

Conversations Today

Your journal about the world of NGOs and Social Enterprises

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FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Reader,

Anniversaries are occasions for remembrance and renewal. Independence Day is one of the most important days in the year for every Indian citizen. We celebrate this on the 15th of August each year marking the day we became an independent nation. This year, as a gesture to commemorate 75 years of Independence and to celebrate the glorious history of its people, culture, and achievements, the 'Har Ghar Tiranga' campaign was launched by our Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi to encourage people to launch the Indian flag in their home.

"The achievement we celebrate today is but a step, an opening of opportunity, to the greater triumphs and achievements that await us. Are we brave enough and wise enough to grasp this opportunity and accept the challenge of the future?" said India's first Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru on this day, 75 years ago.

India rose with the vision of the freedom fighters who fought for the country's independence. Our founding fathers had a path that were full of challenges—both social and economic—before them. The political leadership started the journey with hopes of making the country self-reliant in economic and political terms.

Today, as a nation, we stand tall as one of the world's emerging economies with an advantageous demographic dividend, a vibrant democracy that ensures enthusiastic participation in elections, a diverse polity, and a diversified economy.

Apparently, economic progress through inclusive growth, a process that was accelerated in the early 1990s and the institution of a rights-based approach towards welfare in the mid-2000s has slowed down in the last few years. India must continue policies, framed in the 1990s, of allowing entrepreneurial energies to flourish while relying on comprehensive welfare with a rights approach, which was given impetus in the late 2000s, to help utilise its demographic potential.

The successes and failures of the earlier generations in post-independent India have provided the nation with the pathways to address the challenges of the future. It is time we admit these challenges and work towards sustainable development which is UN's agenda for 2030.

As the preamble of the Indian constitution states itself as a sovereign, secular, and democratic country, it is within our responsibility that we uphold the pillars of virtues in India as a youth. Let us all take a pledge to build the nation, and maintain its honour.

Marie Banu

EDITORIAL

Latha Suresh

Marie Banu

REPURPOSING FABRIC, RESTORING LIVELIHOODS

A sisterhood of women who are empowered through their skills and opportunities to create accessories with unwanted fabric.



A flurry of activity is afoot; the whir of a sewing machine, the sharp snap of scissors slicing through fabric, and the soft drag of a chalk sliding across a surface. But no words are spoken. Mardiana Akhir (Mardi), one of the seamstresses, scribbles on a notepad and passes it to a petite lady next to her. Karen Teo looks at the notepad and scribbles something back. This back and forth carries on for a few minutes and smiles are exchanged.

As Mardi is deaf, Karen communicates with her either through text or writing on paper.

"I'm also learning sign language and I have even practised it with her," beams Karen.

Karen is one of the founders of Re-store, with her daughter Claudia and her sister Veronica. It is a social enterprise that focuses on upcycling unwanted fabric into products while employing individuals from marginalised communities.

"We realised that she [Mardi] has not been working for 14 years," shares Karen.

"It did not stop us from hiring her, because we felt like there's a lot of potential."

44 year old Mardi moved to Singapore from Malaysia in 2004. She worked as a seamstress there but was unable to find a job in Singapore due to her being deaf. Mardi's husband was the only breadwinner in the family and they struggled to make ends meet. In 2021, her daughter, Marisha Ng, chanced upon Re-store's call for seamstresses on Instagram and realised that it was a perfect opportunity for her mother and their situation.

"I don't want her to just be a housewife and not doing what she loves," says Marisha. "I want her to feel happy outside and inside."

Re-store currently employs 12 beneficiaries including Mardi. By allowing for flexible work arrangements; bringing work home, or doing part-time hours, Veronica and Karen want to create a community where women can feel safe and seek support from each other.

Veronica shares: "Most of the women who work with us tend to be very focused on providing for their family, and very often, they have very little time and energy for themselves to the extent that they neglect even their personal, mental and emotional well-being."

The Re-store team treats Mardi and her daughter like family, bonding over meals and even helping them out with home matters.

One such way was when over lunch, Mardi shared

her financial woes and Karen realised that Mardi was paying too much for her phone bill. Karen then called the servicer provider and helped to reduce her bill.

"This amount matters a great deal if you have to decide what you eat on a daily basis... This experience actually enabled Mardi to think about how she optimises spending her money," says Karen.

Mardi signs: "Veronica and Karen support me in so many ways. We treat each other like sisters. We listen and help each other."

Mardi has been with Re-store for about a year. Through understanding the process of repurposing discarded fabric into fashionable products like tote bags, pouches, hats and even pet accessories, Mardi and her daughter are more conscious of wastage.

"In the past, I used to discard things that I thought weren't useful anymore," signs Mardi. "After being at Re-store, I am surprised at how there are so many ways to repurpose waste."

"Now, we don't even buy new clothes. We thrift and repair our clothes." Marisha adds: "They (Re-store) actually see the potential in unwanted waste, like fabrics, and they make them into something beautiful... I think that's beautiful actually, like trying to contribute to the world and also empowering women."

Mardi's newfound passion with Re-store has inspired Marisha in her choices as well.

Marsiah shares: "When there is a challenge, she actually doesn't give up, she actually perseveres, and I think I should apply that in my future."

"She actually inspires me about my own future because we can actually fulfil our passion. I should do what I love... So I want to be happy for myself as well."

ABOUT RE-STORE

Re-store is an organisation that is focused on upcycling pre-loved fabric, deadstock and off cut textiles into fashionable accessories while providing work opportunities for marginalised and underprivileged women who struggle to make ends meet.

*A story by Our Better World
(the digital storytelling initiative of the Singapore
International Foundation)*

www.ourbetterworld.org

FARMER TO FARMER, ORGANICALLY



The gender gap in land ownership is both a national and an international concern as data continues to point out that women are less likely to be land holders than men. Irrespective of the reasons, what emerges clearly from this stalemate is the line of obstacles for women farmers. “We are easily accepted as agricultural laborers who work on commands but not as land owners and capable farmers, who can take wise decisions on yield, productivity and farming methods. Situations led me to farming after marriage, but it all started with my husband,” reflects Ms Manimozhi, Founder of the Vandavasi Organic Farmers’ Group in Thiruvannamalai district, Tamil Nadu.

Hailing from Soraputhur village near Vandavasi, Manimozhi was the eldest among five siblings and therefore her parents decided to get her married early. Married off as a teenager, she took active interest in agriculture with her husband who encouraged her to participate in all activities on their land. “It took me four years to understand rural life. For an amateur teenager who hardly knew if rice grew on tree or plant, first-hand experience in farming was marvelous, to say the least,” she says, adding that she was a fast learner. She also engaged her two kids in the process and started managing farm activities efficiently.

“What changed my course was my husband’s death. He was an alcoholic and

farming gave us the much valuable family time. His death was a shock but my kids stood by me and we decided to continue farming ourselves. Now that I was completely into my land, every aspect became even more clear and I started thinking futuristically.”

