we invest in primary care and specialised therapy areas where we find the public health system needs augmentation. Through various initiatives such as the Type 1 Diabetes (T1D) Programme, delivery of quality rural healthcare, and the Mobile Healthcare Project featuring Mobile Medical Units (MMUs), we extend essential medical services to underserved communities. Our initiatives are always grounded in rigorous need assessment surveys of the communities we serve and in a spirit of partnership with the public sector, which we seek to strengthen and complement.

In education, while we offer higher learning and professional qualifications at the K.P.B. Hinduja College of Commerce in Mumbai, we are equally committed to improving primary learning outcomes both in urban government schools and at the rural level. At the Foundation, and across our Group companies, we work with partners to directly implement broad-based

programmes like Road to School and Road to Livelihood.

Beyond these, we have long-term projects that call for a 360-degree intervention and expertise across the board - like our sustainable rural development project in the tribal belt of Jawhar in Maharashtra.

In 2015, we embarked on an ambitious journey spanning multiple villages, which has unfolded and evolved over the years. One of the main goals of this project is to enhance income generation by creating livelihood opportunities and improving the standard of living of the local communities.

Finally, we believe that appreciating our Indian heritage can profoundly enrich our society. We are the custodians of a world-class collection of historical artefacts, including very rare ancient Indian numismatics. Also known as the Lance Dane bequest, this treasure trove is being brought to the public domain through a website, publications, exhibitions and workshops.

## In which regions are these various initiatives implemented?

In addition to making an impact on the lives within and around the areas where our business operations are situated, we extend help wherever the need is most pressing, whether by bringing rainwater harvesting solutions to rural Rajasthan or helping small and marginal farmers in Maharashtra develop climate-resilient farming practices.

## Do elaborate on the customised system followed for the best outcome, and the impact from each of them.

In addition to numerous field visits, we work with ImpactDash to integrate data-driven decision-making in CSR





management. Together, we have built an end-to-end MIS platform that has helped us to increase the transparency, accountability, and efficiency of our CSR programmes. The platform allows us to maintain dynamic dashboards with status reports, monitor deliverables, and perform compliance checks for implementing partners which has allowed us to scale up the impacts through our flagship CSR initiatives like Road To School and Jal Jeevan.

## Impact

**Jal Jeevan Water Programme:** We have impacted five million+ lives, restored 56 lakes and dispensed 892 megalitres of safe drinking water.

**Education Programme:** We have reached 4,37,000+ students and disbursed 3,398 scholarships. Six thousand and fifteen schools have benefited from our programme.

**Integrated Rural Development Programme:** This programme has impacted 22,600+ lives, developed 924 hectares of wasteland, and planted 4,45,000 trees. It has also reduced distress migration by 78 per cent in Jawhar Taluka of Palghar District, Maharashtra.

**T1D (Type 1 Diabetes) Programme:** We are happy to share with you that we have helped 800+ children receive free insulin and treatment through our partners - KEM Hospital Pune, PD Hinduja Hospital in Mumbai, and Dr V Mohan's Madras Diabetes Research Foundation in Chennai, through this programme.

## What are your upcoming projects in the healthcare sector?

We have launched new collaborations with international world leaders like King's College London to work on training and joint research in speciality areas. For our T1D Programme, we will continue our proud association with Hinduja Hospital Mumbai, KEM Pune, and MDRF Chennai. We hope to extend our network of care beyond the 800+ beneficiaries we are currently supporting. We are now looking to expand the T1D Programme to Bangalore.

## Talk to us about the ambitious mission to restore and rejuvenate various lakes and wetlands in Chennai. How important is this for the city?

As part of our mission to ensure water security and boost climate resilience, our Jal Jeevan programme rejuvenates water bodies from village lakes to rivers.

In Chennai, we started with the various

lakes and wetlands surrounding the factories and plants of Hinduja Group companies in the industrialised area of Ennore.

We have successfully desilted, cleaned, deepened and reinforced the embankments of ten lakes and wetlands, like Thamaraikeni Kulam, Ramachandra Nagar Pond, and Thalambur wetland. These initiatives stand as bulwarks against the adverse effects of urbanisation and climate change.

Notably, these ten water bodies withstood 40 cm of rainfall over 24 hours during the 2023 Chennai Floods. They served as crucial buffers against the floods caused by Cyclone Michaung, safeguarding communities, infrastructure, and ecosystems while simultaneously recharging groundwater tables.

These restored water bodies foster a spirit of environmental stewardship among residents and lead the way to a sustainable future for Chennai and its citizens.



Ariyalur Tank



Thamarai Kulam Pond

Before

After



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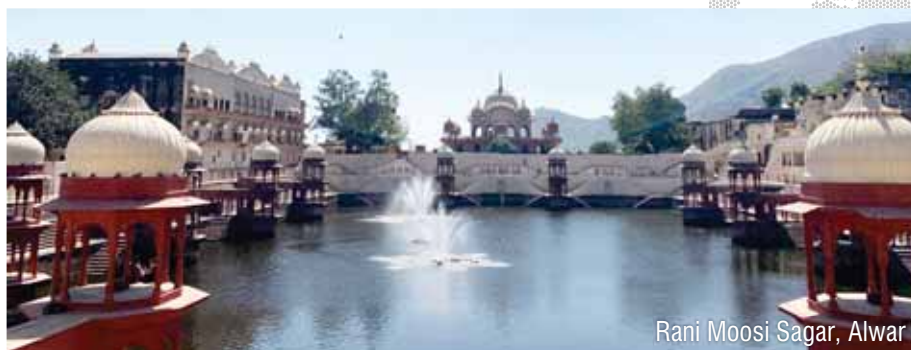
We are currently restoring another historic stepwell, the 300-year-old Navlakha Bawri of Jodhpur. It was built in the 1700s near Jagat Sagar Lake during the reign of Maharaja Abhay Singh. Over the years, the Bawri has fallen into disrepair, littered and choked with vegetation, and its artistic pillars crumbling. When restored, the Navlakha Bawri stepwell will benefit around 5,000 people living in the villages nearby.

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### What are the restoration projects undertaken for the various heritage properties?

Lakes, step wells, and other water bodies are part of the cultural history of a region besides being big tourist draws.

Through our water programmes, we have restored some priceless heritage monuments like the Rani Moosi Sagar of Alwar. A marble and sandstone memorial to a queen, Moosi Rani ki Chhatri in Alwar was built in 1815 by Raja Vinay Singh in memory of Maharaja Bakhtawar Singh and Rani Moosi. The Chhatri is situated on the banks of Sagar Kund, a stepwell that is fed by the rainwater running off the surrounding Aravalli Hills. The revival of this stepwell in Alwar, completed in 2021, has become a showpiece for water and heritage conservation. It was restored with funding from Ashok Leyland, Hinduja Foundation and Prince Albert II of Monaco Foundation, with implementation partner, EFI. Today, the stepwell serves over three lakh beneficiaries in the city.