“In 2007, I attended a meeting in my village and developed interest in organic farming. While the gender linkages were not so comprehensible to me, organic farming helped me completely focus on land and overcome my personal loss,” shares Manimozhi.

She tried organic farming on 50 cents of her land and the successful yield drove her to try bigger. With a huge debt to repay, her son also discontinued studying and both of them built their land from the scratch. “Economic hardships in the family usually force you to stick to chemical methods but fortunately, my son understood my decision and we both worked passionately,” she adds. Despite all the challenges and the criticism, Manimozhi never gave up. Very soon, all her seven acres were farmed organically and she experimented all methods she had learnt. “Once you go the nature way, there is so much you can do without fear and confusion,” she laughs.

She got back to all her contacts from that first meeting she had attended and took guidance from every source possible. She also shared her experiences with others, which in turn encouraged

others to stay in touch and learn mutually from these interactions. “Our interests kept each other growing and the help from District Agriculture Department officers increased our knowhow. I started seeing the potential of a network and wanted to influence as many farmers as possible to understand organic farming as the best way to replenish land nutrients and improve yields. Land is the mother of everything and we must do what is in our capacity to keep it from dying. Organic farming teaches you why it is critical to give natural resources the time to rebuild. One can never regret this decision, I was confident,” says Manimozhi, who faced flak from her family while being hailed as a leader by farmers in her network.

Her perseverance and support from kids encouraged her to widen the network and in every interaction with farmers in different villages, there were at least two of them who would want to try organic farming like she did. Vandavasi Natural Farmers’ Group grew bigger and moved far and wide to spread knowledge, share experiences and also provide organic fertilizers, pesticides and other materials for those who wanted to purchase them from Manimozhi.

“The scale of farming worked favorably for me. As I started distributing materials, I saw how interactions were the main source of information and learning in many villages, especially for women. I also saw women naturally driven to trying

organic methods. Women saw it simpler, convenient and above all, safer for their families. It was too much to consume but all of it kept me going,” she reflects. From only four organic farmers, Manimozhi now leads more than twenty farmers and realized the need to work strategically. Because no matter what or how much they all produced, organic farmers needed a strong marketing network to ensure their products were not compromised from the price point of view.

She worked hard to recognize correct channels for different products and eventually, she herself was impressed by the presentation of organic products from her farmers’ group.

CSIM helped Manimozhi see things in perspective. “My classes from CSIM made me see my mistakes clearly. I did many things simultaneously, as and when they came up. I had to organize and also do value addition to our products. We are now better equipped to take regular orders and promote our products. We also regularly visit farmers’ festivals like exhibition of rice varieties in Arcot. We have learnt to identify ourselves with farmers like us. Above all, branding is something we never really thought of. Thanks to CSIM, consumers now know how to get back to us for repeat orders,” she says.

Shanmuga Priya.T

UNRAVELLING COMPONENTS OF QUALITY EDUCATION

The discussion on quality of education is definitely vast, complex, buoyant and critical. After a decade of celebrating education as a fundamental right, we as a society are still not prepared and informed to transform the education ecosystem to meet the aspirational needs of today's generation and at the same time, prepare them to acquire the skillsets that may grow to be relevant when they look out for jobs. It is a process, a long process that starts when every child enters school. So, where do we start? "To witness a transformation in education, we must transform day to day interaction in class rooms, and for that to happen organically, we must open ourselves to investing in teachers' capabilities," says Mr Nilesh Nimkar, Founder of QUEST NGO in Maharashtra.

Has the focus on teachers not been adequate or efficient? They are the drivers of this system. Where are we lacking? Nilesh has an answer to that too. "Why should we always see them as providers? Or for that matter, why should students only be recipients? There is a lot of scope to make class rooms places for participatory learning and knowledge generation," he signifies, adding that establishing a dynamic two-way relationship between research and practice will help us shape the future.

This is the principle with which QUEST – Quality Education Support Trust – in Palghar district began its operations from a very humble scale. An informal group called the Thane Study Circle met every month to discuss frontier articles on education in India and members' presentations, ensuing reflections opened room for numerous ideas. All the brain storming since 2005 led to the establishment of QUEST in 2007. The focus was on school education and the team decided to work with existing schools to improve quality of education, at scale. "As the process was time consuming and resource intensive, we had to demonstrate the impact on a scale because our discussions led us to learn that quality at scale was the real concern and not just quality. We started off with just 9,000 rupees and formed 10 Shikshan Samruddhi Kendras (SSKs) in Wada Block, Palghar district, Maharashtra," says Nilesh. Today, QUEST is a resource organisation that has reached out to over 2.7 lakh children, with an annual budget of over 5 crore rupees.

At the SSKs, trained local youth became the point of contact who worked with teachers on common problems. Every school and every location was peculiar, with its own bag of concerns. While bringing teaching material in local language was a challenge (especially in tribal areas), in some cases, teachers had to handle multiple grades at the same time. All inputs and resources like the teaching learning material were developed by QUEST and teachers were trained to enable collaborative, child centred learning. The team meticulously chose the locations in order to widen the scope for demonstration of ideas and eventually, built a strong knowledge base. Having invested a good amount of four years in this process, SSKs then became Centres of Excellence where demonstrations and trainings happened regularly. All of QUEST's programs started as an idea and were piloted in these SSKs.

The rich, first-hand knowledge on struggles in ensuring good quality of education and the approaches used were well documented and also published as research papers. "We were heavily reliant on western research fifteen years ago and now when we see research literature from India making its space, we see that we have built our own knowledge from our very own situations. We as a society need to realize that we cannot use a 'one size fits all' model. But we haven't yet reached there, and there is a lot to be done," explains



Nilesh, iterating that research and practice can never be mutually exclusive. Anupad program brought the focus on grades 5 to 8, working out strategies to strengthen students' foundation in language and mathematics. The diagnostic tests, created in-house, which were later used by the Government of Maharashtra across 34 blocks, were administered to students to assess their levels of learning and then, based on the results, students were grouped into specific levels. Thereafter, level specific inputs developed by QUEST were imparted through teachers who were trained to identify the instructional needs in all levels. While these processes transpired as effective strategies, the team also simultaneously gathered every possible data to develop insights for replication and policy.

The success of Anupad led to the implementation of quality education program for residential schools run by the Department of Social Justice in 24 districts across Maharashtra. Apart from books and short films on story telling targeted at children, teachers and parents, Anupad also used Goshtarang (children's literature presented through simple plays so that children can see the gist of what they will read in the books) as a tool to encourage reading habits.

QUEST's presence in the field made it easier for them to observe realities at all levels including Anganwadi centres. Apparently, the early childhood education (ECE) service at Anganwadis was inferred to be weak as a lot of energy and resources were spent on providing health and nutrition services. The Palavee program was designed to engage children as creatively and cerebrally as possible at the centres by transforming them into centres of early childhood education. The program has reached over 2300 Anganwadis in 8 districts and the collaboration with ICDS (Integrated Child Development Services), Government of Maharashtra gave the momentum to universally replicate its success.

"Palavee invests time and inputs to not only prepare Anganwadi workers but strategises the implementation in two phases to ensure that the objectives are achieved. In the first year, a lot of ground work is done to build two or three model Anganwadis in every beat. In the next phase, these Anganwadis are used as training and demonstration sites to enable smooth replication," he elaborates. Offering inputs in six -stages, Palavee tried

to make the experience as friendly and interactive as possible. "We must give them the time to adapt and evolve a new routine related to ECE in the Anganwadis," adds Nilesh. And the interface that sets in between QUEST, Anganwadi workers, children and the community lays the foundation for a long term impact.

As the team spaced out interventions and data collection, there was a growing body of knowledge which was regularly published to encourage context specific discourses on quality education. Based on samples from Nasik, learning levels before and after the pandemic were analysed to learn that there was 27% backslide in language competencies and 12% backslide in math competencies due to closure of schools during the pandemic. The research paper titled "Addressing learning loss in Ashram Schools – Pedagogical insights from a field study" was published in the Children First Journal, by the Delhi Commission for Protection of Child Rights.

QUEST's success and wide impact comes from recognising the needs of every stakeholder, at every level. "The idea was not just to make the children learn better, rather it was to build an ecosystem where their learning was a natural outcome," says Nilesh. In the process, teachers' skills were improved, modules in multiple languages depicting local life in remote areas were published, schools and Anganwadi centres were equipped to encourage, promote the culture of learning right from early stages. Above all, -QUEST has made everybody believe that classrooms are places to create knowledge. "Books must not only show about the outside world, but must help children reflect on their own lives and communities. We tried to do the latter in as many formats as possible and that influenced children's ability to read. Only when children can read with comfort and confidence, they can cope with diverse subjects offered in the school. This ability is a good indicator of the quality of education they have received. QUEST will keep evolving to learn from different scenarios and will make sure it contributes to the evolving discourse with relatable stories from the field," promises Nilesh.

Shanmuga Priya.T

75 YEARS OF UPLIFTMENT: INDIA'S NGO STORY

As India completes 75 years of her independence, a lookback on how far we've come reveals some glowing statistics and great achievements. The nation has made great strides in science, technology, space exploration, art, culture and most importantly, societal development. We put a man in space before most countries did, India's financial technology is one of our greatest innovations, today, and our proud heritage has a reputation that goes before it. However, one of the lesser-narrated stories about India's progress has been in the manner in which individuals have risen to the occasion to help each other out. Proof of that is the NGO network in the country, today.

According to the Central Statistical Institute, India had 3.3 million NGOs in 2009, which translated to an NGO for every 400 Indian citizens, back then. There's little doubt that the pace of growth has been as stellar as ever, despite several challenges along the way. In 2020, GuideStar India had over 10,000 verified NGOs and more than 1,600 certified NGOs on its own portal.

Over the last few decades, NGOs have also gone from strength to strength in terms of the effectiveness of their operations. Their focus has turned a lot more specialized and has evolved from organizations that dabble in all aspects of societal development to focused entities that are clear-cut in their priorities and target, in the interest of development capabilities to their optimum levels. There's no denying that the change in approach has also helped NGOs and the men and women who run them give their full potential towards resolving issues that matter to India, today.

A key focus area that NGOs have done well in, is women and child empowerment. Historically, Indian women have suffered from sub-par literacy rates. The inherent lack of education has led to power empowerment — an aspect that Indian NGOs have looked to correct. The beauty of it all is that NGOs haven't stopped there. The follow-up towards the education of children has been more apparent than ever, all in the hope to build a better future for generations to come.

Several NGOs focused on issues impacting women and children have had to contend with litigation and campaigns against child labour, abuse and trafficking, not to mention step in whenever a situation surrounding the health of women and children comes to be. Several NGOs have stepped in to rescue women and children facing numerous forms of harms, abuse, neglect, exploitation, violence and physical abuse. From overseeing operations to executing programmes in some of the most far-flung places on the



Indian sub-continent, there is no denying that such groups have given it their all, purely for the purpose of making the country a better and safer place for women and children. Achieving these goals haven't been easy and have demanded that partnerships be forged and initiatives be built. Together with other stakeholders including donors, volunteers and the government itself, these efforts have progressed in a manner that is worthy of pride.

Several campaigns to save children, reduce infant mortality, bring down instances of deficiencies and disease among children, while at the same time ensure equitable access to education has brought out the best of Indian NGOs. A well-rounded approach to engage governments and civil society has led to favourable results, especially given that fundraising and building infrastructure have proven to be challenging tasks in the mission of making India a better place for women and children.

On the healthcare front, NGOs have outperformed and how! Doctors for You (DFY), founded in 2007 by doctors and the medical fraternity in general



with the mission of providing health for all, has made great strides in making the country healthier. Working across a majority of Indian states, and involving professionals in medicine, social workers and disaster management experts, DFY has reimagined the role of a healthcare-oriented NGO, managing to contend with issues like poverty, natural disasters, health crises and general injustice leading to calamities in public health.

Similarly, the Rural Healthcare Foundation (RHCF) has also been working on the frontlines of healthcare and public health since 2009, providing

a superior degree of affordable primary healthcare to low-income and underprivileged communities in West Bengal. The group's aim has been to make healthcare accessible to the economically weaker and most deprived sections of society.

RHCF has over 17 centres operating across the state and 12 centres in remote villages. The NGO continues to march forward in its quest to improve the lives of the deserving.

Over the years, agriculture and farmer oriented NGOs have also achieved a great deal in their time. After all, India is an agrarian economy and the presence of farm-based NGOs have added an extra layer of comfort and security to several underprivileged sections of society with a clear agricultural edge. Dilasa Sanstha has been one example.

Established in 1994, the NGO has worked in close association with several smaller NGOs in Maharashtra's Vidarbha and Marathwada regions. Dil Sanstha has strived to advocate innovative and sustainable irrigation methods to support agricultural development for tribal communities and marginal farmers. The NGO has also done yeoman service towards the development of low-cost innovations and technical solutions to aid farmers in improving irrigation methods and adopt practices like mixed cropping.

Other organizations like End Poverty, also established in 2009, have come a long way in lifting Indian society from poverty and economic distress. End Poverty has worked with a sustainable outlook towards improving the living situation for several thousands of women on the education and rural development front. The NGO has been working in Rajasthan, Haryana, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Delhi, and has been impacting the lives of poor, landless farmers, including marginal farmers, artisans, women, uneducated women and unemployed youth. The NGO has taken giant strides to support several communities across the country.