Rani Moosi Sagar, Alwar



Navlakha Bawri, Jodhpur

We are currently restoring another historic stepwell, the 300-year-old Navlakha Bawri of Jodhpur. It was built in the 1700s near Jagat Sagar Lake during the reign of Maharaja Abhay Singh. Over the years, the Bawri has fallen into disrepair, littered and choked with vegetation, and its artistic pillars crumbling. When restored, the Navlakha Bawri stepwell will benefit around 5,000 people living in the villages nearby.

### Do shed light on the Foundation's investment in antiquities and its connection to preserving India's cultural heritage and history.

Hinduja Foundation is the custodian of an invaluable archive of historical Indian artefacts, at the core of which is the Lance Dane bequest. This is a collection of 35,000 ancient Indian coins ranging broadly from 600 BCE to 600 CE, as well as paintings, bronzes, stone sculptures, beads and other artefacts collected over five decades by army veteran, Lt. Col. Lance Dane.

Continuing our commitment to promote Indian art and culture globally, we aim to expand our Antiquities Collection's reach through strategic partnerships. This collection is also a subject of ongoing



PhD research. It is accessible to the public via our heritage website, workshops, and publications.

### Could you share information about the NGO partners you collaborate with?

We choose partners for their scalability. From local leaders in our T1D programme to national-level experts, we promote shared responsibility by uniting them around common goals and celebrating their achievements together.

We have forged key partnerships to expand and deepen our impact.

**Health:** We partner with PD Hinduja Hospital & Medical Research Centre, Mumbai; Dr Mohan's Diabetes Specialities Centre and the Madras Diabetes Research Foundation (MDRF), Chennai; KEM Hospital, Pune; and Novo Nordisk, who supply our T1D Programme beneficiaries with the highest quality insulin, free of charge.

**Water:** We partner with various NGOs, including Ambuja Cement Foundation, Environmentalist Foundation of India, WOTR, MYRADA, Chirag and Care Earth Trust to implement our water programmes.

**Education:** Our partners include the Learning Links Foundation, Language and Learning Foundation and Magic Bus.

**Rural Development:** We partner with BAIF and Mukul Madhav Foundation in Jawhar, Maharashtra.

**Heritage:** We collaborate with the Indian Numismatic, Historical and Cultural Research Foundation (INHCRF) in Nasik for our heritage outreach and for conducting workshops.

### Internally, are you collaborating with other Group companies to achieve sustainable growth for India?

Hinduja Foundation is the implementing agency for rural development projects and programmes mandated by respective Company Boards as part of their CSR projects u/135 of the Companies Act 2013. We secure funding from CSR allocations of ten other companies within our Group, collaborating to address various challenges together. These companies encompass Ashok Leyland, Gulf Oil, Hinduja National Power, Hinduja Renewables, Hinduja Leyland Finance, Bharat Financial Services, Hinduja Global Solutions, NXTDigital, Hinduja Group Corporate, and Hinduja Tech.

### Kindly elaborate on your partnerships with various government bodies and their impact on the communities.

Government partnerships validate our Foundation's efforts. In Tamil Nadu, we coordinate with the Education Department to avoid redundancy. Continuous dialogue with State officials ensures our initiatives align with government reforms, amplifying our impact.

In Palghar, close collaboration with the Local Collector enhances farmers' access to government schemes. We aim to optimise fund utilisation for maximum farmer benefit. Across all projects, we actively synchronise with local authorities and government bodies.

### What is the Foundation's growth plan and initiatives for the future?

We will continue to scale our interventions in the areas of water, health, education and rural development. In November 2023, we convened leading organisations in Mumbai for a symposium titled "Water Practice & Policy" to address India's critical resource challenges. Our goal is to unite experts, establish a repository of water solutions accessible to the public, and foster collaborative contributions. Currently, our water projects benefit over five million people across India..

In the field of education, we are enhancing curricula and infrastructure at K.P.B. Hinduja College of Commerce, Mumbai, through a major redevelopment initiative. This project aims to create a state-of-the-art campus for expanded, multi-disciplinary education opportunities. Our education initiatives, including Road to School and efforts in foundational literacy, livelihood development, and nutrition support, are also expanding their reach. Currently, we positively impact over 4.3 lakh students annually across more than 6,000 schools in India.







## Britannia Nutrition Foundation: Building Malnutrition-Free and Healthier Communities

Malnutrition has long been a significant challenge in our country. According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO)'s 2023 Global Food Security Report, an estimated 74 per cent of the Indian population cannot afford a healthy diet. There is a lack of awareness and accessibility of nutritional food in underprivileged sections of society.

Since its inception in 2010, Britannia Nutrition Foundation (BNF) has focused on preventing and managing malnutrition among children aged 0-5 years and addressing iron deficiency anaemia among children, adolescents, and expectant/new mothers. Using an inclusive and holistic approach, BNF targets the affected individuals and their entire communities to break the intergenerational cycle of malnutrition. CSR Mandate spoke with **Rajneet Kohli, CEO and Executive Director, Britannia Industries Ltd.**, to learn more about the extensive work Britannia is undertaking to raise a healthy generation.





Detect



Treat



Prevent



Sustain

### Could you share Britannia Nutrition Foundation's mission statement of reaching out to the underprivileged in India?

Our mission is to contribute to every child's right to nutrition and growth by implementing sustainable, replicable programmes, pursuing product innovation and research, addressing core and allied causes for malnutrition and assuming responsibility for the nourishment and vitality of the community.

### What made BNF decide to focus its CSR programmes on nutrition, apart from the fact that it is one of the best food products companies in the country?

Our decision to focus our CSR programmes on nutrition stems from a deep commitment to creating holistic well-being and societal impact. Beyond our position as a leading food products company, we recognise the critical importance of nutrition in shaping lives and communities across rural and urban areas. By prioritising nutrition in marginalised communities, we aim to address pressing societal challenges of health inequalities, promote healthier

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We use a structured methodology to ensure that our interventions deliver optimal and long-lasting impact to drive positive social transformation through a four-stage approach to address malnutrition in the communities.

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lifestyles, and contribute to sustainable development. We want to ensure everyone is accessible to nourishing food for a better tomorrow.

### How is BNF improving the health and nutrition of the communities under this programme?

We use a structured methodology to ensure that our interventions deliver optimal and long-lasting impact to drive positive social transformation through a four-stage approach to address malnutrition in the communities.

**Detect:** Screening children to identify

Severe Acute Malnutrition/Moderate Acute Malnutrition (SAM/MAM), screening adolescents for low Body Mass Index (BMI) and anaemia, and screening pregnant women for low BMI and anaemia.

**Treat:** Referring children suffering from SAM to nutrition rehabilitation centres, providing nutrition support, iron biscuits, hygiene and water kits as well as setting up nutrition gardens.

**Sustain:** Building and strengthening the ecosystem with improved awareness of entitlements and delivery of health and nutrition services.

**Prevent:** Sensitising children, adolescents, mothers, caregivers and the community towards health, hygiene and nutrition practices.

### How is BNF addressing malnutrition among newborns, children aged five and under, mothers, adolescents, newly-married women, pregnant women, and lactating women?