Some of these names are merely scratching the surface when it comes to the progress of NGOs since independence. Today, India prides itself on Aatmanirbhar Bharat or a self-reliant nation. However, several NGOs have been helping several communities in India remain self-reliant and sustainable while they self-develop, for several years. And therein lies the great Indian NGO story.

Rahul Philip

SAVING THE WORLD, ONE BABY AT A TIME



All the world over, preterm births (premature birth) make for a significant public health problem mainly on account of the associated neonatal (first 28 days of life) mortality, morbidities and disabilities in later life.

“Preterm” is defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) as those babies born before completing 37 completed weeks or fewer than 259 days of gestation since the first day of a woman’s last menstrual period. The WHO estimates that nearly 15 million babies are born premature every year — that is approximately one in ten births. According to data, nearly a million children die due to preterm birth complications, with the percentage of such births (against the total births in a particular country) ranging from 8 percent to 18 percent across 184 nations.

“Nearly one-fifth of all preterm babies are born in India, and there is a need for better neonatal critical care, here,” says Dr Nitasha Bagga, a consultant neonatologist and the founder of Extra Mile. “In the last decade, advancements in the field of neonatology have been phenomenal,” she adds, “Today, we are able to save extremely premature and extremely low birth weight babies in India”

However, it is also a fact that the survival of premature babies depends on where they are born — poorer families are at higher risk. “Almost nine out of ten preterm babies survive in high-income countries

because of enhanced basic care and awareness,” Dr Nitasha adds.

The majority of neonatal deaths (75%) occur during the first week of life, which is contributed not only by prematurity but also various spectrums of new-born disorders, which are treatable if addressed in time. “More than 3 quarters of preterm or premature babies can be saved with timely and cost-effective interventions,” says Dr Nitasha. “And while there are government organizations working towards this, we need to go The Extra Mile.”

With this objective in mind, Dr Nitasha established Extra Mile Foundation in December 2021, a charitable trust and non-profit organization, to save premature and unwell new-borns from economically weaker communities. Typically, these were babies that could be saved with new-born intensive care treatment (NICU) but whose families were not able to bear the cost.

“Our vision is to build a world where every premature and sick newborn has access to care that helps prevent needless loss of life and illness among underprivileged new-borns,” she says, “Our mission is to provide excellent and equitable care to every new-born. To do this, we partner with institutes and health care facilities providing quality care and timely referral and transport to more equipped centres.”

Extra Mile works on innovative private-public partnership models at district and sub-district levels to provide equitable care. The organization also partners

with educational institutions to spread awareness about prematurity. “In last seven to eight months, we have helped 40 underprivileged new-borns with the aid of 150 donors who resonate with the cause,” says Dr Nitasha, “Four of our initiatives have brought us great satisfaction”:

1. Our ability to spread smiles to parents by extending fiscal support and saving tiny lives resonates with our mission of excellent and equitable care to every new-born.”
2. In terms of specifics, Extra Mile foundation supported small new-born care unit (SNCU) in Nalgonda, Telangana, which is a 20-bedded new-born intensive care unit (NICU), with level-2 care facilities, established in 2012 and rendering services covering Nalgonda and adjacent districts in Telangana. It has in-house paediatricians, nursing staff, support staff, security, lab technicians and a data manager, but is short of trained nursing staff. On average, 9000 to 10,000 deliveries happen in the maternity ward every year and this SNCU provides support to new-borns who are unwell. To continue delivering excellent care in a sustained way, Extra Mile also decided to support the team of passionate and dedicated doctors and nurses by supporting nursing staff for kangaroo mother care (KMC).
3. The organization has decided to take on new-born hypothyroidism. “Awareness and support

will help eliminate hypothyroidism among new-borns in the next few years and transform their lives by enabling normal growth without being a burden to the family,” says Dr Nitasha.

4. The organization has also donated electrical breast pumps to SNCUs, to help not only in easy expression but also more frequent and hygienic expression of breast milk.

However, Dr Nitasha says there’s plenty left to do and

an “ocean of things” that still needs working on in this sector: “Supporting universal thyroid screening, promoting exclusive MOM and KMC practices for premature new-borns, and extending financial support to save more and more lives with equitable care are some of them,” she says.

In the coming quarter, one the focus areas for Extra Mile is to concentrate on the optimal usage of oxygen. “Oxygen is one of the most dangerous drugs for a premature baby’s eye,” says Dr Nitasha, “It is responsible for Retinopathy of Prematurity (ROP). Oxygen flow meters, which are used routinely in most hospitals, measure oxygen from minimum 1 litre to 20 litres.” She adds: “These premature babies need and can be managed even with lesser oxygen. For the judicious use of oxygen, we will be helping various district SNCU’s low-flow meters, which are designed to provide one-tenth of the oxygen that is being used, today.”

For Extra Mile, there are a few “very clear goals” which the organization hopes to achieve in the near future. “First and foremost, we want to help 100 underprivileged new-borns to bear the cost of care this year,” says Dr Nitasha, “To achieve this, we need funding, as we try to bring more awareness and need to go the extra mile to save tiny lives.” She adds: “We are also looking for volunteers to work for our organization, as we haven’t employed any one as a way of keeping costs down, and using the bulk of our funding to save new-born babies.”



NURTURING FUTURE-READY CHILDREN

Whitefield, Bangalore is a buzzing neighborhood that boasts of luxurious residential complexes, shopping malls and ample public transportation facilities. The IT sector boom transformed the footprint of this neighbourhood over the course of a short few decades. It is also a stark example of the ever-widening economic divide in rapidly urbanized areas.

In an effort to bridge the gap between the opportunities afforded to the rich and the poor, several NGOs have been offering their programs in the neighbourhood. Prominent among them is a volunteer run initiative called Whitefield Ready- a volunteer run initiative that has been transforming public schools in Whitefield for over 11 years now. Says Sumedha, one of the founders of Whitefield Ready, “Whitefield Ready is a part of Whitefield Rising- a citizen movement to bring about social transformation in the Whitefield area. We encourage residents to take active part in the nurturing and transformation of the young.”

“We started out 11 years ago as a group of like-minded residents of the neighbourhood, who wished to give back to society. Among us are stay-at-home moms who wanted to explore a different career than the one they were used to, retirees and young techies who offer their weekends for tutoring and mentoring,” Says Sumedha.

Some of their initial programs included providing essential services to the six government schools- appointing janitors through the Rotary Club of Bangalore IT Corridor, offering sports, life-skills and library-programs. Over a period of time, the core members of Whitefield Ready built a lasting relationship with the schools to be able to offer more in-depth partnership in terms of raising funds for their infrastructure, curriculum development and newer teaching methodologies. Currently there are 56 regular volunteers who directly work with over 2500 children at 6 different government schools in Whitefield.