We are working at various levels of society to address malnutrition.

We educate pregnant and lactating mothers through awareness sessions in one-to-one discussions and group



sessions on healthy pregnancies, and protecting themselves from conditions like anaemia.



Newborns and children under five years old are supported by Suposhan Sakhis, who are volunteers and part of the local community. They do regular home visits and provide the right knowledge to parents about the issue of nutrition and healthy child-rearing practices.

Our student volunteers called Nutrition Champions, aged 9-19 years, are trained and educated on anaemia, well-balanced and nutrient-rich meals and menstrual hygiene, which they further extend to their 6-19-year-old peers.

### How do you sustain the nutrition impact and ensure that communities stay free from malnutrition?

Our efforts to sustain nutrition impact and

combat malnutrition are bolstered by our dedicated team of Suposhan Sakhis, who are trained volunteers hailing from local villages. These individuals possess a clear understanding of the importance of balanced, nutrient-rich diets. They actively encourage their families and communities to adopt and sustain healthy eating habits through regular engagement. This involves offering advice on dietary selections and conducting counselling sessions.

Over the past year, our intervention has positively impacted over two lakh beneficiaries, specifically targeting malnutrition and anaemia. We prioritise addressing the root causes of malnutrition, focusing on improving dietary habits, implementing beneficial

## Diksha's Journey to Wellness: Overcoming Congenital Heart Disease

In one of the transit camps of Rudrapur, Uttarakhand, lives a young girl named Diksha. Her parents - Ramakant and Sonam, are daily wage labourers. During a routine household visit by the BNF team, they observed that Diksha appeared weak and had difficulty breathing. Suspecting a medical complication, the

Area Coordinator advised the parents to take her to DEIC for further examination.

At DEIC, paediatricians conducted an ECG and other tests on Diksha, diagnosing her with congenital heart disease. The parents were deeply disappointed by this revelation. They anticipated huge costs, that too for a girl child. However, after consistent counselling, the BNF team managed to convince them. They coordinated with the DEIC staff and facilitated a referral to a

specialised medical facility, Shri Satyam Sanjeevani International Center for Child Heart Care and Research in Haryana.

After regular follow-ups, Diksha's surgery was scheduled for June 2023. The surgery was successful, marking a turning point in her life. Thanks to the collaborative efforts of the DEIC staff, the BNF team, and the medical experts at the medical centre, Diksha overcame a life-threatening condition.

As of the last visit and monitoring, Diksha's health had improved significantly. She now weighs 13 kg and stands 95 cm tall, maintaining her normal nutritional status. Her mother, Sonam, expressed profound gratitude towards BNF for their support in ensuring Diksha's successful surgery and recovery, all free of cost.





practices, and enhancing access to essential services. Additionally, we foster collective support and awareness by forming beneficiary groups. Our initiative extends its reach to children, adolescents, mothers, caregivers, and the wider community, emphasising the significance of health, hygiene, and nutrition in overall well-being.

### How do you ensure there is seamless accessibility and delivery service?

We work with Convergence under NUHM and the Integrated Child Development Services to ensure quality services and quick delivery to anyone in need. This ensures seamless accessibility through an efficient team of frontline workers.



We also facilitate home visits and counselling sessions to drive behavioural changes in parents to ensure long-term adaptation and understanding of how to take care of their child's health and nutrients.

### Water, sanitation, and hygiene are critical components in addressing malnutrition. How are you strengthening these initiatives in vulnerable communities?

Let me share in detail what we do through each pillar.

#### Water

- We provided clean drinking facilities in schools/PHC/villages by installing RO water filters.
- We repair and refurbish water bodies and construct new water storage infrastructure in the communities.



- We spread awareness at the individual and household levels on how to incorporate clean drinking water practices and mitigate and prevent waterborne disease.
- We distribute water kits for poor



### Shivani Adivasi A Tale of Triumph over Malnutrition

In the modest dwellings of Maanpur, Shivpuri, M.P., young Shivani Adivasi began her life marked by immediate adversity. Her parents, Morpal and Kranti Adivasi, are daily wage labourers. When the BNF team visited the family during a routine household call on May 12, 2023, two-year-old Shivani weighed barely 4.9 kg, and measured only 65 cm in height. Her nutritional status was classified as Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM).

#### Intervention Amidst Resistance

The family's reluctance to support Shivani's recovery was rooted in deep-seated gender preferences. They could not justify the potential wage loss and Kranti's absence from home, especially as she was pregnant, possibly with a boy. Kranti was torn between her duty to Shivani and the societal pressure to prioritise the unborn child, who may be a son. The family's nomadic lifestyle and Shivani's additional health issues added layers to the already complex situation.

Despite these hurdles, we were able to persuade the family of the urgency to tend to Shivani's acute condition:



households where there are limited means for storage of drinking water.

“

The project has made a significant impact in 600+ villages and slums across the country, covering about 700+ schools, and 1200+ Anganwadi across nine States, namely, Assam, Bihar, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Uttarakhand and Tamil Nadu. It has positively impacted the lives of 68,000 children under five years old.

Overall, the project has impacted a population base of 2,00,000 people, including children under 5, between 6-9 years, 9-19 years adolescent girls and boys, and pregnant and lactating women.

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## Sanitation

- We conduct awareness sessions for adolescent girls in Anganwadis on topics like anaemia, hygiene during menstrual cycle.
- We create awareness on hand-washing practices.
- We improve toilet facilities at the school level, especially for girls.
- We teach and encourage residents to



keep the locality clean for a disease-free environment.

## Hygiene

- We carry out awareness sessions on health, hygiene and locally available nutritious food for pregnant, lactating mothers and adolescents.
- We provide hygiene kits to young children who are SAM/MAM.
- We create awareness and behaviour



- Referral to a Nutrition Rehabilitation Centre (NRC): Shivani was eventually taken to NRC, overcoming the initial resistance due to her mother's condition and caregiving duties.
- Enhanced Nutrition Support (EDNS): Shivani was provided with steady nutritional supplements, a crucial step in restoring her health.
- Supervised Feeding and Dietary/Medical Counselling: Through careful monitoring, Shivani received adequate nutrition and healthcare guidance.
- Kitchen Garden Initiative: A garden was set up to ensure a lasting supply of fresh produce, aiding in Shivani's and the family's nutrition.
- Vitamins and Local Health Services: Multivitamins and the support of the local Anganwadi Centre were instrumental in her recovery

## Victory over Prejudice and Poor Health

By December 21, 2023, the narrative had shifted remarkably. Shivani's weight rose to a robust 7.1 kg, and her height reached 69 cm. She moved from the SAM to normal health status, a testament to medical intervention and to a community slowly recognising the value of its daughters.





change in children and adolescents on personal hygiene.