“Most of these are Kannada medium schools. However, learning other subjects becomes difficult without sufficient grounding in the English language. So, we partnered up with an international school called Inventure Academy and adopted a school in Ramagondanahalli. Here the school now runs in a PPP model. Inventure Academy appoints teachers who are former Teach for India fellows, in the school’s English-medium classrooms. The quality of teaching is at another level altogether. We offer academic support programs to both the English and Kannada medium classrooms, to help children with their learning needs. We also reach out to parents and get them involved in the education of their kids,” Says Sumedha,

Over time Whitefield Ready has narrowed their focus to the one school which they hope to completely transform, in terms of reducing the dropout ratios, improving the post-secondary school opportunities for the kids, and so on. They are also in touch with the other schools to the extent of providing active support wherever required. Sumedha explains, “Our work has been the most impactful when we directly work with kids. We tried working with the government school teachers first. It was long winded process and took a lot of efforts for little change. We were not satisfied with that. We wish to see real change. So we needed to get in touch with children and their families. That means that over time, we have only been able to work with fewer kids and families than we started out with”

At the start of this year, Whitefield Ready ran a two-week program called the Discovery Run. They explored different extra-curricular activities such as created mural art on the school walls, baking, painting and whitewashing the walls, stitching and embroidery, gardening, theatre and more. Sumedha says that they are



hoping to hone in on any three or four of these to start more intensive training in those skills. Later this year, they hope to start formal vocational training that would help translate these skills into employable or entrepreneurial skills.

Apart from academic and extra curricular activities, Whitefield Ready has also been promoting civic responsibility related programs for the kids. In the month of July the Student Council’s election campaigning, voting drew to a close and a formal Investiture Ceremony was held. The candidates who won the popular vote for various positions within the Council, gave acceptance speeches that included their agenda- what they will do for the school and their fellow schoolmates. Ideas that the children have been working on, include a way to bridge school-dropouts and reintegrate them in their local schools, through peer-to-peer support. Sumedha says it was an intense but enriching experience for the children.

The last couple of years have been challenging for Whitefield Ready, as they have been finding it difficult to get more volunteers, as well as get children back to school. There was substantial learning loss that happened due to the lockdowns. They raised funds to provide 400 smart tablets with internet connectivity for children to transition into a hybrid learning system. They provided rations and essential medical supplies to their families as

well. Dedicated community mobilizers visited the children and their parents at their homes to help with troubleshooting the devices and check up on their learning. They were able to retain 90% of all children in the schools. The rest mostly migrated away from the area due to various reasons.

Currently they are putting together all their learnings from the past eleven years into an organized toolkit that other similar organizations can access and replicate. While the focus is not on scaling their operations, this will be necessary documentation of progress made so far.

Sumedha enumerates the success of Whitefield Ready so far, “The school in Ramagondanahalli has grown from 200 students to nearly 800 students in the past three years alone. The dropout ratio after 10th standard used to hover at around 50% when we started working with these schools. Today there is 100% enrolment in high school. Over 70% students are able to clear their 10th boards. We encourage kids to pursue diplomas in vocational skills. For example there is the Toyota Technical Training Institute. The healthcare industry offers diplomas. By not pushing every single kid to complete their 12th Standard, we are able to steer them towards a career pathway that would bring them at least INR 30-35000 as their starting salary. On the other end of the spectrum 5-10% of our kids have extraordinary academic talents. We find scholarships for them to attend schools that would tap into their talent, like Deeksha Academy. Currently we are sponsoring the Engineering degrees of five of our students, with support from individuals and organizations like the Rotary Club of Bangalore IT Corridor. We are working on building a repository of a large number of scholarships that our kids can apply for.”

What is the way forward for Whitefield Ready? Sumedha says they now have permission to start a high-school. They are looking to build a hub-and-spoke model, whereby children from the current schools will graduate into the high school to finish their schooling. “We wish, more than anything, to build a community of responsible and mindful learners who will go on to do great things” she says as she signs off.

Archanaa Ramesh

GIVING LOVE AND CARE TO THE FURRY FRIENDS OF THANE

It was during a regular walk on a busy street of Mumbai, I saw a family of dogs. I bought a packet of bread to feed them. As I opened the packet to feed around 5 puppies, I saw 10 other dogs approaching me. Soon I was surrounded by around 20 dogs. I quickly emptied the packet of bread on the roadside and moved aside. The bigger dogs had now started fighting with each other. And what began as a small activity to feed five cute puppies turned into an ugly territorial fight of the dogs.

Lakhs of stray animals roam around the city of Mumbai. With limited resources and infrastructure, it is a huge task to look after so many street animals. Thousands of such animals die due to accidents, starvation, or injuries. As per Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), the number of stray animals in Mumbai is currently over 2,50,000, out of which only 90,000 have been neutered since 2016. It is a time consuming and expensive activity. Although, many individuals come forward to neuter and rescue these stray animals, it is an enormous task to handle both financially and physically. This is where NGOs, rescue centres, and activists come into picture.

Shakuntala Majumdar, a 59-year-old animal welfare activist from Thane, Mumbai, has been playing an active role in rescuing and rehabilitating street animals. "I have always been surrounded by animals, who needed any kind of help, and I was born absolutely obsessed with the need to reach out to animals needing help. However, I started to help them in an organisational way from 1994 onwards, when I started my first organisation locally," Majumdar said.

Majumdar always visualised turning her home into a rescue centre with different floors of the house dedicated to different animals.

"However, when my own dog passed away due to wrong diagnosis, it propelled me to action," she shares.

Majumdar, along with other empathetic group of people started the Thane CPCA Emergency Animal Care centre in 2002. It is a registered public trust and animal hospital founded to provide animals with quality diagnosis and treatment.

"I started CPCA at the behest of the then Animal Welfare Minister Maneka Gandhi. She was one who fuelled my need to establish an animal hospital, with a proper direction.," Majumdar said.

The Holistic Animal Care System

CPCA works towards creating safe spaces not just for street animals but also regular citizens through their holistic programme.



Rescue

The first step towards animal welfare is rescue. With an animal helpline number, the team receives leads for animal rescues. Animal injuries and cruelty cases are reported on this number and then appropriate next step is taken. The three ambulances cover the entire 4000 sq km district of Thane and even travel to nearby districts if needed. "We receive an average of 50 calls per day," shares CPCA team. The trained rescue team then provides on the spot treatment and severely injured animals are brought back to the centre,



Rehab

"We try to perform animal birth control surgeries on every animal (age and health permitting) before they are returned to their territory or adopted. All animals are inoculated before release," the team shares. The team also works towards fostering and adoption of rescued animals. The details of any rescued animal that cannot be returned to its territory are immediately handed over to their adoption coordinator.

Detailed house checks and post adoption surveys are done to ensure the animal has found a loving home.

Release

Once animals are released to their original territory, the team visits the spot several times after the release to ensure the animal is comfortable. In the cases of wild animals' release, the Forest Department is intimated and the animal is released in its habitat in the presence of relevant officials.