### How do you monitor and assess the programme?

We monitor the programme at two levels: digitally, and in the field. To implement the programme and track the beneficiaries, we developed a mobile app that equips the team at the central and field levels to monitor beneficiaries for follow-up services. It is important to note here that we still employ the traditional method of field visits, interaction with the beneficiary on the services taken, quality of intervention, and outreach. These two methods complement each other, ensuring the overall quality of the programme. Digital tracking of beneficiaries ensures monitoring at scale, whereas field visits help ensure the quality dimension of the programme.

### Who are the implementing NGO partners in the different States of India working hand-in-hand with you?

Our intervention model primarily involves direct implementation. However, in two locations - Shivpuri in Madhya Pradesh and Sirsi in Karnataka - we collaborate with NGO partners to implement the project. In the direct implementation model, the programme field staff are hired through a third-party payroll service.

### What is the impact of the initiatives undertaken in the villages and slums in the implementing States?

The project has made a significant impact in 600+ villages and slums across the country, covering about 700+ schools, and 1200+ Anganwadi across nine States, namely, Assam, Bihar, Odisha, Madhya

Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Uttarakhand and Tamil Nadu. It has positively impacted the lives of 68,000 children under five years old. Overall, the project has impacted a population base of 2,00,000 people, including children under 5, between 6-9 years, 9-19 years adolescent girls and boys, and pregnant and lactating women.

### As a well-established, respected and trusted food brand, is Britannia planning to expand this programme to more States across the country to combat malnutrition?

We will add two new projects in 2024; one in North India - in Barabanki, Uttar Pradesh, and one in South India - in Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu. With these additions, our operative projects across the country will reach 13, spanning ten States. ■







## Swabhiman Bhoj: Nourishing and Transforming Lives One Rupee at a Time

**Indu Mehta** is the President, Corporate Communications and CMD's Office.

According to the Global Hunger Index Report 2023, India is ranked 111 out of 125 countries. The country finds itself among 40 nations classified as 'serious' on the scale of global hunger, highlighting a pressing concern for food security. The latest report reveals India's overall GHI score to be 28.7, calculated on a 100-point scale. A higher score indicates a poorer performance by the country in addressing hunger and malnutrition.

While access to quality and nutritious food is considered a basic right, it remains a distant reality for millions of people. For many, a simple meal consisting of a bowl of rice with a spoonful of dal, twice a day, is a luxury. Some cannot even afford this bare minimum and often go to bed starving.

These challenges are exacerbated by a variety of factors, including the burgeoning population, and rising costs of living, making it increasingly difficult for households to provide nutritious meals to their families.

In a world where economic disparities



persist, and the gap between the privileged and underprivileged seems insurmountable, initiatives that bridge the gap become beacons of hope.

One such impactful initiative is the provision of one rupee meals for the underprivileged. This modest sum,



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Our project, Swabhiman Bhoj, is not just about providing food but restoring self-respect and upholding the dignity of those in need, irrespective of their background. It has been instrumental in aiding the community in addressing the pressing issue of food insecurity.

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equivalent to a very small fraction of a dollar, holds the potential to make a significant difference in the lives of those struggling with hunger.

Our project 'Swabhiman Bhoj' originated from the growing need to address food insecurity and malnutrition in different parts of Rajasthan. Dedicated to minimising the existing nutritional gap, Jawahar Foundation (the CSR initiative of LNJ Bhilwara Group) under the leadership of Riju Jhunjhunwala launched this progressive and benevolent programme to provide wholesome, nutritious, and hygienic meals for one rupee only. The initiative is not just about providing food but restoring self-respect and upholding the dignity of those in need, irrespective of their background.

Our initiative, Swabhiman Bhoj, has been instrumental in aiding the community in

addressing the pressing issue of food insecurity. However, it proved invaluable in the post-pandemic period when the majority of the population faced challenges rebuilding their lives after the long interruption. As one of the most impacted States in terms of deaths due to starvation, post-pandemic, Rajasthan was in critical need of assistance. We supplied 60,000 food packages to the needy under this programme on the request of the Bhilwara and Ajmer administrations.

The food served at our Swabhiman Bhoj centres is prepared and cooked with utmost care and in hygienic conditions to ensure the health and well-being of the people. We procure the vegetables and grains from local vendors and farmers to support and strengthen their livelihoods. Even the food is cooked by locals to foster a sense of community engagement and contribute to the economic empowerment of the region.

We are currently operating in Ajmer, Banswara, Bhilwara and Jaipur, and have



Riju Jhunjhunwala







served close to five lakh meals in just nine months. Our community kitchens are a continuous activity. The impact and positive response we received from these regions have encouraged us to consider expanding our community kitchen services to other cities in Rajasthan.

We have been actively evaluating the inclusion of new regions or States in the Swabhiman Bhoj initiative. We continue to assess potential areas that would benefit from the community kitchen service.

In tandem with providing affordable and nutritious meals, we are committed to raising awareness about healthy eating habits. We have implemented various awareness programmes to educate the community on the importance of balanced nutrition and its impact on overall health. These programmes include workshops, seminars, and distribution of food packets and informational pamphlets.

We take pride in our non-discriminatory approach to ensure that every individual,

regardless of their income or social status, is entitled to a wholesome meal at just Re. One. This encompasses labourers, daily wage earners, travellers, street vendors, students, and others. Through this initiative, we recognise the importance of catering to the nutritional needs of those who may face economic challenges.

We have signed Memorandums of Understanding (MoU) on six kitchens with the Government of Rajasthan under 'Annapurna Rasoi'. This reflects our



### **Pradeep Telni** **Restoration of Health and Dignity**

In the heart of Patel Nagar, Bhilwara, resides Pradeep Telni, a hardworking labourer at a local tea hotel. His life, intertwined with the challenges of a meagre income and a family battling with various health issues, took a transformative turn when he came to know about Swabhiman Bhoj. Pradeep's daily struggle was not just confined to earning a livelihood at the tea stall, it extended to the well-being of his wife, who was incapacitated due to health issues. With a meagre monthly salary of Rs 6,000, which also covered his accommodation, Pradeep found himself in a perpetual financial crunch, often running out of money for daily expenses.

Driven by faith in God and the desire to provide for his family, Pradeep learned about Swabhiman Bhoj through word of mouth. The prospect of pure and tasty food available for just one rupee at Gajadhar Mansingh's Dharamshala near the railway station seemed almost too good to be true. Intrigued, he decided to investigate. To his utter joy, he discovered Swabhiman Bhoj Rasoi. This initiative marked a turning point in Pradeep's life. No longer did he have to endure the pangs of hunger while working at the tea stall or compromise his daughter's sleep to prepare meals. The hot and delicious food served at Swabhiman Bhoj became a source of sustenance and relief for Pradeep.

The availability of affordable meals allowed Pradeep to allocate his savings for his daughter's education and his wife's medicines. The burden of financial stress was alleviated, and the family's self-respect was restored through dignified access to nutritious and wholesome food. Pradeep expresses heartfelt gratitude to Jawahar Foundation for initiating the Swabhiman Bhoj kitchen.



commitment to provide essential support to the local community in line with the Government of Rajasthan's vision - Annapurna Rasoi Yojana – that 'No One Sleeps Hungry'.

Swabhiman Bhoj's journey of helping people in need and giving back to society is close to the heart of Riju Jhunjunwala. He became a social activist at an early age; taking inspiration from his grandfather and his father. It was his dream to do something for his family's place of origin - Rajasthan - and continue the legacy of supporting the communities.

Looking at the massive success of this programme, we also started the 'Swabhiman Jal' initiative to provide clean and safe drinking water to the people residing in the remote regions of Rajasthan. One thousand four hundred and forty registered community members are benefitting from the Swabhiman Jal Water ATMs at Banswara and Bhilwara. This demonstrates the growing awareness and acceptance of the initiative within the community.

So far, a remarkable 2,44,715 litres of safe and clean water have been dispensed through the Swabhiman Jal Water ATMs. This accomplishment underscores our contribution to addressing water-related challenges in the region.

Another initiative - Swabhiman Water ATM - has helped Vineet Kumar of Banera village of Bhilwara, who has emerged as a symbol of good health in his family. With a 65-year-old retired teacher father - Suresh Chandra, Vineet has always prioritised his father's health, often accompanying him to the hospital for advice. When Suresh Chandra and his daughter experienced toothache and pyorrhoea, the doctor recommended pure RO water due to the poor levels of TDS in their village. Vineet, who was planning to install an RO system at home, came to know from his friend that Jawahar Foundation has installed a water ATM in Banera village, which provides pure, clean water at an affordable price.

Choosing Swabhiman Jal Water ATM brought about a positive change in his family's health. Today, the whole family is using this water. Vineet has become a

strong advocate of the benefits of high-quality water from Swabhiman Water ATMs, ensuring that his community is well-informed about these benefits.

As we navigate an ever-changing world, the importance of initiatives like the One Rupee Meal and Water ATMs cannot be overstated. Beyond addressing immediate hunger, they lay the groundwork for sustainable solutions by emphasising the significance of community involvement, nutritional awareness, hygienic drinking water and the inherent dignity of every individual.

Through this initiative, we are helping to build a healthier India where food is not a luxury but a fundamental right. Food insecurity can have far-reaching consequences. It may not only impede an individual's physical progress, but it may also have widespread impacts on the emotional and psychological well-being. Access to nutritious food is essential to life. It provides nourishment for the body, fuel for the mind, and solace for the soul. Nobody should be deprived of it, regardless of their socioeconomic status.

We have also undertaken Swabhiman Shiksha, which has benefited over 20,000 children so far and has managed to increase public school attendance by 23 per cent.

In conclusion, providing one rupee meals for the underprivileged is a silver lining, a reminder that positive change can begin with the smallest of contributions. In the fight against basic necessities, these humble initiatives stand tall, showcasing the transformative power of collective compassion and the belief to make a world of difference. ■







## Udhyam Learning Foundation: Developing and Empowering Entrepreneurial Mindsets

**Krishnan Ranganathan** is the Director of Udhyam Vyapaar and Co-founder of Udhyam Learning Foundation.

**Shyam Suryanarayanan** is the Director of Udhyam Shiksha.

If we look at the formal job market, there is a huge deficit in the number of jobs available vis-à-vis the eligible youth-working population. With only one million new jobs created annually for a youth population surging at 12 million each year, the job availability deficit is widening at an alarming rate. To add more flavour to the argument, a staggering 97 per cent of young Indians entering the workforce end up in the informal sector, often due to a lack of formal education (73 per cent do not go to college). Udhyam Learning Foundation's vision is to co-create a caring world where people fearlessly pursue their potential and Make Bharat Entrepreneurial. We see immense potential in this demographic by equipping them with entrepreneurial skills and allowing them to create opportunities for themselves.



One important reason we introduce entrepreneurial mindset education is that the high school adolescent phase (Grades IX to XII) is a crucial time in a child's life. This is when they start making decisions that will shape their future. During this period, they begin to consider the subjects they want to pursue and the career paths they want to take, ultimately determining the opportunities available to them. By fostering agency at this stage, we empower them to make choices that align with their interests and goals.



With automation shrinking job opportunities further, India needs a massive surge in entrepreneurship to bridge the job gap. We recognise that becoming job creators and not just job seekers is the key to creating the 145 million new non-farm jobs needed by 2030.

By focusing on the youth and entrepreneurship, we tackle the challenge at the root cause, enabling young Indians to thrive in a rapidly changing job market.

Udhyam focuses on empowering youth through building entrepreneurial mindsets and entrepreneurship.

### Udhyam Shiksha

Fourteen is a crucial age in a child's life as it marks that stage when students begin to make decisions that shape their future, such as choosing subjects and potential career paths. Encouraging independence



Udhyam Shiksha is the Foundation's educational initiative, driven by the belief that entrepreneurial skills should be nurtured from a young age. The programme enables youth (between 14-22 years) to develop these mindsets and accentuate them with 21st-century know-how. The key pillars of this initiative to help students build entrepreneurial mindsets are: learning by doing, student autonomy and real-world experiences. By channelling real-world experiences gained from business projects and experiential curricula, the youth will have the agency and necessary skills to tread new pathways that can take them to higher levels of success and happiness.



at this stage will empower them to make choices that align with their interests and goals. Moreover, evidence suggests that waiting until college to focus on career readiness is less effective because

students are already committed to a certain pathway by the time they are in college. Their primary focus is acquiring skills for a job. The emphasis on employment at this stage is much higher due to considerable pressure, particularly among underserved segments, to start earning a livelihood.

Another reason for working with schools is the potential to influence the mindset of the youth on a large scale, given that they all undergo the school journey. This approach is particularly impactful because, statistically, only 27 percent of students go on to pursue a college education. Therefore, the school years offer a critical opportunity to shape their mindset effectively.

Realising this need, we introduced Udhyam Shiksha. This is the Foundation's educational initiative, driven by the belief that entrepreneurial skills should be nurtured from a young age. The programme enables youth (between 14-22 years) to develop these mindsets and accentuate them with 21st-century know-how. The key pillars of this initiative to help students build entrepreneurial mindsets are: learning by doing, student autonomy and real-world experiences. By channelling real-world experiences gained from business projects and experiential curricula, the youth will have the agency and necessary skills to tread new pathways that can take them to higher levels of success and happiness.

Integrating skill development and entrepreneurship into







school education aligns with the national education policy, which increasingly emphasises these aspects. This alignment presents an opportunity to make a significant societal impact, especially considering the scale at which the NEP is being rolled out across the country.

While traditional government schools might not have dedicated skill-learning programmes, this initiative's partnership approach enables bridging the gap by introducing these valuable concepts at this critical developmental stage.

### Mindset Curriculum

The Mindset Curriculum aims to inculcate four entrepreneurial mindsets: Independence, Self-Awareness, Grit and Trying New Things and 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills like Creativity, Critical Thinking, Communication and Collaboration. One of the core objectives in designing a curriculum at Udhyam is to drive entrepreneurial action in learners through real-world engagement. This curriculum integrates gamification principles and enables students to pick personally meaningful projects, work in groups and evaluate their growth.