Outreach

The last leg of the whole process to spread awareness. The organisations loops in young school and college students and trains them in basic first aid of street animals. The students also get to intern at the hospital and learn how to report cruelty and provide humane guardianship to their pets.

The impact

"The impact of welfare work on street animals really cannot be measured tangibly, as they are not resources in the sense humans are. However, my organisation has treated 1,50,000 animals in a span of two decades, and the fact that all these animals would have died miserably if we hadn't reached out to them, sounds to me like a considerable impact. We have returned lost animals to their owners, given new homes to abandoned animals and set wild animals free in their habitat after treating them for their ailments," Majumdar shares.

Majumdar's work has played a key role in giving a better life to thousands of street animals in Thane. With a team of 26 members including veterinary surgeons, veterinary physicians and services like Intensive Care Units, digital radiography, a fully equipped operation theatre, the hospital has provided quality medical support to the animals in need.

"I would think I have been able to give the animal loving community a platform, from where they could carry out their individual work, voice their opinions about animal rights. I have worked very closely with administrative authorities, and have been able to showcase that it is very important to work hand in hand with the administration and that it can be done successfully," she added.

CPCA has also mitigated over 800 cases of man animal conflicts, including police cases and court cases. They have created job opportunities for a segment of people who were below the poverty line as support staff.

The scope of improvement

With time, we have seen some awareness among the citizens and administration about the animal rights. However, there are still many issues to fight on a daily basis.

"The outdated law which guides our work - Prevention of Cruelty To Animals Act, 1960, and the penalties mentioned in it for cruelty to animals ranging from Rs.10 to Rs.50 is a ridiculous amount in today's world. We need the amendment immediately," Majumdar said.

She further adds that implementation of this Act is another glitch as the implementing authority is solely the Police Force who are over burdened with other work, and animals are not one of their priorities. She suggests that the government needs to appoint nodal officers for implementing the laws, and the department should be dedicated only to this.

The long journey ahead

Majumdar was awarded with Nari Shakti Puraskar by the former President of India, Late Shri Pranab Mukherji, acknowledging her journey in the field of animal welfare. Majumdar wants to expand her hospital services once they find sufficient funds and space.

"If you cannot love, then be tolerant, but don't hate. Not to the extent that you harm others physically and mentally. Each one of us is placed on this earth for a reason, someone beyond our wisdom. Be grateful for every breath you take, as a gift, because somewhere else someone is losing it and it is irrevocable. Cause the least pain to others in everything you do," Majumdar concludes.

Shreya Pareek

WOES TO WOWS

PEACE AND HAPPINESS

“World peace must develop from inner peace. Peace is not just the mere absence of violence. Peace is, I think, the manifestation of human compassion.” – Dalai Lama



Peace and security have emerged as the foremost global calling for the world we live in. While material accumulation, power, and position have failed to bring the feeling of safety, hope, and compassion to the world, the need for instilling, nurturing, and developing peace and security as the foundational aspects of the future world is a worthwhile subject to spend time on. From physical war to an emotional onslaught of abuse, rape, and racism to threats to the environment through global warming, there is fear, distress, insecurity, anger, and hopelessness. Couples have begun to question the worthwhileness of bringing children into this world, and youngsters are questioning their role and identity in responding to this world. Where are empathy, compassion, sharing, inclusion, support, and camaraderie?

“Peace is not the product of terror or fear.

Peace is not the silence of cemeteries.

Peace is not the silent result of violent repression.

Peace is the generous,

Tranquil contribution of all to the good of all.

Peace is dynamism.

Peace is generosity.

It is right, and it is duty.”

— Archbishop Oscar Romero.

We automatically come to the Youth to create a space of security and peace in the future world. They stand in the transition between the current world and the next. They are vulnerable to absorbing the best of history and envisioning the future. If we can think of ways to equip, open up opportunities, and a path forward, they have all the capabilities to give us a hopeful future. Over 1.2 billion Youth (aged 15 to 24) account for 16 percent of

the global population. The active engagement of Youth in sustainable development efforts will nurture peace and security, which in turn will lay the foundation for building an emotionally, socially, economically, and politically stable world.

Pandemic was the time when we saw the convergence of the different energies amongst the youth under a powerful goal that beckoned them. Mallappa block sat snugly between the two posh localities, Nehru Nagar phase 1 and 2, with high-rise buildings, villas, and shopping malls. The residents of high-rise buildings thought mallappa block was an eye sore even though most of their houses ran because of the maids, drivers, gardeners, and cooks who came from mallappa block. The residents of mallappa block were constantly grateful as well as scared of the inhabitants of the high-rise buildings. They avoided clashes as much as possible. Yet, none of these were the story of youth life.

The youth of mallappa block envied the youth of the high-rise buildings and villas. They dreamt of traveling in those cars and playing on the cricket grounds where the rich teenagers played. They did not lose a chance to taunt them, scratch their cars subtly or steal small things to satisfy their envy. If they found a rich boy walking alone, they did not waste much time annoying him, picking up fights, or calling him names. Over time, both the parties had their judgments set on each other. The rich teenagers and youth believed the mallappa block kids were useless, uneducated, dirty, good for nothing, and vice versa. They thought the rich fellows were arrogant, had no heart, greedy for money, stingy, and show off. The judgments had brought an enormous void and gap between them, making co-existence an issue.

They were like two warring groups. Rarely if someone developed a little friendship between two groups, they are never appreciated, and all efforts were made to pull them apart.

Consciousness constantly challenges the stereotype. Pandemic was the time that universe decided to play in Mallappa block and Nehru Nagar. Sudden lockdown spelled doom in different ways in both places. The Mallappa block could not go to work, and Nehru Nagar shuddered without labour. A few who had live in maids managed somehow, but the cooks mainly were day labour. Drivers lost their job entirely since no one traveled. A few with compassionate hearts gave half-salary to the maids and drivers, hoping the pandemic would be a temporary phase. Work from home situation made many of them bid goodbye to the cooks. While Mallappa block suffered a financial crisis, Nehru Nagar reeled in frustration and exhaustion.

It was a hot summer day. The television and media screamed about the migrant workers moving toward their villagers without food, water, and shelter. There was chaos, fear, and anxiety in the city. Suhas stood on his balcony on the 20th floor, looking at the empty streets and the adjacent hamlet with people sitting outside their shacks and some moving around with masks. The small shops with everyday groceries were open as well as the supermarkets. He had a kind of friend from Mallappa block, Raju, who usually smiled at Suhas when they passed by. Raju worked at the small grocery store at the corner of the street.

Once or twice, they had exchanged a few words when Suhas bought some chocolates at the store. Suhas felt helpless and jailed at home. Standing on the balcony, a thought came to Suhas’s mind to take a quick stroll to the grocery store and check on Raju.