### Udhyam's Beneficiaries

We focus on empowering students from underprivileged backgrounds who attend government schools across India. The programme targets students enrolled in

## Divyanshi Chitransh Providing Innovative Education through Padhai Vadhai



Divyanshi Chitransh always dreamed of starting her own business. However, coming from an economically disadvantaged background, she was well aware of the numerous challenges she would have to confront. She studied Udhyam's Entrepreneurship Mindset Curriculum in high school and learned about social entrepreneurship, along with other entrepreneurial, implementation and execution skill sets. At 16, she brought Padhai Vadhai to life after going through Udhyam's Real World Business Projects in

Delhi. With Padhai Vadhai, Divyanshi, now 18, has set out to create an inclusive educational firm encompassing two key aspects – Padhai and Vadhai. Padhai caters to conventional education, and acts as a support system for formal academic pursuits. On the other hand, Vadhai supports skill education, ensuring students acquire the skills necessary to excel. This app provides students free access to YouTube videos through queries submitted on the app. Starting with a nominal seed funding of just Rs. 2000 to each team member, the business is at a growth stage with four-plus offline centres, generating revenue of Rs 1.5 Lakh per month, and Rs 8.5-9 Lakh profit per annum, with a user base of 750+ students from weak socio-economic backgrounds.

public schools, ensuring accessibility and broad reach. We recognise the challenges faced by students from underserved communities. Many of our beneficiaries come from such communities, and a significant number are the first in their families to pursue

education beyond the 10th standard. We provide crucial support and guidance as they navigate this new chapter.

While some government colleges have reserved seats for these outstanding students and their business projects, our focus goes beyond immediate college admissions. We equip these young minds with the entrepreneurial mindset and skills to thrive in their future endeavours, regardless of their chosen path.

### What is Taught

Problem-solving: The foundation starts in the ninth grade where we teach

#### ENTREPRENEURIAL MINDSET CURRICULA



Encourages students to pick personally meaningful projects focused on their problems and interests.



Has a strong focus on working in groups.



Has tools for students to evaluate their own growth.



Integrates principles of gamification.





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Udhyam Shiksha fosters the 'freedom to fail' environment. We encourage students to learn from mistakes and view them as valuable stepping stones on their entrepreneurial journey.

This is especially crucial for underserved populations, who often lack a sufficient safety net to take risks and experiment with new ideas.

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portfolio showcasing the projects they have undertaken since Grade IX, demonstrating their growth and entrepreneurial journey.

### Approaches

**Student-Centric Approach:** We prioritise student autonomy through this initiative. Students can choose projects that ignite their interests, fostering a sense of ownership and engagement.

**Learn by Doing:** We emphasise the 'learn by doing' philosophy. Student workbooks guide them but the focus is on hands-on experience and putting their learnings into action.

**Stepping Outside the Comfort Zone:** We encourage students to take calculated risks and venture outside their comfort zones. This fosters resilience and a willingness to learn from both successes and failures.



students to focus on identifying and solving problems within their schools and communities.

**Career Exploration:** We teach students in Grade X to explore various career possibilities, broadening their horizons beyond traditional job paths.

**Business Projects:** In Grade XI, students are then led to put theory into practice by undertaking a business project. This allows them to learn by doing and gain valuable real-world experience.

**Portfolio Building:** By Grade XII, students create a comprehensive







## Supporting Student Growth

**Seed Grant:** To make this experience as real as possible, certain State Governments empower students to experiment with their ideas by offering seed grants of up to Rs 2,000 per student for their business projects. The seed grants from all team members are pooled together into a fund to kickstart the teams' business ideas. This allows them to explore and gain valuable insights by putting their plans into action.

**Embracing Failure:** Udhya Shiksha fosters the 'freedom to fail' environment. We encourage students to learn from mistakes and view them as valuable stepping stones on their entrepreneurial journey. This is especially crucial for underserved populations, who often lack a sufficient safety net to take risks and experiment with new ideas.

**Monitoring and Evaluation:** Our robust monitoring and evaluation framework ensures the initiative's effectiveness. We utilise accessible technology platforms, such as WhatsApp-based chatbots, to connect and engage with teachers and students. Additionally, we extensively use data dashboards to provide government stakeholders, principals, and teachers with insights, enabling continuous improvement in the learning experience.

By combining a well-structured curriculum with a student-centric approach, our initiative equips young people with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to thrive in the ever-evolving world.

## Impact

Udhya Shiksha has played a significant role in inculcating an entrepreneurial mindset among the youth who are the future workforce in India.



Our experiential programme, the Entrepreneurial Mindset Curriculum, has reached over 8,300+ institutions through a 60-hour curriculum for Grades IX-XII imparted by 37k+ educators. It equips students with practical skills, alongside theoretical knowledge, preparing them for the real world.

We partner with government education departments across 12 States as well as government schools in Andhra Pradesh, Delhi, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, and Kerala. Partnering with government schools enables us to reach a vast population of students, maximising our influence in fostering a culture of

entrepreneurship among young Indians belonging to underserved segments. We have a cumulative student-learner base of 29.5 million students.

## Udhya Vyapaar

Udhya Vyapaar focuses on nano businesses in India, solving large problems faced by Vyapaaris who typically earn between ₹5,000 to ₹20,000 per month. We do not directly train unemployed individuals as our efforts work in tandem to empower underprivileged communities. We enable them to scale and succeed by implementing proven business growth tools such as technology, marketing,

## Ashish Kumar

### EMC Success Story: The Rise of AK Logistics



Ashish Kumar, an alumnus of our Delhi EMC school programme, has seen incredible success with his company, AK Logistics. This young entrepreneur and his team have generated a revenue of Rs 1.5 Crore for FY 2023-24. What began on campus through our EMC (Entrepreneurial Mindset Curriculum) programme has now grown into a business employing 45 people and forming partnerships with three companies across India. With offices in Delhi and Bihar, the Company plans to expand to other States this year. We are extremely proud of Ashish's achievements and the tangible impact of our programme. We wish AK Logistics continued success in the future.



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Our flagship initiative, the Istri Project, has significantly benefitted over 5,000 ironing Vyapaaris (Istriwalas) in Bangalore and Chennai. This intervention focuses on transitioning these workers from traditional coal-based iron boxes to more efficient LPG iron boxes, to enhance their economic prospects. It has led to a remarkable 27 per cent increase in their incomes, generating an additional Rs 25 Crores annually by 5,300 Vyapaaris.

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operational support, and design-based interventions.

Our flagship initiative, the Istri Project, has significantly benefitted over 5,000 ironing Vyapaaris (Istriwalas) in Bangalore and Chennai. This intervention focuses on transitioning these workers from traditional coal-based iron boxes to more efficient LPG iron boxes to enhance their economic prospects. It has led to a remarkable 27 per cent increase in their incomes, generating an additional Rs 25 Crores annually by 5,300 Vyapaaris. Furthermore, this transition has helped reduce annual coal usage by 2,500 tonnes and has boosted productivity by saving 133 minutes per worker daily. This initiative's success and impact have garnered attention from Azim Premji University, which conducted a study to validate these impressive outcomes.



Another initiative under Vyapaar, New Solutions, assists street food vendors in getting onboarded onto aggregator platforms like Swiggy and Zomato. Our



interventions included helping vendors acquire FSSAI licenses, planning and managing discount campaigns, photoshoots, pricing, and menu creation. So far, between June and December 2023, our interventions have successfully onboarded 15 businesses, with Rs 6.25 Lakhs of revenue generated online. Four businesses generated more than Rs 25,000 in online revenue, while four others have received ratings of 4 or higher, with a cumulative total order exceeding 3000 by December.



We dream of a future where our efforts will tackle diverse social issues while bolstering India's economic vitality. By strategically nurturing the entrepreneurial spirit in young minds and empowering nano entrepreneurs to grow their ventures, we aim to harness India's demographic advantage. Our focus on youth and small-scale entrepreneurs will nurture personal growth, foster economic prosperity, and pave the way for more fulfilling lives. ■





# Roots Foundation: Building Bridges and Transforming Communities

**Ritwik Bahuguna** is the Director of Farlense Group and Founder of Roots Foundation.

In India, the importance of quality education as the driver of societal progress is widely recognised. Despite increased enrolment rates, significant challenges are affecting the quality of education across the country. According to the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2023, a substantial portion of Indian students lack basic reading and arithmetic skills, indicating a quality gap in education. The report finds that about 25 per cent of the youth (14-18 years) cannot read a Class II level text fluently in their regional language, and over 50 per cent struggle with basic division problems. Further, only 57.3 per cent can read English sentences, and just three-quarters of them understand their meaning.



Educational inequality lies at the core, perpetuating cycles of poverty and hindering social mobility. Children from marginalised communities and rural areas are especially vulnerable to substandard education due to inadequate infrastructure. Over 60 per cent of schools lack computers, and 90 per cent have no internet access, particularly impacting rural areas. Another challenge is the shortage of skilled educators. There is a significant gap between the demand and supply of qualified teachers, leading to a very high student-teacher ratio,

further undermining the quality of education.

The New Education Policy represents a paradigm shift towards inclusivity and holistic education. It aims to foster academic excellence and essential skills through initiatives like regular library sessions to promote reading and independent learning. Introducing Bal Sansads (Children's Parliaments) encourages activities such as debate and community service, nurturing leadership and civic responsibility among students.

However, implementing such initiatives demands collaboration among policymakers, educators, parents, and communities, forging partnerships between government, NGOs, and private sectors for increased efficacy.

As part of our efforts, we at Roots Foundation, collaborated with Acuity Knowledge Partners to launch Project Utkarsh in 2022. The project was implemented in six government schools in the North and South blocks of Mandya, Karnataka.

## Bal Sansad Elections



Project Utkarsh seeks to narrow the digital divide, foster critical thinking skills, and introduce STEM education to improve students' academic performance and retention rates. The Project adopts a comprehensive approach to education by focusing on long-term engagement with students to foster lasting relationships and instil analytical thinking through Innovative Learning Centres. STEM workshops foster creativity and innovation.

Activities such as summer camps, science expos, and student-led Bal Sansad elections significantly enhance the overall impact of the Project. During the summer camp, 255 enthusiastic students actively engaged in various educational and recreational activities, fostering a vibrant learning environment. The Bal Sansad elections witnessed a

remarkable turnout, with more than 80 students demonstrating leadership qualities by nominating themselves for key roles, showcasing their commitment to democratic processes and student governance. The Science Expo garnered substantial attention, drawing participation from over 150 eager students who showcased their innovative projects and scientific prowess. These events not only provided platforms for learning and self-expression but also nurtured essential skills such as teamwork, creativity, and leadership among the student community, reinforcing the project's broader educational objectives.

Starting with a thorough needs analysis and stakeholder engagement, the project sets clear objectives and timelines, regularly assessing progress through midline and end-line evaluations. Post intervention, significant improvements were observed, with a 20 per cent increase in academic performance across subjects in Classes II-VII and heightened student interest.

One such story is of Brundashree. Due to her mother's untimely demise, she had to transition from an English-medium private school to a Kannada-medium. She grappled with language barriers and

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Over the past two years, Project Utkarsh has seen a remarkable improvement in students' overall behaviour, speaking skills, and confidence. The project emphasises collaboration, attentive care, and a steadfast commitment to ensuring educational equity and quality through tailored solutions and strategic partnerships.

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academic setbacks. Project Utkarsh's timely intervention improved her academic performance, rekindled her interest in learning and restored her confidence.

A similar challenge arose at GHPS Chikkamandya, where nearly half of the attendees come from the Urdu-speaking Muslim community, encountering difficulties in adjusting to Kannada and English instructions. Under the leadership of teacher Tejaswini, the project's intervention brought about positive change. Through tailored support and engaging activities integrated into lessons, Tejaswini ensured that students from Urdu



Brundashree



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We lead pioneering initiatives in Punjab and Haryana, marking some of the nation's foremost efforts to uplift underprivileged children in the sports sector. Through our one-of-its-kind Sports Lab project, we provide comprehensive training, equipment, and support, exposing talented students to a diverse range of sports. We aim to propel them to international sports standards, enhancing India's sports prowess globally.

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backgrounds grasped concepts effectively, building their concentration and confidence.

With over 1,000 students benefitting from the programme, Project Utkarsh's trajectory is full of successful stories. Over the past two years, the project has seen a remarkable improvement in students' overall behaviour, speaking skills, and confidence. Students from Grades III to VII demonstrated substantial average score improvements of 14.4, 38.5, 12.7, 42.2, and 41.5 per cent respectively, highlighting their academic progress. Our Project emphasises collaboration, attentive care, and a steadfast commitment to ensuring educational equity and quality through tailored solutions and strategic partnerships.

Besides Project Utkarsh, I would like to provide more information about the other initiatives we are involved in.

### Focus Areas

We uplift underserved communities through the following interventions.

Operating across 18 States and over 100 districts, our goal is to promote



sustainable and inclusive growth throughout India.

### Sustainable Agriculture

Our primary focus is on agricultural communities in villages across 16 States. We concentrate on initiatives such as crop residue management, direct seeding of rice (DSR), farm mechanisation, and water conservation. Additionally, we promote improved farming practices through intensive training in innovative techniques, aiming to maximise yields and conserve resources. Our approach emphasises sustainable agriculture, enhancing farming practices, and promoting environmental stewardship through inclusive and impactful interventions.

Impact: Over 10 lakh farmers are trained in good agricultural practices.

### Sports

We lead pioneering initiatives in Punjab and Haryana, marking some of the nation's foremost efforts to uplift underprivileged children in the sports sector. Through our one-of-its-kind Sports Lab project, we provide comprehensive training, equipment, and support, exposing talented students to a diverse range of sports. We aim to propel them to international sports standards, enhancing India's sports prowess globally.