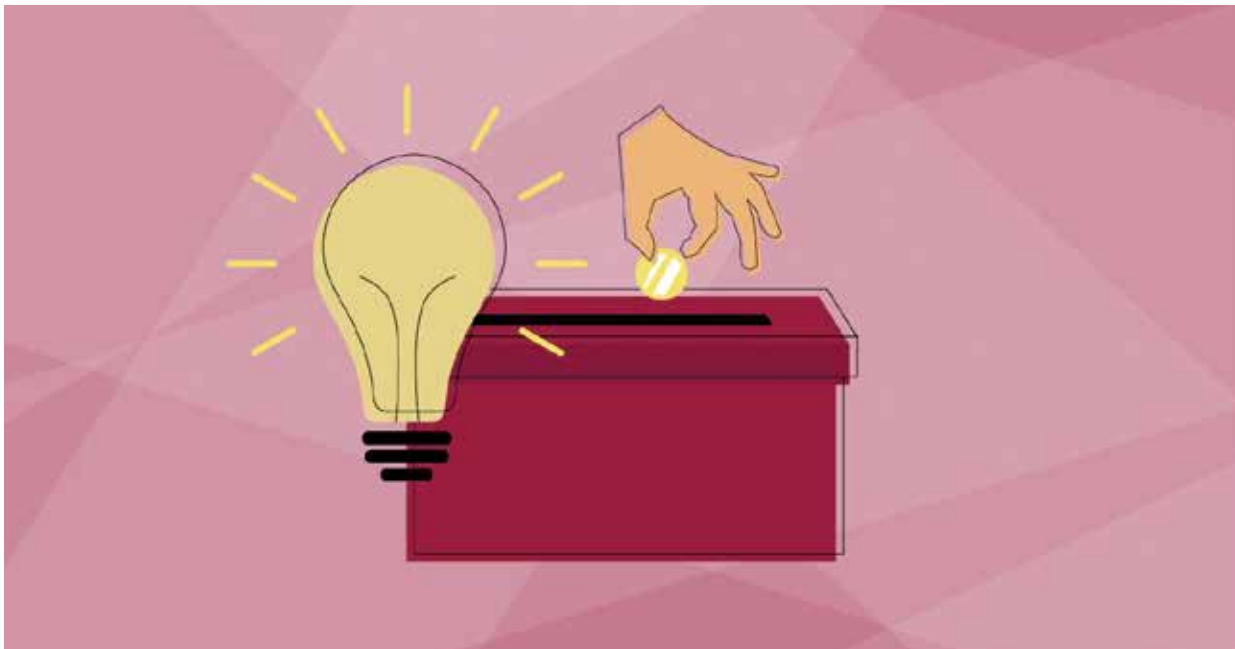
He phoned his friend Rohan and Chitti. They agreed to come down with him. Suhas and his friends walked into the street with masks on their faces and a bag. The police officers looked at them and assumed they would buy groceries. Raju was at the store helping the store manager pack materials. Seeing Suhas, the happy Raju gave a broad smile which showed as a widened mask. “Hey, Raju, how are you? Is your family fine?” there was concern in Suhas’s voice. Chitti and Rohan stood outside the shop with a sense of disapproval on their faces.

Raju’s face was crestfallen, and he replied, “No, Anna. Every house is suffering without money and food. No jobs too. Not possible to have all at home in that small place, and the worry for the future is killing us slowly.”

Suhas quickly asked him, “I want to help you all. I have been feeling low last two weeks. How can I?”

Raju’s eyes brightened. “Anna, food is our main issue. Can you please help us with groceries? I saw on TV they are distributing groceries. Buying it here will help our shop too. I will ask the shop uncle to give discounts on the price. Can you do it?”

Suhas was thrilled at the possibility. By then, Rohan came near Suhas and wanted to pull him home. Most had parental instructions not to mix with the boys from Mallappa block. They bought some chips, chocolates, and fizzy drinks and left walking home.



For the next two days, Suhas had a tough time convincing his friends Rohan and Chitti, plus their parents, of the idea of distributing groceries and some medicines to the residents of mallappa block. There were nearly 600 plus tiny houses in the area. Where will they get the funds, and how to collect money? Suhas used all his creative mind and came up with an appeal to the residential houses of Nehru Nagar. He spoke to his friend Deepali about this idea. She was very good at graphics and writing. She helped Suhas develop a nice one-pager on the fundraiser.

The next hurdle to cross was the paranoid parents and other residents of Nehru Nagar, who were anxious about losing life to Corona and so shunned from all external interactions. They always thought the government had to take up all support works since they pay taxes. They were unable to imagine or empathize with the situation next door. Suhas now had collected a small group of six friends from the apartment and five friends from the villas who were also his college mates. The fundraising spree began. They approached the apartment management committee to put up posters and distribute information digitally through apartment WhatsApp groups.

The actual work began when they collected nearly three lakhs rupees within a week. Suhas made a deal with the grocery store owner. Raju was overjoyed! When all the groceries arrived, Suhas took the party hall in the basement of the building to stock the groceries. Permission was obtained from the police station for 5 of his friends to help him. Raju happily extended help and

came with 10 of his friends.

“God, they look like thugs! How am I going to work with them? Suhas friend Meghana’s enthusiasm shrunk within her.

“Why do we need these fellows? We could have done this ourselves,” replied annoyed Chitti.

“Oh, No chance! This much hard work I have never done! Forget it, said Rohan.

Along with all cribbing and grouping, the work began. Suhas asked the volunteers to classify the process. He had developed a list of items to go into the bags. There were over 750 bags that needed to be packed. The Mallappa block boys somehow knew and grasped whatever Suhas said instantly. They quickly grouped themselves and developed an assembly chain of filling the items and tying up the bags ready for dispatch. They had made an exhaustive list with the name and numbers of the houses as instructed by Suhas. The rice and dal had to be measured in kilograms and packed separately.

Two hours into work, the Nehru Nagar group was already looking exhausted. They went and got juices to drink. They shared some with other volunteers too. The Mallappa block volunteers were working without a stop.

Small conversations began between them. By the end of the day, all things were packed into 700 bags. They were kept ready for distribution the next day morning. Both groups were tired physically but energized mentally. There was mutual respect and admiration that had formed. The myths of judgments based on class had vanished amongst them. They laughed and they had sung movie songs in between to keep the work going.



Girisha, Raju’s friend was an amazing singer but had never found the right platform. Now, he had become the star of the day loaded with appreciation and song requests.

The next morning, the apartment management committee President Mr. Deshpande came to see the work. He swelled with pride to see both groups work together. Raju and Girisha took responsibility to distribute the groceries. Plans were being made for one more round of distribution after 15 days. Three people who were the leaders of the Mallappa block came to see the bags. They profusely thanked Suhas and his team! Unnoticed the branch of friendship, camaraderie and mutual respect grew between the two groups spreading to the elders too. The myths, judgments, and the invisible wall that existed between the youth slowly began to melt! Suhas had become a hero to them.