Our project has successfully scouted and brought on board a group of talented athletes as brand ambassadors. Our



former students from Project Sports Lab, Haryana, Kiran Godara and Sangeeta Malik, have excelled in their respective sports. Kiran, an Indian freestyle wrestler, secured a bronze medal in the women's 76kg freestyle wrestling category at the 19th Asian Games 2022 in Hangzhou, China.

Impact: We have provided over 7,000 budding sportspersons with a platform to showcase their potential.

### Skill Development

We collaborate closely with communities to enhance skill development, aiming to create sustainable employment and entrepreneurial opportunities. Our goal is to empower communities to increase their total family income. We offer diverse vocational training programmes, including handicrafts, sewing, stitching, and mechanical work, across Uttar



Pradesh and other States, fostering economic resilience and growth at the grassroots level.

Impact: Each year, we empower over 5,000 women and youth each year with skill training and entrepreneurship opportunities.

### Education

We collaborate with families in adopted communities to provide primary education to children in Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and other regions. By partnering with local education providers, we enhance infrastructure and staffing at village-level schools, ensuring optimal learning environments for students.

Our goal extends beyond education. We aim to empower the rural and make them aware about employment opportunities and government schemes for rural development.



Through our focus on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN), we address the rural-urban language gap and enhance fundamental Math, Science, and Language skills among government school children. Our initiative aims to fill learning gaps and strengthen community-level education support, preparing the next generation for brighter futures.

Impact: Each year, over 5,000 children attending government schools experience improved learning and retention abilities, making a significant contribution to their academic growth and success.

### Healthcare and Nutrition

Our Nutritional Security Programme (NSP) targets children under ten years old. We provide them with dairy-based nutritional support, primarily regular milk supply, partnering with local dairies and brands in select geographies in India to execute this programme. In addition to NSP, we facilitate healthcare through Mobile Medical Services for the rural population of Haryana and Rajasthan, fully equipped to cater to deprived communities.

Impact: Over 60,000 rural and urban poor are given primary preventive and curative



healthcare in North India annually.

### Community Development

We are committed to holistic community development, aiming to enhance livelihoods, improve access to quality education, and promote health and well-being. In Karnataka and similar States, our Community Development initiatives focus on elevating health and literacy standards within communities. This includes deploying teachers, implementing BaLA (Building as a Learning Aid) programmes in schools, improving health services for children and pregnant women in Anganwadis, and providing essential infrastructure support to schools where we intervene. These efforts are geared towards fostering sustainable improvements and empowering communities for a better future.

Impact: Our initiatives have positively impacted over 3,500 lives, fostering sustainable livelihoods, improving access to education, and enhancing overall community well-being.

As we forge ahead towards a brighter and more equitable future, we will continue to dedicate ourselves to promoting livelihoods and act as a light of positive change, while leading with integrity. We recognise the power of narratives that transcend numbers, connecting the strands of human experience. As we strive for growth, we will continue to construct a society where wealth and fairness harmoniously coexist, and create a future where everyone's potential is developed, their voices are heard, and every opportunity is made available. ■

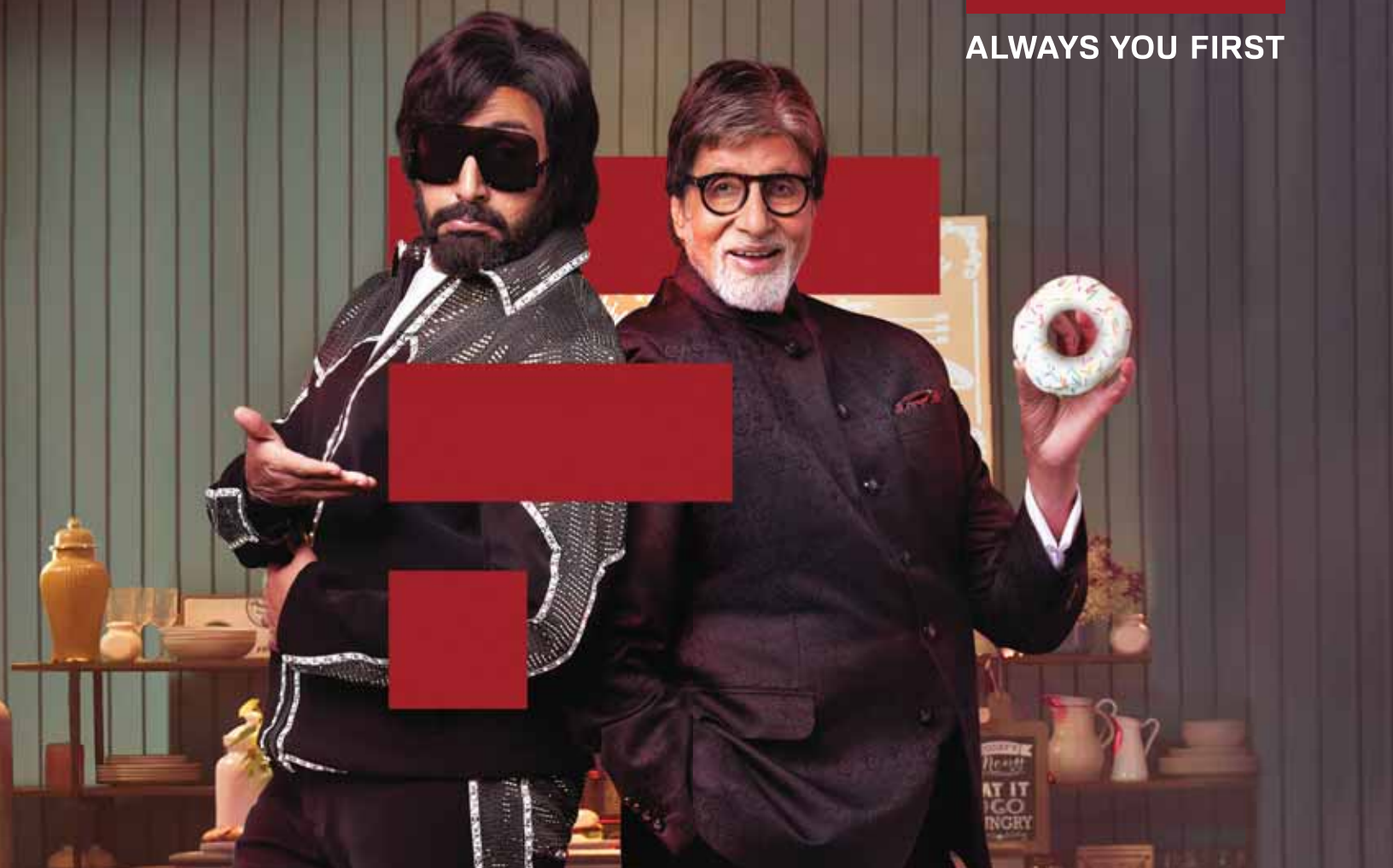


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- Residential Accommodation Facilities for Boys and Girls.

Headquarter: NFSU, Sector - 9, Gandhinagar - 382007, Gujarat  
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