Six months down the lane, Suhas had a list of activities for two Sundays a month on career counseling, spoken English classes, operational computer usage, healthy habits, cleaning and waste management campaigns and so on. Raju had his team were willing to support Suhas. The resistances from Parents of both areas which were loud slowly tapered significantly! The initial doubt, dis-belief, suspicion and political agenda gradually lost interest in the strong well meaning activities. The vision to make Mallappa and Nehru Nagar a model relationship had began to take shape. Thanks to Pandemic and Thanks to the power of Youth forces!!!

Dr. Kalpana Sampath



Centre for Social Initiative and Management

Contact Persons:

Centre for Social Initiative and Management (CSIM) is a unit of Manava Seva Dharma Samvardhani (MSDS). It is a learning centre that promotes the concept of social entrepreneurship.

CSIM offers training and consultancy to social enterprises – for-profits and non- profits to facilitate them to apply successful business practices and yet retain their social mission. It also offers training and hand holding support to prospective social entrepreneurs and enable them to launch their social initiatives. www.csim.in

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CSIM also facilitates **Social Accounting and Audit** for social enterprises, CSR projects, and NGOs through Social Audit Network, India. *(SAN, India is an overseas chapter of Social Audit Network, UK covering India and Middle East.)*

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“A third party evaluation is sort of 'proof of the pudding' for the CSR work we have done on ground.”

Narendra Kumar shares with Marie Banu the CSR programmes of Cholamandalam Investment and Finance Company Limited

Narendra Kumar is Senior Associate Vice President – HR Operations & Head CSR at Chola Finance. He comes with over 23 years of myriad experience of operational Human Resource & Community Development in the financial services & retail industries space. Narendra actively influences Organizational change, developing and implementing innovative strategies in support of workforce engagement. He works closely with the Chola CSR Board to ensure 100% compliance with the Indian Law, helping create time-bound & self-sustainable projects for Chola.

Narendra is a musician / songwriter and is passionate about education, astronomy and social justice. He is a Sociologist and has a Master's degree in Labour Management along with the Post Graduate Diploma in Human Resources and Industrial Disputes.

In an exclusive interview, Mr. Narendra Kumar shares with Marie Banu the CSR programmes of Cholamandalam Investment and Finance Company Limited.

About Chola and its CSR programmes?

Cholamandalam Investment and Finance Company Limited (Chola) incorporated in 1978 as the financial services arm of the Murugappa Group. Chola commenced business as an equipment financing company and has today emerged as a comprehensive financial services provider offering vehicle finance, home loans, home equity loans, SME loans, investment advisory services, stock broking and a variety of other financial services to customers. Chola operates from 1148 branches across India with assets under management above INR 86,703 Crores.

The mission of Chola is to enable customers enter a better life. Chola has a growing clientele of over 16 lakh happy customers across the nation. Ever since its inception and all through its growth, the company has kept a clear sight of its values. The basic tenet of these values is a strict adherence to ethics and a responsibility to all those who come within its corporate ambit - customers, shareholders, employees and society.

Chola's CSR programs are carried out as a blended activity along with business. We not only cover our operating geographies but also extend to the neglected and needy segments of society. Our CSR initiatives are currently concentrated in 12 states of Tamil Nadu, Delhi-NCR, Maharashtra, Assam, Karnataka, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, Telangana, Rajasthan, West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh.

As one of the largest Non-Banking Financial Companies, Chola believes that it is our responsibility to fulfill society's needs and shape a better future for our nation. Chola is always dedicated towards CSR activities and has spent more than the prescribed CSR Budget in last three financial years.

Our CSR interventions are guided by the Schedule VII of Section 135 of The Companies Act 2013. We focus on the holistic development of the Commercial Vehicle Crew Members (CVCMS) - drivers helpers/cleaners, single truck owners, mechanics - specifically in the areas of Healthcare, Access to education, WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene), Environmental Sustainability, Rural Development, and Promotion of Arts, Culture and Heritage.



Which of Chola's CSR projects have the highest CSR spend and why?

While a good amount of CSR projects are undertaken by the corporate sector, not many programmes focus on the Commercial Vehicle Crew Members. Chola's flagship project "Holistic Welfare of the Commercial Vehicle Crew Members" supports this community and provides them with Water, Sanitation, Health and Hygiene facilities. We conduct free eye screening camps for the CVCMS to identify if they have any vision related issues. Individuals who have been diagnosed with refractive error are provided with corrective eyeglasses right away and those who require a more thorough eye examination and treatment are directed to the base hospital.

This intervention is an attempt to prevent visual problems among drivers in India, as it is learnt that road travel accidents have an annual death toll of 1.5 lakhs and up to 5 lakh people get injured. Over the years, the Eye Health Camp programme has grown steadily and we have screened over 300,000 CVCMS and provided free spectacles to 1,11,600 CVCMS so far. As part of this programme, we also gather comprehensive data to identify the gaps and address the need.

Chola also provides Safe drinking water to communities living in areas which have little or no access to safe drinking water or the available water is contaminated with high levels of fluoride, than the permissible limit in underground water. Over the past 5 years, we have been supporting Educational Trusts (such as the AID India foundation, Nalandaway and Isha Vidya) that provide quality education to children belonging to economically backward sections of the society.

Our other programmes include scholarship support to children of CVCMS for higher education; maternal and paediatric health care, free heart surgeries for children with congenital heart disease, and alternative / additional livelihood support to CVCMS families.

About your implementing partners and the criteria for selecting them?

We follow a stringent process as we need to identify the right implementing partner suitable for the CSR project in a particular geography. We have an efficient CSR team that identifies and conducts due diligence of the NGOs before recommending them to the CSR committee for empanelment as implementing partner. As much as possible, we try to associate with well reputed partners.

What are the key takeaways from your CSR evaluations that other corporates can learn from?

We have been coordinating Social Impact Assessments for our CSR programmes much before it was mandated by our Government. A third party evaluation is sort of 'proof of the pudding' for the CSR work we have done on ground.

In most cases, there are points of reassurance that we have done our programmes well. Sometimes, we also realise the gaps that arises out of minor concerns pointed out by the assessment team and we take it up as a learning for course correction.

Can you tell us about the awards and recognition received by Chola for the CSR programmes?

The Southern India Chamber Of Commerce & Industry (SICCI) & Rotary International District 3232 has awarded and recognized Chola's CSR for our contribution in Creating Sustainable Environment at the RI District 3232 Conference on 8th February 2020.

CIFCL participated in The second United Nations Global Sustainable Transport Conference. We focused on the importance of opportunities, challenges, and solutions towards achieving sustainable transport worldwide. At the conference, Chola made recommendations on SDGs alignment with CVCMS and transport sector in India. As 42% of drivers have uncorrected vision in India, Chola also stressed on the need of clear visibility while driving as this will reduce road accidents.